Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle

Diocesan Directives 2026

Introduction

The diocesan bishop has the authority to issue directives concerning the general regulation of all Catholic schools in his diocese. A directive is a diocesan law which legally binds all Catholic schools, including those which are not in diocesan trusteeship. By virtue of the governing documents of most Catholic schools they will also become binding in civil law.

Directives will be made by a decree of the diocesan bishop and will be promulgated (formally publicised in the way set out in the directives) before they are able to come into force. It will be clear in the promulgation on which date the directives become binding for schools (1st September 2026). After that point, compliance with the directives will also be a feature of Catholic School Inspection. As with all laws, the directives do a variety of things, such as: stating the existing legal position;[1] establishing definitions;[2] dealing with technicalities such as commencement and revocation;[3] imposing prohibitions;[4] exhorting a particular mode of behaviour;[5] and imposing an obligation to act, either as a result of a specific set of circumstances,[6] or more generally.[7] Of those which require universal compliance, many will admit of a range of compliance, rather than a binary which can be easily verified. Only those directives which are susceptible to a binary test will be part of the second compliance test during inspection.

Any school that is not compliant with the directives of the diocesan bishop cannot be judged to be an outstanding Catholic school. Those directives that are not susceptible to a binary test will still feature as an aspect of inspection in the leadership of the Catholic life and mission of the school part

[1] E.g. the first part of directive 1, and directive 21.
[2] E.g. directives 4 and 31.
[3] E.g. directives 32 and 33.
[4] E.g. directives 8 and 9a.
[5] E.g. directives 2 and 7.
[6] E.g. directives 17- 19.
[7] E.g. directives 11-13.

of the framework. Here it will be possible for inspectors to comment on the extent to which a school has responded to those directives which allow for a range of compliance. Given the significance of directives, this will also have a bearing on the overall effectiveness grade a school receives in its inspection.

Prior to an inspection a school will be asked to include in its self-evaluation documents an evaluation of where it sits in relation to compliance with diocesan directives. Inspectors will seek to establish a school's compliance with diocesan directives as early as possible in the inspection process. Compliance with some of the directives will be possible to ascertain before inspection even begins.

For each of the directives given below a brief explanation of its character and meaning are given. For those susceptible to a binary test, an indication of how a school would evidence compliance is also suggested. There may be other ways that compliance could be established, other than the examples given, and inspectors will always consider all relevant evidence provided by a school.

Diocesan Directives

Diocesan Directives issued by the Diocesan Bishop for the General Regulation of all Catholic Schools and Colleges in the Diocese pursuant to canon 806.	Commentary for Schools and Colleges	Evidencing compliance - Inspectors will check:
General		
1. These Directives concern the general regulation of Catholic schools in the Diocese, and apply to all Catholic schools, regardless of the nature of their trusteeship. In the case of schools in the Trusteeship of a Religious Order, the Mutual Relations Protocol will be respected, and the Directives will be implemented by way of mutual consultation and collaboration between the Diocese and the Religious Order Trustees that springs from a mutual respect, trust and care of each other.	This initial directive sets out clearly that the directives apply to all schools, including religious order schools, but sets this in the context of a good relationship between officers of the diocese and those of each religious order, respecting the Mutual Relations Protocol.	
2. Catholic schools are part of the mission of the Church in the Diocese, as expressed, co-ordinated and directed by the Diocesan Bishop. Accordingly, they are to respond generously to Diocesan initiatives and co-operate with them.	This is a directive which states the existing legal position and exhorts schools to 'respond generously' to diocesan initiatives. This is the kind of directive which can admit of a range of compliance and will be evident in the manner and extent of a school's response to such initiatives.	

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3. If any action contemplated by these Directives relates to a Religious Order school, the Diocese will consult the Religious Superior before taking action, which will, ideally, be an agreed course of action. In Religious Order schools, the Bishop has the discretion to appoint a member or officer of the Religious Order to be his representative in matters coming within these Directives. 4. In these Directives 'School' means any Catholic school (including its Senior Leadership and Governing Board) and includes maintained schools, independent schools (including academies), non-maintained special schools and sixth-form colleges.	This directive states the existing legal position and makes clear the manner in which the diocese will engage with any religious orders that run schools in the diocese. It follows from the principles set out in Directive 1. This is a defining directive and makes clear that the directives apply to every kind of Catholic school in the diocese, regardless of funding sources or trusteeship (see canon 806).	
Admissions 5. The admission arrangements of Catholic schools shall always give priority to Catholic applicants above all other applicants.	This is a general obligation on all Catholic schools and is susceptible to a binary test for the purposes of compliance. It applies to those decisions which the admission authority makes about admissions priority by requiring schools to give priority to all Catholic children before other looked-after and previously looked after children.	• The school's admissions policy • Discussions with the diocese • Discussions with governors, or those responsible for the governance of the school and for approving its admissions policy.

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6. The definition of Catholic for the purposes of school admission shall be defined in accordance with diocesan guidance. If any question arises in relation to membership of the Catholic Church or the practice of the Faith it is to be determined authoritatively by the Diocesan Bishop or his delegate in accordance with the norms of canon law.	This is a defining directive and makes clear that the school must define 'Catholic' in the same way that the diocese does, and if there is uncertainty that the school should check its definition with the diocese.	
7. The Governing Boards of Catholic schools are to co-operate with each other and with other Catholic admission authorities to ensure that the maximum number of Catholic parents are able to take advantage of a Catholic Education for their children.	This is a general obligation that pertains to all Catholic schools, and is the kind of directive which can admit of a range of compliance and will be evident in the manner and extent of a school's engagement with other schools and other Catholic admission authorities (those responsible in different kinds of Catholic school for setting the admissions policy)	
8. The membership of any admissions committee is not to include any person who is likely to have a conflict of interest when determining applications to the school, including those involved in the provision of Certificates of Catholic Practice for any applicants to the school.	This is a prohibiting directive and makes clear that those making admissions determinations should not have any conflict of interest.	

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9. In maintained schools and academies: a) no function relating to the admission process or admission appeals is to be delegated to any other person (including any local authority) without the written consent of its Trustees and the Diocese; b) the admission policies shall follow (or follow as closely as circumstances allow) the diocesan model admission policy; and c) the Published Admissions Number (PAN) shall not be changed without written consent from its Trustees and the Diocese.	This directive contains prohibitions and obligations. It relates to the Diocesan Bishop's responsibility for ensuring sufficiency of places in Catholic schools and is intended to ensure the proper strategic oversight of the provision of Catholic school places across the Diocese. Where any proposals might have an impact on schools in Religious Order Trusteeship or in neighbouring Dioceses, the Diocese will ensure that the relevant Religious Order Trustees or the neighbouring Dioceses are consulted before any consent is given.	
Staffing ***10.*** Certain posts in a Catholic school are required to be held by practising Catholics. The posts to which this requirement applies are set out in the *Bishops' Memorandum*. The recruitment process set out in the Bishops' Memorandum is to be followed in the appointment of any staff covered by the Bishops' Memorandum. In case of doubt in the interpretation of the Bishops' Memorandum, the question is to be determined by the Diocesan Bishop.	This makes the longstanding expectations of the *Bishops Memorandum* (see the latest version of this document here) legally binding on all Catholic schools.	

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11. Schools are to use the model employment documentation produced from time to time by the Catholic Education Service. This includes using model contracts and adopting model policies. Any substantive change to the model documentation requires the consent of the Diocesan Education Service.	This is a directive which imposes an obligation on all Catholic schools that is susceptible to a binary test for the purposes of compliance.	• Examples of a school's employment documentation. • Discussions with the diocese • Discussions with governors, or those responsible for the governance of the school.
12. Schools are to ensure that all new members of staff participate in an appropriate induction programme which emphasises the distinctive nature of Catholic education.	This is a directive which imposes an obligation on all Catholic schools that is susceptible to a binary test for the purposes of compliance.	• A school's policy on the induction of new staff, including a timetable of planned CPD. • Any records of induction training already carried out. • Discussion with those members of staff recently appointed by the school
13. Appropriate and tailored ongoing formation is to be an entitlement and an expectation for all staff for the whole of the duration of their employment. Schools are to ensure that all members of staff participate regularly in an appropriate ongoing formation for their work in Catholic education. The same expectation and entitlement apply to all governors and directors. All teaching members of staff who do not already hold the Catholic Certificate (or equivalent) are to be encouraged and supported to obtain it (or an equivalent or higher qualification) as part of their ongoing formation.	This is a general obligation that pertains to all Catholic schools and is the kind of directive which can admit of a range of compliance and will be evident in the extent of a school's provision of CPD that focuses on the Catholic life and mission of the school. This is a feature of the inspection framework in the section that deals with the leadership of the Catholic life and mission of the school. It embeds the entitlement and expectation of career-long tailored formation for every adult in a Catholic school.	

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Governance		
14. Before making or consenting to any amendments to a School's governing documents, the Governing Board shall submit the proposed amendments to its Trustees and the Diocese and request confirmation in writing that the amended governing documents comply with the requirements of canon law and that the school will continue to be a Catholic school. The school shall not make or consent to any such amendments until it receives the consent in writing of its Trustees and the Diocese to do so.	This directive imposes a general obligation on those who govern Catholic schools intended to ensure that the governance documents of Catholic schools ensure its continued status as a Catholic school.	
15. When accounting for any assets owned by its Trustees, a school shall follow any accounting and auditing requirements established by the Diocese or its Trustees.	This directive imposes a general obligation on those responsible for the oversight for Church assets in use by the school.	
16. Schools shall pay the diocesan levy which contributes towards the expenses of the Diocese in providing episcopal oversight of Catholic schools.	This is a directive which imposes a specific obligation on all Catholic schools that is susceptible to a binary test for the purposes of compliance.	• Discussion with the diocese • Discussion with those responsible for the governance of the school and its finances

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17. Schools shall co-operate with any inspections or visitations carried out in the name of the Diocesan Bishop (or any other Ordinary) and shall defray the expenses of the same. The school shall comply with and implement any findings of the Ordinary or Visitor following an inspection, visitation or review of governance. 18. A school shall notify its Trustees and the Diocese immediately if: a) any formal notices are received from the local authority, the Department for Education or Ofsted; b) a complaint is received relating to the School's Catholic character, ethos and mission, religious education, collective worship or relationships and sex education; or c) a serious incident takes place (as defined in Charity Commission Guidance). In the case of (c) above, or in any other circumstances which might harm the reputation of the school, its Trustees, the Diocese or the Church generally, the school shall co-operate with its Trustees and the Diocese in managing the content and method of any public response, including any media strategy.	This directive imposes a general obligation on all Catholic schools to co-operate with any inspection or visitation. There is a code of conduct for school leaders in the inspection handbook (Appendix 4) which makes clear what the expectations of school leaders are during inspection. This is a directive which imposes specific obligations on all Catholic schools in the situations specified.	

Diocesan Directives issued by the Diocesan Bishop for the General Regulation of all Catholic Schools and Colleges in the Diocese pursuant to canon 806.	Commentary for Schools and Colleges	Evidencing compliance - Inspectors will check:
19. A school shall notify its Trustees immediately if a request is made by any body for information which relates to the property of the Trustees, or any communication is received relating to the Trustees' property.	This is a directive which imposes specific obligations on all Catholic schools in the situation specified.	
Curriculum and Religious Education		
20. Schools shall implement a broad and balanced Catholic curriculum which follows the teachings of the Church and which has Catholic Religious Education at its core. Religious Education is to be given no less than parity with other core subjects, and is to inform all other subjects on the school's curriculum. At least ten per cent of curriculum time (five per cent at key stage 5) is to be devoted to it.	This is a specific obligation which reiterates the obligation already imposed by the general norms set out in the *Religious Education Directory*. It is susceptible to a binary test.	• School timetables • Discussion with school leaders • Discussion with co-ordinator of religious education • Discussion with pupils
21. The teaching of Catholic Religious Education is subject to the authority of the Church. It is for the Bishops' Conference to issue General Norms on the subject and for the Diocesan Bishop to regulate and watch over it (canon 804). It is to be carried out in accordance with the Bishops' Conference *Religious Education Directory.*	This is a directive which states what canon law already requires and makes clear the canonical status of the norms set out in the *Religious Education Directory.*	

Diocesan Directives issued by the Diocesan Bishop for the General Regulation of all Catholic Schools and Colleges in the Diocese pursuant to canon 806.	**Commentary for Schools and Colleges**	**Evidencing compliance - Inspectors will check:**
22. Only materials approved by the Diocesan Bishop are to be used in the teaching of Religious Education	This is a directive which imposes a specific obligation on all Catholic schools that is susceptible to a binary test for the purposes of compliance. If a school is using a scheme recommended or required by the diocese additional approval will not be necessary. If a school is using other materials, these must be approved by the diocese.	Resources approved by the Diocesan Bishop: Early Years, KS1 and KS2 - *The Way* KS3 – *Source to Summit* (OUP) or *Spirit and Life* (Hodder)

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23. In conformity with the decision of the Bishops' Conference in 2016, any Catholic school in the Diocese wishing to teach the GCSE in Religious Studies is only to select an examination specification which requires: a) A study of Catholic Christianity as the primary religion; b) A 50% study of Catholic Christianity, covering all four topics: i. Beliefs and Teachings, ii. Practices, iii. Sources of Wisdom and Authority, iv. Forms of Expression and Ways of Life; c) A study of Judaism as the second religion. This paragraph, unless revoked, remains in force during the period that the criteria document entitled: *Religious Studies GCSE Subject Content* published by the DfE in February 2015 remains effective.	This is a directive which imposes a specific obligation on all Catholic schools that is susceptible to a binary test for the purposes of compliance. It sets out the appropriate GCSE requirements in accordance with the teachings of the Church.	• Schemes of work and programmes of study for KS4. Schools must use one of the following: - **AQA GCSE Religious Studies B** - **Pearson Edexcel GCSE Religious Studies A** - **Eduqas GCSE Religious Studies Route B** • Discussion with the curriculum lead for religious education. • Discussion with the diocese.
24. General Religious education provided at key stage 5 is to be an academic subject at a level commensurate with the level of study of the student's other courses, taught on the normal curriculum plan, assessed and recorded.	This is a directive which imposes a specific obligation on all Catholic schools that is susceptible to a binary test for the purposes of compliance.	• Schemes of work and programmes of study for KS5. • Discussion with the curriculum lead for religious education. • Discussion with the diocese.

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25. Only materials approved by the Diocesan Bishop are to be used in the teaching of Relationships and Sex Education.	This is a directive which imposes a specific obligation on all Catholic schools that is susceptible to a binary test for the purposes of compliance. If a school is using a scheme recommended or required by the diocese additional approval will not be necessary. If a school is using other materials, these must be approved by the diocese.	• Schemes of work and programmes of study for R(S)HE – *Ten:Ten Life to the Full* • Discussion with the curriculum lead for R(S)HE • Discussion with the diocese.
Ecclesiastical Property		
26. Governing Boards are to comply with any requirements which the Trustees may from time to time set out for the stewardship and administration of ecclesiastical property occupied or used by the school.	This is a directive that imposes a general obligation on all Catholic schools. The land and buildings which are owned by the trustees and occupied by the school are regarded in canon law as ecclesiastical property.	

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27. Governing Boards shall diligently discharge in their entirety the responsibilities of dutyholder under any relevant health and safety regulation, whether the Governing Board is the dutyholder by virtue of the law itself or is appointed to discharge the responsibilities of dutyholder on behalf of its Trustees. Each Governing Board shall appoint a competent person to assist it in discharging the responsibilities of dutyholder and all other requirements of the relevant statutory provisions.	This is a directive that imposes a specific duty on all Catholic schools. It obliges the governing body to appoint a person who, in the governing body's judgment, is competent to assist the governing body in discharging both the governing body's responsibilities as dutyholder under all the relevant legislation, as well as to discharge any responsibilities which might fall to the trustees, but which have been delegated to the governing body (see the CES model *Occupation Document*).	
Censuses and Data Protection		
28. Schools shall complete the annual Catholic Education Service school census each year and shall do so by the requested date. This includes any supplementary questionnaire issued alongside the annual census.	This is a directive that imposes a specific duty on all Catholic schools to complete the annual CES census.	

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29. Each school shall provide the following data to its Trustees and to the Diocese: a) details of applicants for, and those appointed to, posts covered by the Bishops' Memorandum; b) details of all governors and associate members of any Governing Board; c) any details necessary to enable the Trustees or the Diocese to assist, support or advise the school on any matter.	This is a directive that imposes a general duty on all Catholic schools to provide the specified data to the Diocese and its Trustees. It provides assurance for all parties that sharing such data is fair processing under the UKGDPR.	

Diocesan Directives issued by the Diocesan Bishop for the General Regulation of all Catholic Schools and Colleges in the Diocese pursuant to canon 806.	Commentary for Schools and Colleges	Evidencing compliance - Inspectors will check:
30. In addition to the data collected in connection with the annual Catholic Education Service school census, each school shall provide the following data to the Catholic Education Service: a) any details necessary to enable the Catholic Education Service to assist, support or advise the Trustees or the Diocese on any matter relating to the school; b) any details necessary to enable the Catholic Education Service to assist, support or advise the school directly on behalf of the Trustees or the Diocese.	This is a directive that imposes a general duty on all Catholic schools to provide the specified data to the Catholic Education Service. It provides assurance for all parties that sharing such data is fair processing under the UKGDPR.	
Interpretation, revocation and commencement		
31. In these Directives: a) any communication required with the Diocesan Bishop or the Diocese is to be undertaken via the Diocesan Education Service; b) unless the context requires otherwise, 'Diocesan Bishop' includes any person	These directives provide clarificatory definitions that allow the other directives to be properly understood. This definition includes auxiliary bishops, vicars-general and episcopal vicars.	

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exercising Ordinary jurisdiction in his name; c) 'Bishops' Memorandum' means the *Bishops' Memorandum on the Appointment of Staff in Catholic Schools* or any successor document approved for this purpose by the Bishops' Conference; d) 'Catholic Certificate' means the Catholic Certificate of Religious Studies (CCRS) or any successor qualification approved for this purpose by the Bishops' Conference; e) 'Diocesan Schools' Commissioner' is the principal representative of the Diocesan Bishop in matters relating to education and is also known as the Diocesan Director of Education; f) 'Ecclesiastical Property' means any property which is regulated by the Code of Canon Law, whether by virtue of the law itself, by particular statutes, or by the provisions of a Decree of Recognition; g) 'Governing Board' refers to the legal entity which has the authority to make decisions on behalf of the school including any other body to which that authority has been delegated;		

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h) 'Mutual Relations Protocol' means the Protocol entitled *Mutual Relations between Religious Orders, Dioceses and the CES in the Service of Catholic Education* or any successor document approved for this purpose by the CES Management Committee; i) 'Trustees' means the Public Juridical Person on behalf of which the Governing Board conducts the school within the meaning of canon 803 (whether a Diocese, an Institute of Consecrated Life, a Society of Apostolic Life or any other ecclesiastical body). In the case of a school exceptionally recognised by the Diocesan Bishop under canon 803, it shall be interpreted in accordance with the Decree of Recognition in force for the school.		
32. All previous Diocesan Directives for the general regulation of Catholic schools are hereby revoked.	This directive makes clear that only those directives included here remain in force.	

Diocesan Directives issued by the Diocesan Bishop for the General Regulation of all Catholic Schools and Colleges in the Diocese pursuant to canon 806.	Commentary for Schools and Colleges	Evidencing compliance - Inspectors will check:
33. A copy of these Directives will be sent to every school in the Diocese and to all Trustees of schools in the Diocese, and they come into force from **1 September 2026.**	This directive makes clear how schools will be informed about the directives and what the timescale is within which schools must comply.	