



LORETO COLLEGE, ST. STEPHEN'S GREEN **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POLICY**

1. Rationale

“Loreto Stephen’s Green is a Catholic Voluntary Secondary School in the Loreto tradition. As a Catholic school, the person of Jesus Christ is at the heart of our community and Gospel values permeate the whole school experience as reflected in our mission statement”¹. The distinctive philosophy of Loreto Stephen’s Green emerges from the vision and insight of Mary Ward. “Mary Ward’s core values of justice, freedom, sincerity, truth and joy are central to the spirituality of the school”.² Education in this school is a holistic and person-centred endeavour. Priority is given to the integration of the spiritual, physical, intellectual, moral and emotional development of the individual student. Religious Education is regarded as central to this philosophy.

2. Context

There are varying levels of faith experience and faith commitment in our school reflecting the wider cultural context of the Church in Ireland today.

3 Aims of R.E. in the School

“The general aim of Religious Education is to awaken people to faith and to assist them in its development”³. The fundamental principles governing the Religious Education of students in this school may be stated as follows.

Religious Education:

- Contributes to the revelation and communication of God’s love.
- Invites the student to respond to God with love and gratitude through a variety of experiences including prayer, liturgy and outreach.
- Embraces those with special education needs.
- Respects the student as a person and engages with her personal and social development.
- Encourages the student to ask the key questions humankind has always asked.
- Deepens the appreciation and understanding of the Catholic tradition.
- Fosters and deepens the student’s faith.
- Contributes to the student’s religious and moral development.
- Helps the student tell her own story and the story of her Faith Community.

¹ Kolkata Education Guidelines (India: IBVM, 2003). p1.

² Kolkata Education Guidelines, p2.

³ A Syllabus for the Religious Education of Catholic Pupils in Post-Primary Schools, (Dublin: Veritas 1982), p4.

- Promotes open, mutually respectful and inclusive attitudes among students of different social, ethnic and religious backgrounds and highlights ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue as an essential feature of modern Christianity.
- Facilitates authenticity, commitment and responsibility on the part of the student and the teacher.
- Recognises the whole school, whole community nature of Religious Education.
- Acknowledges its intergenerational character.
- Values the partnership between home, school, parish and Loreto tradition.
- Promotes hospitality, generosity, compassion, justice, respect and peace.

4 A- Curriculum: Aims

Junior classes are following the State Syllabus for Religious Education.

This approach promotes religious development in an academic content provides a concrete knowledge base and gives students a tangible goal on a par with other disciplines. The reader of this policy is referred to its stated aims.

We are aware that the State Syllabus in R.E. is non-confessional and is built around a framework of knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes. “The Syllabus does encourage and support the students in their reflections on their experiences of religion and their commitments to particular religious traditions but cannot and does not examine personal faith and practice”⁴. Both can be fostered in the interactions in the Religious Education classroom and in the prayer life of the school. Every effort is made to provide students with opportunities to integrate theology with life experience and to engage in creative liturgical celebrations.

As a Catholic school we are guided in our teaching by a publication of the Irish Catholic Bishop’s Conference, ‘Guidelines for the Faith Formation and Development of Catholic Students studying the State Syllabus. In this document, nine additional aims of a faith formational approach to the syllabus are cited.

As a result of studying the syllabus, students will be enabled:

- To become aware of their own identity and worth as human beings who are created in the image of God and are in need of redemption from sin.
- To develop an awareness of the spiritual dimension of human life, of the mystery of God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit as understood in the Trinitarian concept of Catholic teaching and revelation.
- To interpret the events and experiences of life through a better understanding of what it means to be a Catholic Christian.
- To learn by guidance and example how better to express their relationship with God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.
- To deepen their sense of belonging to the church, to participate more fully in the Church’s liturgy and life, prayer, worship and retreats.
- To acquire the virtues of the Christian life through social justice issues based on praxis, by developing a sense of solidarity with others in the service of humankind.
- To have greater respect for, and appreciation of, Sacred Scripture and to act in accordance with the values of the Gospel by bringing its truth to the world.
- To understand the teaching of the Church and it’s relevance to the questions, problems, aspirations and hopes of the modern world.

⁴ Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus, p4.

- To explore faith perspectives other than their own and the values and beliefs of those who do not espouse any religious affiliation.

B – Curriculum: Content (Junior Cycle)

Students complete five of the six section of the syllabus. The specific aims of each section are:

First Year

Section A: Communities of Faith

See *Syllabus*: Pages 8-13 and *Guidelines*: Pages 18-19.

Section B: Foundations of Religious – Christianity

See *Syllabus*: Pages 14-19 and *Guidelines*: Page 20-21.

2nd Year

Section C: Foundations of Religion- Major World Religions

See *Syllabus*: Pages and *Guidelines* Page

Section D: The Question of Faith

See *Syllabus* Pages 26-31 and *Guidelines* page 25-25).

Section E: The Celebration of Faith (Second Year)

Aims

- To show how ritual and worship have always been part of the human response to life and to the mystery of God.
- To identify how communities of faith express their day –to-day concerns in various forms of ritual.
- To explore an experience of worship.
- To explore the link between patterns of worship and mystery, that which is of ultimate concern to individuals and communities (See *Syllabus*: Pages 32-37 and *Guidelines*: Pages 26-27)

Section F: The Moral Challenge (Third Year)

Aims

- To explore the human need to order relationships at the personal, communal and global levels.
- To explore how this need can be explored in a variety of ways.
- To identify how this need is expressed in civil an other legal codes.
- To show how religious belief is expressed in particular moral visions.
- To explore the moral visions of two major world religions, one of which should be Christianity.
- To analyse the impact of these visions on the lives of believers and non-believers in considering some current moral issues.
- To introduce students to some aspects of the relationship between religion, morality, and state law. (See *Syllabus*: Pages 38-43 and *Guidelines*: Pages 28-29).

Journal Work: (Second and Third year)

Students will be required to keep a journal for Junior Certificate examination. A title for journal work will be selected from 12 titles.

Aims

- To facilitate a variety of teaching and learning methods.
- To promote the development of skills in research analysis, drawing conclusions, presentations etc.
- To afford the students the opportunity to encounter religion as part of life.
- To facilitate the exploration of an area of personal interest or concern to the student. (See Syllabus: Pages 44-47. Guidelines Pages 31-32).

Resources

The following are some of the resources we use at Junior cycle level: texts, internet sites, DVDs, documentaries, published articles, CD's etc.

Duffy, Connie – The New Religion for Living Series (Dublin: Hawthorn, 2003)

Boyle, Anne and Niall – All About Faith: (Gill and Macmillan 2005)

Mc Dermott, Niamh and Fields Gloria- 'A Question of Faith' (Dublin: EDCO, 2007)

Ryan, Tom and Goan, Sean – Exploring Faith (Dublin: Celtic Press 2004)

Homework Policy

At Junior Certificate level in accordance with the school's Homework Policy, homework is given on a regular basis and in a variety of forms.

Assessment

First Year: Continuous assessment from September to Easter. Written examination in May.

Duration 1 hour.

Second Year: Continuous assessment from September to Easter. Written examination in May.

Duration 1 hour 30 minutes.

Third Year: Continuous Assessment up to Mocks. Mock examinations taken in February. Junior Certificate Exam in June. Duration: 2 hours

All marks and comments are registered on the official school reports.

C – Curriculum: Senior Cycle

The N.C.C.A. and the National Catechetical Office are at present reviewing the Senior Cycle curriculum. We will adopt our programme in response to their proposals.

At present we are following a modular programme at Senior Cycle.

Assessment

There are no formal R.E. examinations at Senior Cycle level. Assessment is ongoing based on class contribution and participation which is noted on the school reports.

D – Curriculum Timetable

All classes in the school are timetabled for three periods per week with the exception of 4th year which has two periods. 5th & 6th years are blocked to facilitate speakers and group preparation.

E- Curriculum Resources

We have a press and Library of textbooks, workbooks, videos, CD's, DVD's, visual and art equipment. There are class sets of some textbooks. Photocopying is financed through the Department budget. The Department has access to computer with internet, laptop & projector and e-mail facilities. All classrooms have access to a VCR and CD player and overhead projector. In a central school area there is a large display board for highlighting liturgical seasons.

5. Budget

The budget for RE finances resources for photocopying, art equipment and supplies, Pastoral Care, Folk Group, Mission Impossible, Amnesty, JPIC, liturgical supplies and the updating of equipment.

6. Staffing

All teachers of RE are required to possess qualifications in the subject that satisfy the Teaching Council and the Diocesan authorities.

A: The Department Co-ordinator

The RE department has adopted a collegial model of leadership providing an opportunity for leadership and teamwork that is reviewed on an annual basis.

Shared Responsibilities include:

- Co-ordination of the programme.
- Participating in RE department meetings.
- Planning and evaluation of the work of the R.E. team.
- Arranging In-Service in conjunction with the Principal.
- Overseeing and evaluating the overall direction, balance and scope of the curriculum.
- Preparing the annual budget in conjunction with the team and the Principal.
- Planning meetings as required during the school year.
- Maintaining a close working relationship with the Principal, Departmental Heads, the Guidance Counsellor and Pastoral Personnel.
- Liaising with the Chaplain regarding the training and development of the Eucharist Ministers.
- Ensuring that the liturgical seasons are highlighted within the school.
- Overseeing and arranging special services e.g. opening of School Year Mass, Carol Service and Grandparents' Mass, organising Retreats.
- Promote and organise fundraising events for charity e.g. Samaritan's Purse.

7. Liturgy

"A Loreto/IBVM school prays, celebrates, participates in sacramental life and ministry and honours Mary the Mother of God"⁵.

"We recognise that good liturgical experience is vital to the faith formation of our students"⁶. For many of them school is their only experience of a praying Christian Community. Liturgical celebrations take place throughout the year and are prepared by the students assisted by the R.E. team, the Chaplain and the Music Department. We aim to involve as many students as possible in our celebrations. Attendance at the Opening year Mass and the Christmas Carol Service is obligatory. Students are also brought to the oratory by their class teachers on occasion for prayer and meditation time. The Chaplain would also organise prayer services and liturgies for individual classes at specific liturgical times during the year. Other Liturgies take place before school, during lunchtime and at week-ends and attendance is optional. Prayer services, meditations and class masses may be arranged during religion class.

⁵ Kolkata Education Guidelines, p4.

⁶ Guidelines for the faith Formation and Development of Catholic Students, p11.

A liturgical calendar is prepared for the year. There are additional liturgies for events that may take place in any year such as critical and significant events. “Good catechesis at this time makes provision for prayer, meditation, reflection, a listening ear, sensitivity, silence and above all gives witness to the love of Christ”⁷.

LITURGICAL CALENDAR

DATE	SERVICE
September	Mass to open the Academic Year
November	Service for the Dead/ Grandparents Masses
December	Advent Services
December	Carol Service
January	Service for Mary Ward
February	Feast of St. Valentine
February	Mass for Ash Wednesday
February	Lent:: Reconciliation Services
March	Lent: Grandparents Mass
May	Graduation Mass for 6 th Years
September- May	5 Folk Masses & 5 th Year Class Masses

A minimum of four Folk Masses take place throughout the year, Icons, Religious Iconography is visible throughout the School. An oratory is available for communal and private prayer.

Folk Group

Students across the year groups are involved with this group. It is a joint initiative of the Music and Religion Departments. They celebrate Folk Masses at four different occasions throughout the school year and they also provide music for school liturgies when required

Ministers of the Eucharist

Fifth Year students are invited to apply for positions as Ministers of the Eucharist. Applications must be submitted by February midterm including a parish reference. This role requires a deep faith commitment and active participation in the Eucharist. They must attend training sessions to prepare for the role. They are commissioned at the opening year Mass to serve in the school community. Some agree to act as Ministers of the Eucharist in their Parish Communities. The Principal, RE department and Year heads will be involved in the selection process.

8. Chaplaincy Services

The role of the Chaplain is of great importance. “The Chaplain is a faith presence committed to the values of Christ, on behalf of the Church and school community accompanies each person on the journey through life”⁸.

- Is available throughout the school day, at break times and at lunch hours in places where students gather e.g. the canteen, corridors, outside the staff room etc. He is involved in public examinations and when results of such examinations are published.
- Is involved in planning and organising all Retreats for both staff and students.

⁷ Ibid, p12.

⁸ L. Monahan & C. Renehan, *The Chaplain: A Faith Presence in the School Community* (Dublin: Columba, 1998) p13.

- The preparation and organisation of Folk Masses.
- The Coordinator of Transition Year Community Care Placement.
- Teaching a certain number of RE classes in agreement with the Principal.
- Co-ordinating St. Vincent De Paul and Mission Possible and other social Justice and outreach activities.
- The City Quay Transition year module.
- The preparation and organisation of Prayer Services during the Liturgical year.
- The planning of the Lourdes pilgrimage.
- The training of the Eucharistic Ministers throughout the school year.
- Marking publicly the different Liturgical seasons.
- Meetings both formal and informal with Tutors, Year heads, Guidance Counsellor and Principal regarding Pastoral Care issues.
- Liaising with certain charitable organisations regarding different events during the year.
- The care of the Oratory, the provision of of altar bread, wine and Mass cloths.
- The organising of speakers for certain events.

9. Retreats

“Retreats are a spiritual experience that recognise and acknowledge the human context of the students but go beyond the faith context”⁹. All Retreat experiences offered in school are obligatory except for 5th year students who have the option of a guided Scriptural retreat. Retreats are funded through subsidies from the school and from school fees.

Retreats are organised with each year group’s needs in mind on an annual basis.

Staff are offered the opportunity to attend a Scripture guided retreat on a one to one basis.

10. Justice and Peace

“The promotion of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation is a Gospel imperative and a priority within Loreto/IBVM education”¹⁰

As educators working in a Loreto school, we recognise our responsibility to develop agents of social change who will commit themselves to building a better world. “Good catechesis is about leading students to seeing the value of giving practical assistance and shaping their own lifestyle so that justice will prevail”¹¹. We challenge our students to identify injustice and to work to eradicate inequality and unfairness.

We provide opportunities to be involved in fundraising campaigns. Working for Trocaire, Amnesty, Mission Possible, J.P.I.C., Concern, Loreto International, Samaritans Purse, the St Vincent de Paul and a host of other Irish charities encourages students to contribute towards the alleviation of material need but also provides the educator with the opportunity to engage in social analysis to ask the “whys” of poverty.

11. Parents and Guardians

Parents/Guardians are the primary educators of their children. We welcome opportunities to support parents/guardians in their role. How do we do this?

⁹ Ibid, p90.

¹⁰ Kolkata Education Guidelines, p13.

¹¹ Guidelines for the Faith Formation and Development of Catholic Students, p13.

- We meet parents/guardians at the structured parent-teacher meetings and provide them with information on the aims, objectives and content of the R.E. programme. We use these meetings to clarify questions and issues that may arise.
- We develop further links at the many liturgical services throughout the year e.g. Folk Mass, Carol Service and 6th Year Graduation Mass.
- We are available to parents/ guardians by appointment throughout the school year.

12. Parish/Diocese

“The parish is the primary Eucharistic community, the place of worship, service and welcome, it is the pre-eminent place for catechesis”¹²

Because of the diverse geographical spread of our students from Drogheda to Greystones and from Dunboyne to Stephen’s Green our contact with parish is limited. However, we have established links with St. Teresa’s, Clarendon St – holding our opening school Mass there, and Newman University Church, St. Stephen’s Green. We also work with a number of priests who facilitate our liturgies.

The Faith Connect programme in T.Y includes a Parish based outreach.

Students participate in the Diocesan Pilgrimage to Lourdes.

We welcome the diocesan advisors for religious education on their annual visit to the school. We attempt to have at least one representative at the diocesan inservice and arrange a time for that person to share resources and information at a team meeting.

Teachers are members of the Religious Teachers’ Association and access new publications and resources.

13. Ecumenism and Inter-Faith Dialogue

“Loreto/IBVM education while maintaining a Catholic ethos, fosters multi-cultural and multi-faith dialogue”¹³

We welcome the presence of student of other faiths and see their contribution in religion class as fostering mutual understanding and respect.

We have a special connection with St, Ann’s, Dawson St. (Church of Ireland) and our students have participated in their Songs of Praise at Harvest Festival and our annual Carol Service takes place in this church. As a School community we foster an openness to faith and respect those of all faiths and none while working within the context of a Catholic school. We value the life experience of all students.

14. Visitors

The school is informed in this regard by Circular 0023 / 2010, Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) AND Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), Best Practice Guidelines for Post- Primary Schools.

We recognise that visiting speakers/ facilitators play a valuable role in supplementing, complementing and supporting our programme. Visitors/ visiting groups are required to adhere to the following guidelines of good practice:

¹² Ibid, p12.

¹³ Kolkata Education Guidelines, p17.

- All visits will be planned in line with the relevant whole- school SPHE/RSE programmes. All visits must be planned with school personnel.
- Parents/ Guardians must be made aware of visiting speakers or agencies to the classroom.
- The class teacher (s) must remain in the classroom with the students.
- All programmes and events delivered by visitors and external agencies must use appropriate, evidence based methodologies with clear educational outcomes. Such programmes are best delivered by those specifically qualified to work with young people for whom the programmes are designed.
- All programmes, talks, interventions and events should be evaluated by students and teachers in terms of subject matter, messages, structure, methodology and proposed learning outcomes.

