

Fostering Hope

***Policy for Religious Education
in South African Catholic Schools***

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66 Nelson Road, Booysens, Johannesburg 2091
PO Box 2083, Southdale 2135
email: info@cie.org.za

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Contents

GLOSSARY	2
FOREWORD	3
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN LEGISLATION	4
QUESTIONS FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS	5
A PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING POLICY	6
PART 1: THE AIM OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL	8
PART 2: PRACTICAL POLICIES FLOWING FROM THIS AIM	9
ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL	9
VISION FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION	9
A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT	10
PARTNERSHIP WITH FAMILY AND PARISH	11
AN EXPLICIT UNDERSTANDING	11
AN OUTWARD-LOOKING DIMENSION	12
MULTI-FAITH DIMENSION	13
RE COORDINATOR	13
DEFINITE CURRICULUM	14
APPROPRIATE METHODOLOGY	15
ADEQUATE TIME	15
ADEQUATE RESOURCES	16
EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT	16
TEACHER FORMATION	17
A SAMPLE POLICY	18
APPENDIX 1: THE PROCESSES OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION	20
APPENDIX 2: QUESTIONS FOR THE VALIDATION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION	22



Glossary

In order to facilitate your reading of the document we supply a few words of clarification on some key terms.

POLICY

A policy is a guideline for action based upon a particular vision or way of seeing. If, for example, Religious Education is seen as something of great importance in the school, then the school's policy will ensure that adequate time and resources are given to it.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Religious Education is that part of the school curriculum which helps the learner to explore the religious dimension of human experience. It seeks to develop the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, and the experience-base necessary for the learner to grow towards maturity in that dimension. It comprises two areas – ethos and the religious life of the school and a classroom teaching and learning subject called Religious Education or RE.

Religious Life of the School

The religious life of the school consists of those activities which provide teachers and learners with opportunities for collective practices such as prayer, worship and reflection. It also refers to aspects which may be ongoing, such as the display of religious symbols and artifacts, the meeting of voluntary societies and groups, personal expressions of religious identity, and the establishment of pastoral care and outreach programmes. The right of freedom of conscience applies more typically to such activities than to Religious Education classes.

Teaching and Learning

Religious Education (RE) as a dimension of the academic life of the school has a well-defined curriculum whose purpose is "to penetrate a particular area of culture and to relate with other areas of knowledge."¹ It should "appear as a scholastic discipline with the same systematic demands and the same rigour as other disciplines."²

CATECHESIS

Catechesis is the task of fostering and deepening the faith of believers. Based as it is in the faith community, catechesis is primarily the responsibility of the parish. It does however find some scope in the Catholic School which has a distinctive religious character, and which gives Religious Education a central place in the curriculum. The distinction between catechesis and Religious Education needs however to be born in mind.

INCULTURATION

Inculturation is the process whereby the Gospel takes flesh in human culture. It does so in such a way that the experience of the gospel message and the response to it are expressed through elements that belong to the culture in question. The process furthermore animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it into a new creation.

¹ Congregation for the Clergy. 1997. General Directory for Catechesis, par. 73.

² Congregation for Catholic Education. 2009. Circular Letter to the Presidents of Bishops' Conferences on Religious Education in Schools, par. 18.



Those committed to Catholic Schools believe that Religious Education (RE) lies at the heart of a school's curriculum which should reflect clearly the special character of the school. Furthermore, it is part of the Church's mission of bringing Good News to the young people of today, and it goes beyond the classroom to include the whole school community.

I hope that this document will prove to be an important aid in advancing the Church's mission in the school, especially in meeting the need created by the 2012 Curriculum and Assessment Policy statements which, while including a minimal programme called Religion Education for teaching and learning about religion, religions, and religious diversity in South Africa and the world, does not accommodate RE as a holistic and integral part of the school curriculum.

The vision outlined in this document is in harmony with both the National Curriculum and the Constitution which guarantees religious freedom as a fundamental human right. The Catholic school, while having a particular identity and ethos, provides a space where the worldviews and religious practices of all who work or study there are respected in a constructive dialogue aimed at holistic education and the building of the school community.

Work on a set of policy guidelines for RE in Catholic schools in South Africa was begun in January 1995. These guidelines would be of use to those negotiating the Catholic School position with the national and provincial Education Ministries. In addition, the guidelines were to assist schools in the development of their own RE policies. The first phase of Fostering Hope was completed in August 1995. A series of 37 consultative workshops followed to introduce the guidelines document. All interested parties were invited by means of a questionnaire to offer criticism to help shape the document further. The final draft of the document, Fostering Hope, was tabled at the August plenary session, 1997, of the Southern African Bishops' Conference in Mariannhill for its adoption.

Nine years later (2006), this policy document, Fostering Hope, was revised in the light of developments, most notably the signing of Deeds of Agreement which guarantee a partnership between the Catholic Church and Education Departments in maintaining Catholic Public schools which comprise 72% of the Catholic schools network. Now 20 years since its initial adoption, the policy has been reviewed for a second time to bring it in line with recent developments in the practice of RE and developments within the broader society.

This opportunity to provide for a fresh edition offers a renewed impetus in bringing RE more clearly to the centre of the Catholic School's attention, notwithstanding the pressure that it experiences from a demanding National Curriculum. It is hoped that this policy document will serve in helping schools, both public and independent, to exercise their rights to develop their RE practice so that the important role it plays in building the new South African nation and the Kingdom of God within it will be more clearly discernible.



+Giuseppe Sandri MCCI
Bishop of Witbank

PRESIDENT, CATHOLIC BOARD OF EDUCATION (CBE)
DEPARTMENT FOR CHRISTIAN FORMATION, LITURGY AND CULTURE,
SOUTHERN AFRICAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE



Religious Education in South African Legislation

The following national documents regulate the practice of Religious Education in schools in South Africa. Relevant sections from these documents are quoted below.

CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA (1996)

15. Freedom of religion, belief and opinion.-

- (1) Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.
- (2) Religious observances may be conducted at state or state-aided institutions, provided that-
 - (a) those observances follow rules made by the appropriate public authorities;
 - (b) they are conducted on an equitable basis; and
 - (c) attendance at them is free and voluntary.
- (3)
 - (a) This section does not prevent legislation recognising-
 - (i) marriages concluded under any tradition, or a system of religious, personal or family law; or
 - (ii) systems of personal or family law under any tradition, or adhered to by persons professing a particular religion.
 - (b) Recognition in terms of paragraph (a) must be consistent with this section and the other provisions of the Constitution.

SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS ACT (1996)

Transitional provisions relating to private property owned by religious organisation

57. If the owner of the private property referred to in section 56 is a religious organisation, such owner may require that the agreement contemplated in section 14 must recognise, in an appropriate manner consistent with this Act, the distinctive religious character of the school.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS OF AN AGREEMENT

(Government Gazette No. 18566 dated 19 December 1997)

Recognition of the religious character

18. This clause is applicable only in respect of an owner of private property who has exercised his or her rights as contemplated in Section 57 of the Act.
 - 18.1 The Member of the Executive Council recognises the distinctive religious character of the school as
-

- 18.2 The recognised distinctive religious character of the school referred to in sub-clause 18.1 will be maintained in the following manner:
-

[A Catholic school is a school community, recognised by the local Bishop, which through its general programme of education and especially its Religious Education classes and religious practices, exercises the right to live and learn the values of Jesus Christ, as upheld by the Catholic Church. Such a school provides this values-based education for the Catholic community as well as for those from the wider community who seek an education in harmony with the aims of the school.]

RELIGION AND EDUCATION (2003)

16. Citizens do have the right, at their own expense, to establish independent schools, including religious schools, as long as they avoid racial discrimination, register with the state, and maintain standards that are not inferior to the standards of comparable public educational institutions.³ Similarly, Section 57 of the Schools Act provides for “Public Schools on Private Property with a recognised religious character”, which also have the right to specify a religious ethos and character, subject to an agreement with the provincial authorities.⁴ In both such institutions the requirements for Religious Instruction and Religious Observances would not be prescribed by this policy. However in maintaining the curriculum standards with respect to Religion Education, both independent schools and public schools on private property with a recognised religious character⁵ are required to achieve the minimum outcomes for Religion Education.

Questions for Catholic Schools



The questions in PART 2 of this document, Practical Policies Flowing from This Aim, are intended to facilitate discussion. Thus a response of YES or NO to them serves no constructive purpose. Rather, in addressing the questions, the committee overseeing the process of policy development should seek to discern to what extent the school is or is not compliant with the policy statements in question.

Such discussion will help to ensure that the school’s policy is in harmony with this national policy and will ensure clarity and relevance in light of the school’s particular context and identity.

³ Section 29(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa

⁴ In terms of Section 14 of the South African Schools Act

⁵ As provided for in Section 57 of the South African Schools Act



A Process for Developing Policy

1 SELECT A COMMITTEE TO OVERSEE THE PROCESS

It probably only needs three or four members. Key candidates for membership of this committee include:

- the RE co-ordinator or head of department
- another senior member of staff (possibly the principal or deputy)
- the parish priest or school chaplain (where available)
- a well-informed parent
- the school's owner, or their representative, if you are a public school on private property

If the school has an established ethos committee it would be the ideal body to carry out the process.

2 THE COMMITTEE PREPARES ITSELF FOR THIS TASK

- The Committee should be familiar with *Fostering Hope*, the Religious Education Policy for Catholic Schools endorsed by the South African Catholic Bishops' Conference. This contains study questions which could be used with staff and parents.
- Both public and independent Catholic schools will find the Special Religious Character Schedule of the Deed of Agreement, which deals with Catholic character, and *Signs of God's Presence: Appraising the distinctive religious character of the Catholic school* useful. The latter provides a list of references and resources that includes key Church documents on education.
- A look at the multi-natured processes of RE will help broaden views of this subject. A synopsis of the processes is supplied as an appendix to this document.

3 THE COMMITTEE PLANS AND CARRIES OUT A CONSULTATIVE AND EDUCATIVE PROCESS

- This should include three constituencies – staff, parents, and students. It requires a mix of information and discussion shaped by materials such as those listed above. It should use existing structures and dates for scheduled meetings – e.g. a staff meeting and a parent body meeting. The views of students could be elicited through questions such as:
 - (a) What do you find relevant in RE?
 - (b) What do you find unhelpful in RE?
 - (c) When do you feel involved in RE?
 - (d) When does RE make you think?

Their views on assemblies and masses should also be sought.

- Let staff, students, and the parent body know what the steps in this procedure are, including opportunities for input and when the policy will be submitted to staff and parents for adoption. This could be drawn up in the form of a timeline.
- Provide regular feedback on progress made.

4 THE COMMITTEE COLLATES FEEDBACK AND FORMULATES A DRAFT POLICY

- Keep the policy short and in line with *Fostering Hope*. The sample policy at the end of this document illustrates the sort of areas that need to be covered. Use your school's (intended) practice to provide specific details.
- Name any curricular or extramural service projects, or school-based student organisations that are viewed as part of the school's Religious Education Programme.
- Include commitment to a regular review (e.g. annual) of the school's Religious Education Programme as part of your evaluation & development cycle. *Signs of God's Presence* is designed to facilitate this process.

5 THE COMMITTEE TAKES THE DRAFT TO STUDENTS, STAFF, AND PARENTS FOR COMMENT

- Again, use existing structures and scheduled meetings for staff and parents. Students could provide comment during an RE lesson.

6 THE COMMITTEE AMENDS THE DRAFT POLICY, IF NECESSARY, IN THE LIGHT OF FEEDBACK RECEIVED

7 THE COMMITTEE TAKES THE PROPOSED POLICY TO THE STAFF AND PARENT BODY FOR CONSULTATION AND THEN TO THE SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY OR BOARD OF GOVERNORS FOR FINAL ACCEPTANCE AND ADOPTION



PART 1

The Aim of Religious Education in the Catholic School

The Catholic School exists as an expression of the Catholic Church's mission to share the Gospel⁶ of Jesus. But the Church does not exist for itself. The Catholic School therefore represents the Church in service of others, and not of self⁷. However, since the school's communication of the gospel is in terms of the Catholic tradition, it is best adapted to offer this service to students from Catholic families or else from families that are in reasonable harmony with a Catholic understanding of Jesus and his message.

The Catholic School does not assume that all students from Catholic families are committed to the Catholic faith, nor that all students classified 'Christian' have made a personal decision to follow Jesus. Nor does it assume that students of other faith-traditions would not be able to relate to the gospel of Jesus. But since sharing this gospel is integral to the Catholic School's reason for existing, what must be assumed in fairness is that anyone who joins the school community is open to the school's principles and practices, and therefore to the school's Religious Education. However, 'to proclaim or to offer is not to impose; the latter suggests a moral violence which is strictly forbidden, both by the gospel and by Church law.'⁸

The aim of Religious Education then, in the Catholic School, is to nurture in its students their personal gifts of faith so as to bring awareness, growth, true freedom, and healing into their daily lives. It will equip them in every sphere to help in the building of responsible and life-giving communities that are signs of hope for the world⁹.

The Gospel of Jesus both inspires this aim and provides its thrust. For some of the Catholic school community, the person and message of Jesus are the heart of Religious Education. However Religious Education at the Catholic School involves all in the challenge of allowing gospel values to enrich their faith, philosophy, and lifestyle.

It follows that the school is open not only to Catholics, and that its offering of Religious Education strives to be respectful and sensitive to the diversity of chosen and inherited religious paths of individuals within the school community¹⁰. Indeed, Catholic School Religious Education actively endeavours to promote mutual understanding and respect among people of different religious and other world-views, in response to the gospel vision of unity and love among all people.

⁶ Literally 'good news'

⁷ See the current motto of the Catholic Church of South Africa: "Evangelising Community serving God, Humanity and all Creation" and the Vatican Council's Declaration on Christian Education (1965), Article 9.

⁸ The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, (1988) Article 6, from the Congregation for Catholic Education.

⁹ See SACBC's Department for Christian Education & Worship's 1995-7 Vision/Mission Statement for Religious Education/ Catechesis.

¹⁰ See the Catholic teaching on religious freedom in Vatican II's document *Dignitatis Humanae*: 2; 9; 10; 12.

PART 2

Practical Policies Flowing from this Aim



ROLE OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

Our policy:

- We check annually, through a review of the school's religious character¹¹, whether our values and practices are in harmony with the Catholic school's role of integrating faith, life, and culture.¹²

Questions for Catholic Schools:

Have we, as staff, explored the role of the Catholic School in today's South African society, and in the context of the mission of the Church?

Do we have an ethos committee that is commissioned by the School Board or Governing Body to see to the maintenance and flourishing of the school's Catholic ethos?

Do we cultivate relationships with relevant department officials in order to communicate clearly our vision and intentions with regard to Religious Education and its practice?

Are we, as a Catholic school community, sufficiently engaged in promoting our rights and responsibilities with respect to Religious Education?

VISION FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Our policy:

- We understand the particular nature of Religious Education in the school as an opportunity for learners to engage with the religious dimension of life in an educative way, so as to affirm them in their own religious identity, while coming to appreciate the religious diversity of the society in which they live.
- We ensure that the Staff – especially those directly involved – realise that Religious Education is planned and evaluated with sensitivity to the school's and learners' contexts, and not merely in terms of outward organisation and efficiency.
- We ensure that the RE teachers regularly work at refining and renewing their common vision of the task, and actively refer to this developing vision in order to evaluate their efforts.

¹¹ Conducting an annual appraisal of the school's special religious character is a responsibility of the public school on private property in terms of the Deeds of Agreement allowed for in the South African Schools Act (1996), Articles 14 & 57. *Signs of God's Presence: Appraising the distinctive religious character of the Catholic school* has been developed for this purpose.

¹² See *The Catholic School*, Article 37ff, from the Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977.

- We identify means for keeping the school's Religious Education in touch with the thinking, concerns, and emphases of the local (South African) Church, of the Catholic schools' network, and of the National Curriculum.

Questions for Catholic Schools:

Do the RE teachers – and ideally the whole Staff – have a vision of what the school is trying to achieve in Religious Education?

Is the vision shared in the wider school community of parents and School Governing Body or Board of Governors?

Does the shaping and refining of this vision regularly get time and prayer together?

How is this vision kept open to the concerns of the local (South African) Church, of the network of Catholic Schools, and of the National Education system?

SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Our policy:

- We recognise that Religious Education is not just a formal school subject, but that it also happens through a supportive environment – which needs careful shaping and constant evaluation.
- We expect the whole staff to support and affirm the school's Religious Education in ways appropriate to their personal convictions, and encourage as many as possible to be part of the RE team itself.
- We involve the whole staff in developing the school's efforts in this area by means of frequent reflection and planning exercises.
- We support the establishment of religious societies in the school, and encourage students, staff, and even parents to participate in their activities.
- We develop a pastoral care programme in the school, and involve students, parents, staff and Board in its formulation, implementation and regular evaluation.

Questions for Catholic Schools:

Is Religious Education restricted to RE periods and to the RE teaching-team?

Are staff encouraged to find common ground with the education vision of their school's Religious Education, and to identify what and how they can contribute to this?

Does the school encourage and support voluntary religious societies as part of its total RE programme?

Does the school have a network of pastoral care? Are structures for pastoral care in place, or is it left to chance and the goodwill of individual staff members?

PARTNERSHIPS WITH FAMILY AND PARISH

Our policy:

- We acknowledge the role of parents as first educators of their children¹³, and aim, through structures and programmes, to assist them in their task.
- We acknowledge the responsibility and interest of parish communities in the catechesis of their young members, realising that there is a limit to what the school can do, and that it does not replace the parish community.
- We liaise with parents and parishes to agree upon the role of the school in specific preparation of Catholic students for the sacraments. Such agreement will be in accord with the policy operating in the particular diocese.
- As a community focused on personal growth, we resist cooperating with any approach that reduces Confirmation to an automatic procedure instead of treating it as an occasion celebrating a ripening of personal commitment.
- We reflect RE meaningfully in students' term-reports.
- We communicate periodically with parents, guardians and parishes about what their children are doing in RE, and consult with them about what they feel is needed.
- We find occasions to offer complementary workshops where parents and teachers can help one another grow in their own faith.

Questions for Catholic Schools:

What is done to acknowledge practically the partnership between school Religious Education and that provided by parents, guardians, and parishes?

Does the school community have a clear vision of the complementary roles of Religious Education and parish-based catechesis, and a clear perception of their difference?

What creative and pastorally sensitive agreements can be reached between the school and the parish with regard to preparation for sacraments?

AN EXPLICIT UNDERSTANDING

Our policy:

- We communicate clearly with prospective staff, parents and students about the integral role of Religious Education in the school community's life. Religious Education includes
 - an academic classroom curriculum; and

¹³ See the Vatican Council document *Gaudium et Spes*, Article 48.

- various aspects that reflect the religious life of the school – such as a weekly assembly programme, school prayer times, celebration of major liturgical feasts and other significant days, student and staff reflection days and retreats, and a pastoral care programme.
- Before appointment or admission, an agreement is reached between the school and the prospective teacher or student about participation in the various aspects of Religious Education in the light of
 - a recognition of the school’s right to express its identity,
 - an awareness of the school’s educational aim, and
 - a sensitivity to the areas where a teacher’s or student’s freedom of conscience might apply.
- While we regard such participation as the norm, the need may arise for the provision of a more limited or an alternative participation where individual circumstances make this appropriate.

Questions for Catholic Schools:

Is the school’s understanding with staff and parents explicit about the place of Religious Education in the school?

Is it clear to staff, parents and students why joining the school community involves accepting participation in Religious Education in ways appropriate to each?

AN OUTWARD-LOOKING DIMENSION

Our policy:

- We observe national and international days as a mark of concern for the well-being of people and the wider community of all living beings.
- We offer opportunities to engage students in outreach projects of a service nature, and protect these involvements from the monopolising tendencies of other after-school activities.
- We encourage staff – and parents where possible – to participate in the school’s outreach projects.

Questions for Catholic Schools:

How creatively does the school approach marking national and international days?

Does the school’s Religious Education include an outreach dimension? In other words, does it encourage and support both students and the whole school community to become involved in groups and projects that make the vision of ‘Evangelising Community serving God, Humanity and all Creation’ tangible and real?

MULTI-FAITH DIMENSION

Our policy:

- We ensure that the special place of Religious Education in the Catholic School is clearly understood and accepted by students, parents and teachers who wish to join the school community, and also work to make it sufficiently open to include everyone meaningfully.
- We keep class-groups together for RE as far as possible; we divide them only when it is important for Catholic students to be identified as Church (e.g. in preparation for sacramental initiation).
- We find opportunities for teachers to grow in knowledge of the major religions represented in the school community and in the wider society.
- We invite personnel from different religious communities to address and interact with students on appropriate occasions.
- We mark the major religious festivals of different faiths in assembly and in preparatory or follow-up RE class-periods.
- We decide what practices and approaches to inter-denominational and inter-faith dialogue would be helpful, given the readiness of both staff and students.

Questions for Catholic Schools:

Should Religious Education in Catholic Schools be geared towards Catholics only?

Should there be separate RE classes and functions for Catholic students and those of other religious traditions in our schools?

What can the school do to promote in the students awareness of and respect for other faiths, while at the same time confirming and deepening their own?

Given the society in which we live, how should the particular school's student composition (e.g. age, and mixture of religions and cultures) influence the way we go about Religious Education? What practical measures are taken to give effect to this?

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COORDINATOR

Our policy:

- We reserve and use one of the school's posts-of-responsibility for a Coordinator who acts as the Principal's delegate for animating and organising Religious Education and for ensuring that it incorporates in due proportion the different dimensions such as the timetabled classroom subject, times of prayer, liturgy, outreach and voluntary groups.

Questions for Catholic Schools:

Is there someone responsible for coordinating the school's Religious Education efforts? How important or unimportant is this seen to be? Is this person seen as part of the school leadership?

Is the person appointed to this position given a clear role description that emphasises a leadership role and encourages the support of teamwork among the staff?

DEFINITE CURRICULUM

Our policy:

- We agree on a national core curriculum that allows for local addition according to need so as to facilitate common support and practical cooperation between schools.
- We ensure a well-rounded RE curriculum¹⁴, and check that neither the thinking nor the feeling sides of RE are neglected.
- We allow flexibility in our curriculum so that learners' needs are recognised while making sure the course that results is a wholesome blend of processes, and that it gives due attention to the different dimensions of learning.
- We keep the curriculum open to respond to the needs of the times, and to the local (South African) Church's current concerns about our country's and our world's needs. We link into suitable local, national, and international efforts. We take the trouble to raise awareness by observing days that are important to the world community, to the nation, and to various religious communities, as well as the seasons and feast days of the Church's year.
- We recognise that RE is a privileged opportunity for addressing the urgent need to develop values and moral sensitivity in our society.
- We find creative ways of harmonising RE with the National Curriculum so that neither is compromised.

Questions for Catholic Schools:

How definite and how flexible should the RE curriculum be?

What additions should we make to the core curriculum, taking our special charism, context and learner needs into consideration?

¹⁴ An analysis of a well-rounded RE curriculum and its constituent processes and learning dimensions is offered in CORD, a curriculum design for RE in the secondary school by brother Michael Burke. CORD is recommended for use in Catholic Schools by the SACBC's Department of Christian Education, Liturgy and Culture. This analysis of what RE involves also informs the primary school curriculum, *Lifebound*. A synopsis of these processes is given as an Appendix.

APPROPRIATE METHODOLOGY

Our policy:

- We encourage adventurous, creative, stimulating methods in RE.
- We ensure that methods used in RE are educationally sound.
- We give emphasis to a life-centred approach that is in touch with contemporary experience and needs.
- We encourage efforts to root the expression of faith in our African soil, true to the Church's call for inculturation.
- We regard group-processes as vital in RE since shared learning is more appropriate here than narrowly individualistic learning.

Questions for Catholic Schools:

Is RE experienced as exciting or as boring? To what extent are teacher-attitudes responsible for this?

Is our approach to RE life-centred?

Could our RE classes be accused of any attempts to impose doctrine or win converts? Are they divisive in any way?

Does the spirit of inculturation affect our approach to RE?

How much group-work is evident in our school's approach to RE?

ADEQUATE TIME

Our policy:

- A meaningful and holistic timetabled classroom RE programme¹⁵ requires at least two hours weekly.

Questions for Catholic Schools:

Is RE given enough time to accommodate its needs and to acknowledge its importance in the students' education for life?

In the light of pressure from the National Curriculum, what strategies does the school implement to effect this?

Do academic or extra-mural staff request time off RE for other academic, sporting or cultural activities?

¹⁵ This does not include those activities that give expression to the religious life of the school as explained in the Glossary

ADEQUATE RESOURCES

Our policy:

- We include Religious Education as a priority in the school's budget.
- We build up, and regularly update, a resource-collection for Religious Education.
- We find a way to provide a special venue for RE lessons that requires reflection or prayer, such as a chapel or RE room or a pleasant spot outside.

Questions for Catholic Schools:

Is Religious Education an item in the school's budget?

Does the school have an adequate supply of books and other resource-materials to assist RE teachers?

Does the school have any venues that are especially suited to creating an atmosphere that supports reflection and prayer?

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Our policy:

- We ensure that feedback, assessment, and evaluation form a routine and regular part of the RE process, with teachers checking on how effective and in-touch their efforts are.
- We find ways to draw into the programme-evaluation not only the whole Staff, but the Owner, the parents, and the students themselves.
- We seek creative, appropriate, and sensitive methods for assessing individual student's growth and learning in the subject. Teachers are helped to distinguish between those aspects of Religious Education that can be evaluated and those which cannot.
- We are open to a periodic validation¹⁶ of our Religious Education by persons delegated with this responsibility.

Questions for Catholic Schools:

Is there adequate evaluation of the school's RE programme?

Who is involved in this evaluation?

How is individual student assessment handled?

Does RE feature in school reports, awards ceremonies, school magazines and newsletters?

Do we facilitate a validation of our Religious Education when requested?

¹⁶ Sample questions for validation are given as an Appendix

TEACHER FORMATION

Our policy:

- We make opportunities for in-service formation as accessible as possible to ensure that staff is trained in the ethos and culture of the Catholic school. Special assistance is provided for teachers who are not familiar with it.
- All RE teachers are provided with adequate formation and training to achieve the aims of the school's Religious Education policy.
- We recognise professional upgrading in RE in ways that will encourage teachers to select this valuable option.

Questions for Catholic Schools:

Does the school encourage and support ongoing formation of its RE teachers?

Does the school acknowledge RE upgrading by means of salary notches in the same way as is done for other forms of professional upgrading?



A Sample Religious Education Policy

We provide a sample policy to illustrate the area that a school's Religious Education policy should cover. You can use this as the basis for developing or evaluating your school's policy. If you decide to use the sample policy remember to:

- provide specific details suitable for your school
- edit out those things which are currently not applicable (but keep them in mind for evaluation and future planning)

Recognising our call to participate in the Catholic Church's mission to share the gospel of Jesus, we, the staff, students, and parents of, acknowledge our responsibility to provide an environment in which this gospel is lived out and experienced. This includes:

- maintaining and fostering the Catholic ethos and faith environment of the whole school
- nurturing the faith of all those within the school community
- being responsive to the changing needs and programmes of the local church, Catholic schools, and national education

To this end, offers a co-ordinated, comprehensive Religious Education, under the leadership of a Religious Education Coordinator, that includes:

- a weekly assembly programme
- celebrating major liturgical feasts and other significant days through liturgy, masses, and paraliturgy
- student and staff reflection days and retreats
- an RE curriculum
- a pastoral care programme
- a clear understanding with the Catholic learner's parish regarding the school's role in sacramental preparation

The school's RE curriculum:

- is structured around the National Core Curriculum
- is coherent, well-organised and resourced across the school

continued

- is relevant to all students, thus keeping classes together except where Catholic students need to be identified as Church
- sensitive to students and their relationship to their faith and their religious communities¹⁷
- life-centred and rooted in an African context
- given a timetable allocation of 2 hours (or more) per week
- oriented to using appropriate forms of learner assessment (e.g. term reports and portfolios)

Our RE Programme is constantly renewed through:

- regular RE team meetings
- ongoing formation of RE teachers and staff through in-service programmes, reflection days, and retreats
- annual evaluation
- periodic external validation

Parents receive regular news of the school's Religious Education activities as well as invitations to take part in various events.

¹⁷ This could include items such as the right of withdrawal and the negotiated recognition of religious dress. These could be stated in the body of the policy or placed in an appendix.

Appendix 1

THE PROCESSES OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

NOTE: *It is important to remember that the names of these processes are “teacher talk”. They are not intended to be used in classroom discussion.*

1 EDUCATION BY ENVIRONMENT

The Catholic School is an Environment. The whole way in which a school runs has a power to teach without words. The Christian message has to be experienced before it can be heard. This section therefore takes place among the staff members particularly through various renewal and development programmes. It is not a classroom process.

2 THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Theology is faith seeking understanding. It is a process of seeing and searching to form an overall picture of life with God in the centre. We inherit the Church's vision and vocabulary as our starting point and we are invited to play our part in developing that vision and vocabulary further.

3 SPIRITUAL EDUCATION

Spiritual Education strives to bring the person through experience to the realisation of God's existence, presence and loving concern for each human being, and to alertness to the God's action and voice in our lives. It is the cultivation of the person's spiritual faculties and powers.

4 PRAYER EDUCATION

The emphasis here is to help the students in the development of their personal relationships with God by inspiring right attitudes and leading them further in the art of praying.

5 WORSHIP (SACRAMENTAL/LITURGICAL) EDUCATION

The previous process emphasised personal prayer. In this process we concentrate on public prayer and worship, aiming to lead the students year by year more fully into an understanding and appropriate practice of the Church's liturgical and sacramental life.

6 EDUCATION BY ARTS

In the Middle Ages of Europe, when very few had the opportunity of education, the people's Bible was the stained-glass window. Through responding to the arts and through creating art, this process aims to awaken in the students an awareness of mystery within which religious insight and understanding can develop.

7 EDUCATION BY STORY

Story has a wonderful power to educate, and Religion is a world of story. God may be described as a character we have to recognise in our personal and communal stories. So this process aims to facilitate the students' encounter with a wide range of relevant stories, and to encourage in them the telling of their own stories.

8 SCRIPTURAL EDUCATION

The Scriptures are the story of Israel, specially chosen among the nations. Scriptural Education aims to develop an understanding of what Scripture is, and a knowledge of what the Bible contains. It also aims to foster a personal reading of Scripture and a response to what is read.

9 EDUCATION BY MODELS

A model is someone whom we admire and strive to imitate. This process introduces students to a variety of models in order to inspire and encourage them to pick up Christ's challenge: Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.

10 PHILOSOPHICAL EDUCATION

Philosophical Education is about wisdom. The process aims to help students in their thinking coherently about the deeper realities of life. It aims to develop their faith vision in the light of the words and life of Jesus, and other men and women with deep insight and experience.

11 PERSONAL MORAL EDUCATION

Morality is an ordering of life that enables all to live in a fully human way. Morality asks the questions: Who/What is the human being? How ought she or he to live? The goal of moral education is moral maturity, and this means the ability to make choices with a formed and informed conscience.

12 EDUCATION IN STRUCTURAL MORALITY

Structural Morality is concerned with institutionalised forms of discrimination against human dignity and oppression of human rights. It is about justice issues.

13 EDUCATION FOR PERSONAL GROWTH AND RELATIONSHIPS

The name of this process is self-explanatory. Students are helped progressively to discover their identity, to appreciate and integrate their own sexuality, and to understand what loving means in practice.

14 EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

Here the students are prepared for membership in their faith community. The process brings to them a vision of Church, a knowledge of its story, and an initial training for leadership and ministry.

15 INTENSIVE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

This final process involves concentrated periods of time which are not part of the regular classroom RE. It takes various forms: class and group retreats, school missions, days of recollection, weekend experiences,, growth camps are some examples.

Appendix 2

QUESTIONS FOR THE VALIDATION OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- The school has an RE policy based on *Fostering Hope*.
- RE appears on the school timetable.
- Adequate time is given to both RE and Life Skills / Life Orientation.
- Staff are allocated to teach RE.
- Staff teach RE on a regular basis.
- Staff have access to RE materials for teaching.
- The students' work in RE is assessed, and reported on – and this is done on the school's report form.
- The school has appointed an RE Coordinator who submits a regular report to the SGB/BOG or Ethos Committee.
- The Catholic identity of the school can be seen through the presence of various signs, symbols, relationships between members of the school community, and activities of a service nature.
- The school calendar includes RE events – e.g. Mass, paraliturgy, retreats, an assembly programme.
- RE teachers meet as department, plan a coordinated delivery of the school's RE curriculum, and report back and reflect on the progress of lessons.
- A monitoring process, similar to that used in other departments in the school, is followed by the RE Department.
- Parents and governors are informed about relevant aspects of the school's RE.
- RE activities and curriculum are included in the school development plan.
- RE Teachers are encouraged – and, where possible, offered assistance – by the school to participate in ongoing professional development.
- The school undertakes a review of its RE policy with regard to due process and own context.