***Religious Education***

***Suggested Guidelines towards the Formulation of Religious Education Policy for Catholic Primary Schools***

***(Revised September 2017)***

***Diocesan Advisers for Religious Education in Primary Schools***

***Dublin Archdiocese***

**Aim of Religious Education**

The aim of Religious Education is to foster and deepen the children’s faith. People of faith perceive themselves and their world in a special way. Faith is active. As people of faith we are aware of God as a presence in our lives. We see things in relation to God. This awareness calls for a response. Our lives become a response to a compassionate and loving God. Faith is our response to God’s self-communication to us through revelation. God’s initiative is a gift, an invitation. The response we make is our choice, our decision. It is a response that no one can make on behalf of another, neither can it be forced from anyone. What is possible, however, is the creation of a context wherein people have the opportunity to become aware of God’s invitation, to hear God’s word and to explore how best they can respond in their own lives.

Faith is a personal act – the free response of the human person to the initiative of God who reveals himself. But faith is not an isolated act. No one can believe alone, just as no one can live alone. You have not given yourself faith as you have not given yourself life. The believer has received faith from others and should hand it on to others. Our love for Jesus and for our neighbour impels us to speak to others about our faith. Each believer is thus a link in the great chain of believers. I cannot believe without being carried by the faith of others, and by the faith I help support others in the faith.

*(Catechism of the Catholic Church, 166)*

The presence of God in our lives is revealed in a unique way through the person and teaching of Jesus Christ. Those involved in the Religious Education of children today are offered the same challenge which Jesus offered his followers:

An argument arose among them as to which one of them was the greatest. But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, and said to them, ‘Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest ‘ (Luke 9:46-48).

The Apostles judged who was the greatest according to a particular narrow set of values. Jesus, however, pointed out a different way of viewing the situation, which caused the Apostles to review their previously held judgements. He continually challenged the people who were with him to new perspectives. He viewed life from a particular viewpoint – God’s viewpoint.

***Extract from the Introduction to the Alive-O Programme***

**SUGGESTED GUIDELINES TOWARDS**

**THE FORMULATION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POLICY**

**FOR CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

1. **INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT**
* State how the policy was formulated and who was involved, e.g. Board of Management, Teachers, Chaplain, Parents, Special Needs Assistants, Ancillary Staff, Student Council etc...
1. **THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND PRIMARY EDUCATION**

**(Refer to CPSMA Handbook, Section 2)**

* How are staff led and supported in their faith development and the teaching of Religious Education?
* Is the Schedule for the Catholic School displayed in the welcome area in the school? How often is it referred to?
* Is the Mission Statement in place?
1. **AIM OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POLICY**
* State what the school will achieve by introducing this policy.
* Outline the whole school approach to the teaching of Religious Education and at class level.
* To assist all members of staff in the teaching of Religion.
* To affirm that the ethos of the school is built on Gospel values.
1. **GENERAL INFORMATION**
2. **Diocesan Information**
* Name of Archdiocese
* Name of Patron/Archbishop
* Name of Director of Education
1. **Parish Information**
* Name of Parish
* Name of Parish Priest
* Name of Chairperson of Parish Pastoral Council
* Name of Parish Pastoral Worker
1. **School Information**
* Name of Patron of School
* Name of Chaplain
* Names of Board of Management members
* Name of Religious Education Coordinator
1. **MATERIALS**
* The *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* is the foundation document for all Religious Education in Catholic primary schools.
* The *Grow in Love* and *Alive-O* programmes are the only programmes approved for use in Catholic primary schools in Ireland
* List the contents of the *Grow in Love* and *Alive-O* kits used in each class
* Does each teacher have his/her own complete kit? / login code for Grow in Love website?
* Are children using the textbooks from *Grow in Love*/*Alive-O*?
* Are children using the workbooks from *Grow in Love*/*Alive-O*?
* Do children bring these books home regularly?
* What day will children at all class levels bring home materials from the programme(s)?
* How and when are the Home Link pages for Fifth and Sixth Classes used?
* Does the school have a set of approved Bibles? (e.g. *Contemporary English Version*, the *Good News Bible*, *New Revised Standard Version* or *The Catholic Children’s Bible*)
* How are the Bibles timetabled for use in the school?
* Is there a set of *Grow in Love*/*Alive-O* posters available to each class teacher? Are the posters displayed around the school to enhance its Catholic identity?
* What additional resources are used? How are they sourced?
* How are additional Religious Education resources distributed and used?
* Are there suitable Religious Education reading resources for teachers (see *Bibliography*)?
* What provision for Religious Education is provided for children with Special Educational Needs?
1. **SYMBOLS**
* What symbols are on display to identify that the school is a Catholic school? e.g. is there a crucifix/ statue of Our Lady/ holy water font / a picture or statue of the school patron?
1. **PRAYER SPACE**
* What is the purpose of the Prayer Space?
* What provision is made for a Prayer Space in each classroom?
* Does your Prayer Space include an age appropriate Bible, a candle, a crucifix or cross and a statue of Our Lady?
* What provisions are made for a communal Prayer Space (ie. the school entrance hall, prayer garden, prayer rooms, oratory etc)?
* Who is responsible for the communal Prayer Space?
* Does the Prayer Space reflect the Liturgical Year and God's creation?
* How often is the Prayer Space changed?
* Do the children contribute to the Prayer Space?
* Does the Prayer Space reflect the children’s work on the current themes in *Grow in Love*/*Alive-O*?
1. **PRAYER**
* When do you pray as a whole school?
* When do you pray during the day as a class? (at assembly, in the morning, before and after meals, at midday, at home-time, incidentally, etc.)
* How do you pray? (aloud, silently, with actions, using on-line prayer space, through dance and song...)
* How are the children introduced to prayerful meditation?
* What formal prayers are recited during the school day? (cf.: *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (pp. 47, 59, 74, 94, 120; Formal Prayer at each level)
* How do you create a prayerful atmosphere (lighting a candle, use of music, focus on religious image, reverencing the Bible)?
1. **SACRAMENTAL PREPARATION**
2. **General**
* How do teachers ensure that sacramental preparation is an ongoing process from Junior Infants to Sixth Class?
* How are staff selected and supported for the role of teaching sacramental classes?
* How are parents helped towards a deeper understanding of the sacraments?
* How are parents encouraged to guide their children on their faith journey?
* How will the school support and encourage the ongoing reception of the sacraments?
* What is the policy concerning student dress at the celebration of First Penance/Reconciliation/Confession, Eucharist and Confirmation?
* What is the policy regarding numbers attending the Sacraments of Eucharist for the first time and Confirmation?
1. **Sacrament of Penance /Reconciliation/Confession**
* Which term, Penance or Reconciliation or Confession will be used throughout the school?
* How do you highlight to parents that preparation for the Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation/Confession is a two-year programme?
* How are on-line liturgical planning resources ([www.growinlove.ie](http://www.growinlove.ie)) utilised?
* What format will the children learn for Rite 1 of the Sacrament of Penance/Reconciliation/Confession?
* What prayers are the children expected to memorise as part of their preparation for receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
1. **Sacrament of Eucharist**
* Which term, receiving Holy Communion or Eucharist will be used throughout the school?
* How do you highlight to parents that preparation for receiving Eucharist for the first time is a two-year process?
* What values are emphasised as the children prepare to receive Eucharist for the first time?
* How are on-line liturgical planning resources ([www.growinlove.ie](http://www.growinlove.ie)) utilised?
* Has your school considered the Archdiocese policy document on *First Communion and First Reconciliation 2012*?
* Are the children involved in parish-based preparation programmes?
* What prayers are the children expected to memorise as part of their preparation for receiving the Sacrament of Eucharist?
1. **Sacrament of Confirmation**
* Are children using the *Alive-O* sacramental workbook from the *Alive-O* programme as a method of recording their faith journey?
* What prayers are the children expected to memorise as part of their preparation for receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation?
* Can the children name the Gifts/Fruits and Symbols of the Holy Spirit?
* What values are emphasised in the preparation for Confirmation?
* How are the pupils encouraged to be witnesses to their faith as individuals/community in preparation for and celebration of Confirmation?
* What provision is made for continuation of faith formation for children who have been confirmed?
* How are the children brought to an understanding of the significance of the pledge?
* How are parents involved in the preparation of pupils for Confirmation?
1. **IMPLEMENTATION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL YEAR**
* What time of the day is Religion taught in each class throughout the school?
* Does each member of staff have a recognised Certificate in Religious Studies?
* How are Religious Education and Ethos integrated with other areas of the curriculum?
* What is to be memorised by the children? (*For Memorisation* in *Grow in Love*; The *Questions & Answers, Now We Know* and *To be Learned* sections of the *Alive-O7* and *Alive-O 8* Programme)
* How are the various feast days celebrated throughout the year?
* What arrangements are made for the Chaplain’s /Parish Pastoral Worker’s visits to the school?
* How is missionary awareness highlighted, e.g. through charities such as *Trócaire, Children Helping Children* and other agencies?
* How is social justice awareness highlighted, e.g. through charities such as the *Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Trócaire, Focus Ireland* and other agencies?
* Are school retreats organised for specific class groups in your school?
* What arrangements are in place to provide in-service in Religious Education to all staff?
* How are the partners in education in your school community informed of and encouraged to attend the annual school Mass organised by the Archdiocese?
* How does your school engage with Catholic Schools' Week?

**11. PARTNERS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

1. **Home/School**
* How does the school involve parents in their children’s Religious Education?
* Is there a weekly Religious Education link with the home?
* What opportunities do parents have to prayer services, assemblies and/or Mass during the school day?
* What prayers are sent home as they are being taught?
* What arrangements are in place to ensure that each child has a copy of the relevant workbook/book and/ or journal for RE?
1. **School/Parish**
* What programmes are implemented in your parish for:
	+ First Eucharist? (e.g. *Do This In Memory*)
	+ Confirmation? (e.g. *Confirming our Children, You Shall Be My Witnesses*)
* If these programmes are in use, how are they coordinated between the relevant partners, home, school and parish?
* How are children encouraged to actively participate in the life of the parish?
1. **PUPILS OF OTHER FAITHS AND NONE**
* Have you consulted the Catholic Schools Partnership document: *Catholic Primary Schools in a Changing Ireland* (2015)?
* How are children of other faiths included in the teaching of the *Grow in Love*/*Alive-O* programmes and prayers?
* What are the procedures in place for pupils of other faiths and none during RE time?
1. **ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES**
* Will a staff meeting period be allocated to formulating a Religious Education Policy?
* When will the Religious Education Policy be compiled?
* Who will take responsibility for writing/collating the policy?
* What provisions are made for selecting an R.E. representative? (See Appendix 1)
1. **REVIEW**
* How often do you review the Religious Education Policy?
* Who will review the RE policy?
1. **RATIFICATION & COMMUNICATION**
* When will the Religious Education Policy be presented to the Board of Management?
* How will the Religious Education Policy be communicated to all staff?

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**APPENDIX 1: THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COORDINATOR IN THE CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOOL**

The principal of a Catholic school has overall responsibility for maintaining and strengthening the Catholic ethos of the school. A Religious Education Coordinator should be appointed to support the principal in this role.

The aim is that the Religious Education Coordinator will facilitate the work of the principal and the staff as they strive to enhance the Catholic ethos and charism of the school.

The role of the Religious Education Coordinator should be informed by the fundamental tasks of catechesis *(General Directory for Catechesis, 85-86)*:

* Promoting knowledge of the Catholic faith
* Liturgical education
* Moral formation
* Teaching to pray
* Education for community life
* Missionary initiation

Suggested Role:

* To facilitate the formulation of the Religious Education Policy
* To organise the distribution and collection of all necessary resources, e.g. full *Grow in Love*/*Alive-O* kit, Bibles for senior classes etc…
* To avail of the resources on www.education.dublindiocese.ie
* To facilitate the prayer life of the school throughout the liturgical year, e.g prayer at assemblies, special feast days etc…
* To encourage the use of prayer spaces in classrooms and in school common areas, and to ensure the prominence of religious symbols and icons.
* To provide input on Religious Education at staff meetings, in order to maintain a conscious profile of the subject.
* To facilitate links with chaplains and parish personnel.
* To enable parents to take an active role in the Religious Education and formation of their children, e.g. use of home-links in *Grow in Love*/*Alive-O.*
* To liaise with Diocesan Advisers
* To distribute resources throughout the Liturgical Year.