

Saint Ambrose College



THE MISSION AND VISION OF CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Saint Ambrose College is one of twelve schools in England in the Edmund Rice Schools Network and it was rated 'Outstanding' by both Ofsted and the Diocese of Shrewsbury upon our last inspections. In 1940 the De La Salle Brothers of Les Vauxbelet's College in Guernsey evacuated the island and re-established their school in our local area. "St Ambrose College" was officially opened in 1942, named in honour of St Ambrose of Milan, but as a nod of thanks towards the local Bishop Ambrose Moriarty. The De La Salle Brothers returned to Guernsey following the liberation of the Channel Islands and in September 1945, at the request of the Bishop, the Christian Brothers took responsibility for St Ambrose College. Whilst no Christian Brothers have taught at St Ambrose College since the 1990s, the charism of the founder of the Christian Brothers, Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice, is retained at the heart of all that we do.

St Ambrose College is one of twelve Edmund Rice schools in England and each Edmund Rice school is also a Catholic school.

Charism

Within schools established by religious orders the word 'charism' is used with regularity; the word 'charism' is used to describe their spiritual orientation and anything specific about their particular order's mission. The word 'charism' in fact comes from the Greek word "charisma" which means a gift of goodness that flows from God, out of His love, towards human beings. The spiritual graces that Edmund Rice received in the 1800s ignited in him a passion to start the order of Christian Brothers to provide the marginalised with a Catholic, holistic education. Edmund's charism comprised three main gifts: Presence, Compassion, Liberation.

The responsibility for the maintenance of the charism of Edmund Rice at St Ambrose College has been, since the 1990s, in the hands of a completely lay teaching staff.

Ethos

Every school whether Catholic or non-Catholic tends to have its own 'ethos'; a prevalent character or spirit that pervades the habits and actions of those people who are a part of the school. 'Ethos', a dominant and pervasive character and spirit, can be seen in all institutions from political parties to Rugby teams; it is not necessarily unique to schools. What *is* distinctive then about a school such as St Ambrose College with a 'Catholic ethos' is that it aims to educate young people in the perennial values of the Gospel and to foster a sense of community in which each member is afforded every opportunity to realise their full potential and is support of each other. A Catholic school ethos directs its students to the ultimate values and purpose of their life here on earth and prepares them for the life hereafter. In a sense the ethos of a Catholic school helps it to resemble a church or parish; distinct from other human institutions that proclaim to have an 'ethos'. In any Catholic school, education is not solely be about academic success and, following in the mission of the Church, concern for the marginalised is a significant part of the ethos of any Edmund Rice school. The mission statement of St Ambrose College captures the essence of our ethos perfectly: "In this College we strive together to make real in our lives



and in the world the values of the Gospel of Jesus Christ”; this cannot simply be used as a dry marketing tool. Describing the ethos of a school should actually be a ‘snapshot’ of the Catholic values that genuinely pervade the school from top to toe. The Congregation for Catholic Education (1997, 11) stated that maintenance of ethos is paramount; that the Catholic school has an “ecclesial identity and role” which “penetrates and informs every moment of its educational activity”.

The most distinctive thing about us as an Edmund Rice school is therefore not simply the beautiful icon of Blessed Edmund Rice in the Reception area; it is our ‘ethos’. An Edmund Rice school should first and foremost be a community where its members exude the Gospel values of love and forgiveness. At the centre of this approach is the challenge that Christ Himself gave us in Matthew 6:33: “Strive first for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you”.

The Eight Essentials of Edmund Rice Education

The question has to be posed: if there is no Christian Brother presence in the English schools to maintain the ethos and charism of Edmund Rice education, who will guard and indeed, importantly, develop it? The Christian Brothers' Leadership Team foresaw this problem and prior to their departure in the 1990s outlined the ‘Eight Essentials of Christian Brother Education’ specifically for the laity of the English schools meaning that whilst the twelve Edmund Rice schools in England are a diverse bunch, they share a common bond and educational vision that are encapsulated in these ‘Eight Essentials’. These ‘Eight Essentials’ have always existed but never needed to be explicitly outlined, until that is, the English schools became devoid of Brothers working within them. These ‘Eight Essentials’ are for both teachers, students and support staff alike; a framework around which to structure their working lives.

1. Evangelising the Modern World
2. Promoting the Spiritual
3. Building a Christian Community
4. Compassion for those in Need
5. Concern for the Whole Person
6. Striving for Excellence
7. Education as a Christian Calling
8. Education for Justice

The Purpose of a Catholic school

The purpose of a Catholic school is defined well in Canon Law:

“Since true education must strive for complete formation of the human person that looks to his or her final end as well as to the common good of societies, children and youth are to be nurtured in such a way that they are able to develop their physical, moral, and intellectual talents harmoniously, acquire a more perfect sense of responsibility and right use of freedom, and are formed to participate actively in social life.” (Canon Law, 1983, 795).

It is worth noting that the Church states that *all* pupils’ talents are celebrated in a Catholic school. Many schools in England focus solely on results and pay simple lip service to the other talents that pupils have



to offer; as former Shrewsbury Diocesan Inspector, Father Jim Gallagher sagaciously states, “the rights and needs of pupils may be overlooked because they do not feature positively on the league table measurements” (2007, 253).

First and foremost a Catholic school should portray itself as a sign of Christ’s presence here on earth:

“It is precisely in the Gospel of Christ... that the Catholic school finds its definition as it comes to terms with the cultural conditions of the times”
(Congregation of Catholic Education, 1997, 9)

A Catholic school like St Ambrose College is therefore a place that should offer a holistic and high quality education, exude Gospel values, and show particular concern for the marginalised.

As Pope Francis said in 2014:

“Education cannot be neutral. It is either positive or negative; either it enriches or it impoverishes; either it enables a person to grow or it lessens, even corrupts him. The mission of schools is to develop a sense of truth, of what is good and beautiful. And this occurs through a rich path made up of many ingredients. This is why there are so many subjects — because development is the results of different elements that act together and stimulate intelligence, knowledge, the emotions, the body, and so on.”

“If something is true, it is good and beautiful; if it is beautiful; it is good and true; if it is good, it is true and it is beautiful. And together, these elements enable us to grow and help us to love life, even when we are not well, even in the midst of many problems. True education enables us to love life and opens us to the fullness of life.”

Excellence in Catholic schools

It is easy to simply trot out the line, “Catholic schools are better than non-Catholic schools”. But statistics speak volumes on how the Catholic schools of England & Wales are truly beacons of excellence. According to recent data, at GCSE level, Catholic schools outperform the national average by 5%. In Catholic primary schools in England, 74.7% have been rated either Good or Outstanding by OFSTED in comparison to 64% nationally (CES, 2014); these are certainly achievements to celebrate.

Catholic schools, through their excellent holistic education, make a huge contribution to the common good of society. In 2011, Oona Standdard of the CES commented on OFSTED’s affirmation of the value of the Catholic schooling system: “To have such happy and successful outcomes doesn’t just benefit the pupils – nearly 30% of whom are not Catholic – but also shows the Church making an investment in the future well-being of society through Catholic schools.” Therefore excellence of Catholic schools cannot simply be measured by external secular bodies such as OFSTED but it is in fact the meeting of the needs of all pupils, their families, and wider society, with a concern for the poor and marginalised.