

DIOCESE OF KERRY



RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POLICY
for
PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Introduction

The Catholic vision of education is rooted in its Christian concept of life centred on Jesus Christ. *“He is the One who ennobles people, gives meaning to human life, and is the model which the Catholic school offers its pupils” (C S 33-37)*

Pope Francis says *“faith is perhaps the most beautiful heritage we can give because it makes you grow. To help children boys and girls to know and to love the Lord ever more is one of the most beautiful educational adventures, for it comprises the Church.” (Address to International Catechetical Congress 27 September 2013)*

Pope Francis expresses his gratitude to teachers for their dedication in passing on the faith to young people. *“Let us thank all those who teach in Catholic schools. Educating is an act of love; it is like giving life.”* Catholic teachers are people who keep the memory of God alive; they keep it alive in themselves and they are able to nourish it in others.

Catholic schools carry a great mission to serve God by introducing children to His love for them and nourishing their desire to follow in His footsteps. The Grow in Love programme is the recognised Religious Education series for primary schools. The First Letter of St. John states this very clearly: ‘God is Love’ (1 John 4:8). Therefore, where there is love, there is God. Children experience the love of God through the love of their parents, families and others. They will come to know that God loves them unconditionally and that human love is only a hint of what God’s love is like. Teachers help children to be attentive to their lives and to the beauty of nature around them, so that they can find in them the presence and action of God. They are encouraged to celebrate God’s constant presence in their lives.

This resource book is intended as a support to creating a Religious Education Policy that will enhance the faith formation and faith experience of the children within the school.

Table of Contents

Suggested Guidelines towards the formulation of a Religious Education Policy in Primary Schools	2
Developing a Policy	
School Details	3
Aims of Religious Education in Catholic Primary Schools in the Diocese of Kerry	4
The Vision for Religious Education in Catholic Schools	
The Aim of a Religious Education Policy	5
The Principal and Religious Education School Environment	
Classroom Environment	6
Prayer in the Classroom Liturgical Celebrations	
Sacramental Preparation and Celebration	7
Parish Link Home Link	
Pupils of Different Faiths and Traditions	8
Success Criteria Policy Monitoring Timeframe	

Guidelines

Suggested Guidelines towards the formulation of a Religious Education Policy in Primary Schools in the Diocese of Kerry

1. The school's current policy on Religious Education should be reviewed by a small group of teachers and the principal.
2. If there is no formal written Religious Education Policy in the school, all that is currently being done should be evaluated for what has worked well and what could be improved.

Developing a Policy

1. The views of all the interested parties, Board of Management, teachers, pupils and parents are gathered.
2. A draft policy is created by a subgroup of teachers, including the principal.
3. The draft policy is presented to the whole staff, senior pupils and parents for feedback and evaluation.
4. The final draft policy is given to the Board of Management for ratification and made available to parents.
5. The policy is communicated to the whole staff and implemented by all.

"A school, as part of its mission of the Church, should always allow its policies, its priorities and purposes, to be illuminated, inspired, guided and challenged by the teaching of the gospel."

(Sullivan, 2000)

School Details

Our school is a Catholic School under the patronage of the Bishop of Kerry.

Name of School _____

Mission Statement _____

School Principal _____

Chairperson of the Board _____

School Chaplain _____

1. Aim of Religious Education in a Primary Catholic School

The aim of Religious Education is:

“To help children mature in relation to their spiritual, moral and religious lives, through their encounter with and exploration and celebration of their Catholic faith.”

(page 31 Catholic Pre-School and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland 2015)

2. The Vision for Religious Education in a Catholic School

“The Catholic vision of education is rooted in its ‘Christian concept of life centred on Jesus Christ; he is the One who ennobles people, gives meaning to human life, and is the model which the Catholic school offers to its pupils’

(page 12 Catholic Pre-School and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland 2015)

Religious Education in the Catholic primary school has two distinct but complementary dimensions; the education dimension and the faith formation dimension.

- 1) The educational dimension teaches the children the skills of spiritual, moral and religious literacy.
- 2) The faith-formation dimension helps form the children’s characters in the values of Jesus Christ. It nurtures and supports their faith development. They begin to experience a sense of belonging to a Faith Community. (Religious Education Curriculum)

Religious Education

- Seeks to focus on Gospel values and the teachings of the Church.
- Teaches skills of spiritual, moral and religious literacy.
- Contributes to the building of the faith community.
- Helps pupils develop a living relationship with God and other people.
- Provides a place where all are respected and valued.
- Promotes the harmonious growth of the whole person.
- Works for peace and justice.
- Offers outreach to the poor and needy.
- Seeks to care for creation.
- Helps children appreciate and respect the religious traditions within the school.
- Acknowledges the different roles of home, school and parish in the faith formation of the children.

The General Catechetical Directory 1971 states Religious education *“must present the Christian message and the Christian event with the same seriousness and the same depth with which other disciplines present their knowledge.”*

The Religious Education Policy provides the mechanism whereby the values expressed in the Mission and Ethos Statements are implemented. In a structured way, these statements help and support all in the school to actively engage with the values. These values are expressed in attitudes, behaviour, beliefs, practice, teaching and decision-making within the school.

3. The Aims of a Religious Education Policy

- a) To provide greater clarity in respect of aims, procedures, understanding and delivery of religious education.
- b) To ensure that religious education is not *“just another subject”*, but continues to be the inspiration and foundation of the entire education process.
- c) To help class teachers in their approach to the different levels of faith-commitment and knowledge which they encounter in their classrooms.

4. The Principal and Religious Education

- a) The principal ensures the Religious Education Policy is implemented.
- b) The principal ensures Religious Education is timetabled in each classroom for the designated time of 30 mins daily.
- c) The principal encourages and supports the teachers who are preparing children for the Sacraments.
- d) The principal checks that all teachers have the relevant Grow in Love material needed for classroom teaching.
- e) The principal maintains a good working relationship with the parish.
- f) The principal offers opportunities for in-service and faith development.

5. Catholic School Environment

“Our faith challenges us to work for a better world, and to allow God to bring about the ‘reign’ or ‘kingdom’ of God through us. As children hear stories about Jesus and gradually understand the things he did and said, they will be encouraged to think like him, to judge like him and to live as he lived.”

(General Directory for Catechesis, number 53)

The Catholic School Environment Consists of the following:

- a) The Schedule for the Catholic School is clearly visible to those working in and those who visit the school.
- b) The school's Mission Statement is prominently displayed.
- c) A Prayer Space that reflects the Liturgical Seasons is obvious when entering the school.
- d) Religious symbols are on display and utilised in the school as visible signs of our Catholic faith.
- e) School Prayer Services take place to mark Church Feasts.
- f) Outreach to foreign Missions and awareness of Social Justice is evident in the school through engagement with Children Helping Children (*the Society of Missionary Children is Pope Francis' charity –www.wmi.ie*) along with support for Trocaire and Vincent de Paul etc.
- g) Staff meetings in school begin with a prayer.

6. Classroom Environment

"As teachers in Catholic schools. We have a responsibility to teach children about God's Revelation and how they can respond to it." (Grow in Love, Primary 7 page 6)

- a) There is a Prayer Space in each classroom. It reflects the current Liturgical Season.
- b) The Prayer Space contains the Catholic Bible and faith symbols such as holy water, a crucifix or statue.
- c) Children's work from a current Grow in Love lesson is displayed in the Prayer Space.
- d) The Grow in Love series aims to help children to see how they can respond to God's love through love: by doing acts of love that mirror the actions of Jesus.

7. Prayer in the Classroom

There is a designated time for prayer in every classroom

- a) At the beginning of the day, before and after lunch and before the children leave for home in the evening. The Angelus is said by the senior classes.
- b) Children are taught their prayers in accordance with the Grow in Love series.
- c) Children learn by heart traditional prayers and Mass responses in accordance with the Grow in Love series and in preparation for the sacraments.
- d) Children have the opportunity to experience different forms of prayer i.e. spontaneous prayer, guided meditation, reflection on a gospel story etc.

8. Liturgical Celebrations

- Observance of **Holy Days** of Obligation.
- **September:** School Mass or Prayer Service
- **October:** Missionary-awareness is highlighted through the school's engagement with missionaries abroad. The children engage with Children helping Children etc
- **November:** Prayer Service for the holy souls. A Remembrance Tree.
- **Advent and Christmas:** The Advent wreath marks the four weeks of preparation and waiting for the birth of Jesus. The crib takes central place in the school. Nativity play. Carol Service.
- **January:** Celebration of Catholic Schools Week.
- **February:** St. Brigid's day: The story of St. Brigid and the making of crosses.
- **Lent:** Ash Wednesday: the blessing of Ashes. The children are encouraged to learn about the good work that Trócaire does to help people in need and where possible make a contribution to the Trócaire box.
- **March:** Feast of St. Patrick. Children learn about St. Patrick. Explanation of the symbolism of the Shamrock.
- **Holy Week:** The children learn about the events of Holy Thursday and Good Friday.
- **Easter:** The Easter story - the Resurrection of Jesus.
- **May:** The school celebrates Mary, the mother of Jesus, by saying the rosary and singing hymns.
- **Pentecost:** The story of Pentecost. Symbols of the Holy Spirit- a link is made with Confirmation.
- **Graduation** Prayer Service.
- **June:** End of year Prayer Service or Mass.

9. Sacramental Preparation and Celebration

- a) In school the children are prepared for the sacraments in partnership with home and the parish.
- b) The school and parish engage with parents to plan for sacramental preparation.
- c) The school supports the Diocesan guidelines on how best to prepare for and celebrate the sacraments of First Penance, First Holy Communion and Confirmation.
- d) Parents and children are encouraged to engage in the parish-based programmes provided for their preparation for First Holy Communion and Confirmation, such as Do this in Memory and You Shall be my Witnesses.
- e) The celebration of First Penance takes place in the local church. Parents are invited to participate in the Sacrament with their children.
- f) In preparation for the sacraments, the children learn and memorise the relevant prayers.

10. Parish Link

- a) At the beginning of the school year, the school plans a number of liturgical celebrations with their local priest, namely a School Mass/Prayer Service to mark the beginning of the school year, a Carol Service, Catholic Schools Week, Ash Wednesday and an End of School Year liturgy etc.
- b) The school and parish priest plan for Sacramental celebrations – First Penance, First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

11. Home Link

The school encourages parental involvement in the following ways:

- a) Religious education is included in parent-teacher meetings and reports.
- b) Parents are encouraged to engage with their child and the Grow in Love weekly lesson on Thursday night.
- c) Attendance at Sacramental Preparation meetings is encouraged.
- d) Parents are informed about which prayers the children are currently learning in school.
- e) The school recommends parents to pray with their children at home.
- f) The parents are invited to attend the Nativity Play or Carol Service, school Masses etc.
- g) All are encouraged to support Catholic Schools Week.

12. Pupils of different Faiths and Traditions

Our school is a welcoming, inclusive school. Children of all faiths and no faith are welcome.

- a) The Admissions Policy clearly states that the school is a Catholic School.
- b) The Admissions Policy makes clear that we welcome diversity and inclusion.
- c) Parents are made aware that the Catholic ethos of our school is not confined to the religion class only, but permeates the whole school day.
- d) The class teacher and pupils will show interest in any pupil marking a special feast in his/her tradition while attending school.
- e) Children are helped to recognise that everyone, regardless of their ethnic origin, colour or faith, is created in God's image and is precious in God's eyes.

13. Success Criteria

- An acknowledged sense of God, prayer and worship within the school community.
- Evidence of family engagement with the Grow in Love programme.
- Respect for the dignity of each person in the school community.
- Concern for the environment and creation.
- Active outreach to those in need.
- Evidence of mutually supportive partnership between school, parish and home.

14. Policy Monitoring

The Religious Education policy requires ongoing monitoring and regular evaluation to ensure successful implementation and to review whether any adjustments are necessary at any given time.

Timeframe

This policy will come into effect.

Year _____

It will be reviewed every three years.

Reviewed in _____



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