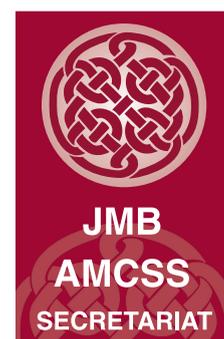




# Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Different Beliefs in Catholic Secondary Schools

SECOND EDITION



# Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Different Beliefs in Catholic Secondary Schools

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## **Acknowledgements**

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- ▶ Catholic Schools Partnership;
- ▶ The Episcopal Commission;
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- ▶ Annette Honan;
- ▶ Jack Cleary and Christine West, Secretariat of Secondary Schools.





## Foreword

In 2010, JMB/AMCSS produced *Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Other Faiths in Catholic Secondary Schools*. This marked the culmination of a process that had seen consultation on what such guidelines should entail and the document, excellently crafted by Dr Aiveen Mullally, has become an important source of information and reference point for our schools. It deals in an affirmative and practical manner with our invitation as Catholic schools to embrace people of other faiths in our schools in a manner consistent with the inclusivity that has always characterised our sector.

In the context of the ever-changing needs of society and of our schools, it was felt timely that the guidelines might be reviewed, and we were fortunate that Dr Aiveen was again prepared to engage with the project and work on producing these updated guidelines. In this regard, a core working group was established to liaise with Dr Aiveen on all that the project entailed, consisting of myself as General Secretary, Dr Michael Redmond, our Director of Research and Development, and Paul Meany, who has many years of experience in education and as a leader within our organisation, and who has contributed regularly over the years to debate and policy on matters relating to Catholic and voluntary education. The need to review and the changing nature of the society in which we live are, in themselves, reflected in a change of title to *Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Different Beliefs in Catholic Secondary Schools* and comprehend the rise in the number of people in Ireland declaring in census returns that they have no religious belief.

This group held numerous meetings over a two year period with representatives of trust

boards/trustees and other groups involved in education to determine how the guidelines might be updated, informed as we are by our experiences since they were first published and the lived reality of societal change and the evolving nature of education and schools.

On behalf of all involved in JMB/AMCSS, I would like to thank all of those who engaged in this rich dialogue, not only to determine how the guidelines might be updated and amended, but also as to how they would incorporate that sense of mission and inclusivity and care which is integral to all that we do in our schools. When the guidelines were envisaged, prior to their first iteration in 2010, it was to help give effect to a stated aim that '*Catholic schools aspire to create an open, happy, stimulating and mutually respectful community environment*'. Our ambition in this respect has not changed, and also mirrors the recent call of Pope Francis that we '*Strive to ensure that Catholic schools are truly open to all*'.

We trust that these guidelines will serve to enlighten, inform and prompt dialogue and that they will be of assistance to you and your school community.

John Curtis,  
General Secretary,  
JMB/AMCSS,  
September 2019

# Contents

Rationale.....	4
The Changing Context for Catholic Schools.....	4
The Catholic School as an Inclusive Community .....	5
The European Context .....	6
Catholic Schools and the Law.....	7
Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Different Beliefs.....	8
▶ Religious Education.....	8
▶ Religious Education: A Pedagogy of Dialogue.....	8
▶ Fostering Faith Development.....	10
▶ Prayer and Ritual .....	11
▶ The Liturgical Year.....	11
▶ Sacred Space .....	13
▶ Religious Imagery in the School.....	13
▶ Retreats.....	14
▶ Admissions .....	14
▶ Religious Instruction .....	15
▶ Withdrawal from RE.....	16
▶ Pupil Uniform .....	17
▶ Wearing of Religious Garments .....	17
▶ School Crests .....	18
▶ Henna Skin Decoration .....	18
▶ Facial Hair .....	18
Background Information on Different Faith Traditions and World Views.....	19
▶ Islam in Ireland.....	19
▶ Evangelical Christians in Ireland.....	21
▶ Jehovah’s Witnesses in Ireland.....	22
▶ Atheism and Humanism .....	23
Funerals and Commemorations of the Dead in Different Faith Traditions .....	25
▶ Islamic Funerals .....	25
▶ Sikh Funerals .....	25
▶ Jewish Funerals .....	26
▶ Humanist Funerals.....	26
▶ Hindu Funerals.....	26
▶ Buddhist Funerals .....	27
Conclusion .....	28
Recommendations.....	29
Endnotes .....	30
Appendix A .....	31
Appendix B .....	32

Note: The use of the term parent(s) in this document includes the role of legal guardians.

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## Rationale

This second edition of the *Inclusion of Students of Different Beliefs in Catholic Secondary Schools* arises out of an acknowledgement that the make-up of the Catholic school population in Ireland has continued to change considerably in the past decade. An increasingly diverse population in terms of culture, language and belief systems is enriching our school environments. Simultaneously, a rise in the number of people declaring that they have no religion and an increase in those loosely identifying with their Christian identity are all part of the community that makes up Catholic schools in Ireland. The 2016 census highlights the decline in numbers of people identifying as Roman Catholic in Ireland, falling from 84.2% in 2011 to 78.3% in 2016 (CSO 2017). It also tells us that half the citizens who do not identify as Irish in the 2016 Census are Roman Catholic, namely people from Poland, Lithuania, the Philippines, Nigeria and Brazil. While this growing religious and cultural diversity enriches our school communities, it also poses challenges to schools as they seek to adopt more inclusive practices.

Public debates are ongoing on the role of religious education in schools, on religious

pluralism, and about what equality in education in Ireland now means. This document seeks to offer practical suggestions for Catholic school communities on how to welcome and accommodate all students, including those of different beliefs and those with no religious affiliation, while remaining true to the characteristic spirit of their school and the Gospel values that motivate Catholic education.

**The 2016 census records show that 1.3% of Irish residents (almost 64,000) describe themselves as Muslim. There is also a notable increase of those adopting a secular stance in the state. Almost 10% of the Irish population now state that they have no religion, increasing by 74% from 2011. The largest-growing minority faith groups are Orthodox and Apostolic / Pentecostal faiths.**

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## The Changing Context for Catholic Schools

The prevailing climate in Ireland over the past two decades of rapid change and diversification has resulted in many positive changes as well as challenges to Catholic schools. Increased plurality has brought our educational system into a complex arena, with a majority of Catholic schools now serving an increasingly religiously diverse and secular population.

The Catholic Church is patron to the majority of schools in Ireland. It is important to acknowledge that this situation arises out of a historical context where the vast majority of the Irish population was Catholic and wished to send their children to Catholic schools. During penal times, schools for Catholics were forbidden until the Relief Acts of the late eighteenth century when Nano Nagle, Catherine McAuley and Edmund Rice, among others, began to establish schools for Catholic children. Following Catholic emancipation in





1829, the Catholic community was anxious to assert its new-found freedom and to establish schools which reflected its sense of identity. We see a similar process in contemporary Ireland, where minority faiths and other groups are now seeking to establish primary and secondary schools which reflect their own identity and ethos, which our Constitution allows for.

This diversification in the provision of education is widely welcomed, as it reflects and provides for the changing demographics of modern Ireland. It is right that the provision of schools reflects the needs and wishes of a changing population. Equally, it is right that there will continue to be denominational schools which serve the needs of parents who wish to educate their children within a particular faith and identity.

The decline of clergy and of professed religious men and women in Irish society has led to the establishment of lay trusts for Catholic schools in recent times. This has been accompanied by a process with schools to re-imagine the Catholic identity in contemporary Ireland.

## The Catholic School as an Inclusive Community

Catholic schools are for all. The roots of the word Catholic originates from the Greek *kath'holou* which means universal. Jesus valued diversity while inclusion was at the heart of his life and ministry. He reached out in particular to those considered to be 'other' or different in society and they were a source of enrichment in his own ministry. He emphasised the dignity of all human life and engaged with those who were marginalised or oppressed due to their gender, religious belief, culture, occupation or health.

Affirming diversity is at the heart of Catholic education. The Church values the 'ray of truth' that is present in the teachings of all religious traditions:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all<sup>1</sup>.

Catholic schools recognise and respect the religious freedom of their students and of their families. The Catholic school 'offers itself to all, non-Christians included, with all its distinctive aims and means, acknowledging, preserving and promoting the spiritual and moral qualities, the social and cultural values, which characterise different civilisations'<sup>2</sup>. They are places of welcome and dialogue.

At the same time, the Catholic school holds the right and duty to offer faith formation based on the values of the Gospel to Catholic students<sup>3</sup>. They do not seek to convert or indoctrinate students with different religious beliefs or no religious affiliation into the Catholic faith.

Catholic schools can no longer take for granted that its Catholic pupils are necessarily practising Catholics. At the same time, we are looking at ways to cater for students of different faiths, who are often the students who are most committed to their own religious tradition, as are their families. There can be some uncertainty in schools about how best to honour the spiritual formation of all pupils, including those of different faiths.

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This dilemma offers an opportunity to involve all partners of the school community in a review of what it means to be a Catholic school in a contemporary context. What is distinctive? Does it still have value? Does it still have something to offer? Before we can comfortably host students of other beliefs and their needs, it is helpful to address our own identity as Catholic schools and how we approach the responsibilities we have towards the faith development of Catholic students.

This is a worthwhile process to undertake with boards of management, staff and parents, while support is offered by the different trust bodies through their Charter Statements and Ethos Development personnel.

These guidelines offer some practical suggestions on how Catholic schools can seek to remain true to their Catholic identity and mission while also welcoming and including students with different beliefs, which is a core characteristic of Catholic education.

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## The European Context

It is the norm throughout Europe that Catholic schools welcome pupils of different beliefs since 'welcoming all' is at the heart of the educational project of Catholic education. For example, Norway stipulates that it is considered an asset for the Catholic school to have students of different religious backgrounds, while it is on the basis of 'welcoming all' that Catholic schools in France welcome pupils of all religions. In Austria, the state obliges denominational schools to provide religious instruction for the different belief groups in the school when requested.

In some countries or regions (Spain, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Austria), the number of pupils of





different beliefs in Catholic schools is increasing because of recent migrations. Today's Catholic schools throughout Europe make every effort to be inclusive and distinctive – open to students of all beliefs, yet offering an educational vision founded on the Gospel and true to the Catholic tradition. They strive to be communities of faith and learning, working in communion with the local parish, with the guidance and support of the local bishop.

Essentially, the European Union (EU) allows member states autonomy over their own decisions for state schooling. It acknowledges the rights of parents to choose denominational schooling or not and believes it falls to the individual state to uphold the quality of education being delivered rather than the religious affiliation of the schools.

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## Catholic Schools and the Law

Denominational voluntary secondary schools are supported not just by the Irish constitution and legislation but by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the European Court and the directives and treaties of the European Union.

The European Convention on Human Rights (article 9) deals with both freedom *for* religion

and freedom *from* religion while freedom *of* religion is supported by the European Court of Human Rights. The European Court and the European directives and treaties note that the autonomous existence of religious communities is indispensable for pluralism in a democratic society. The Lisbon Treaty (2007) notes that the EU shall maintain dialogue with such churches, religious associations and communities.

There is a right to education under article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. A protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights notes that the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure education and teaching in conformity with their own religions and philosophical convictions. The State, therefore, has an obligation to set up the conditions for this to be achieved through its education system.

The right to have an education other than that organised by the State is enshrined in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989). This notes the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions as long as they conform to the minimum standards as laid down by the State. This right is not just confined to patrons who have a religious ideology. In turn, it is the responsibility of the board of management of each school, under the Education Act section 15(2)(b), to uphold the characteristic spirit of the school on behalf of the patron.

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## Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Different Beliefs

The Catholic school, animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love, is an inclusive space where every student is welcomed and belongs. Aware of the living presence of Jesus in its midst, this characteristic spirit permeates every aspect of the school day and seeks to nurture the personal development of every student, foster their sense of values, prioritise outreach to the poor, encourage robust dialogue between culture and the Gospel message, promote a spirit of mutual understanding between different beliefs and form good citizens within a democratic society. The Church calls on Catholic schools to be at the forefront of creating spaces for robust wide-ranging dialogue between beliefs and to model in practice what an inclusive and integral pedagogy is all about. This section presents practical guidelines on how this may be achieved.

### Religious Education

In Catholic schools, Religious Education (RE) should be at the heart of the curriculum. The subject should be allocated the correct minimum requirement of three periods per week (two hours) across all year groups on the timetable and qualified, specialist teachers should be allocated to teach Religious Education. Different approaches are taken to RE in secondary schools in Ireland, but it is essential that, whatever RE programme is offered by the school, it needs to consider how it invites students of different beliefs into dialogue with the programme. Religious Education in Catholic schools is a process that contributes to the development of students and offers opportunities for the expression of spiritual, moral and transcendent dimensions of life. It seeks to engage all students in this transformational process, allowing each



student to make free and consistent choices in the way they live their beliefs (*Share the Good News*, 2010).

### Religious Education: A Pedagogy of Dialogue

Religious Education seeks to foster a space for questioning, exploring, enquiring and reflecting. This space responds to the shift in the national curriculum (NCCA 2015) from an educational purpose focusing on examinations to one which is student-centred and embraces the holistic development of all students. Religious Education is a space like no other, that enables students to learn from the spiritual wisdom of their own belief and that of others for the enrichment of their lives. It helps students to develop religious ways of thinking, feeling and doing, which give expression to the spiritual, moral and transcendent dimensions of life (*Share the Good News*). The Congregation for Catholic Education states that teachers:

should be open at all times to authentic dialogue, convinced that in these circumstances the best testimony that they can give of their own faith is a warm and sincere appreciation for anyone who is honestly seeking God according to his or her own conscience.<sup>4</sup>

Religious Education that seeks to facilitate conversations between different voices and perspectives calls for a dialogical pedagogy. In the Congregation for Catholic Education's most recent publication '*Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*' (2013), schools are called to place intercultural

dialogue as an overarching aim of Catholic schooling. An understanding of the growing multi-religious reality of society needs to be fostered where students learn about different beliefs and dialogue with those beliefs and with non-believers<sup>5</sup>. It goes on to recommend that teachers allow students 'to experience real listening, respect, dialogue and the value of diversity'<sup>6</sup> in Catholic schools. The NCCA curricula for Religious Education seek to offer this opportunity and textbooks for Catholic schools will support and inform the Catholic faith of students from Catholic backgrounds as well as providing content relevant to students from different beliefs. *Share the Good News* provides a rationale and vision for Religious Education in Catholic secondary schools. It states:

Religious Education offered in a Catholic school, particularly at post-primary level, as well as supporting Catholic students in their faith, may find itself facilitating discussion not only among Catholic students, but also between them and students of a variety of faiths, as well as those who may not be committed to a religious interpretation of life. Religious Education holds open the possibility of helping all people to grapple, within their own reality, with crucial questions central to life and to living, playing its part in personal faith formation if the young person is open and interested and supported in following this through in their lives.<sup>7</sup>

Historically, in Ireland, the term 'religious instruction' has been used in the constitution and legal documents and circulars to refer to an educating *into* a particular religious tradition. Whereas, 'Religious Education' implies a broader approach and is not necessarily defined within a particular religious tradition. It seeks to open students to education *about* different beliefs in society as well as an opportunity to learn *from* these different religions and beliefs in order to deepen their own belief and commitment.

Legislative documents referring to publicly-managed schools in Ireland clearly refer to 'religious instruction' taking place during the school day. This was also the term traditionally used in denominational schools. However, the nature of religious instruction has changed dramatically in the last twenty years. The advent of the NCCA curricula for Religious Education (2000; 2004; 2018) and the assessment of the subject has moved away from the formation of students into a faith (catechesis) and more towards a broader Religious Education that reflects the growing diversity of belief of a once relatively homogenous Ireland. Religious Education is now the preferred term and approach taken in schools today. However, Religious Education in Catholic schools should never be content to study religions as a phenomenon in society, comparing one religion with another without any regard for the lived expression of faith or life stance of students. *Share the Good News* (2010) states that RE should always acknowledge the faith experience of students and help them to delve deeper into religious commitment in their lives.



Dialogue and encounters with peers who hold different beliefs can provide rich opportunities for students to reflect more deeply on their own beliefs.

**N.B. It should always be made clear to parents that students will be experiencing the values and ethos of the school in the day-to-day running of the school, not just in RE class. If they are concerned about their child learning about different religious beliefs or the Catholic content of the curriculum, they can be encouraged to see it as part of their civic education to seek to understand the history and heritage of Ireland, as well as an opportunity to enter into respectful dialogue about their belief. Religious Education never seeks to convert their son or daughter to Catholicism.**

### **Fostering Faith Development**

Religious Education, therefore, always has a formational aspect.<sup>8</sup> Catholic schools hold at the heart of their enterprise the nurturing of the faith and/or spirituality of all their students. As commitment to faith can no longer be presumed, Catholic schools are called to meet their students where they are in their faith or belief journey and to provide space, not only for healthy dialogue between students, but also for reflection and opportunities for the faith development of students who are aligned, however tenuously, with the Catholic faith. This is always invitational and students from other faith backgrounds are also encouraged to grow in knowledge of their own tradition and religious practice.

Research by Tuohy and Cairns<sup>9</sup> in 2000 proposes three approaches to faith development in the Catholic context:

- Many schools are now reporting that students who are practising Catholics are a minority group in their schools. Many of our students have had little opportunity to reflect on the experience of God in their



lives. The school therefore seeks to open them to the spiritual and a sense of mystery in their lives through human development and aesthetic initiatives which seek to engage the imagination and foster reflection.

- For those who are open to faith formation but with low levels of familiarity with prayer or liturgy, the school offers opportunities to develop their knowledge of the Catholic tradition as well as formational opportunities to experience and reflect on their relationship with God in their lives.
- The school seeks to give special support to students who have already made a personal commitment to their faith and offers opportunities for them to explore and deepen their commitment and the service of their community.

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**Lay school chaplains in Catholic schools are needed now more than ever. They are a faith presence in the school, offering support and formation opportunities to all students in the school as well as to staff.**

For this to happen in a Catholic school, in addition to excellent Religious Education, schools need to offer opportunities to all students who wish to explore and develop their faith through programmes such as the *John Paul Awards*<sup>10</sup> or the *Lighthouse Programme*<sup>11</sup>.

These programmes engage students in some of the questions young people ask about life and their place in the world and are opportunities for celebration together, for service and action for justice and peace.

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### Prayer and Ritual

Opportunities for prayer and ritual are also crucial components of what Catholic schools offer to students. As stated earlier, a majority of our Catholic students have less and less experience of ritual and prayer outside that which they are offered in our schools. The Catholic school community differs from other schools in how it celebrates its Catholic faith through community prayer and liturgy. Prayer and sacramental experience need to be a central feature of a Catholic school. Prayer can take many forms and can occur intermittently throughout the day. This needs to be explained to parents who may feel sensitive about it. The ethos of the school permeates the school day.

When there is a prayer before class, students of different faiths are encouraged to show reverence during the prayer, promoting respect for the prayer experience. They do not have to participate in the prayer but could be encouraged to use the time to pray quietly in their own way. This is an opportunity to recognise and honour the spirituality of all the students. Students who hold no religious interpretation of life are invited to show respect for the prayer experience.

The importance of prayer and reflection can be emphasised and fostered by holding regular assemblies for the whole school which include a formal time for prayer and reflection. Classes can take it in turns to take responsibility for the preparation of a short, inclusive prayer service



and also to highlight important festivals of different faith traditions throughout the year during these assemblies (e.g. Ramadan, Diwali or Hanukkah).

**N.B. All students in a Catholic school are encouraged to grow in their own faith or conviction, whether it is Catholic or not, and provided it is not harmful or disrespectful of others.**

### The Liturgical Year

Worship of God through prayer and the celebration of liturgy and the sacraments, 'the doors to the sacred', belongs at the very centre of the Catholic school's life.<sup>12</sup>

The liturgical seasons should be marked in a Catholic school. Liturgical events and seasons such as Advent and Christmas, Ash Wednesday, Lent, Easter and Pentecost need to be visibly celebrated during the school year. A Catholic school is welcoming, outreaching and inclusive, celebrating the diversity of all people. The only sacraments that can be celebrated in the life of the secondary school are Eucharist and Reconciliation. These should be celebrated when possible during the school year and creativity around prayer and ritual should also be encouraged. With the decrease in the number of priests available to visit schools a more creative approach is required from teachers and chaplains.



Whilst it is not necessary to hold a Mass for all occasions, schools should be mindful that for many students today, their only sacramental experiences may be in the school context. If there is a prayer room in the school, class services or a lunch-time service can also be arranged and led by RE teachers or the school chaplain.

There are many other ways to pray together and celebrate throughout the school year.

When there are school Masses, students from different beliefs should always be warmly invited and welcomed but never obliged to attend. They can be invited to approach the altar during communion time with their hands folded across their chest, for a blessing. It is a very enriching experience to have students of different beliefs attend and observe communal celebrations throughout the year as they are members of our school community. They should know that we value their presence among us.

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**Schools should be mindful that for many students today, their only sacramental experiences may be in the school context.**

If a school has a large proportion of students of different faiths in a graduating year, the possibility of an inter-religious ceremony could

be considered as well as, or instead of, the Graduation Mass.

Prayer services within the school can also be inter-religious. A good example of this is at a time of death or when remembering the dead during the month of November. It is informative for the rest of the school to understand how other cultures remember their dead and to have that respect promoted within the school.

It may be appropriate to acknowledge some of the major feasts of the beliefs present in your school. This could be done in the following ways:

- ▶ Encouragement and awareness of students who are fasting for religious reasons. The school community should be aware that they are fasting and why. These students ought to be supported and commended for their spiritual practice. One practical way of doing this is by providing a space away from their peers eating at lunch time. A space for Muslim students to pray could also be offered, with washing facilities and a clean towel.
- ▶ Some images relating to a religious festival could be posted on the walls of the school or on a notice board as it is being celebrated.
- ▶ Reference to different major festivals may be made during year-group assemblies.

Such approaches can only benefit the entire school community, as well as foster an attitude of welcome to all. An interfaith calendar is available at <http://www.interfaith.org> This calendar lists the sacred times and dates of all of the major religious traditions, including Catholicism. See also Appendix A for suggestions for some of the important festivals in other traditions that could be acknowledged in Catholic schools.

**N.B. This approach is only appropriate if the feast days, festivals and seasons of the Christian calendar are clearly and prominently acknowledged and celebrated also. Otherwise the characteristic spirit of the school is compromised.**



## Sacred Space

All Catholic schools, where possible, should consider setting up a sacred space or prayer room in their school. The prayer room can display contemporary images and symbols from the Christian tradition and place a focus on the Bible in the room. It is a matter of debate for each school whether they want the Blessed Sacrament to be present in the room. Some schools feel that pupils do not understand or respect the implications of having the Blessed Sacrament present. Others believe that is the precise reason to have it there and to bring the pupils to an understanding of its presence.<sup>13</sup>

The opportunity to contemplate quiet and stillness should be part of every student's experience of Catholic education. Students and staff of any tradition should be welcome in the school's prayer room. Depending on the numbers of students of different beliefs present in a school, it needs to be decided whether the prayer room is considered to be a specifically Catholic place of worship or a place of welcome for those of all beliefs. A prayer space in a Catholic school could acknowledge other faiths in the prayer room. This could be done in the following ways:

- ▶ Prayer mats, small cushions and chairs provided in the room to cater for people's different styles of praying.
- ▶ Including the symbols from different faith traditions in the room. This could be done in one area of the room, designated as the interfaith corner. Images of the Buddha,

the Jewish menorah (candelabra) and the Qur'an, for example, could be placed in this interfaith space. Quotations from scripture could be placed in this space. For example:

'Truly I understand that God shows no partiality but in every nation anyone who reveres him and does what is right is acceptable to him.' (Acts 10:34)

'Be Still and Know that I am God' (Ps 46:10)

'God has told you what is good and what is required of you, only this: Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God.' (Micah 6:8)

## Religious Imagery in the School

Religious images and symbols appropriate to a contemporary understanding of a Catholic school should be placed in prominent areas around the school. Schools should examine their use of religious imagery in the school and consider how well it speaks to students in a contemporary context – many statues are dated and neglected in dark corners of the school.

Mindful of the need to avoid symbols for the sake of symbols, pupils could be engaged in choosing or creating symbols which they feel best reflect their relationship with God. Contemporary Catholic imagery, posters, crucifixes and sculptures are widely available online and in religious bookstores and may be more appropriate than some of the traditional imagery that has been in a school for decades.

Pupils from different faiths could also be invited to display art/icons of their faith around the time of their major feasts. However, difficulty may arise for students of some religious traditions around the use of imagery and iconography. Muslims make no recourse to imagery or icons whatsoever and find images of prophets or God offensive. Jehovah's Witnesses



strongly believe that the Old Testament clearly states that statues and icons should not be used in worship. Similarly, some Protestant traditions do not advocate the use of statues in sacred places and during worship.

However, this is an example of where a Catholic school has a distinctive characteristic. Catholic worship and sacred spaces are very visual spaces, appealing to our senses and are a distinctive feature of our religious tradition. People of any tradition are welcome to pray in a Catholic space but if they wish imagery or icons to be removed it needs to be explained that this would be equally problematic to the Catholic tradition.

The Mission and Charter Statements for a school should also be displayed prominently in the school, as well as relevant iconography representing the founder or ethos of the school. This places value on our heritage and belonging to a wider network of Catholic schools.

### **Retreats**

Retreats can also be a spiritual experience for all and should seek to include all students.

This could be done by encouraging an awareness of the spiritual in their lives and teaching them about the different forms of prayer, rather than exposing them solely to

sacramental experiences. Provided we are already grounded in our own faith, we can understand our faith better when we encounter another religion and it can be very enriching for students to experience and respect one another's prayer practices. Retreats are also days that focus on relationships and personal development and all students ought to be encouraged to partake in these days.

### **Admissions**

Much difficulty can be prevented if schools have a clear Admissions Policy. A school should clearly state in its Admissions Policy that it is a Catholic school. Section 7(3)(c) of the Equal Status Act 2000, as amended, allows a Catholic post-primary school to give priority to Catholic applicants over other applicants where the school is oversubscribed. Section 7(3)(ca) would allow a Catholic school to refuse to enrol a student who was not Catholic in circumstances where the school had places available if it is proved that the refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school. It would be extremely difficult to prove this in practice.

More importantly, however, to refuse to enrol a student of a different belief, in circumstances where a school had a place available, would go against the spirit of welcome and inclusion that is at the heart of the Catholic school.

The policy should state that Catholic schools are schools for all, and that affirming diversity is at the heart of Catholic education. Catholic schools recognise the religious freedom of their students and their families and do not seek to convert students with different religious beliefs into the Catholic faith.

Catholic schools are required to consider the demographic context in which they serve, give expression to their ethos in a way that fosters inclusivity and intercultural dialogue and '... to allow Catholic faith to inform the values and traditions that are lived out on a daily basis in the school'<sup>14</sup>.



**To refuse to enrol a student of a different belief in circumstances where a school had a place available, would go against the spirit of welcome and inclusion that is at the heart of the Catholic school.**

### **Religious Instruction**

Our schools respect the religious freedom and personal conscience of individual students and their families as guaranteed under Article 44.2.4 of the Irish Constitution:

Legislation providing State aid for schools shall not discriminate between schools under the management of different religious denominations, nor be such as to affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending religious instruction at that school.

When commenced, section 62(7)(n) of the Education Act 1998, as inserted by section 9 of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018, will require schools to provide details of the school's arrangements in respect of any student where the parent, or a student aged 18 or over, has requested that they attend the school without attending religious instruction. In terms of the school's arrangements for the rights of parents/guardians and students over 18 years to withdraw from participation in religious instruction, it needs to be clearly stated that Catholic schools teaching the NCCA curricula are not offering religious instruction. It is important to note that the NCCA curricula

are written to encompass all beliefs; students are invited into dialogue with the Christian vision as well as with one another's beliefs. There is no reason why students of different faiths or students with no religious belief in a Catholic school should not participate fully in this curriculum, whether the class is sitting the state examination or not. All parents should be made aware of the new Junior Cycle Religious Education specification (NCCA, 2019) which can be taught with students of all faiths and none.

It is reasonable to expect all students in a Catholic school to learn *about* each other. The Council of Europe emphasises the importance of teaching about religions and non-religious beliefs and of fostering respect for religious differences. From a civic point of view, this helps to develop a cohesive, harmonious society. A society that acknowledges a plurality of beliefs must ensure that citizens have an open, informed and respectful attitude to those whose beliefs are different to their own.

The Council of Europe notes that Religious Education is one curricular area where students can learn *about* and *from* those whose beliefs are different to theirs, while simultaneously developing their own belief perspective.

It also promotes the social development of students and enhances their moral and spiritual development.

However, parents or students who have already reached the age of 18 can still exercise their right to opt out of Religious Education classes on conscientious grounds. Under Section 30 (2)



(e) of the Education Act (1998), the Minister shall not require any student to attend instruction in *any* subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student or a student who has reached the age of eighteen years. This decision should optimally be made in advance of the commencement of the school term and on a case-by-case basis, with all parties fully briefed on rights, capacities and curricular content.

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**Religious Education is one curricular area where students can learn *about* and *from* those whose beliefs are different to theirs, while simultaneously developing their own belief perspective.**

While advice on the practical arrangements for the management of withdrawal from Religious Education are addressed in the next section, a school experiencing significant withdrawal from Religious Education classes will require more focussed advice which may be accessed by management through JMB.

Enrolment policies need to clearly state that Religious Education is **a core subject** on the school curriculum and an integral part of the ethos of the school. All students are encouraged to participate in RE. Subjects such as Music, Physical Education (PE) and Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) should also be discussed with parents from

different religious backgrounds. These subjects will be looked at later in these guidelines.

Parents or guardians of all incoming pupils are sent appropriate literature, including the Mission Statement and Charter outlining the ethos and expectations of the school. An invitation is also issued to all parents to meet with the principal before acceptance. This provides an opportunity for both the principal and the parents to discuss any concerns and to understand the expectations of the school from the outset, avoiding possible future conflict. This applies to parents who are 'nominally Catholic' as well as parents of other beliefs.

**N.B. It is worth discussing with parents who are concerned about the content of the RE class that the syllabi have changed in their approach and they focus on dialogue and learning from one another's beliefs.**

### **Withdrawal from Religious Education**

Withdrawal of students from Religious Education class needs to be negotiated with school management and hopefully addressed during their enrolment meeting. Parental concerns around religious instruction or the conversion of their child to Catholicism need to be addressed in a spirit of understanding, especially with parents of different beliefs. Some ways of addressing this could include:

- ▶ A member of the Religious Education team could be invited to present an outline of the RE specification or programme at an evening for the parents of incoming first years.
- ▶ The school could offer a copy of the RE textbook to parents to review at home if they are concerned about the content being covered in RE class.

While it is a parent's right to withdraw their son or daughter from RE class, the supervision of the student can present the school with considerable logistical and supervision dilemmas. In cases such as this, a school should make it clear that they may not have capacity for

the individual supervision of the student outside of the RE classroom due to the limitations of the Department of Education and Skill's staff allocation to the school. Students who opt out of Religious Education may often have to remain in the classroom while not participating. If it is feasible and the school has a local solution for supervision, such as the library or other supervised area, students could be invited to go there during RE class.

**It is important that the school insists that this is not a 'free class' to do homework.**

The 1998 Education Act states that schools are required to promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students (Section 9(d)).

The allocated time on the timetable for Religious Education responds to this and students who opt out of the subject should be required to use this time to study something relating to their own religious tradition or belief, for example, a sacred text.

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**Students who opt out of the subject should be required to use this time to study something relating to their own religious tradition or belief.**

If a student is humanist or an atheist there is relevant literature or philosophical texts that could be read during this time, for example *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder or *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl (See Appendix B for more suggestions). This approach highlights the importance the school places on the religious or spiritual formation of *all* of its students. All students have their own personal journey that should be encouraged and respected.

If practical, and if there is a sufficiently large cohort of students of a particular faith tradition, it would be respectful and hospitable from



time to time to invite ministers or leaders from that faith community into the school to meet with students from that faith. These visits could happen during RE times or at another agreed time if the students are participating in the NCCA RE specification. This would emphasise a spirit of welcome and inclusiveness but is at the discretion of the school. The school should ensure that the person invited in is vetted for child protection, has an ability to teach and is of good standing in their community.

### **Pupil Uniform**

In 2008 the Department of Education and Skills issued government recommendations on school uniform policy as follows:

1. The current system, whereby schools decide their uniform policy at a local level, is reasonable, works, and should be maintained.
2. In this context, no school uniform policy should act in such a way that it, in effect, excludes students of a particular religious background from seeking enrolment or continuing their enrolment in a school. However, this statement does not recommend the wearing of clothing in the classroom which obscures a facial view and creates an artificial barrier between pupil and teacher. Such clothing hinders proper communication.
3. Schools, when drawing up uniform policy, should consult widely in the school community.<sup>15</sup>

## **Wearing of Religious Garments**

No pupil or staff member should be prevented from wearing a religious symbol or garment in accordance with their tradition, for example, the hijab for Muslim girls and the turban for Sikh boys. Freedom of religious expression is a basic human right<sup>16</sup> and is in keeping with the Catholic understanding of its identity as being a universal Church.

Some schools require girls to wear a hijab that is the same colour as the school uniform and short in length. Islamic girls wishing to wear the full veil (niqab) in Irish schools is a rare enough occurrence and, as stated by the Department of Education and Skills, creates an artificial barrier between the student and her teachers and is therefore discouraged. Some schools' uniform policy states that full uniform must be worn to and from school and on trips when the students are representing the school. Schools may wish to consider having the wearing of the hijab and niqab comprehended by their school uniform policy if necessary.

If a female principal or teacher is meeting with a mother who is fully veiled in the *niqab*, it is reasonable to ask them to uncover their face for the meeting if you wish, but only on the understanding that no man will enter the room during the meeting.

## **School Crests**

In 2013 another circular was issued by the Department of Education and Skills on the reduction of the cost of school uniforms. This circular gives more voice to parents regarding the school's policy on uniform and whether parents would prefer generic uniforms following the colour code of the school or uniforms with bespoke designs, including the school crest. A further circular issued in 2017 on measures to be adopted by schools to reduce the cost of school uniforms and other costs. If your school stipulates the wearing of the school crest on the uniform jumper, it is important to have conversations with parents or students over



18 who may have difficulty, on conscientious grounds, with wearing a Christian symbol such as the cross if it is on the school crest. Ideally, any issues around the school uniform should be resolved with parents before the student commences at the school.

## **Henna Skin Decoration**

On occasion females and sometimes males from the Hindu tradition may have painted henna hands and feet, a temporary form of skin decoration, following a family celebration or religious festival. Muslims from India also sometimes apply henna to their hands and feet during Eid-Al Fitr and Eid-Al-Adha. As this is temporary and fades after one to two weeks, it should be regarded with understanding.

## **Facial Hair**

In accordance with religious custom and tradition it is obligatory for Sikhs not to cut or shave any hair on their body. Sikh men tie their hair in a turban and are expected to grow their facial hair. For them, this is a symbol of holiness and strength. Therefore, if the uniform policy in your school stipulates no facial hair, an allowance needs to be made for Sikhs as it is an essential aspect of their religious observance. Some Muslim males during adolescence are encouraged to grow facial hair into a beard with a trimmed moustache. However, Muslim scholars describe this as a recommendation to emulate the Prophet Muhammed but not an obligation. Therefore, dialogue with the student and his parents as to whether his facial hair is a necessity is recommended.

# Background Information on Different Faith Traditions and World Views

## Islam in Ireland

The Muslim community in Ireland can be traced back to the early 1950s. Within the last few decades, the Muslim community has become one of the fastest growing religious minorities within Ireland and has made a considerable contribution to social, economic and inter-religious dialogue in our country. The present population, according to the 2016 census, is estimated to be approximately 64,000.

In terms of education, Muslim families who immigrate to Ireland can find it challenging to adapt to a European system of education. The existence of a small number of Muslim national schools in Dublin has been a considerable help. However, integration into state second-level schools has brought challenges for some families.

It is important to note that, as with all religious and non-religious groups, Islam is not a homogenous group. There are diversities of belief and expression in most religious faiths. There are students who may identify as Muslim or Arab who may not be religious at all. Therefore, the following information may not be relevant to all students of the religion they identify with.

### Food

Muslims eat halal food. They do not eat pork and only eat meat that has been slaughtered by people 'of the book' i.e. people from a monotheistic tradition:



Islamic Cultural Centre, Dublin

Judaism, Christianity or Islam. The only cutlery Muslim students can use is cutlery that is specifically used for halal food. This can present a challenge to students who wish to use school canteens. The most sensible way around this seems to be to invite students to bring in their own cutlery or food from home. Home Economics teachers also need to be sensitive to this matter. Teachers need to be aware that gelatine is made from pork skin, therefore jelly sweets are also prohibited in Islam.

### Prayer

Prayer is central to the daily life of Muslims. They are required to pray five times a day:

- At sunrise (Fajr)
- Noon (Zuhr)
- Late afternoon (Asr)
- Sunset (Magrib)
- Evening (Isha)

Muslims do not have to go to a mosque to pray; in fact, they can pray anywhere, once they face east towards Mecca. Some Muslim students or their parents may ask if their son or daughter can pray in the school during lunchtime, especially during Ramadan, an important thirty-day period of fasting. If our schools are concerned with the spiritual development of all our students, there seems no need to deny Muslim students the space to pray, e.g. the prayer room or an empty classroom. However, this room would not be 'allocated' to the Muslim pupils on a permanent basis or become 'their' room. It

would simply be a space provided for them to pray in at certain times.

Some schools that are situated near a mosque may be faced with requests from parents for their son or daughter to attend the mosque every Friday afternoon for their communal gatherings. In such cases, the parents should meet with the principal to discuss the implications of missing the same subjects every week or ideally the matter should have been discussed during their enrolment interview.

At the very least, a letter needs to be provided from parents permitting their daughter or son to be released from school to attend the mosque and, ideally, they should return to school afterwards (approximately 2 p.m.).

## **POSSIBLE CURRICULAR ISSUES FOR MUSLIMS**

### **Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)**

The concern some Muslim parents have in the area of relationships and sexuality education is not whether RSE is taught or not, but rather with the moral framework through which it may be taught. The context, in terms of methodology and content and the assumptions that may underpin the teaching of RSE, may be of concern to some parents. Muslim parents sometimes prefer to provide guidance about sexual behaviour and the way in which men and women should relate to each other to their children at home and may prefer that their child does not attend RSE class, as is their right on conscientious grounds. That said, some parents may be satisfied and supportive of the values framework offered by the Catholic school.

Schools should inform parents when RSE is to be taught and provide an opportunity for parents to view all the resources to be used and discuss the moral framework underpinning the teaching of the subject before discussing whether they wish to withdraw their child from class or not.

### **Music**

Participation in music class is seldom a problem for Muslim students. However, there is a diversity of opinion regarding music among Muslims. These are often influenced by local cultures and varying religious interpretations. Some Muslims consider music to be sinful and therefore prohibited, while others take a more moderate approach to certain genres of music. Traditionally in Islam, music is limited to the human voice and non-tuneable percussion instruments such as drums.



The concern from Muslims is often about music that promotes immoral behaviour; encouraging or promoting sexual or violent behaviour or the consumption of intoxicants and drugs. It is important to explain to Muslim parents who wish to withdraw their son or daughter from music class that music of this nature is not part of the music curriculum. The music curriculum is very varied, teaching composition, different musical styles and genres and a practical performance. A solution for Muslim students doing the practical exam could be an unaccompanied chant or *nasheed* and the use of a drum or other suitable percussion instruments.

If parents wish to withdraw their son or daughter from music class on conscientious grounds the school needs to ascertain what difficulty they have with the curriculum before looking into the logistics of supervision capacity.



### Physical Education (PE)

It is important that PE teachers are aware of the values and stipulations on Muslims regarding sport. Generally speaking, Muslim girls are not encouraged to partake in sports that involve physical contact with the opposite sex. It is acceptable for boys to partake in sports that involve physical contact (e.g. football, basketball) but not against girls.

Modesty is one of the principles of the Islamic faith. Therefore, concern can arise around swimming and the PE uniform for girls. It is usually not deemed appropriate for girls and boys to swim together. Muslim girls may also be concerned about wearing a swimsuit. A solution to this could be the use of a short wet suit (burkini) as an alternative. If a short skirt is worn for sports, some Muslim girls may wish to wear a tracksuit underneath the skirt, in the interests of modesty.

Sports practised in the presence of the same sex only do not require the wearing of the hijab. However, in a mixed gender environment, a sports hijab could be worn by girls if they wish to wear it. Some Muslim students may struggle with PE when fasting during Ramadan, due to the physical effort required. Schools generally deal with this on a case-by-case basis.

### Evangelical Christians in Ireland

Evangelical Christianity is a useful term to describe the arrangement of mainstream Protestant Churches and the new independent Churches practising in Ireland.

Evangelical Christianity is not a denomination in the way that Methodism or Catholicism is. Instead, it is a broad alignment of churches based more on beliefs and practices than on organisations. Evangelicals, regardless of their denomination, tend to hold four emphases in common. They are:

- ▶ **Conversion:** Placing a high value on an individual's personal experience of God leading to transformation.
- ▶ **The Bible:** Placing the Bible in a position of supreme authority.
- ▶ **Activists:** A desire to share their faith in word and deed.
- ▶ **The Cross:** The centre of evangelical theology and practice is the Cross of Jesus.

Evangelicalism in Ireland is often understood purely as an expression of Protestantism but there is a movement of Roman Catholics who consider themselves evangelical, and there are few evangelicals that would welcome



the description of 'Protestant'. To further complicate things, evangelical Christianity in Ireland today is not to be confused with the kind of evangelicalism that one might encounter in Northern Ireland or the United States of America. In Ireland it is more ethnically diverse and less culturally conservative.

So, what do you need to know about Evangelicalism in Ireland? It has experienced ongoing significant growth over the last fifteen years. In part, this is caused by an influx of immigrants from evangelical backgrounds but also from a relatively large number of Irish Catholics who have become disillusioned with their faith and have rediscovered their faith in an evangelical setting.

Evangelical Christian students in Ireland are likely to be well acquainted with their own faith and school is less likely to be the primary source of religious formation. While Irish evangelicals may hold distinctive theological beliefs, for the large part they are not likely to be at variance with the daily running of a Catholic school. Most differences lie in dogmatic, theological matters.

Their families and local Church are the prime sites of catechesis and so most parents will tend to see religion class and religious activities at school as an added bonus, an anthropological curiosity or simply another academic subject to be engaged in. There are, of course, strands of fundamentalism within the movement as in any other religious grouping and this often comes down to individuals and their personal convictions.

### **Jehovah's Witnesses in Ireland**

All Jehovah's Witnesses are keen Bible students and differ from other Christian religions in their interpretation of scripture. They firmly believe in their commission to help others to come to acknowledge what they understand as truth, but also respect the fundamental right of all to believe as they wish.

Jehovah's Witnesses believe in the Bible as the Word of God and consider its sixty-six books to be inspired directly by God and to be historically accurate. They endeavour to improve their ability to explain Bible teachings to others. Therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses usually tend to express themselves very well due to conscientious study and regular attendance at Bible meetings.

### **Rituals and Celebrations**

The differences in belief between Catholicism and Jehovah's Witnesses are particularly reflected in their form of worship and particularly in response to customs and practices that they consider to be of un-Christian origin.

### **Birthdays**

Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate birthdays. They believe it to be a secular custom that has no mention or foundations in the Bible. 'Although considered to be a harmless secular custom today, birthday celebrations are actually rooted in paganism.'<sup>17</sup>

Parents of Jehovah's Witnesses prefer to buy gifts for their children during the year rather than celebrating the day of their birth.



### Christmas

Jesus's birthday is unknown and was set as 25 December during the fourth century. At that time, this was the date of the winter solstice festival called the 'Birth of the Sun' because the sun appeared to grow stronger as the days became longer once again. This day was chosen to replace the pagan festival with the celebration of the light that broke forth into the world through Christ and the symbolism of the *Sol Invictus* was transferred to Christ. However, the early Christians did not celebrate Christmas and there is no biblical evidence for it. Therefore, Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate Christmas or accept presents on this day. It is understood as a secular custom.



### Halloween

Halloween also causes difficulties for Jehovah's Witnesses and other evangelical groups that place strong emphasis on scripture. They consider it to be another pagan ritual that promotes false worship. In Deuteronomy 18:10-13, the Old Testament is very clear that the faithful should avoid 'bad spirits' and 'spells and omens'.

### Worship

Jehovah's Witnesses do not celebrate sacraments. However, they do practise adult Baptism and acknowledge Easter because Jesus said very clearly in scripture to '... Do this in memory of me ...'

Jehovah's Witnesses do not use any form of imagery or icon in their worship, as they believe the second commandment clearly forbids it. If you visit the places where they meet, known as Kingdom Halls, you will find neither icons of saints nor statues of Jesus or Mary. There are also issues around praying to saints or anyone except God.

### Religious Education

Jehovah's Witnesses parents differ conscientiously in minor matters as to what they will allow their children to be involved in. They generally appreciate the high moral ethos of Catholic schools. Some parents may have no difficulty with their children participating in Religious Education, once it is not catechetical in nature, but others might have great difficulty with this.

It is important for Catholic schools to be sensitive to the fact that the three aforementioned religious groupings all resist religious imagery and hold the word of God as paramount. Difficulties may arise around devotion to Mary with evangelical or Protestant students as well as with Jehovah's Witnesses.

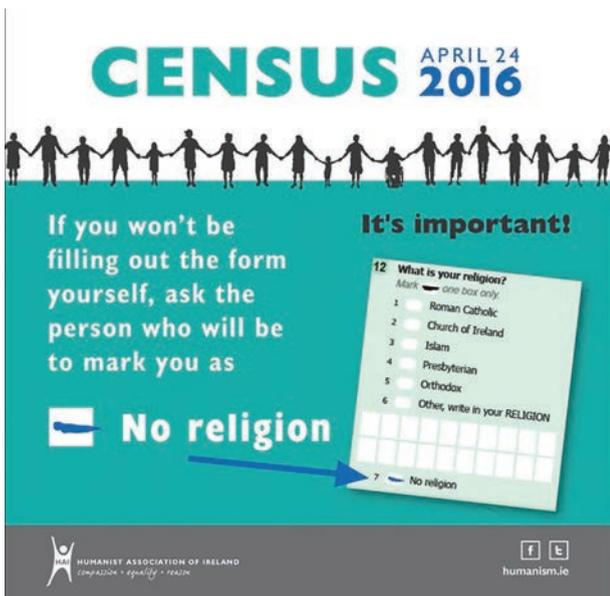
### Atheism and Humanism

The 2016 census showed that 10% of Ireland's population now identifies as atheist, which is a significant increase from 2006. Atheism is the

**12 What is your religion?**  
Mark  one box only

1  Roman Catholic  
2  Church of Ireland  
3  Islam  
4  Presbyterian  
5  Orthodox  
6  Other, write in your RELIGION


7  No religion



active lack of belief in any god or gods. It is not a belief system. However, it is protected by many of the same constitutional rights that protect religion. Some people in society today identify as atheists because they were not taught to be anything else. Other atheists were taught to believe in a god or gods but decided it didn't make sense, and so they abandoned their belief.

Some atheistic groups identify as agnostic or secular or humanist or even as 'cultural Catholics'.

**Agnostic:** A person identifying as agnostic neither believes nor disbelieves in a god or religious doctrine. They believe that nothing can be known of the existence or nature of God and therefore withhold an opinion as to whether or not God exists. They identify with what they know rather than what they believe.

**Humanism:** The World Humanist Congress states that Humanism is a life stance aiming at the maximum possible fulfilment through the cultivation of ethical and creative living and offers an ethical and rational means of addressing the challenges of our times. The Amsterdam Declaration (2002) of the World Humanist Congress describes Humanism in terms of the following principles:



- ▶ Humanism is ethical, rational and supportive of democracy and human rights.
- ▶ It has no creed and is undogmatic.
- ▶ It insists that personal liberty must be combined with social responsibility.
- ▶ Humanism recognises the transforming power of the arts.

Humanists also conduct ceremonies for rites of passage such as birth, death and marriage and actively campaign for the equal treatment of people of no religion by the State. They promote an equality-based approach to education that does not favour one religion over another. See [www.humanism.ie](http://www.humanism.ie) for more information.



**Ateist Ireland** is an Irish advocacy group that promotes atheism and reason. It aims to build 'a rational, ethical and secular society that is free from superstition and supernaturalism'<sup>18</sup>. They actively campaign for an Ireland that does not support or fund or give special treatment to any religion. They are particularly concerned with challenging discrimination in the Irish education system and the Irish Constitution in terms of religion and actively lobby for a secular education system and the separation of Church and State. See [www.atheist.ie](http://www.atheist.ie) for more information.

## Funerals and Commemorations of the Dead in Different Traditions

When there is a death in the school community, it would be usual to contact the bereaved family to express the school's condolences and to discuss the most appropriate response for the school. This is very important when the deceased is from another faith tradition.<sup>19</sup>

### Islamic Funerals

Muslims bury the body of the deceased within twenty-four hours. The deceased is placed with their head facing the Muslim holy city of Mecca. The body is then ritually washed. They prefer this ritual to be performed by family or close friends rather than by hospital staff or undertakers. Male relatives will wash male bodies and female relatives will wash female bodies.

After the ritual washing, the body is wrapped in a shroud that is usually white. The *salat* for the dead, *salat ul janaza*, is then performed. This takes the form of the usual Muslim daily *salat* prayers with some special additions which specifically relate to death. The ceremony usually takes place in the family home and is led either by someone the deceased chose before their death, a close relative or the family Imam.



It is forbidden to cremate the body of a Muslim. Muslims are buried with their face turned to the right, facing Mecca and may be removed from the coffin when placed in this position in the grave. Members of the funeral party throw a little earth onto the grave while reciting: 'We created you from it, and return you into it, and from it we will raise you a second time' (Qur'an, Surah 20:55).

Gravestones are kept simple, marked only by the deceased's name and date of death. Many Muslims will spend money on the poor rather than on an elaborate memorial stone. Official mourning lasts for three days and includes a banquet to remember the deceased. On the third day relatives visit the grave and recite extracts from the Qur'an.

### Sikh Funerals

Sikhs view death as a separation of the soul from the body and consider it part of God's will. Sikhs believe that the soul moves on to meet the supreme soul, God. Death is seen as a time for praising God in accordance with the teachings of their code of conduct, the *Rahit Maryada*.

After someone dies, if the body is on a bed it should not be moved and no light should be placed next to it. Prayers are said which acknowledge that the death is an act of God.

Sikh scriptures state that relatives should not indulge in wailing and anguish, although this is, naturally, hard. Hymns are sung in preparation for the cremation of the body. The family read the Holy Book continuously for forty-eight hours or in stages which must be completed within one week and end on the day of the funeral.

Cremation is the accepted form of disposal of the body. The body is bathed and dressed in fresh clothes. Hymns that induce a feeling of detachment are sometimes sung on the way to the crematorium, to aid the family in not showing their grief. At the crematorium,

the prayer known as the *Kirtan Sohila* is often recited. *Ardas*, or 'general prayers', are often said before cremation as well. These seek a blessing for the departing soul. A member of the family will then light the funeral pyre or push the button for the coffin to disappear.

Men wear black headscarves to the funeral and women wear pale coloured or white headscarves. Ashes are collected and scattered in running water or on the sea. Sikhs do not hold any river as holy but may deposit the ashes in a place of sentimental value. After the cremation, guests return to the family home and readings are given and hymns sung. Everyone must bathe as soon as they go home to cleanse themselves.

The mourning period lasts between two and five weeks. On the first anniversary of the person's death, the family gathers and undertakes *Barsi* prayer. They then have a meal. This is not a sad occasion but is seen as a way of remembering the deceased and celebrating their life.

### **Jewish Funerals**

Jewish people are buried in the ground. If possible, a handful of dust from Israel is placed in the grave or coffin. The funeral service consists of psalms, speeches praising the deceased, prayers for the repose of the soul and the final recital of the *Kaddish*, a hymn to praise God.

After the funeral, the mourners eat a simple meal prepared by friends or neighbours. In Orthodox families the next of kin will tear their upper garments and remain indoors for seven days (the *shivah*) sitting on low stools.

Mourning can last for one month or one year. These stages of return to normal life of the mourners reflect the soul's gradual progress to the afterlife.



### **Humanist Funerals**

Humanist funeral ceremonies are led by a Humanist celebrant who assists the family in creating a ritual that is meaningful for the family and that celebrates the life of the deceased. The ceremony usually consists of reflections, poems, music and symbols that are meaningful for the family and the celebrant will say a few words about the deceased. The funerals can be held in a suitable venue such as a crematorium, at a graveside, a community hall, a hotel, in the outdoors or in a funeral parlour. While Humanist funerals are by definition secular, some celebrants may agree to prayers being read during the ceremony by religious mourners if appropriate.

### **Hindu Funerals**

Hindus believe in reincarnation and view death as the soul moving from one body to the next on its path to reach Nirvana, or heaven. Death is a sad occasion, but Hindu priests emphasise the route ahead for the departed soul and a funeral is as much a celebration as a remembrance service.

Hindus cremate their dead, believing that the burning of a dead body signifies the release of the spirit and that the flames represent Brahma, the creator.

Family members will pray around the body as soon as possible after death. People avoid touching the corpse as it is considered unclean. The corpse is usually bathed and dressed in white traditional Indian clothes. If a wife dies



before her husband, she is dressed in red bridal clothes. If a woman is a widow she will be dressed in white or pale colours.

The funeral procession may pass places of significance to the deceased, such as a building or street. Prayers are said here and at the entrance to the crematorium.

The body is decorated with sandalwood, flowers and garlands. Scriptures are read from the *Vedas* or *Bhagavad Gita*. The chief mourner, usually the eldest son or male, will light some kindling and circle the body, praying for the well-being of the departing soul.

After the cremation, the family may have a meal and offer prayers in their home. Mourners wash and change completely before entering the house after the funeral. A priest will visit and purify the house with spices and incense. This is the beginning of the thirteen-day mourning period when friends will visit and offer their condolences.

Often, a garland of dried or artificial flowers is placed around a photograph of the deceased to show respect for their memory.

*Shradh* is practised one year after the death of the person. This can either be an annual event or a large one-off event. This is the Hindu practice of giving food to the poor in memory of the deceased. A priest will say prayers for the deceased and during this time, usually lasting one month, the family will not buy any new clothes or attend any parties.

Sons are responsible for carrying out *Shradh*.

### **Buddhist Funerals**

Funerals are relatively unimportant in Buddhism. Buddhists concentrate their efforts on the deceased's frame of mind up to, and at the moment of, death. Most Buddhist funerals held in the west are simple and low-key affairs organised by family and friends. They include appropriate Buddhist readings and tributes to the deceased.

The final committal is usually carried out at a chapel attached to the cemetery, preferably with overtly Christian symbols concealed. Most Buddhists prefer cremation.



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## Conclusion

Diversity of beliefs is rich and complex. Mutual understanding and mutual respect between management and parents, teachers and students in a Catholic school is of vital importance as we move forward as a pluralist society. These guidelines will hopefully continue to assist Catholic schools in creating enriching communities that enable all stakeholders to work together respectfully, regardless of their basic differences.

It is up to each one of us to inform ourselves about different religious traditions and beliefs with no religious interpretation of life. A disposition of openness, sensitivity and understanding is important while at the same time holding fast to the characteristic spirit of the Catholic school and the school's Charter for education.



## Recommendations

The following key recommendations are made in this document to further improve the inclusive nature of the Catholic School:

1. The Catholic ethos of the school needs to be explained to all parents prior to enrolment in the school. Any difficulty with the school uniform or Religious Education or any other subject should be discussed and resolved before the student is admitted.
2. Subjects such as Music, PE and RSE should also be discussed with parents from different belief backgrounds prior to enrolment.
3. It is important to allay any parental fears about the nature of Catholic schooling. Parents should be informed that the Religious Education syllabi are open to all religious and secular beliefs.
4. It should also be made clear that their son or daughter will be experiencing the values and ethos of the school in the day-to-day running of the school, not just during RE class.
5. All students are encouraged to grow in their own faith or spirituality, whether it is Catholic or not.
6. A student of a different denomination cannot insist that religious instruction in that denomination be provided.
7. Withdrawal from Religious Education can present a difficulty for the Catholic school, as Religious Education is at the heart of its holistic education enterprise. However, students who are withdrawn from formal Religious Education classes can be asked to use these classes to explore their own belief or some philosophical text, rather than doing their homework.
8. Recognition of some of the festivals from different religions in your school is appropriate in a Catholic school, provided that the festivals and seasons of the Christian calendar are clearly and prominently acknowledged and celebrated also.
9. Depending on the numbers of students of other faiths present in a school, it needs to be decided whether a prayer room is considered to be a specifically Catholic place of worship or a place of welcome for those of all faiths.
10. If a school has a large proportion of students of different beliefs in a graduating year, the possibility of an inter-religious ceremony could be considered, as well as, or instead of, the Graduation Mass.



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## Endnotes

1. *Nostra Aetate*, 1965, par 2
2. *The Catholic School*, 1997, par 85
3. *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, 1988, par 6
4. *Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith*, 1982, par. 42
5. *ibid*
6. *ibid*, par 83
7. Irish Episcopal Conference, *Share the Good News*, 2010, p. 58.
8. Irish Episcopal Conference, *Share the Good News*, 2010, p. 58.
9. See Tuohy, D and Cairns, P. (2000), *Youth 2K: Threat or Promise to a Religious Culture*, Dublin: Marino Institute of Education.
10. For more details see <https://thepopejohnpauliiaward.com/>
11. Walsh, O., (2019), *The Lighthouse Programme* (Veritas, Dublin). This is a faith development programme undertaken voluntarily by transition year or fifth year students and sixth class pupils who will be receiving the Sacrament of Confirmation.
12. Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, *Vision 08*, p.4
13. If a school wishes to create a prayer room and host the Blessed Sacrament, they need to contact their Bishop first.
14. Catholic School Partnership, (2014), *Catholic Education at Second Level: Looking to the Future*, p. 20.
15. Department of Education and Skills 2008. Recommendations on School Uniform Policy [Online]. Available from [www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2008-Press-Releases/PR08-09-23A.html](http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2008-Press-Releases/PR08-09-23A.html)
16. See Universal Declaration of Human Rights: 'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance' (Article 18).
17. Watch Tower Bible and Trust Society of Britain (2006), *Jehovah's Witnesses and Education*, p. 15
18. See [www.atheist.ie](http://www.atheist.ie)
19. This information has been adapted from <http://www.staffspasttrack.org.uk/exhibit/ilm/default.htm>

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# Appendix A

## Religious Festivals Calendar for the Major World Religions

The following are some of the religious festivals from other faith traditions that may be appropriate to highlight during your school year:

### ISLAM

- ▶ **Ramadan and Eid al-Fitr:** A thirty-day period of fasting with celebration at the end. The celebration of *Eid al-Fitr* involves family meals and the exchanging of gifts. *Ramadan* and *Eid* occur during the ninth month of the Islamic calendar.
- ▶ **Eid al-Adha:** Islamic festival ending the annual Mecca pilgrimage. This occurs at the end of the twelfth month of the Islamic calendar.

### BUDDHISM

- ▶ **Buddhist New Year:** The date depends on the country of origin to which the student belongs.
- ▶ **Chinese New Year** is generally in late January, while students from South-East Asia celebrate their New Year in April.
- ▶ **Vesak:** The major Buddhist festival of the year, it celebrates the birth, enlightenment and death of *the Buddha* on the one day. It is celebrated on the first full moon day in May, except in a leap year when the festival is held in June.

### JUDAISM

- ▶ **Passover:** Celebrating the Exodus; usually occurs close to the Christian dates of Easter, sometime in April.
- ▶ **Rosh Hashanah:** Jewish New Year, generally around September.
- ▶ **Yom Kippur:** The Day of Atonement, also in late September.
- ▶ **Hanukkah:** Festival of Lights in December.

### HINDUISM AND SIKHISM

- ▶ **Diwali:** This is the Festival of Lights which lasts for five days. For many Hindus and Sikhs, *Diwali* is also New Year's Eve.

See [www.interfaithcalendar.org](http://www.interfaithcalendar.org) or [www.dublincityinterfaithforum.org](http://www.dublincityinterfaithforum.org) for the exact dates of these festivals each year and ideas for celebrations.

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## Appendix B

### Suggested Reading for Students Opting Out of RE

Students within a particular faith tradition can be requested to study something pertaining to their own faith.

Students who are not aligned to any religious tradition could be provided with some of the following texts that deal with broad issues related to social and environmental justice, personal development, moral decision-making and philosophy.

It is the responsibility of the class teacher to know which texts may suit these students and read them beforehand to assess their suitability.

#### Junior Cycle

- ▶ *Stella by Starlight*, Sharon Draper
- ▶ *This Side of Home*, Renée Watson
- ▶ *Chicken Soup for the Teenage Soul*, Jack Canfield, Mark Hansen & Kimberly Kirberger
- ▶ *Operation Redwood*, S. Terrell French
- ▶ *A Little Piece of Ground*, Elizabeth Laird
- ▶ *Wonder*, R.J. Palacio
- ▶ *The Lions of Little Rock*, Kristin Levine
- ▶ *Return to Sender*, Julia Alvarez
- ▶ *Sylvia & Aki*, Winifred Conkling

#### Senior Cycle

- ▶ *Plato and the Platypus Walk into a Bar*, Thomas Cathcart
- ▶ *The Philosophy Files*, Stephen Law
- ▶ *The Choice: Embrace the Possible*, Edith Eger
- ▶ *I Was a Boy in Belsen*, Tomi Reichental
- ▶ *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck
- ▶ *March: Book One* (Trilogy), John Lewis and Andrew Aydin
- ▶ *The Little Prince*, Antoine De Saint-Exupéry
- ▶ *Sophie's World*, Jostein Gaarder
- ▶ *Man's Search for Meaning*, Victor Frankl



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