

# SPIRITUAL AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

A DISCUSSION PAPER  
for the  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
of  
TEACHERS IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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**CATHOLIC EDUCATION SERVICE**

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## PREFACE

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*“May I know Thee more clearly,  
love Thee more dearly  
and follow Thee more nearly.”*

*(From the prayer of St Richard of Chichester.)*

The primary responsibility for the religious, spiritual and moral education of children lies with parents. Catholic schools have always had a significant role to play in supporting parents in this task. Religious education is compulsory in all schools in England and Wales and, since 1988, schools are now also required to promote “the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils.....and of society”. (Education Reform Act, Part 1, Chapter 1)

Within the distinctive character of Catholic education, spiritual and moral development are intimately connected with, though not identical to, religious education, catechesis, collective worship, private prayer and liturgies. However, they are also promoted through all subjects of the curriculum and throughout the general life and work of the school. This discussion paper is designed for use in the in-service professional development of teachers. It is not a treatise on spirituality or morality, nor does it seek to give a full account of Catholic teaching on these topics. Rather, it attempts to offer teachers, governors and parents a contribution to discussion about spiritual and moral development and the ways in which they are central to all teaching and learning across the curriculum in Catholic schools.

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## **SECTION 1.**

### ***INTRODUCTION: THE SACRAMENTAL REALITY OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL***

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1. The Catholic school is an expression of the life of the Church in a particular place and at a particular time. Its purpose and task arise from the sense of purpose of the whole Church. So any question about the purpose of the latter is also a question to be posed of the distinctive nature of Catholic education.
2. The Church does not simply exist for its own sake. Christians cannot be content to construct for themselves a community of warm welcome, mutual concern, shared faith and common endeavour aimed solely at their own well-being or salvation, important though all those things are. Rather, faith and all its demands are given to all Christians as a divine gift not just for our own fulfilment, but for the well-being of our wider society and of all creation. It is the gift of the truth about the human condition and, therefore, crucial to the well-being of the whole of society.
3. Such a conviction gives rise to a sense of commitment in Christians towards the wider world. It also gives rise to tension and difficulty about how that commitment to witness is to be fulfilled. Few are attracted to preaching at Speakers' Corner. Likewise, few have the opportunity to bear witness through public or political life. However, if the school - like the Church - is understood as "the sacrament of salvation" in the world, as both the visible sign and the person of Christ at work in our lives, we can see more clearly the complexity of the relationship between all that we do in the Catholic school and the wider society of which it is a part and to which we belong. We are bearing witness to God's presence in society, but we are also being a sign, and touching the lives of those around us, in many undiscerned and perhaps unintended ways.
4. If we use the analogy of the school as a sacrament - a "sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind" (Lumen Gentium 1.1) - this places real and sharply focused demands on the life we lead within it. That life itself, its successes and failures, its celebrations and conflicts, its endeavours and limited vision, all become important, not just for the well-being of the school, but for its credibility as "a sacrament of salvation", as an outward sign of God's presence. The reality of that life is often the means used by God to touch others. It is not so much the verbal or written account we give to our contemporaries of ourselves

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and of our belief that matters. Our mission statements, our policy documents may well echo the many statements on education made by the Church. But they are simply pieces of paper, intention not reality. It is how they are implemented in the life of the school that counts. It is the shared life of a gospel community which is both the witness to God and an experience of God's presence, the saving, tangible reality.

5. This understanding of the nature of Catholic education rests on one of the fundamental aspects of the Church's teaching. It is the insistence, in the Catholic synthesis, that the human and the divine are inseparable: in the person of Christ, in the action of God in our lives, in the task of exploring and understanding revealed truth. Catholicism sees no separation of the human from the saving action of God. It is in the person of Jesus, the Word of God made flesh, that the fullness of truth and salvation is to be found. In embracing fully our human nature, Christ has given a new meaning to the relationship between the human and the divine.
6. Put more simply, nothing which is truly human is foreign to God. It is Catholic understanding that God, who is Creator, works with the raw material of our human nature. Even if we sometimes feel like rejecting it, God does not. Grace builds on nature, not against it. In this sense, properly understood, Christianity is not an ideology. It does not seek to destroy and replace: it seeks to redeem, to bring to fulfilment the created reality. Nor is Catholic Christianity a denomination: it is not something defined or separated out by its name. Rather, as its name suggests, it is inclusive, calling all into unity and wholeness, never admitting that anything human is beyond redemption and therefore to be scrapped. This does not mean pretending that human nature is not, at times, extremely difficult to cope with, or that it does not, on occasion, consciously reject what is good and true. But it does mean never giving up hope; never giving in to the temptation to dismiss someone's work as totally worthless. It means selling no-one short: neither those with special needs nor those with special gifts nor, even, the most difficult of children. It does mean having the highest expectations of every person in the school community, since everyone is made in God's image and everyone is destined for a full share in the divine life.

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## **SECTION 2.**

### **SOME GENERAL ISSUES**

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7. The Government, in the Education Reform Act (1988), set education within the broad context of the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils and of society. The National Curriculum Council, in its Discussion Paper on Spiritual and Moral Education (April, 1993), stated that:

*“These dimensions underpin the curriculum and the ethos of the school”.*

It went on to say that they:

*“... apply not only to Religious Education and collective worship but to every area of the curriculum and to all aspects of school life”.*

Although both the National Curriculum Council and OFSTED make it clear that spiritual and moral development do not necessarily depend on religious belief, in the Catholic synthesis of the human and the divine they must. In Catholic schools, they are closely related to the more easily defined task of religious education.

8. Their inter-dependence is clear in the statement on religious education issued by the Bishops' Conference in 1988.

*“Any definition of religious education must be informed by, and be part of, a vision of education which seeks to promote the well-being and freedom of the whole human person, understood as created in the image and likeness of God and finding fulfilment in God alone. For this reason, religious education is not just one subject among many, but the foundation of the entire educational process. The beliefs and values it communicates should inspire and draw together every aspect of the life of a school.”*

*(The Education Reform Bill - a Commentary for Catholics, February 1988)*

9. Experience shows, however, that it is extremely difficult for schools to implement broad educational objectives across the subjects of the curriculum even if we succeed in doing so in, for example, our pastoral system. This may be particularly true today, following the introduction of the National Curriculum and the measurements of performance associated with it. In the case of spiritual and moral development, the main stumbling block is that many teachers do not see any significant opportunity for including these dimensions in their teaching of the National Curriculum. Indeed, they may not see the relevance of, or connections between, spiritual and moral development and their particular subject.

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10. Another problem is that, while we may be prepared to identify possible opportunities for spiritual and moral development in mathematics, English, physical education or, perhaps especially, in religious education, we are reluctant to attempt to evaluate the pupils' response. And with some justification: this is a deeply personal area in which, to a considerable extent, we have neither the competence nor the right to make judgements. Yet, if we make no attempt to evaluate how our pupils are developing spiritually, morally and religiously, how do we know whether or not we are helping them? How do we know whether or not we might help them more?
11. Perhaps the dilemma becomes less intractable once we have a clearer idea of what we are trying to achieve. And when we have a better understanding of what we mean by spiritual and moral development, it is crucially important to share that understanding with our pupils. In this, more than in any other area of our work in schools, we should not leave them in the position of having to "second guess" what we are about. We should also acknowledge that we, too, are learning, struggling, developing, alongside them, that it is a shared experience of failure and success.
12. In "The Catholic School", the Congregation for Catholic Education outlined the role of the Catholic school.
- "Its task is fundamentally a synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life: the first is reached by integrating all the different aspects of human knowledge through the subjects taught, in the light of the gospel; the second in the growth of the virtues characteristic of the Christian."* (Paragraph 37)
13. Spiritual development across the curriculum is, thus, concerned with the individual's growth in faith through his or her deepening knowledge of creation and revelation. Moral development across the curriculum is about how individuals - pupils and teachers - increasingly live that faith within community, in school, home, parish and the wider world.

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## SECTION 3.

# SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

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14. In one of its discussion papers, the National Curriculum Council says that spiritual development:

*“... needs to be seen as something fundamental in the human condition which is not necessarily experienced through the physical senses and/or expressed through everyday language. It has to do with relationships with other people and, for believers, with God. It has to do with the universal search for individual identity - with our responses to challenging experiences, such as death, suffering, beauty, and encounters with good and evil. It is to do with the search for meaning and purpose in life and for values by which to live”.*

*(Spiritual and Moral Development, April 1993)*

15. Whilst not a full, or even adequate, expression of the meaning of the spiritual in our Catholic tradition, this does usefully sketch out some common starting points. It is true, after all, that “spiritual” means “of the spirit”. We are, therefore, talking about the development of the essence of a unique individual. “Gaudium et Spes” (para. 15) refers to our ability to “surpass the material universe”, to “share in the light of the divine mind”. The continuing search for “more penetrating truths”, “the quest and love of what is true and good” are what spiritual development is all about. It is in this sense of “the spiritual” that we must help our pupils, each in their unique way, to think, appreciate, question, struggle, suffer, wonder, love, reflect and, indeed work! In the Catholic tradition, spiritual development is inseparable from growth in faith, from life in “the spirit of truth” (John 15.26), as we each help to bring creation to perfection and find our own true and lasting fulfilment.

### **The Seed of Glory**

16. How then does a Catholic school go about reflecting on the task of promoting spiritual development? A useful starting point can be found in the phrase from a well-known hymn which speaks about “the seed of glory” to be found in every person. The phrase points to that capacity in each person to reach beyond the limitations of their present experience, knowledge or imaginings. There are many moments in which we become aware of that “capacity for more”, moments in which we are invited or provoked into experiences or understandings which we

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never before imagined. A glimpse of beauty, an insight into a truth, the inspiration of remarkable goodness are all such moments. They take us “outside of ourselves” in a way that hints at the literal meaning of the word “ecstasy”: to stand outside of oneself. We sometimes refer to the “timeless” quality of a work of art. In moments of deep emotion, we speak of “time standing still”, or of “time flying”, expressions which point to the capacity in each of us to appreciate ever new dimensions of created reality.

17. So the book, whether it is a picture book in the infant classroom or an Advanced Level set text, becomes not just a story, the account of a series of events, but an opportunity to recognise, reflect on, be moved by the existence and experience of others, from Humpty Dumpty to Agamemnon; from “Alice in Wonderland” to “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”. In the same way, we help youngsters develop their desire to search for meaning through their experience of water play in the nursery; through understanding displacement; the life-giving and life-threatening potential of water; water as a source of energy and as an elemental power.
18. We encourage pupils to express their innermost thoughts and feelings through, for example, dance, art, writing. So, in the primary class, we ask them to paint their house, their family, or their pets. And we get them to talk about their work, helping them to explore why they painted the house orange, or the cat green. Later on, we give them the opportunity to study shape, form, colour, perspective, then their creativity can become more thoughtful, more imaginative, more personal, freed by newly acquired understanding, perception or skill. In physical education, pupils are helped gradually not only to understand the beauty of line and form but also physical effort, energy, the value of the individual, respect for others, and the need for good relationships with others in successful team games. In mathematics, we take pupils from the basic skills of recognising and exploring the meaning of number through to logical, abstract thinking. Young children see numbers growing bigger (and smaller), realising that there is no **biggest** number. They thus begin to appreciate infinity. We encourage pupils to search for truth, beauty and perfection through their study of religious education, languages, music, history, physical education. And this is not just in the passive sense of responding to others’ work or achievements. We need to help them understand why they have to persevere with scales in order to be able to play a Chopin Prelude; with practice in shooting at goal or using a forehand drive in order to develop their physical skills; with understanding mathematical principles in order to create a notation of their own; with learning French verbs in order to be understood in the language and to understand its richness.

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19. Youngsters need to know that, when we correct a spelling or query the use of the word, the significance of the correction lies in the emphasis on the search for the right, “true” expression of thought, its intrinsic value and not simply in accuracy for its own sake. Our assessment should always be, in this deeper sense, formative. It is for this reason that all of us in schools, teachers and pupils, take pride in our work, rejecting the shoddy and the superficial. In an age when many young people are offered instant satisfaction of superficial desires, simply at the press of a television button, it is perhaps difficult for us to convince them that true freedom and lasting fulfilment demand a greater effort. But there is another step we must take.

### **Our response to the Creator and Author of all knowledge**

20. Our faith gives the realities with which we work a much sharper focus. The first and obvious focus comes from our belief in God. Such belief names the author of all knowledge, all beauty, all goodness and all truth. Sister Wendy Beckett, the unmistakable art commentator, puts it very simply.

*“One of the mistakes we make is to think that God only comes to us through religion. Wherever there is beauty and truth, there is God; not under his rightful name but anonymously. It doesn’t work with bad art. Bad art only occupies the mind. The depths are left unchallenged. Good art puts us in touch with the transcendent.”*

*(The Times, 16 February, 1994)*

Our faith asks us to respond to knowledge, beauty, love and truth, in whatever form, precisely as a revelation of their author. Our task as teachers, therefore, is to ensure that pupils gradually come to understand that what we are teaching them, what they are learning in all subjects of the National Curriculum, is not an end in itself.

21. Knowledge of the way in which the human body works, of geological phenomena, of the laws of physics or mathematics; an understanding of human passion, of human creativity and achievement, of human exploration of the meaning of the divine, all this contributes to our understanding of the way God works in the world and in our lives and thus to our understanding of and response to Him. We need to help pupils explore beneath and beyond mere factual knowledge. In this way, our faith in God as creator and redeemer, the author of all knowledge, gives new meaning and depth to study.
22. It also gives new purpose to our work. The struggle to translate a German poem, to interpret a play, to solve a technical problem, to improve a physical skill, is seen not simply as a task to be undertaken and assessed, an attainment target to

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be reached, but a means to understanding of far greater and lasting significance. And the way in which we and our pupils work is then seen as contributing to God's creation and continuing purpose. The way in which we respond to the opportunities we are offered either enriches or impoverishes that continuing creation. It is our faith which enables us to speak of spiritual development in these terms, in terms of a response to God.

23. Interestingly, the masters of the spiritual life always speak in these terms. For St Francis and St Clare of Assisi, the spiritual life is always that search to know ourselves as we are before God: to know that all we have comes as a gift from God, and that without God we are and have nothing. St Ignatius of Loyola saw as the object of all spiritual development the readiness and ability of the person to respond to God, because he understood that God comes to meet us in every event, in every circumstance, in every person, in sickness, in health, in happiness, in work, in love, in easy and in difficult relationships. The spiritual quest is quite simply that of recognising the God who comes to meet us, and of responding to that meeting with a heart no longer preoccupied with its own longings, hurts or inadequacies.
24. Similarly, faith enables us to identify and name the "seed of glory", that capacity within each one of us to recognise and respond to God. That "seed of glory" is none other than the Spirit of God, given to each person. The Holy Spirit is that inner force, or principle, dwelling in each of us and to be found at work throughout humanity. The task of spiritual development is, in Christian terms, that of enabling the Spirit to become the sole driving force of each person's life. By baptism, of course, a person is drawn into the life of Christ, the incarnate and complete manifestation of that redeeming Spirit. Throughout the Christian life, therefore, we are seeking a personal assimilation of the Gospel in the power of the Spirit, knowing that it will only come to fulfilment in the fullness of God's presence. As the words of the hymn remind us: "the seed of glory sown in man will flower when we see your face".

### **Questioning**

25. Of course, the presence of God is not often clear and unambiguous, at least not to us. For some, coming into a Catholic school from homes where this existence is barely acknowledged and where a life in faith is unknown, the bridge between the two environments is difficult to cross and can be a place of inner conflict. For most of us, the awareness is fleeting and fragile; it is often found wrapped up in fierce questioning and, certainly, with the struggle to break out of cynicism. Intellectual curiosity and the questioning of everything about faith, even a phase

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of disbelief, are often a crucial part of spiritual development.

*“The religious questioning of young people today needs to be better understood. Many of them are asking about the value of science and technology when everything could end in a nuclear holocaust; they look at how modern civilisation floods the world with material goods, beautiful and useful as these may be, and they wonder whether the purpose of life is really to possess many ‘things’ or whether there may not be something far more valuable; they are deeply disturbed by the injustice which divides the free and the rich from the poor and the oppressed.*

*For many young people, a critical look at the world they are living in leads to crucial questions on the religious plane. They ask whether religion can provide any answers to the pressing problems afflicting humanity.” (The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, paragraphs 20,21)*

26. The struggle of coming to terms with the fundamental questions and mysteries of life can, of course, take place in the content of many subject classes - and often outside them. This, again, has important messages for the way we teach and for the way our pupils learn. There are often no easy answers to difficult questions which arise in history, economics, religious education or literature, for example. Sometimes, there may be no answer at all or, at least, no single answer. For young children seeking the security and reassurance of certainties, it can be disconcerting and unsettling to be made aware of this. This can be particularly the case if their home life is unstable. And we must be careful neither to:

*“...break the crushed reed, nor quench the wavering flame”  
(Isaiah 42.3).*

27. Young children often see their teachers as people who know all the answers. We may encourage them in this kind of dependence if we only ask closed questions, those for which there is only one answer - the one we want. But if we encourage them to understand that a number of answers may well be acceptable, provided they can be justified, that even then the question might not be fully solved, then we are preparing them to see where they will find the answers to the major questions they will face in their lives, to see where real security and reassurance are.

*“Whoever walks in darkness, and has no light shining for him, let him trust in the name of Yahweh, let him lean on his God.” (Isaiah 50.10)*

To lead pupils in the direction of open-ended enquiry is to help them in their spiritual quest.

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## Reflection

28. Christian faith enables us not only to name the author of all goodness, beauty and truth and, indeed, of the restlessness that provokes in us the questions we seek to resolve, it also opens our minds and hearts to recognise in Jesus Christ the fullest expression of God's presence in our world. So, for Catholics, spiritual development means a familiarity with the life, words and actions of Jesus Christ, who makes plain to us the way God acts in the world. No wonder St Clare says repeatedly that the secret of the spiritual life is to look at Christ, to gaze on him, to contemplate him constantly. Only then will we recognise the God who always comes to meet us.
29. In this respect, spiritual development is, of course, inseparable from religious education, catechesis, worship and liturgy in which we try to introduce to the pupils the person of Jesus Christ and relate his teaching to their experience. It is in this context that the liturgical life of the school assumes its richest significance, where opportunities for prayer and reflection enable pupils to strengthen, in a very specific way, their life in Christ. The opportunities provided by a Catholic school for pupils to deepen their personal relationship with Christ in personal prayer, public liturgy and the celebration of the sacraments bring the spiritual life of the school to its most explicit expression.
30. These characteristics of our Catholic understanding of spiritual development, based firmly on the human quest which we share with all humanity, but going further because of our faith in Christ, should shape the particular kind of enquiry, discussion and reflection that we wish to encourage in our pupils. So, we need to give them opportunities to reflect, in increasing depth, on what they have seen, or read, or done; to analyse their reactions; to justify the meaning they give to a particular experience. There are numerous opportunities across the curriculum for us to help young people to see how some aspects of popular opinion, their own emotions or prejudices may cloud or distort their understanding. We all carry this sort of baggage with us throughout our lives. That is why all judgements have subjective elements in them. However, this does not mean that we should not try to be rational, to question the views of the media or of contemporary society, to free ourselves from our own worries or concerns, however pressing they may be, so that we are then open to the working of God in our own lives and in the lives of others.
31. We also, sometimes, need to step aside and give our pupils the space to explore for themselves, to question, to reflect and, indeed, to reject. Young people have little time or space, never mind quiet, in which to become aware of themselves, of their feelings, reactions and needs. How often do we expect them to express

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themselves in poetry, prose or prayer on demand, in the last ten minutes of a lesson? Could we produce something of value within such constraints? More time and space are needed for meaningful reflection.

32. Reflection, if it is to contribute to spiritual development, needs to be directed towards an understanding of ourselves and of how God is at work in our lives. The great temptation is to make it into an examination of conscience, or an attempt to improve our behaviour. To reduce all moments of reflection on what we are doing and why we are doing it to a consideration of moral consequences runs the risk of reducing spiritual development to a search for moral conformity. In this context, we might need to consider whether the task of maintaining good order and discipline in a school is inadequate if it works against providing opportunities for spiritual development through reflection. The development of a spiritual life is much more to do with understanding life's patterns and all they teach us about ourselves and, more importantly, about God's action in the world and in our own lives, and about the ways in which God brings us gifts of peace and contentment.

### **Self-awareness**

33. To help pupils into the habit of this kind of reflection is, therefore, an essential part of spiritual development. The self-awareness it can bring is an important step, but not the real objective. It is not an exercise in endless introspection. Rather, it should be an opportunity to deepen in each of us a true sense of self, a growing awareness of God's presence and action in our lives and our readiness to respond to Him. Cardinal Hume has described it in this way:

*"Within each of us is an inner sanctuary where none may enter save, perhaps, one or two close and trusted friends, allowed for a brief moment a quick, cursory glimpse of what is hidden within. It is our inner selves, often an area where we feel ill at ease. Here we experience suffering, that dreaded visitor, a thief that steals from us our peace of mind, our joy, our hope. Here, too, however, we experience love, the guest that brings happiness and contentment. It is into this area - the inner sanctuary - that God seeks to enter and to make his abode. Suffering and love are often, in different ways, heralds of his arrival. He knocks at our door. We are free to open or not".*

*(Address to Secondary Heads' Association, Cardiff, March 1993)*

34. It is this intensely personal nature of spirituality and spiritual development that makes it varied and adaptable to an infinite number of circumstances and individuals and, of course, to the different ages and experience of children in our

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schools. The developmental aspect of spirituality should be well appreciated by teachers trained to work to the differing capacities of children at the different key stages.

35. In tackling such a sensitive and personal area as spiritual development, it is crucial that we are keenly aware of all that works against our aims. Many of our pupils come from secure, happy homes, and are well supported by their parish community. For them, the shared values of home, parish and school create an environment of trust and openness. However, some of our pupils bring to school experiences which have seriously damaged their capacity or readiness to develop a sense of self-worth or of the value of life and the world around them. Many of them are deeply marked by distrust, if not hatred, of themselves and of others. They are already cynical about anything which appears to be good or wholesome, and highly skilled at hiding their vulnerability and sensitivity.
36. There can be no doubt, therefore, of the importance of the environment we create for our pupils if they are ever to move out of the imprisonment of such experiences. And, in this environment, acceptance, respect and love are essential. Creating and maintaining this "safe place" is, for teachers, both difficult and demanding, particularly for those who may themselves be trying to come to terms with similar experiences. Only in an environment of mutual trust will young people who have been deeply hurt begin to open themselves to the truth of their own experience and feelings and to value themselves and others once more.

*"The Council summed this up by speaking of an environment permeated with the Gospel spirit of love and freedom. In a Catholic school, everyone should be aware of the living presence of Jesus the 'Master' who, today as always, is with us in our journey through life as the one genuine 'Teacher', the perfect Man in whom all human values find their fullest perfection."*

*(The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, paragraph 25)*

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## **SECTION 4.**

### **MORAL DEVELOPMENT**

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37. Before beginning to explore how we might promote moral development across the curriculum in Catholic schools, it is useful to remind ourselves of the origins of the word “moral”. The Latin word “mores” means custom, manners, a way of life which is characteristic of a society. It also involves the distinction between right and wrong, good and evil in a social context. Moral development, therefore, is about a growing awareness of, and a positive response to, the demands of living as an individual with others in community.

*“All men are called to the same end: God himself. There is a certain resemblance between the union of the divine persons and the fraternity that men are to establish among themselves in truth and love. Love of neighbour is inseparable from love for God.*

*The human person needs to live in society. Society is not for him an extraneous addition but a requirement of his nature. Through the exchange with others, mutual service and dialogue with his brethren, man develops his potential; he thus responds to his vocation.”*

*(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1878,1879.)*

So, we need to consider how an individual pupil and, of course, teacher can best develop in his or her unique way within an identifiable - in our case, Catholic - community.

#### **The Christian Tradition**

38. One of the current features of society in this country is its lack of any common, over-arching system of values. If the Catholic school is to be “a sacrament of salvation”, we have to demonstrate the effectiveness of living within the context of a shared set of values and a shared practice of moral discernment and decision. This, of course, is no easy matter and never one free from disagreement and, at times, personal pain. But, at least, we can confidently say that the Christian community has been dealing systematically in such matters for centuries and, properly understood, has much to offer from its experience and teaching.
39. Faced with the moral confusion of contemporary society, it is helpful to remind ourselves of people’s continuing search for ways of living happily and at peace with each other through the ages. It is a dynamic search: moral thinking has

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developed and is still developing. The way in which Christian society regarded slavery, child labour, the mentally ill, poverty has changed quite dramatically in recent times - at least, in relation to our immediate society. But, with world-wide, instant communication, the notion of "society" now necessarily includes not just our own school, our own parish, our own town, but the "global village". It is interesting that, in the hymn "All things bright and beautiful", the verse:

*"The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate,  
God made them, high or lowly,  
And ordered their estate"*

is rarely sung in these days of universal suffrage, free, compulsory education and the welfare state. But do we, in our northern castles, show a similar attitude to those standing at the gates of the third world? We catch a glimpse of them, not as we drive past them in our carriages, but as we switch channels on our television sets. Certainly, the greater the demands made on our planet by its increasing population, the more we appreciate that the notion of "the common good" includes animals, plants, soil, water, the very air we all breathe. So the frontiers of moral thinking are constantly being extended.

40. For Christians, the natural search for happiness finds its end in the Beatitudes - "the heart of Jesus' preaching" (Catechism 1716).

*"The Beatitudes reveal the goal of human existence, the ultimate end of human acts: God calls us to his own beatitude." (1719)*

*"The beatitude we are promised confronts us with decisive moral choices. It invites us to purify our hearts of bad instincts and to seek the love of God above all else." (1723)*

40. How we understand and interpret Christ's new commandment:

*"Love one another as I have loved you" (John 13:34)*

depends on our deepening understanding of God's love for us. We will work for the good of all God's creation (loving one another) increasingly as we comprehend the extent of his love for us. So, spiritual and moral development are inseparable and interdependent.

### **Policy and practice**

41. If, in Catholic schools, we are to play our part in the moral development of the young people in our charge, we need to agree, among ourselves, both academic and support staff, and with parents and governors, what our shared values are and how we plan to put them into practice. In other words, a school contributes,

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or fails to contribute, to the moral development of its members, its pupils in particular, by the broad values that are upheld in the school generally.

*“It is a genuine community bent on imparting, over and above an academic education, all the help it can to its members to adopt a Christian way of life. For the Catholic school, mutual respect means service to the Person of Christ. Co-operation is between brothers and sisters in Christ. A policy of working for the common good is undertaken seriously as working for the building up of the Kingdom of God.” (The Catholic School, paragraph 60)*

42. The extent to which we, as teachers, uphold, for example, honesty, respect for each other, integrity of effort, contributes, or fails to contribute, to the moral development of the children. And we must make it clear to the children and their parents that, in advocating certain moral values, we are presenting a distinctive vision of human life; that this is a dynamic vision; that we will all have our successes and failures in trying to live the values we are both learning and teaching. Since, for young people, witness is more effective than words, we need to be particularly aware of the tendency to say one thing and do another.
43. Having agreed our mission statement and incorporated it into our policies on the curriculum, on assessment, pastoral care, admissions etc., we need to be aware of the extent to which we, as staff, are living the values we proclaim. This is a demanding task, particularly at a time when there are so many pressures on schools. However, we do need to ask ourselves whether the current emphasis on academic success and league tables prompts us to refuse admission to pupils with special educational needs. If, in our mission statement, we include the aim to help all pupils achieve their full potential as unique human beings, we need to ensure that the school's policies for monitoring and evaluating each pupil's work are capable of fulfilling this aim - and that they are effectively implemented. We need to look across the curriculum at the ways in which we identify and provide for those with special needs and special gifts. In the right and proper search for academic excellence, we must ensure that we do not sacrifice the progress of the weak and vulnerable by the way we construct the timetable or allocate staff. While encouraging a sense of respect for others in our pupils, we need to be aware that they are more likely to respect each other and their staff if we respect them. They must not be the only ones to hold back a door or to give way on a crowded corridor!

### **Moral awareness**

44. As with spiritual development across the curriculum, we can find moral values, moral dilemmas in every subject we teach, even though some offer richer

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opportunities than others for developing pupils' growing awareness of moral questions and moral choices. Primary children can explore in science the impact of pollution on their local environment, for example, while older children can begin to examine in science and geography the complexity of environmental decisions taken by national governments or international companies. Through environmental education, pupils of all ages will grow to understand the impact of their litter, their vandalism, their noise on the life and work of others. In history, at all stages, pupils learn about the struggles, the achievements and the failures of earlier generations. We sometimes ask younger children to act out historical events, to try and imagine they are a certain character in history. Later, they might debate the difference between the reactions of the English and the Normans to the Battle of Hastings, or more, recently, those of the French, German and British to the D-Day landings. We can encourage them to consider the differences between "defeat", "liberation" and "conquest" and the related moral implications. Similarly, we can ask them to reflect on acts of great heroism or of great cruelty in the Bible, primary school fables, the Greek legends, Shakespeare or contemporary literature.

45. An awareness of the ways in which pictures tell or support stories can lead, much later, to a discussion on how and why advertising is aimed at young people. In mathematics, pupils can discover how number is used to add weight to, or distort, an argument. They can see the significance of using statistics produced by, for example, the World Health Organisation rather than by armament companies. History, geography, religious education, economics, literature offer them numerous examples of the use and abuse of power. In physical education, they can be made aware of how a particular physical strength or skill can support or destroy a team game. More directly, health education encourages them to respect their own and others' bodies. So, in all subjects of the curriculum, we need to identify the particular knowledge and skills which help pupils to become increasingly aware of moral issues and of the complexity of moral choices.

### **Conscience**

46. This leads to another core aspect of pupils' moral development: their ability to begin to think rationally and impartially about moral and ethical questions, to recognise that "the education of conscience is a lifelong task" (Catechism 1784). Having helped them to be aware of the wide range of topics and situations in which moral choices are made, deliberately or unthinkingly, which affect the lives of others, we have to take them beyond the immediate, emotional response ("That's great!" "I like that!" "How terrible!" "I couldn't do that!" "I'd love to be able to ...") and ask them why they have reacted in a certain way. They should be encouraged to examine and justify their reactions. If they do begin to explore

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what is within them and what, out of laziness or habit or because of their cultural setting, they have been prepared to let pass as a fleeting experience, then they are beginning to think rationally and impartially about moral issues.

47. In a culture of unrestricted choice in the pursuit of personal satisfaction, this aspect of moral development is crucial. To learn the skill of thinking rationally and impartially about ethical issues is a key part of moral development. Across the curriculum, particularly in science, technology, history, geography, literature and religious education, they will find examples of how moral thinking has changed over the centuries, they will be able to analyse and reflect on their own response to the moral dilemmas and the moral decisions of others and will see the need to be well informed when they make moral decisions themselves.
48. Moral development, in the end, is about making moral decisions. In the Catholic tradition, making moral decisions is about judgement of conscience. It is, therefore, crucial that young people understand what is meant by conscience and, particularly, informed conscience. Its meaning and significance are very clearly set out in "Gaudium et Spes":

*"Conscience is the most intimate centre and sanctuary of a person, in which he or she is alone with God whose voice echoes within them. In a marvellous manner, conscience makes known that law which is fulfilled by love of God and neighbour. In their faithfulness to conscience, Christians are united with all other people in the search for truth and in finding true solutions to the many moral problems which arise in the lives of individuals and in society. And the more a correct conscience prevails, so much the more do persons and groups abandon blind whims and work to conform to the objective norms of morality" (Paragraph 16).*

49. It is also crucial that, through their awareness of how others - politicians, businessmen, scientists, fictional characters - take moral decisions, young people are helped to understand that conscience is not the same as instinct or personal preference. Rather, it involves responsible, properly informed judgement, a judgement based on the moral teaching of Christ and his Church. Young people need to know not only what the Church's moral teaching is but also why certain acts are judged to be good or evil. As is pointed out in "Veritatis Splendor":

*"...conscience expresses itself in acts of "judgement" which reflect the truth about the good and not in arbitrary "decisions". The maturity and responsibility of these judgements - and, when all is said and done, of the individual who is their subject - are not measured by the liberation of the conscience from objective truth, in favour of an alleged autonomy*

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*in personal decisions but, on the contrary, by an insistent search for truth and by allowing oneself to be guided by that truth in one's actions" (Paragraph 60).*

This search for truth, especially in moral matters, requires a certain inner strength, or freedom. As 'Gaudium et Spes' states in paragraph 17, under the title "The Excellence of Liberty":

*"It is only in freedom, however, that human beings can turn to what is good.... Genuine freedom is an outstanding manifestation of the divine image in humans. For God willed to leave them in the hands of their own counsel, so that they would seek their creator of their own accord and would freely arrive at full and blessed perfection by cleaving to God. Their human dignity therefore requires them to act through conscious and free choice, as motivated and prompted personally from within, and not through blind internal impulse or merely external pressure".*

50. It is quite clear, therefore, that if we do a good act through fear, this is not a sound moral act. It has to be done as a result of free, informed choice for good. As "Veritatis Splendor" states simply:

*"...freedom of conscience is never freedom "from" the truth but always and only freedom "in" the truth" (Paragraph 64).*

There are important implications in this crucial aspect of morality for the ways in which we encourage good work or good behaviour in school. If these are achieved because our pupils are afraid of punishment, then we are failing in this way to support their moral development: we have limited their freedom to choose good. Likewise, if we fail to help them to make informed decisions, particularly by failing to give them opportunities to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the moral teaching of Christ and the Church, then we are restricting their moral development.

### **Moral decisions**

51. Having helped our pupils to become increasingly aware of the scope and complexity of morality, and of the need to be well informed, to think rationally and impartially across the curriculum about moral issues, we will see them becoming increasingly alert to the moral decisions we take which directly affect them, to the ways in which we use or abuse our position of authority, to the ways in which we treat them inside and outside the classroom.
52. They may detect in the way we arrange the furniture in the classroom that we are trying to direct their learning, or that we want to encourage an exchange of ideas

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and individual enquiry. If we don't explain why we lock them out of the school building in the lunch hour, they may perhaps interpret this as our lack of trust in their honesty or their respect for the environment. The ways in which we mark their work - or don't - will show them whether we are trying positively to help them fulfil their potential or implying that we take little account of the efforts they have made. If we don't explain to them differences in marking policies within and across departments, they may interpret these as our own inability to co-operate effectively with each other for the good of our pupils. If we offer the same intellectual challenge to all those in a mixed ability group, they may find it hard to accept that we believe they have a unique potential to be developed in the classroom. If we regularly give them time-filling (time-wasting) tasks such as colouring pictures or copying from the board, they may question our respect for their intellectual ability or, indeed, for the subject we are teaching.

53. As teachers, we are constantly making moral decisions in the classroom. These are, perhaps, most obvious, and they touch pupils most immediately. in the ways in which we keep discipline, in our use of punishments and rewards. How we handle disruptive pupils, whether we punish a whole class for the faults of a few, the reasons for allocating jobs with their various perks, all need thinking through, not only in the staff-room, but also with the pupils themselves so that our criteria are known and understood by all. Pupils rarely object for long to a just punishment which is reasoned and reasonable. On the other hand, nothing rankles more deeply than unexplained or unjust punishment. The arbitrary nature of such punishment, or reward, undermines young people's instinctive sense of order and of natural justice which are both crucial to their developing moral awareness. Sometimes, we are able to share decision-making with them, drawing them into the process and the responsibility. Sometimes, because of our greater experience or knowledge, or because of our responsibility for them as teachers, we have to take the decision ourselves. Our readiness to share with pupils, as much as possible, the reasons for our decisions, and the principles and consequences which have been taken into account, is one of the most formative ways in which we can help their moral development.

### **Self-discipline**

54. Closely related to this is our own self-discipline; the extent to which we, as teachers, set an example as people who can think clearly, impartially and rationally about ethical questions, but who can also put our moral decisions into practice. In doing this, we are not saying to our pupils: "Look how good we are!" but rather, "Look, we're struggling too!" And we know that sometimes we will fail: failure is part of the human condition. We know that we'll be provoked and lose our

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temper; we'll promise and not deliver; we'll be disloyal to our colleagues or gossip about our pupils; we, too, will linger at break and be late for lessons; we, too, will not prepare our work properly. But the ways in which we face up to, and deal with, our own lack of self-discipline - and that of others - offer important lessons to our pupils. Vincent MacNamara puts it this way:

*"We stand in continuing need of acceptance and healing, of reconciliation with others, with God, with ourselves and with our environment. The heart of the Christian message is that we can expect forgiveness - and that it should become a dynamic in our lives. We may find it difficult to forgive ourselves. Others may find it difficult to forgive us. History may not forgive us. We may not be able to undo the harm that we have done. But our story is that the one whom we regard as the ultimate reality, God, is forgiving".*

*(The Truth in Love, p.181)*

We cannot expect our own lapses in self-discipline to be accepted by our colleagues or our pupils unless we acknowledge them, see ourselves as part of a forgiving community, seek forgiveness and strive to improve. Likewise, we cannot expect forgiveness and reconciliation unless we, too, are prepared to forgive ourselves and others, as individuals and as a school community.

### **Motivation: the greater good**

55. A crucial element in the moral development of young people is the question of motivation. Formed by faith, we cannot be satisfied with motivations of reward or punishment, nor simply with a standard of "equality" or "do unto others as you would have them do to you". Both these approaches are not only fragile but open to real misuse, as daily life often demonstrates. Rather, in conjunction with our approach to spiritual development and to religious education, we must strive to base moral development on our understanding of the truth about the human person as revealed to us by God and experienced in our best, and worst, moments. In other words, our aim must not be that of winning a reluctant conformity to some arbitrary laws, no matter how reasonable they may be. We must strive to bring about a readiness to follow the law which is written in our hearts.
56. In attempting to do this, we need to keep a sharp eye on a key feature of that law: that we are made not for ourselves, but to live with, in and through community; that we find fulfilment in giving rather than in receiving, that we give because we have received. Any moral framework must have at its heart the concept and call of a greater good and the question of having to defer some immediate self-gratification. Our ability to identify an immediate good and, then, deny ourselves

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of it for the sake of a greater good demands considerable maturity, particularly in the case of those who have themselves been deprived of love, trust, respect or generosity.

57. Pupils learn about examples of heroic deeds or self-sacrifice in, for example, history, religious education or literature. If they are asked to examine why men or women gave up their lives - the ultimate sacrifice - and so saved others, they may discover that their motives may not have been morally good. They may have been seeking their own glory; it may have been an act of despair or because they lacked the courage to face future hardships. This aspect of moral development is complex and demanding. We are encouraging pupils not only to postpone their satisfaction, to deny themselves, but to do so for morally good reasons; for the good of others.
58. There are many opportunities in school life for the sense of the greater good to be formed: in promoting the good of the team or the class; in working for the disadvantaged in the local community; in giving money to support charities. All such activities teach young people about the greater good, the common good. They are all at the basis of a sense of service to others. They all help to strengthen, in each of us, the reasons why we make decisions that cause us sacrifice.
59. They are also activities which help us to reflect on our motives for action. In encouraging youngsters to put others first, we need to help them understand that we are not inviting them to do this simply to please us, their teachers. We must be just as careful with praise as with blame. But, in a school, we have many excellent opportunities to develop not only broad values, not only a sense of the struggle between good and evil, of making choices, of thinking rationally and impartially about morality, not only **how** to make moral judgements but also **why**. For the greater good, we strive, and, sometimes, in the end, give up what we want for ourselves. And so, once more, in the Catholic school we see the inter-dependence of spiritual and moral development. Moral development hinges on the practice of self-denial, on the willingness of the person to see his or her own good in relation to that of others and in terms of a loving God who calls us, through generous self-giving, to the true fullness of life.

*“The Lord Jesus came to live among us in order to show us the Father’s love. His ultimate sacrifice testifies to his love for his friends. And the Lord’s new commandment is at the centre of our faith: ‘This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you’. The ‘as’ is the model and the measure of Christian love.”*

*(The Religious Dimension of Education  
in the Catholic School, paragraph 85)*

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## *Questions to aid discussion*

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Within the National Curriculum, all subjects offer opportunities for the spiritual and moral development of pupils, but they are not equally fruitful. However, teaching methods, expectations of pupils, evaluation of performance, relationships inside and outside the classroom are all relevant to this area of provision. The following questions are offered as examples for discussion among teachers, within and across subject areas, on spiritual and moral development across the curriculum.

### **Spiritual Development**

- What examples are there in Programmes of Study of opportunities for pupils to be able to reflect on the values, experiences and attitudes of others?
- What opportunities are there in Programmes of Study for pupils to understand and reflect on the physical world as God's creation?
- How are pupils encouraged to widen their horizons?
- What opportunities are planned across the curriculum for pupils to explore their own feelings, and express them in their work?
- In what ways can teachers encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own learning?
- In what ways can pupils be helped to recognise God's presence in their work and in their lives?
- In what ways can teachers counteract pupils' pre-conceived ideas and prejudices in their work?

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- What is the role of Religious Education teachers in spiritual development across the curriculum?
  - How do liturgy and worship promote spiritual development?
  - How does the school/department identify and provide for those with special needs and special gifts?
  - How do systems of reward and punishment encourage pupils to give of their best?
  - How can assessment encourage pupils to reflect on their work?
  - How does assessment encourage and take account of original thinking?
  - In what ways does a school/department take account of and evaluate spiritual development across the full range of ability and age in the school?
  - In what ways do school/department policies encourage the awareness of/ reflection on/ response to God's presence in the life of all those in the school?

### **Moral Development**

- What opportunities are there in Programmes of Study for pupils to form a moral conscience?
- What opportunities are there in Programmes of Study for pupils to understand the complexities of moral choices?
- What opportunities are there in Programmes of Study for pupils to study the moral choices of others and their impact on society?
- In what ways are pupils encouraged to make independent, rational and informed judgements across the curriculum?
- How are pupils encouraged to use rational argument in assessed work?
- How can subjects develop pupils' understanding of the role of authority in informing moral judgements?

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- What opportunities are there for pupils to co-operate with each other in their work?
  - How is their ability to co-operate assessed?
  - How does the school identify and support those with special needs and special gifts?
  
  - How are pupils motivated to behave in a moral way?
  - How do systems of reward and punishment encourage moral thinking and behaviour?
  - How does assessment promote moral development?
  
  - What is the role of Religious Education teachers in moral development across the curriculum?
  - How do liturgy and worship encourage moral development?
  
  - To what extent are school policies based on moral principles?
  - How does the school/department evaluate moral development across the full range of ability and age in the school?

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# **CES Publications**

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## **Special Educational Needs**

### **Guidelines for Parents**

These guidelines for parents supporting children with special educational needs have been revised in the light of the 1993 Education Act and the Code of Practice issued by the DFE. Headteachers, parish clergy, SEN co-ordinators and parent advocates will need to be familiar with the contents of this booklet to be able to assist parents of children with special educational needs.

### **Our Stories**

A collection of personal reflections of parents of children with special educational needs within the Catholic community. Parents share their stories with their readers not only to help them better to understand the experience of many families, but also as a reminder that parents are not alone in the task of raising their children.

## **Other Publications**

### **The Inspection of Catholic Schools**

These guidelines for governing bodies, headteachers and staff of Catholic primary and secondary schools are designed to help schools prepare for Section 9 and Section 13 inspections. Advice is offered regarding procedures to be followed prior to, during and after inspection to help schools anticipate the inspection process with confidence and also, subsequently, fully implement their Mission Statement.

### **Evaluating the Distinctive Nature of a Catholic School (3rd Edition)**

This series of working papers on different, but complementary, aspects of a Catholic school has been comprehensively revised and includes several new topics. It is designed to stimulate not only debate but also, as appropriate, informed action and change at individual school level.

### **Journeying together**

This video and supportive material on home-school partnership have been produced to help Catholic primary school communities explore their present practice in relation to school teaching; to consider a range of practical strategies and to plan realistically for the future in the light of all other demands.