

Denominational Education Review

**Denominational Review Briefing Note June 2021**

The Education Service has carried out a review of Midlothian’s denominational school provision in the context of a national shortfall in availability of teachers with approval necessary to teach in Roman Catholic (RC) schools. In 2016 the Catholic Church through Archbishop Tartaglia declared a ‘crisis in faith education’ due to the shortage of Catholic teachers in Catholic Schools (The Tablet.co.uk June 2016). This situation has not improved since 2016 and our objective in undertaking this review has been to find ways to stabilise and strengthen RC provision and denominational education within and across Midlothian.

The relevant legislation on the management of denominational schools in Scotland states that: “A teacher appointed to any post on the staff of any such school by the education authority shall be required to be approved as regards religious belief and character by representatives of the church or denominational body in whose interest the school has been conducted” (Education (Scotland) Act 1918; Education (Scotland) Act 1980 Section 21(2); Self-Governing Schools etc. (Scotland) Act 1989 Sch.10)

The guidance on applying for Approval to teach in a Catholic school issued by the Scottish Catholic Education Service on behalf of the Bishops’ Conference of Scotland states that:

“To enable Councils to fulfil their statutory responsibilities, the Catholic Church requires to be assured that the personal "religious belief and character" of a teacher is appropriate to the duties associated with the teaching post for which he/she has applied. When seeking approval, a teacher must demonstrate how his/her personal “religious belief and character” enables him/her to undertake the duties of the particular teaching post within the context of a Catholic school, with its particular mission, values and ethos, as outlined in ‘A Charter for Catholic Schools in Scotland’.”

At the point the denominational review was initiated, the RC primary schools across Midlothian were operating with only 50% of teaching staff having Church approval and temporary shared headship arrangements in place for four of our RC primary schools. This followed a number of challenging years in relation to recruitment of both teaching and senior leadership staff.

Since then there has been a sustained effort to employ a greater number of teachers with the necessary qualifications to teach in our RC primary schools and for teachers working in our RC schools to undertake the Catholic Teaching Certificate and to obtain Church approval. Looking forward to the 2021/22 school year we have set the intake capacity of our RC primary schools taking account of suitably qualified teachers in each school. Taken together these strategies can be seen to be having a positive impact as we anticipate that 67% of the class teachers in our RC primary schools next year will have Church approval.

A permanent shared headship has been established at Sacred Heart and St Mathew’s Primary Schools, which has brought greater stability to the leadership of both schools. There are no longer any temporary shared headship arrangements in place, however, there are still temporary leadership arrangements at three of our RC primary schools.

In Midlothian, at the time of the 2019 pupil census, our seven RC primary schools had a total of 907 pupils and St David’s High School, which serves Musselburgh as well as Midlothian, had 648 pupils. The overall percentage of children attending our RC primary schools in 2019/20 who had a declared affinity with the RC faith was 40%:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **RC Primary School** | **Total Roll** | **Percentage RC** |
| Sacred Heart | 127 | 34% |
| St Andrew's | 157 | 36% |
| St David's | 192 | 41% |
| St Luke's | 201 | 34% |
| St Margaret's | 40 | 48% |
| St Mary's | 135 | 51% |
| St Matthew's | 55 | 41% |
|   | **907** | **40%** |

Midlothian, as one of the fastest growing local authorities, has rising school rolls across both primary and secondary schools and our RC schools play an important role in providing capacity, particularly in areas of significant pressure such as Bonnyrigg, Dalkeith, Gorebridge and Mayfield. The pupil enrolment process for August 2021 is now well progressed and the demand for Primary 1 places at St David’s, St Luke’s and St Mary’s has been greater than the number of places available. To date there are no Primary 1 pupils enrolled at St Margaret’s for the coming school year.

The projections for August 2021 is shown in the tables below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **School** | **Total Roll** | **Number of Classes** | **Percentage RC** |
| Sacred Heart | 120 | 6 | 37% |
| St Andrew's | 150 | 7 | 43% |
| St David's | 190 | 7 | 51% |
| St Luke's | 203 | 8 | 36% |
| St Margaret's | 18 | 1 | 39% |
| St Mary's | 160 | 7 | 47% |
| St Matthew's | 56 | 3 | 52% |
|  | **897** | **39** | **43%** |

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| --- |
| **All RC Primary Schools – Projected Number of Pupils by Year Group** |
| **P1** | **P2** | **P3** | **P4** | **P5** | **P6** | **P7** | **Total** |
| 104 | 128 | 129 | 120 | 136 | 139 | 141 | **897** |
| **St David’s RC High School Projected Roll 2021/22** |
| **S1**  | **S2**  | **S3**  | **S4**  | **S5**  | **S6** | **Total** |
| **138** | **135** | **142** | **139** | **109** | **98** | **761** |

Parental support for our RC schools in terms of choice of school remains strong: the pupil roll of St David’s High School is growing; the number of pupils attending six of our seven RC primary schools is stable, with a slight increase in the percentage of pupils attending being baptised Roman Catholic. However, the school roll at St Margaret’s has fallen from 40 to 18 pupils and there are indications that a number of these children will move to other schools in the near future.

Taking account of the growth in housing across Midlothian, which will lead to significant growth in total pupil numbers, the Council’s learning estate strategy makes provision for investment in new schools and school expansions. Over the past year the refurbishment and expansion of Sacred Heart in Penicuik was completed and we opened a new St Mary’s school building in Bonnyrigg. The Council has been awarded funding as part of Scottish Government’s Learning Estate Investment Programme to replace the Mayfield School Campus, including the replacement of St Luke’s. Plans are being formulated for the refurbishment and expansion of St David’s Primary School in Dalkeith and the strategy allows for an extension to St Andrew’s Primary School in Gorebridge.

St Matthew’s Primary School serves the rural community of Rosewell and is included in the Scottish Government’s list of rural schools. The school building it occupies is leased from the Church and the Council has no plans to make the significant investment that would be required to replace this capacity. St Matthew’s Primary School may not continue to be considered rural given the significant housing developments in the area.

In the Denominational Review Briefing document of 18 March 2020 we advised that we had applied the following required outcomes in arriving at the preferred school model of four RC primary schools, with locations in Dalkeith, Gorebridge, Bonnyrigg and Penicuik, and 1 RC secondary school:

* To reduce the required complement of head teachers and teaching staff with Church approval;
* To create an RC school structure which provides opportunities for staff progression;
* To maintain sufficient primary RC school capacity across Midlothian;
* To minimise the detrimental effect on the number of pupils who will go on to attend St David’s High School;
* To minimise the increase in distances for children to travel from home to school.

Very shortly after that Covid19 struck and delayed our plans to carry out further engagement activities and to progress to statutory consultation as quickly as possible.

We are steadfast in our objective to stabilise and strengthen RC provision and denominational education within and across Midlothian. Because of the progress made to date we are now more optimistic about our ability to recruit and retain suitably qualified teachers for our RC schools. With continued investment in our workforce plan, specifically for our RC schools, we will strengthen our ability to grow our own RC teachers, middle managers and head teachers.

In light of all the foregoing we now believe that we can achieve the required outcomes while making fewer changes to the structure of our RC schools. Any change will require statutory consultation and our next steps prior to the meeting of Council on 29 June are:

* to engage with schools that will be directly affected by the proposals for consultation;
* to engage with Church representatives on the proposals for consultation;
* to draft a paper to obtain governance from Council on 29 June to progress proposals to statutory consultation.

A further briefing will follow before the end of the school session, providing details of the proposals for consultation. This will be timed to ensure that schools are fully informed prior to the council papers being made public.

**7 June 2021**