Extract from Keynote address by Archbishop Eamon Martin to JMB/AMCSS 31st Annual Conference Galway, 3 May 2018

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In light of much public discussion about LGBT and gender issues, it is important that we, in Catholic schools, also evaluate the support offered to students who are facing new and deep questions relating to their sexual identity as they mature.

All young people must be treated with compassion and be helped to understand that they are loved by God and their inherent human dignity is valued and respected. The prevalence of sexual bullying and ostracisation can so easily leave them susceptible to feelings of rejection, distress, self-harm and risk-taking behaviours. This cannot be tolerated in any school, never mind a Catholic school which holds, as a core value, the dignity of every human person.

In the context of the current debate about relationships and sexuality education in Ireland it would be helpful for us to evaluate, at both local and national level, how our Catholic schools can ensure the safest and most healthy learning environment for all young people. Given that many Catholic schools have already been sensitively offering support to pupils who are beginning to express same sex attractions or raising personal questions about gender identity, it is timely to identify, develop and disseminate best practice in this area across all our Catholic schools. While recognising the challenges at the interface between the Church's moral teaching and pastoral practice, it would be helpful for us to share learning about: inclusive school structures and relationships; sensitive pastoral outreach and support for students; age-appropriate pastoral programmes together with curricular methodologies and resources; quality professional development and training for staff. At all times, the needs and views of parents should be fully considered in such a review and resources and methods should be developed which reflect and enhance the characteristic spirit of a Catholic school.

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