

Towards Quality in Education

A viewpoint on education in Catholic Schools in Kiribati

Sister Margaret Sullivan

The dream for our Catholic Schools is that they will be:

- centres where students and staff meet Jesus Christ;
- centres of human excellence.

This dream or this vision implies that

- a) our schools will be centres of evangelisation providing effective integration of faith and culture;
- b) we recognise that each child has a personal excellence so we provide a challenging curriculum designed to meet the needs of all students in Kiribati society today and in the future.

Here in Kiribati such a vision has become more difficult to realise in an increasingly materialistic society and with an education system dominated by examinations.

Throughout the country external examinations take place in Classes 7 and 9 and at Forms 3, 5, 6 and 7 levels. Examinations dictate the curriculum at these levels. In the classroom situation at the upper primary level very often only examinable subjects are taught. Other subjects receive little or no attention.

Thus students selected for secondary education are largely deprived of an overall quality education.

After much consultation, discussion and long years of having students begin their secondary education under such circumstances, the Catholic Schools have decided to initiate a new educational policy. It is aimed at providing quality education which not only benefits individuals but is for the good of Kiribati as a whole.

In October, 1991 Bishop Paul Mea, MSC., and the Diocesan Executive Council endorsed a five-year education plan, presented by the Catholic Education Advisory Committee. It is hoped that this plan will be an answer to the expectations of parents for more places available in our Catholic schools. More students will be offered the opportunity of a comprehensive education.

There are three proposals which are different phases in this new education plan:

First Proposal:

To admit in addition to an intake of 120 students from Class 9 into Form 2 at St Louis High School in February, 1992, one class of 30 students selected from Class 8 in Primary schools on urban Tarawa and Buota.

Aim: To assess the suitability of admission of this Class 8 age group to Form 2 in comparison with current Class 9 entry with a view to general adoption of Class entry to Catholic Secondary Schools in future years.

Selection: Due to the lateness of this decision, selection for the experimental class has to be carried out from the above mentioned areas on Tarawa.

Examination: The examination was held at St Louis High School on 9 November, 1991. It aimed to test potential ability as well as current attainment in the areas of Mathematics, English, Kiribati, Environmental Studies and Religious Knowledge. The examination took the form of an Integrated Studies Paper.

After Entry to Form 2: The Form 2 class thus selected will follow the same curriculum as that in other Form 2 classes. Individual progress will be carefully monitored.

Second Proposal:

From 1992 onwards it is proposed to introduce a National Entrance Examination for entry to Form 2 from Class 8 or its equivalent. This is on an experimental basis and will be evaluated yearly.

Aim: to progressively phase out intake from Class 7 into Form 1 and Class 8 into Form 2

Implications:

- (1) More students will be motivated to carry on to Class 8 to complete their primary education. (Statistics indicate that at present there is a 15% dropout of students after Class 7).
- (2) By 1993 all our schools will begin with Form 2, with new intakes at Taborio and St Louis.
- (3) In 1994 and 1995 students may choose to go to Form 2 at Tabwiroa, Taborio or St Louis.
- (4) Parents will have one year less of school expenses and the Catholic Secondary Schools could become more economically viable.
- (5) Phasing out of Form 1 will relieve space to allow an increase in the number of students and classes in the higher forms, thus giving more students the opportunity of a fuller secondary education. Overall intake will have increased from 270 in 1992 to 330 in 1994.

Third Proposal:

That gradually in the period 1992-1996 all our schools will offer places to students in Forms 2-5.

Aims:

- (a) to offer more students in our Catholic Secondary Schools the possibility of completing their secondary education to Kiribati National Certificate level.
- (b) to widen curriculum areas to include Bible Studies, Music, etc.
- (c) to offer different subject electives that would distinguish each school, especially at Forms 4 and 5 levels.
- (d) to meet more effectively the spiritual and faith development of Catholic students in increased numbers at our schools.
- (e) to assist in integrating human and Christian education at the maximum level possible.

Implications:

- That education will be less dominated by external examinations.
- That secondary school teachers will concentrate on the education and development of their students so that their faith, wisdom, knowledge and God-given talents are integrated to the full.
- An improvement in the quality of school leavers is expected to follow from the implementation of this proposal.

Conclusion

It is our hope that this new Catholic education policy will result in an ever more Christ-centred caring community at each school. A community that does not lose sight of those educational needs which relate to the development of the whole person and not just to his/her future occupation.

The students of our schools are the future citizens and leaders of our nation. By offering more of them a fuller secondary education we challenge them to serve the Church and their country with a commitment that demonstrates some of God's love in their daily life.