



Killoughteen National School Opting Out from Faith Formation Policy

Policy for Opting Out from Faith Formation

Killoughteen NS

04/11/2019

Introduction

Killoughteen National School is a primary school under the patronage of the Bishop Brendan Leahy (Diocese of Limerick) The vision of the school is as follows:

To promote the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person of the pupil including her relationship with God, with people and with the environment as we work in partnership with our parents for the welfare of our students. / It is our aim to lead our pupils towards a sense of their own worth, a pride in our school and town and develop a sense of the love of God. / Committed to the development of the whole person, they hand on Christian values and a shared Irish culture to the next generation. / The vision that underpins a Christian education is rooted in the life of Jesus Christ and emphasises that every person is made in the image of God./ The school aims to promote the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person: intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual, including a living relationship with God and other people. / The school models and promotes a philosophy of life inspired by a belief in God and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

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. However, all staff are expected to uphold the ethos of the school and must take part in all aspects of the school day.

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 has published its new schools admissions bill. Schools now 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.



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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 following 9 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 Sexual Education (RSE), Stay Safe, Walktall, etc.
- **Iconography:** this school is patronised by the Catholic Faith. This means that symbolism of the school's faith can be found around the school building.

Timing of Faith Formation Lessons

- The time of Faith formation classes is at the discretion of the class teacher. While children will not be expected to take part in the lessons, they must remain in their seat. 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 throughout 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.



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School Plays

This school puts on a Christmas Play/ Carol Service sometimes based on the Ethos of the school. (Nativity/Songs) The play/ service 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 preparing for these performances. Should a family wish for their children to take part in these performances, they should inform the school in writing.

Sacraments

The Sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation are a central part of a Catholic pupil's journey in school and life. Much 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.

It is practice for the school to take a photograph of the Communion class each year. While the school does not wish to cause offence to families, it is impossible to include children that are opted out of religion in this 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 prayer service but will be expected to attend the ceremony. Please see section above regarding photographs.

Charity Work

The school supports a number of charitable organisations. Many of them are linked to the Catholic **faith**. (for example, Trócaire and the Shoebox Appeal. Children that are opted out will not be forced to participate.)

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**.



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Visits to Church or other religious buildings/venues.

- Where possible, the school will inform parents/guardians of any visits to the **Church**. Parents/guardians will be invited to collect their children at this time. If parents/guardians cannot collect their children, the children may have to 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. Sometimes these inspections may be unannounced. However, inspectors will be informed of any child opted out in the classroom.

Children with Additional Needs

All children, including those with additional needs are covered by this policy. Where a child with additional needs has full access to a Special Needs Assistant, there may be flexibility to withdraw the child during Faith Formation classes.

Ratification

This policy was drawn up by the Board of Management of **Killoughteen NS** in conjunction with staff, parents Association, and was ratified at a Board Meeting on **[04/11/2019]**.

Signed: *Sheilagh O Mahony Kennedy*

Date: 6/11/2019

(Chairperson)