

Guidance on clergy in schools during the coronavirus pandemic

The CES has received a number of requests to give guidance about the role of clergy in Catholic schools as they open up to wider groups of children.

Local clergy are a vital part of the normal operation of any Catholic school. Whilst the exact nature of the involvement in the life of the school will differ depending on the type of school and the character of the parish or parishes it serves, there should be a good relationship between the senior leadership of the school and the local clergy. This will enable the most effective spiritual support and pastoral care to be delivered to the pupils and staff of the school in appropriate ways. Indeed, many clergy have played a part in the continued operation of Catholic schools for vulnerable children and those of key workers since 23rd March.

From this week onwards, schools are starting to enter the first phase of wider opening, in accordance with DfE guidance.

Decisions about whether and how to move towards wider opening will be taken by the relevant governing body or academy trust board, advised by school leaders. A risk assessment will be undertaken for each phase of this wider opening, taking into account the relevant guidance. This approach will guide any decisions on how spiritual and pastoral support from the clergy can be delivered safely in each setting.

Accordingly, clergy should be advised to be in contact with the relevant head teacher(s) in order to discuss the most appropriate way to deliver the spiritual and pastoral support the school needs. Whatever decisions are made by the school need to be carefully risk-assessed to ensure they are carried out in such a way as to safeguard the well-being of both pupils and staff (including the clergy themselves).

The DfE guidance includes specific guidance on four categories into one of which it is likely that many clergy may fall.

- Those staff who have been classed as **clinically extremely vulnerable**, have been advised to shield, are not expected to be visiting schools.
- Those who are **clinically vulnerable** (but not clinically extremely vulnerable) should follow medical advice and avoid visiting schools where possible.
- Those **living in the same household** with someone who is **clinically extremely vulnerable** should only visit schools where stringent social distancing can be adhered to.
- Those **living in the same household** with someone who is **clinically vulnerable** (but not clinically extremely vulnerable) may visit schools.