

Scottish Churches' Education Group

A CHRISTIAN VISION



FOR EDUCATION
IN SCOTTISH SCHOOLS



action of churches together in Scotland

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Members of Scottish Churches' Education Group

2016

Church of Scotland

Methodist Church

Roman Catholic Church

Scottish Episcopal Church

United Free Church of Scotland

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Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS)

Aims to bring Christians of different traditions in Scotland closer to one another in their shared faith in Jesus Christ. ACTS does this by bringing people together to meet, pray, learn, reflect and act on matters of common concern.

ACTS is made up of the: Church of Scotland; Congregational Federation; Methodist Church; Religious Society of Friends; Roman Catholic Church; Salvation Army; Scottish Episcopal Church; United Free Church of Scotland and the United Reformed Church.

FOREWORD

Jesus said *“I have come that you may have life in all its fullness” (John 10:10).*

Education is integral to the ability to live life in all its fullness; Scotland’s churches therefore have a deep and long term interest in education.

“A Christian Vision for Education in Scottish Schools” is an update of a document approved by the nine Member Churches of Action of Churches Together in Scotland in 2008, drawing on work initially developed in 2000. Writing in 2016, much has changed during this period. The challenges of globalisation, rapidly changing information technology and economic uncertainty mean that the debate will never be static; against this the call to live a “life in all its fullness” remains unchanging and just as relevant.

The Scottish Churches Education Group is a programme group of Action of Churches Together in Scotland. As such, the Group hope that this paper will be of interest, help and practical use to all concerned with Scotland’s schools.

We also hope that the paper will be discussed widely in churches at the congregational, regional and national levels and will inspire Christians to continue their active interest in and concern for Scotland’s schools, contributing to “life in all its fullness” for our young people and the generations to come.

The Rev Matthew Ross

General Secretary

Action of Churches Together in Scotland

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INTRODUCTION

The Christian vision of education is founded upon an understanding of the human person as a unique individual, created in the image of God, worthy of respect and deserving to be nurtured in all his/her God-given talents, for self and for others.

Each person, as a unique part of God's creation, deserves to be treated with respect and dignity – in other words – for who we are and for what we can become. The purpose of education is to encourage the development of the full potential of each person. Education should develop all our human capacities – moral, spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual. It should help to make meaning out of life and to acquire a sense of purpose in and for life. It should enable the choice of priorities for life, the development of values and growth in virtue, and foster relationships with God, with self and other people.

In this Christian vision, the Scottish Churches find that they share many of the aspirations of the Scottish Government for all young people to be provided with opportunities to realise their full potential in life. It should be acknowledged that significant resources are invested in education: in teachers, in school buildings and, above all, in

promoting opportunities for young people to raise their aspirations and to realise their potential.

The agenda for 'excellence' in education should be recognised as a worthy one, in its determination for all young people to be developed as 'successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.' However, it is an agenda which requires to be monitored carefully to ensure that it continues to meet young people's needs as spiritual and moral beings.

There is always a danger in education initiatives that ends are confused with means, that raising measurable standards of achievement becomes the determinant focus of policy rather than the broader purposes of education. The purpose of this paper is to consider aspects of education policy in Scotland in the context of Christian values. It is not intended to suggest a narrow view, exclusive to any faith group. The perspective we offer throughout is intended to raise issues of common interest in the common good of our society. It is a vision of education and of life which is shared not only by those who subscribe to a faith tradition, but to people of many traditions, cultures, backgrounds and beliefs.

The paper suggests that the following questions are significant:

- **What is the vision of the human person which underpins our educational policies?**
- **What values should be offered to our young people and how should these be taught?**
- **What are the roles of parents, families and communities in educating young people?**
- **How do we best support teachers to deliver a vision for education which will be vital for a diverse Scotland?**





A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF PERSONS

We believe that people are to be valued not only for what they can do, or what they can produce, but for who they are, because they are created in the image of God.

We believe that God is not only rational but is also loving and feels with and for creation. We therefore must understand ourselves as rational beings whose senses and emotions are essential to an appreciation of what it means to be a person. Within education this understanding of who we are must be seen as just as important, if not more important, than intellectual development. It is important to be valued for who we are and what we may become. Our rationality can never be separated from that other part of us which the Bible calls our heart. All our human capacities are part of God's gift and education should be directed to the complete nurture, development, sustaining and enjoyment of them.

That is why education must be concerned with the whole person – intellectual, emotional, moral, spiritual, physical, cultural and social.

Often parents, when asked what they want for their children, will answer that they want them to do well. But doing well does not only mean that they should succeed in terms of passing examinations and gaining qualifications. Doing well is about well-being and wholeness. It is about success in relationships and knowing the source of true happiness. It should also mean that young people will be helped to develop important qualities such as fairness, respect for others and a sense of responsibility. Such qualities will help them to become well-adjusted young people, able to make sense of an increasingly complex world, and make positive contributions to its development.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

A Christian vision of education is rooted in the wider appreciation of what it means to be a human being within God's creation. Our relationships to one another and to the environment are of fundamental importance. Education is not just about the whole person as an individual; it is also about that person in community and in relationship with others.

In the Bible Jesus teaches that, after the command to love God, the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbour [*Matt 23:39*] when asked, "Who is my neighbour?" Jesus responded with the Parable of the Good Samaritan [*Luke 10: 25-37*] - our neighbour is anyone who needs our help.

This is the basis of a Christian understanding of true justice and love:

- Treating others with dignity, respect and honesty,
- showing real care, compassion and concern,
- serving and supporting others with our gifts.

If education is to be a beacon of hope in the world, it should educate children for responsible, active global citizenship, and it should do this through valuing inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue and partnership. Encouraging participation in community affairs and political events can foster a culture in which people take citizenship responsibilities seriously.



Qualities such as co-operation and interdependence are essential in our society of diverse people and cultures. The promotion of understanding, tolerance, respect and empathy among people of diverse backgrounds should be a hallmark of our national education system. Hope in a better world can only be developed through the nurturing of community in ways which:

- Form a culture of justice;
- develop the ethos of a school to give life in its fullness;
- establish and foster a community spirit;
- develop loving and supportive relationships;
- demonstrate the inclusivity of society;
- address the human need to be at peace (understood as, not just the absence of war, but the presence of love).

We believe that schools will become more effective places of learning when what happens outside the classroom is linked more closely to what happens within it. Education needs to serve the marginalised and the underprivileged. The great human need of our time is for justice in society. Within education this is not merely a legal concept, or one based on a kind of superficial fairness. It should produce a deep desire to treat each person with dignity and respect, and to encourage all to build a better world.

We welcome efforts to encourage families towards greater involvement in their children's school education but we believe that, to make this process work, some need to be empowered. Families themselves want to learn how best to encourage children in their learning and also how to support young people through the particular challenges of adolescence and beyond school education.

In an age when family structures are much less uniform than before, provision should be made by various agencies to assist parents and carers to acquire the skills required.

We welcome the recognition that the potential of all children can best be realised where there is a multi-agency approach to education. It is our belief that if full attention is to be paid to addressing the child's social, emotional, developmental and health (including mental health) needs, the different services involved in schools will have to develop trust and co-operation. We recognise the value of providing more 'joined-up' working through the creation of integrated services across local Councils, but would caution against the assumption that re-structuring of service management will, of itself, be effective.

Many school communities have long-established links with local Christian communities, evident in the effective contribution of local religious leaders to the provision of religious observance in schools. We see the strengthening of these links being vital to the development of a nurturing community.

In Roman Catholic denominational schools, which see themselves as 'communities of faith and learning', such partnership with the local parish, with the active participation of parents and families, is an essential component in the religious, spiritual and moral formation of young people. This partnership is evident at times of preparation for the Sacraments and in the pastoral and liturgical support offered by local clergy and school chaplains.





VALUES IN EDUCATION

Traditional points of anchorage to which our shared values had been tied (e.g. family, church, community, political affiliation) have changed. This lack of ‘rootedness’ can make it difficult for people to find meaning in their lives and may leave them feeling alienated and lacking in identity.

The social cohesion required to build a just, caring and civil society can only exist when:

- we promote a clear understanding of values and moral principles;
- we develop our young people in character as well as intellect;
- we educate wisdom as well as in knowledge.

It is essential that the curriculum reflects what we value as a nation and what we seek for our young people. It is our view that young people should be helped to understand and to commit to certain moral values if they are to lead lives of worth. They need help to understand the core values which societies have upheld since classical times. This is recognised in the Scottish Government’s Curriculum for Excellence programme which describes one of the purposes of education as being ‘to make our young people aware of the values on which Scottish society is based.’

Helpfully, it goes on to specify the values engraved on the Mace in the Scottish Parliament – Wisdom, Justice, Compassion, Integrity – as defining values for democracy in Scotland. We anticipate, then, that schools will be expected to teach these values explicitly. In order to do so, however, teachers will require significant support to find ways to make them accessible and intelligible to young people. Values should lie at the heart of a school’s vision of itself as a community. They should inform the school’s key policies in learning and teaching, in curriculum, in support for pupils and in management and leadership. The values which are shared within the school community should be articulated by its leaders and lived by its members. It is important that school communities agree on core values which they can share, reflecting the school’s identity and traditions, its vision for education and for life. Courageous moral leadership is required if schools are to play their part in supporting young people in developing values which are good for them and encouraging them in the four capacities of Curriculum for Excellence.

CURRICULUM

A curriculum is the purveyor of a particular world-view – a way of understanding and being in the world. It reflects the priorities of our nation and indicates the extent of our aspirations for young people. We believe that the curriculum should fully reflect and value the diversity of both Scottish indigenous cultures and Scottish multi-ethnic cultures. The curriculum must provide young people with a sound foundation on which to base moral and ethical decisions and behaviours which respect the dignity of themselves and others and the nature of the interdependent world in which we live.

We believe that there is a need for a broad and a balanced curriculum; one which provides the foundations of knowledge about the world and equips young people with the skills which will be necessary to negotiate a safe, happy and fulfilling path through life.

Often we hear it being voiced that the place of religion and of values in education is dangerous and ‘fundamentalist’. There have been demands for a ‘religion-free’ state education with the claim this would be neutral. However, this is not neutral but a narrow secular view of education. The curriculum is not simply the delivery of a series of facts; it reflects developmental, pedagogical, social, economic, aesthetic, spiritual, moral and other considerations. What educates is the way experiences, knowledge and skills are organised and sequenced in order to encourage individuals to be active, co-operative, committed and partners in the learning process.

People cannot separate their world-view from their faith. Such a curriculum needs to take account of: A child’s individual needs, culture and background; the many social and emotional problems associated with the prevalence of prejudice and intolerance; and other problems such as, poverty and addiction – and the pressures of social media. It should also

acknowledge the important context of the child’s home in which family have a vital role as the first and foremost educators. While it should equip young people with skills for the workplaces of tomorrow, it must also develop the life skills vital in a society which will be strongly dominated by technology and the challenges to the understanding and exploration of the concepts of marriage, family and community will be significant.

It is important that young people are equipped with the skills necessary to recognise the significant moral and ethical issues that impact on their lives, so that, as people of conscience, they can reflect on these issues and make informed and responsible decisions. These significant issues do not emerge merely in Religious and Moral Education, nor in programmes of Personal, Social and Health Education, but across the curriculum and in the school ethos. This is recognised in the aspirations of the Curriculum for Excellence to develop young people as not only successful, but confident, responsible and effective. It is clear to us that Religious and Moral Education is one area of the curriculum which can provide vital experiences and outcomes for all children.

Indeed, we would argue that its role in the curriculum is all the more significant at a time of increasingly diverse attitudes towards religious belief and practice across the world. For, where many young people are not being introduced to religious beliefs and practices and philosophical enquiry at home, where else will they be challenged to consider the ‘great’ questions, about the origins of life and human destiny? How else will they be enabled to consider the Christian traditions of the Scottish nation and the enrichment brought to our society by people of the other great faith traditions? For these reasons, we value the continuing statutory guidance on the provision of religious and moral education and religious observance.



A CHRISTIAN VISION FOR TEACHERS AND LEARNERS



Teachers are expected to educate and care for young people in the context of their family, community and environment with a concern for their physical, mental, social and emotional well-being. All teachers convey a sense of values in the ways in which they relate to young people and in how they structure and facilitate learning in their classrooms. All teachers are expected to develop in their students positive attitudes to learning and to life, to self and to others. In this sense all teachers have important roles to play in influencing the lives of their students for good – forming, informing and transforming lives. A child can grow to love learning through the inspiration and trained expertise of the teacher who works with family and other professionals to provide an integrated programme of support in the learning communities of modern society.

Because it involves people, education can never be value-neutral. The interface between teacher and learner, is a place of special encounter – Christians might say ‘grace’ – where the teacher not only imparts some of his/her own experiences and assumptions but in return is informed by the pupil whom he/she teaches.

In an ever-changing society the teacher is called to read the signs of the times, and when necessary, to be an agent in countering negative values:

individualism, selfishness, materialism. For some teachers this is the role of teaching as vocation – even as ministry. In Roman Catholic denominational schools, teachers undertake particular responsibilities – as catechists – to form pupils in a particular faith tradition, according to the wishes of parents/family and guided by the Church. At the same time they are able to teach and show respect for other faith traditions.

Pupils in all schools should be encouraged to adopt positive attitudes and to value and respect difference. This lies at the heart of human spiritual formation and transformation. Each child is entitled to the best from the school and from their teacher. Initiatives to raise achievement and provide a framework for learning should be welcomed, as should social inclusion. Teachers and pupils should therefore receive the necessary support.

It is important to set children realistic goals, to maximise their potential so they can achieve success. All teachers offer support but those with a special pastoral remit have an important contribution to make to the social and moral welfare of pupils. Essentially they offer particular forms of pupil support, linking the school with the home and wider community. They need highly developed interpersonal skills to work in collaboration with pupils, family and other agencies. For this they need the time and support to develop these skills.



IN CONCLUSION

- **Curiosity and a desire to explore, question, imagine and create;**
- **the arousing of a sense of wonder;**
- **the transmission of knowledge and skills;**
- **a love of learning;**
- **developing responsibility, respect and a sense of justice:**

*These are all at the heart of the learning enterprise
helping both teacher and learner
to achieve their maximum potential throughout life*



“ It is impossible to overstate the importance of education, both for individuals and the communities to which they will contribute. This paper provides a valuable Christian perspective on current conversations surrounding education and will be a useful resource for all those interested in reflecting on educational aims and approaches in schools and elsewhere.”

Rev Dr Grant Barclay,

Executive Secretary, Christian Education Association Scotland.

“ This is a helpful piece of work offering a Christian perspective on what is important in Education in Scotland and I hope that pupils, parents and carers, school chaplains, teachers and those with influence over our education system reflect on the points raised, as to do so will no doubt benefit the society in Scotland as a whole.”

Richard Knott,

Convener of ACTS Scottish Churches Children's Group

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