

TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN ETHOS IN EDUCATION

1. The Christian faith acknowledges the value and uniqueness of every human being regardless of gender, age, ethnic origin, creed or sexual orientation. Every child should be enabled to flourish in his or her potential as a child of God, as a sign and expression of the Kingdom. This is at the heart of the Church's mission. Christian faith teaches the importance of love, respect, forgiveness, dignity and the need to work for peace and justice. Christianity believes that true education must encourage the mental, physical and spiritual development of each pupil. Distinctiveness must include a wholehearted commitment to putting Christian faith and spiritual development at the heart of the curriculum.

While the Christian faith is the majority faith with historical roots in Ireland, it is also acknowledged that Ireland is a multi-faith society in which there is respect for those of other faith traditions and a welcome for the contribution that they bring to our schools.

2. The Christian ethos in schools is a core principle underpinning and permeating all that each school seeks to undertake and achieve, which flows through the whole educational experience. The object in practical and general education is to set out clearly the place given to the teachings of Christian faith, but sensitive also to the teachings, attitudes and practices of all Christian denominations. This has been interpreted over a long period as being of a mainstream nature and tolerant. It does not embrace extreme views. The importance of clearly ascribed Christian values and their outworking in the life of schools is widely accepted. This should be worked out in expressions of example and service to the local community, the nation and the world.

3. The interpretation of this underpinning principle within a school and its community requires sensitivity, respect and tolerance, all of which are important Christian characteristics upheld by the Church. The aim for schools is that they will be a place of learning with a clear spiritual and moral dimension. High quality religious education and collective worship should continue to make major contributions to the Christian ethos in a school.

While the Christian faith will be the starting point and the central focus for the ethos of schools, the beliefs and practices of other faiths will be valued and respected. It is hoped that parents and pupils of all faiths and none, will find each school to be a welcoming community in which the importance of faith itself is emphasised.

With respect to the employment of Principals, it is expected that successful candidates in order to lead schools with a clear Christian ethos, will be able to demonstrate their ability to do so and their sympathy with it. There will need to be a genuine desire to do so in a way which is thoughtful, creative and sensitive.

4. The expression of the Christian ethos within the school must be both explicit and implicit. The Board of Governors and the Principal will, for example, ensure that:

- All pupils (subject to the right of parents to withdraw their child) will participate in a daily act of collective worship wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character. The teachings of the Bible and other Christian texts including hymns and prayers will be central to the acts of collective worship.

- The Principal and other members of the school teaching staff will take a direct role in the design and delivery of acts of collective worship.
- Religious Education is taught throughout schools to all pupils (subject to the right of parents to withdraw their child). The curriculum model followed by the school will give priority to the teachings of Christianity and engage seriously with, and develop an understanding of the Person and teachings of Jesus Christ, but will, as well as teaching the facts about other principal world religions, treating other faiths with respect.
- The principal festivals of the Christian year (e.g. Christmas, Easter) and other major events in the school year (e.g. the start of the school year or the opening of a major new building) are marked by an appropriate act of collective worship.
- Pupils, staff and parents have appropriate voluntary access to a Christian priest, minister or pastor if and when that is required. This provision may mean that the school employs a chaplain; on the other hand, it may mean that the school develops links with a neighbouring church or churches, or has contact with an ordained person. The need for such access may be particularly important at times of personal, community or national celebration or crisis.
- Schools, in collaboration with local churches would provide appropriate spiritual care when required to those of Christian and other faith traditions.
- Pupils are encouraged to support local charities and community projects with their time, talent and contributions.
- Where pupils and parents desire, support may be given to the activity of such organisations as a Christian Union or similar, providing they do not upset the tolerant balance of the ethos of the School.

5. The implicit expression of an underpinning Christian ethos requires the commitment of all members of the school's community and particularly of teachers, whose position is such that they have influence over the development of beliefs, values, moral code and conduct of pupils. The characteristics of the Christian ethos, values such as truthfulness, honesty, generosity, selflessness, loyalty, and social justice will find expression in the life of the school. In particular, it is expected that such values will underpin the aims, objectives, shared values, policies, rules, codes of conduct, rewards and sanctions of the school.

7. It is recognised, understood and welcomed that teachers will come to schools with a variety of faiths, beliefs and backgrounds and this diversity will promote excellence in the delivery of education.