



Koinonia Group

the best, for children and the common good

RESEARCH PAPER 2/22

*Further thoughts and questions regarding the new
Catholic schools' inspection framework*

Format: Report
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Contents

Acknowledgments	
Executive Summary	2
1. Extract from the draft new inspection framework	3
2. Our findings	9
3. Concluding remarks	10
4. Notes	11

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to all the Heads who responded to this quick investigation into the unfolding perceptions, and questions, of Catholic school leaders towards the [draft] new inspection framework. The relatively small number of respondents could tend to indicate broad assent and a degree of comfort, or a lack of awareness of the significance of the changes, or simply being very busy. However, what is clear is the importance of reading the draft document, including the appendices.

Thank you for your help.

Executive Summary

1. There are still a few school leaders who had not fully taken on board the draft compliance appendix, and its implication
2. Governors have a variable [strong to none] knowledge and understanding of the new framework. This presents a real vulnerability, particularly for Section 48 'Outstanding' Catholic schools, and demonstrates the necessity to better understand the framework
3. School leaders welcome the rigour and professionalism in the new framework, including the training of new inspectors.
4. School leaders recognise the extent to which the new approach should reinvigorate conversations, within school and between school leaders and Governors/Trust Boards around Catholic life and mission, RE and collective worship.
5. School leaders recognise that the new framework will be more challenging and should drive up standards, particularly challenging schools which have become complacent [overly self-assured?] as regards their status.
6. School leaders are concerned that the doubling down on compliance issues at the heart of the new framework – though mostly not new - is not widely known and, assuming these principles remain in the published framework, could lead to a significant number of erstwhile 'Outstanding' settings falling foul.
7. Curriculum time in the Sixth Form attracted pushback, including the impact of the rest of the curriculum offer, and the fact that many of our Sixth Forms attract outside students.
8. The cost of Sixth Form RE for schools with budgets under pressure was questioned
9. The 10% is not in place at all Key Stages in all schools [though most] and the replanning and financing would involve time, money and making difficult choices.
10. Some respondents felt that 'outstanding' criteria compared to 'good' were highly subjective and, therefore, more likely to favour some school contexts than others.

1. Extract from the new draft Catholic School Inspection Framework including draft compliance statement

I have highlighted the key areas, not because they are necessarily new, but because Governors and Trustees must be aware of this.

1.1 What is the new framework?

In giving the overall effectiveness grade, Catholic school inspectors are presenting a global judgement about how effective the school is in providing Catholic education. In arriving at this judgement, Catholic school inspectors will make judgements on the following areas:

1.1.1 CATHOLIC LIFE AND MISSION

- Pupil outcomes: the extent to which pupils contribute to and benefit from the Catholic life and mission of the school
- Provision: the quality of provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school
- Leadership: how well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for the Catholic life and mission of the school

1.1.2 RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- Pupil outcomes: how well pupils achieve and enjoy their learning in Religious Education
- Provision: the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in Religious Education
- Leadership: how well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for Religious Education

1.1.3 COLLECTIVE WORSHIP

- Pupil outcomes: how well pupils participate in and respond to the schools' collective worship
- Provision: the quality of collective worship provided by the school
- Leadership: how well leaders and governors promote, monitor, and evaluate the provision for collective worship

In addition to judging these three key judgement areas Catholic School Inspectors will judge whether a school is compliant in the following two respects:

1. Has it met the curriculum requirements of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales and any additional requirements of the Diocesan Bishop?
2. Has it responded to the Areas for Improvement identified in the previous Catholic school inspection (or equivalent predecessor inspection)?

Catholic School Inspectors will use the following four-point scale to make all judgements:

	In England	In Wales
Grade 1	Outstanding	Excellent
Grade 2	Good	Good
Grade 3	Requires Improvement	Adequate and needs improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate	Unsatisfactory and needs urgent improvement

The evaluation schedule is not exhaustive. Grade descriptors are not checklists and do not replace the professional judgement of inspectors. Inspectors must interpret grade descriptors in relation to pupils' age and phase of education.

When making a judgment in each of the nine judgment areas, inspectors should begin with the good descriptors. Only if a school meets all of the requirements for good, should an inspector then consider, using the principle of best-fit, whether it meets enough of the outstanding/excellent descriptors to warrant judging the school to be outstanding in this area. If it does not meet all of the requirements for good then the inspector should use their own professional judgment, using the principle of best-fit, in deciding whether the school overall is good or requires improvement in this judgement area.

School leaders need to be clear as to the content of the strictly enforced compliance statements.

1.1.4 Draft compliance statements

Classroom Religious Education complements and is enhanced by the catechetical and worshipping life of the whole school community but is distinct from each of them.¹ The nature, purpose and scope of classroom Religious Education are defined in the Religious Education Curriculum Directory.² It is a discrete subject discipline as canonically and statutorily defined; it is not to be conflated with, or subsumed under, other curriculum subject areas, such as Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) or Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). It is an academic discipline "with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines."³ Its primary goal is an increase in knowledge and understanding⁴ of the Christian message for all pupils in Catholic schools. Teaching Religious Education, as defined by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, is the main reason Catholic schools exist.⁵ It is for this reason that Religious Education in Catholic schools is considered the "core of the core curriculum."⁶ The centrality of classroom Religious Education to the curriculum is reflected in several ways in Catholic schools, including the parity it has with other core curriculum subjects. This parity means that Religious Education should be taught, as far as possible, by subject specialists or by those trained by such specialists and Catholic leaders must ensure that in terms of funding, facilities and staffing it is at least as well-resourced as the other core curriculum subjects. As a demonstration of this parity, the Bishops have mandated that pupils are entitled to receive a Religious Education that constitutes 10% of the taught

¹ CCE, 'Circular Letter on Religious Education in Schools', 2009, 18

² CBCEW, Religious Education Curriculum Directory (3-19) for Catholic Schools and Colleges in England and Wales (London, 2012).

³ Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 1997, 73

⁴ CCE, 17

⁵ CBCEW, 'A Joint Pastoral Letter from the Bishops of England and Wales for Education Sunday, 27th January 1991, on Catholic Education', 1991, 7.

⁶ Pope John Paul II, 'To the Bishops of Great Britain on Their Ad Limina Visit, 26 March', 1992.

week from the beginning of compulsory schooling until the end of year 11⁷, and 5% of the taught week in the Sixth Form⁸.

1.1.5 Context and rationale

This figure of 10% may seem arbitrary, but it is not meaningless. It first arose in response to the UK Government's implementation of a National Curriculum in 1988, prescribing 10% for all core curriculum subjects. It was first issued as a directive by the Bishops in 1989⁹, and reiterated in a joint pastoral letter that quickly followed it:

Catholic schools have the responsibility to show that it is possible to study all the subjects in the National Curriculum without lessening the attention and time given to Religious Education. 10% of teaching time should be allocated to this subject. This will not always be easy, but we insist that it be done.

The 10% figure is thus a proxy for the parity that Religious Education must have, as core of the core, with the other core curriculum subjects in Catholic schools. If anything, the curriculum time given to maths and English has increased since the National Curriculum first came into existence. Therefore, the 10% figure represents the minimum expectation for the amount of time to be devoted to Religious Education in the taught week of a Catholic school.

Independent schools were never obliged to teach a National Curriculum, but the concept of core curriculum subjects has the same meaning in such schools as it does in maintained schools and academies. Hence, Catholic independent schools must also ensure that 10% of the taught week is devoted to Religious Education. In addition, such schools must ensure that the parity between Religious Education and other core curriculum subjects must extend to the private study time prescribed by the schools for particular subjects.

1.1.6 For age 3-16

The Bishops require that Catholic school leaders ensure that:

- Religious Education be taught for a specified portion of each repeating cycle¹⁰ of the regular school timetable in each year of compulsory schooling.
- the amount of time must constitute at least 10% of this repeating cycle.

1.1.7 For age 16-19

The Bishops require that Catholic school leaders ensure that:

⁷ CBCEW, 'Religious Education in Catholic Schools', 2000

⁸ CBCEW, Religious Education Curriculum Directory (3-19) for Catholic Schools and Colleges in England and Wales, p.5.

⁹ CBCEW, 'Statement Issued after the Low Week 1989 Meeting', *Briefing*, 19/8 (1989)

¹⁰ The phrase "repeating cycle" is here used to refer to the number of days in a single timetable cycle. For example, some schools have a ten working day cycle (a two-week timetable), while many have the historically more common five working day cycle (a one-week timetable).

- Religious Education be taught for a specified portion of each repeating cycle of the regular school timetable in each year of sixth form;
- the amount of time must constitute 5% of this repeating cycle.

1.1.8 Compliance test

Any Catholic school, academy or college that does not meet this curriculum requirement in each year of each key stage, would not be compliant with the requirements of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, as defined in the Catholic School Inspectorate National Framework for Inspection.

1.2 Exemplars for different ages and phases

1.2.1 Age 3-11

In Primary schools, the 10% will best be understood as a minimum number of hours in each of these repeating cycles, which in Primary schools are usually one week in length. For example:

- in a school week of 22.5 hours, the number of hours spent teaching classroom Religious Education must be no less than 2 hours and 15 minutes.
- in a school week of 25 hours, the number of hours spent teaching classroom Religious Education must be no less than 2 hours and 30 minutes.

1.2.2 Age 11-16

In Secondary schools, the 10% will best be understood as a proportion of the lesson periods in each repeating timetable cycle, on the presumption that each of these lesson period lengths is equal. For example:

- in a school with a timetable cycle of five working days (a one-week timetable) of 30 periods, the number of periods spent teaching classroom Religious Education must be no less than 3 periods in each cycle;
- in a school with a timetable cycle of five working days (a one-week timetable) of 25 periods, the number of periods the number of periods spent teaching classroom Religious Education must be no less than 3 periods in each cycle;
- in a school with a timetable cycle of ten working days (a two-week timetable) of 50 periods, the number of periods spent teaching classroom Religious Education must be no less than 5 periods in each cycle.

Any collapsed timetable days would be in addition to the regular requirement for each timetable cycle and must not replace it. Limiting the proportion of curriculum time in some school years or key stages and off-setting this in others would not be compliant with the Bishops' curriculum requirements which require 10% curriculum time be devoted to Religious Education in each taught week of each year of compulsory schooling up to the end of KS4.

1.2.3 Age 16-19

In school Sixth Forms and Catholic Sixth Form Colleges, the 5% will best be understood as a proportion of the total number of learning hours a Sixth Form student is expected to receive in an average sixth form offer. This will differ depending on the curriculum route individual students take through their sixth form studies. The 5% should be worked out as a proportion of the number of hours students attend curriculum lessons. This proportion should be distributed in such a way that they constitute a proportion of each repeating timetable cycle, as laid out above. Ordinarily, the requirement will best be understood as one period of Religious Education in each week that a student is on timetable, ending when the public examination season begins. For this reason, inspectors need to be aware that after Easter of a student's final year of study, the standard timetable cycle may no longer be applicable and the General Religious Education programme may be complete by then.

Any collapsed timetable days would be in addition to this requirement and must not replace it. Adjusting the proportion of curriculum time in either year of sixth form and off-setting in the other is not compliant with the Bishops' curriculum requirements which require 5% curriculum time be devoted to Religious Education in each year of sixth form study.

For students who have more than two planned years of sixth form, it is expected that they have Religious Education in each of their years of sixth form, that is designed in such a way as to ensure that their experience of the offered curriculum is not repetitive.

49

1.2.4 Questions and Clarifications

Can the curriculum requirement for Religious Education be under the Bishops' conference requirements in one key stage if it this is offset in other key stages?

No. Pupils have an entitlement to Religious Education that meets the conference requirements in every year of schooling. Learning in Religious Education, like learning in all subjects, is developmental and incremental. Curtailing in one Key Stage and cramming in another does violence to this developmentally appropriate pedagogy. The curriculum requirements of 10% and 5% apply to each key stage and each year group equally.

Can the curriculum requirement for Religious Education be under the Bishops' conference requirements in one year if this is offset in other years?

No. For the same reasons given above in relation to key stages, this practice would not be compliant with the Bishops' conference requirements. Furthermore, such a calculation assumes that pupil populations and timetables remain constant year to year. Attempting to meet the requirement in this way may well put some students at risk of receiving significantly less than their entitlement.

Is the quality of Religious Education not more important than the quantity?

Both are important. The quality of Religious Education is judged throughout the rest of the Catholic school inspection framework. Whether a school is compliant or not is not matter of degree, it is a straightforward binary: they are either compliant or they are not. Even if they are compliant,

the quality may be poor. Compliance is a minimum expectation, not an aspiration: a floor, not a ceiling.

If a school does not have a sufficient number of Religious Education specialists to cover the curriculum minimum, would it not be preferable to have less curriculum time taught by specialists than a compliant curriculum taught by some non- specialists?

No. Obviously, the ideal would be a fully compliant curriculum taught by fully qualified Religious Education specialists. However, if this is not possible because of staff shortages, then 8% covered by specialists and the remaining 2% covered by non-specialists would be compliant with the Bishops' conference requirements, on the understanding that the school was doing all it could to fill the teaching gap. A comparison with other core curriculum subjects is helpful here. When a school is short of a maths teacher, it does not reduce the amount of time given to maths but fills the teaching gap with the best available expertise until a specialist teacher can be appointed to cover the shortfall. The same should apply to Religious Education.

Can the curriculum requirement be met by collapsed timetable days, for example retreat weekends or themed days?

No. This would not be compliant with the principle that the 10% must be a portion of each repeating cycle of the regular school timetable. Such experiences are hugely valuable and are to be encouraged, but they must be offered in addition to the minimum curriculum for each repeating cycle of the regular school timetable, not offered instead of it. Collapsed timetable days do not respect the developmental pedagogical principles laid out above, and they are far more likely to mean that some students miss out on their entitlement to Religious Education if they happen to be absent on the collapsed timetable day.

Can the Religious Education portions of other subjects count as part of the 10% curriculum time? For example, in teaching RSE, some of the content will be Catholic teaching on marriage and family life.

It is clearly possible that other curriculum subjects could cover some portions of the Religious Education curriculum. For it to count towards the curriculum requirement for classroom Religious Education then the lesson, or sequence of lessons must be:

- explicitly part of the Religious Education scheme of work/learning for that year group for that year – e.g. it has to be identified on the Scheme of Work that this particular module (say a unit on relationships) will be delivered in tutorial time;
- mapped to the *Religious Education Curriculum Directory*;
- planned by the Religious Education department or curriculum lead for Religious Education;
- marked by the Religious Education department or curriculum lead for Religious Education, or coordinated by the department of curriculum lead and feedback given by the Religious Education department or the curriculum lead for Religious Education; able to feed into the system that is used to track pupil progress in Religious Education.
- There is no requirement for these lessons to be taught by Religious Education specialist teachers, but the same support must be given to those teachers delivering the lessons as would be given to other non-specialists who teach other parts of the Religious Education curriculum.

2 Our findings

2.1 What was welcomed in the draft?

Respondents welcomed the fact there was more rigour and that the descriptors were clear and comprehensive. One described it as being 'less fiddly' and more closely aligned to the Ofsted process. Some wondered how many school leaders, Governors, Board members and so on will have examined just how comprehensive the descriptors are, in the light of self-evaluation.

The process of inspection, descriptors and improved quality of training for inspectors – as well as the pan-hierarchy reach of qualified inspectors, was seen as a positive step forward. A major strength will be consistency across the dioceses.

The sense of greater alignment – in rigour, content and training – with Ofsted, was seen as a strength. Also, the way in which the new framework would challenge the misperception of Catholic school leaders who, it was suggested, believe that their Ofsted 'Outstanding' will, itself, guarantee a Catholic schools' inspection, whether by inspectors being [overly] 'impressed' or from inspectors fearing to be seen to digress from the judgements of the 'real' inspection.

Some respondents said the new framework was giving them the motivation and challenge to ask deeper questions [e.g. around Catholic life and mission] at a time when, post-Lockdown, it would be easy to side line such fundamental questions.

2.2 Questions and concerns

One respondent was concerned that many schools may believe the 10% curriculum time, and the rest of the compliance material [set out above], could/would be softly interpreted [especially in an Ofsted 'Outstanding' school or school judged as Outstanding in a previous section 48 inspection]. The question was, notwithstanding that much of the compliance was not new, what would be done to ensure that Headteachers, Governing Bodies and MAT Boards were crystal clear as to expectations, on the assumption that such rigorous compliance statements remained in the final version?

There was concern that the 5% Sixth Form curriculum time was unreasonably high and could, therefore, lead to a situation where a school 'sacrificed' its Section 48 'Outstanding' to ensure its Section 5/8, which would seem to be a very undesirable outcome, though one which it would not be unusual to expect to be supported by some Governing Bodies.

Catholic schools tend to have a catchment area significantly larger than non-faith secondary schools. As such many are in competition with local Colleges, who do not impose the 5% of RE lessons upon students and some respondents were concerned that the implementation will drive students away.

One respondent expressed a concern thus: For schools who a run a 30-period timetable [3.3% per lesson], they would be forced to run two lessons per cycle. This would lead to an additional 10 lessons in the timetable, taking the cost of Sixth Form RE lessons to over £50,000. This cost will have a significant impact on schools, during a challenging financial climate.

Additionally, it was noted that it continues to be a challenge to recruit high quality RE teachers, preferably Catholic. This additional curriculum time will stretch staffing further. One leader feared schools will be forced to choose between aspiring for an Outstanding Inspection, while balancing out the impact of their budget, staffing and retention of students. If they choose the latter, will that undermine the inspection?

One respondent saw in the more comprehensive evidence descriptors in the new framework not a strengthening of the framework, but, rather, many more 'boxes to tick'. Even though the framework makes it clear that it is not a 'box ticking' exercise.

One respondent spoke of the delay of sample materials [e.g. questionnaires, self-review format] meaning that it is hard to be September-ready. A common theme was the perceived lack of clarity about thresholds between good and outstanding, where the significant subjective element – especially in the early days of the new inspection, where benchmarking will be more difficult – could lead to unjust outcomes.

Some respondents continued to ask for more dialogue with the Diocese regarding the choice of RE curriculum model. Others [most] recognised the local model as being 'settled'.

One respondent questioned what they saw as a perceived need to write 'curriculum intent' statements for RE, even though such statements are not required by Ofsted.

Two respondents suggested that either Catholic Independent, or some Religious Order catholic schools, were focussed on serving *their* community, as against their 'Catholic communities'. Although this is probably a semantic point, the wider issue they were addressing is where there are a smaller number of Catholics in the community and the extent to which the framework anticipated for such a scenario.

One respondent felt the framework was better suited to Catholic schools under Diocesan Trusteeship, as against those under the Trusteeship [or joint Trusteeship] of a religious Order of Congregation, where there were, in their words, 'additional masters to serve'.

Several felt the implication that RE had to be *better* than English Maths and Science to be just plain wrong. They argued that RE should, indeed, be 'up there' with the best of the core subjects, but that it was irrational to suggest that it **must** be somehow, superior.

4. Concluding remarks

This small-scale research has been conducted after consultation with *Koinonia* schools, and others, partly as it became clear that school leaders, having received their training, retained

questions and concerns. It is hoped that this will be helpful for Diocesan officers in their feedback to the CES, and for Governing Bodies and Trusts as they begin to retool for the emerging new framework.

Simon Uttley, February 2022

Notes

CCE, 2009, 'Circular Letter on Religious Education in Schools', 2009, 18

CBCEW, Religious Education Curriculum Directory (3-19) for Catholic Schools and Colleges in England and Wales (London, 2012).

Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 1997, 73

Pope John Paul II, 'To the Bishops of Great Britain on Their Ad Limina Visit, 26 March', 1992.