

**Children and Young People Committee
School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Bill
SSO16 – Response from the Catholic Education Service**

**Consultation on the School
Standards and Organisation
(Wales) Bill
Written Evidence**



The Catholic Education Service is the Catholic Bishops' agency for education, representing 90 maintained Catholic schools in Wales. Our schools educate over 29,000 pupils and employ over 1500 teachers in Wales. We work in partnership with the Welsh Government in the provision of education in Wales and, as statutory partners in the provision of education, are strongly supportive of the aims of this Bill.

The Catholic Education Service welcomes the introduction of this Bill and its focus on school improvement and measures to achieve high academic standards in all Welsh schools. The Catholic Church expects its schools to achieve high academic standards (this is required under Canon Law, Can. 806 §2). Only last year the Bishops of England and Wales re-emphasised the need to develop new strategies to help struggling schools to improve¹. We are pleased that we share these aims with our partners in the Welsh Government.

We also welcome the work that the Welsh Government is doing to consolidate existing law into one piece of legislation and we hope that this will lead to greater clarity in the future. We support the consolidation of provisions from the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and statutory regulations into one place, but **we believe that it is important that the distinctive and unique Welsh context is recognised**. Consequently, we feel that it will be important to ensure that provisions are not simply 'copied across' but, rather, that they are adapted where appropriate to reflect the specific needs of Wales.

We have some reservations about certain aspects of the Bill as presently drafted and would look to the Welsh Government to offer greater clarity on these issues.

We have some concerns relating to the provisions regarding proposals to change schools' categories and we seek reassurance that the Welsh Government will continue to ensure that our schools will be able to retain their voluntary aided status. All Catholic schools in Wales are voluntary aided and we believe that this framework best meets the shared aims of the Catholic Church and the Welsh Government in the provision of education in our sector in Wales.

One of the key features of a voluntary aided school is the ability of the trustees to appoint a majority of foundation governors to the school's governing body. **We seek support this long-established principle and believe it should be made clear on the face of the Bill.**

We believe that some of the provisions relating to the disposal of land require greater scrutiny and we hope to work with officials to ensure that any concerns can be addressed.

We have some concerns relating to the Miscellaneous Provisions in Part 5 but we believe that these can be adequately addressed by clear statutory guidance. We look forward to working with officials to draw up guidance which reflects the concerns of all those involved in the provision of education in Wales.

**Gregory Pope
Deputy Director**

¹ Resolutions adopted by the Bishops of England and Wales at their Plenary Meeting, <http://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/index.php/news/press-releases/item/82-resolutions-adopted-by-the-bishops-of-england-and-wales-at-their-plenary-meeting-18-november-2011> (November 2011).

19th June 2012