



# Whole School Development Plan for Religious Education and Faith Development

## **Introductory Statement**

In St. John the Apostle, Knocknacarra NS (hereafter known as the school) we aim to provide a caring environment which will enable children to make the most of their potential for academic, spiritual and human development. As a Catholic Primary School, we seek to promote an ethos throughout the school, which reflects the Christian teaching and values of the Church. We seek to establish a caring community centred on Christ so that his values and message are instilled in the life of our school. The central focus in terms of our ethos is a 'child centred' approach, whereby all partners involved in the pupils' learning development have a key role to play. We consider our parents to be a proactive force in the partnership between home, school, parish and wider community.

## **Rationale**

St. John the Apostle is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Bishop of Galway, Kilmacduagh & Kilfenora. Therefore, it is inclusive and subject to the terms of the Enrolment Policy (enrols children of other faiths and none and respects their beliefs and practices). Consultation with parents of all pupils takes place at enrolment and parents are welcomed to view the Religious programme taught (Grow in Love). The school models and promotes a philosophy of life inspired by belief in God and loving one another as Jesus loves us.

It promotes Religious Education for the pupils in accordance with the doctrines, practices and traditions of the Catholic Church and promotes the formation of the pupils in the Catholic Faith. A Christian ethos permeates the school and the life of the school.

In this school, there are children from a range of religious faiths and from differing religious backgrounds. The application of a positive inclusion policy and the study of 'Other Religious Traditions' as part of the 'Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum' will ensure that their needs are met. There is a spirit of prayer in the school and children of no faith are encouraged to respect prayer time and to use the quiet time for reflection. Children from non-Catholic backgrounds may be excused from sacramental preparation if they wish. Often they choose to attend the sacramental ceremonies to perform in the choir or be part of the day.

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

However, the school has an obligation to nurture the spiritual and moral development of all its children. Children of other faiths and no faith are facilitated to work on their moral and spiritual development during religion time, mass preparation for sacraments' and catholic celebrations.

### **Vision and Aims**

The aim of the Religious Education curriculum is to help children mature in relation to their spiritual, moral and religious lives, through their encounter with, exploration and celebration of the Catholic faith.

This school aims to provide a caring environment which will enable children to make the most of their potential for academic, spiritual and human development. We endorse the aims of the Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum. Children will, in a way appropriate to age, maturity, and faith development:

- Come to know God the Father, through Jesus Christ, in the Spirit.
- Value self as loved and gifted by God.
- Become aware of the religious, spiritual and moral dimensions of their own being.
- Come to a knowledge and understanding of the truths about human life, its origins and purpose as revealed by God and taught by the Church.
- Develop competence in the investigation, understanding, appreciation and communication of Catholic culture, tradition, prayer, sacramental life and practice, understanding the relationship between faith and life, and between faith and culture.
- Learn how to participate in the prayer and worship of the Church.
- Develop skills of religious literacy, in the Catholic religious tradition, appropriate to young children.
- Develop virtue, personal and social responsibility, ecological consciousness and the ability to act in accordance with an informed conscience when making moral decisions as a child.
- Develop an understanding of what membership of the Church means and of the Christian missionary vocation.
- Acquire a sensitivity to and knowledge of other Christian traditions (ecumenism).
- Acquire a sensitivity to some other religious traditions and a basic knowledge of their principal beliefs, spiritual values and traditions (inter-Religious Education).
- Develop Christian attitudes and values: for example, love, justice, compassion, truthfulness and respect.

## Content Objectives for Each Class Level

Level 1: Junior and Senior Infants	
Strand	Strand Units
Christian Faith	Mystery of God Mystery of Jesus Christ Creation Mystery of the Church Eternal Life
Word of God	Bible Sacred Scripture God's Loving Plan of Salvation Jesus' Birth and Youth Jesus' Public Life Passion, Death and Resurrection
Liturgy and Prayer	Prayer Prayer Gestures Formal Prayer Additional Prayers Spontaneous prayer Liturgical Year Sacraments Mass
Christian Morality	Human Dignity Social Teaching of the Church RSE in a Christian Context

<b>Level 2: First and Second Class</b>	
<b>Strand</b>	<b>Strand Units</b>
Christian Faith	Mystery of God Mystery of Jesus Christ Mystery of the Holy Spirit Creation Mystery of the Church Mary Eternal Life Other Religious Traditions
Word of God	Bible Sacred Scripture God's Loving Plan of Salvation Jesus' Birth and Youth Jesus' Public Life Jesus' Passion and Death Jesus' Resurrection and Pentecost
Liturgy and Prayer	Prayer Formal Prayer Additional Prayers Liturgical Year Sacraments Mass
Christian Morality	Human Dignity Human Freedom and Responsibility God's Graceful Presence and Assistance Social Teaching of the Church RSE in a Christian Context

<b>Level 3: Third and Fourth Class</b>	
<b>Strand</b>	<b>Strand Units</b>
Christian Faith	Mystery of God Mystery of Jesus Christ Mystery of the Holy Spirit Creation Mystery of the Church/Kingdom Mary Eternal Life Other Religious Traditions
Word of God	Bible Sacred Scripture God's Loving Plan of Salvation Jesus' Birth and Youth Jesus' Public Life Jesus' Passion and Death Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension Pentecost
Liturgy and Prayer	Prayer Formal Prayer Additional Prayers Liturgy Liturgical Year Sacraments Mass
Christian Morality	Human Dignity Human Freedom and Responsibility God's Graceful Presence and Assistance Social Teaching of the Church RSE in a Christian Context

<b>Level 4: Fifth and Sixth Class</b>	
<b>Strand</b>	<b>Strand Units</b>
Christian Faith	Mystery of God Mystery of Jesus Christ Mystery of the Holy Spirit Creation Mystery of the Church/Kingdom Mary Eternal Life Other Religious Traditions
Word of God	Bible Sacred Scripture God's Loving Plan of Salvation Jesus' Birth and Youth Jesus' Public Life Jesus' Passion and Death Jesus' Resurrection and Ascension Pentecost
Liturgy and Prayer	Prayer Formal Prayer Additional Prayers Liturgy Liturgical Year Sacraments Mass
	Human Dignity Human Freedom and Responsibility God's Graceful Presence and Assistance Social Teaching of the Church RSE in a Christian Context

### **Grow in Love Programme**

*Grow in Love* is the new Religious Education series for Catholic primary schools in Ireland. It introduces a new curriculum for Religious Education. Each *Grow in Love* programme is divided into a number of themes, which allows teachers to take a thematic, cross-curricular approach to the teaching of Religious Education. Each theme is designed to last between two and four weeks. As well as the Teacher's Notes and photocopiable worksheets featured in the Teacher's Manual, a comprehensive set of free online resources are also available, including illustrations to accompany every story, video clips and weblinks for further study.

The *Grow in Love* Children's Book features illustrations, stories, poems and activities for families to do together. Parents and children are encouraged to talk and pray about what is being learned in school.

### **Sacred Space and Symbols**

Each classroom has a Sacred Space/ Prayer Corner set up which is used during Prayer services, daily prayers and moments of reflection. This space also displays the children's work on current themes of the 'Grow in Love' programme and changes throughout the Liturgical Year. Each classroom has a crucifix, rosary beads, holy water, and bible. Each class also has a Grow in Love Kit, which contains a Teacher's Manual and Posters. Around the school, symbols of our faith communicate our school's catholic ethos. An altar table is located inside of the foyer of the main entrance area. Here, a different theme is displayed each month, which ties in with the 'Grow in Love' Programme. At Christmas, an Advent wreath and crib are displayed in the corridor also.

### **Sacramental Preparation**

Preparation for the sacraments begins in Junior Infants and continues throughout the school. The whole school celebrates the specific sacraments of Confirmation and First Communion each year. Pupils in second and sixth class attend mass with the community in St. John the Apostle church in preparation for their specific sacrament.

### **Sacrament of Confession and Sacrament of First Communion**

Children in Second class make their First Confession and First Communion in the parish church. Children are thoroughly prepared in all aspects of this sacrament through the 'Do this in Memory of Me Programme'. This is a parish-based pre-sacramental programme designed to help children, parents/guardians and the wider parish community prepare for First Eucharist. An enrolment meeting takes place at the start of the year, where all parents are invited to attend. A dedicated committee of volunteer parents attend planning meetings at the parish office throughout the liturgical year.

## **Sacrament of Confirmation**

Sixth class pupils are prepared for the Sacrament of Confirmation through the parish-based programme 'You Shall Be My Witness'. Parent volunteers train in the programme and assist the parish team in its delivery each January/February. The pupils celebrate the Service of Light in the school and the Sacrament of Confirmation takes place in St. John the Apostle Church. Children are prepared thoroughly in all aspects of these sacraments by the individual class teachers, parents and the community in keeping with the Catholic ethos of the school.

## **Approaches and Methodologies**

- Study of the Grow in Love Teacher's Guide.
- Interactive learning. 'Grow in Love' has an Interactive website.
- Giving children prayer experiences that are meaningful.
- Sacramental and non-sacramental liturgies.
- Use of imagination in prayer.
- Drama and role play on the theme of Christian Values.
- Questions and answers helping children to use their own words.
- Vocal prayer.
- Music – songs
- Artwork.

## **Linkage and Integration**

There are valuable links between spiritual, moral and Religious Education and all other areas of the curriculum. Every effort will be made to respect the freedom of conscience of children who have withdrawn from Religious Education. Religious Education will be integrated with the following areas, Gaeilge, Language and Literacy, Mathematics, Social, Environmental and Scientific Education, Arts Education, Physical Education and Social, Personal and Health Education.

## **Success Criteria**

We will know this policy is working in our school if:

- There is an acknowledged sense of God, Faith, Prayer and Worship within the school community.
- There is an ordered community where respect for all is evident at all times.
- There is an outward-looking care for the less fortunate in society.
- There is evidence of parental interest in the religious education programme.
- There are recognisable links between parish/home/school.

Children can speak confidently about their faith.

## **Implementation**

The Board of Management and the teachers have adopted the Grow in Love Programme. Grow in Love is a new Religious Education series for Catholic primary schools. It is based on the Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland. This curriculum was approved by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and was granted recognition from the Holy See in 2015.

The programme incorporates the recommended approach to religious education for the reception of the sacraments of Penance, Holy Communion and Confirmation. The programme is studied each day for one half-hour.

Meaningful pictures and artworks are on display throughout the school building.

The major Catholic and local feasts are celebrated. They are marked with the aid of a sacred space at the main entrance and with signs and symbols displayed throughout the school e.g.

- Advent – the Advent wreath and Jesse tree
- Months of November (holy souls)
- Mary's month (May)
- Christmas – tree and crib
- Catholic Schools' Week, Feast of St. Brigid – traditional crosses  
- Grandparents' Day
- Feast of St. Patrick – depiction of story and shamrock
- Lent – symbols of repentance and ashes
- Easter – symbols of the new life of resurrection, the empty tomb
- Pentecost – artistic depiction of the coming of the Holy Spirit.

**Liturgical celebrations are held on some occasions e.g.**

- The opening and closing of the school year
- Carol service at Christmas
- Nativity Play
- First Confession
- Communion
- Confirmation
- Blessing of Ashes
- Times of trauma or crisis and for other occasions which from time to time are considered appropriate to celebrate or to mark.

**The pupils of the school join:**

- At the celebration of First Communion and Confirmation
- Family Masses throughout the year- Do this in Memory First Communion Programme.
- Other liturgical celebrations in cooperation with the parish.

The catholic education offered in St John the Apostle is conducted in collaboration with the children's parents and the local parish. We see our role as being supportive of the role of parents and parish.

**Responsibility for Implementing This Policy**

The Board of Management in consultation with the Principal and the Assistant Principal with responsibility for Religious Education are responsible for facilitating the smooth implementation of the policy. The teachers teach the programme appropriate to their class.

**Teachers and Staff:**

- Inform themselves through studying the Grow in Love teacher's manual.
- Deliver and teach the Grow in Love programme appropriate to their class.
- Cooperate with the Chaplain/ Parish and the Diocesan Advisers.
- Actively support the spirit and ethos of the school.
- Provide a broad, balanced, relevant and practical curriculum to meet the needs of a changing environment by providing a rich and varied bank of learning resources supported by an enriching range of extra-curricular activities.
- An ethos of support, challenge and encouragement will infuse innovative teaching and foster an investigative approach to and love of learning.
- Seek continuous improvement by working collectively as a high performance team in a self-evaluative context.
- Secure the strong future of the school by ensuring the proactive and personal development of all team members and embracing the pastoral welfare needs of all.

**Parents:**

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

**Principal:**

- Takes an active role in encouraging the whole school aspects of the programme and monitors progress throughout the school.
- Liaises with the parish priest in defining the role of the chaplaincy and the parish in the life of the school.
- Helps to facilitate supportive interaction of all parties in implementing the programme.

**Spiritual Formation Of Teachers**

The spiritual nourishment of teachers is understood by the Board of Management to be an integral part of the religious education programme undertaken by the school with each staff meeting and Board of Management meetings beginning with prayer and reflection.

**Pupils of Other Religious Faiths and None**

Pupils of other faiths and none are very welcome at St. John the Apostle, Knocknacarra NS. When they enrol it is clearly stated that they are enrolling in a school with a Catholic ethos and that this ethos of caring and consideration for others permeates all in the community. Children are not removed from class during the religion lesson but can work at an interesting, educationally appropriate and child-friendly activity set by the class teacher. Children of other faiths and none and their families are most welcome to join their class at any sacramental or liturgical celebration.

**Head Dress policy**

Specific cultural and religious headdresses, which are not part of the school uniform/dress code may be worn. These may include but not limited to a Dastar (turban) and Hijab headscarf. Children who for religious reasons need to wear extra garments are required to do so in the school colours of blue, navy or white.

**Review and Monitoring**

This policy will be monitored and reviewed by the Board of Management on an annual basis or when the need arises. Staff will be requested on a regular basis to review the school policy in this area and every effort will be made to ensure that the attention of all new staff is drawn to the school Religion Policy. The Board of Management will ensure that adequate training and support, is provided for all staff.

**Ratification and Communication**

This policy was reviewed and ratified by the Board of Management of St. John the Apostle, Knocknacarra NS, on January 29th 2019 and subsequently communicated to the school community via the school's website.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Frank Laffey, Chairperson,  
Board of Management

Date: \_\_\_\_\_