

**STATEMENT BY KATE PEREIRA HEADTEACHER OF ST JOHN FISHER RC VA HIGH SCHOOL****Introduction**

I have been the Headteacher of St John Fisher since April 2019 and worked here previously as an assistant Headteacher for eight years. I have worked in eight very different Catholic secondary schools across the country over my 26 years of teaching and held senior positions in three of them, two as a Head. Each Catholic school I have taught in has had a very different context but the threads that run through each are the same and will ring true to any Head of any Catholic school. Catholic schools are open, inclusive and happy places to work in, with the students at the centre of everything we do. Anybody is welcome to apply to a Catholic school and every school I have worked in has had a mixture of faiths, those of no faith, different cultures and backgrounds.

**Context**

St John Fisher Catholic High School draws students from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. The composition of the student body is complex with students joining the school from more than 20 different primary schools and from outside the United Kingdom. Attainment on entry is consistently significantly below national levels. The percentage of each cohort with 'high' attainment tends to be significantly below national and those with 'low' attainment significantly above national. The percentage having 'middle' attainment also tends to be slightly below national. The very high turnover of students is noticeable with typically only about three-quarters of each GCSE cohort having completed a full five years at the school. The basic characteristics of the school indicate that it is in the extreme quintile for EAL, ethnic groups, stability and deprivation, as has been the case for several consecutive years. The school has a high number of vulnerable children who are either on the child protection register or are children in need. Low and falling attainment on entry and low stability continue to be significant barriers to achievement. Just under half the students at St John Fisher are Catholic and the second largest denomination is Muslim. Racial and ethnic harmony is a high priority for the school and good community relations are evident.

**Values**

Our values, which are based on the Gospel, are at the heart of the school. Mutual respect and tolerance, recognising each student as the unique creation of God, informs all that we do from the organisation of the day to the pastoral care provided for students. Each day begins with reflection and prayer and students contribute willingly to tutor time, assemblies and liturgies, regardless of belief. There is a strong house structure and successful fund raising for charities and good causes, most of which is student-led.

Our values also underpin how people are treated in the school. These are reinforced via assemblies and throughout the year, particularly focussing on equality for all. Bullying is quickly addressed, and students are taught to understand the possible consequences of negative actions towards others through PSHE and assemblies. House and School Councils, anti-bullying ambassadors, mentors, reading buddies, learning leaders, and so on, all contribute to an overall feeling of concern and support.

## **How we work**

One of the aims of St John Fisher as with all Catholic schools is to educate and support the most disadvantaged in society. This huge part of our mission is something we take very seriously. Progress levels for disadvantaged students are positive. We support all of our students to 'live life to the full', particularly those with barriers to learning such as those who are financially disadvantaged, who have emotional and behavioural difficulties, have an additional learning need or have English as an additional language. The majority of our work is focussed on this because these types of students form the majority of our intake. Parents choose St John Fisher because they know we will nurture and care for their children regardless of their background, ability, aptitude, religion or barriers to learning. As with all Catholic schools we remain focussed on this because it is at the heart of the purpose of Catholic schools. Reasons for admissions appeals cited by prospective parents have been its caring nature and its community feel as well as its strong reputation in the local community, which ranges from people of no faith, Christians of many denominations, including Catholics and many Muslim families and families of other world faiths.

St John Fisher works very closely with the local community. Catholic schools are outward looking, not insular. We are linked with local sport community groups and run the only Girl Guides group in Peterborough, which stemmed from a need to engage a particularly vulnerable group of girls. The school is a key part of the community and community spirit is increased through House charity days that raise many thousands of pounds. Students engage in activities such as collecting and delivering food for the homeless. They have also represented the school for the recent Holocaust memorial event and performed in the city centre. In the Autumn term, the students take part in a school election voting for school head boy and head girl. The candidates give speeches in assembly and all students are given the opportunity to vote for who they would like to see in post. The Head Boy and Head Girl lead school council with representatives from each House. This year we have a student who is running for Peterborough Youth Parliament. Our Core Values represent our Catholic ethos and the regard we have for each individual. The need for high quality care, pastorally and spiritually, is supported by national initiatives such as the PREVENT strategy for which all staff have been trained. We are part of the Teaching School Alliance with other Peterborough schools and help to train and support trainee teachers with Teach East. We have many visitors to our school including other professionals who want to look at an aspect of our work and take it back to their own schools. We work across Peterborough with teachers of the deaf as we have a Hearing Hub here at school and our SENCO leads the SENCO Peer review programme as well as setting up networks to support SENCOs across the city. Community relations are very good.

## **Inclusion**

All students study RE where they can and do question and explore religion as would be expected in any Catholic school. Students are able to enter into full philosophical and ethical debates regarding questions of belief and atheism, including different approaches to atheism such as Humanism. World religions are studied with an in depth study of Islam undertaken at Key Stage Three and Judaism at Key Stage Four. Students explore moral issues such as prejudice and discrimination, abortion and euthanasia fully with all points of view covered. Students study RE in an academic manner because fully qualified specialist RE teachers with degrees in Theology & Religious Studies teach it. There is no 'indoctrination' which is an outdated, stereotypical and narrow approach with no place in modern

society (a common misconception with negative connotations about RE in Catholic schools which is simply not true).

Respect for everybody regardless of background, aptitude, religion, beliefs, sexual orientation, colour, and culture are at the centre of how we work here at St John Fisher. We uphold the Equalities Act of 2010 and ensure we provide all those with protected characteristics with full support and an ambitious curriculum. All students study a full programme of PSHE including mental health and Sex and Relationship Education (SRE). We provide students with a full, engaging curriculum, which includes same sex relationships and issues relating to being LGBT. As a voluntary aided maintained school, we are accountable to the Local Authority and Ofsted as well as to our Diocese and must uphold education law as we do. Our PSHE programme includes keeping safe and staying healthy, and these factors are reinforced in assemblies and on Focus Days. Students know how to use the reporting process if they do not feel safe. Six members of staff are designated Child Protection Officers and all staff receive child protection training biannually with an annual update.

Provision of Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) development includes respect for the site and others; SMSC runs across the curriculum and students are encouraged to develop their cultural capital through lessons, trips and focus day activities. Positive reports received from visitors about the orderly nature of the school, students' behaviour, and their respect for others; student-led mentoring process; core RE for Sixth Form students ensures that these aspects are sustained for as long as students are with us.

### **Openness to all faiths and those who do not have a faith**

We welcome children of faith whatever that faith may be and of no faith. We do not 'discriminate' against anybody, as this would be against our ethos, or 'select' those who apply, as 'selection' is not in keeping with our school ethos or allowed by law for a fully comprehensive, maintained school like ours. Anybody can apply to St John Fisher. All types of families are welcome, including those who are in a same sex relationship. The school is very popular because of its reputation, not only for outcomes but also for being a caring, friendly community and so, as with many schools, there are often more applications than places available. If this does happen, we have to apply our oversubscription criteria, as all schools do at this point. We have waiting lists which include Catholics.

We are a successful school which we put down to the talents of our staff and students and the way the school community works together in a cohesive, positive manner making sure that no child is left behind and no time is wasted. Students and staff are happy – we make sure of that - and happy children learn, unhappy children do not. We are always happy for people to visit our school and see in practice how a Catholic school operates.

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