

Chapter 10

Religious Education and Worship

Summary

This chapter describes the role and the duty of the Board of Management and staff to uphold the Religious Ethos of the school as defined by the Patron/Trustees.

Principal Themes

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Documentation

[Guidelines on the Role of Trustees in Community Schools](#)

[DES CL 57/2008.](#)

[Mediating School Ethos](#)

Chapter 10

Religious Education and Worship

10.1. Religious Ethos of the School

In describing the functions of the Board of Management of a school the Education Act (1998) states that the Board shall “uphold and be accountable to the patron for so upholding the characteristic spirit of the school ...” The religious ethos of the school is an essential part of this “characteristic spirit” and consequently must be clearly understood and agreed by the Board of Management and by the whole school community.

Community Schools are commonly perceived to be “multi-denominational”. This term is taken to mean:

That the school will seek to provide religious instruction and worship in accordance with the rites, practice and teaching of the religious denomination to which the pupil belongs.

The original Articles of Management of Comprehensive Schools are silent on the issue of religious ethos. It is therefore incumbent on the Trustees and the Board of Management to define its own religious ethos and practice.

The Trustees (Patrons) of any particular school have a particular responsibility to agree the “characteristic spirit” of the school which includes, inter alia, its moral, religious and spiritual values. Attention in this regard is drawn to [Guidelines on the Role of Trustees in Community Schools](#) as published by ACCS. A presentation by Fr. Michael Drumm to the 2010 NTF Conference entitled [Mediating School Ethos](#) provides an excellent outline of the implicit realities and challenges.

10.2. Personal Suitability of Religious Education Teachers.

The Deed of Trust for Community Schools, Second Schedule Articles of Management, Section 11, states explicitly that R.E. must be taught and assigned a minimum of two hours (or three class periods) per week per class. Teachers are required by the Deed of Trust to ensure that religious instruction given to any student is in accordance with the rites, practice and teaching of the religious denomination to which the student belongs, and should deal sensitively with issues which may be controversial.

In appointing teachers of religion Boards of Management should follow the normal procedures for the appointment of all staff and in so doing ensure that a sufficient cohort of qualified staff is available to meet fully the religious educational needs of the school.

Teachers of religion to Roman Catholic pupils must satisfy local diocesan authorities that their own beliefs and religious practice are in conformity with diocesan expectations. If such a teacher ceases to have the approval of the diocesan authorities, then the teacher must be withdrawn from the teaching of religion and assigned to other teaching duties for which s/he is qualified. If, as a result, there is difficulty in providing for the teaching of R.E., the Board of Management may seek from the Department of Education and Science a curriculum concession to employ a teacher of religion beyond the entitlement accruing to the school under the prevailing pupil/teacher ratio.

If a school has enrolled a significant number of pupils of a minority religious persuasion a Board of Management has an obligation to provide, in so far as possible, appropriate religious instruction. In employing teachers for this purpose every effort should be made to ensure that they meet with the approval of the religious authority of the particular denomination to which their pupils belong.

While no particular requirement is set down for the employment of Religion Teachers in Comprehensive Schools, Boards of Management are advised to follow the practice as outlined above for Community Schools.

10.3. Withdrawal of a Student from Religious Education and Worship

Parents are entitled to withdraw their children from worship and/or R.E. classes. School authorities are obliged to respect the wishes of parents in this matter, and any action by the school to interfere with the exercise of such entitlement is in contravention of the requirements of the Deed of Trust.

However, the school has a duty to establish that both parents are fully aware of a proposed withdrawal and in agreement with it. It is wise to get such an instruction in writing, signed by both parents. If there is a question about the authenticity of a signature or the authorship of a letter from parents, the matter should be investigated. All correspondence and documentation relating to such a matter should be kept on file.

If and when a student is withdrawn from Religious Education classes the matter of appropriate supervision must be addressed by the school authorities in accordance with custom and practice in the school. This will normally involve the provision of supervised

study in conjunction with other students. The school's duty of care to the pupil will determine the appropriate arrangements.

10.4. Religious Practice

The Principal of a Community School is explicitly required to facilitate religious worship. Principals of Comprehensive Schools may have no such explicit imperative, but there is an implicit requirement that they do so.

In the normal course of school life, worship covers religious services and group prayer, which are formally organised, as well as opportunities for individual prayer and reflection. To meet more fully their obligations in this regard, many schools have provided oratories or meditation rooms.

As the school going population becomes more international, it is inevitable that schools will become more multi-denominational with the consequent obligation on school management to provide an increased amount of diverse religious education. If the religion of a student requires that s/he wear a particular form of dress – headscarf, turban, veil etc, schools are advised to accommodate them unless there is reason to believe that such dress would interfere with the work of the school or proper communication with the student.

10.5. The School Chaplain

Provision is made for the appointment of a Roman Catholic Chaplain in all Community Schools. The School Chaplain is appointed by the Board of Management on the nomination of the local Bishop. The terms and conditions of such appointment are set out in [DES CL 57/2008](#). The Chaplain is appointed in addition to the school allocation of wholetime teacher equivalents, and is paid a teacher's salary by the Department of Education and Science.

The Chaplain is required to teach four hours of class instruction per week. Other Chaplaincy duties include visitation of homes, religious services, retreats and celebrations, as well as counselling. The Chaplain is also expected to take an interest in the extra-curricular activities of the school, to encourage young people to be involved in the community, to be available during state examinations and to be in contact with the adult education student body.

Chaplaincy is a full-time job and requires full-time commitment. As a staff member, the Chaplain is expected to share in the corporate responsibility for discipline and good order. In this context, it is reasonable to expect that the Chaplain shares supervisory duties, but it is important that the special role of the Chaplain in developing the spirituality of students and in providing a strong Christian witness is not compromised by too much involvement as a disciplinarian.

Although no specific provision is made for the appointment of a Chaplain in Comprehensive Schools, Boards of Management are advised to seek such an appointment as a matter of equity. In the case of the five Protestant Comprehensive Schools the appointment of a School Chaplain should, of course, be subject to the nomination of the appropriate Church authorities.

The NTF Conference 2010 Report (Mediating School Ethos)is excellent for outlining the realities and challenges. The presentations could and should be incorporated into TAGAIRT or at least placed as Links.