



Diocese of Portsmouth

## Catholic Academies and Schools Office

### APPOINTMENTS TO KEY POSTS WITHIN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Recently, the Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales (CBCEW) issued a ‘Memorandum on Appointment of Teachers to Catholic Schools’ (September 2014), restating and clarifying the Church’s position on appointments to key leadership posts in **all** Catholic schools and colleges, including maintained schools, academies, independent schools, sixth form colleges and non-maintained special schools.

The memorandum is available online from the (CES). It states:

“As a minimum requirement the Bishops expect that the posts of Head Teacher or Principal, Deputy Head Teacher or Deputy Principal and Head or Co-ordinator of Religious Education are to be filled by **practising Catholics**”

Moreover, the Bishops also expect that certain other posts that directly affect the Catholic mission of the school are to be filled by practising Catholics too: e.g. the Chief Executive or equivalent of a Multi Academy Trust Company, lay chaplains and any other posts that directly affect the Catholic mission of the school.

#### **Initial Definition of a ‘Practising Catholic’**

A practising Catholic is defined basically as someone who keeps the precepts of the Church, as summarised in the *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* n. 432, namely:

- attends Mass on Sundays and other holy days of obligation;
- confesses their sins, receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation at least once each year;
- receives the sacrament of the Eucharist, at least during the Easter season;
- observes the days of fasting established by the Church; and
- helps provide for the material needs of the Church, according to ability.

This means that a practising Catholic is someone whose general mind-set and overall lifestyle is consistent with the above, e.g. they are not in an irregular relationship that would prevent them receiving the sacraments. They are “in full communion with the Catholic Church.”

#### **Why is being a ‘practising Catholic’ a requirement for these key posts?**

To uphold and develop the Catholic ethos of the school. The law already recognises that in schools with a religious character, posts within the school will need to be filled by members of the religion of the school. Thus in Catholic schools, preference for a teaching role may be given to a Catholic. But certain key posts in a Catholic school require more than this. They require that their holders are

**practising** Catholics, and that they refrain from doing anything “incompatible with the precepts, or with the upholding of the tenets” of the school’s religious ethos. They must hold religious opinions, attend religious worship and give, or be willing to give, religious education in accordance with the religious faith of the school and be responsible for preserving and developing the school’s religious ethos. Such religious objectives and activities require the post-holder to strive to model in their own lives the values of the Gospel and to adhere, in the substantive life choices they make, to the teaching of the Catholic Church.

### **What role in the Church do these holders of key posts perform?**

Holders of key posts in a Catholic school are collaborators with the Bishop and are at the service of the Bishop’s mission to sanctify, teach and govern the People of God. They are expected to model lives of personal holiness and professional integrity, worthy of their high calling and the position of religious trust they are given within the mission of the Church. They are expected to participate in a specifically religious way in the mission of the local and universal Catholic Church. These religious activities of key post-holders are made provision for in statutory legislation and made explicit in the contracts of employment.

In other words, these key posts are vocational as well as professional in nature. They involve the exercise of a distinct vocation in the Church. This demands a fidelity to Christ and the teachings of the Catholic Church, as with other vocations and ministries within the Church. Indeed, as with any vocation to a specific ecclesial ministry, there are two distinct elements:

- the personal call that the individual discerns within themselves; and
- the confirmation of that call and suitability by the competent ecclesiastical authority.

Thus a person’s desire to be appointed to a key post in a Catholic school also requires the Church’s assessment of their ability to model an authentic Catholic life of faith.

### **In this context, then, what then is the objective definition of a ‘practising Catholic’?**

The Church’s general obligations for its members require they strive to live lives of holiness by being faithful to the teaching of the Gospel, by trying to uphold Gospel values, by assisting in the Church’s mission to make Christ known to all peoples, by upholding privately and publicly the Church’s moral and social teaching, and by endeavouring to follow an informed conscience. This is the ‘practice’ of the Catholic faith in its widest and all-encompassing sense.

At the heart of these general obligations, there is the essential component of “full communion” with the Catholic Church. This comprises sacramental initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist), professing the doctrines of the Catholic Faith, regularly receiving the Sacraments and keeping the bond of unity with legitimate ecclesiastical governance. This is expressed most basically in keeping the precepts of the Church listed above (*Compendium* 432), especially regular attendance at Sunday Mass.

Therefore, for appointment to key posts, a ‘practising Catholic’ is defined as someone

- who has been sacramentally initiated into the Catholic Church,
- who keeps the Church’s precepts, including weekly attendance at Mass,
- who adheres to those substantive life choices which do not impair them from receiving the sacraments of the Church and which will not be in any way detrimental or prejudicial to the religious ethos and character of the school.

Inspired by the Gospel and sustained by God's grace, a 'practising Catholic' will give sincere external expression to their interior faith through specific religious, moral and ethical behaviour in accordance with the teaching of Christ and the Catholic Church.

### **Does this mean that a 'practising Catholic' holding a key post has to be 'perfect'?**

No. The process for appointment to key posts within the school may never be used as an appraisal of an applicant's spiritual and moral successes or failures. Assessment of a person's suitability cannot be a subjective judgement about their 'goodness' or 'holiness'. Rather, assessment of a person's suitability is objectively based on the requirement for the office or post to be held by a 'practising Catholic' as defined in the section above. The evidence taken into consideration in that assessment is of the substantive life choices that they are known to have made and adhere to, both in the personal and public forum, and whether or not those choices are compatible with the teaching of the Catholic Church.

There are some substantive life choices which are incompatible with the teaching of the Catholic Church and which may be detrimental or prejudicial to the religious ethos and character of a Catholic school. Some examples of these would be:

- formal apostasy from the Catholic Church;
- becoming, even casually, part of a Christian community not in full communion with the Catholic Church, and receiving communion in that community;
- maintaining membership of, or giving direct support to, any organisation whose fundamental aims are contrary to Gospel values and the teaching of the Catholic Church;
- maintaining the publication or distribution of material content which is contrary to Gospel values and the teaching of the Catholic Church;
- contracting a marriage in a non-Catholic church, registry office or any other place without dispensation from canonical form; or contracting a marriage where one or both parties have been previously married (and whose former spouse[s] is[are] living) without the former marriage(s) being annulled or declared invalid by the Church;
- maintaining a partnership of intimacy with another person, outside a form of marriage approved by the Church and which would, at least in the public forum, carry the presumption from their public behaviour of this being a non-chaste relationship; and, where such a presumption in the public forum is not repudiated by the parties within the relationship.

### **Contractual obligation**

All those appointed to key posts within a Catholic school are expected to read and sign the relevant Catholic Education Service Contract. These contracts state that they are:

“...expected to be conscientious and loyal to the aims and objectives of the School, having regard at all times to the Catholic character of the School, and not to do anything detrimental or prejudicial to the interest of the same.”

If someone who has been appointed to a key post in a Catholic school subsequently makes a substantive life choice incompatible with the teaching of the Catholic Church, then their ability to govern or to lead and model Catholic life and faith with ecclesial integrity may cease to exist.