



Policy for Opting Out from Faith Formation

School Name: Scoil Fhursa, Lyre

Date: December 2018

Introduction

Scoil Fhursa is a primary school under the patronage of the Catholic Bishop of Cloyne. The vision of the school is as follows:

Scoil Fhursa is a co-educational, Catholic, Primary School which strives to provide a well-ordered, caring, happy and secure atmosphere where the intellectual, spiritual, physical, moral and cultural needs of the pupils are identified and addressed.

While Scoil Fhursa is a school with a Catholic ethos, it also has due recognition for all other religions.

Scoil Fhursa will strive to promote, both individually and collectively, the professional and personal development of teachers through staff development programmes.

Scoil Fhursa will encourage the involvement of parents through home/school contacts and through their involvement in the Scoil Fhursa Parents' Association.

Scoil Fhursa will endeavour to enhance the self-esteem of everyone in the school community, to imbue in the pupils, respect for people and property and to encourage in them the idea of being responsible.

Scoil Fhursa will promote gender equity amongst the teachers and pupils.

While the faith of the school permeates throughout the school day, there are 2.5 hours per week dedicated to discrete faith formation classes in the school. This school uses the Grow in Love programme. The school recognises that some of our families do not come from a Catholic background. We strive to treat all of our children with respect in our school throughout the day. However, we also recognise that the message delivered from the school's faith formation

programme can be counter to the belief system of some families. We, therefore, offer families an option to "opt out" of these lessons.

The school also recognises the diversity of its staff. In line with the Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015, no teacher or other member of staff will be discriminated against because of their own religious beliefs.

Rationale

There are a number of factors that make this policy important for every denominational primary school in Ireland.

The Department of Education and Skills will be publishing its new schools admissions bill soon. Schools will have to outline their practices in terms of how they accommodate children that opt out of faith formation.

The above is grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that *"Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status."* It also states that *"parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members."* Articles 14 and 30 also refer to a child's right to freedom of religion.

Furthermore, the Irish Constitution (Article 44.2.4) makes express provision for the right to opt-out: *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.*

Also, Section 30 (2) -(e) of the Education Act 1998 permits you to opt your child out of any subject in the curriculum.

The Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015 outlaw discrimination in a wide range of employment and employment-related areas. These include recruitment and promotion; equal pay; working conditions; training or experience; dismissal and harassment including sexual harassment. The legislation defines discrimination as treating one person in a less favourable way than another person based on any of the nine grounds including religion. (Employment Equality Act, 1998)

In light of these, this school sets out the following policies with regards to faith formation during the school day.

Content of Policy

This policy covers situations where a pupil opts not to participate in faith formation classes or certain religious practices. It does not cover the following areas:

- Enrolment: it is assumed that the child is enrolled in the school before wishing to opt out. The Enrolment Policy describes how the school prioritises enrolment of pupils.
- Other Curriculum Subjects: The ethos of the school must permeate throughout the school day. This means that many subjects must follow the patron's religious values, including programmes such as Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), Stay Safe, Walk Tall, etc.
- Iconography: this school is patronised by the Catholic Church. This means that symbolism of the school's faith can be found around the school building.

Timing of Faith Formation Lessons

- *Faith formation classes take place at 12 noon each day.*

Provisions made for children that are opted out

- *While children will not be expected to take part in the lessons, they must remain in their classroom. Alternative work will be provided for them by the teacher, which will be of a non-religious nature.*

Prayers

In line with the ethos of the school, prayers are said during the school day. If a child is opted out of faith formation, he/she will not be expected to join in with the prayers. However, a teacher will not be expected to intervene should the child join in with these prayers. This is to avoid singling out and embarrassing the child.

Nativity Plays

This school puts on a Christmas Play based on the Nativity every second year. The play may be a direct retelling of the story of the birth of Jesus Christ or a story with a theme linked to this story. Children that are opted out of faith formation will not be expected to take part in these performances. However, they will remain in class while children are prepared for these performances. Should a family wish for their children to take part in these performances, they should inform the school in writing. The same protocol will be applied to school carol services in the intervening years.

Sacraments

The Sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation are a central part of a Catholic pupil's journey in school and life. Some preparation is done outside of the normal Faith Formation allotted time. Children that are opted out will have the same provisions made for them as they would for regular Faith Formation classes.

In order to be as inclusive as possible, a photograph of the class will take place in the school with children in their school uniform. This ensures that all children in the class will be in the photograph.

Graduation

In general, the school's graduation ceremony will have a religious aspect to it. Children that are opted out will not be expected to take part in the Mass but will be expected to attend the ceremony. Teachers and staff will also be expected to attend the full ceremony.

Newsletters

In line with the school's ethos, the school newsletter may contain messages, notes, prayers or information about Faith Formation in school. The school does not have the capacity to create separate newsletters for parents of children that are opted out.

Visits from Church Leaders

The priest often visits classes to talk to the children throughout the school year. The school cannot plan for these visits but will do their utmost to ensure that the priest is aware of any children that are opted out of religion in the school. However, the school cannot take any responsibility for interactions between the faith leaders and children in the school. Where rituals take place, such as dispensing of ashes on Ash Wednesday, the priest will be informed of the wishes of families that are opted out. In very rare circumstances, an error may arise, and while the school will do their very best to ensure that no upset is caused, it cannot take responsibility for any such error performed by the visit of a priest.

Visits to Church or other religious buildings/venues.

Where possible, the school will inform parents/guardians of any visits to the Church. The school will always contact parents/guardians before any school religious service held in the Church. Parents/guardians will be invited to collect their children at this time. If parents/guardians cannot collect their children, the children must attend the Church. However, they will not be expected to take part in the service.

Religion Inspections

Schools are sometimes inspected by the patron with regards to their provision of faith formation. Often these inspections are unannounced and inspectors will be informed of any child opted out in the classroom where possible.

Children with Additional Educational Needs

All children, including those with additional needs are covered by this policy.

Ratification

This policy was drawn up by the Board of Management of Scoil Fhursa in conjunction with staff and parents and was ratified at a Board Meeting