



Policy for Opting Out from Faith Formation

Introduction

Naíscóil Íde (“The School”) is a primary school under the patronage of Catholic Archbishop of Dublin. Naíscóil Íde, aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person: intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual, including a living relationship with God and with other people. The school models and promotes a philosophy of life inspired by belief in God and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Catholic school provides Religious education for the pupils in accordance with the doctrines, practices and tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and promotes the formation of the pupils in the Catholic Faith.

While the faith of the school permeates throughout the school day, there are 2.5 hours per week dedicated to discrete faith formation classes in the school. This school uses the **Grow in Love** programme.

The school recognises that some of our families do not come from a Catholic background. We strive to treat all of our children with respect in our school throughout the day. However, we also recognise that the message delivered from the school's faith formation programme can be counter to the belief system of some families. We, therefore, offer families an option to "opt out" of these lessons.

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

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 have to outline their practices in terms of how they accommodate children that opt out of faith formation.

The above is grounded in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that "Parties shall respect and ensure the rights set forth in the present Convention to each child within their jurisdiction without discrimination of any kind,

irrespective of the child's or his or her parent's or legal guardian's race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status." It also states that "parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure that the child is protected against all forms of discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions, or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members." Articles 14 and 30 also refer to a child's right to freedom of religion.

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

Legislation providing State aid for schools shall not discriminate between schools under the management of different religious denominations, nor be such as to affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending religious instruction at that school.

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

The Employment Equality Acts 1998–2015 outlaw discrimination in a wide range of employment and employment-related areas. These include recruitment and promotion; equal pay; working conditions; training or experience; dismissal and harassment including sexual harassment. The legislation defines discrimination as treating one person in a less favourable way than another person based on any of the 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. Religion is not a criteria in the school's priorities for 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

- Faith formation classes take place at a prescribed time each day. However teacher's may change the timing at their discretion.

Provisions made for children that are opted out

Unfortunately, the school does not have the required resources to accommodate children that are opted out of Faith Formation classes. In consultation with parents, an accommodation will be reached from the following suggestions:

- While children will not be expected to take part in the lessons, they will remain in their classroom and alternative work will be provided for them by the teacher which will be of a non-religious nature. Work with the use of headphones would help ensure that they are not party to the faith formation class in the classroom.
- Faith Formation classes can be staggered throughout the school day to allow for children who are opted out to go to a classroom where faith formation is not taking place.
- Faith Formation classes could take place at the beginning or end of the day.

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.

Assemblies

Assemblies in our school often take on a religious theme in line with the ethos of the school. Prayers and religious songs are sung during this time. As all members of the school community are expected to attend the assembly, no pupil or teacher or other staff member is exempt from assembly.

Nativity Plays

Every year this school puts on a Christmas Play. This which may be based on the nativity. The play may be a direct retelling of the story of the birth of Jesus Christ or a story with a theme linked to this story. Children that are opted out of faith formation will not be expected to take part in these performances. However, they will remain in class while children are prepared for these performances. Should a family wish for their children to take part in these performances, they should inform the school in writing. Due to the ethos of the school, all teachers are expected to prepare their pupils for a religious-themed Christmas performance.

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. Teachers and staff will also be expected to attend the full ceremony.

Newsletters

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

Visits from Church Leaders

The priest may visit classes to talk to the children throughout the school year. The school cannot plan for these visits but will do their utmost to ensure that the priest is aware of any children that are opted out of religion in the school. However, the school cannot take any responsibility for interactions between the faith leaders and children in the school.

Where rituals take place such as dispensing of ashes on Ash Wednesday the priest will be informed of the wishes of families that are opted out. In very rare circumstances, an error may arise, and while the school will do their very best to ensure that no upset is caused, it cannot take responsibility for any such error performed by the visit of a priest.

Visits to Church

- Where possible, the school will inform parent(s)/guardian(s) of any visits to the church. However, this is not always possible.

Religion Inspections

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

Children with Additional Needs

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

Ratification

This policy was drawn up by the Board of Management of **Naíscoil Íde** in conjunction with staff and parents and was ratified at a Board Meeting on **Monday 3rd February 2020**.

Signed: _____ (Chairperson) Date: _____