

Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland

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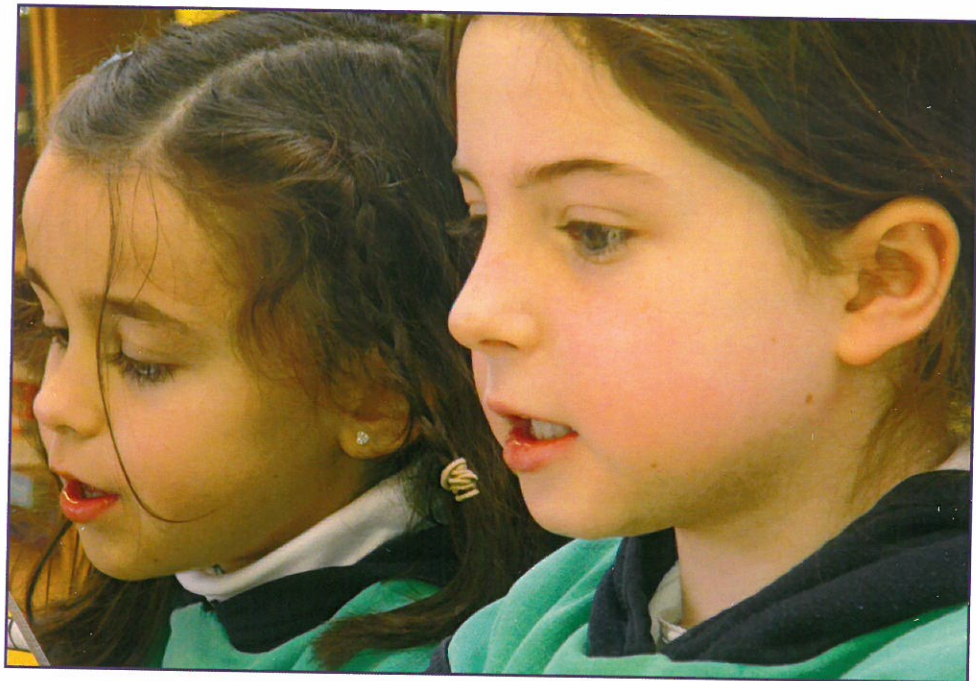
Share the Good News – the National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland identifies the need for a Primary Religious Education Curriculum and a new schools programme ‘based on the principle of connecting home, parish and school in the formation of Catholic pupils’ (paragraph, 164). The *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (2015), written by Anne Hession, St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, was formally launched in September 2015. The curriculum received recognitio

from the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelisation in March 2015. While religious education is one of seven areas in the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999), and the *Northern Ireland Curriculum*, this is the first time that teachers have been offered a structured outline of what religious education, as an academic discipline in Catholic schools, contributes to the Catholic education and formation of young

children at pre-school and primary level. It is envisaged that the *Grow in Love* programme and other resources based on this outline will be developed to support teachers in their implementation of the curriculum.



The purpose of the new curriculum is to guide and inform the teaching of pre-school and primary 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 Christian faith commitment. It is addressed to bishops, trustees, principals, teachers, programme and



resource writers, priests, diocesan advisers, parents/guardians and lecturers in the field of primary religious education. As professionals, teachers are ultimately responsible for implementing the curriculum of religious education in their own particular classes. This work is carried out in partnership with the board of management and the principal of the school. The curriculum empowers teachers in their agency as critical and creative crafters of quality religious education experiences for their students.

Four-fold Structure

The content of the curriculum is divided into four interrelated strands: Christian Faith; The Word of God; Liturgy/Prayer; and Christian Morality. This four-fold structure provides a clear scope and sequence for religious learning, with clear signposts to the knowledge and skills of religious literacy to be learned at each level of the primary school. This curriculum uses *an outcomes approach*, emphasising the educational alignment between religious education and other areas of the primary school curriculum.

Religious Education Outcomes and Faith-Formation Goals

The curriculum provides a set of *religious education outcomes* (skills) and *faith formation outcomes* for each level.



The religious education outcomes describe the skills of religious literacy that are to be taught. Skills of religious literacy are divided into five categories:

1. Understanding: outcomes seek to help children to understand and explore what has been revealed by God: the given content of the Catholic faith. Children learn how to listen, learn from and respond to what has been revealed by God and they are invited to judge and decide what this might mean for their lives.

2. Communicating: outcomes involve children developing a specific spiritual, moral and religious vocabulary; learning how to appreciate and respond to sacred texts, stories, music and poetry; learning how to pray, how to communicate in liturgy, and how to respond artistically to religious experience. Communication skills include talking and writing with understanding and insight about spiritual, moral and religious ideas, reflecting critically and creatively on spiritual, moral and religious issues, and debating and using reasoned arguments.

3. Participation: outcomes involve inviting children to participate in experiences of prayer, silence and meditation which develop their capacity for personal prayer and for participation in the Church's liturgy. Children are also invited to engage in practical activities associated with Christian charity, stewardship of creation and social justice and to work with others in research projects, drama activities and common educational tasks.

4. Developing Christian spiritual literacy: outcomes involve understanding that Christian spirituality is ‘the whole of life guided by the Holy Spirit’ (Saint John Paul II). Aspects of a Christian spirituality that are developed include: learning to pray, to participate in sacraments, developing a sacramental imagination and developing a prophetic imagination. Finally, children are enabled to understand how a Christian spirituality is sustained in the community of faith, the Church.

5. Inter-religious learning: outcomes 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 cultures, to explore the beliefs and practices of other world religions, to enter into dialogue with people of other religions and beliefs and to foster awareness of shared values such as justice, peace, solidarity, tolerance and freedom.

A set of faith-formation goals has been provided for each level of the curriculum, illustrating the full scope of faith development across the primary school. The primary focus of faith-formation goals in the



primary school is on fostering an encounter with the person of Jesus and on enabling the experience of intimacy and communion with him. Children are invited to learn from Jesus' actions, his teaching, the teaching of his Church, and to think and judge like him, in the Religious Education Curriculum. Finally, it is hoped that children will develop a commitment to participate in the mission and ministry of Jesus, our Saviour, living their Christian faith, in the Church community, for the Kingdom of God.

Fundamental Principle

A fundamental principle of the curriculum is that children's current religious understanding should form the basis for new learning. The curriculum promotes an incremental approach to teaching and learning by increasing the complexity of concepts and skills of religious literacy as the child progresses through the school. The outcomes outlined in each of the strands observe a spiral progression from preschool to sixth class.

Facilitating Planning

The curriculum provides a clear outline of the scope and sequence of skills and religious knowledge that are taught at each level of the Catholic primary school. Within this framework, teachers will be

afforded flexibility to plan a programme that is appropriate to the individual school's circumstances and to the needs, aptitudes and interests of the children. It is recommended that teachers use the curriculum to draw up long term plans and to facilitate whole-school planning. They can also use the curriculum (in conjunction with the *Grow in Love* programme) when drawing up fortnightly plans, weekly plans and Individual Education Plans (IEPS). Religious education is taught for two-and-a-half hours per week in Catholic schools.

