

Scottish Churches' Education Group

# A CHRISTIAN VISION



## FOR EDUCATION IN SCOTTISH SCHOOLS



**action of churches together in scotland**

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## FOREWORD

**“A Christian Vision for Education in Scottish Schools”** has its roots in a document published by ACTS’ Education Committee in 2000. That paper dealt with issues which were being debated in the educational world at that time. The members of the Scottish Churches’ Education Group have worked to transform that original time-limited paper into one which expresses the general principles which Christians would wish to see underpinning education systems at any time.

The approval, at the May 2008 meeting of the Scottish Churches’ Forum, of “A Christian Vision for Education in Scottish Schools” by the representatives of ACTS’ nine Member Churches confirmed their common acceptance of the principles contained in the paper.

The members of the Scottish Churches’ Forum have agreed that the paper should be widely circulated. We believe that it will be a useful reminder to the politicians and public servants responsible for Scotland’s schools that the Scottish Churches have an abiding and significant interest in education and will be prepared to argue for policies which embody the principles expressed in “A Christian Vision for Education in Scottish Schools”.

We also hope that the paper will be discussed in congregations and local ecumenical groups across Scotland and that it will inspire Christians at that level to take a more active interest in the provision of education in their schools.

**Revd. Mary Buchanan,**  
Convener, Scottish Churches’ Forum





## INTRODUCTION

The Christian vision of education is founded upon an understanding of the human person as a unique individual, created in the image of God, worthy of respect and deserving to be nurtured in all his/her God-given talents, for self and for others.

Each person, as a unique part of God's creation, deserves to be treated with respect and dignity - in other words, to be loved - for who we are and for what we can become. The purpose of education is to develop the full potential of each person - for our own good and for the good of others. Education should develop all our human capacities - moral, spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual. It should help us to make meaning out of life and to acquire a sense of purpose in and for life. It should enable us to choose our priorities for life, to develop values and to grow in virtue, and to develop loving relationships with God, with self and with other people.

In this Christian vision, the Scottish Churches find that they share many of the aspirations of the Scottish Government for all young people to be provided with opportunities to realise their full potential in life. It should be acknowledged that, in recent years, significant resources have been invested in education: in teachers,

in school buildings and, above all, in promoting opportunities for young people to raise their aspirations and to realise their potential.

The agenda for “excellence” in education should be recognised as a worthy one, in its determination for all young people to be developed as “successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors”. However, it is an agenda which requires to be monitored carefully to ensure that it is also designed to meet young people’s needs as spiritual and moral beings.

There is always a danger in education initiatives that ends are confused with means, that raising standards of achievement becomes the determinant focus of policy rather than the broader purposes of education.

The purpose of this paper is to consider aspects of current education policy in Scotland, in the context of a Christian vision of education and of life. This is not intended to suggest a narrow view, exclusive to any faith group. The perspective we offer throughout is intended to raise issues of common interest in the common good of our society. It is a view which is shared not only by those who subscribe to a faith tradition, but to people of many traditions, cultures, backgrounds and beliefs.

The paper suggests that the following questions are significant:

- **what is the vision of the human person which underpins our educational policies?**
- **what values should be offered to our young people and how should these be taught?**
- **what are the roles of parents, families and communities in educating young people?**
- **how do we best support teachers to deliver a vision for education which will be vital for a diverse Scotland in the 21st century?**











## A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF PERSONS

We believe that people are to be valued not only for what they can do, or what they can produce, but for who they are, because they are created in the image of God.

We believe that God is not only rational but is also loving and feels with and for creation. We therefore must understand ourselves as rational beings whose senses and emotions are essential to an appreciation of what it means to be a person.

Within school education this understanding of who we are must be seen as just as important, if not more important, than our intellectual development.

Our rationality can never be separated from that other part of us which the Bible calls our heart.

All our human capacities are part of God's gift and education should be directed to the complete enjoyment of them. That is why education must be concerned with the whole person – intellectual, emotional, moral, spiritual, physical, cultural and social.

Often parents, when asked what they want for their children, will answer that they want them to do well. But doing well does not only mean that they should succeed in terms of passing examinations and gaining qualifications. Doing well is about well-being and wholeness. It is about success in relationships and knowing the source of true happiness. It should also mean that young people will be helped to develop important qualities such as fairness, respect for others and a sense of responsibility. Such qualities will help them to become well-adjusted young people, able to make sense of an increasingly complex world.

## FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

A Christian vision of education is rooted in the wider appreciation of what it means to be a human being within God's creation. Our relationships to one another and to the environment are of fundamental importance. Education is not just about the whole person as an individual; it is also about that person in community and in relationship with others. It is about educating for the common good.

In the Bible Jesus teaches that, after the command to love God, the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbour [Matt 23:39]. When asked, "Who is my neighbour?" Jesus responded with the Parable of the Good Samaritan [Luke 10: 25-37] - our neighbour is anyone who needs our help. This is the basis of a Christian understanding of true justice and love:

- treating others with dignity, respect and honesty,
- showing real care, compassion and concern,
- serving others with our gifts.





If education is to be a beacon of hope in the world, it should educate children for responsible, active global citizenship, and it should do this through inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue and partnership. Encouraging participation in community affairs and political events can foster a culture in which people take citizenship responsibilities seriously. Qualities such as co-operation and interdependence are essential in our society of diverse people and cultures. The promotion of understanding, tolerance, respect and empathy among people of diverse backgrounds should be a hallmark of our national education system. Hope in a better world can only be developed through the nurturing of community in ways which:

- form a culture of justice;
- develop the ethos of a school to give life in its fullness;
- establish and foster a community spirit;
- develop loving relationships;
- demonstrate the inclusivity of society;
- address the human need to be at peace (understood as, not just the absence of war, but the presence of love).

We believe that schools will become more effective places of learning when what happens outside the classroom is linked more closely to what happens within it. Education needs to serve the marginalised and the underprivileged. The great human need of our time is for justice in our society. Within education this is not merely a legal concept, or one based on a kind of superficial fairness. It should produce a deep desire to treat each person with dignity and respect, and to see each person as a source of human progress for a better world.

We welcome efforts to encourage parents towards greater involvement in their children's school education but we believe that, to make this process work, parents, especially those from socially

disadvantaged backgrounds, need to be empowered. Parents themselves need to learn how best to encourage children in their learning and also how to support young people through the particular challenges of adolescence and beyond school education. In an age when family structures are much less uniform than before, provision should be made by various agencies to assist parents and carers to acquire the skills required throughout parenthood.

We welcome the recognition that the potential of all children can best be realised where there is an multi-agency approach to education. It is our belief that if full attention is to be paid to addressing the child's social, emotional, developmental and health (including mental health) needs, the different services involved in schools will have to develop trust and co-operation. We recognise the value of providing more 'joined-up' working through the creation of integrated services across local Councils, but would caution against the assumption that re-structuring of service management will, of itself, be effective.

Many school communities have long-established links with local churches, evident in the effective contribution of local religious leaders to the provision of religious observance and worship in schools. We see the strengthening of these links being vital to the healthy development of school education.

In Roman Catholic denominational schools, which see themselves as 'communities of faith and learning', such partnership with the local parish, with the active participation of parents and families, is an essential component in the religious, spiritual and moral formation of young people. This partnership is evident at times of preparation for the Sacraments and in the pastoral and liturgical support offered by local clergy and school chaplains.



## VALUES IN EDUCATION

We seem to have come adrift from many of the traditional points of anchorage to which our values have been tied (e.g. family, church, community, political affiliation). Consequently, we are less able to identify, claim and explore commonly held or shared values. In a milieu of ambiguity and relativism, this lack of 'rootedness' makes it difficult for people – especially young people – to make and find meaning in their lives, leaving them feeling alienated and lacking in identity.

The social cohesion required to build a just, caring and civil society can only exist when:

- we promote a clear understanding of values as moral principles;
- we develop our young people in character as well as intellect;
- we educate in wisdom as well as in knowledge.

It is essential that the curriculum reflects what we value as a nation and what we seek for our young people. It is our view that young people should be helped to understand and to commit to certain moral values if they are to lead lives of worth. They need help to understand the core values which societies have upheld since classical times. This is recognised in the Scottish Government's Curriculum for Excellence programme

which describes one of the purposes of education as being: "to make our young people aware of the values on which Scottish society is based". Helpfully, it goes on to specify the values engraved on the Mace in the Scottish Parliament - Wisdom, Justice, Compassion, Integrity - as defining values for democracy in Scotland. We anticipate, then, that schools will be expected to teach these values explicitly. In order to do so, however, teachers will require significant support to understand values and to find ways to make them accessible and intelligible to young people.

Values should lie at the heart of a school's vision of itself as a community. They should inform the school's key policies in learning and teaching, in curriculum, in support for pupils and in management and leadership. The values which are shared within the school community should be articulated by its leaders, and lived by its members. It is important that school communities agree on core values which they can share, reflecting the school's identity and traditions, its vision for education and for life.

Courageous moral leadership is required if schools are to play their part in supporting young people to develop values which are good for them and good for society.



## CURRICULUM

Increasingly, it appears, voices which speak of the place of religion and of values in the education and formation of children and young people are characterised as being dangerous and “fundamentalist”. Secular voices are vociferous in their demands for a “religion-free” state education. Some even suggest that education should be “values-free”.

The design of the curriculum is not simply a matter of the juxtaposition of a series of facts; it includes developmental, ethical, social, pedagogical, economic, aesthetic, spiritual, moral and other considerations. What educates, however, are not only the facts to be learned but the way they are organised and sequenced; the connections made; the implicit messages; the methods used which call upon the learners to be active or passive, competitive or co-operative, committed or disinterested, partners or consumers.

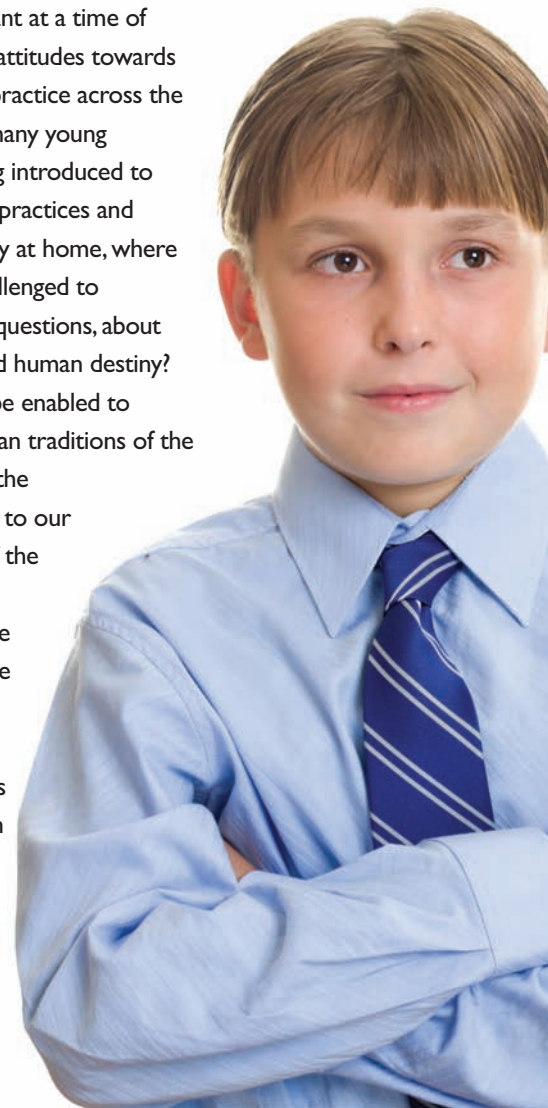
A curriculum thus becomes the purveyor of a particular world-view – a way of understanding and being in the world. It reflects the priorities of our nation and indicates the extent of our aspirations for young people. We believe that the curriculum should fully reflect and value the diversity of both Scottish indigenous cultures and Scottish multi-ethnic cultures. The curriculum must provide young people with a sound foundation on which to base moral and ethical decisions and behaviours which respect the dignity of themselves and others and the nature of the inter-dependent world in which we live.

We believe that there is a need for a broad and a balanced curriculum; one which provides the foundations of knowledge about the world and equips young people with the skills which will be necessary to negotiate a safe, happy and fulfilling path through life. Such a curriculum needs to take account of: a child's individual needs, culture and background; the many social and emotional problems associated with the prevalence of prejudice and intolerance; and other problems such as alcohol and drug abuse. It should also acknowledge the important context of the child's family in which parents have a vital role as the first and foremost educators. While it should equip young people with skills for the workplaces of tomorrow, it

must also develop the life skills which will be vital in a society which will be strongly dominated by technology and where challenges to the positive influences of marriage, family and community will be significant.

It is important that young people are equipped with the skills necessary to recognise the significant moral and ethical issues that impact on their lives, so that, as people of conscience, they can reflect on these issues and make informed and responsible decisions. These significant issues do not emerge merely in Religious and Moral Education, nor in programmes of Personal, Social and Health Education, but across the curriculum. This is recognised in the aspirations of Curriculum for Excellence to develop young people as not only successful, but confident, responsible and effective.

It is clear to us that Religious and Moral Education is one area of the curriculum which can provide vital experiences and outcomes for all children. Indeed, we would argue that its role in the curriculum is all the more significant at a time of increasingly diverse attitudes towards religious belief and practice across the world. For, where many young people are not being introduced to religious beliefs and practices and philosophical enquiry at home, where else will they be challenged to consider the ‘great’ questions, about the origins of life and human destiny? How else will they be enabled to consider the Christian traditions of the Scottish nation and the enrichment brought to our society by people of the other great faith traditions? For these reasons, we value the continuing statutory guidance on the provision of religious and moral education and religious observance in







## A CHRISTIAN VISION FOR TEACHERS AND LEARNERS

Teachers are expected to educate and care for young people in the context of their family, community and environment with a concern for their physical, mental, social and emotional well-being. All teachers convey a sense of values in the ways in which they relate to young people and in how they structure and facilitate learning in their classrooms. All teachers are expected to develop in their students positive attitudes to learning and to life, to self and to others. In this sense all teachers have important roles to play in influencing the lives of their students for good - forming, informing and transforming lives. In the early years a child needs food but learns about love in the way food is provided. Likewise, a child can grow to love learning depending on the inspiration and trained expertise of the teacher who works with parents and other professionals to provide an integrated programme of support in the learning communities of the 21st century.

Because it involves people, education can never be value-neutral. The interface between teacher and learner, is a place of special encounter – Christians might say ‘grace’ – where the teacher not only imparts some of his/her own experiences and assumptions but in return is informed by the pupil whom he/she teaches.

In an ever-changing society where there is often a rapid shift in values, the teacher is called to read the signs of the times and, when necessary, to be an agent in countering false values: individualism, selfishness, materialism. For some teachers, this is the role of teaching as vocation - even as ministry. In Roman Catholic denominational schools, teachers undertake particular responsibilities - as catechists - to form pupils in a particular faith tradition, according to the wishes of parents and guided by the Church. At the same time they are able to teach about and show respect for other faith traditions. Pupils in all schools should be encouraged to adopt positive attitudes and to value

and respect difference. This lies at the heart of human spiritual formation and transformation. Each child is entitled to the best from the school and from teacher. Initiatives to raise achievement and provide a framework for learning should be welcomed - as should social inclusion - provided teachers and pupils receive the necessary support. It is important to set children achievable goals, to maximise their potential so they can taste success regardless of their abilities. All teachers are ‘support’ teachers but those with a special pastoral remit have an important contribution to make to the social and moral welfare of pupils. Essentially they offer particular forms of pupil support, linking the school with the home and the wider community. They need highly developed interpersonal skills to work in collaboration with pupils, parents and other agencies. For this they need the time and support to develop these skills.



## IN CONCLUSION:

The transmission of knowledge and skills;  
a love of learning;  
the arousing of a sense of wonder;  
a desire to explore, question, imagine and create;  
and developing a sense of justice:  
these are all at the heart of the learning enterprise,  
helping both teacher and learner  
to become fully human and fully alive.



### Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS)

aims to bring Christians of different traditions in Scotland closer to one another in their shared faith in Jesus Christ. ACTS does this by bringing people together to meet, pray, learn, reflect and act on matters of common concern.

ACTS is made up of: the Church of Scotland, Congregational Federation, Methodist Church, Religious Society of Friends, Roman Catholic Church, Salvation Army, Scottish Episcopal Church, United Free Church of Scotland and United Reformed Church.



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