

Scoil Asicus Naofa,

Strandhill,

Co Sligo.

Roll No. 15004P



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## Religious Education Policy

The Religious Education Policy outlines

1. The school's Catholic ethos
2. The programme of religious education that is provided
3. Support provided for faith formation, and
4. The school's approach to diversity and inclusion, which includes provisions for families who may wish to opt out of religious education and faith formation

### Catholic Ethos

Scoil Asicus Naofa—named after Saint Asicus of Elphin—is a primary school with a Catholic ethos. We provide high-quality academic education as part of a faith and values-based holistic education—developing the whole child intellectually, spiritually, socially, emotionally, and physically.

This means that the way things are done in the school and the experiences that pupils, staff, board members and parents have as they partake in the daily life of the school are based on the concept of the human person being rooted in the teaching of Jesus Christ as embodied in the Catholic faith community. This encompasses collective attitudes, beliefs, core values, traditions, aspirations, and goals which are reflected in the actual practices which are carried out in the school on a daily, weekly, and yearly basis. Our Catholic ethos is a living, constantly regenerating feature of the school and is part of discussions in the playground, staff room, management, and general meetings.

While it is impossible to outline all aspects of the school 'ethos, the following characteristics are experienced and promoted as essential elements in the establishment of a supportive and positive 'ethos.

- The school is named after a saint whose feast day is celebrated
- The school aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the pupil (intellectual, physical, cultural, moral, and spiritual), including his / her relationship with God, with other people and with the environment.
- The school sees faith formation as part of its core mission and proposes a life of faith to all pupils within its care, but never imposes the school's faith on any pupil or family
- The school uses the Patron's Grow in Love Programme to provide religious instruction as part of the normal school day, in accordance with the doctrine and tradition of the Catholic Church as part of the education given to children who belong to that Church.

- Pupils of Catholic faith are prepared for the reception of the sacraments of First Confession, First Holy Communion and Confirmation, in accordance with arrangements in the diocese.
- Mass and prayer services are held throughout the year, and prayer is a feature of the school day – at morning assembly, in class and on days when classes visit the church. Where a child is opting out, he/she will not be expected to join in with the prayers but are expected to respect those who do by taking a moment of quiet reflection.

### **Admissions**

Article 44.2. 4 of the Constitution provides for “the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending religious instruction at that school”. Section 62.7(n) of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018 requires schools to publish an admission policy which will include details of the school’s arrangements for students who do not want to attend religious instruction.

While our school maintains its Catholic ethos and provides religious education and formation in the Catholic faith, religious freedom and the personal conscience of individual pupils and their families is respected. This freedom is explicitly recognised by the Church which is our Patron. Our school is open to people of other denominations, other faiths, and none, and respects their beliefs. As outlined in our Admissions Policy, parents may indicate that they wish to enrol their child(ren) in a school with a Catholic Ethos but would like to opt out of religious education. The practical accommodations for children opting out of religious education are outlined in the school’s Admissions Policy.

### **Religious Education**

The overarching perspective for teaching and learning in religion in Catholic primary schools is the Roman Catholic tradition, its beliefs and practices. Religious education (instruction??) in Catholic primary schools is distinctive because it seeks to encourage and support the Catholic faith commitment of Catholic pupils. 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’. The Religious Education curriculum provides formal 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.

The Department of Education has allocated up to 2 hours per week to faith based religious education in Irish primary schools. Teachers provide religious instruction to children in all classes from Jnr Infants to 6<sup>th</sup> as set out in Grow in Love programme. 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 and resembles other academic disciplines that are taught in Catholic schools. 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 and appreciation for all.

Teachers are free to timetable this lesson as best suits their respective class. This programme includes stories, songs and prayers intended to introduce children to the Catholic faith and deepen their understanding of what it means to be a Christian.

## **Faith Formation**

Formation refers to personal development: the process through which a person's way of being, knowing and doing are shaped and transformed by religious education. While religion permeates throughout the school day, faith formation includes;

- **Sacred Spaces** - Classrooms will generally have a space dedicated to prayer and reflection. This may include a candle, holy water, crucifix, religious pictures, statues etc. This space will evolve to reflect the seasons in the Christian calendar and be decorated with children's work around Christmas, Easter, St. Patrick's Day etc. Our school hall will also display seasonal posters and prayers for use at assembly e.g. "In November we pray for the Holy Souls", "St. Brigid's Day".
- **Visits to the Church** – children are invited to attend masses typically 3 times each year including on St Asicus' Day, the beginning of the school year, and to receive blessed ashes on Ash Wednesday. However, they may visit the church from time to time with their teacher.
- **School/Parish Choir** - Children who wish to are prepared to sing in the parish choir, and this includes singing at a monthly mass in Strandhill church. The school choir, on the day of First Communion and Confirmation, and at other religious events e.g. blessing of an extension.
- **Altar Servers** – children from 3<sup>rd</sup> class upwards are invited to act as altar servers in the parish. With parental consent, they may leave the school to serve at ceremonies during the school day.

**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.

**Catholic Schools Week:** Our school celebrates Catholic Schools Week each January. During this week there is a focus on themes such as "A Living Tradition", "Serving the Community" "Welcoming Everyone". We celebrate Grandparents Day as an extension of this week in April when children's grandparents or other significant family members or friends are invited to attend a mass in Strandhill and visit the school to meet children in their classrooms.

**Sacraments:** During their period of education in Scoil Asicus, children are prepared for the following sacraments with support from the diocesan catechist.

- **Penance:** Children in 2<sup>nd</sup> class are prepared for the Sacrament of Penance each year. The book **Grow in Love** is used by the teachers and the First Confession ceremonies are prepared and organised by the teachers in collaboration with the priest(s) and parents / guardians. First Confessions usually take place shortly before the Communion ceremony and are conducted in the Church in the evening time. Parents / guardians are invited to attend with their children. All children are also invited to go receive the sacrament of penance before Christmas and before confirmation.
- **First Holy Communion:** Children in 2<sup>nd</sup> class are prepared for the Sacrament of Communion each year. The book **Grow in Love** is used by the teachers as a guide to the programme of religious education for Communion. A series of Masses, called "Do this in Memory" are organised during the school year by the teacher in collaboration with the Priest. Children and their parents/guardians are invited to attend these Masses. The

school choir also participates in these Masses. Communion ceremonies are prepared and organised by the teachers in collaboration with the priest(s) and parents / guardians.

- **Confirmation:** Children in 6<sup>th</sup> class are prepared each year for the Sacrament of Confirmation. The Grow in Love book is used by the teachers as a guide to the programme of religious education for Confirmation. Pupils use a workbook which is completed as each topic is covered in class. Confirmation ceremonies are prepared and organised by the teachers in collaboration with the priest(s) and parents / guardians. As many children as possible are involved in the ceremony. The Ceremony of Commitment takes place in November.

## **Diversity and Inclusion**

Our school welcomes diversity and inclusion as an opportunity for dialogue and understanding with those of different faiths in a culture of encounter and enrichment of intercultural education. Teaching and modelling appreciation and respect for people of different religious affiliations is seen as important for all our pupils, as children do in a multicultural and pluralist society. Through the history curriculum within social, environmental, and scientific education (SESE), children have opportunities to become aware of the lives of people from different social, cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds in Ireland, Europe, and the wider world.

Our school has always welcomed and included families who are not of the Catholic faith, may have other faith, atheist, or agnostic. It is an integral part of our school's Catholic ethos that all families and children are welcomed into our community and respect shown to their beliefs. 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 as provided for within Section 30 (2) (e) of the Education Act 1998.

Parents who do not wish their children to participate in the religious education programme may indicate this to the school upon enrolment and specify whether they want their child to join in the class lessons (Grow in Love programme), to visit the church for masses or to participate in the Christmas Concert.

**Religious classes:** Children will not be expected to participate in the religion lesson where their parents have opted out, they will remain in their classroom and parents can provide children with books or written material of a faith-based or secular nature for the child to view during the lesson. For reasons of supervision, the material should not involve media or ICT and be able to be independently accessed by the child without disturbance to the other children. Where such a child wishes to contribute to the lesson or discussion, their contributions should of course be heard and valued by the teacher and the class.

**Prayers:** In line with the ethos of the school, prayers are said at times through the school day including during morning assembly. If a child is opted out of faith formation, he/she will not be expected to join in with the prayers.

**Assemblies:** Assemblies in our school may contain prayers and religious songs in line with the ethos of the school. 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. All children should arrive in

school as normal between 8.45am – 8.55am and can privately say a prayer from their own faith tradition or take a moment of mindfulness instead.

**Sacrament Preparation:** In classes where sacramental preparation is undertaken, we will endeavour to provide an itinerary to all children near the start of the school year outlining dates when the parish catechist will visit and when church visits / class retreats are taking place. This itinerary, which is liable to change, will also give the date for the sacrament so parents may prepare suitable alternative educational materials for these days when teachers are rehearsing prayers, responses, reading etc in advance of the sacrament.


**Church visits:** All children who take part in the Religious Education programme in school will be accompanied to the church by staff. Children not participating in the Religious Education programme may remain in school under supervision of a teacher.

**Christmas Concert:** Every year in December, our school puts on a Christmas Concert which is based on the birth of Jesus. All classes perform a song, dance, or reflection on the story of Jesus' birth and parents are invited to attend. All children will participate in line with the parents' wishes as expressed in the enrolment form.

#### **Ratification**

This policy was drawn up by the Board of Management of Scoil Asicus Naofa in conjunction with staff and parents and was ratified at a Board of Management Meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2025

To be reviewed in 2030.

Signed: 

Chairperson Board of Management.