

GT. MANCHESTER CAMPAIGN TO SUPPORT CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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Press Release on Catholic Schools workshop in Trafford

Campaigners uphold parental rights to keep Catholic schools

Parents' rights to educate their children in schools promoting their faith are valued by Catholics because they want what these schools offer academically, socially and spiritually. This includes parents who are not regular Sunday Mass attenders.

“Supporting Catholic schools in a hostile environment” was the title of a campaign workshop (on April 14, 2010) addressed by Dr Andrew Morris, of Liverpool Hope University. He produced evidence to show that Church schools are attractive because they created a genuine sense of community while providing higher than average results.

The workshop at St Anthony's College, Urmston, Trafford, was sponsored by three Catholic societies – the Knights of St Columba, the Catenian Association and the Union of Catholic Mothers – together with the Catholic Union of Great Britain. Most participants were parents or grandparents – many were school governors or teachers.

Dr Morris said that the Church provides schools as part of its threefold religious mission: “To assist parents fulfil their responsibilities, to serve the local Church and to provide for the common good of society.” For more than a century the English Bishops had given priority to opening more schools rather than new churches to meet the needs of Catholic children, including generations of Irish immigrants and now large numbers of Polish, African and Asian newcomers.

Yet there were secular critics in the media, academic and political circles who wished to abolish public funding for all faith schools or restrict their ability to provide their own unique ethos which was so admired by parents and OFSTED inspectors alike.

Answering the critics, he argued that far from being divisive or causing disharmony all the evidence showed that Catholic schools promoted community cohesion and tolerance. Fortunately, politicians in all three major parties backed the funding of faith schools.

But Dr Morris added: “Yet if we are to avoid our schools being absorbed into the secular culture, or swept away by legislation intolerant of religious beliefs and motivations, their values and purposes must be effectively transmitted to future generations of believers and proclaimed to those who are not. We must press our case vigorously.”

Parliamentarians should be made aware of the concerns of Catholic parents, one of the workshop discussion groups emphasised.

Another group believed that the formation of leadership within the Church, our schools and the wider community should be a major priority in Catholic education. Falling church attendance was both a challenge and a reason for promoting Catholic schools.

“Solidarity among the whole school community – children, staff, parents and governors – was a vital feature of our Catholic schools. And solidarity is a communal expression of social justice,” Workshop Chair John Mulholland concluded.