

Pastoral Letter: Education Sunday

Dear Parents and Carers

This weekend we celebrate **Education Sunday**, one of the oldest Days of Special Prayer in the liturgical calendar of England and Wales, established by the bishops in 1848.

Catholic schools have been a beacon of light in this country since as early as 600 A.D., first founded by monastic communities as places of learning, formation, and faith. After the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in 1850, the bishops of England and Wales articulated a vision to prefer the establishment of good schools before churches. That vision has borne great fruit over generations.

Here in the Diocese of Hallam, we are blessed with 48 schools - many of them built with the hard work and sacrifice of our ancestor Catholic communities. Today, those schools continue to serve thousands of young people, supported by dedicated headteachers and a quiet army of volunteer governors and directors who offer their time, energy, and love in service of our children.

Catholic schools continue to be true to their historical mission, in educating substantially more pupils from the most deprived backgrounds than other state-funded schools. But the future of our schools now stands at a crossroads.

At present, there are around 80 vacancies for Foundation Governors across our Diocese. Without these essential roles, the mission of our schools, and the Catholic ethos that makes them so special, is at risk.

And so, I turn to you with a heartfelt invitation: might you consider becoming a Foundation Governor of one of our Catholic schools? To echo the words of the late Cardinal Basil Hume: "To be a governor of a Catholic school is to be involved in the mission of the Church." And what a beautiful mission it is, to help shape young minds and hearts, to offer them not just knowledge but wisdom, not just skills but purpose, not just education but an encounter with Christ.

The role of a Foundation Governor is, in essence, to be a witness, to help ensure that our schools remain places where Christ is known and loved, where the dignity of every child is cherished, and where Catholic values infuse the curriculum, the culture, and the community.

As St Gregory the Great once said, "The love of Christ is not rested until it works to shape the hearts of others." Your time and talents could do just that for the next generation. You don't need to be an expert in education - just a practising Catholic, aged over 18, who is willing to serve. People from all backgrounds are warmly welcomed, and full training and support are provided. The time commitment varies from school to school but averages out at less than one hour a week.

If you, or someone you know, has benefitted from a Catholic education, this may be a chance to give back, to continue the legacy and renew the mission. Foundation governors are my representatives in our schools, ensuring that maintaining an outstanding Catholic ethos is a priority. Therefore, I make a personal appeal to you to consider this ministry.

To find out more, please talk to your headteacher, or visit our diocesan website, schools' section, (<https://hallam-diocese.com/schools-home/information-for-governors/>) to learn more about this important ministry. If you have questions, or if you are interested in becoming a Foundation Governor in one of our schools, please contact the Hallam Diocese Schools Department, at abramall@hallam-diocese.com, telephone 0114 256 6440.

"Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. "(Matthew 5:16)

Thank you for taking the time to read this invitation. I ask you to prayerfully consider this important ministry. Your 'yes' could help secure the future of Catholic education in our Diocese.

With my prayers and best wishes

Ralph, Bishop of Hallam