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Catholic Association for Racial Justice

Education Green Paper
Schools that Work For Everyone

A Reponse to the Consultation from:
The Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ)
9 Henry Rd, London N4 2LH.
Tel: 020 8802 8080. info@carj.org.uk

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The Catholic Association for Racial Justice (CARJ) is a small independent charity, established in 1984. CARJ works with others to create a more just, more equal, more cooperative society. Schools and young people have for many years been one of our highest priorities. We support young people from marginalised communities to achieve their full potential, and we work with all young people to raise awareness, facilitate dialogue and challenge them to embrace a vocation to 'world citizenship'.

We welcome the Green Paper *Schools that Work for Everyone,* and the following are a few brief comments from our experience working with schools and young people in England & Wales.

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The Green Paper is addressing two important social issues – **equality and social cohesion**.   These issues are separate but inter-related. The UK has long been divided by social class, but the vast majority shared a language, a religion, a history and a culture. Since the end of the Second World War, through a process of immigration from different parts of the world, we have become much more diverse. Thus equality and social cohesion have become fundamental issues, running through the whole of society, and they have a specific relevance to education.

Across our education system, there is **a significant and persistent achievement gap** between the majority of young people and those from low income families. (6) White working class boys are especially vulnerable, alongside young people from some minority ethnic groups - most notably those from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds. OFSTED and others have recently highlighted a north – south divide in relation to some aspects of educational achievement. The hope is that with better schools we can offer all young people a quality education.

Alongside this persistent inequality, we face **social divisions**; and we hope that schools can play a role in overcoming these social divisions – enabling young people from diverse backgrounds to understand one another and learn to live together, with mutual respect, and work together for the common good.

Equality - Independent Schools, Selective Schools and Universities
The Green Paper makes specific proposals for independent schools, selective schools and universities. Traditionally associated with the elite in society, these institutions are being asked to reach out to more marginalised communities.

We support the Government's plan to ask **Independent schools** to sponsor academies, set up new free schools in the state sector, offer bursaries for young people from low income families and take other initiatives to support state schools especially in poor areas. We have been impressed by the positive impact of very simple partnership arrangements between independent schools and schools serving marginalised communities. (6)

Selective Schools have a poor history in taking young people from low income families. They aren't necessarily located in proximity to areas with high levels of deprivation. Most have entrance exams, and parents often have their children coached for these exams. If selective schools are to remain or expand, we would support the Government's suggestion that they take a significant proportion of pupils from low income households and partner with non-selective schools.

Universities too often charge higher tuition fees without widening access to lower income students, and we support the Government's suggestion that universities might establish new schools in the state system or sponsor Academies. CARJ has been especially encouraged by the establishment of University Technical Colleges (6).

In asking Independent Schools, Selective Schools and Universities to reach out to those from disadvantaged backgrounds, we must keep in mind that they can only make a modest contribution to educational equality. We must have a strategy for the entire education system that will adequately support schools, families and young people in marginalised communities. (6)

Social Cohesion - Faith Schools
As the Green Paper points out, Faith Schools overall are relatively high performing schools; and pupils from poorer backgrounds tend to do better in Faith Schools than at other schools. Many faith schools are open to children of other faiths, and Catholic schools have a good record on ethnic diversity.

Nonetheless, **there is a concern that Faith Schools may undermine social cohesion** by separating young people who come from different faith communities..

To address this concern a cap was introduced on faith admissions to new Faith Schools. However, as the Green Paper acknowledges, it is questionable whether capping faith admissions has had much effect in promoting inclusion and community cohesion**.**   The Government, therefore, suggests that we need to consider other ways to ensure that Faith Schools promote inclusivity and community cohesion.

We would suggest that more thought needs to be given to the specific 'safeguards' that might be imposed on Faith Schools to ensure that they make an appropriate contribution to social cohesion. To provide a context for considering such issues, we briefly describe our impression of Catholic Schools and how they prepare young people for life in a diverse society.

It is our experience that **Catholic schools are making a serious effort** to foster active citizenship, understanding, mutual respect and community cohesion among young people. This is a process of awareness and good practice which has been taking shape in Catholic schools over a period of half a century.

The Second Vatican Council (1960-64) was an extremely important event in the history of the Catholic community worldwide. Among other things, Vatican II set a new much more positive direction for the Church in relation to Other Faiths. The spirit of Vatican II has influenced the Catholic community locally and globally, and it has permeated the whole ethos of Catholic Education and especially 'religious education' in schools. (1)

Quite a few Catholic schools are serious about developing a sense of active citizenship in their pupils. Some are members of Citizens UK, and through local branches (eg. London Citizens, Leeds, Citizens, Cardiff Citizens, etc) their pupils meet young people from other faith backgrounds and work together for the common good.   Other schools have serious programmes of 'formation for citizenship' within the school. (5)

In addition, Catholic schools draw heavily on input from Catholic Charitable Agencies like CAFOD, CARJ, Pax Christi, the Jesuit Refugee Service, the Justice & Peace Networks and many others. The positive outlook, values and world view of such agencies are an important influence on young people in Catholic Schools.

In imposing new safeguards to promote inclusivity and community cohesion, it is **important that we recognise and reinforce the process of increasing awareness and good practice** that has been developing in the Catholic community and in Catholic Schools over the past fifty years.

Conclusion
As a society, in recent decades, we have become more unequal, more diverse and more divided. More than ever, we must try to work together to face **two serious educational challenges**: to offer every child a quality education and to prepare young people to live as good neighbours and fellow citizens alongside people from diverse backgrounds.

Those involved in education at all levels are struggling to address these two challenges. The role of Government is to give some leadership, vision and direction to their effort. We hope our **Stepping Stones Project** makes a modest contribution to this effort. (6)

Bibliography and Notes

The following documents have been selected and ordered (chronologically) to illustrate the development of awareness in the Catholic community and in Catholic Education over the past fifty years since the Second Vatican Council.

1   *Nostra Aetate – Declaration* on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions (October 1965)

2   *Learning from Diversity: A Challenge for Catholic Education.* Report of a Working Party on Catholic Education in a Multi-Racial, Multi-Cultural Society (Catholic Bishops Conference, 1984)

3   *Catholic Schools and Other Faiths* (Catholic Bishops Conference, 1997).

4   *Ethnicity, Identity and Achievement in Catholic Education* (Catholic Education Service, 2003).

5   *Formation for Citizenship in Catholic Schools* (Von Hugel Institute, 2007).

6   *Stepping Stones to a More Equal Society: A Review of selected educational initiatives designed to support young people, families and schools in marginalised communities* (CARJ, 2014).