

POLICY FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SAINT JOSEPH'S N.S. KILCOCK



*Updated April 2021.
Ratified by the BOM on May 17th 2021*

TEMPLATE FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POLICY FOR
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN KILDARE & LEIGHLIN DIOCESE

INTRODUCTION:

This policy has been formulated by the staff of Saint Joseph's NS.

THE AIM OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN A 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, exploration and celebration of their Catholic faith¹.

THE VISION FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN A CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

In the Irish context the educational vision of the Church is a pastoral one. It acknowledges the complementary, connected, but different roles of the home, school and parish community in the faith education of children.

In this vision parents are the first and the primary teachers of their children in faith and the home is the first school of faith.

The parish is where children learn to worship, where they meet Jesus Christ in sacramental celebrations and where they experience and share in the mission of the Church.

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

- The educational dimension is centred and founded on the formal curriculum and focuses on the values and teachings of the Catholic Church. It teaches children the skills of spiritual, moral and religious literacy. The Religious Education outcomes at each level in the curriculum reflect this dimension.
- The faith formation dimension forms the children's characters in the virtues and values of Jesus, supports their faith development and helps them to experience what it means to be a member of the Church. The faith formation goals in the curriculum (pp 134-143) support and reflect this dimension.

An important part of this vision is our response to religious and cultural change in our society. Catholic schools are places where all are respected and valued. This includes the

¹ Catholic Pre-School and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland page 31

many different levels of faith that we will encounter in both our teachers and pupils and those pupils who are of other faiths and different stances for living.

AIM OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POLICY

The purpose of this Religious Education policy is

- To ensure that we strive to understand and promote Religious Education in a Catholic primary school as never simply one subject among many, but the foundation of the entire educational process.²
- To ensure that formal teaching in matters of belief, values and practice that equip children for a free and intelligent expression of personal faith within the family, Church and wider society is provided. (*based on Share the Good News 39*)
- To appreciate the richness of all religious traditions, especially those present in our school community, and to provide a framework to encounter these traditions.
- To provide appropriate religious education for the different levels of faith commitment that we encounter in our classrooms
- To lead to a greater degree of clarity in respect of aims, procedures and roles for RE in the school.
- To assist all members of staff in the teaching of Religion.
- To consider strategies that respond to the needs of children of different faiths and other stances for living in terms of Religious Education.

² Catholic Pre-School and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland page 12

ABOUT OUR CATHOLIC SCHOOL:

Our school is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Bishop of Kildare & Leighlin, Bishop Denis Nulty. Our school is in the parish of Kilcock and Newtown. The priests of the parish: Fr. John Brickley & Fr. George Augustine.

The Religious Co-Ordinator: Mrs Catherine McNally-Codyre.

The members of the Board of Management:

1. Mr David Powderly
2. Fr George Augustine
3. Mrs Ann McQuillan
4. Mr Stephen Halligan
5. Ms Laura Butler
6. Mr Flan Hedderman
7. Mrs Jane Ennis
8. Mr Gerry Lawless

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Visitors, parents and children know that we are a Catholic School:

- The Schedule for the Catholic School is on display and visible to all visitors to the school. (*Appendix A*)
- The Mission Statement for our school has been developed, is included with all welcome information for parents and staff and is regularly reviewed. (*Appendix B*)
- There are religious symbols and visible signs of our Catholic faith in all public areas of our school.
- There is a Prayer Space that reflects the liturgical seasons in the entrance area of our school.
- There is ongoing communication with the local priest or parish worker who acts as chaplain to the school. Regular meetings and visits are scheduled throughout the school year
- Missionary awareness is highlighted through the school's support and engagement with charities such as *Trócaire*, *Children Helping Children* and other agencies
- Social justice awareness is highlighted through the school's support and engagement with charities such as the *Society of St. Vincent de Paul*, *Focus Ireland* and other agencies

PRAYER IN OUR SCHOOL

- Religiously themed assemblies, communal prayer time and liturgical celebrations are timetabled during the school year *e.g. beginning and ending of school year Mass or Prayer Service, Advent and Lent celebrations, Saint Joseph's Day and Catholic Schools Week celebrations.*
- Important Feast Days are celebrated throughout the Church Year
- All meetings in the school begin and end with prayer. *The Prayer for School Meetings booklet is used as a resource for this prayer time.*
- Staff are offered opportunities for prayerful reflection, retreat and personal faith development on a regular basis.
- There is time for prayer in every classroom at the beginning of the day, before and after lunch and before the children leave at home time.
- Children know their formal prayers and Mass responses as indicated by the curriculum; Level 1 p59; Level 2 page 74; Level 3 p 94; Level 4 page 120.
- The Rosary is prayed with children at level 2, 3 and 4 as indicated by the curriculum
- Children have the opportunity to experience different forms of prayer, *e.g. meditation, contemplation, spontaneous prayer, Eucharistic Adoration*

TIMETABLING AND TEACHING STAFF

Our school believes that Religious Education is a core subject in a Catholic primary school. It is the foundation of the entire educational process. This means that:

- Religious Education is timetabled in each classroom for the designated time of 2 ½ hours per week
- Religious Education is included in all teachers Fortnightly Notes and Cúntas Míosuil.
- All teachers have a copy of the Pre-School and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland.
- All teachers have the relevant *Grow in Love* materials needed to teach Religious Education in their classroom
- The Religious Education Coordinator distributes all resources and relevant communication from the Diocesan Advisor's office.
- Opportunities for ongoing professional development are regularly offered to teachers.

CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

- There is a Prayer Space in every classroom. This space reflects the movement of the liturgical seasons. It also contains samples of the children's work, religious symbols and God's creation.
- Every Prayer Space has a Bible (Catholic Children's Bible)
- There are symbols of the Catholic faith in every classroom e.g. a Holy Water Font, religious icon or picture, cross or crucifix.

CLASSROOM TEACHING

In teaching the approved Religious Education programme for use in the diocese teachers are enabling children to learn the skills of moral, spiritual and religious literacy so that their understanding of their Christian faith is constantly deepened and they develop a mature and informed response to God's call to relationship. The skills of religious literacy as defined by the curriculum are understanding, communicating, participating, and added to these are the further skills of spiritual literacy and inter-religious literacy. (*Curriculum page 35-37*). Since 2011 it has been a requirement of teachers to have the appropriate Catholic teaching qualification, as outlined by the Irish Catholic Bishop's Conference.³

Grow in Love Programme

Grow in Love is the new Religious Education series for Catholic primary schools in Ireland. It introduces a new curriculum for Religious Education. Each *Grow in Love* programme is divided into a number of themes, which allows teachers to take a thematic, cross-curricular approach to the teaching of Religious Education. Each theme is designed to last between two and four weeks. As well as the Teacher's Notes and photocopiable worksheets featured in the Teacher's Manual, a comprehensive set of free online resources are also available, including illustrations to accompany every story, video clips and weblinks for further study.

The *Grow in Love* Children's Book features illustrations, stories, poems and activities for families to do together. Parents and children are encouraged to talk and pray about what is

³ The Certificate in Religious Studies

being learned in school. The approved *Grow in Love* scheme has been adopted throughout the school.

In addition to the *Grow in Love* scheme, used to deliver the Religious Education curriculum, classes use additional support materials during Sacramental preparation, seasonal liturgical resources and for Catholic Schools Week. Many of these can be accessed through the Resources section on the Diocesan website, www.kandle.ie.

- In order to better help parents, understand what their children are learning in Religious Education children a link with home is made on a weekly basis in each class.
- Children have an understanding and knowledge of their Christian faith through exploring the mystery of God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Church/kingdom, through learning about creation, Mary, Eternal Life and other Religious Traditions and as indicated by the curriculum in Level 1 page 52 -54, Level 2 page 66-67, Level 3 page 84-88 and Level 4 page 106 -113.
- Each senior classroom has access to a set of Bibles. ⁴
- Children are familiar with Bible stories, have an understanding and knowledge of Sacred Scripture, study the structure of the Bible, know that Sacred Scripture is the revealed Word of God as indicated by the curriculum in Level 1 page 55, Level 2 page 71, Level 3 page 89 and Level 4 page 115-116.
- Children have an understanding and knowledge of the liturgical life of the Church, the structure of the Mass, the seasons of the liturgical year, the way in which we meet Jesus in liturgy, sacraments and prayer, the seven sacraments of the Church as indicated in Level 1 page 58-80, Level 2 page 73-77, Level 3 page 93-99 and Level 4 page 119-125
- Children have an understanding and knowledge of human dignity, Church social teaching, RSE in a Christian context, the two-fold commandment and the Ten Commandments, they know that following Jesus is living according to Gospel values, that the Christian moral life is an expression and consequence of relationship with God as indicated by the curriculum in Level 1 page 42, Level 2 page 78-80, Level 3 page 100 - 102 and Level 4 page 126-130

⁴ The following Bibles are most appropriate for use in the primary classroom: The Good News Bible, New Revised Standard Version, The Catholic Children's Bible, The Contemporary English Version

- The faith formation dimension which forms the children's characters in the virtues and values of Jesus, supports their faith development and helps them to experience what it means to be a member of the Church is recognised and supported as an integral part of Religious Education. The faith formation goals in the curriculum p 134-143 support and reflect this dimension.
- Attention is given to integration of Religious Education across the primary school curriculum. St John Paul II gave expression to this when he stated that Religious Education will always seek to 'keep in touch with the pupil's knowledge and education; thus the Gospel will impregnate the mentality of the student in the field of their learning and the harmonization of their culture will be achieved in the light of their faith⁵
- Children are provided with opportunities to learn by heart traditional prayers, Mass responses, hymns, biblical texts, faith words and faith summaries as outlined in the programme of Religious Education in use in the classroom.
- Provision for Religious Education is made for children with Special Educational Needs as indicated by the Special Education Curriculum Guidelines page 146-154

⁵ Catechesi Tradendae 60

Content Objectives for Each Class Level

Level 1: Junior and Senior Infants	
Strand	Strand Units
Christian Faith	Mystery of God Mystery of Jesus Christ Creation Mystery of the Church Eternal Life
Word of God	Bible Sacred Scripture God's Loving Plan of Salvation Jesus' Birth and Youth Jesus' Public Life Passion, Death and Resurrection
Liturgy and Prayer	Prayer Prayer Gestures Formal Prayer Additional Prayers Spontaneous prayer Liturgical Year Sacraments Mass
Christian Morality	Human Dignity Social Teaching of the Church RSE in a Christian Context

Level 2: First and Second Class	
Strand	Strand Units
Christian Faith	Mystery of God Mystery of Jesus Christ Mystery of the Holy Spirit Creation Mystery of the Church Mary Eternal Life Other Religious Traditions
Word of God	Bible Sacred Scripture God's Loving Plan of Salvation Jesus' Birth and Youth Jesus' Public Life Jesus' Passion and Death Jesus' Resurrection and Pentecost
Liturgy and Prayer	Prayer Formal Prayer Additional Prayers Liturgical Year Sacraments Mass
Christian Morality	Human Dignity Human Freedom and Responsibility God's Graceful Presence and Assistance Social Teaching of the Church RSE in a Christian Context

Level 3: Third and Fourth Class	
Strand	Strand Units
Christian Faith	Mystery of God Mystery of Jesus Christ Mystery of the Holy Spirit Creation Mystery of the Church/Kingdom Mary Eternal Life Other Religious Traditions
Word of God	Bible Sacred Scripture God's Loving Plan of Salvation Jesus' Birth and Youth Jesus' Public Life Jesus' Passion and Death Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension Pentecost
Liturgy and Prayer	Prayer Formal Prayer Additional Prayers Liturgy Liturgical Year Sacraments Mass
Christian Morality	Human Dignity Human Freedom and Responsibility God's Graceful Presence and Assistance Social Teaching of the Church RSE in a Christian Context

Level 4: Fifth and Sixth Class	
Strand	Strand Units
Christian Faith	Mystery of God Mystery of Jesus Christ Mystery of the Holy Spirit Creation Mystery of the Church/Kingdom Mary Eternal Life Other Religious Traditions
Word of God	Bible Sacred Scripture God's Loving Plan of Salvation Jesus' Birth and Youth Jesus' Public Life Jesus' Passion and Death Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension Pentecost
Liturgy and Prayer	Prayer Formal Prayer Additional Prayers Liturgy Liturgical Year Sacraments Mass
	Human Dignity Human Freedom and Responsibility God's Graceful Presence and Assistance Social Teaching of the Church RSE in a Christian Context

SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION AND CELEBRATION

GENERAL

- Leadership in the school make a conscious effort to ensure that teachers in sacramental classes are faith filled witnesses to the Christian life.
- Children are prepared for the sacraments of Reconciliation, Holy Communion and Confirmation in partnership with parents and parish.
- It is understood that children's understanding of these sacraments develops throughout their time in primary school and beyond.
- The school supports the ongoing conversation at parish and diocesan level about how best to prepare for and celebrate the sacraments of Reconciliation, Holy Communion and Confirmation
- The school works together with parents and parish to ensure that sacramental celebrations are authentic, sacred encounters with Jesus Christ
- Practice for sacramental celebrations are confined to no more than two hours of school time.

CELEBRATING RECONCILIATION FOR THE FIRST TIME

- The celebration takes place in the local parish church preferably during the Lenten season
- Parents and other family members are invited to celebrate the sacrament with their children

CELEBRATING HOLY COMMUNION FOR THE FIRST TIME

- Consideration is given to celebrating Holy Communion during a Sunday Mass or over a number of Sunday Masses
- Children sit with their parents
- Children are ministered to by the faith community on the day on which they receive Holy Communion for the first time. They are not called to minister. Their main task on the day is to be present to what is happening, to focus on the most important thing that will happen on the day, receiving Jesus, the Bread of Life.
- Parish led preparation for the sacrament is offered. The programme or process in place is followed in conjunction with Diocesan guidelines.

CONFIRMATION

- Teachers of Confirmation classes are aware of the Diocesan Guidelines for Confirmation and together with school and parish leadership ensure that these guidelines are followed
- Children are encouraged to write their letter to the Bishop telling him why they would like to be confirmed.
- Children preparing for Confirmation are offered a retreat experience either before or after celebrating the sacrament
- Parish led preparation for the sacrament is offered. The programme or process in place is followed in conjunction with Diocesan guidelines.

PARTNERSHIP IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

HOME

- The school seeks to involve parents in their children's religious education by
 - Offering an input on Religious Education for parents of Junior Infants
 - Making a link with home in Religious Education every week
 - Encouraging parents to have a prayer space at home
 - Ensuring parents know which prayers their children are learning and encouraging them to pray with their children at home
 - Inviting parents to attend prayer services, assemblies Mass and other religious celebrations

PARISH

- Relationships between school and parish leadership are fostered and encouraged
- The school seeks a meeting with parish leadership at the beginning of each term to plan for visitation of classrooms, visits to the church, celebration of Feast Days, key liturgical celebrations in the school calendar, sacramental preparation and celebration
- The school supports the parish in offering parish led preparation for sacraments

INCLUSION OF PUPILS OF DIFFERENT FAITHS AND OTHER STANCES FOR LIVING

Children of all faiths and different stances for living are welcome in our school. Our school is hospitable, open and inclusive. We continuously strive to best practice concerning the inclusion of pupils in our school. Our practice is founded on principles of good communication, clarity on rights and responsibilities, right relationships, openness to dialogue and compromise and flexibility. ⁶

- Our Admissions Policy and Mission Statement makes clear that we are a Catholic School under the patronage of the local Catholic Bishop
- It is clear to parents enrolling their children that the Catholic ethos of our school permeates the whole school day and not just the formal Religious Education class
- Our Admissions Policy makes clear that we welcome diversity and inclusion and that we believe that the presence of children from diverse backgrounds enhance and enrich our school community.

PRE-ENROLMENT MEETING

- A pre-enrolment meeting is held at which issues relating to ethos and formal Religious Education are discussed with prospective parents
- Parents are aware that there are prayers at assemblies, and at moments during the school day. It is made clear that for children of other faiths and different stances for living that these can be times for personal reflection.
- Parents are given an understanding of the nature of Religious Education in the Catholic Primary School. *(An example of what this might look like is available in Catholic Primary Schools in a Changing Ireland, p25) See Appendix C*
- Parents who have concerns about the content of the Religious Education programme are invited to meet with the principal/teacher/religious coordinator

⁶ Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector: Progress to Date and Future Directions, p19

OPT OUT

- If parents wish to have their children opt out of formal religious education the school offers some or all of the following options:
 - If alternative supervision is not possible; staying within the classroom and engaging in an educationally appropriate activity
 - Split timetabling of Religious Education across class streams
 - Supervised educational activity where a staff member is available
 - Withdrawal by parent of child for the purpose of receiving religious instruction elsewhere

ONGOING COMMUNICATION, OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCLUSION AND PARENTAL CHOICE

- Parents whose children are of other faiths or different stances for living are made aware in advance of any religious events or celebrations.
- Children are always invited but not obliged to attend all Catholic religious celebrations in the school
- Individual children, with parental consent, may wish to participate in these celebrations by reading appropriate prayers and texts, participating in art or drama, being part of the choir, playing an instrument etc
- Parents are free to absent their child from school for the duration of these events. Consideration is given to the timing of these events.
- Care is taken that the time allotted to Religious Education is not exceeded during times of sacramental preparation
- Notice boards and school displays are used to make pupils feel welcome
- Celebrations of the different cultures present in the school are scheduled
- Reconciliation is a feature of daily life. Staff and children are encouraged to grow in appreciation of human dignity
- School assemblies acknowledge festivals associated with the other faith traditions present in the school.
- Children of different faiths are given the opportunity to explain their beliefs to other children

- Key materials are translated as resources allow

SOME USEFUL TEXTS

Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (Veritas: Irish Episcopal Conference, 2015)

Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland (Veritas: Irish Episcopal Conference, 2010)

The Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults (Veritas: Irish Episcopal Conference, 2014)

Catholic Schools in a Changing Ireland: Sharing Good Practice on Inclusion of All Pupils (Catholic Schools Partnership: 2015)

Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015-2019

Appendix A: School Schedule

St. Joseph's NS is a Roman Catholic school (which is established in connection with the Minister) aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person of the pupil: intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual, including a living relationship with God and with other people.

The school models and promotes a philosophy of life inspired by belief in God and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Catholic school provides religious education for the pupils in accordance with the doctrines, practices and tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and promotes the formation of the pupils in the Catholic Faith.



Appendix B

Vision and Mission Statement for Saint Joseph's NS

Our vision at St. Joseph's NS is to provide an inclusive and respectful school environment for all. We aim to work co-operatively as a team to create a caring, kind and happy school. At St. Joseph's NS we promote the wellbeing and safety of all those in our school community. We strive to encourage everyone to reach their potential and to pursue a lifelong love of learning.

Integrity and trust are fundamental to our shared vision involving all the partners in the education of our pupils.

We work together to create a positive, inclusive and active learning environment. We are guided by purposeful leadership, involving staff, students, parents and the local community as partners in the education of our pupils. We believe that our school is a place of encouragement which enhances the self-esteem and confidence of all the education partners.

Effective management combined with a belief in the value of teamwork is fundamental to our shared vision.

We realise this mission in the following ways:

1. We believe that good leadership and dedicated staff working together will lead to a safe, happy and supportive school.
2. High standards will be expected for all in every aspect of school life
3. The classroom learning will be activity based and child centred with due regard to the differing levels of ability.
4. Assemblies will be advocated to allow children demonstrate their talents and to create a good spirit in the school.
5. The development of the confidence and the self-esteem of all is paramount.
6. A positive Code of Behaviour called 'Discipline for Learning' will be used throughout the school. This code encourages positive behaviour and places children at the forefront in relation to decisions they make in relation to their behaviour.

Appendix C

Sample Information for Parents

Regarding the Nature of Religious Education in the Catholic Primary School as a Catholic school, Religious Education is provided for pupils in accordance with the doctrines, practices and traditions of the Catholic Church. Catholic children will be provided with religious experiences that will help them to develop their faith, such as prayer and sacramental preparation. In addition to these activities, all children will also learn about and from the beliefs, teachings and practices of the great religious traditions of the world, with a particular focus on Christianity. This type of learning is open to, and inclusive of, all children, regardless of their faith background. Children from all faith traditions and none are therefore welcome to participate in the religious education programme that the school provides.

Catholic Primary Schools in a Changing Ireland Sharing good Practice on inclusion of all Pupils (Published 2015 by Catholic Schools Partnership, Columba Centre, Maynooth, Co. Kildare)