

# What's so good about Catholic schools?

All schools are good, but Catholic schools are "uniquely holistic". What does this really mean? In this excerpt of a talk for parents, Rev Fr Edward Seah, Ad-Interim Executive Director of the Archdiocesan Commission for Catholic Schools (ACCS) explains the unique character of a Catholic school.

In Singapore, we are blessed to have many Catholic schools dotted across the island. Every year, the archbishop commissions newly appointed principals to Catholic schools and assures them of the Church's support and prayers.

**Each person is a child of God**  
What distinguishes faith-based schools from other schools? In the former, there is a basic belief that there is a God. Furthermore, in Catholic schools, we believe that each person is a child of God.

This means we do not value a person just for his or her successes and achievements. Rather, we believe that there is goodness in each child, and that all the potential, skills and abilities given by God will emerge in time and be developed at each person's pace.

We respect and accept the children for who they are, and nurture them, rather than impose unachievable standards. Every child is, therefore, valued even if he or she is not performing well academically at a point of time.

Indeed, the family of 35 Catholic schools in Singapore caters to the whole range of students, from the late bloomers to the better performers, and even to those with hearing disabilities. Many of the academically weaker students actually do very well after graduation.

**A truly holistic education**  
Today, all schools strive to offer a holistic education. But the difference is that Catholic schools are committed to the transformation of the whole person: a mission which embraces the emotional, aesthetic, spiritual, religious, moral and social dimensions. While most of these are present in other schools too, the emphasis on the spiritual and religious realms are invariably neglected.

The study of literature and the arts is a window to diverse cultures and philosophy about life, which often include a religious dimension. In non-faith-based schools, the study of life is limited as the religious dimension is not distinctive. This is a very important aspect because most of us, regardless of what we believe in, have a religion that forms a big part of our lives. How can we deny that we believe in God?

Sometimes, in Catholic schools, especially at the secondary level, students are encouraged to share about their faith. Beyond studying about religious festivals, students get to know another's faith and understand each other better, learning the differences and looking for what is common in order to build relationships.

**Mission for the common good**  
This helps us to work for the common good – a focus of Catholic schools. Catholic education sees this as an important mission. It is not about converting everyone to Catholicism. It is a sharing of our faith and communicating about love.

Jesus' summary of the Old Testament's Ten Commandments, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself," is also a tenet of the Jews and Muslims.

These points can be mapped with the dimensions I shared earlier:

- *Emotional and aesthetic:* Love the Lord your God with all your heart.
- *Spiritual and religious:* Love the Lord your God with all your soul.
- *Intellectual:* Love the Lord your God with all your mind.
- *Physical and vocational:* Love the Lord your God with all your strength.
- *Moral and social:* Love your neighbour as yourself.

In a nutshell, Catholic education is about nurturing love among everyone.

**Living out the faith**  
Catholic schools endeavour to integrate faith and life within the daily activities of the school. The Church's social teaching is about human dignity, respect for one another, advocacy for the poor, sensitivity towards the less fortunate, understanding our neighbour in need, and being stewards of our environment – in short, how we care for one another and for our planet.

we do not take things for granted, reflecting how we are called to make a positive difference in the world and to the people around us, and to ponder the sacrifices we can make for others.

**Home for students and teachers**  
Catholic schools try their best to offer more than basic education. My memories of growing up and studying in a government school is mainly one about getting the necessary paper qualifications. I had friends, but these relationships were not as strong as the ones formed in mission schools. There is truly a sense of kinship. Some students in less ideal home environments see the school as a safe haven to study in. Ex-students meet up with each other, and continue to support one another through life, regardless of religion.

For teachers too, the school is more than a place where they work. Not all are Catholic, yet the non-Catholic teachers choose to go on pilgrimages together with their Catholic colleagues. The bonds are strong.

On a personal note, I was not born Catholic, and was raised

“ We respect and accept the children for who they are, and nurture them, rather than impose unachievable standards. ”

Catholic schools aim to be a place where one can encounter Christ and experience the love of God; where leaders are nurtured to work collaboratively for the common good; and where there is learning and reflection on the deeper meaning of things, such as the ultimate purpose of life, our identity and acknowledgement of God as the source of life.

We think of ourselves as pilgrims on earth – here today, gone tomorrow – and we tend to see every day as a blessing from God. When we have that belief in God,

in a Taoist-Buddhist family. My siblings and I were sent to government schools as these were nearer home.

However, all my 12 nieces and nephews, most of whom are non-Catholic, went to Catholic schools – whether primary or secondary or both, and regardless of whether they were in Gifted, Express or Normal stream, they were all very happy to be in these schools. What stood out in the education they received was the emphasis on values. My family's consensus is that all schools are good, but Catholic schools are uniquely holistic! □



Rev Fr Edward Seah sharing with parents about the benefits of Catholic schools. Photo: Montfort Junior School.



**PRAY, ACT, GIVE.**

Some key archdiocesan organisations that GIFT supports are:



**BUILD A MORE VIBRANT, EVANGELISTIC AND MISSIONARY CHURCH IN SINGAPORE**

**GIFT NOW**  
www.catholicfoundation.sg



ACCS works with Catholic schools to strengthen the Catholic ethos in their communities, and support the religious, civic and moral education these schools provide.

It organises events and formation programmes to bring the different families of Catholic schools together to better equip school staff and parent volunteers with the skills needed to build students up in the Catholic faith.