

Statement on Faith and Ethos

“Do you wish to be great? Then begin by being. Do you desire to construct a vast and lofty fabric? Think first about the foundations of humility. The higher your structure is to be, the deeper must be its foundation.” Saint Augustine

Part I: Background and Religious Culture of the School

More House was founded by the Canonesses of St Augustine at the request of a group of parents determined to send their daughters to a Catholic London Day School. More House remains today, as it was founded, a caring community of Faith, an extension of the home, and an integral part of the Catholic community.

The primary aim of More House is to educate. Christ was a teacher. He taught that education is deeper than the simple learning of superficial facts. At More House we do not educate with the sole purpose of accruing grades or UCAS points; rather, we seek to provide the means and the environment for human flourishing. At More House our understanding of the uniqueness of the individual is rooted in the belief that the human and the divine are inseparable. More House seeks to provide an environment where every individual has a sense of dignity and self worth, a respect for others and a reason for living.

More House seeks to lay deep social and moral foundations that will endure for life in every pupil. We aim to provide a safe and secure environment where young people can live, make mistakes, learn and trust in those who guide them. We aim to prepare our pupils for the world so that, when they leave, we and they can be confident that they have already succeeded as human beings. We aim to provide every pupil with the confidence, humility and ambition they need to live a full life striving for the common good. As the late Cardinal Hume put it *“The pupils will become good human beings, purposeful and wise, themselves with a vision of becoming a better person and creating a better society.”*

The School not only draws on the teachings of St Augustine for its inspiration, but also looks to the life and works of St Thomas More, who lived nearby and who was established as the archetype for us by the Canonesses when founding and naming the School. Thomas More placed great emphasis on the need for action to translate aspirations into reality. He regarded the education of women as essential; and he believed that good humour, friendship, fellowship, and a joy in life were essential for

the human spirit; that being human was not easy; and that there are certain religious standards upon which there can be no compromise.

Thus through the works of St Augustine and St Thomas More ~ two essentially very 'human' saints ~ we have guidance for the ethos and structure of belief of our School. This underlying commitment to the values of our founders, our archetypes, the Catholic Church and its teachings are expressed through the Aims and Objectives of the School:

- to establish an environment where pupils and staff are valued and supported as individuals and where their rights and dignity are maintained
- to foster an ethos of spiritual growth, not only for those within the Roman Catholic Church, but also for those who adhere to other Christian traditions and other faiths;
- to develop the spiritual, academic and cultural potential of each pupil to the full at every stage of her school career in such a way that this development will continue throughout her life;
- to encourage intellectual curiosity and pride in achievement

The School expects all its members to act with integrity, to display a concern for justice and to be sensitive to the needs of other people.

As a Catholic school, More House looks to the Church, and in particular the local diocese of Westminster, for relevant and appropriate guidance. Religious education is in accordance with the teachings, doctrines, discipline and general and particular norms of the Catholic Church, religious worship is in accordance with the rites, practices, discipline and liturgical norms of the Catholic Church, and at all times the School seeks to serve as a witness to the Catholic faith.

On 22 February, 2006, a group of religious leaders, including Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor (then the Patron of our School), issued a joint statement on religious education. As a school that serves a community that is not exclusively Catholic, More House wholeheartedly endorses the statement, which is attached as Appendix 1. More House seeks both to reflect the aims of the statement and, wherever possible, to incorporate these into life in school. The School feels particularly encouraged to do this because of its own multicultural and multi-faith nature.

Part 2: Pastoral care, Chaplaincy, Teaching, Learning

All that is done in and out of the classroom must be viewed in the context of the Catholic, and in particular the Augustinian, ethos of the School, expressed in our commitment to tolerance and respect, as well as in our understanding and application of the notion of 'worth'. The School places a high premium on the ideas of trust, responsibility and obligation. In the daily life of the School these values are expressed in a number of ways:

- in the pastoral and House structures;
- in the relationships which exist between teachers and pupils;
- in the liturgical life of the School;
- in the School's discipline & rules.

The same values feature in the role of parents and their relationship with the School. This relationship is expressed through the Home-School Agreement (see Appendix 2), as well as elsewhere.

Pastoral Care: The School's pastoral structures and discipline are built around our lives as community rather than as organisation. We recognise the importance of diversity. We know the need to feed the spiritual as well as intellectual life of each individual pupil, and to provide them with the opportunity to explore religious, cultural and ethical issues in a protected environment. In the pastoral context our first priority is always the well-being of the child. We recognise that there may be times when it is necessary to distinguish between what a child wants and what she actually needs.

Chapel: The School is fortunate to have its own Chapel, which is the School's quiet, calm centre. Its location is off the main entrance hall, accessible to all pupils, staff and visitors. It is available for quiet reflection during the day and after school, and is also used for the music-making which is an important contribution to the liturgical life of the School.

Mass: The Chapel is only large enough to take one Form at a time, and this means that weekly mass has to be 'rationed', in that each Form takes it in turn to attend mass taken by the Chaplain, Father Peter, during the term. The girls and their Form Staff have responsibility for preparing for this Mass. Whole School masses are celebrated by our Chaplain at the local church of St Mary's. He is assisted by pupils and Staff who act as altar servers, readers and members of the choir. The Head of the RS Department, assisted by the Headmaster and the Director of Music, is responsible for mapping out the various services.

Special Occasions: Where they fall within the School week, Holy Days of Obligation are celebrated within School. St Thomas More's Day (22nd June) is a 'day of celebration' for the whole School: church in the morning, and Battersea Park in the afternoon for a picnic lunch and a rounders tournament. The theme of the whole day is one of fellowship and thanksgiving, and parents, Old Girls, members of the governing body, and staff families are encouraged to attend for part or all of the day.

The Chaplain is in School for weekly mass and for special liturgical and social occasions, and he is available to minister to the girls and Staff as necessary. His presence has proved invaluable when dealing with a number of recent pastoral and safeguarding issues. In line with diocesan practice the School no longer prepares candidates for Confirmation as this is done in the parishes

Assembly: Sections of the School gather together each day, except Wednesdays, for a joint religious and administrative assembly. As the Dining Room is too small to house the complete School, assemblies are grouped into Junior and Senior sections. Monday and Tuesday assemblies are usually taken by either the Headmaster or the Deputy, but sometimes they may be taken by the Head of RS or another member of Staff. On Thursday and Friday the assemblies are taken by the pupils themselves, with each Form taking it in turn to present an assembly on a spiritual or ethical topic of their choice.

Music: Sacred Music is an integral part of the spiritual life of the School, and is woven into the fabric of the School's day and year. The annual international music tour has taken the girls to perform in some of the greatest cathedrals in Western Europe, From the singing of hymns in Morning Assembly to the international tour, all girls have an opportunity to understand the truth of St Augustine's assertion that 'to sing is to pray twice'. The School has its own Carol Service at the end of the Autumn Term and also provides a choir and instrumentalists to work with the congregation of Our Lady of Victories to produce their Christmas Concert of Worship. The School Choirs have also supported Westminster Cathedral's 'Welcome to Advent' fayre when asked. Music forms part of every act of worship which the School makes.

Service and Charity: The School places a premium on charity, and all girls are involved either directly or indirectly in works of charity throughout the academic year. There is also an element of service integrated within the formal teaching of the RS Department. The School usually adopts three main charities per year ~ an international charity, a national charity and a local one ~ and these are charities selected by the girls themselves. It is usual for at least one of the three to be a Catholic charity. In addition the School supports one-off charities, such as Red Nose Day, and also responds to disaster appeals, such as the Haiti Appeal of 2010. The girls are responsible for

arranging fund-raising efforts, with the senior pupils usually taking a leading role in this respect.

The idea of service is promoted both inside and outside the School. VIth Formers serve our School community by acting as mentors to Year 7s (their training is provided by a Catholic training organisation), running the Houses and helping with the extra-curricular programme. Outside School many of them will be involved in community service of one kind or another, either on a regular or one-off basis.

The role of the RS Department: The RS Department is central to the well-being and success of the School. The Headmaster and the Head of RS have a regular fortnightly timetabled meeting to discuss the spiritual, liturgical and academic life of the School. Full details of the academic work of the RS Department may be found in the Departmental handbook.

Statement next reviewed: July 2011

Appendix 1: Joint statement on religious education

Joint statement from the Department for Education and Skills and faith communities on the importance of religious education:

In October 2004 the Department for Education and Skills published the first non-statutory National Framework for Religious Education. This inclusive statement of the aims, purposes and nature of religious education in schools in England was agreed by all major faith communities and professional associations in religious education. It is now being embedded in local syllabuses and school programmes around the country.

The Framework identified important principles for religious education. We believe that religious education develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of Christianity, other principal religions, other religious traditions and other world views. It offers opportunities for personal reflection and spiritual development. It:

- provokes challenging questions about the ultimate meaning and purpose of life, beliefs about God, the self, the nature of reality, issues of right and wrong and what it means to be human.*
- enhances pupils' awareness of religions and beliefs, teachings, practices and forms of expression, as well as of the influence of religion on individuals, families, communities and cultures.*
- encourages pupils to learn from different religions, beliefs, values and traditions, while exploring their own beliefs and questions of meaning.*
- challenges pupils to reflect on, consider, analyse, interpret and evaluate issues of truth, belief, faith and ethics and to communicate their response.*
- encourages pupils to develop their sense of identity and belonging. It enables them to flourish individually within their communities and as citizens in a pluralistic society and global community.*
- has an important role in preparing pupils for adult life, employment and life-long learning.*
- enables pupils to develop respect for and sensitivity to others, in particular those whose faith and beliefs are different from their own. It promotes discernment and enables pupils to combat prejudice.*

Together with the Department for Education and Skills, we endorse these principles as fundamentally important for all children and young people, for communities, and for the well-being of society.

We believe that schools with a religious designation should teach not only their own faith but also an awareness of the tenets of other faiths. We are fully committed to using the Framework in developing the religious education curriculum for our schools and colleges.

<i>Catholic Church</i>	<i>Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor</i>
<i>Church of England</i>	<i>Rt Revd Kenneth Stevenson, Bishop of Portsmouth</i>
<i>Board of Deputies of British Jews</i>	<i>Jon Benjamin</i>
<i>Buddhist Society</i>	<i>Munisha</i>
<i>Free Churches Association</i>	<i>Sarah Lane</i>
<i>Hindu Council of UK</i>	<i>Anil Bhanot</i>
<i>Methodist Church</i>	<i>Kathleen Wood</i>
<i>Muslim Council of Britain</i>	<i>Sir Iqbal Sacranie</i>
<i>Network of Sikh Organisations</i>	<i>Indarjit Singh OBE</i>

22 February 2006

Appendix 2: Home-School Agreement