

Catholic Education Service



Guidance for Parish Priests on the recruitment of Foundation Governors in Catholic Schools

The Canonical Foundation of Catholic Education

For almost the entirety of its existence the Catholic Church has been involved in education. To this extent, the Church's commitment to education is reflected in its presence in canon law.

Pope Pius XI in his 1929 encyclical letter *Divini illius Magistri*, produced the first real attempt by the magisterium to illustrate what a Catholic education should look like. Specifically, it sought to define the roles of the parent, the Church and the state in the provision of a Christian education.

Much of the current Catholic educational landscape is still largely based on the ideas expressing in *Divini illius Magistri*.

There are 29 canons on education and they are split into four parts. Three are introductory canons on education, 11 are on schools and 15 are on universities.

Canon law requires parents to send their children to schools which will provide a Catholic education or if this is not possible to ensure their proper Catholic education outside the school. The canon (798) clearly favours the former as the optimal way of achieving this goal.

Moreover, canon 794 states that the Church and its 'pastors of souls have the duty of making 'all possible arrangements so that all the faithful may avail themselves of a Catholic education.'

In essence, parents are duty bound to give their children a Catholic education just as the Church is to assist in its provision.

The Distinctive Nature of Catholic Schools

In order for parents to achieve this the State provides the funding for Catholic schools to exist. Catholic schools have four distinctive elements which make them stand out from other schools. These are:

1) The Curriculum

The governing body is responsible for the school's secular and religious curriculum thus ensuring all subjects of the National Curriculum are informed by Catholic teachings. Dioceses also have the right to inspect religious education and the Catholic character of the school.

2) Admissions

The governing body of Catholic schools are permitted to prioritise Catholics in their oversubscription admissions criteria.

3) Appointment of Teachers

The governing body of Catholic schools appoint and employ their own teachers. For senior leadership roles the governing body must choose practising Catholics to fill the roles.

4) Foundation Governors

The Trustees of Catholic schools have the legal right to appoint a majority of Foundation Governors to the governing body. This ensures that the school is managed in line with the Bishop's education policies.

If any of these four pillars are compromised it could put the future of Catholic education into significant jeopardy as it would leave the schools in direct opposition to the requirements set out in canon law.

The Role of Foundation Governors

As is evident, the role of the governing body is crucial to preservation and development of the Catholic character of the Church's schools. Moreover, without a majority of Foundation Governors on school governing bodies a school is at significant risk of not being able to fulfil its mission as a Catholic school. This is why encouraging practising Catholics to become foundation Governors is so important.

What Can I do In My Parish?

Your diocese has many resources which can be handed out after Mass, these go into varying amounts of detail about the role and responsibilities of Foundation Governors. However, what could really make the difference is the endorsement from the Parish Priest either in a homily or in a speech after Mass.

Lent is the time of year when we reflect on our actions and how we live our life. We look at what we do and how we can change to align ourselves more with the path of righteousness.

In today's fast pace society, time is one of our most precious attributes. So for many, sacrificing their time is the greatest gift they can give, and to do that for our Church should be recognised with the upmost sincerity.

If parishioners want to donate their time to the Church, encouraging them to be a Foundation Governor would be an excellent suggestion. Not only does it provide people with an effective way to live out their faith but also is an essential service for the preservation of one of the Catholic Church's most important missions.