

## Written evidence submitted by Catholic Education Service

### **The impact of COVID-19 on education and children's services inquiry– Written submission from the Catholic Education Service (CES)**

#### **Executive Summary**

- The evidence is being submitted by the Catholic Education Service (CES).
- The complications presented by the current COVID-19 crisis present significant challenges to the well-being of both students and staff. Additionally, the financial and logistical consequences, both in the short term and beyond will impact on all nurseries, schools and further and higher education facilities in both the public and private sectors.

#### **Introduction**

1. The CES represents 2117 Catholic schools in England on behalf of the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales across 20 dioceses. The Catholic Church provides education from early years through to further and higher education, as well as overseeing special schools and schools in the independent sector.
2. 19.3% of pupils in Catholic maintained primary schools and 17.3% in maintained secondary schools live in the most deprived areas which is above the national average of 13.4% and 11.7% respectively). As such, social justice in education is a significant priority in Catholic education.

#### **Support for pupils and families during closures and for the planned return of schools**

3. With significantly more pupils from the most deprived backgrounds compared to other schools, Catholic schools acknowledge their special mission to care for the poorest and most vulnerable children and young people in society. It is clear that the pandemic crisis is disproportionately affecting disadvantaged families and so the CES believes it is critical that every effort is made to enable more pupils to resume their education in school as soon as it is safe to do so.
4. The wellbeing of pupils and staff is fundamental to any decisions taken with regards to the opening and administration of Catholic schools. In the short term, much consideration will be required in how to adequately support the mental, emotional and physical health and development of all pupils.
5. It should be anticipated that pupils' mental and emotional health is likely to be impacted across the school community resulting in refusal to attend or participate in lessons leading to anxiety, and/or behavioural changes. At primary level the transition to secondary from Year 6 should be carefully thought through to avoid potential trauma as a result of the disruption.
6. While at home in the lockdown phase, most children have become used to being within their family units in a closed environment, with no social distancing and with tactile behaviour the norm. Given that young children at the EYFS/KS1 stages experience learning in a highly interactive way and require closer physical care, practitioners in Catholic schools have expressed concern that children will become

frightened to be close to one another, if as a result of social distancing they start to see 'contact' as wrong. This would have a hugely detrimental impact on the very young in their development and emotional growth.

7. Consideration should also be given to the impact on families, where siblings are in different year groups and may not re-start school at the same times.
8. It should be recognised that the potential reluctance of parents to send children to school will require management and a review of the student absence policy. If vulnerable children are not currently attending school, will this change if there continues to be no statutory requirement to do so on re-opening? Equally, it will be vital to identify those who are not able to return due to shielding or other related factors. Continuing to support pupils with home learning in either scenario will be challenging but vital.
9. It will be incumbent on the Department for Education, local authorities, dioceses where applicable, and schools to ensure there will be sufficient counselling services and pastoral or chaplaincy provision in place in all schools for the foreseeable future. There should be capacity to provide support for pupils, staff and the wider school community alike. Emotional literacy support assistants (ELSA) support and mental health activities for students should also be part of this package. Memorial services for anyone who has died and support for bereavement may also be a consideration in some schools.
10. Safeguarding reviews for pupils will be required as consideration is given on how to support families in financial or emotional difficulty. Although many will be pre-existing cases, it should be anticipated that in many cases, newly identified families will have to be supported as a direct result of the pandemic and the lockdown.
11. New hygiene rules in schools will need to be implemented in secondary schools around submission of work, away from paper and towards electronic submission. Equally in primary schools and nurseries there will be additional hygiene issues around shared play resources. In all settings students may have to provide or be allocated with their own devices, pencils, pens etc. If schools are to allocate them funding must be in place. If some of the costs are expected to be met by families then consideration must be given to those in economic hardship and vulnerable families.
12. Older students may choose to walk to school together without respecting social distancing making it harder to enforce when they arrive in school.
13. Regardless of what decisions may be taken on school catering, the Free School Meals (FSM) voucher system should be continued to support vulnerable families, particularly over the summer holiday period.
14. Parents, carers and the school community will require absolute clarity from the Government on the new covid-19 related inflammatory syndrome affecting children and young people.

**The financial implications of closures for providers: schools and nurseries**

15. Catholic education practitioners and senior leaders have expressed confusion and concern about the governments' priorities for reopening schools and what purpose this is designed to serve. Whether it is pupil led for the sake of returning to high quality education, or if it is to serve in providing childcare to allow parents to return to work, there are concerns that logistical pressures to facilitate childcare will be particularly challenging if for example, a rota system is in place with different children attending on different days. The teaching professions meanwhile would prefer to focus on education and pupil well-being.
16. Staff availability will be a major consideration as schools look to increase pupil capacity. Decisions will be required on pupil/teacher ratios as the model for schools returning is drafted.
17. Schools will have to carefully manage staff numbers while some colleagues remain in shielding, in isolation or will have their respective childcare issues: nursery provision is likely to be severely restricted and patchy. The situation will also remain volatile in anticipation of a second wave of the disease. Smaller, rural schools will be particularly vulnerable due to lower budgets available for supply teaching. In turn, the availability of supply teachers will also be impacted as services are stretched. Human Resources policies to manage staff absence, holidays etc will also need to be reviewed and revised.
18. Relationships between governing bodies, local authorities and the teaching unions are likely to be tested during this period. Support from government at a national level to negotiate with unions would help mitigate against the possibility of head teachers and governors being personally faced with challenges if changes to normal working practice are required as a result of national guidelines due to the extraordinary circumstances.
19. Schools will require support if they are to manage staff and school resources which support remote learning as well as classroom teaching. This could perhaps be allocated to those staff who are shielding or are self-isolating, thereby releasing those staff in school to work with smaller groups.
20. Social distancing requirements will present logistical challenges which will undoubtedly have financial implications for schools.
21. Classroom capacity and spacing will be challenging in all schools, many of which are already oversubscribed. In older buildings, spacing in corridors will be a particular challenge at lesson change overs and adequate hand washing and toilet facilities will need to be assessed.
22. With class sizes being halved, it stands to reason that double the classroom space will be required. The resulting spatial challenges for schools could perhaps be alleviated by considering other public and community venues close by which could be deployed to support the process such as church halls and community centres. Many Catholic schools are located in close proximity to the local Catholic church.

23. Extensive curriculum changes and planning will be required to avoid contact, with no team sports, no shared musical instruments, or other equipment, no assemblies and potentially no pair or group work in any lessons. This will also have a particular impact on peripatetic teaching.
24. Teaching professionals and early years childcare providers need to understand what access will be given and what responsibilities placed on schools and nurseries to support contact reporting, tracking and tracing.
25. Other impacts on school building and services will also need to be assessed including on the availability and costs of local suppliers and services (e.g. catering, transport, cleaning) as well as the reorganisation of the school building practically and the condition of the buildings.
26. One area of concern to the Catholic sector is the impact on home-to-school transport services and whether providers will be able to provide adequate transport in line with any specified health and safety requirements, including social distancing. This is a matter which will disproportionately affect Catholic schools, as they draw from a much wider area than other schools, at both primary and secondary levels. It is also likely to have a greater effect on the most vulnerable children who are less likely to be able to travel to school by car.
27. Perhaps the most significant practical challenge within school buildings, will be on refreshment facilities. Management of the space in lunch halls and additional hygiene requirements will lead significant compromises on the catering offer. Those children on Free School Meals and those younger children who currently are encouraged to participate in the Universal Infant Free School Meal programme will miss out the benefits of full cooked healthy school lunches if they are replaced with packed lunches at a desk.
28. A large uptake on deep cleaning services will be required and will represent a significant additional cost to school leaders, particularly if availability of services is stretched. Quotes for the deep cleans of schools run to many thousands of pounds a time, dependent of size.
29. Transport requirements for teachers should be considered, particularly if traveling to inner-city establishments. Even if car travel was a viable possibility, the additional costs to staff for parking and any congestion charges will be significant but necessary if staff are looking to travel safely and avoid public transport.
30. Wrap around childcare services on the school site will need to be addressed. Removing breakfast and afterschool club provision will reduce the number of staff and children on site but this will clearly create an issue for parents seeking to return to normal working practices.
31. After the closure of many school buildings over recent months there have been increased reports of fallen roofs, burnt out boilers and other buildings issues that may need to be addressed, again impacting on funding at a time when greater costs are to be expected.

32. The moratorium on the publication of inspection reports means funding available for school improvements is suspended. For other schools a pause on the academy conversion process will also cause administrative and financial constraints. A reasonable expectation of when the previous processes which specifically impact on funding would assist greatly in financial planning.

### **The financial implications of closures for providers: Universities**

33. The four Catholic universities in England form part of the Cathedrals Groups. These Church foundation universities currently train 20% of all primary and 15% of secondary teachers. In addition, they contribute significantly to the training and development of people who go on to serve in health and social care, wellbeing, sport and other key public services.
34. Church Foundation Universities are known to provide pathways for students from backgrounds that make them statistically less likely to access university successfully. It is important for the rebuilding of the nation's social capital and social structures that there continues to be a diverse and rich range of student choice available, especially in institutions that support more extensive and successful participation in HE. Such institutions help drive the rebuilding and levelling up of local communities and economies through regional job creation, facilities, and investment.
35. As a result, the courses these smaller institutions offer are often cost-intensive programmes – including Initial Teacher Education, and the ongoing funding constraints in the sector, particularly due to the current crisis are likely to fall disproportionately on Church Foundation Universities, making it more difficult to maintain the quality of strategically important public service programmes.

### **Conclusion**

36. All the information presented to the committee by the CES is accurate at the time of submission and every effort is taken to keep information on Catholic schools as up to date as possible. However, as the situation surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic continues to develop rapidly, it is possible that events may overtake the information and recommendations shared here.
37. As a partner in delivering education, the Catholic Education Service remains available to work directly with Department for Education officials whenever required, to help secure schools' coordination and to facilitate an efficient and successful transition in these difficult and unprecedented times. It also remains available to support contingency planning as a consequence of the inevitable review into what lessons can and should be learnt in the education sector.

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