

Religious Observance in a Catholic School

The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 imposes a statutory duty on local authorities to provide "Religious Observance" in Scottish schools. This is defined in a national R.O. Review Group report published in 2004 as comprising: *"community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school's community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community"*.

In a letter of guidance issued by the Scottish Government in February 2011, it is acknowledged that Catholic schools take a distinctive approach to the provision of Religious Observance:

Scottish Government Ministers welcome the tradition that, in Roman Catholic denominational schools, Catholic Liturgy will largely shape the nature and frequency of religious observance activities in the classroom and in the wider school community. So, at times, children and young people will be invited to participate in, and sometimes to lead, prayer and reflection in classrooms and at assemblies. At other times, to honour particular occasions or feasts, chaplains will lead school communities in the celebration of Mass and other forms of liturgical celebration.

Catholic schools follow the customs and practices of the Church in order to nourish the spirituality and faith of pupils and staff.

Our Catholic tradition is enriched by ancient rites, prayers and devotions which help young people to become aware of, and show reverence to, the sacred presence of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Guided by this tradition, we celebrate various seasons and special feast days to honour God, Mary his Mother and the Saints.

Religious observance is evident in the following school activities:

- Pupils are invited to pray with their teachers at times in classrooms and assemblies, as well as in liturgical services.
- All classrooms display a Crucifix on the wall
- In some classrooms and other areas of the school, a sacred space will feature a copy of the Bible and will be decorated with signs and symbols that reflect the changing seasons of the Church Calendar Year i.e., Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Pentecost.
- This regular practice of Prayer is complemented by religious services conducted, sometimes as part of an Assembly, to mark special occasions -

e.g., the distribution of Ashes on Ash Wednesday, the seasons of Advent or Lent.

- To mark special Feast Days and Holy Days of Obligation, Mass is celebrated by the school chaplain, with the school community, in school buildings or in local parishes.
- At certain stages, pupils are able to participate in retreats and pilgrimages to places of special significance within the Catholic tradition.

While Religious Education is governed by separate Church guidance, it is complemented by Religious Observance practices and, together, these experiences help pupils to develop their understanding of the Catholic faith, to experience opportunities for spiritual growth and to commit to beliefs, values and actions in a positive response to God's invitation to faith.

In terms of pupil participation in R.O. Scottish Government guidance makes it clear that it makes an important contribution to pupils' development and that it promotes the ethos of a school by bringing pupils together and creating a sense of community. However, it also makes clear that parents have the right to withdraw children from participation in religious observance and that this right should always be made known to parents and their wishes respected. The Scottish Government also recognises that:

Where a parent chooses a denominational school for their child's education, they choose to opt in to the school's ethos and practice which is imbued with religious faith and religious observance. In denominational schools, it is therefore more difficult to extricate a pupil from all experiences which are influenced by the school's faith character.

**Curriculum For Excellence - Provision of Religious Observance in Schools,
Scottish Government, 17 February 2011**