



Iontaobhas Scoileanna Éamainn Rís
Edmund Rice Schools Trust

The Edmund Rice School - An understanding of Catholic Education

This position paper presents the Edmund Rice Schools Trust approach to living out our faith tradition in all aspects of school life.

Introduction

Christ came that “we might have life and have it to the full.” (John 10:10).

What is Catholic Education?

Catholic education is based on Jesus Christ's vision for humanity as expressed in his living and teaching. It is concerned with the formation of the human person in the image and likeness of Christ. The life journey of each person has the potential to be transformed by a personal understanding of and relationship with the life-journey of Jesus. This becomes a life- long process involving home, school and parish.

Each school, denominational or otherwise, has its own ethos or characteristic spirit. Catholic schools are challenged to give expression to their characteristic spirit through the lens of Gospel values. This should be understood as an invitation to allow the Gospel inform the values and traditions that are lived out on a daily basis in the school. These Gospel values include: justice, hope, love, forgiveness, friendship, humility, generosity, respect, courage, compassion, peace, creativity, trust and service.

The Catholic faith permeates the life of the school and is witnessed in all the interactions and relationships that occur between members of the school community. Being central to the very fabric of the school it is much more than the teaching of Religious Education class.

The Edmund Rice School

Nurturing Faith is a key element of the Edmund Rice Schools' Trust Charter. The Edmund Rice School in partnership with the home and parish is dedicated to providing and developing a Catholic education by cultivating a living faith, fostering Christian spirituality and educating people in Gospel- based values. It is committed to

- ✓ Drawing inspiration from the life of Jesus Christ
- ✓ Developing the whole person
- ✓ Promoting a distinctive Christian Spirituality
- ✓ Celebrating diversity and valuing difference
- ✓ Working for social and ecological justice
- ✓ Celebrating Mary as the mother of God
- ✓ Prioritising resources toward promoting these aims.

The vision of the Edmund Rice school is to promote the full personal and social development of each member and seeks to establish caring Christian communities of learning and teaching.

In line with the Education Act 1998, the Edmund Rice school respects and welcomes the diversity of beliefs, values, traditions, languages and ways of life in society.

Interconnectedness with the earth and caring for our common home is a central part of Edmund Rice education; in the words of Pope Francis “ You are called to care for creation, not only as responsible citizens but also as followers of Christ”.



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The Catholic School – a living Faith

A school's ethos cannot be something that is merely enshrined in a mission statement and posted on a wall. It must be lived out in the myriads of actions and interactions that are part of the daily life of the school. In a Catholic school the message of Jesus informs the values and traditions that guide the school and its community. The characteristic spirit of a Catholic school will promote a Christian concept of the world with a spiritual and moral values system that will contribute to the good of society as a whole.

The Edmund Rice school not only welcomes diversity but cherishes each individual, regardless of race or creed, and at all times strives to bring all to the centre of everything that happens in the school. To be Christian is to be universal and each person's religious freedom and personal conscience are respected and recognised. However, a Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a Christian education – it is not just a right but a duty of the Catholic school.

Faith Formation

Faith formation happens throughout the school day and the school year. It is expressed in actions, interactions and activities and is experienced through the relationships between everyone in the school community. The primary focus of faith formation is that of fostering an encounter with the person of Jesus and on enabling the experience of worship. Students are taught to learn from Jesus, to think, act and judge as He would have done. They are taught the fundamental tenets of the Catholic faith and get opportunities to attend Mass, Liturgies and Religious celebrations. Catholic education, as described above, is obviously not something that is confined to a particular class or, as is often suggested, something that can be taught after school. Catholic education promotes a way of living and as such it is central to all the experiences that make up school life.

The Religious Education Class

Religious Education class plays a central role in a Catholic school. It offers an opportunity for students to search for meaning in life by

1. Learning about different beliefs
2. Learning from the beliefs of students in their class
3. Learning into their own religion

Learning about and learning from are essential to acquiring knowledge and developing critical thinking skills. Opportunities for inter faith conversations and dialogue

help students to understand other view points and articulate their own beliefs. For students of Christian faith it helps them to realise, in the words of Br. Philip Pinto that *“God is a lot bigger than Christianity”*. The purpose is not about bringing other faiths into the Christian tradition. It is about how our tradition is going to be enlarged and enriched by interaction between the different faiths. This is recognised in the ERST Charter in the phrase, “richness in diversity”.

The “learning into” provides the greatest challenge for teachers in RE class. How is formation in the Catholic faith facilitated in a diverse classroom? The New Junior Cycle gives teachers scope to choose content which will facilitate their students to achieve the learning outcomes of the RE subject specification. Teachers in a Catholic school can select content that will provide opportunities to explore and deepen their Catholic faith. If we are to be inclusive, students of different faiths will also be encouraged to grow and develop in their own faith tradition. Just as differentiated teaching methodologies are required in other classes, Religious Education class is no different. The Religious Education class, is, as the name implies, education about religions. Instruction in the Catholic way of life belongs with the whole school and the whole school community.

The New Junior Cycle

With regard to the New Junior Cycle, the question arises as to the place of Religious Education in the curriculum.

Schools can choose one of three approaches.

1. By using the NCCA RE specification with a view to students undertaking the Classroom Based Assessments and presenting for the final assessment at end of third year. In this way, learning in RE will be certified as part of each student's Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA).
2. Schools and students may decide to have two CBAs in RE but no externally assessed, state certified examination at the end of third year. In this approach, students will still be recognised for their work in RE as part of their JCPA under ‘Other Areas of Learning’. The school may or may not follow to a greater or lesser extent the RE specifications from the NCCA.
3. A third approach is where schools offer a different programme, not connected at all to the Subject Specification, designed for example by the school itself. Again, the work done by students might be included under ‘Other Areas of Learning’.

In an Edmund Rice school, regardless of the approach to RE taken, there should always be a provision of two hours for Religious Education.



Individual schools should, in consultation with their Trustees, choose the approach to RE that will lead to the richest possible experience of Religious Education in their school. Excellent RE is at the very heart of a Catholic school's life and mission. Catholic schools have a responsibility to assist in providing for an interesting and educative experience of Religious Education for all students including those of other faiths and those who do not have a religious faith. It should also be remembered that Catholic parents sending their children to Catholic schools have an expectation that their children's faith will be enriched through their experience of Religious Education in a Catholic school. In a Catholic school, our faith tradition should be presented to students in an invitational manner as a rich resource that can bring meaning to the young person's life.

Teaching those who opt out

Article 44.2.4 of the Irish Constitution acknowledges "the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending religious instruction at that school".

Religious Education class in an Edmund Rice school, as described above, provides an opportunity to explore different belief systems. Instruction in the way of Christian living is interwoven into the totality of the school experience. The promotion of the Catholic faith does not just belong in RE class but in every action of the school. For someone with a conscientious objection to being educated in the Catholic faith the issue is much greater than RE class.

Parents of students and students (over 18) who wish to opt out of RE class are invited to meet with Principal, Deputy Principal, Chaplain and/or RE teacher to discuss their options. The non-instructional nature of the RE class, the emphasis on studying world religions and the opportunity for inter-faith discussion will be pointed out in these discussions. However, after these discussions have taken place, the constitutional right of the parent/ student (over 18 years) will be recognised by the school.

Students who opt out of RE class should not be offered extra tuition or study periods. Appropriate texts, or novels with moral or philosophical content, can be provided. See "Guidelines on the inclusion of Students of Different Beliefs in Catholic Schools" (JMB) for a suggested list of appropriate books. The Edmund Rice Schools Trust will support schools in providing a menu of options for these students.

Role of School Management

The school leader needs to be at the heart of promoting Catholic education in the school. The Principal, supported by the Board of Management will ensure that the values of Catholic education and the ERST Charter permeate school life by putting in place structures and experiences to enable this. The Principal's role will be key in cultivating and fostering an active community of faith within the school. The Edmund Rice Schools Trust will support Principals and Deputy Principals in gaining a full understanding of how this can be achieved.

Edmund Rice principals and teachers are invited to partake in the EREBB/ Marino online leadership course which will assist in deepening their understanding of the role. Details can be accessed on the following link:

https://www.mie.ie/en/Study_with_Us/Continuing_Professional_Development/EREBB_Leadership_Certificate/Welcome_to_the_EREBB_Leadership_Certificate.html

Role of Chaplain

Each Edmund Rice school should endeavour to appoint a school chaplain. Being true to our charter requires us to prioritise resources to enable Catholic education in the school. In the absence of DES paid chaplains, schools will need to be creative in how to fund this role. The school chaplain will be a spiritual leader and faith presence in the school and will be instrumental in a faith formation and pastoral role.

Role of RE Teacher

The Religious Education teacher's role will be as a classroom teacher of RE, broadening their students' minds about world religions, deepening their understanding of their own faith and preparing them for exams. They will be a key member of the Chaplaincy team and will assist with liturgical services and religious celebrations, giving due recognition to the varied religious beliefs in the school. They will encourage inter-faith dialogue, participation and inclusion.

Role of other Staff

All members of staff of an Edmund Rice school will have a responsibility to support, respect and uphold the Catholic ethos of the school. In line with LAOS, 2016 they will have a duty "to communicate the guiding vision of the school and lead its realisation". They will be expected to participate in school-organised liturgical events and to promote and support the key elements of the ERST Charter.





Prayer and Liturgy

Prayer and liturgy have a central place in an Edmund Rice school. A trained and well- resourced RE department is essential to the liturgical and spiritual life of the school. Students should be encouraged, facilitated and guided in prayer each day. Whether this is at the beginning and end of each day, each class or at specified times, is at the discretion of school management. The place of prayer in the school may encompass the following:

Opportunities for Inter faith dialogue and prayer, Celebrating the Liturgical seasons, celebrating major feast days, marking school assemblies or occasions, the importance of the sacraments, use of religious symbols and the provision of a dedicated inter faith prayer / space.

Links with Parish

The school acts as an interface between secular society and church. It provides to students, who may not otherwise get it, an opportunity to learn about Jesus and become part of the Christian family. Education prepares young people to make a contribution to their community and, in Catholic schools, this includes their faith community. As the church ponders a changing world it will look more and more to the school to assist its mission. The Catholic school can play a key role in the newly emerging church by introducing and encouraging its students to become involved in parish activities. However, the school cannot assume the role of the parish and is primarily concerned with the growth and developments of all the students in its care.

Conclusion

In summary, the Edmund Rice school will promote Catholic education by

1. Ensuring the Catholic ethos is lived out in the school on a daily basis
2. Recognising the importance of leadership
3. By ensuring that teachers and management are being supported and sustained
4. By working together with parish
5. By appointing a Chaplain
6. By facilitating faith formation opportunities across curriculum.
7. By ensuring religious education is allocated two hours on school timetable per week.
8. By encouraging RE class in which there is learning about other faiths and learning from other faiths but also opportunities to learn into our Catholic faith.
9. By ensuring that RE is always formational and offers a space for dialogue with different beliefs and reflection on the Catholic tradition.
10. By ensuring that students who request to opt out are encouraged to become involved and that those who do choose to opt out are given opportunities to grow in their own faith or ethnic tradition.

Footnote:

1. In the Education Act 15 (2 (b)), the characteristic spirit of the school is understood as being “determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school”.





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