

Review, evaluate, celebrate

Meeting Ofsted's inspection criteria is important, but Catholic schools must also develop an education that goes beyond what simply can be measured and embraces the formation of the whole person

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MANY HEADS and those involved in governance view inspection with a certain degree of trepidation, despite the fact that the 2016 Catholic Education Service data on the health of Catholic schooling shows Catholic schools outperforming the national average at KS2 and GCSE by six percentage points.

Passion, commitment and determination, not to mention a high level of professionalism and expertise, are easily identifiable in most of our head teachers and those involved in the governance of Catholic schools. The Catholic Church has managed its schools for more than a century during which inspection and accountability for the quality of their education has always played a part.

What is at risk of being eroded, if indeed it was ever fully grasped, is the understanding of the true purpose and meaning of Catholic education and what it should actually be accountable for. Since the introduction of the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) under the Education (Schools) Act 1992, as part of the extensive reform and centralisation of the school system begun by the Education Reform Act 1988, the situation has become increasingly confused.

The introduction of the National Curriculum, extensive testing in schools and the publication of league tables, all of which have been subjected to constant changes and challenges over nearly two decades, has resulted in many of those in leadership roles resorting to survival mode.

The structure of the inspection process is identified in Section 5 of the Education Act, which makes key judgements about the overall effectiveness of the school, effectiveness of leadership and management, quality of teaching, learning and assessment, personal development, behaviour and welfare, and outcomes of learning for pupils.

Section 48 of the Act recognises the bishop as the person legally responsible for Catholic schools in the diocese, and so responsible for ensuring that every school is fulfilling its remit to provide the best possible education for every pupil. Indeed, canon law says he has the right to watch over and inspect the Catholic schools in his territory (Can. 806§1).

While Ofsted is perceived as being all powerful in its ability to make or break both a school's reputation and those responsible for

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MAKE the effort to understand the Ofsted inspection in terms of its aims, criteria and methods.

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its leadership and governance, the temptation to focus primarily on ticking all the boxes for the Section 5 criteria has often run the risk of missing the point of the purpose and meaning of Catholic education. Part of the same inspection process is the inspection carried out in the name of the bishop, Section 48. Here the criteria under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 are identified as denominational religious education and the content of collective worship and/or those lessons designated as providing denominational RE. Dioceses have widened the brief to include leadership, management and the Catholic life of the school.

However, we still operate under a dualistic approach and therein lies the confusion. What is urgently needed is the courage to reclaim and reshape the whole structure and process of inspection into a model of ongoing review and evaluation and celebration.

If we continue to downsize the mission of the Church in education to meeting Ofsted criteria, with a heavy emphasis on data and measurable outcomes, we are in danger of valuing only what can be measured. The Church has always had a far greater vision and mission for education. Yes, we must fulfil the law, but what we need to avoid at all costs is dancing to the wrong tune.

The clue lies in our understanding of the Ofsted inspection. Many refer to there being two inspections when in law there is only one inspection in two parts. What we must not erode is the ability to see the whole educational enterprise as a seamless garment. In the 1982 Vatican document, *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, Section 19 sets out a clear holistic agenda "... to form men and women who will be ready to take their place in society, preparing them for the social

commitment to work for the improvement of social structures, bringing them more into conformity with the Gospel".

In an address on 20 March 2013, Pope Francis called on all leaders and those responsible for education to counter the dominance of a "one-dimensional vision of the human person", a vision that reduces human beings to what they produce. He warns that this view is "one of the most dangerous snares of our times". Seeing Christ as being at the centre of the educational enterprise challenges us to think and act against the prevailing culture of our time.

What is needed today is a reintegration of the whole Ofsted process. The 1988 statement by the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales tried to do this when they stated: "Religious education is not one subject among many, but the foundation of the entire education process. The beliefs and values it communicates should inspire and unify every aspect of school life. It should provide the context for, and substantially share, the school curriculum, and offer living experience of the light of faith in its practical expressions."

All that is on offer and experienced in our schools must be contextualised, marinated within the values and beliefs of Christ himself. Learning is a sacred enterprise and every discipline and activity should be seen as a process of discovering the mysteries of our creator. It is the task of those in leadership to translate vision into reality. The Church has never accepted less than the best. Canon 806:2 tells those in charge of Catholic schools to ensure, under the supervision of the local ordinary, that the formation they give is, in its academic standards, at least as outstanding as that in other schools in the area.

Unless we act now, with the ongoing push to academisation, there is a real danger that those in governance and leadership will drift ever more into an economy-driven model. Sadly there is little in the way of formation and training for mission being offered for the emerging roles of leadership for multi-academy trusts, CEOs and boards of trustees. We must step up and retake the initiative and leadership as one of the single biggest providers of education in this country.

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