

Ratified by the Board of Management at its meeting on the 28th June, 2023

Version 2

Supersedes version 1 of the policy dated 3rd November, 2014.



ASHBOURNE COMMUNITY SCHOOL

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION POLICY

(2023)

Religious Education Policy of Ashbourne Community School

The '*General Directory for Catechesis*' states that, when working with young people, content 'should be proposed in new ways which are open to the sensibilities and problems of the age group' (185). Thus, good religious education will acknowledge the context within which it takes place. It requires dialogue with the culture in which students grow and by which they are shaped. In the school community, where the dignity of each individual is respected, the role of the teacher of religion is to ensure that a pastorally caring, socially reflective, and religiously sensitive atmosphere permeates the daily life of the school. The Education Act, 1998, Section 9(d), notes the obligation placed on schools to "promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students in consultation with parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school".

The NCCA states that the "Junior Cycle Religious Education focuses on developing knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, and values to enable young people to come to an understanding of religion and its relevance to life, relationship, society, and the wider world. The course is built around three interconnecting strands: Exploring Beliefs, Exploring Questions and Living our Values. (NCCA, 2022).

For this work to be adequately done, home, school and parish communities must work together. (Please refer to the characteristic spirit and the mission statement of the school – see [appendix 1](#)). By working together, these communities help the students to develop the maturity of faith in the world and to develop the willingness to respond to it.

Rationale

We are a multid denominational school. In exercising its general control over the curriculum and conduct of the School the Board shall ensure that there is religious worship and religious instruction for the pupils in the school.

The religious worship attended by any pupil at the school, and the religious instruction given to any pupil shall be in accordance with the rites, practice, and teaching of the religious denomination to which the pupil belongs.

We endeavor to; live by Community and Gospel values, recognise the dignity of each individual, are challenged to develop a curriculum that promotes the harmonious growth of the whole person, contribute to the building up of the local community and work for peace and justice in society.

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Aim of Religious Education in School in Ashbourne Community School

The general aim of Religious Education is to:

- Develop in people their personal faith and spirituality, to help them throughout their lives to deepen and strengthen their beliefs.
- To foster awareness that the human search for meaning is common to all peoples of all ages, at all times.
- To explore how this search for meaning has found, and continues to find, expression in religion.
- To identify how understandings of religious traditions have contributed to the culture in which we live, and how they continue to have an impact on personal lifestyle, inter-personal relationships, and relationships between individuals and their communities and contexts.
- To appreciate the richness of religious traditions and to acknowledge the non-religious interpretation of life.
- To contribute to the spiritual and moral development of the student.
- In Ashbourne Community School this is done in partnership with teachers, parents, Board of Management and the wider parish community.

Curriculum

While Religious Education in Ashbourne Community School is not a state examined subject, the school still follows the aims and objectives of the Junior Certificate Religion syllabus as outlined by the Department of Education, which is to “provide students with a framework for encountering and engaging with the variety of religious traditions in Ireland and elsewhere”.

This is achieved by, “Contributing to the spiritual and moral development of the student”. -- (Department of Education, Religious Education, Junior Certificate Guidelines for Teachers). This is in accordance with the wishes of the Religious Patron of the school, the Bishop of Meath.

At senior level teachers will devise a course outline for their students. Religion classes are of a mixed ability student cohort. Assessment techniques include project work, debate, discussion, copy collection, class quiz and class tests. Opportunities are provided for students to critically reflect on other faith communities and religions. It is the policy of the RE Department to arrange, when and where possible, class trips to religious places of interest and worship.

The syllabus imposes requirements on the school classroom. However, the work of religious education (catechesis) is broader than syllabus content. As mentioned previously, for this to be done adequately done, home, school and parish communities must work together. By working together, these communities help the students to develop the maturity of faith to see God’s presence in the world and to develop the willingness to respond to it.

The Religion teachers at Ashbourne Community School will annually review the textbooks used in class. Homework is given in accordance with the homework policy of Ashbourne Community School and with the discretion of the class teacher.

The programmes in use are:

Junior Cycle- Religious Education Junior Cycle Syllabus

Senior Cycle - Religion teacher designed curriculum plan.

Transition Year- Religion teacher designed curriculum plan.

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Textbooks:

Junior Cycle: Junior Cycle Textbook reviewed annually.

Transition Year: Religion teacher designed curriculum plan.

Senior Cycle: Religion teacher designed curriculum plan.

In accordance with the wishes of the Religious Patron of the school, the Bishop of Meath and in line with the Deed of Trust, each individual class in Ashbourne Community School receives two hours of religion per week.

Resources and Facilities

Resources for the teaching of Religion in Ashbourne Community School include:

- Fully equipped Meditation/Prayer room designed by the Religion Department.
- DVDs and Video materials.
- Access to a computer and over-head projector in every Religion classroom.
- IT Facilities – a device trolley can be booked and used in classes.
- Shared One Note page containing resources.
- A photocopying facility is available to all religion teachers.

The Meditation/Prayer room is to be kept as a sanctuary of peace and tranquility for reflection and prayer. Every attempt will be made to keep the prayer room exclusively for the above purpose.

Religious Instruction and Religious Worship

Ashbourne Community School is a multi-denominational school. It is expected that all students participate in Religious Education classes, as outlined by the N.C.C.A. White Paper in Education ref. Societal and Individual Development through Education. If a pupil seeks an exemption from attending religious instruction the following steps must be adhered to:

- A meeting between the student and class teacher.
- Written confirmation of parental / guardian consent, to the Principal Secretary of the Board of Management, outlining clear and valid reasons for individual's exclusion from Religion instruction.
- For supervision purposes, the exempted student will remain in the religion classroom and complete personal study. Where this is not to the satisfaction of parents/guardians, the student must leave the school grounds for the duration of the RE class. with parental permission for the duration of the RE class only.

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Staffing

Teachers of Religious Education in Ashbourne Community School are expected to hold the relevant qualifications necessary to teach Religion. They should possess a degree in Theology / Religious Science plus a Higher Diploma in Education or its equivalent. This is the minimum qualification needed to teach Religion to any class in the school.

As an RE department, we meet on a regular basis throughout the year.

Co-Ordinator of Religious Education in Ashbourne Community School

Currently, in the absence of a post of responsibility for Religious Education in the school, the coordinating of the Religion Department will be a shared one, rotated on an annual basis.

Religious Celebration

The liturgical seasons are celebrated by the school through prayer, masses, para-liturgies, meditations, reflections, assemblies etc. Significant seasons include Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter while acknowledging other world faith celebrations.

Chaplaincy Services

The school Chaplain is the faith presence in the school community who is available to all students and staff. The Chaplain's non-disciplinary role in the school enables him/her to develop a relationship of trust with students, staff, and parents. The Chaplain is committed to the teaching and values of Christ, acting on behalf of the Church and the school community and accompanying each student on their journey through life.

The Chaplain will be a professionally qualified person with responsibility for the co-ordination of specified activities associated with the Catholic faith in collaboration with others who also have designated pastoral responsibilities in the school community.

The Chaplain will be a full-time member of staff. S/he shall be nominated by the local Bishop and shall remain a member of the staff until the bishop withdraws his/ her nomination. The Chaplain will participate fully in all activities which relate to the wellbeing and development of the school. A significant role of the Chaplain will be to ensure that the characteristic spirit of the school as expressed in the school's mission statement finds practical expression in faith formation as well as pastoral, liturgical and outreach activities.

The Chaplain will be required to act collaboratively with all members of the school community and with those who hold designated pastoral responsibilities relating to students, staff and members of the wider community connected with the school. Given the complex nature of the role and the inevitable over-lap involved, the Chaplain will work within agreed structural arrangements as outlined by the principal. The Chaplain will be accountable to the principal.

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The Chaplain is a member of the Religious Department of the school. The principal, together with the Chaplain shall make provision for religious worship and instruction of the pupils in the school, in accordance with the wishes of the parents and of the local Bishop. The Chaplain in Ashbourne Community School will exercise his/her pastoral role:

- By personal contact with individual students.
- By class contact.
- Through religious worship.
- By maintaining a lively interest in recreational, cultural, and apostolic activities.

Inclusion

As stated in our Admission Policy, 'The core values of Ashbourne Community School are care, respect, community, inclusion, equality, justice, and fairness'.

- A genuine community ethos is based on universal values which are formative for people of all faiths e.g., respect for humanity and the earth, a search for meaning, truth, goodness, beauty, charity etc.
- A representative of the Catholic church is invited to attend functions in the school.
- The New Junior Cycle syllabus is inclusive of students of all faiths and none.
- Multi-denominational services are held throughout the school year.
- No student is prevented from wearing a religious symbol. Any query with uniform due to religious tradition will be answered before the student is admitted.

Parish / Diocese / In-service

The Religion Department, in conjunction with the chaplains, will ensure that contact is maintained between the school and the parish of Ashbourne / Donaghmore through regular meetings with local clergy, both in and outside of the school and through attending meetings and social events in the parish. The Religion Department will be facilitated to meet the Diocesan Advisor on his / her visit to the school. Religion teachers will be encouraged to attend Diocesan in-services and in-services related to the teaching of Religion. This Religious Education Policy of Ashbourne Community School is reviewed on a regular basis.

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Appendix 1

Characteristic spirit and general objectives of the school (ACS Admissions Policy)

Ashbourne School Community School is a co-educational multi-denominational post-primary school under the joint patronage of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Meath and Louth Meath ETB. Community Schools provide a comprehensive system of post-primary education open to all the children of the local community. An innovative approach to delivery of a wide-ranging curriculum contributes to the spiritual, moral, mental, physical, and social well-being of students within their community. Community Schools may also provide for life-long learning within their local community through the provision of adult education programmes.

Our school was established under the Deed of Trust and opened in September 1994 on a greenfield site. The values of Louth Meath ETB as a multi-denominational State Body and the inherited traditions, Christian values and founding intentions of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Meath are enshrined in the characteristic spirit and in the life of our school and are respected and cherished.

The core values of Ashbourne Community School are care, respect, community, inclusion, equality, justice, and fairness. These values combine to provide and support an atmosphere which is conducive to excellence in teaching and learning. We endeavour to assist each student to reach his/ her full potential in a calm, caring and creative environment.

Our values are reflected in how we live as a school community. The unique and intrinsic value of each member of the school community is recognised and respected. All are treated equally, regardless of race, gender, religion/belief, age, family status, marital status, civil status, membership of the Traveller community, sexual orientation, ability, disability, or socio-economic status. All students are given equal opportunity for enrolment, in line with the Education (Admissions to School) Act (2018) construed in accordance with section 3 of the Equal Status Act 2000. Once enrolled, Ashbourne Community School provides all our students with equal opportunities to engage with the curriculum, school life and the local community.

Ashbourne Community School provides a safe physical and social environment that reinforces a sense of belonging to the school community and wider society. We strive to enable every student to realise their full potential regardless of any aspect of their identity, culture, or background. Ashbourne Community School promotes a fully inclusive education which recognises the plurality of identities, beliefs and values held by students, parents, and staff. We prepare open-minded and responsible citizens with a strong sense of shared values with a view to contributing to a just and fairer society.

Our school is multi-denominational where we welcome, respect and support students of all religions and beliefs. The provision of religious education, religious worship, and the work of the Chaplain all combine to reflect the founding intention of the school, the school's mission statement and the needs of the students within the school. The characteristic spirit of the school finds practical expression through the provision of pastoral, liturgical and social outreach activities, as appropriate, for each student.

In Ashbourne Community School, we celebrate the partnership, collaboration and empathy which nurtures and develops our young people in a community where the essence of our ethos is care and respect for self, others, and our environment.

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Mission Statement

Our school is a place where we foster such values as respect, inclusion, and care as evident in our school policy and practice.

Ashbourne Community School is a partnership of Students, Staff, Parents/Guardians, Board of Management, and our local and global communities. We value the on-going input of all these partners in the life of the school.

We pursue academic excellence while recognising the diversity of our student body. Through our relevant curriculum, designed to meet the needs of all, we endeavour to help all students realise their potential.

Through positive staff and student relationships and a broad extra-curricular programme, we aim to develop in each student a confident, healthy self-image and a sense of personal, local, and global responsibility.

We recognise that each student's personal and spiritual growth is important. We endeavour to co-operate with parents and guardians and religious leaders of all faiths to encourage the development of religious and spiritual values in each student.

END OF APPENDIX 1

This policy has been ratified by the Board of Management of Ashbourne Community School at its meeting on 28th day, June, 2023 (Ref Meeting Nr. 281).



Signed: Ciarán Flynn, Chairperson,

Date: 28th June, 2023.

**Board of Management,
Ashbourne Community School.**