

General Synod 2022

Board of Education Report Secunder: Mr Kieran Sparling

Bishop, Kieran Sparling, the Diocese of Limerick,

In seconding the Report of the Board of Education, I wish to speak to some of the experiences of the education sector as we emerge from the pandemic. Thankfully, schools have returned to in person teaching and learning, which for educators and students is a wonderful step back into normality and one we are very grateful for. However, some of the negative effects of students being away from the classroom and normal peer socialisation are evident.

In having to adapt to online learning as a provisional measure during the pandemic, students missed out on much else which comes with their educational experience. In person assemblies, missing out on sports, not being able to socialise in person with peers, having to defer certain rites from graduations to confirmations, to name some of the aspects of school life which contribute to an overall education. All involved in running schools and education ought to be rightly commended for their hard work and commitment during such challenging times – but our students are most definitely deserving and worthy of singular praise when one considers their adaptability in such circumstances.

In schools, certain effects and consequences from the pandemic situation are revealing themselves and becoming evident. Students are experiencing issues stemming from the lack of normal socialisation with peers, heightened anxieties, and mental health issues. However, ground is being made up. What is clearer now more so than ever, is that schools are about more than mere tuition – schools are communities where the so called ‘hidden curriculum’ becomes a reality, relationship is at heart of the educational experience: knowing students and being known, leading, being led, mutual enrichment, inspiring and being inspired. Schools are often the communities through which our young people encounter faith, ethos and the values which flow from the same. They are a provider of stability for our youth.

It has been a real blessing of late to see more of what was normal happen in school. In my own school context, Glenstal Abbey School in Limerick, we have had much enjoyment returning to whole-school assemblies, having the choir sing once again, getting back to having school tours, having fundraising coffee

mornings to help with aid in the Ukraine and also celebrate a student who was baptised and confirmed over the Easter. Schools across the island have been having such similar returns to normality and for that we give thanks to God.

Bishop, I am delighted to second the Report of the Board of Education.

Kieran Sparling