

## **Religious Education & Faith Development Policy**

In this document the Board of Management sets out the policy of the school regarding Faith Development & Religious Education in accordance with the founding intention of Catherine McAuley.

This is a Roman Catholic School, founded in 1900, by the Sisters of Mercy. It is run according to the norms for Catholic education outlined in many Church documents. Entwined with the theology and philosophy of Catholic education is the educational philosophy of the Sisters of Mercy as handed down by Catherine McAuley and developed by succeeding Sisters of Mercy and their colleagues.

Catherine McAuley lived from the end of the eighteenth to middle of the nineteenth century. She recognised a two-pronged need in the educational world of her day. In a time before compulsory education she recognised that the dignity of the human person demanded that all children be educated; she also believed in the right of Catholic children to be educated in their own faith tradition, and in the inherent excellence of Catholic education as practised in Ireland since early monastic times.

She committed herself to founding schools which would be centres of excellence and she adopted the very best educational methods known in the world of her time. To this end she went abroad to visit schools that were renowned for the quality of the education they provided. She also planned the religious education programme with her own maxim in mind that:

We should fit children for heaven without unfitting them for earth.

It is therefore in this entwined tradition – Catholicism and Mercy – that this school is managed and run.

*The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Millennium, The Mercy Philosophy of Education* and the *Deed of Variation 1998* (which is the legal underpinning of Catholic Education) are available for perusal from the Principal of the School.

### **Relationship to School's Mission Statement**

Reflecting the founding intention, the Board of Management has ratified the following mission statement, drawn up collaboratively with the staff and the Parents' Council.

\_\_\_\_\_ School is a community which is proud of its Catholic tradition as handed down by the Sisters of Mercy. We are committed to developing each child's full potential in a positive, supportive and Christian environment. We invite everyone to participate and we urge everyone to contribute.

### **Religious Education**

Religious Education in a Catholic school has two main dimensions:

#### **1. Religious Knowledge & Faith Development**

The children are led to know about God and to know God.

#### **Religion**

Any universally acknowledged Religion is generally accepted to have six elements:

- Its founding story
- Its doctrines

- Its rituals
- Its morality
- Its community aspect
- An experiential element

### ***Aims***

The programme aims to encourage:

- Belief in God and in the person of Jesus Christ as portrayed in the Bible
- An understanding of doctrine
- The practice of prayer and worship
- Moral growth
- The development of community spirit [which implies caring for the other, recognising the uniqueness and dignity of each person, the sacredness of life, our welcoming of the stranger, etc.]
- The experience of God through prayer, through the recognition of the world as God's creation and through the circumstances of daily life.

### ***Faith Development***

We carefully plan for the development of the inner life of the child through creativity, imagination, an appreciation of our world and a sense of wonder.

This inner growth lays the basis for helping children with:

- faith in their ability to develop a personal relationship with God;
- faith in the doctrines of the Catholic Church in which they have been baptised and an awareness of the mysteries of faith;
- the development of a personal prayer life and an understanding of the importance of communal worship.

This growth in the understanding and faith informs their willingness to share, to make sacrifices for others and to act in a morally appropriate way.

## **CONTENT OF THE POLICY**

### ***The Programme***

The Board of Management and the teachers have adopted the Alive-O Catechetical Programme approved and recommended by the Irish Hierarchy for use in Catholic Schools.

The programme assists our aims in an age-appropriate progression through the school.

There are eight separate programmes presented in a child's book and a teacher's manual for the classes from Junior Infants to Sixth class.

The programme incorporates the recommended approach to religious education for the reception of the sacraments of Penance, Holy Communion and Confirmation, which is undertaken by the school in close co-operation with parents and parish.

The programme is studied each day for one half-hour. A Catholic ethos, however, permeates the school day and the life of the school.

### ***Whole School Dimension of Religious Education Programme***

As well as the programme, which is taught in each class, there are many aspects of religion, which are undertaken by the whole school together.

The Management and Staff and sometimes the children decide on appropriate and

meaningful icons, pictures and statues to display throughout the school building and in An Lár. These speak of people, events and ideas with which children can identify or through which they can be led to some new understanding of God.

### **Prayer & Worship**

The school community is given the opportunity to share prayerful reflection and a sense of awe and wonder at the presence of God in daily life.

The major Catholic and local feasts are celebrated in this spirit. They are also marked with the aid of signs and symbols displayed throughout the school.

- Advent – the Advent wreath and Jesse tree,
- Christmas – tree and crib,
- Feast of St Brigid – traditional crosses,
- Feast of St Patrick – depiction of story & shamrock,
- Lent – symbols of repentance and ashes,
- Easter – symbols of the new life of resurrection, the empty tomb,
- Pentecost – artistic depiction of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Liturgical and paraliturgical celebrations are held in common on some occasions e.g.

- The opening and closing of the school year;
- Some of the above feasts,
- Mercy Day,
- Carol service at Christmas,
- Blessing of Ashes,
- Times of trauma or crisis,

And for other occasions which from time to time are considered appropriate to celebrate or to mark.

### **Community Building**

We try to ensure that all children feel safe within the school community and feel that they belong; we also aim to ensure that all children understand that each one has the same right to have his/her opinions heard as any other.

A sense of togetherness and solidarity among the school community is fostered through, e.g.

- assemblies being held by the Principal or organised by other teachers in their turn
- our Green Flag initiative
- School Council
- Sports Day
- School Concerts
- celebrating achievements of the pupils
- celebrating diversity

### **Collaboration**

The Catholic education offered here informs and permeates the whole atmosphere and ethos of the school.

It is conducted in collaboration with the children's parents and the local parish. In all matters pertaining to the education of the children and especially in religious education we acknowledge the primacy of the place held in this process by the parents or guardians of the children. We see our role as being supportive of the role of parents and parish.

### ***Spiritual Formation of Teachers***

The spiritual nourishment of teachers is understood by the Board of Management

to be an integral part of the religious education programme undertaken by the school. The Board of Management is committed to supporting such events.

### ***Religion in Relation to Admission Policy***

Subject to the terms of the admission policy children of any faith or of no faith are welcome to this school. Each child is welcome to attend and benefit from the Catholic religious education programme. However, if parents have difficulty with this the Principal shall meet with them to see if an accommodation can be reached.

The school cannot, however, undertake to educate children of other faiths in their own faith, nor can it provide supervision during the religious education period apart from the class.

Where parents agree and see value in it, children who are not Catholic are welcome to participate in the Religious Education Programme and prayer life of the school.

### ***Methodologies used to achieve aims –***

- Study of the Alive O Cathetical Programme Manual
- Interactive learning
- Giving the children prayer experiences that are meaningful
- Sacramental and non-sacramental liturgies
- Use of imagination in prayer
- Drama and role play on the theme of Christian values
- Vocal prayer.

### ***Success Criteria for the Programme***

- There is an acknowledged sense of God, Faith, Prayer and Worship within the school community
- There is an ordered community where respect for all is evident at all times
- There is an outward-looking care for the less fortunate in society
- Recognisable links between Parish/Home/School
- Children can speak confidently of their faith.

### ***Responsibility for Implementing this Policy***

The Board of Management in consultation with the Principal, all staff and our school chaplain are responsible for facilitating the smooth implementation of the policy. The teachers teach the programme appropriate to their class. All members of staff and all within the school community are expected to actively support the spirit and ethos of the school.

### ***Roles within the General Responsibility***

#### **Board of Management**

- Initiates, approves and resources the policy
- Includes in a Post of Responsibility duties relating to Religious Education and Faith development
- Clearly understands and supports the role of the Chaplain/Parish.

#### **Teachers**

- Inform themselves through studying the Teachers' Manual
- Deliver the programme
- Co-operate with the Chaplain/Parish and the Diocesan Advisers
- Avail themselves of the in-service support.

**Parents**

Co-operate and support the school in its efforts, especially at times of sacramental preparation and at other school events to which they are invited. They are also asked to help with religious education homework and to read the parts of the Alive-O Programme that are intended for them.

**Principal**

- Takes an active role in encouraging the whole school aspects of the programme and monitors progress throughout the school
- The Principal facilitates the inclusion of *Faith Development* as a topic for staff and Board meetings
- Liaises with the school chaplain in defining the role of the chaplaincy and the parish in the life of the school
- Helps to facilitate supportive interaction of all parties in implementing the programme.

**Timeframe for Implementation**

This policy will be implemented as soon as it is approved by the Board of Management.

**Timeframe for Evaluation/Review**

It will be evaluated and reviewed one year after implementation and thereafter on a regular basis.

**Responsibility for Review**

The Board of Management will initiate the review of the policy.

**Approval and Communication**

The policy is approved by the Board of Management and forwarded to the Trustees. It is available for perusal by the parents.

## 2. Teaching the Programme

**Content**

The content of the programme is set out in each teacher's manual, which may also be viewed by consulting the Principal. The curriculum is spiral and aims at deepening both knowledge and faith development in each succeeding year. The aim of religious education is to foster and deepen the children's faith.

**Aims of the Programme as laid out in stages for each class group**

<b>Junior/ Senior Infants</b>	Introduction to prayer and the story of Jesus
<b>First/ Second Class</b>	Building on Infant Programme & Sacramental preparation.
<b>Third/Fourth Class</b>	Exploring faith development & consolidation of previous work
<b>Fifth/ Sixth Class</b>	Sacramental preparation and looking at Catholic Religion in relation to other religions.