

*Blackwater Community  
School*

*Religion Policy  
( 2020 )*

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### **SCOPE of the policy:**

As a Community School recently amalgamated from Christian Brother, Mercy and Presentation Catholic Schools this religious education policy will impact on the whole school community. The scope will reach:

#### **Board of Management**

To approve the policy and ensure its implementation.

#### **Principal and Deputy Principal**

To support the procedures of the policy and ensure its effective implementation.

#### **School Staff**

As teachers in a Community school, the hope is that the whole staff embraces and safeguards the ethos of the school and support the cross-curricular nature of Religious Education.

#### **Teachers of Religious Education**

To implement and review the policy.

To ensure a high standard and effective delivery of Religious Education.

#### **Chaplain**

To assist in the faith development of students.

**Pastoral Care Personnel (Class Tutors / Guidance Counsellor)**

To monitor the effects of the policy and to provide support and guidance to the students.

**Parents / Guardians**

To support the Religion Programme in the school and facilitate the faith formation of their children.

**Students**

To participate in the Religion programme and to cultivate an openness to other religious traditions.

**Trusteeship**

Mercy Order, Presentation Order, Christian Brothers, Education & Training Board.

## **Section One**

### ***'Towards a Policy on Religious Education in Blackwater Community School'***

Religious Education is a fundamental component of the curriculum in Blackwater Community School. Religious Education is not concerned with indoctrination or teaching a person a religious way of behaving. It focuses on enabling students to speak the public language of religion; to comprehend and appreciate the place of religion and philosophical beliefs and practices in human life; to understand the need for dialogue among Christians; to develop powers of empathy for and sensitivity towards people of other religions and beliefs; to explore the beliefs and practices of other world religions and to foster awareness of shared values such as justice, peace the dignity of the human person; to prepare students for living in community with other people of their own faith traditions and none.

## **School MISSION STATEMENT**

Blackwater Community School is committed to quality education.

### **VISION of our Community School**

Inspired by the vision of the founding trustees:

- Seeks to live by Gospel values;
- Recognises the dignity of each individual;
- Has a special concern for the poor and under-privileged;
- Is challenged to develop a curriculum which promotes the harmonious growth of the whole person;
- Contributes to the building up of the local community;
- Works for peace and justice in society.

### **Aims of Religious Education:**

- To foster awareness that the human search for meaning is common to all peoples of all ages and at all times.
- To explore how this search for meaning has found, and continues to find, expression in religion.
- To identify how understandings of God, religious traditions and in particular the Christian tradition, 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.

## **RATIONALE for the policy**

As an amalgamation of Mercy, Presentation and Christian Brother schools we in Blackwater Community School are committed to the importance of formal religious and moral education. Approximately 97% of Blackwater Community School students are Catholic and 2% Church of Ireland. This policy allows us the opportunity to reflect on, explore and articulate what it means to be a Catholic school following our founding trustees' tradition in third millennium Ireland. It is our hope and privilege to harness the religious development of our students of all faiths and none. It is the policy that all students participate in religious education classes. Religious education is not an option.

## **GOALS or objectives of the policy**

- To ensure the status of Religion in the school.
- To promote the religious and overall development of the students.
- To appreciate the richness of religious traditions and to provide a framework to encounter these traditions.
- To lead to a greater degree of clarity in respect of aims, procedures and roles for Religion in the school.



## **Section Two**

### ***CONTENT***

#### **Staffing**

It is the stated policy of the Religion Department that all personnel will hold a professional qualification in this subject.

The Religion Co-ordinator in the school is Mrs Melanie O'Sullivan Hyland. Her role is to liaise with management and religion teachers in relation to the teaching of Religion.

The school has a fulltime Chaplain, Ms. Caroline Flynn.

#### **The role of chaplain is to:**

- Be available to staff, students and members of the school community
- To work as part of the Pastoral Care Team
- To liaise with key staff: School Guidance Counsellor, Home School Liaison Officer, Special Needs Co-ordinator, Year Heads, Class Tutors, etc.
- To encourage School-Parish links
- To facilitate the implementation of the Liturgical Calendar
- To support the Religion Department.

The school has a sacramental Chaplain, Fr. Michael Cullinan PP Lismore. He facilitates the celebration of the sacramental life of the school.

It is the policy that the Religion Department will meet on a regular basis. The aims of these meetings are:

1. To create a strong, fully briefed Religion team.
2. Curriculum Planning at Junior and Senior Level.
3. To ensure that significant Liturgical events are celebrated and recognised throughout the school year.
  - Opening of the school year
  - Junior Cert Prayer Service in thanksgiving for results
  - Advent Services of Reconciliation
  - Carol Service
  - New Year
  - Catholic Schools' Week
  - Christian Unity Service
  - Ash Wednesday Service
  - Lenten Reconciliation
  - Leaving Cert Graduation Mass
  - Mass of Healing
  - Morning Prayer
  - Class Masses
- 4 To provide a co-ordinated approach to action for justice projects within the school.
- 5 Liaise with School Chaplain for fund raising for charity, organising retreats, inviting in speakers, pilgrimages etc.

## **Curriculum and Resources**

All pupils are required to participate in R.E. classes. There is no opting out clause. If there is an issue it will be dealt with at the discretion of

management. However, withdrawal from religious class needs to be negotiated with school management. Parents will be asked to take an active role in the provision of supervision of their son/daughter if they wish to remove them from religion class.

A member of the Religious Education team will present an outline of the exam syllabus at the opening night for the parents of incoming first years.

- There are three class periods devoted to Religious Education weekly both in Junior Cycle Level and one at Leaving Cert Level.
- Religion is not taken as an exam subject.
- It is recommended at Senior Cycle
  - that there would be an average of 20 per class.
  - to avoid last class on Friday
  - there would be team teaching, based on eight week modules.

**The programmes in use are:**

<i>Junior Cycle</i>	Junior Cycle Syllabus
<i>Senior Cycle</i>	Transition Year Programme
	Senior Cycle NCCA non exam Syllabus
	LCA Religious Education Draft Syllabus.

**Text books and reference books** (frequently in use)

***Junior Cycle:*** Religion for Living-Connie Duffy,  
Veritas Programme

***Transition Year*** Searching Orla Walsh

***Senior Cycle:*** Leaving Cert

- Challenge Of God Tom Gunning
- Life Matters Niall Boyle
- Veritas Series for LC Exam
- Non Exam Syllabus
- Diocesan resource material
- Subject Folder: power points etc.
- Inner Peace Tom Gunning

LCA

- Teacher Guidelines.

### ***Facilities and Resources***

- Classroom based teachers
- Fully equipped Meditation room designed by Fergus Costello
- In keeping with the underlying principle of the room only activities that facilitate the ambience will be acceptable e.g. meditation, prayer service, mass, religion, etc.
- Filled with contemporary images and symbols from the Christian tradition
- Students and staff of any tradition are welcome to pray here
  - Local clergy support
  - Dept. of Education and Science Religious Education Support Service
  - Diocesan Library St Johns College Waterford

- Parents
- School Chaplain
- Chaplain's Office
- Sacramental Chaplain
- Sacred Space
- Local Community Groups
- Interactive White Boards
- Religion Notice Board
- Religion Press
- Religion Filing Cabinet
- Audio Visual Equipment

## **Staff Support and Development**

*Effective Religious Education does not just happen spontaneously or accidentally. The very nature of the Religious Education class requires teachers of Religious Education to keep 'upgrading' and enhancing their teaching skills and resources.*

*No other subject on the curriculum, it could be argued, has the same degree of visibility in a school. Religious Education permeates and pervades the entire school community.*

- Management is supportive of all Religious Education in and out of the classroom
- All Religion teachers are encouraged to attend in-service for Junior Cycle and Leaving Cert and Diocesan In-service
- As with all Subject Departments in the school a budget is provided to support teaching and learning in this area,
  - the cost of covering transport for retreats
  - payment is made for each student to the Diocese

Outside support is received from the

- Diocesan Representative
- Our Trustees: Mercy Order, Presentation Order, Christian Brothers, Ceist
- Religious Education Support Service
- Diocesan Clergy

## **Faith Formation and the Liturgical Year**

*It is important that teachers who work in a school participate actively in the liturgical and sacramental life of the school. Students who witness and experience the concrete involvement of adults in the liturgical and sacramental life of the school will share more readily in the life of the school. There is need to promote a Christian spirituality in our schools.*

### **Religious Imagery**

The Liturgical year is marked by having religious imagery i.e. Crucifix, Month of the Holy Souls, Advent Wreath, Crib, Bible, St. Bridget, St. Patrick, St. Thèrese and other saints, Mary, Jesus, Rosary Beads, Lent, Jesse Tree displayed in our main foyer and corridors. A brief written description of the major images will be displayed.

The liturgical year is also marked in school by a number of events. The major liturgical seasons of Advent and Lent are marked by opportunities for:

- Sacrament of Reconciliation
- Mass
- Carol Service
- Para liturgies
- There is a sacred space in the main foyer that is decorated to reflect the changing liturgical calendar.

- The Morning Prayer is also reflective of the significance of the time of year, feast day etc.
- The school is fortunate to have the services of a priest chaplain and there is an opportunity for pupils to have a class Mass.
- At the beginning of each Staff Day there is a Reflection Service.
- All Staff are supportive of all Religious events and staff are encouraged to participate in the liturgical life of the school.
- Retreats are an essential part of the spiritual life of the school. We would see retreats as desirable for all years especially for exam classes. Retreats are revised on an annual basis. Retreats are subsidised by the school e.g. Transport.
- In the event of a sudden death of a staff member or student, the “Critical Incident Management Plan comes into effect. An appropriate prayer service takes place. The Chaplain and Religion Co-ordinator are responsible for co-ordinating such a prayer service.
- The Rainbows Programme for bereavement and loss.

## **Outreach Programmes**

The students are involved in/with the following:

- Concern
- Trocaire
- Self Help
- Bothair
- Simon
- Senior Citizens party

- Carol singing St. Cartages Hospital, Cappoquin Day Care Centre,
- St. Vincent de Paul
- Development Education week
- Share a Dream
- Guide Dogs for the Blind
- Children's Hospital
- Edmund Rice Awards
- Development Education Programme in Transition Year
- John Paul Awards TY
- Diocesan trip to Lourdes
- Visits to and from Cistercian Order Mount Melleray and Glencairn and Carmelite Order in Tallow

## **Parental and Parish Involvement**

Parents are asked to attend/participate in school activities:

- Carol Service,
- Mass of Healing,
- Remembrance Tree,
- Sixth Year Graduation Mass,
- Choir sings in local Churches.
- Parish Clergy are supportive of Liturgical events in the school

## **Withdrawal from Religious Education**

Blackwater Community School respects and acknowledges the rights of parents who require that their son or daughter be excluded from Religious Education. The manner in which such an 'opt out' is facilitated is related to available resources within the school and complies with the school's policies on curriculum, supervision and child safeguarding.



Three options that Blackwater Community School can provide for students when a request for 'opt out' from Religious Education is made include:

1. Staying within the classroom and reading a book.
2. Parents removing their son or daughter from the school premises for the duration of Religious Education
3. Parents provide supervision within the school for their son or daughter during Religious Education classes

## **Inclusion**

One of the mission aims as stated in the Mission Aims of Blackwater Community School is 'to foster the Christian values of truth, honesty and integrity'. As stated in Blackwater Community School's Admission Policy 'We admit pupils of other faiths on the understanding of the Catholic nature of the school and endeavour if possible to accommodate their faith needs.'

- A genuinely Catholic 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.
- Provision is made for Church of Ireland students to attend classes and participate in liturgies in the Church of Ireland Lismore
- The Dean is invited to attend functions in the school
- The New Junior Cycle syllabus is inclusive of students of all faiths and none.
- Non-denominational services are held throughout the school year.
- As a department we do not wish to supervise students who are not taking part in the Religious Education Programme

- No student is prevented from wearing a religious symbol. Any difficulty with uniform due to religious tradition will be resolved before the student is admitted. The wearing of a full veil over a girl's face, for example, could constitute a hazard and may therefore be forbidden on health and safety grounds.

### **Section Three**

#### **Success Criteria:**

#### **Monitoring and Review of Policy**

- The RE department will monitor policy implementation.
- Good communication between the RE Department and school management.
- At the end of each year, the RE department meet to evaluate the success of the policy implementation.

#### **Timeframe**

This policy came into effect on 14th Nov 2007. It is formally reviewed in October of each year.

***Reviewed 31.08.2020***

### **Signatures**

Board of Management

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Principal

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Religious Education Co-Ordinator

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Diocesan Advisor

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Date

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