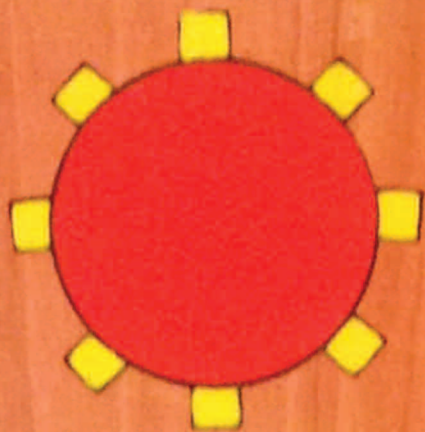


Introduction



The Catholic Preschool And Primary Religious Education Curriculum

The Catholic vision of education is rooted in its ‘Christian concept of life centred on Jesus Christ; he is the One who ennobles people, gives meaning to human life, and is the model which the Catholic school offers to its pupils’(CS 33–37).¹ The Catholic Faith is a body of truth that is to be faithfully handed on through Religious Education and catechesis and this handing on is the Christian mission and duty of parents, clergy, religious, teachers and catechists (cf. LF 40, par 1). Religious education is never simply one subject among many in the Catholic primary school, but the foundation of the entire educational process. Catholic primary Religious Education is distinctive because it seeks to encourage and support the Catholic faith commitment of Catholic students (SGN 39). The National Directory for Catechesis, *Share the Good News* (2010), outlines principles for Religious Education in the Irish Catholic Church (SGN chapter 2).

This Religious Education curriculum was written for Irish Catholic preschools and primary schools, north and south. The curriculum has been developed to respond to the shifting cultural and educational context in which primary Religious Education is carried out today. It offers a common educational language for all those responsible for the quality of Catholic Religious Education at preschool and primary level. Religious education resembles other academic disciplines that are taught in Catholic schools. The GDC puts this notion in these terms:

It is necessary, therefore, that religious instruction in schools appear as a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines. It must present the Christian message and the Christian event with the same seriousness and the same depth with which other disciplines present their knowledge. It should not be an accessory alongside of these disciplines, but rather it should engage in a necessary interdisciplinary dialogue. (GDC 73)

Religious education takes place in primary schools in the island of Ireland within circumstances supported by Education Acts in both jurisdictions.² The *Education Act* (1998) states the requirement that schools ‘promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students ... in consultation with their parents, having regard for the characteristic spirit of the school’.³ In the Irish Republic, the various patron bodies are responsible for the development and implementation of the curriculum of Religious Education in primary schools.⁴ In Northern Ireland, the *Revised Core Syllabus for Religious Education* (2007), prepared by the four major churches – Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, Methodist and Roman Catholic – and negotiated with the Department of Education, Northern Ireland, sets out a common core for the teaching of Religious Education, which schools are free to build on in a way that suits the needs of their pupils and the ethos of the school.⁵ In both jurisdictions, the Religious Education curriculum provides formal

¹ For further information on the vision of Catholic education see Irish Catholic Bishop’s Conference, *Catholic Primary Schools: A Policy for Provision into the Future* (Veritas, 2007); *Vision 08 – A Vision for Catholic Education in Ireland* (2008); The Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland, *Proclaiming the Mission – The Distinctive Philosophy and Values of Catholic Education* (2001); *Building Peace Shaping the Future* (2001); and Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, *Life to the Full: A Vision for Catholic Education* (1996); Catholic Schools Partnership, *Catholic Primary Schools – Looking to the Future* (2012).

² For the Republic, see Government of Ireland, *Education Act* (Dublin: the Stationery Office, 1998); for Northern Ireland see the *Education Reform Act 1988* and the *Education Reform Order*, (Northern Ireland, 1989).

³ Government of Ireland, *Education Act*, 9(d).

⁴ Ireland, Department of Education and Science, *Primary School Curriculum: Introduction* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1999), p. vi.

⁵ *Revised Core Syllabus for Religious Education* (CSRE). Available from www.deni.gov.uk. The core syllabus has been taken into account in the planning of this national curriculum and direct links are indicated in parentheses.

teaching in matters of belief, values and practice that equip the young child for a free and intelligent expression of personal faith within the family, Church and wider society (SGN 39).

In the life of the Irish Church

The National Directory for Catechesis, *Share the Good News*, provides the vision for how Catholic Religious Education is understood, proposing a model of continuous and progressive Religious Education and faith formation across the years of schooling. In this vision, Religious Education in primary school contributes to the process whereby Catholic children are invited ‘to live in community and to participate actively in the life and mission of the Church’ (GDC 86; SGN 99). This kind of Religious Education assumes that the life and ethos of the Catholic school provides the witness and community context that enables this understanding to develop. Ideally, the work of the school stands alongside the lived experience of faith in home and parish (SGN 39, 91) and Religious Education in the school is co-ordinated with the catechesis and sacramental initiation offered in the family and in the parish (SGN 39, 102, 152). As catechesis of adults is now considered the chief form of catechesis in the Church (GDC 20; CT 43; SGN 68-9), school-based Religious Education of young children is to be carried out in the context of *lifelong learning* in religion. This has clear implications for the amount of content and the types of processes found in this primary Religious Education curriculum, as well as the kinds of knowledge and skills considered desirable for young children at the beginning of the third millennium.

Share the Good News outlines an educational vision for the Irish Church which draws on a pastoral model: ‘a vision of the parish community as a catechetical community; recognition of the ongoing need for the spiritual care of all educators, parents/guardians, teachers, parish ministers; and greater sharing of ideas, responsibilities and resources at diocesan and parish levels’ (SGN 100). In this pastoral model the home, school, and parish have differing and connected roles:

The family: Parents/guardians are the primary educators of their children in faith. In the home they can introduce young people to the lived reality of faith through prayer, moral formation, everyday expressions of love and reconciliation, good example and simple sharing of the faith journey. They also contribute appropriately to their children’s formal instruction in and initiation into the faith by participating in parish-based catechesis (SGN 91-8). Catholic schools build upon this foundation and work collaboratively with parents/guardians in the Religious Education of their children.⁶

The parish is where the child learns the meaning of worship, encounters Christ in the sacraments, and shares in the practical outreach of the Christian community in mission to the world. Parish-based catechetical programmes can support family catechesis, school-based sacramental preparation, liturgical formation, and provide many different opportunities for apostolic action and personal spiritual growth.

The school: Religious education in the Catholic primary school consists of two distinct but complementary dimensions, namely an educational dimension and a faith formation dimension (SGN 38, 39, 99-100). The first dimension, most commonly referred to as curriculum religion, is focused on a form of Religious Education which focuses on the

⁶ It is envisaged that ‘Guidelines for Religious Education in the Home and Parish’ will complement this curriculum.

teachings and values of the Catholic Church. It enables children to learn skills of spiritual, moral and religious literacy which informs their minds and enhances their understanding of Christian faith, enabling them to develop an informed, mature response to God's call to relationship. The *Religious Education* outcomes in this curriculum reflect this first dimension. The second dimension, faith formation, forms children's characters in the virtues and values of Jesus; supports their faith development, and helps them to experience what it means to be a member of the Church community called to witness to Jesus in service of others (SGN 39, 101). In the context of the Catholic school, Religious Education is part of and completed by other forms of the ministry of the word (catechesis, liturgical celebration, social justice activities etc.). The *faith formation* goals in this curriculum reflect this second dimension. However, the school as a whole has many opportunities to foster faith formation.

Responding to religious and cultural change

The Church's teaching requires that Catholic schools be places where each person is respected and valued and where the stages of faith of each individual are recognised realistically and responded to sensitively. For many children, the curriculum of Religious Education in the Catholic primary school supports their catechetical education and ongoing initiation as baptised Christians (GDC, 51; SGN 102, 152). Some baptised Catholics may not have been fully evangelised and other children may be preparing for Baptism (SGN 32). As a result, teachers may need to integrate approaches to pre-evangelisation, evangelisation and catechesis at different times for different pupils in the Catholic school.⁷

Children come to school with a range of experiences with regard to religious faith and religious concepts. Teachers too are representative of the diversity of our multi-cultural society, bringing to the task a wide variety of experience and varying levels of faith commitment. In drawing up and implementing schemes of work, all involved must respect not only the requirements of Religious Education as a serious academic discipline, but also the complexities and challenges to religious faith encountered by children, their families and teachers. A guiding principle on freedom enunciated by the Second Vatican Council applies in Religious Education:

... from the very origins of the Church, the disciples of Christ strove to convert people to faith ... not by the use of coercion or by devices unworthy of the gospel, but by the power, above all, of the Word of God. (DH 11)

John Paul II, in *Catechesis in Our Time*, upholds the school's 'grave duty' to 'offer religious training suited to the often widely varying religious situations of the pupils' (CT 69). This point is reiterated in *Lay Catholics in Schools – Witnesses to Faith*, which notes the importance of respecting conscience. It accepts that among Catholic pupils there will be 'many different levels of faith response' and states that 'the Christian vision of existence must be presented in such ways that it meets all these levels' (LCS 28; cf GDC 51, 75, 180).

⁷ The Letter on Religious Education in schools from the Congregation for Catholic education (2009) clarifies that "Religious Education" in schools does not require the assent of faith, and is therefore different from and complementary to, "catechesis". Congregation for Catholic Education, *Religious Education in Schools Fits into the Evangelising Mission of the Church* (8 September 2009). See also RDEC 68-9, c.f. GDC 73; SGN 39; EIDCS 74.

Inclusion of all children in the Catholic school

Catholic schools are communities which are open, welcoming and inclusive. Therefore Catholic schools may include children who adhere to other religions or other stances for living. While mindful of their duty to educate in the distinctive beliefs, values, and practices of the Catholic community, teachers will bear witness to an attitude of respect for and appreciation of all:

Catholic educators ... must have the greatest respect for those students who are not Catholic. They should be open at all times to authentic dialogue, convinced that in these circumstances the best testimony that they can give of their own faith is a warm and sincere appreciation for anyone who is honestly seeking God according to his or her conscience (LCS 42).



The Contribution of Catholic Religious Education to the Primary School Curriculum (1999)

In the Republic, the Catholic Religious Education curriculum contributes to the specific aims and general objectives of the Primary School Curriculum (see PSC, Intro, 34) as follows:

1. *Religious education 'enables the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual' (PSC, Intro, 7).*

Catholic Religious Education:

- provides children with an age-appropriate knowledge of the content of the Catholic faith as set out in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the documents of Vatican II and other Church documents
- helps children to realise and develop their potential for relationship with Jesus Christ who came into the world so that we might 'have life and have it to the full' (Jn 10:10)
- helps children come to a knowledge that they and all human beings are created in God's image and likeness, created purposely by God with eternal life as their ultimate destiny
- cultivates a sense of the virtues and the essential role of grace in the human condition of sin and suffering
- enables children to develop fullness of life with God, fulfilled in eternal life which is not 'an imaginary hereafter ... [but] ... is present wherever God is loved and wherever his life reaches us' (*Spe Salvi*, Pope Benedict XVI, no. 31)
- aids children to develop Christian spiritual, moral and religious values and is concerned with how religious knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes are integrated with the personal development and spiritual life of the child
- takes seriously the pupils' own context in the world in which they are growing up, and the necessity for structuring a programme of teaching and learning which takes account of their developing awareness, attitudes and abilities
- enables children to communicate clearly and confidently using a range of linguistic, symbolic, representational and physical expression
- develops children's capacity for open-mindedness, aesthetic appreciation, creative expression and response
- promotes children's emotional and physical development, health and well-being
- promotes children's cultural development, Catholic cultural identity and cultural practices.



2. *Religious education ‘enables the child to develop as a social being through living and cooperating with others and so contribute to the good of society.’ (PSC, Intro, 7).*

Catholic Religious Education:

- enables children to develop an understanding of what it means to belong to the Catholic Church and of the mission of the Church in service to the world
- develops interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, engendering a positive awareness of self, a sensitivity to others, self-discipline and responsible attitudes to self, others and the environment
- makes a significant contribution to inclusion and community cohesion, particularly in its focus on promoting respect for all
- supports children in developing and reflecting upon their values and their capacity for moral judgement, making an important contribution to the Common Good
- promotes the value of respect for religious diversity and cultural difference, combating prejudice and discrimination, and contributing to the promotion of tolerance and interfaith harmony in society
- has strong associations with learning for national and global citizenship and care for the earth
- helps children to engage with challenging spiritual, moral and social questions that arise in their lives and society
- helps children consider how religious commitment leads to particular actions and concerns in society.

3. *Religious education ‘prepares the child for further education and lifelong learning.’ (PSC, Intro, 7).*

Catholic Religious Education:

- makes a significant contribution to children’s literacy skills, including the use of information and communication technology (ICT)
- promotes the ability to think critically and evaluate their own and other’s views in a reasoned and informed manner, and to apply learning to new contexts
- teaches children how to engage in independent and collaborative learning, as well as to develop skills that facilitate the transfer of learning
- develops an appreciation of the value and practice of lifelong learning, which expresses itself in an enquiring mind and heightened curiosity
- encourages interdisciplinary work
- aims to facilitate the transition from primary to post-primary Religious Education.

Defining Features of the Catholic Primary Religious Education Curriculum

In the Catholic school the overarching perspective for teaching and learning in religion is the Roman Catholic tradition and its beliefs and practices. The following twelve perspectives informed curriculum approaches to content, the development of skills and the appreciation of values.

Church Perspective

The documents of the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) and a number of documents issued since the Council have led to significant development in understanding of the Church's mission to proclaim the gospel. In 1971, the *General Catechetical Directory* was published and this document was revised and updated to form a new *General Directory for Catechesis* in 1997. Sessions of the Synod of Bishops reflected upon evangelisation in 1974 and catechesis in 1977. In 1979 *Catechesi Tradendae* (On Catechesis in our Time) was published. In 1988, the Congregation for Catholic Education published a document on Religious Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School*, and in 1994 the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was published as a 'reference text' for bishops and for those preparing syllabi, curriculum materials and catechetical programmes (FD 3). These documents are a foundational resource for the Irish Catholic community as it reflects on its responsibility to proclaim and witness to the gospel, in this particular culture, at this particular time. The National Catechetical Directory, *Share the Good News*, distills the key principles from these and other documents for Religious Education in the Irish context. Programmes based on this curriculum will conform to the principles and guidelines outlined in *Share the Good News*.

This curriculum is based on Sacred Scripture and Tradition of which the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) is an authoritative, faithful and sure presentation. Other important sources for the content of this Catholic primary Religious Education curriculum are the documents of the Second Vatican Council, especially the four Constitutions (*Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation*, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*), the *General Directory for Catechesis* (1997), the *Compendium of the Social Teaching of the Church* (2004), *Share the Good News*, the *Irish National Directory for Catechesis* (2010), the *Irish Catholic Catechism for Adults* (2014), documents on Catholic education, papal encyclicals, as well as significant Vatican documents which address the call for dialogue between Catholics and people of other faiths.⁸

Sacramental Perspective

A key component of Catholic primary Religious Education is education for understanding of and participation in the Church's sacraments. During the course of primary school, Catholic children are usually prepared for three sacraments: First Eucharist, First Reconciliation/Penance and Confirmation. They are also enabled to develop their knowledge and understanding of these and

⁸ *Nostra Aetate*. Decree on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions (1965); *Dignitatis Humanae*. Declaration on Religious Liberty (1965); *Redemptoris Missio* (1991); *Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions* (1984); *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991); *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994); *Dominus Iesus*. On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church (2000), *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools* (2013).

other sacraments (Baptism, Anointing of the Sick, Marriage, Holy Orders) in an age-appropriate fashion, laying the foundations for sacramental education in secondary school and beyond. The sacramental perspective presupposes that the primary agents of children's Religious Education – home, parish and school – work together in partnership, each playing an important role in the overall sacramental education of the child (see page 13). Religious education programmes based on this curriculum will be structured in such a way as to involve both home and parish in the sacramental education of children.

Spirituality/Prayer Perspective

The Catholic Religious Education curriculum aims to foster a distinctly Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality is following Jesus in the practice of the love of God and neighbour. It is rooted in the experience of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Children are taught how to live their lives in the Spirit of Jesus as they encounter him in prayer, in the Word of God, in the sacraments and in their own lives. They are enabled to understand how a Christian spirituality is sustained in the community of faith, the Church.

Catholic faith 'requires that the faithful believe in it, that they celebrate it, and that they live from it in a vital and personal relationship with the living and true God. This relationship is prayer' (CCC 2558). Therefore, education to and for prayer is at the heart of this Religious Education curriculum. The ultimate goal is to teach children how to develop their relationship with God through prayer, so that they are drawn into the very life of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Trinity).

Educational Perspective

In the Republic, Religious Education is one of seven curricular areas in the Primary School Curriculum (1999). Other documents supporting and extending the Primary School Curriculum which are relevant to Catholic primary Religious Education include: *Assessment in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Schools* (2007), *Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the Primary School Curriculum: Guidelines for Teachers* (2004), *The ICT Framework* (2007), *Exceptionally Able Students: Draft Guidelines for Teachers* (2007), *Guidelines for Teachers of Students with General Learning Disabilities* (2007), *English as an Additional Language: Guidelines for Teachers* (2005) and *Arts in Education Charter* (2012).

This Catholic Religious Education curriculum is structured in a manner that correlates with the rest of the primary school curriculum in the Republic of Ireland. The curriculum model chosen provides teachers with a curriculum formula similar to the other six areas of the primary school curriculum in order to facilitate educational planning and integration with other areas of the curriculum.

The Education Order Northern Ireland (2007) outlines statutory requirements relating to curriculum in Northern Ireland. The statutory curriculum is made up of Religious Education and five broad areas of study at primary level. *The Northern Ireland Core Syllabus for Religious Education* (2007) is compulsory for all. Where possible, the core syllabus has been incorporated into this primary Religious Education curriculum.

Early Childhood Perspective

Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (2006) and *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009) set out expectation of the kinds of learning experiences

children should encounter up to the age of six in the Republic of Ireland. *Aistear* is a theme-based curriculum framework in which the spiritual dimension of young children’s learning is understood as integral to the child’s overall development (Ais 10, 17). In Northern Ireland, *Curricular Guidance for Preschool Education* (2000) provides guidelines for those working with children in the year prior to compulsory education. The guidance outlines the range of learning opportunities which children of this age should have through play and other relevant experiences.

The Catholic primary Religious Education curriculum draws on the national principles of early learning and development outlined in *Aistear* (Ais 7). Where possible, the ways in which each of the strands contributes to the early learning goals is noted in parentheses. Religious education themes in the early childhood classroom will be chosen to encourage interdisciplinary work (See also SGN 100).

Note: Catholic preschools are found, in the main, in Northern Ireland. It is not assumed that children engaging with the curriculum at Level 1 (Junior–Senior Infants; Foundation Stage) will have received Religious Education at preschool level.

Evangelisation, Mission and Justice Perspective (SGN 13, 112-25; EG 111)

‘Evangelisation takes place in obedience to the missionary mandate of Jesus. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20). In these verses we see how the risen Christ sent his followers to preach the Gospel in every time and place, so that faith in him might spread to every corner of the earth.’ (EG 19)

As part of its essential mission of evangelisation, the Church is involved in Religious Education in schools. (SGN 38-40)

The National Directory for Catechesis, *Share the Good News* (2010), clearly outlines the importance of mission and justice for Catholic schools and for the kind of Religious Education carried out in such schools:

Recognising and responding to the educational needs of all children, the Catholic school will exercise an option for justice, especially for the poor and disadvantaged (SGN 148).

The Catholic Church in Ireland desires to ensure that opportunities are provided for all learners to participate fully in its education processes, regardless of need, ability or background (SGN 113).

[Religious education will] always keep justice and generosity to the fore, seeking to overcome any sense of discrimination, prejudice or inequality (SGN 115).

In keeping with these goals, the primary religious curriculum incorporates a development education approach that will afford children a significant and real opportunity to put their developing faith into action. Through this approach children are introduced to the concepts of

solidarity, the option for the poor, compassion, generosity, inclusion, empathy and responsibility. Development education includes two key perspectives: the justice perspective and the global perspective. The global perspective will be reflected in the stories, prayers, songs, poems and images chosen by teachers and programme writers. The justice perspective is found in the ‘Christian Morality’ strand under the strand unit: ‘Social Teaching of the Church’. Opportunities for action on global and justice issues will be built into Religious Education programmes so that children are empowered to respond to the issues they are exploring. Trócaire’s Lenten materials will be integrated into the Religious Education curriculum.⁹

Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Perspective

The Catholic primary Religious Education curriculum will promote a strong sense of the Christian missionary vocation; introducing students to the Church’s mission of evangelisation (CCC 767; EN 14), teaching them how to share the ‘Good News’ of Jesus Christ with others while entering positively into relationship with neighbours who belong to other religious traditions (RM 55; CCC 856). Inter-Religious Education at primary level, while affirming a student’s Catholic identity, will prepare young children for living alongside other Christians and people of diverse religious traditions (CT 32; SGN 62, GDC 197).

The restoration of Christian unity was one of the principal concerns of the Second Vatican Council and principles for ecumenical dialogue and exchange at all levels are outlined in *Unitatis Redintegratio* (1964). The teaching with regard to Other Faiths which arises from the Second Vatican Council and also from more recent Church pronouncements, also affects the kind of Religious Education and formation carried out in Catholic primary schools.¹⁰ The document *Nostra Aetate* (1965) affirms that all the peoples of the earth with their different religions form one family, and that the Church ‘rejects nothing which is true and holy in these religions’ (NA 2). In witnessing to their own religious faith, Christians are called upon to ‘acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods’ found amongst people of other faiths (NA 2). The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994) reinforces this view and reminds us that ‘The Church’s bond with non-Christians is in the first place the common origin and end of the human race’ (CCC 842). Teaching about different religions and beliefs is carried out in a fair and balanced manner in Catholic schools.

Inter-Cultural Perspective (SGN 17)

According to the Education Act (1998), all students should experience an education that ‘respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society’. Reflecting this principle, the Catholic primary Religious Education curriculum is guided by the Congregation for Catholic Education document: *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools* (2013).

Programmes and resources developed to support the Religious Education curriculum will reflect social and cultural diversity within the school and within society as a whole. They will provide positive images of religious and ethnic groups, gender and disability (SGN 125). Particular

⁹ See Sheila Dillon, *Trócaire and Development Education* (Trócaire, 2009) for a description of Development Education at preschool and primary levels.

¹⁰ NA (1965); DH (1965); AG (1965); (1991); *Attitude of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions*, Secretariat for non-Christians (1984); DP (1991); CCC 839-56, 1747, 2108-09.

attention will be given to pupils who are learning English as an additional language. Teachers will integrate language learning and curriculum learning in Religious Education following the *EAL* (English as an Additional Language) *Guidelines* (NCCA, 2011). The connections between racism and religious prejudice will be explored where appropriate. Pupils will be educated, in accordance with gospel values, for good community relations, for respect, for understanding, and for social justice.

Christian Moral Perspective

While knowledge, understanding and skills are central to the curriculum of primary Religious Education, it is also important that Religious Education enables children to develop positive Christian morals, virtues and values. Christian values, virtues and attitudes derive from belief in God, revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and are lived out in the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Some notable virtues, values and attitudes of the Christian tradition which permeate this primary Religious Education curriculum include: the theological virtues (faith, hope, love); the cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance); gratitude; joy; forgiveness; respect for truth; compassion; non-violence; justice; interdependence; respect for God, self and others; fair-mindedness; integrity; appreciation and wonder; enquiry and critical thought; social awareness and moral responsibility; confidence in one's own religious identity while valuing difference and diversity; acceptance of one's own fallibility; and appreciation of the sacred dimension of everyday life.



The curriculum will take into consideration children's feelings, values and attitudes towards that which is being taught. The contemporary social and cultural context is complex and young children regularly encounter attitudes and values incompatible with those promoted in the Catholic school. As a result, children may question the worldview of the curriculum, especially in senior classes. Hence the importance placed on encouraging critical reasoning and real engagement with children's culture in the curriculum. Programmes based on this primary Religious Education curriculum will have the task of inculturation and cultural adaptation as a primary goal (GDC 109-110, 170, 180, 192-3). Children will be taught that the teaching authority of the Church (the Magisterium) is an important factor in understanding the moral tradition.

The Christian Morality strand contains concepts which enable education in the true meaning of relationships and sexuality to be integrated into the Catholic Religious Education curriculum. In this way, 'formation in chastity and timely information regarding sexuality' can be provided 'in the broadest context of education for love' (HS 70). Because of 'the fundamental competency' of parents/guardians in this area, care and attention must be taken that they are consulted in the drawing up of any Relationships and Sexuality programme for the Catholic school (HS 23, 41-43, 48, 64). As Saint John Paul II affirmed:

Sex education, which is a basic right and duty of parents, must always be carried out under their attentive guidance, whether at home or in educational centres chosen and controlled by them. In this regard, the Church reaffirms the law of subsidiarity, which the school is bound to observe when it cooperates in sex education, by entering into the same spirit that animates the parents. (FC 37)

Special Educational Needs Perspective (GDC 189)

Children with severe and profound general learning disabilities most often encounter the presence of God in social situations. Special guidelines for Religious Education have been designed for children with this in mind. They have been framed in conjunction with the curriculum guidelines for students with general learning disabilities (NCCA, 2007). They are particularly suitable for children who have an assessment of functioning within the Moderate\Severe and Profound levels of cognitive development. The guidelines enable teachers to adopt a similar approach to Religious Education as they would to other areas of the curriculum. Teachers will be cognisant of the need for individual planning for children with special educational needs (SGN 119).

The aims and activities in the guidelines allow pupils to explore the world of religion in terms of special people, books, times, places, objects and by regular visits to their local church. They will explore religious stories where sensory activities and experiences are included. They will be introduced to religious words and prayers. Opportunities will be provided so that they can experience special celebrations throughout the school year. They will be given the opportunity to explore and marvel at the wonders of God's world. In association with other areas of the primary curriculum, religious experiences will be viewed as further opportunities for teachers to provide these children with an opportunity to make the greatest possible use of their senses (SGN 119). Activities will be used to develop awareness, alertness, interest, and concentration in an enjoyable and interactive way with people and objects.



ICT Perspective

The use of information technology is an integral part of Catholic primary Religious Education. The Religious Education curriculum will encourage children to research information about religion on the internet; use CD-ROMs and the internet selectively; develop their ideas using ICT tools; use email or videoconferencing to communicate with people on religious matters; use multimedia and presentation software to communicate responses to religious material or a stimulus for discussion; and use equipment such as digital cameras and digital video to enhance understanding of religious belief and practice.

Ecological Perspective

In the Catholic school, ecological respect and concern are rooted in a scripturally-based theology of creation and related ethical considerations. God creates and gives us the gift of creation to care for and celebrate, and the Christian hope for the final renewal of all creation at the end of time encourages our commitment to cultivate and care for the earth (CCC 1042). Children are taught about the unique and special place of human beings in God's creation, the interconnection of all creation and are encouraged to develop affection, and care for all creation as a manifestation of the divine. Children are taught to contemplate and respect the earth in all its complexity and beauty. The Celtic tradition of respect for God's creation is woven into the curriculum at every level. A Christian ecological worldview criticises patterns of consumption that relate to ecological degradation. Children are enabled to understand the concept of eco-sin and to develop an ecological conscience which calls for prophetic challenges to forces destroying the earth.

Guidelines for Religious Education in a Catholic Primary School Context

The following guidelines are provided for teachers engaging with this curriculum:

Catholic primary Religious Education entails true freedom

- The Catholic school respects and supports the right of parents/guardians to withdraw their children from primary Religious Education (See *Rules for National Schools*; Rule 69; Irish Constitution, Art 44.2.4; Education Act 1998 s 30 (2) (e); PSC, p. 58; Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989).

Catholic primary Religious Education is theocentric

- The mystery of God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is the centre of the curriculum.
- Children are introduced to the mystery of God through both Scripture and Church Tradition.
- The narrative of salvation is a key structuring principle for programmes based on this curriculum (GDC 108, 115; DV 14, 15; LG 13, 48; AG 3).
- Teachers will be attentive to the ‘analogy of faith’, i.e. the coherence of the truths of faith among themselves and within the whole plan of salvation (CCC, 114).

Catholic Religious Education as a divine pedagogy

- Religious education must remain faithful to God’s Revelation and Church teaching must be presented in its fullness, not fragmented or impoverished.
- Religious education must be faithful to the child and to his/her age, maturity and stage of faith development (GDC 70; 149).
- Religious education should provide a creative dialogue between life experience and the unique light of the gospel (CT 22; EN 29; GDC 116, 117, 152).
- Inductive (existential or ascending) and deductive (kerygmatic or descending) methods can be used, attending faithfully both to human experience and to Revelation (GDC 118; CT 5).

Jesus Christ is ‘at the centre of all teaching for Christians’ (CT, 1979; EG 164)

- The person of Jesus has priority at each and every stage of the curriculum.
- Christians are guided by the Church’s Magisterium in their understanding of Jesus Christ.
- The life and mission of Jesus Christ are made known to us through Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition (DV 9, 10, 19).

Scripture is a primary source for Catholic Religious Education (GDC 94; CCC 50-83; 102, 106, 108, 111-17, 129, 168)

- Both Old and New Testament Scriptures are presented as the living Word of God, written through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- Sacred Scripture is to be presented in conformity with the teaching of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
- Sacred Scripture is clearly related to the doctrines of the faith of the Church and is to be read within ‘the living Tradition of the whole Church’ (CCC, 113).
- The Scripture texts chosen for each level relate directly to the knowledge and concepts to be taught in each of the other three strands at each level: Christian Faith, Liturgy/Prayer, and Christian Morality. The Word of God strand should not be taught in isolation from the other strands. Programmes based on the curriculum will therefore be thoroughly scriptural throughout.

- The Sacred Scripture texts chosen for each level emphasise the narrative of salvation.
- Individual texts are to be set in the context of the history of salvation.
- Particular attention will be paid to Christological titles in Sacred Scripture that affirm the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ such as ‘Saviour’, ‘Son of God’, ‘Messiah’, ‘Son of Mary’.
- The Sacred Scripture texts chosen for each level constitute a *minimum core* which must be taught at that level. Teachers/programme writers are not restricted to these texts in seeking to enhance their teaching of the Christian Faith, Liturgy/Prayer, Word of God and Christian Morality strands.
- Picture books and online resources of Bible stories for children are made available at all levels.
- A quality bound or covered Bible is used in class celebrations and it has its own special place in the classroom.
- Reverence for the Bible is demonstrated in the ways in which it is used and displayed.

The Church’s liturgy is an essential element of Catholic Religious Education (CCC 1075)

- Children become familiar with short responses and parts of liturgy by experiencing and using them.
- Teaching about the Eucharist includes helping children read the liturgical signs (CCC 1075).
- The intimate relationship of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and the Eucharist is emphasised and each sacrament is presented as the action of Christ.
- The spiral curriculum introduces children gradually and progressively to an understanding of sacraments in the course of primary school, laying the foundations for sacramental education in second-level schools, where appropriate, and beyond.
- Children are invited to investigate the relationship between Biblical passages and moments of liturgical celebration (CCC 1094; GDC 108).
- The curriculum supports the role of the parents/guardians and the wider parish community in sacramental initiation (SGN 102, 152).
- Liturgy, sacraments and prayer are taught in the context of the history of salvation.

The experience of prayer is integral to Catholic Religious Education

- Jesus is presented as the model for prayer (CCC 520).
- At every level children learn a number of traditional Catholic prayers and are helped to develop an understanding of the meaning of these prayers (CCC 2688). Formal prayers are those prayers children will be invited to learn by heart. Additional prayers are suggested as they relate to the knowledge and concepts taught at each level.
- Prayers are to be primarily Trinitarian, directed to the Father, through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Children are encouraged to express their prayers spontaneously in their own language.
- Children are introduced to different types of prayer (meditation, contrition, thanks, supplication, intercession).
- Prayer services are an integral part of the curriculum where appropriate e.g. Advent, Lent, Christmas, Easter, All Souls/Saints, Feasts of Our Lady.

Catholic Religious Education always emphasises moral education

- The moral life is presented as an expression and consequence of our relationship with God.
- Jesus is presented as the model for living a Christian life (CCC 459, 520, 564, 1698).
- Moral education concerns the development of knowledge and reasoning, as well as the affective and motivational bases for moral action.



- Moral education includes teaching children to love and worship God, to know themselves as loved always by God, to develop Christian virtues and values, to develop an awareness of sin and a sense of penance, and to understand the role of the sacraments and the Holy Spirit and the teachings of the Magisterium in helping them live as children of God.
- The eternal and eschatological dimension of the moral life is presented.
- Moral education aims to develop the skill of making moral decisions with an informed conscience.

Music and song are an important part of Catholic Religious Education

- Music is used to explore the key concepts of a lesson.
- Music is a primary resource for meditation and prayer and for the development of spiritual awareness.
- Music enables children to participate more meaningfully in liturgy and sacraments.
- Music provides a language with which to communicate spiritual/religious experience and understanding.
- Songs are often biblically inspired.
- Traditional Irish hymns will form part of the curriculum at levels 3 and 4, e.g. *Ag Críost an Síol*.

Inculturation is an important principle for Catholic Religious Education (SGN 16, 21,29,)

- It is the duty of teachers 'to speak a language suited to today's children and young people in general' (GDC 208).
- Children are helped to integrate religious meaning and cultural meaning in their daily lives (GDC 133; DP 70).

Memorisation is fundamental in Catholic Religious Education (CCC 2688; CT 55; GDC 154)

- Children are provided with opportunities to learn by heart songs, hymns, poems, Mass responses, Biblical texts, traditional prayers and formulas which sum up and express the key concepts of a given lesson. (Note: It is not envisaged that children memorise all the concepts outlined in the strand units).
- The curriculum will introduce formulas that provide a common language of faith, though a full understanding of these formulas may come at a later stage (CCC 84). Such formulas will include texts from the Bible, the liturgy and the traditional prayers of Christian faith (e.g. Creed, Our Father, Hail Mary). Those formulas will be chosen which ‘while expressing faithfully the truth of the Faith’ are suited to ‘the capacity of the listeners’ (cf. GCD 73, 154).

The environment is important for Catholic Religious Education

- Where possible, picture books of Bible stories will be available.
- Providing rich physical environments that include print-rich displays is desirable.
- Where possible, the classroom will contain a ‘prayer corner’/sacred space. Prayer will take account of the liturgical season and the prayer corner will express the seasonal mood.

Catholic Religious Education develops ecumenical and inter-religious awareness and respect for the cultures and religions of others (GDC 197; 200; SGN 62; LG16; EIDCS 63)

- At primary level the process of learning about other Christian denominations and other religious traditions is mainly about awareness, attitudes, relationships and values. Inter-religious learning establishes the basis for appropriate relationships with religious others (EIDCS 42, 69).
- In this curriculum children are introduced to other Christian traditions and to the importance of ecumenical dialogue and endeavours. As members of the Christian family, Catholics have a unique and intimate relationship with other Christians.
- The first step toward inter-religious awareness is to make the connection between Christianity and Judaism. The teaching of Judaism receives special attention because of the close connections between it and Christianity (CCC 1076).
- This initial awareness is built upon through the exploration of the other great monotheistic faith – Islam.
- Catholic teachers do not present all religions as the same or as equally valid but reflect the reality of Christianity’s relationship to other world religions, whereby some are considered to be closer to Christianity than others.
- Catholic teachers will present what religions share in common while causing to emerge the particular and distinctive features of Christianity (EIDCS 13, 33).
- The teaching of other religious traditions prioritises the Irish cultural manifestation of those faiths where possible.
- The teaching approach is predominantly descriptive. The other religious traditions are taught discretely, not by comparisons or by isolated festivals, writings or key figures. That is not to say comparisons may not arise, but that comparisons are not the starting point of the teaching (SGN 38).
- Catholic Religious Education teaches the unique truth of Christian faith and the need for a lively missionary sense among Christians in relation to other religions (NA 1, 2, 4; CCC 813, 846-848; GDC 200, EIDCS 16).
- Where appropriate, members of other religions in the local area can be invited into the school to speak to the children.

- Timing: Level 2 will have one and a half hours of study of other faiths per year. Level 3 will have one week of study of other faiths per year. Level 4 will have two weeks set aside for the study of other faiths per year. It is envisaged that such timing will integrate with the proposed National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) guidelines issuing from the *Forum on Patronage Report* (2012).

Religious education includes appropriate processes for assessment and evaluation

- Catholic schools maintain appropriate and efficient means for ensuring that their Religious Education curriculum is relevant to the legitimate expectations of students and parents/guardians, and is accountable to the Board of Management and to Church authorities. Such means include regular assessment of student progress, meaningful reporting processes and regular review of the quality and effectiveness of the religion programme, in consultation with trained Diocesan Advisers for Religious Education (cf. SGN 146-7, 152).
- The curriculum enables teachers to build on the principles of *Assessment is for Learning*.
- Teachers will value learning that is unanticipated and learning that cannot be assessed.
- The curriculum values a counter-cultural sense of time and aims to nurture waiting and receptivity, acknowledging that some of the most important outcomes of Religious Education are not immediately achieved and may not be directly observable.

Component Structure of the Catholic Primary Religious Education Curriculum

Catholic Religious Education is distinctive in that it takes place within the context of faith development (SGN 100). Faith in its essence is a gift of God. It may be understood in two ways: as a personal act (a process of developing personal belief and trust in God) and as content (the Catholic faith, a body of knowledge). But far from being an isolated act of the individual, faith is essentially ecclesial. Not only does personal faith have to be sustained by the believing community, but each Christian has a responsibility to share his or her faith with others and hand on the gift he or she has received (CCC 166-167). Each of these aspects is integral to Catholic Religious Education. The primary Religious Education curriculum enables children to enhance their spiritual lives, to gain knowledge of Christian beliefs, to develop key skills of religious literacy and to develop positive Christian attitudes and values. This is a holistic vision of Religious Education and alerts children and teachers to the realisation that religion and its practice are more than just 'knowing what you believe', so that they will see the vital relationship between Christian faith and living a particular way of life. Being religious in a Christian way requires a holistic approach to life where intellect is integrated with heart and body and where commitment to embodying gospel values in the world is the mark of the educated Christian.



The Religious Education curriculum framework below describes the content of Religious Education for Catholic primary schools. It is not a programme for use in the classroom. Its purpose is to guide and inform the teaching of Religious Education by expressing clearly the opportunities for investigation and reflection to be offered to children, the knowledge and understanding which they can acquire, and the ways in which the curriculum aims to foster faith commitment. It is addressed to bishops, trustees, principals, teachers, programme and resource writers, diocesan advisers, parents/guardians and lecturers in the field of primary Religious Education. It is envisaged that programmes and other resources will be developed to support teachers in their implementation of the curriculum.

General Aim and Outcomes

The aim of this 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.**¹¹

Desired Outcomes

Children will, in a way appropriate to age, maturity, and faith development¹²

- 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)¹³
- develop Christian attitudes and values: for example, love, justice, compassion, truthfulness and respect.

¹¹ This aim relates directly to the broad aim of the Primary School Curriculum: 'to enable children to develop spiritual, moral and religious values'. See Ireland, Department of Education and Science (PSC 34).

¹² Students in Catholic schools are acknowledged as believers, non-believers or searchers (GDC 75). The experience and faith journey of children is respected and their commitment to the religious tradition of their family is supported (SGN 58).

¹³ These aims relate directly to the PSC objective: 'That the child should be enabled to develop a knowledge and understanding of his or her own religious traditions and beliefs, with respect for the religious traditions and beliefs of others' (PSC 36).

The Levels

There are five levels to the curriculum:

Preschool level

Level 1: years 1 & 2 (Junior and Senior Infants/foundation stage)

Level 2: years 3 & 4 (First and Second/Key stage 1)

Level 3: years 5 & 6 (Third and Fourth/Key stage 2)

Level 4: years 7 & 8 (Fifth and Sixth/Key stage 2)
(year 8 Republic of Ireland only)



The Four Strands

The next part of this curriculum document is a statement of the content of Religious Education for Catholic preschools and primary schools. It distinguishes four interrelated **strands** of Christian Faith,¹⁴ The Word of God, Liturgy/Prayer and Christian Morality. Together these four strands outline the knowledge and understanding, skills and processes, distinctive of learning in this curriculum area. The detailed statement of content for each of the four strands encourages a rich variety of approaches to teaching and learning that cater for the differing needs of individual children. **Note: The strands are not discrete areas of learning, as they overlap and interact to form a holistic learning experience for the child.** Every facet reflects and reinforces the wholeness of the vision of Religious Education. Teachers and programme writers will build on the learning experiences and concepts across levels to provide continuity of teaching and learning.

| Strand (Area of Study) | Vatican II | Catechism |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Christian Faith | <i>Dei Verbum</i> <i>Lumen Gentium</i> | Part I: The Profession of Faith |
| The Word of God | <i>Dei Verbum</i> | Part I: The Profession of Faith |
| Liturgy/Prayer | <i>Sacrosanctum Concilium</i> | Part II: Celebration of the Christian Mystery Part IV: Prayer. |
| Christian Morality | <i>Gaudium et Spes</i> | Part III: Life in Christ |

The Catholic Church, founded on the faith of the apostles, responds under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to the revelation of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Traditionally, four signs of commitment, noted in the Acts of the Apostles as attributes of the early Christian community, have been highlighted as characteristics of gospel living:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (*Kerygma*) and fellowship (*Koinonia*), to the breaking of bread and the prayers (*Leitourgia*). Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were done by the apostles (*Martyria*). All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need (*Diakonia*). Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

This paragraph gives an ideal picture of the early Christian community, setting down what the Church should do, that is, the tasks of any Christian community. *Share the Good News* describes these tasks as follows:

¹⁴ The term 'Christian' in this document reflects its use in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Proclaiming and witnessing to the gospel message (*Kerygma/Martyria*).
Building up a caring Church community based on gospel values (*Koinonia*).
Celebrating faith in worship, prayer and through liturgical participation – in communion with God, in Jesus Christ, and with one another (*Leitourgia*).
Service to neighbour, particularly the most poor and most vulnerable, the work of justice (*Diakonia*).

As one expression of the Irish Church's work of evangelisation, this Catholic preschool and primary Religious Education curriculum engages with these themes as a way of structuring the content of Religious Education and faith formation for young children.

Organisation of Strands (Christian Faith, The Word of God, Liturgy/Prayer, Christian Morality)

The proclamation of the Christian message (*Kerygma*), the announcement of the Good News of Jesus Christ is found in the **Christian Faith** strand. The people of God announce God's loving plan of salvation revealed to us in Jesus Christ and brought to fruition through his Church. Teaching and learning in this strand enables children to become religiously literate in key truths, doctrines and practices of the Catholic religious tradition. By engaging with the sacred texts and beliefs of the Church community, children learn to respond to the revelation and presence of God in Scripture and Tradition, in creation and in their own lives. Children are invited to a deeper understanding and appreciation of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, and of how to participate in the life and mission of the Church. They are taught about the witness to that mission given by the saints and by holy members of the people of God.

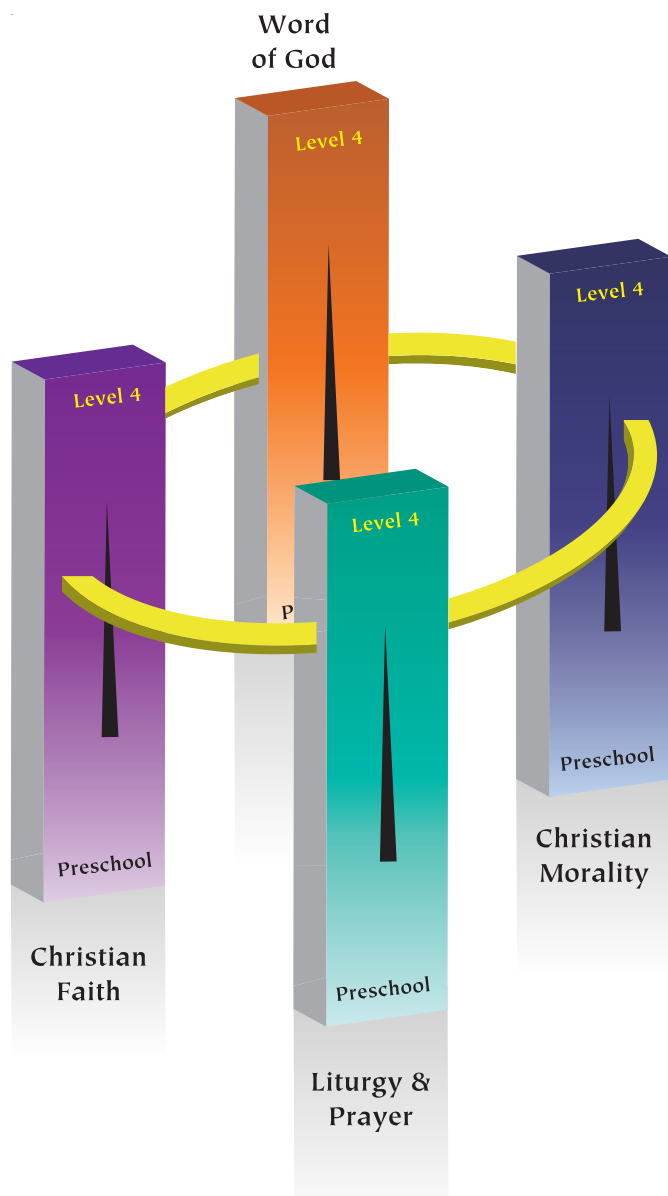
Sacred Tradition and Sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the Word of God, which is entrusted to the Church. **The Word of God** strand introduces children in an age-appropriate way to Sacred Scripture in the life of the Church. Sacred Scripture is the story of God's past blessings of the people of God, as well as an inspired Word for the present to enable the Church community to recognise God's presence among us. Children in Catholic primary schools grow in their familiarity with the Bible and develop the ability to authentically interpret Sacred Scripture in light of Church teaching, applying them in relevant and fruitful ways to the circumstances of their lives as children. By listening to and understanding Scripture, children come to know the person of Jesus Christ and begin to relate to him and to his salvific mission. They discover Biblical events in the three great 'moments' of salvation history (creation, salvation, fulfilment). They learn from the Bible what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in the community of faith. An awareness of the history of salvation in the age of the Church enables children to become more aware of God's ongoing salvific action in the life of his people.

Teaching and learning in the **Liturgy/Prayer** strand enables children to engage with liturgical signs, symbols and rituals which nurture their relationship with God as Father, Son and Spirit, and to develop their capacity for personal prayer and for participation in the liturgy of the Church. The people of God celebrate and praise God for the salvation won through Jesus' life, death, Resurrection, ascension and second coming. Children investigate the relationship between those Biblical passages that record the narrative of salvation with the liturgical celebrations they experience. They learn the centrality of prayer, liturgy and sacraments in creating and sustaining community life. Liturgy invites children to link their own ongoing story, their struggles and triumphs, successes and failures, sorrows and joys to the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ.

Teaching and learning in the **Christian Morality** strand enables children to grow in awareness of their identity as persons created in the image and likeness of God and called to live in loving, respectful, relationship with God, other human persons and the whole of creation. They are introduced to Jesus as the model for living an ethical life and to the moral teachings of the Church that teach them how to live as his disciples. They are formed in gospel values and in love of God and neighbour. They learn that the goal of Christian moral life is only reached by the aid of the grace of the Holy Spirit. They learn the importance of prayer, asceticism and the sacraments in nurturing their moral lives. They learn to cultivate an upright and informed conscience and develop their ability for moral reasoning as they confront moral dilemmas. By reflecting on their own actions and on the moral teachings of the Church, children are invited to live together in the community of faith.

Note: The Christian Morality strand focuses on philosophical and educational bases for morality and the contribution of the Biblical tradition to Christian moral development.

- Some concepts relating to God’s merciful love, the concepts of sin and forgiveness, grace and salvation, the Creed and the Our Father are listed under the Christian Faith and Liturgy/Prayer strands.
- Education in the Christian virtues of faith, hope and charity is found throughout the curriculum.
- Education in the role of the Holy Spirit as a gentle guest and friend who inspires, guides, corrects and strengthens Christian moral life is also found under the Christian Faith strand.
- The ecclesial dimension of moral life is also emphasised in other areas of the curriculum.
- The importance of our moral decisions for salvation is also treated under eschatology (‘Eternal Life’: Christian Faith strand).
- Concepts outlined under the Morality strand unit: *RSE in a Christian Context* complement the State Curriculum for Relationships and Sexuality Education in the Republic when taught in Catholic schools.



Aims

A set of aims is included for each level of each strand. The aims indicate progressions of increasing sophistication and complexity in content and processes taught.

Skills of Religious Literacy

The skills outlined under each of the strands reflect the skills of religious literacy desirable at each level. This section uses *an outcomes approach*, emphasising the educational alignment between Religious Education and the other six areas of the NCCA *Primary School Curriculum* (1999).

The curriculum applies a *religious literacy* framework to Religious Education. The term ‘religious literacy’ refers to the ability to understand and use, in the young child’s day-to-day life, a repertoire of practices and/or ‘ways of knowing’ related to the Christian religion using reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, drawing, music, movement, critical and creative thinking, and multimedia texts of traditional and new information and communications technologies.

The concept of literacy applied to Religious Education:

- enables children to relate faith to life and life to faith
- equips young children with the competencies to use many types of communication, combining traditional and new literacy skills in different ways for new purposes and with new technologies
- provides multiple opportunities for integration and linkage with other subjects
- enables young children to develop the critical literacy skills essential for interaction with new and traditional information and communication technologies
- empowers young children to be open, responsible and wise as they encounter the Christian religion
- prepares children for Religious Education as an academic subject in secondary school.

Understanding

Skills for understanding are rooted in children’s capacity for attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness and responsibility.¹⁵ By studying the given content of the Catholic Faith, children are invited to investigate and interpret religious concepts and to apply them to their own lives. They are enabled to acquire knowledge and organise it effectively and to make informed judgements and decisions. Much emphasis is placed on higher-order thinking skills such as explaining, problem-solving, predicting, analysing, questioning, evaluating and justifying. The use of the imagination, creative process and metaphorical thinking are integral to the process of understanding. Critical literacy skills enable learners to approach new and traditional communication technologies with discernment.

Communicating

Communication involves developing a rich spiritual, moral and religious vocabulary; reading and responding to a range of written, spoken and visual texts (including sacred texts, stories, poetry, prayers, ritual, drama, art); talking and writing with understanding and insight about spiritual,

¹⁵ The critical realist epistemology of Bernard Lonergan underpins skills of understanding, judgement and decision.

moral and religious ideas; reflecting critically and creatively on spiritual, moral and religious issues; debating and using reasoned arguments.

Participating

Participation in experiences of prayer, silence and meditation develops children's capacity for personal prayer and for participation in the Church's liturgy. Engaging in practical activities associated with Christian charity, stewardship of creation and social justice helps children grow in moral awareness and authentic Christian concern for human dignity and the integrity of creation. Working with others in research projects and other educational activities teaches responsibility and interdependence.

Developing Spiritual Literacy

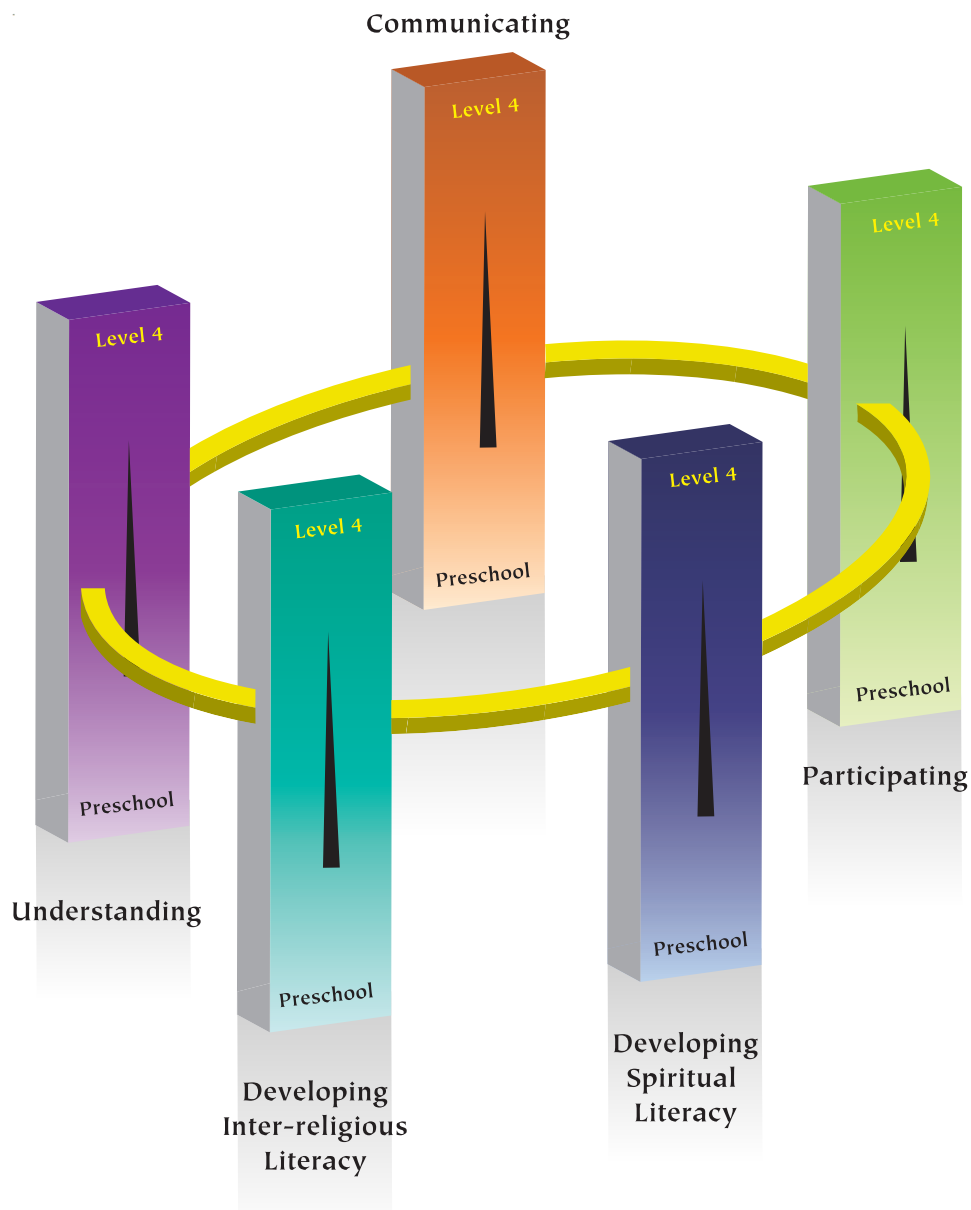
The curriculum seeks to foster a Christian spirituality (see glossary). Skills of spiritual literacy foster the development of spiritual awareness as well as a sacramental and prophetic imagination. Children are enabled to identify Christian spiritual practices that will enhance their spiritual lives. Spiritual literacy also includes reflecting critically and creatively on ultimate questions, on ethical issues and on the challenges to Christian spirituality posed by the other frameworks of meaning found in Irish culture.

Developing Inter-religious Literacy

Skills of inter-religious literacy enable children to be able to speak the public language of religion; to comprehend and appreciate the place of religious 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 enter into dialogue with people of other religions and beliefs; to foster awareness of shared values such as justice, peace, the dignity of the human person and openness to the transcendent.

Skills

- describe in broad outcomes what children are expected to know and understand, and how they will interact with the contents of Religious Education
- are to be considered in conjunction with the 'Knowledge and Concepts' outlined for each level (Note: lessons will simultaneously cover numerous skills and concepts at the same time)
- are sequenced conceptually across levels. Outcomes at each level are qualitatively different from the outcomes at the levels before and after. This sequencing across levels assists teachers in planning learning activities to cater for diverse student abilities
- will be returned to at every level where appropriate. (See Appendix A for a sample of how learning outcomes are carried forward and developed further at each level of the spiral curriculum)
- will be used to develop a range of *specific* learning outcomes/objectives which are tailored to the individual needs of students. These outcomes will incorporate terms which include all forms of verbal and nonverbal communication, including signed and the use of communication aids
- allow for differentiation and adaptation for special needs
- can be used in assessment for learning and for summative use
- can be considered in an interrelated and complementary way for the purposes of planning and assessment.



Discretionary Learning Outcomes

Describe skills of religious literacy beyond what is considered essential at a particular level. Often, these are developed for children whose attainments significantly exceed the expected level of attainment at any level. As well as drawing on materials from later levels of study, teachers may plan further differentiation by extending the breadth and depth of study beyond the curriculum. At other times, schools and teachers may develop discretionary learning outcomes that are specific to the local school community context and the needs and interests of individual children or groups of children.

Faith Formation Goals

A set of 'faith formation goals' complement the Religious Education outcomes for each level. While Religious Education is seen as a scholastic discipline in distinction from catechesis (GDC 73; RDECS 68), this Catholic Religious Education curriculum aims to support baptised children's faith development with a focus on their developing relationship with Jesus Christ. Therefore, teachers will ensure that 'faith formation goals' are taken into consideration in every lesson. For example, while children will learn about the story of a saint as a Religious Education outcome, it is hoped that they will seek to emulate the life of the saint, as a faith formation goal. In sum, the provision of faith formation goals ensures that the specific academic focus of Religious Education is maintained while recognising the faith formation dimension of the discipline that often correlates with catechetical goals.

Strand Units

The strand units contain knowledge and concepts which:

- contain the doctrinal content prescribed by the Irish Episcopal Conference. This content is an expression of the teaching of the Catholic Church as contained in official documents, particularly the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and the National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland, *Share the Good News*
- are written in a language which is accessible to teachers/programme writers and are referenced to Sacred Scripture and official Church documentation. These documents can be consulted for an elaboration of a particular concept¹⁶
- can be adapted by teachers and programme writers according to the age, culture, experience and ability of children (cf. DP 70; EG 11, 27, 41)
- indicate where prescribed content is normally introduced. Content prescribed for introduction at a particular stage of schooling is revised and explored in more depth at subsequent stages
- may be chosen from earlier or later levels so that individual children can make progress and show what they can achieve. Where it is appropriate for children to make extensive use of content from an earlier level, there may not be time to teach all aspects of the age-related levels of study.

Note: for a summary of the strands and strand units see Appendix C.

The **spiral curriculum** describes a sequence for developing **skills** and **knowledge**. The skills and knowledge provide a basis for planning for both lateral (broadening and enriching) and vertical (becoming more challenging) progression.

¹⁶ The introduction to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* advises that teachers 'must suit their words to the maturity and understanding of their hearers' (CCC 24).