



Diocese of Plymouth
From the Office of the Bishop

**“Let the children come to me”: a message from Bishop Mark to all those involved
in Catholic Education in the Diocese of Plymouth**

I wanted to take this opportunity to say a word to all our headteachers, governors and staff working so hard in all our Catholic schools across the Diocese.

I hope you will not mind me, reminding all of us, of an episode in the life of Thomas Edison. He was, of course a great American inventor, famous for the invention of the light bulb, and so many electrical and electronic instruments, that we use today. We would not be able to communicate through social media without his inventions.

What is less well known about him, is that when he was a child, the young Thomas, was sent home from school with a note for his mother. Tears welled up in her eyes as she read the note aloud to her son, “Your son is a genius. Our school is too small to teach him. It would be best if you taught him at home.” Years later, after his mother died, Edison was going through some of her papers, and came across the note his teacher had written to his mother, so many years before. It actually read, “Your son is mentally deficient. We cannot have him in our school. Please teach him yourself at home.”

Edison became quite emotional reading the note, and wrote in his diary, “I became a genius inventor because of the affirmation of my mother.”

And of course, it is true; a word of affirmation can change a person’s whole life.

This is one of the reasons why I wanted to communicate with all of you and to thank you for all that you are doing for the Catholic Education of our children and young people, even in these exceptionally challenging times. We seek to be the face of Christ to each and every child. We believe in the dignity and development of the whole child and bringing each one to their fullest potential. We do so because Jesus showed Himself the friend of the young, the One who wanted to lead them into the fullness of life.

I am aware of what you have all been doing, over these recent months, during the pandemic. How you have been serving so generously our schools and, indeed, the wider communities surrounding, and linked to our schools. Firstly, you have done

so, by keeping our schools available, to some of the children in our communities who have needed to be in school in these months, either because they need to be looked after or because their parents are key workers.

It has been inspiring, to see the different liturgies, the online Masses, online lessons, homework suggestions, PowerPoint ideas, letters and newsletters, that have been shared through social media. But it has been humbling also, to hear of the food parcels, vouchers, and prayers which have been shared from our schools, with those in need in our wider communities. Thank you all, for your generosity in this.

I realise, too, that there continues to be much uncertainty across our country over when our schools will open again. There are legitimate questions about how this will happen and what it might look and feel like. It is a burden felt by all, but I know, most especially, in senior leadership and in our CAST Central team.

In the midst of this, I simply wanted to say that we are immensely grateful for all that you have done so far, and for all that you are still doing to support Catholic education, and to support families and children, across our Diocese. I know, too, that you will all do your utmost to welcome back more of our pupils into our schools, from the 1st June onwards.

I understand that the planning, risk assessing and sheer amount of work, comes at a personal cost, especially to those in leadership. I ask you to please look after yourselves; your own physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. If there is anything, we can do to support you in this, do please be in touch with CAST or with our Diocesan Schools Commission. We can help put you in touch with some good resources to assist you during this challenging and unsettling time. It is so important that we all take the opportunities available to remain healthy and well. Not only is that good for us, but it means we will be able to serve our families and children, and indeed the wider community, throughout this period.

Please be assured of my prayers for all of you – for those in leadership, for our headteachers, for all the staff, for governors, for all those who support the mission of our schools, for families and most particularly for our children. I ask you to pray for me, too.

May the Lord, who said, “Let the children come to me”, bless the children and young people of our schools, and may He bless all of us, and all that we do to bring them closer to Him. Thank you and God Bless You.

+Mark O’Toole
Bishop of Plymouth