



*“Education should be planned and taught in a way that respects the individuality of the child and his or her talents. The child should be cared for in such a way that his or her physical, moral and intellectual talents may develop in a harmonious way so that they may attain a greater sense of responsibility and a right use of freedom, and be formed to take an active part in the life of the community.”*

*(Canon 795 } Letter on Catholic Education in the T Antilles Episcopal Conference)*

# THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION IN TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

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## Background

The Synod of the Catholic Church in January 2009 resolved that the *"Archdiocese articulate a clear vision for Catholic learning institutions and ensure that these learning institutions have adequate resources and effective quality assurance systems to achieve it"*.

In fulfillment of this mandate, the Catholic Education Board of Management (CEBM) undertook the development of a new Strategic Plan that would focus on the development of effective systems for quality assurance and the implementation of measures that would significantly improve student performance and school effectiveness.

The Vision for Catholic Education as stated in the Strategic Plan 2011 - 2015 of the Catholic Education Board of Management (CEBM) is:

*"To form students to achieve their full potential as children of God and citizens of the world"*.

In support of the realization of this vision, there are five (5) Strategic Pillars from which the Quality Assurance Standards for Catholic Education are derived:

- Strengthen academic education
- Strengthen spiritual and non-spiritual education
- Increase parenting skills and parental participation
- Strengthen critical partnerships
- Improve governance and performance management

In 2011, the CEBM launched the first phase of a Quality Assurance Project which focused on the development of a self-assessment instrument for Primary schools. The instrument served as a tool for schools to evaluate their performance against specified criteria and to generate valuable data that would be used in the development of measures of school effectiveness and in the design of interventions for school improvement.

Questionnaires were administered during the pilot project to school Principals, Priest Managers, teachers, parents and students and these provided statistics and data which informed the development of the Quality Assurance System which will be implemented in Phase II of the project.

Consequently, CEBM has appointed a Quality Assurance Committee which is responsible for establishing a Quality Assurance Secretariat with a mandate to implement a system for evaluating, monitoring and improving the quality of education at Catholic Primary Schools in Trinidad and Tobago as its first priority.



## A Common Understanding of Quality

### The Goal of Catholic Education

The framework for catholic education as explained by the Bishops of the Antilles Episcopal Conference in the *Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education in the Territories of the Antilles Episcopal Conference* includes:

- Teaching the whole person
- Education for all, especially the Poor
- Faith lived in Christian Community
- Commitment to Justice and Compassion
- Seeking absolute ethical values in culture
- Call to Renewal

There are four statements in the Pastoral Letter which serve as guiding principles for the development of the Quality Assurance System for Catholic Education (QASCE) <sup>1</sup>in Trinidad and Tobago. They are:

1. *“Catholic education goes beyond the purely technical and practical aspects of schooling and aims at an integration of all knowledge within a vision of the world and of the human person. It focuses on the physical, emotional, moral and spiritual dimensions of human development, leading to a personal synthesis of faith and life of each student.”*
2. *“In its schools the Church is called to promote an education centered on the human person who is capable of living in community, and making his or her contribution to its well being. Given the fact that many are excluded, the Church must press for quality formal and informal education for all, especially for the poorest. This means an education that brings children, youth, and adults into an encounter with the cultural values of their own country, discovering or integrating religious and transcendent dimensions into those values.”*
3. *“Catholic schools are called to deep renewal. We must restore the Catholic identity of our schools through a courageous and bold missionary impulse, so that it becomes a prophetic option shaped in a pastoral practice of participatory education”.*

The fourth statement is perhaps the most critical:

4. *“‘Parents have a particularly important part to play in the educating community, since it is to them that the primary and natural responsibility for their children’s education belongs’. The school exists to complement the work of parents as the first teachers of*

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<sup>1</sup> Pronounced *kah-see*



*their children. Parents should be involved in the life of the school by participating in schools councils and committees and through regular collaboration with teachers.”*

Many success stories are born of situations in which home, school and church - parents, teachers and religious leaders, work together in tandem, each supporting and reinforcing what they collaboratively strive to achieve which is, the true education of the child - the development not only of the intellect but of the character.

## The Quality Assurance Process

The major components of the Quality Assurance System are:

- Institutional Self-Assessment (or self-evaluation)
- External Peer Review
- Continuous Improvement

**Quality assurance** is an ongoing process of self-evaluation, reflection, objective peer-review and engagement in continuous improvement. The entire school community engages in the process, invites external scrutiny and welcomes the constructive feedback of peers. It is a learning process which generates useful recommendations (from both internal and external sources) that improve student and organizational performance.

**Self-assessment** involves all stakeholders in reviewing the extent to which quality standards are being met and to identify areas which the school needs to strengthen or improve. This review is evidence-based and requires the school to collect data, information or documented and verifiable results to validate that it is meeting each standard.

**External Peer Review** is an objective evaluation conducted by suitably qualified and experienced educators (from outside of the school) who have been trained to conduct an evaluation of the school through a critical analysis of the self-assessment reports and an on-site visit to the school. During the visit the peer reviewers engage in interviews, review of documented evidence and observation at the end of which they produce an evaluative, fact-based report with specific recommendations for improvement.

**Continuous improvement** goes beyond the implementation of recommendations. It is demonstrated through a commitment by school leaders and all stakeholders to engage in a sustainable process of reviewing achievements and raising standards and a willingness to being held accountable for improving student performance and school effectiveness on a continual basis.



## The Policy Framework

### Quality Standards

The Quality Assurance Standards for Catholic Education are established by the CEBM in consultation with all stakeholders. The standards will be monitored annually for relevance and subject to a complete review every three (3) years by an independent team of experts appointed by the CEBM and including a representative of the Ministry of Education.

The Quality Assurance Standards are comprehensive statements of quality practices and conditions that research (nationally, regionally and internationally) and best practice indicate are necessary for schools to achieve quality student performance and organizational effectiveness.

Each standard has a descriptor and quality indicators. The descriptor captures the fundamental characteristics or conditions that are demonstrated when the standard has been achieved. Quality indicators are operational outcomes or descriptions of exemplary practices or processes that are observable and verifiable in a school that implements the standard.

The standards are not absolute. As schools improve, they will reach a higher level of implementation of the standards. The standards and indicators are systemic not isolated. They are related to and support each other. Consequently, no one standard or set of indicators is complete without considering all five standards as a collective whole.

### Quality Review

Each school will be scheduled for an external review by the CEBM once every three (3) years and the schedule will be published annually in the CEBM newsletter, on its website and in other Catholic media. School leaders will participate in the development of the schedule as the readiness of the school will be determined by the satisfactory completion of the self-assessment and the status of the resulting improvement efforts.

The Quality Assurance Secretariat (QAS<sup>2</sup>) will be responsible for managing the external review process and communicating with stakeholders. Through the QAS, schools will have access to technical assistance in planning and implementing the Quality Assurance process. The QAS will also conduct school visits to monitor school progress on an ongoing basis between scheduled reviews. Unscheduled reviews may be recommended by the QAS if circumstances warrant an intervention by the CEBM.

Peer reviewers will be selected from among a pool of registered teachers with extensive service in Primary school education and who are no longer working either as teachers or administrators in any Primary school in Trinidad and Tobago. They must have current familiarity with, and

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<sup>2</sup> Pronounced *kas*



interest in, developments in the field of education; possess analytical ability, communication skills, personal maturity and professional integrity commensurate with the requirements of an external reviewer's assignments; and demonstrate a stated willingness to adhere to high ethical standards and the professional code of conduct for CEBM's quality reviewers.

Reviewers will serve in a voluntary capacity without remuneration. Stipends and expenses related to the performance of their duties will be covered by the CEBM. Reviewers must participate in compulsory training workshops to maintain their status as registered CEBM Peer Reviewers.

Each cycle in the review process will culminate in the award of a *Mark of Quality* by the CEBM. The *Mark of Quality* is a symbol of external recognition of the school's commitment to quality and will categorize schools as follows:

- Level I - Developing School
- Level II - Improving School
- Level III - High Performing School

Each mark signifies that the school has actively and successfully engaged in self-assessment, submitted itself to an external review and has taken action to fill gaps, solve problems, address areas of concern and further enhance areas of strength.

The marks are distinguished from each other by the extent to which the external review provides evidence that the quality standards are being attained. The *Developing School* (at Level 1) is meeting the minimum requirements for maintaining quality standards while the *High Performing School* (at Level 3) is excelling in several areas and demonstrating sustained efforts to continuously improve. *Improving Schools* are those that are actively pursuing improvements that are already yielding positive results and have the capability to continue to do so.

Every school that initiates the self-assessment process is a Candidate for Review (CAR) and so a school that fails to attain Level 1 on the first review, will maintain its candidacy and be given a timeframe within which to implement specific recommendations to ensure that minimum standards are met or exceeded.

## **Self-assessment**

The school Principal is responsible for leading the self-assessment and collaborating with all stakeholders to ensure that they take ownership of the process. The process must be designed to be participative, rigorous and meaningful with clear objectives, appropriate resources and realistic targets for timely completion.

The Quality Standards will serve as the first self-assessment tool for the school to uncover its strengths; to determine where gaps exist; and to identify opportunities for improvement. The



QAS will provide schools with access to self-assessment instruments including questionnaires and also provide assistance in the analysis of data and report generation.

## Quality Standards

There are five (5) standards which are aligned to the goals of Catholic Education and the strategic pillars of the CEBM.

The CEBM has also identified three priority areas for improvement based on the research conducted during Phase I of the project and trends in education statistics and other data. They are: *Literacy; Leadership and Parenting Skills*. These have been integrated into the standards and schools will be asked to pay particular attention to demonstrating improvements in these areas.

CEBM has also identified *Catholic School Identity Indicators (CSII)* which are those indicators based on the tenets of the faith and the values that make a Catholic School unique. The CSII are also woven into the standards so that will be embraced in the overall improvement effort.

The five Quality Standards for Catholic Education are:

1. Quality Teaching Professionals
2. Effective Leadership
3. Holistic Learning Experience
4. Strong Home, School, Church, Community Partnership
5. Resources and Support Systems to Sustain Improvement

### Standard 1 - Quality Teaching Professionals

#### Descriptor

**The school has an adequate number of well-qualified teachers who are routinely mentored, monitored and evaluated and provided with ongoing learning opportunities to improve their effectiveness.**

#### Quality Indicators

In fulfillment of this standard the school:

- 1.1 Has a teaching staff that is sufficient in number to meet the needs of the school.
- 1.2 Assigns responsibilities to teachers based on their qualifications, professional preparation, experience and confirmed strengths.
- 1.3 Provides ongoing appraisal and mentoring to support the teacher's role in the holistic development of students.





- 1.4 Ensures that all teachers participate in a continuous programme of professional development that is aligned to the Mission of CEBM.
- 1.5 Employs reliable methods for the assessment of teacher effectiveness to evaluate teacher performance and provide feedback for improvement.

## **Standard 2 - Effective Leadership**

### **Descriptor**

**The school's leaders serve as advocates for a whole-school approach to quality improvement. They provide direction and effectively allocate and manage resources for the achievement of curricular and co-curricular objectives that strengthen collegiality, improve accountability and ultimately enhance student performance and school effectiveness.**

### **Quality Indicators**

In fulfillment of this standard the school:

- 2.1 Monitors, evaluates and controls the use of human, material and fiscal resources for the effective operation of the school.
- 2.2 Implements a structured approach to the periodic analysis and review of student performance, teacher effectiveness and school effectiveness.
- 2.3 Allocates and protects instructional time to support student learning.
- 2.4 Creates a productive school culture by supporting teachers and other staff to do their jobs effectively and to take responsibility for professional growth to improve the quality of their work.
- 2.5 Communicates the Vision and Mission of Catholic Education to build stakeholder understanding and support by promoting a culture of collaboration, shared responsibility and ownership; and promoting and strengthening the catholic identity of the school (see Appendix for CEBM's Catholic School Identity Indicators).

## **Standard 3 - Holistic Learning Experience**

### **Descriptor**

**The school is a community of learners which caters for the development of every person's intellectual, emotional, social, physical, artistic, innovative and spiritual potentials. This is achieved through a coherent, relevant and rigorous curriculum and the design and use of instructional strategies, innovations and activities that provides equitable opportunity for all students to learn; and involves families and the community in supporting children as learners.**



### **Quality Indicators**

In fulfillment of this standard the school:

- 3.1** Promotes the use of instructional strategies and activities that are reflective of best practice and encourages teachers to:
- provide students with focus, feedback and sufficient opportunities to master skills;
  - adapts instruction to meet individual needs and engages learners;
  - uses appropriate strategies to assess students' academic, cognitive, and metacognitive skills;
  - maximizes the use of time for instruction;
  - Creates classroom environments conducive to learning; and optimizes technology and multimedia as learning tools.
- 3.2** Provides instruction that challenges each student to excel and reflects a commitment to intellectual, social, physical and ethical development.
- 3.3** Ensures that all students and staff have adequate access to instructional technology and materials that support the school's curriculum.
- 3.4** Promotes active involvement of students in the learning process, including opportunities for them to explore the application of higher-order thinking skills and real world situations in which to apply their learning.
- 3.5** Ensures that each student has access to support services that include but are not limited to counseling, teacher consultations and teacher-parent/guardian consultations.

### **Standard 4 - Strong Home, School, Church, Community Partnership**

#### **Descriptor**

**The school develops and maintains a collaborative relationship that focuses on promoting cooperation between home, school, Church and community; supporting marginalized students; empowering parents; promoting retention in the education system; and helping all students succeed.**

#### **Quality Indicators**

In fulfillment of this standard the school:

- 4.1** Has formal channels to listen to and communicate with stakeholders including providing them with reliable information about student performance and school effectiveness.
- 4.2** Creates a learning community with a culture of collaboration, respect, understanding and trust that places emphasis on the involvement of parents and families in meeting



children's education needs particularly in relation to literacy and numeracy as well as oral language skills.

- 4.3 Assesses and targets causes of educational underachievement by collaborating with stakeholders (including parents, guardians, teachers, church leaders, community personnel) to offer programmes (in areas such as parenting skills) and other activities.
- 4.4 Establishes a committee to identify school-related issues at the community level that impinge on learning and seek to address these issues by working collaboratively with other interest groups. Issues include school attendance, substance misuse/abuse, bullying, poverty, health and environment concerns, self-esteem, and homework support.
- 4.5 Takes concrete steps to involve the community in the life of the school and the school in the life of the community.

## **Standard 5 - Resources and Support Systems to Sustain Improvement**

### **Descriptor**

**The school secures, provides and manages the materials and services needed to support school improvement and adopts a systematic approach to monitoring and evaluating school performance and effectiveness which includes determining gaps, identifying needs and reporting results.**

### **Quality Indicators**

In fulfillment of this standard the school:

- 5.1 Conducts a systematic analysis of instructional and organizational effectiveness and uses the results to design school improvement interventions.
- 5.2 Maintains the school site, facilities, services and equipment to provide an environment that is safe and orderly for all users.
- 5.3 Monitors and accounts for all financial and material contributions to the school and provides responsible stewardship of the use and allocation of these resources.
- 5.4 Engages in a continuous process of improvement that is aligned with specific goals and targets and documents and uses results to inform future improvement efforts.
- 5.5 Solicits the knowledge and skills of stakeholders to support and enhance the work of the school.



## APPENDIX

### Catholic School Identity Indicators (CSII)

*“The Catholic identity of a school is based on the threefold educational Mission of the Church: to teach the Faith, to do so within the experience of Christian community, and to prepare individuals for effective Christian witness and service to others.” (To Teach As Jesus Did, 1972, #82)*

*Several of the key themes that are at the heart of Catholic social tradition are:*

- 1. Dignity of the human person.*
- 2. The call to family, community and participation.*
- 3. The rights of individuals and their responsibility to their community.*
- 4. The option for the poor and vulnerable.*
- 5. The dignity of work and the rights of workers.*
- 6. Solidarity with all in the human family.*
- 7. The stewardship of all God’s creation.*

Source: *Themes of Catholic Social Teaching, US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998.*

The following indicators assist in measuring the extent to which a Catholic School integrates the teachings of the Catholic faith into the life of the school in observable ways:

1. Catholic symbols are visible in the school and appropriate seasonal decorations are displayed.
2. School leaders clearly articulate and model the Catholic nature of the school.
3. Teachers and other staff are provided opportunities to update themselves on the Church's teachings.
4. Prayer is a regular part of daily school life.
5. The Priest Manager is regularly present in the school in his pastoral role.
6. The school calendar includes celebrations of feasts and days of obligation.
7. Students of all faiths are respectful of the spiritual practices of all religions.
8. Religious Instruction is placed in a prominent place on the timetable.
9. Holy Mass and the Sacrament of Reconciliation are available for the school community on a regular basis.
10. Parents are valued as the primary educators of their children.
11. Disciplinary measures are just, equitably enforced and preserve the dignity of the individual.
12. Disciplinary policies/procedures are aimed at the growth of the individual and the good of the community.



13. The school demonstrates a commitment to equity and diversity.
14. Students engage in activities which reflect Catholic values, Catholic social teaching and global solidarity.
15. Students are polite, courteous and respectful.
16. Hospitality is practiced within the school and extended to all visitors.
17. All members of the school community understand their role as stewards of creation which includes care of the environment.
18. Retreats are available for members of the school community and stakeholders.
19. Teachers and staff understand their vocation as Catholic educators.
20. What is honored, celebrated and rewarded in the school is reflective of catholic values and discipleship.
21. The school cultivates a relationship with neighbouring parishes, clergy and religious, particularly by inviting them to celebrate Mass with students and preside at ceremonies.
22. Respect, collegiality and subsidiarity are evident in the school.
23. There is a role for parent volunteers in the school.



*“As the Catholic Bishops of the Antilles we emphasize the Catholic school’s central role at the beginning of the millennium in the church’s work of evangelization, which must be new in ardor, method and expression. In setting forth principles to direct the Catholic schools of the region, we call on the commitment of students and parents, teachers and administrators, pastors and religious, School Board members and members of PTA, and the whole community to this great work.”.*

*(Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education in the Territories of the Antilles Episcopal Conference)*



## REFERENCES

- Strategic Plan 2011 - 2015 of the Catholic Education Board of Management (CEBM)
- Final Report on Phase I of the Project – Research, Creation & Implementation of a Tool for Self-Assessment of Catholic Schools (Grant #10AG-121812)
- Pastoral Letter on Catholic Education in the Territories of the Antilles Episcopal Conference
- Accreditation Standards for Quality Schools: Advancing Excellence in Education Worldwide (AdvancED, 2007)
- Catholic School Identity: Standards-based Indicators of Catholic School Identity (AdvancEd, 2007)
- To Teach As Jesus Did (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1972)

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