



Diocese of Elphin

Post-Primary Religious Education Policy for Catholic Schools and Catholic Students in Other Schools serving the Parish Communities of the Elphin Diocese

1. Aim

The key aim of Post-Primary Religious Education for the Diocese of Elphin is to awaken Catholic students to faith as a lived relationship with Jesus Christ and to help them to deepen and strengthen that faith through reflective engagement with:

- (i) the knowledge
- (ii) the understanding
- (iii) the skills and
- (iv) the attitudes

which form the foundation of the various Religious Education Curricula approved by the Department of Education and Skills and Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference along with various Religious Education Programmes approved by the Diocese for special programmes and classes.

2. Religious Education in Catholic Schools

The Diocese of Elphin believes that the provision of a quality religious education is integral to an education of the whole person and, therefore, to Catholic Education and to the upholding of the characteristic spirit of every Catholic school. Consequently it calls on all Catholic schools to adopt the following key principles:

- 1) Designation of religious education as a core subject for all years.
- 2) All students to follow the Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus attentive to the *Guidelines for the Faith Formation and Development of Catholic*

Students: Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus (1999) and to sit the state examination in religious education.

- 3) All Senior Cycle students to be offered the opportunity to sit the Leaving Certificate Religious Education State examination.
- 4) All Senior Cycle students, not studying for the Religious Education Leaving Certificate examination, to follow the entire Department of Education and Skills Curriculum Framework for Senior Cycle, with attentiveness to the whole range of Learning Outcomes and the *Catholic Bishop's Conference framework document: Guidelines for the Faith Formation and Development of Catholic Students: Leaving Certificate Religious Education Syllabus. R.E. & A Curriculum Framework for Senior Cycle (2006)*
- 5) All students in special programmes and classes to follow religious education programmes approved by the Diocese for such programmes or classes.
- 6) The Diocese recognises and encourages attentiveness and support on the part of Boards of Management, Principals, Deputy Principals and Religious Education Departments / Teams to the many possibilities offered by both the Junior and Leaving Certificate Religious Education syllabi and approved programmes to contribute to the nurturing of every Catholic student's personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ through prayer, Sacred Scripture and the Sacraments.
- 7) Timetabling of three forty-minute periods or two one-hour periods of religious education per week at junior and senior cycle for all class groups.
- 8) Teachers of Religious Education to possess a qualification in religious education that satisfies the requirements of the Teaching Council and the Catholic Bishop of Elphin.
- 9) The wish of parents of other faith traditions and those of no faith tradition that their children be exempt from religious education is to be respected and reasonable accommodation made. The Diocese respectfully suggests that school communities, in keeping with the Education Act 1998 and in dialogue with Parents/ Guardians, provide such students with other means of advancing their spiritual and moral development during class periods dedicated to religious education.
- 10) Schools to consistently provide forms of assessment capable of providing evidence of junior and senior student learning and development using the Learning Outcomes of the syllabus as key assessment criteria.

- 11) Assessment outcomes to be reflected in reports to parents on a par with other subjects.
- 12) Inter-religious dialogue and dialogue with those of no faith tradition to be among the key skills developed based on knowledge and understanding of one's own faith tradition.
- 13) Uptake of Department of Education & Skills Religious Education in-service training and Diocesan in-service provision by all teachers who teach religious education.
- 14) An openness by the Religious Education Department/Team in each school to support and assistance from the Diocese of Elphin's Education Secretariat.
- 15) An openness by religious education teachers to the visiting of religious education classes by the Diocesan Advisor.

3. Religious Education of Catholic Students in other School Communities

At the request of Roman Catholic parents the Diocese of Elphin also appeals to other school communities serving Roman Catholic students to facilitate Catholic Students in having a quality religious education provision, respectful of their Catholic faith.

We ask schools who seek the affirmation and support of the diocese with regard to their provision for Catholic students to:

- 1) Time-table three forty-minute periods or two one-hour periods of Religious Education per week at junior and senior cycle levels¹.
- 2) Invite, facilitate and support all Catholic Students in following the Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus and to sit the State examination in religious education.
- 3) Facilitate and support all Catholic Senior Cycle students in following the entire Department of Education and Skills Curriculum Framework for

¹ i.e. in keeping with the spirit and provisions of Department of Education Circular 7/79, the Model Agreements of Designated Community Colleges, the Deeds of Trust of Community Schools, and the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference's Guidelines for the Faith Formation and Development of Catholic Students.

Senior Cycle, with attentiveness to the whole range of Learning Outcomes and to facilitate interested Catholic students in sitting the Leaving Certificate State examination in Religious Education

- 4) Facilitate all Catholic students in special programmes and classes to follow Religious Education Programmes approved by the Diocese for such programmes or classes.
- 5) Regularly review, through meetings of the Religious Education Team with the Principal and Deputy Principal, and through Board of Management meetings, how the many possibilities offered by both the Junior and Leaving Certificate Religious Education syllabi and approved programmes are contributing to the nurturing of every Catholic student's personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ through prayer, Sacred Scripture and the Sacraments.
- 6) Ensure that Teachers of Religious Education possess a qualification in Religious Education that satisfies the requirements of The Teaching Council and that they are adequately knowledgeable of the Roman Catholic Faith tradition.
- 7) Ensure that Teachers of Religious Education are knowledgeable of the content of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference *Guidelines for the Faith Formation and Development of Catholic students (Junior Certificate)*, 1999 and *(Leaving Certificate)* 2006.
- 8) Provide forms of assessment capable of providing evidence of junior and senior Catholic student learning and development using the Learning Outcomes of the syllabus as key assessment criteria.
- 9) Reflect assessment outcomes in reports to Catholic parents on a par with other subjects.
- 10) Facilitate inter-religious dialogue and dialogue with students of no faith tradition, i.e. with a view to developing the related skills based on knowledge and understanding of Catholic Student's own faith tradition.
- 11) Facilitate uptake of Department of Education & Skills Religious Education in-service training and Diocesan in-service provision by all teachers who teach Religious Education to Catholic students
- 12) Encourage an openness by the Religious Education Department / Team in each school to support and assistance vis-à-vis the religious education of Catholic students from the Diocese of Elphin's Education Secretariat.

- 13) Encourage an openness by religious education teachers of Catholic students to the visiting of religious education classes by the Diocesan Advisor.

4. Complementing The Religious Education of Catholic Students in All Schools

The Diocese of Elphin also appeals to all school communities serving Catholic students to complement their religious education provision by:

- (1) providing additional means and opportunities of assisting students move towards a deeper sense of God in their lives and greater maturity of faith, e.g. experiences of pilgrimage, school liturgical celebrations, school retreats, engagement with relevant outside agencies, testimonies of guest speakers etc..
- (2) encouraging religious education teachers and school chaplains to liaise with each other with a view to helping chaplains consolidate the school community's religious education provision and Catholic students' maturation in faith.
- (3) encouraging teachers of other subjects, as appropriate, to explore the Catholic understanding of the dignity of every human person and of community.
- (4) integrating opportunities to explore the Catholic understanding of the dignity of every human person and of community through the school's Pastoral Care provision.
- (5) providing students with opportunities for participation in local and global justice projects as a means of engaging with the Christian vision of social justice.
- (6) fostering in students a realisation of the significance of religious dialogue with those of other religious traditions and none, based on knowledge and understanding of one's own faith tradition and a mutual respect for other beliefs and worldviews.
- (7) providing students with vocational discernment opportunities relating to ministries in the service of the Catholic Church, e.g. the ordained ministry,

various lay ministries, e.g. Catechists, and the Religious (apostolic and contemplative) Life.

- (8) providing, with the support of local parishes and the Elphin diocese, opportunities for parents and guardians to become familiar with the school's Religious Education provision.
- (9) facilitating Junior and Senior cycle students in witnessing to their personal faith through experiences of ministry in social justice and peer leadership, e.g. participation of Catholic students in faith related Transition Year programmes and other programmes that provide Catholic students with opportunities to witness to one another.

5. Staffing and Resourcing of Religious Education of Catholic Students in All Schools

In order to maintain a high standard of religious education teaching the Diocese appeals to all Boards of Management and Principals to ensure that every Religious Education class is taught by a dedicated religious education teacher and that every teacher teaching religious education, at both junior and senior levels, has at a minimum a degree in religious education, catechetics and/or Catholic theology along with appropriate educational qualifications.

The Diocese also appeals to Principals to ensure that every teacher teaching Religious Education attends in-services organised by the Diocese, the Department of Education and Science, the Religion Teachers' Association of Ireland and any other appropriate in-service.

Furthermore the Diocese requests that each Religious Education Department/Team select a Department/Team Co-ordinator at the beginning of each academic year. The role of the Department/Team Co-ordinator is to oversee and promote the full implementation of the school's religious education policy.

The Diocese recommends that the Department/Team Co-ordinator work closely with and be accountable to the school's Senior Management. S/he is to facilitate and document team meetings, lead religious education subject planning, co-ordinate assessment and assist the team in undertaking regular evaluation. The role also involves liaising with the principal, chaplain and other staff members, student and parents' council and outside agencies, including the Elphin Diocesan Post-Primary Religious Education Advisor appointed by the Roman Catholic Bishop of Elphin to the school.

The Diocese also encourages school communities to provide adequate resources in terms of time and funding to provide for the teaching of Religious Education along with appropriate resources/prayer spaces/activities that complement the school's religious education programme.

5. Role of Diocesan Religious Education Advisor

In the Roman Catholic Church the role of oversight of the Religious Education of all Roman Catholic Post-Primary students is the responsibility of the local bishop, who in turn appoints a Diocesan Advisor in the exercise of this pastoral responsibility.

In light of this the Diocesan Advisor is to:

- (1) involve him/herself with the on-going resourcing and support of the mainstream syllabi for Religious Education, i.e. from a Roman Catholic perspective.
- (2) visit each school at least annually (following the norms set out in the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference 2013 publication *The Role of the Diocesan Advisor for Post Primary Religious Education* ²)
- (3) organise an annual in-service for the religious education teachers as recommended in *The Role of the Diocesan Advisor for Post Primary Religious Education*
- (4) participate in meetings, seminars, conferences etc. relating to Post-Primary Religious Education, e.g. such as the meetings of the National Association of Post-Primary Religious Education Advisors
- (5) participate in selection / interview boards for teachers of religion, i.e. as directed by the Bishop³
- (6) exercise an element of evaluation, i.e. in keeping with this policy statement, and
- (7) report annually to the following:
 - a. The Bishop

² Copies can be downloaded from Post-Primary Education section of the Elphin diocesan website: www.elphindiocese.ie/education/postprimary.

³ While undertaking this task, the Diocesan Advisor will conform to regulations governing such boards by, for example, the local ETB or the Community Schools concerned. Furthermore, the Diocesan Advisor will be mindful that he/she is the representative of the Catholic bishop on such boards.

- b. The Episcopal Vicar for Education
- (8) hold a briefing meeting, at least annually with
- a. The CEO of each school's Trust body, including those of ETB schools
 - b. The Board of Management and Principal of each school
 - c. The Religious Education Teachers and Chaplains of each school
 - d. The Clergy and Parish Pastoral Councils of the Parishes served by the School community
 - e. Parents (on request)

The Diocese also endorses the role of Diocesan Advisor as proposed in the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference 2013 publication *The Role of the Diocesan Advisor for Post Primary Religious Education* and considers it to be an integral part of the Church's support for and guidance of Post-Primary Religious Education for Roman Catholic pupils.

The Diocese also strongly encourages school communities, through Boards of Management, Principals, Chaplains and Religious Education Department / Team Leaders to recognise the Diocesan Advisor and Elphin Diocesan Education Secretariat as a Religious Education resource that can be drawn upon as need arises.

Signed:



Bishop of Elphin

Date:

15/10/2016

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