



DIOCESE OF HEXHAM AND NEWCASTLE BRIEFING NOTE ON PRACTISING CATHOLIC

Head Teacher/Deputy Head Teacher Appointments: 'Practising Catholic'

General Background

The instrument of government for a Catholic school states:

"The school was founded by and is part of the Catholic Church. The school is to be conducted as a Catholic School in accordance with the canon law and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and in accordance with the trust deed of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle and in particular:

- a. Religious Education is to be in accordance with the teachings, doctrines, disciplines and general and particular norms of the Catholic Church;*
- b. Religious worship is to be in accordance with the rites, practices, disciplines and liturgical norms of the Catholic Church;*

and at all times the school is to serve as a witness to the Catholic faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ".

Appointment of Head Teacher/Deputy Head Teacher

In relation to the appointment of Head Teacher/Deputy Head Teacher the Bishops' Conference have laid down explicit guidance.

'The post of Head Teacher, Deputy Head Teacher or coordinator of Religious Education shall be reserved for practising Catholics.

Advertisements for these posts should make clear from the outset that applications are invited in accordance with these requirements'.

Memorandum of Bishops' Conference of England and Wales on the appointment of Teachers to Catholic Schools

On behalf of the Bishops' Conference Archbishop Vincent Nichols stated:

Selecting Leaders for Catholic Schools

'The posts of Head Teacher, deputy Head Teacher and head or coordinator of Religious Education are to be filled by baptised and practising Catholics'.

**Guidance for Governors on the Appointment of Teachers to Catholic Schools
+ Vincent Nichols 11 July 2003**

More recently, again on behalf of all the Bishops, Bishop Malcolm McMahon stated:

'The posts of Head Teacher, Deputy Head Teacher and head or coordinator of Religious Education are to be filled by baptised and practising Catholics'.

Bishop Malcolm McMahon
Chairman, Department for Catholic Education and Formation, April 2009

Diocesan Policy

Our own diocesan document *The Appointment of Head Teachers and Deputy Head Teachers in Catholic Schools* states:

'Why should Head Teachers and deputies be Catholic?

Catholic schools are at the heart of the Church's wider educational mission. Their senior leaders are responsible, with the governing body, for ensuring that their school's Catholic mission and life are at all times promoted and developed. This includes direct accountability for assuring high quality in the provision of Religious Education and prayer and worship. To meet this responsibility, Head Teachers and deputies need a good understanding of the broad aims and purposes of Catholic education and in particular of the Bishop's vision for diocesan schools. A strong personal faith is essential to sustain them in their demanding but ultimately fulfilling role.

Governors, especially foundation governors, are the stewards of their school's Catholic character and accountable for this to the Church and community. To fulfil this special responsibility, governors of Catholic schools have a duty under both Canon Law and statute to ensure that they appoint senior leaders who will not only excel in their professional responsibilities but who will enhance the distinctive nature of the school, promoting high standards in the quality of Religious Education and provision for prayer and worship. For this reason the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales has specified the Church's expectations that governing bodies will reserve these posts for Catholic teachers who combine personal conviction and the practice of their faith with the required professional qualifications and experience.

The criteria for appointment (also known as the person specification) comprise a list of the skills, qualities and experience that the governing body requires of the person to be appointed. Some requirements will be deemed essential (e.g. that the person appointed should be a practising Catholic). Others will be judged desirable but not essential. These can be used to differentiate between applicants who are equal in terms of the essentials.

Applicants who clearly do not meet one or more of the essential criteria should be ruled out at the short list stage and the reason for this recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

The school has been designated by the Secretary of State as a school with a religious character. Its instrument of government states that it is part of the Catholic Church and is to be conducted as a Catholic school in accordance with Canon Law, the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church and the trust deed of the Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle. At all times the school is to serve as a witness to the Catholic faith in Our Lord Jesus Christ. The post therefore requires a practising Catholic who can show by example and from experience that he or she will ensure that the school is distinctively Catholic in all its aspects'.

'Practising Catholic' is listed unambiguously as the first essential criteria. A positive faith reference is essential and the priest is explicitly asked to comment upon an applicant's commitment to Catholic beliefs and practices.

The diocesan statement on equal opportunities on employment states:

'The posts of Head Teacher and deputy head are reserved for practising Catholics.

In fulfilling the objectives of Catholic schools, governors have regard to matters which are particularly significant in the light of the sacramental teachings of the Church. Catholic teachers by their example and practice are witnesses to the Gospels and to the Church's teachings. The governing body would therefore, in line with its responsibilities,

reserve the right to take account of circumstances which were genuinely within a person's control and which might include marital status, avowed personal conviction, belief or conduct'.

The diocesan memorandum of understanding states:

Employment of the Principal and Key Teaching Staff

1. *'The Head Teacher or principal of the school as well as the deputy Head Teacher(s) and the head or coordinator of Religious Education shall be practising Catholics in full communion with the Church'.*

Marital Status

The quotation above makes explicit reference to marital status. Applicants for the posts of Head Teacher and deputy Head Teacher whose conduct is incompatible with the precepts and tenets of the Catholic faith would not be deemed as meeting the first essential criteria of practising Catholic. An applicant living with a partner would be deemed not to be 'in full communion' by the Catholic Church. The Church is absolutely clear on this point:

'The sexual act must take place exclusively within marriage. Outside of marriage it always constitutes a grave sin and excludes one from sacramental communion'.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph 2390

'Sexuality and Marriage: There are two fundamental principles which determine Catholic teaching on sexual matters: that the sexual expression of love is intended by God's plan of creation to find its place exclusively within marriage between a man and a woman, and that this expression of love must be open to the possible transmission of new life. This, of course, is a great challenge. It means that many types of sexual activity, including same-sex sexual activity, are not consistent with the teachings of the Church. No individual, bishop, priest or lay-person is in a position to change this teaching of the Church which we hold to be God-given'.

Archbishop Vincent Nichols, The Catholic Herald, March 2012

The teaching of the Church makes it absolutely clear that an applicant in an 'irregular' marriage or living with a partner does not meet the first essential criteria of practising Catholic. Consequently such an applicant must not be shortlisted.

**Joe Hughes
Director of the Diocesan Education Service
March 2012**

