



Religious Education Policy

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Religious Education is a lifelong process that contributes to the full development of the human person. The role that the modern Catholic school provides for that process through its provision of Religious Education is crucial to the holistic development of the young people entrusted to its care. Religious Education in any faith-based school is not simply an academic subject making up a proportion of the taught curriculum; it should also provide a theological, philosophical and moral encounter with life itself. Indeed it should be noted that the spiritual atmosphere that pervades the monastery (and is available in some measure to the students) at Glenstal Abbey is unique in Ireland. This document will attempt to articulate the roles and function of Religious Education at Glenstal Abbey School and provide a framework within which the subject area will be defined on an ongoing basis.

Religious Education and the curriculum:

- All students who pursue the Junior Certificate Programme at Glenstal Abbey School are required to sit the Junior Certificate Religious Education (JCRE) examination.
- RE will be offered as a subject choice at Leaving Certificate level (LCRE) from 2006/2007 at Glenstal Abbey School.
- The requirement for the teaching of the JCRE syllabus is a minimum of *three* class periods per week.
- The requirement for the teaching of RE as an exam subject for the Leaving Certificate is a minimum of *five* class periods per week.
- In the case of senior classes not taking RE as an exam subject for the Leaving Certificate there should be no less than *two* periods per week.
- Non-exam RE will be mandatory for all seniors regardless of subject choices.
- It is considered fundamental that some senior RE classes be timetabled for periods during the day and that every possible effort should be made to facilitate this.
- A continuing effort should be made to encourage a meaningful cross-curricular approach to RE where possible.

Religious Education and the pupils:

- Through RE pupils should learn to appreciate that life has religious, spiritual and moral dimensions.
- Students should develop an awareness, understanding, knowledge and appreciation of the key Christian teachings about God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit; about Jesus Christ, and about the Bible.
- Students should develop an ability to interpret and relate the Bible to personal life and current affairs.
- Students should develop a knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the growth of Christianity, of its worship, prayer and religious language, and a growing awareness of the meaning of belonging to a Christian tradition.
- Students should develop their ability to think and make judgements about morality, to relate moral Christian principles to personal and social life, and to identify values and attitudes which influence behaviour.
- Students should develop the skills of empathising with the religious and moral beliefs and practices of other traditions.

Religious Education and the teacher:

- All teachers of RE to examination level should be suitably qualified to teach the subject and should follow the course laid down by the Department of Education in the JCRE and LCRE syllabi.
- Teachers who take the non-exam senior classes should also have relevant qualifications and experience, and (at least in part) follow the course soon to be laid down by the Irish bishops.
- Staff development through in-service training should be regular and effective in enhancing the teaching and learning of RE.
- The teacher must take sufficient account of the special needs of pupils with learning difficulties through the selection of appropriate content, teaching approaches, learning activities and methods of assessment.
- RE class should allow pupils to share views and explore issues in an atmosphere of mutual respect, which promotes tolerance and self-worth for the students.
- RE should challenge pupils' thinking and beliefs and challenge them also to extend their skills and understanding in new and different contexts.
- RE should be enjoyable for the student and should be made relevant to the pupils' lives.

Assessment of Religious Education:

- There should be a common policy for assessment in RE which is consistent with the whole school assessment policy. The RE department should be agreed on how students are marked and how their progress is recorded.
- Homework should be varied, challenging and, above all, given consistently.
- The basis on which their work is assessed should be explained clearly to the pupils with class work and homework being marked and discussed frequently.
- RE should always have a place on the report cards of all students.
- The RE department should encourage critical self-assessment on the part of all teachers of RE at the school.
- The RE department should regularly re-evaluate and amend the RE policy as new needs become apparent.

Planning in Religious Education:

- The RE department should have a suitably qualified person designated as head of that department, and should consist of those who teach RE at the school and the school chaplain.
- The RE department should be responsible for the planning and implementation of all RE programmes at the school.
- The department should be responsible for the evaluation of teaching and learning strategies employed both individually and collectively by teachers of RE.
- Planning should include anticipated learning outcomes and the standards expected in RE while taking account of the pupils' differing abilities, interests, faith experience and levels of maturity.

- Planning should include the gathering, assessment and effective use of resources available to the RE department.
- The department should meet on a regular basis throughout the school year to discuss issues of importance to the effective delivery of RE programmes at the school.
- All teachers should implement agreed planning consistently.

Accommodation and Resources for RE:

- There should be a permanent classroom base for the teaching of RE in the school that is equipped with a television, video machine and DVD player.
- In such a room the arrangement of furniture should be adaptable and there should be adequate space for displaying the pupils' work.
- There should be a stock of Bibles, Bible atlases, textbooks, reference books, videos and DVDs relevant to the subject.
- A budget should be agreed upon by the department for the procurement of resources on an annual basis. Extra funding should also be available for once-off purchases for the RE department.
- The chaplain should have a permanent base from which to work and where he/she can meet students in a relaxed atmosphere.
- A prayer and meditation room should be provided for the students. This should be a room of appropriate size and decor where the student can spend time alone in peace, and where liturgies may be occasionally be held for groups of students.

The role of the chaplain in Religious Education:

- To promote Gospel values through their interactions with the students.
- To counsel students in relation to issues of personal faith development.
- To help organise regular liturgies and other faith-based activities in the school.
- To highlight the turning of the liturgical year and its relevance for the Christian community.
- To provide spiritual care for students and teachers in the school community who suffer bereavement.
- To work in close association with the RE department in order to achieve an approach to RE that balances both the academic and faith-based aspects of the area successfully.

Liturgies and faith-based activities:

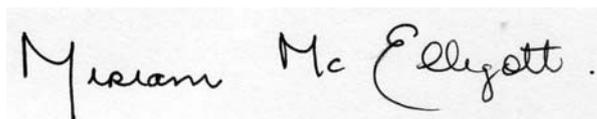
- Well-organised and meaningful liturgical celebrations should be a staple for any faith-based learning community. Liturgies and faith-based activities must be seen as a priority in the RE policy for Glenstal Abbey School.
- Existing liturgies such as the school mass at the beginning of the academic year, the sixth year mass and penitential services at Advent and Lent should all be maintained, as should the weekly Sunday morning mass for the students.
- Students should be given the 'tools to pray'. This would involve teaching the students about the philosophy of prayer, types of prayer, and how one might use this information in their own approach to personal prayer.

- All students should be taught in first year how to behave in a proper manner and to respond appropriately while at mass.
- Morning and night prayer should remain part of the daily routine for housemasters in junior and inter house.
- Opportunities for organised prayer (and/or Scripture reading) and reflection should be provided for senior students also, preferably in the monastery church or the icon chapel.
- The school choir provides an important encounter for its members with RE through a different medium and should be maintained.
- Student retreats should be compulsory and may be organised by the chaplain in conjunction with the RE department. Each year group should be provided with a positive retreat experience appropriate to their age and spiritual maturity on an annual basis.
- It should be made known to the students (esp. seniors) that attendance at the monastic offices is open to them at appropriate times should they wish to avail of it.
- The tradition of sixth year students serving at mass in the monastery should continue.
- A strong emphasis should be placed throughout all RE programmes at Glenstal Abbey School on the school community as a believing and practicing Christian community.

Links with the community:

- Parents are the first and foremost educators of their children and the family is generally the first place where children come to Christian faith. A partnership approach to RE should therefore be fostered and encouraged between home and school.
- All parents should be provided with a copy of the RE policy and should have an input as to its continued evolution through the appropriate channels (Parents' Council / B.O.M.).
- Links between the pupils and the local community should be forged through social work and charitable fundraising.
- Guest speakers should be regularly invited to address the pupils on a range of religious, moral and social justice issues.
- Reflection on social justice issues should be facilitated. The notions of compassion, peace and justice as a lifelong challenge should be strongly imbued in the students.

This policy adopted by the Board



Signed:

Chairperson Board of Management

Date: December 2005