



**R.C. DIOCESE OF ABERDEEN
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**Bishop of Aberdeen
Rt Rev Hugh Gilbert O.S.B.**

**Letter to the parishioners of the city of Aberdeen
To be read at all Masses in the city on 12th and 13th of October 2024**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On Wednesday 2 October, Aberdeen City Council voted 24 to 18 against the motion that a working group be set up to explore the viability of a Catholic Secondary School in Aberdeen. That vote means that this possibility is for now closed. Many of you will know this already.

This is disappointing.

It is disappointing in itself. Even in a time of financial constraint, the case for a Catholic Secondary School is a reasonable one and deserves the deeper consideration we and others were pressing for.

We are also disappointed at the ways in which the Council's handling of our own proposals fell short of proper process. This has left us with a sense of being disrespected.

Let us, however, turn to the future.

First of all, I want to thank all those who, in any way, helped to bring this aspiration forward. There are many. I also want to thank all the Councillors who supported the proposal. Ideas have their times, and this idea will not die. Administrations and attitudes change. The facts are simple. Of all the major cities of Scotland, Aberdeen is the worst served in terms of Catholic Education. According to the latest figures, Aberdeen has some 19, 239 people who identify as Catholic. Dundee has just over 1000 more. Aberdeen has three Catholic Primaries and no Secondary while Dundee has 12 Catholic Primary Schools and two Secondaries. The disparity is striking.

Secondly, I want to reaffirm appreciation of the work of the teachers and staff of our Primary Schools. Catholic Schools do not just provide an 'ordinary education' with bits of RE stirred in. They help children to face the whole of life and to approach the full range of learning in a Christian and Catholic way. Our schools are not closed spaces but open to those of other faiths or none who appreciate what they have to offer. Our schools fulfil their mission in a spirit of service to the whole community. It was no surprise to hear how highly an official report rated one of our recently inspected Primary Schools.

This temporary setback is not a time for angry 'blowbacks'. We want all our relations with civil authority to be marked by courtesy and reasonableness, as we continue to build our case and to maintain and develop the appropriate provision for Catholic education in this city. But, finally, we can take this occasion to remind one another of our various responsibilities for the Christian formation of our children. This responsibility falls primarily on parents themselves and I would encourage all parents to continue their vital and indispensable efforts in this domain. It is not easy to be a Christian in our world. The wind is often against us. There are currents of thought, ideologies, fashions, behavioural patterns that are contrary to our own convictions and can be deeply damaging of our humanity. We want our children to grow up strong in faith, hope and love. This is a collaborative effort. Several of our parishes have youth groups and I would encourage parents to take advantage of these as well as of our schools. Together – and surely in time with fuller support from Local Authority – let us like the Lord place our children at the centre and open the paths for them to find their way to Him.

Yours devotedly in Christ,

+ *Hugh*

Hugh Gilbert OSB
Bishop of Aberdeen