



# **Religious Education & Faith Formation Policy**

## **Meán Scoil Mhuire Longford**

**Chairperson:** Mr. John McGovern

**Principal:** Mrs. A. Mulrennan

**Date:** 9<sup>th</sup> October 2019

## **SCHOOL POLICY ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

### **(FAITH FORMATION)**

#### **Our mission statement:**

Meán Scoil Mhuire is a voluntary Secondary Catholic School. It is a centre for the holistic formation of girls and young women.

#### **Aims**

- We respect the dignity of each person with her unique background, talents, traditions and beliefs.
- We provide a pleasant disciplined atmosphere in which students can grow spiritually, morally, academically, socially and culturally.
- We expose all to a rich cultural heritage and help them to acquire the knowledge and skills, which enables them to understand, appreciate and respect themselves, others and their environment.
- We foster positive Christian values and self-esteem so that our students leave school with a sense of self-worth and self-esteem and are well equipped for the challenges of life.
- We encourage partnership at all levels between the management, staff, parents, students and the local community.
- Meán Scoil Mhuire has not only a highly respected academic tradition, we also develop creativity, leadership and social skills by promoting involvement in extra-curricular activities.

#### **Introduction:**

A Catholic school, of its very nature, exists as a faith community and faith development is a process through which this community deepens its Christian life. Spiritual and moral development cannot be relegated to the realm of Religious Education only but are nurtured by the whole curriculum. Each member of the school community has a responsibility to live in a way that witnesses to the Gospel so that faith permeates all aspects of our school life.

*“Faith is not simply the subject matter of particular lessons but forms the foundation of all that we do and the horizon of all that takes place in the school.” (Vision '08)*

#### **School vision:**

Our school vision is inspired by The Sisters of Mercy who promoted education through justice and freedom. We strive to:

- (a) To commit our energies and resources to promoting the dignity and liberation of all, particularly women and children.

To seek to challenge unjust systems and structures in all that we do and are

### **Rationale:**

The rationale of the Faith Formation Policy /Religious Education Policy of Meán Scoil Mhuire is based on the CEIST Charter the characteristic spirit of Catherine Mc Cauley and the educational philosophy of Mercy Sisters

This policy will articulate this school's commitment to its Catholic ethos and to the religious and moral development of our students. It will ensure that in striving to achieve academic excellence, this school will also provide holistic education and spiritual formation that each student may learn to live in solidarity with other persons in search of the common good.

### **Scope of the Policy**

Scope of the Policy: This policy will impact on students, staff, parents and the local parish, as we strive to create a faith community in which Gospel values ensure a culture of good relationships, sensitive to the needs of each person and to the common good. Faith formation is the responsibility of the whole school community

### **Aims of the policy:**

- To contribute to the religious formation and faith development of our students and to their spiritual and moral development.
- To encourage all members of the school community in their search for truth and in seeking answers to the fundamental questions about the meaning of life.
- To nourish the life of students, staff and parents as they work together for the common good, respecting each other's rights and the carrying out responsibilities in a manner which promotes the spiritual development of each person, achieves quality in teaching and learning, creates a sense of community and is founded on compassion and justice.
- To allow each member of the school community to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, which will give meaning and purpose to their lives.
- To articulate this school's commitment to its Catholic ethos and to the religious and moral development of our students. It will ensure that in striving to achieve academic excellence, this school will also provide holistic education and spiritual formation that each student may learn to live in solidarity with other persons in search of the common good. Goals:
- To promote awareness of the reality that faith formation belongs to the whole school community.
- To support and encourage parents in exercising their responsibility for their child's spiritual growth and faith formation in partnership with the school and their parish communities.

- To develop a sense of the presence of God in the lives of our students.
- To provide the framework for a school faith community which will enable its students to become catalysts for social transformation.

### **The aim of religious education in our school**

- (1) To contribute to the spiritual development of our students in a safe and caring learning environment.
- (2) To foster within our students as part of their role in the Kingdom of God, care for others, mutual co-operation, equality, respect for truth a passion for justice and a love of learning.
- (3) To provide opportunities to deepen sacramental awareness.
- (4) To encourage our students to ask and seek answers to important questions about the meaning of life

### **Rationale**

As a Mercy School we are committed to following the founding vision of Catherine McAuley. Our desire as her followers, is to tell her story, where her story which will inspire and challenge all those who are part of our school community. We do this through our commitment to providing a holistic education for the girls and women of our time.

### **Rationale of Junior Cycle Religious Education- Links to the Statements of Learning:**

<b>The statement</b>	<b>Examples of relevant learning</b>
The student creates, appreciates and critically interprets a wide range of texts ( <i>written, audio, music, tactile, electronic and digital</i> ).	Students will engage with a wide range of texts in narrative and aesthetic forms and explore the meaning that people assign to certain religious texts
The student has an awareness of personal values and an understanding of the process of moral decision-making.	Students will identify the values underpinning moral decisions and gain an understanding of how moral decision-making works in their own lives and the lives of others
The student appreciates how diverse values, beliefs and traditions have contributed to the communities and culture in which she/he lives.	Students will research different communities of faith within Ireland today and also examine how Christianity has contributed to Irish culture and heritage.
The student values what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in local and wider contexts.	Students will learn about issues of concern to them and the wider world and be challenged to consider how their response in local and wider contexts can contribute to creating a more just and sustainable world.
The student values local, national and international heritage, understands the importance of the relationship between past and current events and the forces that drive change.	Students will learn how religious traditions and beliefs have evolved over time and consider the influence of religion on events, people and society and the influence of these on religion.
The student takes action to safeguard and promote her/his wellbeing and that of others.	Students will consider how their values, decisions and actions impact on their own wellbeing and the wellbeing of others, extending to planet Earth.

## **Curriculum, Facilities and Resources**

**Curriculum-**At Junior Certificate level Religious Education is an examinable subject taken up by the vast majority of students and it is offered as an option at Leaving Certificate level. There are currently three religious education classes per week.

At our school students follow the NCCA syllabus for religious education, assisted by the Catholic Bishops Conference Guidelines on Religious Education for Catholic Schools.

In following the new Junior Cycle course first year students are currently using the ‘A World of Beliefs’ text book published by Folens. At Leaving Certificate level non exam teachers use individual resources when planning. While Leaving Cert academic students use the Veritas books.

(Please see Religion plan 2019-2020 for detailed breakdown)

**Facilities and Resources-**All classrooms contain whiteboards, some are interactive, others have computer access and projectors. This resource is valuable in the teaching of religious education.

There is a specially designated oratory which is widely used by students, staff and the religious education department.

A religious education resource locker is available where we store resources such as workbooks, c.ds, videos, other religious texts, art materials.

It is the policy of our school to keep all students within class during class time. Parents/guardians who wish students to opt out of religious education, are requested to meet with the Principal to discuss the matter.

The Religious education department is supported by management by being facilitated to meet, given a budget for the department for the purchase of resources and there is an open door policy with regard to ongoing needs of the department including retreats, trips etc.

Religious educators also participate in on-going training and CPD.

**Local Priest-**The religious education department is assisted in their work by the local priest, Fr. Michael, who offers support and encouragement to management, staff and students. He also conducts the school’s liturgies throughout the year.

### **Sacred Space-**

A distinctive feature in our Catholic school is our oratory. The space is decorated to reflect changing liturgical calendar and it contains sacred scripture.

### **Religious Imagery**

Religious imagery and symbols are integral to our catholic school. These images and symbols are prominent around the school. The religious images include: imagery in each room consisting of crucifix/painting. We display Advent, Christmas and Easter displays on our notice board.

### **Chaplaincy Services**

The school's chaplain's role (not full time) is to

- Encourage School-Parish links
- Facilitate implementation of the Liturgical Calendar
- Support the RE department
- Liaise with key staff (Re Co-ordinator, Year Heads, Tutors, Guidance Counsellor etc.)

### **Retreats**

Retreats are an area to be developed more in the academic year 2019/2020. The RE department understands that the role of retreats is to provide an opportunity for students to deepen their understanding of the content of RE by engaging in creative activities, group discussion, meditation and prayer.

The RE team plan to look at what group(s) would benefit most from retreats and whether the school/BOM will contribute to the cost.

### **Diocesan Support**

The Diocesan Advisor (Fr. Turlough Baxter) visits the school once a year to meet with the Religious Education team. We keep in regular contact with him via email, phone calls etc.

### **Inclusion of Students of Other Faith or no faith traditions**

All faiths are welcome to Mean Scoil Mhuire. By way of encouraging and supporting the religious and spiritual development of students from other faiths, we ask that they educate the class on various customs and traditions that they partake in.

Meán Scoil Mhuire respects and acknowledges the rights of parents who require their daughter to be excluded from Religious Education. The manner in which such an 'opt out' is facilitated is related to available resources within the school and complies with the school's policies on curriculum, supervision and child safe guarding.

Parents are informed that in opting out of this subject, students are not taking it as a Junior Cycle subject and are 'down' one subject.

An appropriate procedure to facilitate a request for withdrawal from RE is as follows:

1. A written notification from the parent/s to the principal.
2. The principal meets with the parent/s
3. The ethos and policy of the school is explained and the options above are given to parent/s.
4. Options provided for students when a request for 'opt out' from RE is made include:
  - a) Parents remove their daughter from the school premises for the duration of RE.
  - b) Staying within the classroom following an appropriate activity. Students of other faiths are required to use the time to study something relating to their own religious tradition such as a sacred text. Students of other world views

may read a philosophical text pertaining to ethics/values, the search for meaning etc.

### **Staffing**

The teaching of religious education should be conducted by suitably qualified teachers with a specific qualification in religious education/theology.

The role of re co-ordinator rotates on an ad hoc basis between members of the RE department, and can be shared between two members of staff. This role involves co-ordinating the groups who will work on the opening year and graduating liturgies, a contact person for management and other interested parties and the religious education department, convening and taking the minutes of departmental meetings and facilitating the use of resources.

The RE department meets at least once a term, the aims of these meeting is to co-ordinate the work of the department, to assist the sharing of resources and for pedagogical planning.

New members of the staff are introduced to the department when a meeting of the religion department is held at the start of the school. If a teacher joins the department later in the year, an introductory meeting is held to welcome them.

Margaret King and Aileen Devaney are sharing the role at present.

The role of the Religious Education Co-ordinator(s) is to:

- Establish and overlook the subject plan for each year level
- Liaise with management re liturgical celebrations
- Organize meetings with the Religion department
- Inform about In service
- Implement and review the plan treating it as a living document.

### **Subject Teachers:**

Ms. Anita Griffin  
Ms. Aisling Kilcline  
Ms. Aileen Devaney  
Ms. Clare Macko  
Ms Joanna Ross  
Ms Annette Mc Manemy  
Ms Margaret King

### **Liturgy**

We celebrate the opening of each new school year with a Eucharistic celebration in our local church, St. Mel's Cathedral, with the support of the local clergy.

During the school year we have a liturgy for Mercy Day, a carol service, Lenten activities and the graduation mass in the final weeks of the year.

The liturgical seasons are celebrated and promoted by the religious education department

The celebration of Mercy Day in September is a key part of the handing on of the Mercy story to our students. All year groups are involved in Mercy Day as they are encouraged to promote the good works of the sisters. Each student makes a voluntary contribution to the local Hospice group to encourage this. It is usual for class time to be freed up on Mercy Day. It is fully supported by all members of the staff and is facilitated by management.

We also celebrate a variety of feast days during the year within the classroom for example St. Brigid's Day

All members of staff are encouraged to participate in any way appropriate in liturgical celebrations i.e. At the planning stage. Members of staff who are Ministers of the Eucharist, readers, singers, musicians, are encouraged to take part in these celebrations.

The religious education department keeps other departments up to date on liturgical celebrations during the year at staff meetings. All staff meetings commence with a prayer usually said by the school Principal and many subject teachers may also begin class with a prayer.

### **Extra Curricular Activities/ Outreach Programmes that aid Teaching and Learning**

As a religion Department we provide students with a broad range of curricular, co-curricular and extra- curricular learning opportunities. They are meeting the LAOS framework expectations as examples of highly effective practice as they engage students in a meaningful way. These activities are also reflective of the CEIST ethos and enable students to meet their full potential.

- Opening of the school year. Whole school mass in September.
- Mercy Day 24<sup>th</sup> September.
- Christmas Carol Concert.
- Ash Wednesday Services.
- Sacrament of Penance available during Lent.
- An oratory available for Reflection/ Prayer Service.
- St Vincent De Paul Christmas hampers collected for and arranged.
- 'Christmas Child' Shoe Box appeal organised within the school.
- 'Trocaire' Boxes for Lent.
- 'Trad Sessions for Trocaire' during October.
- Other fundraising done throughout the school and year.
- Student's involvement in the local Parish Holy Hour.
- Liaising with local priests and parish council in relation to:
  - Eucharistic Ministers
  - Ministers of the Word
  - Other Liturgical services
- Alpha Course.
- Legion of Mary.
- John Paul II Awards.
- AC Youth.
- Prayer services/Masses with local Sisters of Mercy.
- Linking with Dev. Ed. Programme /Green Schools.

Students are conscious of local and global problems that exist. Fundraising for various charities takes place annually. Other projects to fundraise for local needs take place throughout the year also. TY students now partake in the Alpha course.

### **Guest presentations**

Guest presentations must be in accordance with the Catholic ethos of the school and adhere to the school's visitor policy.

### **Parental and Parish Involvement**

There is an opportunity for parents to be involved about the content of the Religious Education programme through:

- Enrolment meeting with parents
- Parent teacher meetings
- First year and transition year information night
- Parents can access school website for information relating to RE
- Parents are actively involved and invited to liturgical services including opening of the school year mass, graduation mass, carol service
- Parish clergy are encouraged to link with the school.
- The Legion of Mary representatives frequently come to say the Rosary with the students.

### **Role of Management**

The role of management is to facilitate and support the central role of religious education in our school as outlined in this document. This includes:-

- (a) Allocating an appropriate budget to the department.
- (b) The continued banding of senior cycle religion.
- (c) Supporting our school ethos.
- (d) Supporting liturgical celebrations including Mercy Day.
- (e) Upkeep and maintenance of the oratory.

### **Links with Other Policies**

- School Visitors Policy
- Child Protection Policy
- RSE Policy

### **Policy Monitoring and Timeframe**

At the end of each academic year the religious department meet to evaluate the success of the policy implementation. This policy was ratified by the Board of Management in October 2019 and is reviewed on a regular basis.