

Catholic Education Week 2018



Sunday, 11 February 2018

Dear friends

The theme for this week is "Catholic Schools: Serving the Common Good".

In preparing for this week we have been learning about what the term "The Common Good" means and how we are putting that into practice in our homes, schools, parishes and communities.

We have discovered that, through the mission and aims of our Catholic school, we are challenged to stop thinking about ourselves all of the time and to put others first. We are taught to do as Jesus asked and "love our neighbour as ourselves". In our classrooms, through our charity work, and during our school prayers and liturgies, we are developing into young adults who are discovering our vocation and learning what it means to be at the service of others.

Our Catholic schools are communities that promote social justice and opportunity for all. Pope Francis said last month that education should help our *"young people to be open and interested in the reality that surrounds them, capable of care and tenderness, free from the widespread prejudice where you must be competitive, aggressive, and hard towards others, especially towards those who are different, foreign or in any way seen as an obstacle to one's own affirmation."*

Catholic schools in Scotland are putting into action these words of the Holy Father by being inclusive communities which welcome, value, affirm and support all pupils, parents and staff to fulfil the potential of their God-given talents.

The Common Good is served through what the Church calls, 'the preferential option for the poor'. This challenges us to always ensure that our decisions and actions lift up and support those who are poorest amongst us. Our work in schools has always been informed by this, but the recent focus by the government on closing the poverty-related attainment gap is helping all schools aim to do better. At St John's we have been positively targeting some of our children and young people for extra opportunities so that they can reach their full potential.

This year marks a special centenary – one hundred years since the 1918 Education (Scotland) Act was written into law. This marked the end of Catholic parishes having to pay for and run their schools, when Catholics were amongst the most economically disadvantaged groups in Scotland. And the law offered the Catholic community guarantees about religious education, the appointment of staff and the ethos and life of the school. In 2018 we will be participating in a number of events marking this centenary with the theme, Catholic Schools – Good for Scotland. We aim to make Catholic schools good for Scotland's young people and our families, but we should also recognise what a huge step forward this was in terms of equality. This is a great example of government stepping in and stepping up, recognising the wish of the Catholic community for their own schools so they could pass on the faith of their fathers and mothers. This year we give thanks and say, 'Good for Scotland!' For the government, this was an incredibly ambitious decision and one which has led directly to us here, in 2018, to St John's Academy, St Stephen's, Our Lady's and St Dominic's – our flourishing Catholic schools throughout Perth and Kinross.

As adults, we all aim to share the best of our learning with our children as they grow up. We hope they'll become full and valued members of society – active citizens in our world. When we recently asked pupils, parents and staff what they value most in their school, they agreed that fairness, achievement, respect and love should be at the heart of what we do and these same values are at the heart of the gospel message.

We teach that every single person has a right to be treated with unconditional positive regard. For us as Catholics, this is agape, how we show our love for one another. Our parents are the first and most important teachers of every child, and together with grandparents, families, friends and the wider Church community, show in their actions what love looks like in our day-to-day lives.

We believe in fairness and aim to make sure every child can achieve their potential – no matter what barriers they face, including the barriers caused by poverty. Teaching the whole person means that we create a school which allows our young people to grow, in a happy, safe environment where they feel respected, involved and included. At our school, we know that we can only succeed together as a family.

Thank you for all the support you give to your Catholic schools. It is wonderful to know that we are part of a bigger family, and your generosity in so many different ways is always appreciated. Thank you too to our priests, deacons and our bishop who give so much of their time to ensuring we provide the best possible Catholic education within our communities.

God bless and with every best wish to you and your family,

Seán Hagney

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