

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION and FAITH DEVELOPMENT POLICY

SCOIL URSULA, STRANDHILL ROAD, SLIGO.

"May the strength and true consolation of the Holy Spirit be in you all,

So that you can sustain and carry out vigorously and faithfully the charge laid upon you."

St. Angela de Merici

INTRODUCTION:-

Scoil Ursula is a Catholic primary school established under the patronage of the Bishop of Elphin. It promotes Christian values and is committed to the holistic development of both pupils and staff. The school endeavours to recognize, develop and appreciate the dignity and uniqueness of each child in a happy, caring and safe environment where respect for both people and the environment is central; thus enabling children to strive with confidence towards their full potential animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity.

VISION:-

"Catholic schools seek to reflect a distinctive vision of life and a corresponding philosophy of education." (Vision 08 - A Vision for Catholic Education in Ireland - Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference).

The main objective of Scoil Ursula is to provide primary education for children from junior infants to sixth class grade. The school is also committed to the professional and personal development of its pupils in a community environment. It aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the pupil; intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual, including a living relationship with God and with other people. The school models and promotes a philosophy of life inspired by belief in God and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

OUR OBJECTIVES:-

The primary objectives are aimed at embracing:

- A sense of fairness and good relationships with all other persons.
- Deep respect and cherishing for all people equally.
- Forgiveness and reconciliation: A place where grudges are not held.
- Respect and Dignity: Deep intrinsic respect for others.
- Affirmation and Tolerance: That we speak to, react to and act towards others, respectful of their dignity.
- Personal Faith Formation: Formal prayer, religion lessons, celebrations of sacraments as well as recognition and appreciation of the liturgical seasons of the year.
- Belonging: That all, children and staff, experience a sense of belonging and contribute to the promotion of the Christian ethos of the school.
- Understanding: Teachers and pupils promote positive experiences of school and foster healthy and wholesome relationships.

CORE VALUES:-

A Catholic Primary School is recognised as a national school by The Department of Education and Skills. This recognition is expressed in the Deed of Variation, a legal agreement between the Patron, the Trustees and the Department of Education and Skills.

The Catholic school is a faith school that expresses a set of core values that can be described as human, religious, Christian and Catholic. The Board of Management, the Principal and the staff, working with the Patron, the parents and the Parish, model a living human - religious - Catholic educational tradition to nurture the faith of Catholic pupils in a manner that is welcoming to and inclusive of the presence of pupils committed to other religious faiths or human traditions.

Religious Education is a core subject but in the Catholic school, the curriculum for it is specified by the Patron. The programme approved by the Catholic Bishops of Ireland is currently the Alive - O Programme.

In recognition of these core values of the Catholic school education, Scoil Ursula 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.

OTHER RELIGIOUS DENOMINATIONS:-

Subject to the terms of the enrolment and admission policy, we enrol pupils of other faiths or no faith in the school and accord due respect for their beliefs and practices. Consultation with parents of these pupils takes place on enrolment. Each child is welcome to attend and benefit from the Catholic religious education programme. If parents have difficulty with this the Principal shall meet with them to see if an accommodation can be reached. Parents are welcome to view the religious programme taught - at its core is the commandment '*Love God and love your neighbour.*' Sensitivity is always shown when pupils cannot participate in liturgical celebrations. The school cannot, however, undertake to educate children of other faiths in their own faith, nor can it provide supervision in a separate class environment during the religious education period.

PROMOTING AND NURTURING A CATHOLIC ETHOS:-

The Board of Management and the teachers have adopted the Alive - O Catechetical Programme approved and recommended by the Irish Hierarchy for use in Catholic Schools.

The programme incorporates the recommended approach to religious education for the reception of the sacraments of Penance, Eucharist and Confirmation and other religious educational curricular activities.

The programme is timetabled each day for one half - hour. A Christian ethos however permeates all aspects of school curricular activities.

WHOLE SCHOOL DIMENSION:-

There is a spirit of prayer in the school, not just related and taught to the children, but is seen to be a lived and valued experience for the teachers. In each classroom the aim is to create an atmosphere of openness, forgiveness and understanding and above all love. A sense of awe and wonder at the goodness, beauty and love of God is developed in the child.

Meaningful icons, pictures, artwork and sacred spaces are on display throughout the school building.

The major Catholic and local, feast days are celebrated appropriately. They are marked with prayer services and with the aid of artwork, signs and symbols, which are displayed in the classroom and throughout the school. These include:

- November - All Saints and Remembering the Dead
- Advent - the Advent wreath and Jesse tree
- Christmas - tree and crib
- Catholic Schools Week
- Feast of St. Brigid - traditional crosses
- Feast of St. Patrick - depiction of story and shamrock
- Lent - symbols of repentance and forgiveness
- Holy Week - Reflection on the way of the Cross
- Easter - symbols of the new life of the resurrection
- Pentecost - artistic depiction of the coming of the Holy Spirit

Liturgical and Eucharistic celebrations are held on significant days of the school including:

- The opening and closing of the school year
- Feast Days
- Christmas Carol Service
- Times of trauma or crisis and for other occasions, which from time to time are considered appropriate to celebrate or to commemorate.
- Catholic Schools Week
- School assemblies, which incorporate thematic religious subject matter, appropriate to age, season and circumstances.

THE PUPILS OF OUR SCHOOL ALSO PARTICIPATE IN:-

- At the celebrations of First Eucharist and Confirmation
- School Masses at the beginning and the end of the academic year
- Other liturgical celebrations in cooperation with the wider community of the parish including altar servers and members of the choir and other participatory roles in the Parish Eucharist

A COLLABORATIVE & PARTNERSHIP APPROACH:-

Catholic tradition has always emphasised that parents are the primary educators and that the role of the school is to work in partnership with the family / home. Parents have a right to a free choice of school in a manner that reflects their religious convictions. The Board of Management will endeavour to promote and encourage close links with the parish and the wider community.

CONNECTING WITH OUR PARISH:-

The Catholic education offered in Scoil Ursula is conducted in collaboration with the children's parents and the local parish. The school perceives its role as being supportive of the role of parents and parish. The priest provides support, expertise and assistance in the religious formation of the children and in a collaborative manner, with the other stakeholders and partners in education. These include providing opportunities for:

- Blessing of throats on the feast of St. Blaise
- Celebrating the Sacrament of Reconciliation prior to Christmas and Easter.
- Informal lessons / talks and interaction with pupils on faith issues and moral development
- Praying with the pupils
- Prayer Services i.e. Advent & Catholic Schools Week
- Faith talks for parents in preparation for First Communion and Confirmation.
- Training and organising altar servers, choirs, and assisting in other participatory roles in the liturgical life of the Parish.

SPIRITUAL FORMATION OF OUR TEACHERS:-

The spiritual nourishment of teachers is acknowledged by the Board of Management to be an integral part of the religious education programme undertaken by the school, and this is fostered where appropriate.

IMPLEMENTING A RELIGIOUS EDUCATIONAL AND FAITH FORMATION PROGRAMME

Teaching Methodologies include:

- Study of the Alive - O, Teacher's Guide
- Interactive learning
- Giving children prayerful and faith formation experiences that are meaningful and relevant
- Sacramental and para-liturgies
- Use of meditation in prayer
- Drama, pageants and role play on thematic Christian values
- Questions and answers which encourage children to use their own words
- Vocal, spontaneous and non - vocal prayer

SUCCESS CRITERIA:-

We will know this policy is operating effectively in our school if:

- There is an acknowledged sense of God, Faith formation, a sense of prayer and worship within the school community and environment
- There is a well behaved school community where respect for the dignity and uniqueness of all school staff and pupils is evident and upheld at all times
- There is evidence of a committed parental interest and involvement in the implementation of the religious education programme, particularly in the home environment
- There are recognisable links which forge strong bonds between parish / home / school
- Children can speak confidently and lovingly of their faith and its relation to the living of their lives.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR IMPLEMENTING THIS PROGRAMME.

The Board of Management in consultation with the Principal and the staff 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 *Alive - O* teacher's manual
- Deliver and teach the *Alive - O* programme appropriate to their class
- Cooperate with the Chaplain/ Parish and the Diocesan Advisers
- Avail of themselves of in-service support which may be provided.
- Actively support the spirit and ethos of the school remembering that Religion is not taught but caught!

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 may be asked to help with religious education homework and to read some parts of the *Alive-O* 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 school priest(s).
- Helps to facilitate supportive interaction of all parties in implementing the programme.

RATIFICATION AND COMMUNICATION

The Board of Management of Scoil Ursula ratified this plan at a Board meeting on

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This policy will be reviewed from time to time and maybe amended whenever the need arises or when circumstances requires it.

Signed: _____