

INDEX	PAGE
Introduction	3
Is the Ethos of a Catholic Primary School distinct from that in other schools?	4
The Key Characteristics of Ethos in the Catholic Primary School	5
<u>Ethos Reflection A:</u> The school is founded on a Catholic understanding of education.	6
<u>Ethos Reflection B:</u> The school is a Catholic community	7
<u>Ethos Reflection C:</u> The school is an agent of personal and spiritual growth and social transformation.	8
<u>Ethos Reflection D :</u> Religious Education is an integral part of the life of the Catholic Primary school	9
<u>Ethos Reflection E:</u> We are called to be followers of Christ.	10
The Facilitation models	11
Aims over 5 years	12
“Conversation”	13
Where do we go from here?	14
Religious Education Policy Template	15 -24

INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Schools Partnership (CSP) is an association established by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Conference of Religious of Ireland (now known as 'Association of Missionary and Religious of Ireland' or AMRI). It was formally launched in 2010. Its aims are to:

- *Foster coherence in Catholic education at a national level;*
- *Provide a unified voice for Catholic education in the public forum and with educational bodies and the Government;*
- *Support Catholic educators in the core activities of learning and teaching in order to foster high quality lifelong learning and faith development for all learners.*
- *Support the roles of governance, trusteeship and management. The CSP has a council of twenty-one members representative of the various stakeholders in Catholic schools.*
- *This council is charged with implementing a strategy that will achieve the aims of the CSP. In this way, the CSP is best understood as an umbrella body that provides strategic thinking on major issues facing Catholic schools..*

In 2019 the CSP published the final draft of a document entitled **“Understanding and Living the Ethos in a Catholic Primary School - A Process Centred on Conversations”**. This document, which was the result of over 6 years of work, is an extremely comprehensive and well thought out publication. It offers schools strategies which will enable them to articulate an awareness of their identity and to assist them in evaluating their standing in relation to schools within the Catholic tradition. We acknowledge the tremendous work done within this publication and have drawn heavily from it in the compilation of this booklet. *See Page 15 for a detailed breakdown of the CSP document.* Our rationale for drawing up guidelines specifically for the use of the Primary Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Ferns relates solely to our conviction that considering the busy nature of our schools and the demands being made on Principals, Staff and Boards of Management, a shorter, more concise document would make the process of the drawing up of and practical implementation of an Ethos Policy more accessible.

Mairin Jackson, {Primary} DA Ferns

Is the Ethos of a Catholic School Distinct from Other School Types?

There is no such thing as a value-neutral education. All schools, whether established by the state or by one or other voluntary group, necessarily and implicitly espouse a vision of the human person and give expression to a particular ethos by their choices, actions and priorities. Some people argue that schools should have no role in the public sphere of religious education, however, those who would exclude religion from school also espouse their own ethos. They impart a world view, a philosophy of life, just as much as the person of faith. [CSP “*Understanding and Living The Ethos in a Catholic Primary School*” 2019]

The well-known comment by G.K. Chesterton made in 1950 is as apposite today as it was then “*Every education teaches a philosophy, if not by dogma then by suggestion, by implication, by atmosphere. Every part of that education has a connection with every other part. If it does not all combine to convey some general view of life, it is not education at all*”

The ideal of the Catholic school is one whose ethos or characteristic spirit is rooted in its ‘Christian concept of life centred on Jesus Christ: The Catholic school also seeks ‘to promote the Christian concept of the world whereby the natural values, assimilated into the full understanding of man redeemed by Christ, may contribute to the good of society as a whole’. [Vatican II “*Declaration on Christian Education* 28/10/1965]

Catholic schools have a robust spiritual and moral value system. The Catholic school welcomes diversity and strives for inclusivity. It is open to people of other denominations, other faiths, and none, welcomes them into its community and respects their beliefs.

While it maintains its own ethos and provides religious education and formation in the Catholic faith, the Catholic school sees this diversity as an opportunity for dialogue and understanding with those of different faiths. Building on what Pope Francis refers to as a culture of encounter and enriching its intercultural education, Catholic schools seek to cooperate with parents of other traditions who wish to provide religious instruction for the children in their own tradition. [“*The Joy of the Gospel*” 2013] This welcoming ethos explains why Catholic are among the most inclusive schools in Ireland today [ESRI and Educate Together, School Sector Variation Among Primary Schools in Ireland (2012).]

In relation to “Ethos” / “Culture” within a school, ALL schools commit to:

- Care for the child
- Foster respect for the dignity of the person
- Commitment and Integrity
- Value diversity
- Share values of tolerance and freedom
- Respect all beliefs
- Teach children to take responsibility for their own judgement and beliefs
- Lay foundations for autonomy
- Help children to realise that they are stewards of and carers for the environment
- Commit to the children’s moral and spiritual development
- Support democracy and equality
- Respect human rights, freedom of conscience and religion
- Promote justice and peace.

The Key Competencies are interlinked:

Being an Active Citizen

Being well

Being mathematical

Being a communicator and using language

Being creative

Being an Active listener

And all are developed in the child in a Catholic Primary School in

The Name of the Father

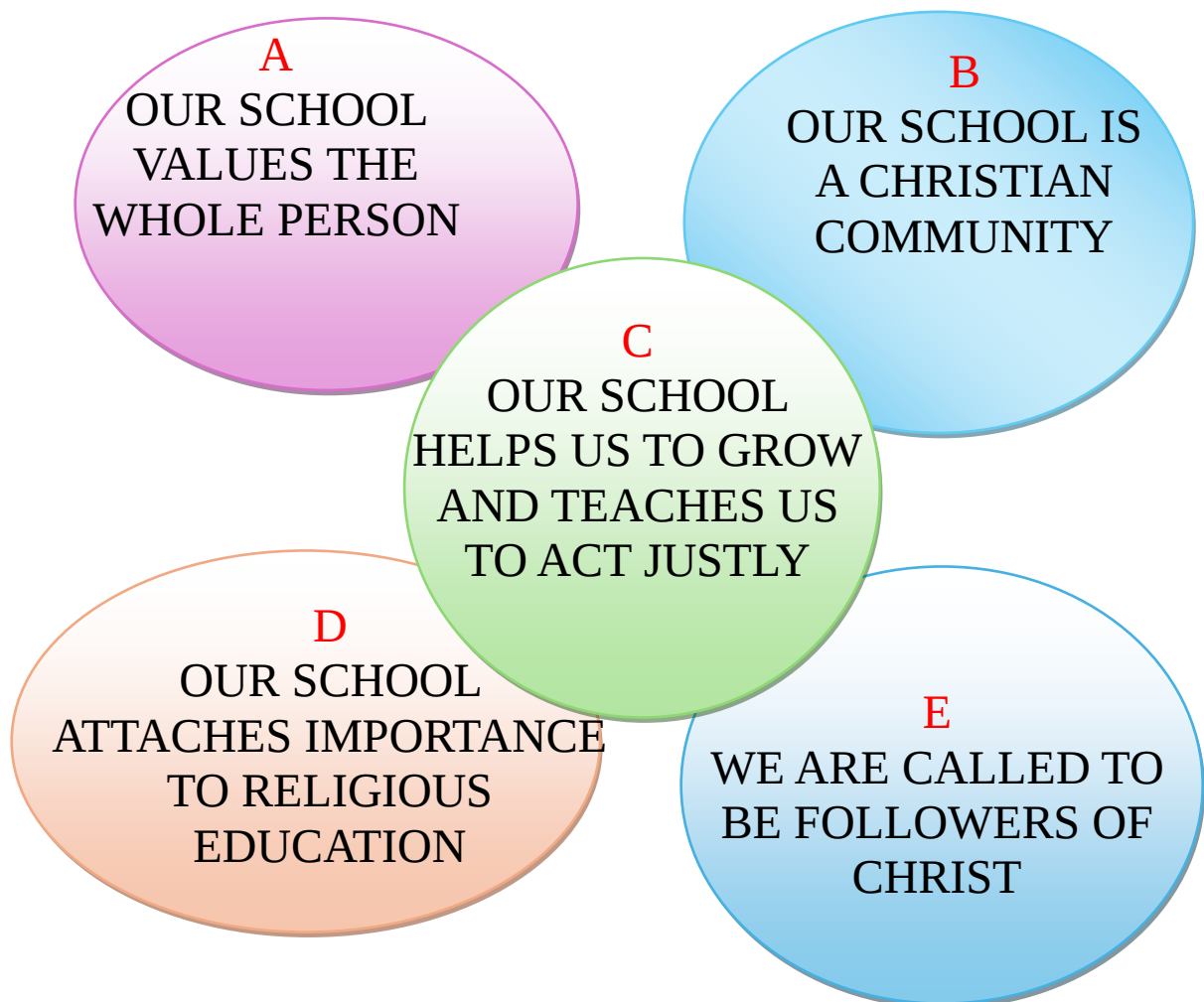
And of the Son

And of the Holy Spirit

*Based on Dr. David Kennedy, Patron’s Programme- Online Summer Course {Mater Dei} facilitation of
Module 1 “Patronage and Partnership” July 2024*

THE KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF ETHOS OF THE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

The Ethos Reflection process / instrument is based upon an analysis of the Catholic School which assumes that the Ethos of such schools can be designated by Five Key Characteristics.



Each school, using information in this booklet or any other relevant resource, **is asked to**

- Choose **ONE** of the above characteristics for each year
- Reflect on how this characteristic is part of your school life.
- Identify Targets for the year and examine correlating actions.

A: The school is founded on a Catholic understanding of education

The spiritual development of pupils is a central educational aim in Catholic education. The school seeks to nourish the person through a varied academic curriculum, involvement in the arts, physical education and sporting activity, and a commitment to moral development and personal responsibility. Diversity is welcomed and catered for.

TARGETS	<i>Very True</i>	<i>True but could improve</i>	<i>Lacking in this area</i>	<i>Is NOT part of our school life</i>
The school understands all pupils are made in the image of God				
Values inspired by the Gospels are integral to decision making within and on behalf of the school				
The moral development of the pupils is attended to in policy and planning				
All understand the importance of ecumenism				
All school personnel accept responsibility for the faith development of the pupils				
Excellence in school life is understood as the best each child can attain				
We work closely with other Catholic schools				
Education embraces the academic, social physical, spiritual and religious development of each child				

B: The school is a Catholic Community

Schools are communities made up of pupils, parents, staff, board members, patrons, trustees and others associated with the school. Parents are the primary and most important educators of their children. Our Catholic school is rooted in the parish community which fosters a sense of shared responsibility for Catholic education.

TARGETS	Very true	True but could improve	Lacking in this area	Not part of our school life
Catholic pupils are prepared for the sacraments through a partnership of home, school and parish				
The school is active and visible in parish and local community event				
The contribution of parents to the life of the school is encouraged and welcomed				
The school ensures that there is a safe and caring environment for all				
Members of staff are confident in articulating it's Catholic ethos.				
There is active, living link between the school and the parish which in turn supports the school				
Issues in relation to the Catholic ethos appear on agendas for BoM meetings				
In school meetings usually begin / end with a prayer.				

C: The school is an agent of personal growth and transformation

Our school community is committed to growth in moral awareness and to the search for justice, integrity and care for the earth. There is an emphasis on pastoral care and student support.

TARGETS	Very true	True but could improve	Lacking in this area	Not part of our school life
All school planning and development is clearly linked to the school's mission statement				
Visitors to our school experience an atmosphere that reflects our values				
Our pupils, in a spirit of mutual respect and trust can approach staff and share concerns				
The school as a whole participates in and supports justice and peace initiatives e.g. as Trócaire's Lenten campaign				
Pupils receive an age-appropriate introduction to media studies. They are encouraged to reflect on the uses, influences and dangers of modern means of communication.				
The school teaches our pupils to care for creation by encouraging life style choices which are environmentally beneficial				
As a Catholic school we challenge all members of the school community to live a life aware of the need to share our common home with all people				
In Laudato Si Pope Francis teaches that a passionate concern for our world needs the support of "a spirituality capable of inspiring". By stimulating pupils towards exercising concern for our world our school community is animated by the church's rich spiritual heritage.				

D: Religious Education is an integral part of the life of the school

The religious education programme includes faith formation, prayer and sacramental preparation. Religious Education in our school is not just a school subject but embraces the whole journey of life

TARGETS	Very true	True but could improve	Lacking in this area	Not part of our school life
There is a policy statement in the school on religious education which includes faith formation, prayer and sacramental preparation [see Pages 15 – 25]				
The R.E. programme receives it's allotted time and the school follows the curriculum and texts approved by the Irish Bishops' Conference.				
The programme is planned for the year and this is communicated to parents, staff and the local parish as a basis for mutual understanding and partnership				
At the beginning and end of each day there is time devoted to prayer and/ or reflection.				
There is a developmental programme in the school on environmental and ecological education which is inclusive in R.E. We promote “ a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature” in accord with Pope Francis' encyclical “ Laudato Si”				
Adult members of the school community participate in opportunities for spiritual support and growth provided in partnership with the diocese and other bodies				
The school makes explicit mention of the central role played by the spiritual development of pupils				

E: We are called to be followers of Christ

The vision that underpins all aspects of the life in this school informs us that we are made in the image of God and are invited to share in His life as are all Christians.

The school helps all staff, parents and pupils to constantly rediscover what it is to be a follower of Christ and continues the mission of the Gospels in it's work,

TARGETS	Very true	True but could improve	Lacking in this area	Not part of our school life
The school has a mission statement clearly rooted in the teachings of Christ				
All members of the school community are equally cherished				
The Christian way of life is reflected upon and emphasised at school assemblies				
Children are introduced to and allowed to experience ways of praying including guided reflections, periods of silence and participation in liturgies.				
The seasons of the Christian year are highlighted by appropriate and relevant celebrations in which all members of the school community are welcome participants.				
There are Christian symbols, prayer /sacred spaces in each classroom in our school. The children actively participated in the maintenance of these areas				

Facilitation Models:

The CSP has, following consultation with schools, suggested that each school choose a facilitation model for the drawing up of the Ethos Document.

The Education Act 1998: Section 15 states *“the Patron and Trustee of a school have the responsibility for determining the ethos of a school. The Board of Management is responsible for the upholding of the ethos”*

Facilitation Model: Option 1	
Principal	Teacher/s

Facilitation Model: Option 2			
Principal	One or two teachers	Member of Board of Management [other than principal]	Parent

Facilitation Model: Option 3	
Member of Board of Management [other than principal]	Teacher/s

Facilitation Model: Option 4
Any model which you feel may work best in the context of your school

What are the AIMS of the facilitation group?

["Characteristics" are explained in detail on Page 5]

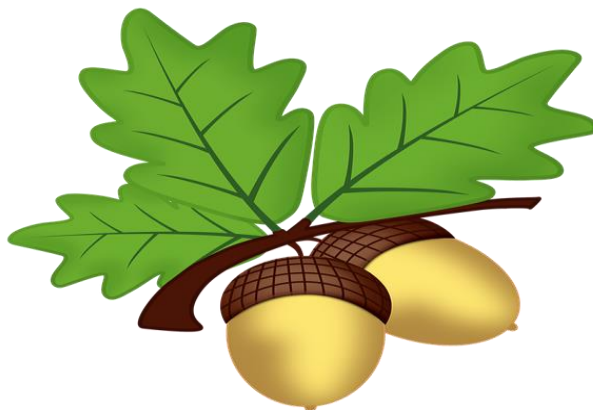
YEAR ONE: Launch the process; choose a facilitation model and complete the Ethos Reflection exercise; identify one of the five characteristics to reflect on and from within that characteristic select a target to bring to life in their school.

YEAR TWO : Complete the Ethos Reflection exercise for a different characteristic to that of year one, and identify a target from within that characteristic to bring to life in their school.

YEAR THREE: Complete the Ethos Reflection exercise for a different characteristic from year two and identify a target from within that characteristic to bring to life in their school.

YEAR FOUR: Complete the Ethos Reflection exercise for a different characteristic from year three, and identify a target from within that characteristic to bring to life in their school. .

YEAR FIVE & ONWARDS: Review progress to date; repeat the Ethos Reflection exercise; review the facilitation process; choose a facilitation model; identify one of the five characteristics and from within that characteristic select a target to bring to life in their school. The following years (six, seven and eight) will be a repeat of years two, three and four.



“Understanding and Living the Ethos in a Catholic Primary School: A Process Centred on Conversations”

“CONVERSATION”

Richard Stanley Peters “The Concept of Education”

“Conversation is not structured like a discussion group in terms of one form of thought or towards the solution of a problem.

In a conversation lecturing to others is bad form as is using remarks of others as springboards for self-display. The point of a conversation is to create a common world to which all will bring their distinctive contributions.

By participating in a shared experience much is learnt though no one sets out to teach anyone anything.

One of the things learnt is to see the world from the viewpoint of another whose perspective is very different.

To be able to take part in a real conversation is thus, of course an achievement. This is not possible without knowledge, understanding, objectivity and sensitivity.

Conversation is a learning situation, albeit of an informal kind.

However, a vast amount of learning takes place throughout life in such informal situations.



“Understanding and Living the Ethos in a Catholic Primary School: A Process Centred on Conversations “

This booklet was originally produced and distributed to the schools in Ferns Diocese in the first term of 2019 – 2020 with the sole intention of making it easier for schools to draw up their Ethos Policy. This updated version also contains a Religious Education Policy template [see Pages 15 to 25]

The original document as compiled by CSP was distributed to each school also in 2019. It may be accessed online at

Catholicschools.ie/useful publications/ Primary

Additional hard copies of the document may be obtained by contacting

Mr Ferdia Kelly,
Catholic Schools Partnership,
Columba Centre,
Maynooth,
Co. Kildare

Phone: (01) 505 3164

Email: office@catholicschools.ie



The CSP document contains excellent resources including Lesson Plans: Concrete suggestions for meeting each target: Checklists: a Glossary of terminologies used: Useful Publications and Resources.

In conclusion, we would once again we would like to acknowledge the excellent work done in the compilation of this document by the Catholic Schools Partnership, and particularly Mr. Ferdia Kelly. We would like to thank them for agreeing to the publication and distribution of this summary booklet for use by the Catholic Primary Schools in the Diocese of Ferns, and for their co-operation and support.

I would also like to acknowledge the support and advice received from Monsignor Joe McGrath, Fr. Pat Duffy, Michael Foley, Sean Furlong and Maureen Kavanagh and to express my gratitude to them for their guidance and painstaking proof reading of the original version [2019] of this summary booklet.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mairin Jackson".

Mairin Jackson, Diocesan Advisor for Primary Schools in Ferns Diocese.

TEMPLATE FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POLICY FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS IN FERNS DIOCESE

INTRODUCTION:

This policy has been formulated

by _____

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.

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

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 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.

ABOUT OUR CATHOLIC SCHOOL:

Our school is a Catholic school under the patronage of the bishop of Ferns, _____.

Our school is in the parish of _____.

The priests of the parish:

The chaplain:

The Religious Coordinator:

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

The members of the Board of Management:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____

[Please tick the relevant boxes]

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. *(A copy may be attached to this policy)*
- ☐ The Mission Statement for our school has been developed, is included with all welcome information for parents and staff and is regularly reviewed. *(A copy may be attached to this policy))*
- ☐ 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, Catholic Schools Week celebration, participation in masses celebrated by our Bishop with the children of Ferns Diocese.*
- ☐ Important Feast Days are celebrated throughout the Church Year
- ☐ All meetings in the school begin and end with prayer.
- ☐ 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 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* material 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 *{“Grow in Love” published by Veritas}* 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*) The following will help ensure that this can be achieved

- ☐ All teachers have a recognised qualification in religious education³

The following approved textbooks/workbooks are in use in the school.

Junior/Senior Infants

First/Second:

Third/Fourth:

Fifth/Sixth:

List any additional resources being used: *e.g. Journey to Confirmation, Come, Gather and Celebrate, Advent and Lenten Diocesan Resources, Catholic School Week Resources, Sacramental Workbooks*

- ☐ 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.

This is done by

³ The Certificate in Religious Studies

- ☐ 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
- ☐ 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 faith'⁵

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

⁵ Catechesi Tradendae 60

- ☐ 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

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

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 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

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 sacramen

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 reflect 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*)
- ☐ 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 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

I would like to thank Maeve Mahon, Diocesan Director of Catechetics in the Diocese of Kildare and Loughlin for her kind permission to adapt and use their Religious Education Policy.

Mairin Jackson, Diocesan Advisor, Ferns Diocese

NOTES

Ethos in a Catholic School

and Religious Education Policy Template

A booklet on which to base conversations and to facilitate the drawing up of a Catholic Ethos Policy for the Catholic Primary Schools in the Diocese of Ferns.

Compiled by Mairin Jackson, Primary DA, Ferns