

THE HEADTEACHER AND PRINCIPAL IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL AND ACADEMY

Catholic schools and academies in the Archdiocese of Southwark are established to provide the highest standard of Catholic education for the children and young people in their care. They form a vital part of the educational mission of the Diocese, and make a major contribution to the Church's task of evangelization. They are challenged to be communities of hope and of witnesses to the love of Jesus Christ.

By accepting the post of headship, headteachers and principals make a public commitment to follow Christ's example of leadership. They share in the ministry of the Archbishop and undertake their work in communion with him, with all the catholic schools, academies and colleges in the Diocese and with the wider Church community.

Catholic schools and academies are the interface of many different understandings of life, society and education. The difference between the Christian approach to education which is based on an understanding of the life as God's gift, and a general approach to education which does not openly acknowledge any religious values is of fundamental importance. However, in a fast moving world where there are innumerable issues to be dealt with on a daily basis, the challenge to discern what will assist the growth of the community is not an easy one.

Prayer and reflection are essential for headteachers, who give witness by their example to the central importance of relationship with Christ. Their exercise of leadership should increasingly demonstrate qualities of love and forgiveness, of service, of respect for the individual and of care for the disadvantaged. Their roles give them a position of influence not only with pupils, staff, parents and governors, but also in much wider context.

The nature of the headteacher's role means there are high expectations of those applying for headship. Candidates should be people of prayer and have a sound theological and educational understanding and the qualities of wisdom and discernment necessary to manage the tensions and ambiguities of the role. They must be baptized Catholics, or received into the Catholic Church, in good standing in their parish and wider Catholic community, there must not be anything in what they believe or practice that is against the teachings of the Catholic Church and they must be in full sacramental communion with the Church.

The demands of the role could appear to be impossible. Certainly, no headteacher can succeed in fulfilling most requirements of the job without the support of colleagues in and out of school, of all members of the Church community and of family and friends. But if a person is called to this ministry, God will give him or her the grace and strength to carry it out, to begin again after failure and to find great joy in responding to the mission.