

Charter Statement for Catholic Diocesan Secondary Schools



1. The Story of Catholic Diocesan Secondary Schools in Ireland

Catholic diocesan secondary schools exist to support parents in providing an education for their children which is inspired by a Catholic ethos. A Catholic diocesan secondary school is under the trusteeship of the bishop of the diocese and will support parents in handing on the faith to their children and helping to build local faith communities. The bishop, in his role as trustee, exercises the functions of a patron (trustee) as outlined in section 8 of the Education Act, 1998. The roles and responsibilities of a trustee of a Catholic voluntary secondary school are outlined in the Articles of Management for Catholic Secondary Schools (Published by JMB/AMCSS – see www.jmb.ie).

A Catholic diocesan secondary school provides a full secondary education to the pupils enrolled in the school within a community that is animated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In order to ensure that our Catholic diocesan secondary school community creates opportunities for growth, each member is encouraged to embrace and live out the key elements of the life of the school as outlined in this charter.

2. History of Catholic Diocesan Secondary Schools in Ireland

Many diocesan colleges were founded as junior seminaries, providing secondary schooling for boys and facilitating them to sit public examinations organised by the state. These diocesan seminaries were the main entry route to the national seminary in Maynooth and to other seminaries where the seminarians received a third-level education as part of their training for the priesthood in Irish dioceses.

The word ‘seminary’ is derived from the Latin word ‘seminarium.’ Building on the rich spiritual heritage and tradition of these junior seminaries, Catholic diocesan secondary schools continue to be places where young persons are made ready for the challenges of the world.

A number of the thirty-eight Catholic diocesan secondary schools, spread across nineteen dioceses, have their roots in a variety of religious congregations. Many of these Catholic diocesan secondary schools continue to celebrate the charism and traditions of the founding congregation. These schools, in recognising their founding intention, also live out the current reality of their role as Catholic diocesan secondary schools serving a local community under the trusteeship of the bishop of the diocese.



3. Vision Statement

Each Catholic diocesan secondary school should agree on its vision statement as a Catholic school playing a particular role in the diocese in a way that inspires the school community now and into the future. Developing a vision statement should be seen as an opportunity to articulate a school's dreams and hopes. It describes what a school is trying to be and acts as a touchstone for future actions.

The following vision statement is an adaptation of a vision statement drawn up by the Catholic Schools Partnership based on the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference pastoral letter, *Vision 08 – A Vision for Catholic Education in Ireland*:

Catholic diocesan secondary schools in Ireland are a living expression of a long and varied tradition of education inspired by the life of Christ. Such schools emphasise the dignity of the human person as a child of God called to work with other persons in creating an inclusive community in service of the common good, where knowledge is sought and respected while faith is nurtured and challenged.

Mission Statement

A mission statement is created to outline the purpose or goal of an organisation. Each Catholic diocesan secondary school should be clear on the purpose for which the school was established and create a mission to communicate that purpose.



4. Catholic Education

a) What is Catholic education?

Catholic education provides an opportunity for a human being to grow and develop in an environment which takes its values from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Catholic education is focussed on continuing the mission of Jesus Christ and building up the kingdom of God.

b) What are the characteristics of a Catholic school? (*Catholic Education at Second-Level in the Republic of Ireland: Looking to the Future, Catholic Schools Partnership, 2014*)

Catholic schools continue the work of Jesus the teacher;

- Catholic schools are part of a living tradition;
- Catholic schools are places of learning with a commitment to the holistic development of each pupil;
- Catholic schools respect both faith and reason;
- Catholic schools integrate religious education in the curriculum, while providing opportunities for catechesis;
- Catholic schools educate to intercultural dialogue.

c) What are the implications of being a Catholic school?

Each Catholic school develops its own ethos or characteristic spirit which influences the way in which the school engages with each individual member of the school community. The ethos of a Catholic diocesan secondary school should be informed by this charter and developed in line with the educational philosophy of the diocese.

School policies and procedures should reflect the Catholic ethos of the school and its characteristic spirit as a diocesan school. The Catholic faith informs the values and traditions that are part of the lived reality in the school. Catholic diocesan secondary schools are open and welcoming, respecting each young person and their family's traditions and worldview. The role of religious education is central to the life of the school and the promotion of Catholic values. Well-being is understood in terms of the whole human person and is framed within the Catholic ethos of the school. It includes engagement with the spiritual, religious and moral development of the young person.



5. What are the core elements of a Catholic diocesan secondary school?

Each Catholic diocesan secondary school community should reflect on the core elements or characteristics that help to identify the unique qualities of that school as a Catholic faith community.

The following are core elements or characteristics of a Catholic diocesan secondary school:

- a) Promoting the holistic development of each member of the school community including the spiritual, moral, emotional, social, intellectual, physical and human aspects;
- b) Striving to excel in teaching and learning both inside and outside the classroom;
- c) Creating a caring school community that celebrates its diversity and keeps partnership and inclusion at the centre of all of its activities;
- d) Encouraging effective leadership, especially Christian leadership, at all levels;
- e) Continuing the ministry of Jesus Christ through nurturing a faith community in the traditions of the diocese.

6. The five core elements of a Catholic Diocesan Secondary School – Elements and Actions

- a) **Promoting the holistic development of each member of the school community including the spiritual, moral, emotional, social, intellectual, physical and human aspects.**
 - **A Catholic diocesan secondary school promotes the growth of a well-rounded person**

The growth of each person in the school community is promoted so that the full potential of the each human being is facilitated. The leaders of tomorrow are in the classrooms of today. The school aims to create a human person who is knowledgeable and innovative and can adapt



to many different roles and realities in the future. A Catholic diocesan secondary school promotes curiosity, fosters a love of learning, stimulates problem-solving and critical thinking and encourages students to become independent learners while at the same time being able to grow responsible relationships and develop a sense of the common good.

- **Faith and reason are valued in the Catholic diocesan secondary school**

The Catholic diocesan secondary school promotes dialogue between faith and reason in order to allow for members of the school community to be formed and educated as mature people. In such an environment students will develop a moral compass which will assist in the growth of the necessary skills to help them make good moral decisions.

- **The Catholic diocesan secondary school recognises that each human being is unique in the eyes of God**

The unique qualities that each member of the school community possesses as children of God are acknowledged and celebrated. Each person shares his/her gifts and personality traits with the other members of the school community and in that way supports an atmosphere which allows all to feel welcomed and cherished.

- **Through a broad formal and informal curriculum a Catholic diocesan secondary school community provides a stimulating environment to assist in the growth of each member of the community**

The curriculum of the school, formal and informal, provides a challenging but reassuring experience for young people and adults alike. High quality teaching and learning is a mark of the school and creativity and innovation are encouraged. All students are encouraged to participate in a range of programmes which stimulates the growth of each individual through creative activities such as sport, drama, art, music and debating.



- **The school encourages Christian members of the school community to engage in activities that translate their faith into action as they follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Those of other faiths and worldviews may be inspired by the life and mission of Jesus too**

Members of the Catholic diocesan secondary school community are challenged to look beyond themselves and to identify opportunities to bring the love of Jesus into the lives of their colleagues through engaging in selfless actions which will make the school and the local community a better place.

b) Striving to excel in teaching and learning inside and outside the classroom

- **High quality teaching and learning is prioritised and promoted**

Catholic diocesan secondary schools have a long tradition of promoting high quality teaching and learning. The Catholic diocesan secondary school aims to achieve best practice in the areas of curriculum and assessment. The use of differentiated teaching and learning is also encouraged as is team teaching.

- **Members of the school community are encouraged to respond positively and innovatively to an ever changing world**

As the rate of change in the world continues to accelerate the Catholic diocesan secondary school is always open to change and improvement. At the same time, students are encouraged to engage critically with these developments and to learn to differentiate between positive and negative developments.



- **All talents and gifts are respected and nurtured within the Catholic diocesan secondary school**

The Catholic ethos of the school understands that each person is made in the image and likeness of God (*imago Dei*). At school level each person is encouraged to develop and share their gifts and talents for the betterment of the community and the human race in general. Members of the school community are encouraged to develop all their gifts to the maximum of their ability and, in this way, make their unique contribution to the common good.

- **Members of the school community with additional needs are supported and encouraged**

The approach of the Catholic diocesan secondary school to people with additional needs, physical and intellectual, should always commence from the point of view of respect and support. Priority is given to ensuring that the resources are provided so that each person with additional needs can live as full a life as possible and achieve their full potential.

- **The Catholic diocesan secondary school raises an awareness of the interconnectedness of our world**

Modern technology and especially communications has ensured that each person is much closer and more closely engaged with others. Such developments provide opportunities for all to grow as people. However, a person must also be open to encouraging others in the value of being alone sometimes, being at peace with their thoughts and, at times, enter into prayerful conversation with God.

- **The Catholic diocesan secondary school promotes the creative and positive use of information technology and all other resources**

Developments in technology have provided exciting opportunities to enhance the quality of our lives. Such opportunities for enhancement should be embraced and celebrated. Teachers are encouraged to integrate information technology into their work and to promote



blended learning. At the same time care must be taken against developments which endanger lives and have the potential to lead to suffering and inequality. All aspects, positive and negative, of advances in information technology will be explored in a school environment which prioritises respect for the dignity of the person. The benefits and disadvantages of becoming involved in social media will be highlighted.

c) Creating a caring school community that celebrates its diversity and keeps partnership and inclusion at the centre of all of its activities.

- **A Catholic diocesan secondary school continues to promote a sense of community**

A Catholic diocesan secondary school is a faith community which promotes the well-being of all its members. Members of the school community are encouraged to engage in activities on behalf of the whole school community and to support the school community in reaching its potential in all areas of engagement.

- **All students are supported and encouraged with particular support being afforded to students who are deemed to be vulnerable and/or at risk**

The positive growth and development of each student is at the centre of school life. Each student is encouraged and supported to reach his/her full potential. In continuing the ministry of Jesus in a Catholic diocesan secondary school, particular care and support is given to those students who are vulnerable and have issues in their lives which place them at risk.

- **Students are encouraged to engage in social justice programmes**

Care for fellow human beings is promoted in Catholic diocesan secondary schools through formal and informal social justice programmes. Students are encouraged to reach out with a generosity which reflects the spirit of Jesus Christ.



- **The role of parents/guardians as the primary educators is supported**

The importance of parents/guardians as the primary educators of their children is emphasised and supported. Parents are encouraged to acknowledge this responsibility in partnership with the management and staff of the school to ensure the best possible educational experience for their children. The implementation of the Junior Cycle Framework provides a range of opportunities for parents to support a student's personal, creative and academic progress and to play a key role in supporting them through the assessment process.

- **Inclusion, in all its facets, is at the centre of school life in a Catholic diocesan secondary school**

Inclusion is the default position for all the school's policies and actions. All members of the school community are made feel welcome and respected and their well-being is promoted in all facets of school life.

- **A safe, respectful and caring school environment is promoted**

The school community takes great pride in ensuring that the school environment creates a sense of care and welcome for all its members and those who visit.

- **An appreciation of the natural environment is encouraged**

The natural environment which God has bestowed on mankind must be nurtured and cared for. A Catholic diocesan secondary school understands that there is a nobility in the simple daily actions of care for creation and the activities that protect and promote nature are developed and promoted in the school.



d) Encouraging effective leadership, especially Christian leadership, at all levels

- **Effective leadership is encouraged throughout the school community**

The great gift of leadership is promoted and encouraged in a Catholic diocesan secondary school. The role of each member of the school community as a leader is developed so that all members of the school community come to understand that leadership is a shared gift.

- **A wide range of responsibilities are delegated to members of the school community**

The capacity to share and delegate tasks and roles within the school community is encouraged and supported. Each member of the Catholic diocesan secondary school community is challenged to support the work of the school through sharing in a range of opportunities to promote an environment in which real responsibility is delegated and supported.

- **Christian leadership and witness are encouraged as part of the mission of a Catholic faith community**

The ministry of Jesus Christ encourages human beings to walk in his footsteps as leaders in a faith community. To walk with and on behalf of others will allow all of us to see each other as sisters and brothers in faith.



- **Respectful interpersonal relationships are central to school life**

Respect for each other is central to the life of the Catholic diocesan secondary school. All actions are encouraged to care for and support each other as members of a school community.

- **Personal and professional development programmes are promoted**

Catholic diocesan secondary schools promote excellence through encouraging all members of the school community to be the best they can be through engagement in programmes of personal and professional development. Opportunities for such development are provided as part of the reality of school life. Members of the school community are encouraged to develop all their gifts to the maximum capacity. Teachers are encouraged to engage in continuous professional development at both school and national levels. Learning communities are promoted within and beyond the school.

e) Continuing the ministry of Christ through nurturing a faith community in the traditions of our diocese

- **Nurturing a faith community**

In his public ministry, Jesus proclaimed and emphasised that the solidarity of the Kingdom of God is characterised by love and that this love is non-exclusive. The disciples of Christ, after his death, encountered the Risen Christ as a community of believers. Animated by his presence, early Christian communities emphasised that the inclusivity of persons, which was proclaimed by Jesus throughout his public ministry, be maintained as to ensure that no person ever comes to be neglected within the community. In this way each Catholic diocesan secondary school, as a faith community, is challenged to proclaim the message of the Kingdom of God.



- **The person, presence and ministry of Jesus Christ are central to the Catholic Diocesan Secondary School**

Christ is the foundation of the whole education enterprise in a Catholic Diocesan Secondary School. Members of the school community are encouraged to bring to life Christ's ministry in their deeds and actions.

- **A formal Religious Education Programme is promoted across all class groups in a Catholic Diocesan Secondary School**

The religious education department in a Catholic diocesan secondary school is well supported and resourced. Members of the religious education department are requested to research and recommend the most appropriate programmes to the board of management and school management for all class groups to follow. Such programmes, including those published by the Department of Education and Skills, are academically robust in nature and all students, regardless of their family religious tradition, are encouraged to follow these programmes. Religious education is provided for a minimum of two hours each week (or three forty-minute classes or equivalent) in each year of the school.

- **A deep faith and liturgical tradition permeates the Catholic diocesan secondary school**

A variety of liturgies, including Masses, Reconciliation and prayer services, are organised to support members of the school community to live out their Catholic faith life. All members of the wider school community – students, parents, family, staff and the wider parish community - are encouraged to come together to celebrate key sacramental moments in the liturgical life of the Catholic Church. As a faith community, the school will identify relevant liturgies to bring the school community together to celebrate and remember friends and colleagues.



- **A living faith-life is fostered through promoting social justice and ecological awareness**

Life is precious and the continued health and well-being of each person and the human race in general is constantly under threat from dangerous practices which threaten our environment and promote inequality. A Catholic diocesan secondary school community is called to promote a sense of care for the natural and human environment. Catholic social teaching provides a bedrock for reflection on the needs of people, particularly those marginalised in society and in the world. An awareness is cultivated with regard to the difficult circumstances which can befall families, neighbours and friends in the school and the local community.

- **Members of a Catholic Diocesan Secondary School community are encouraged to reflect on the spiritual**

In promoting the development of the whole person, Catholic diocesan secondary schools encourage young people and adults to look beyond the human and reflect on the spiritual dimensions of our being. In this way human lives will be transformed as it is recognised that we have a future way beyond the limitations of our earthly lives.

- **Diversity and difference are respected and celebrated**

Through policies and practices Catholic diocesan secondary schools are encouraged to respect and support reflection on diversity and difference. Regular reviews are arranged to ensure that policies are lived out in the reality of the day-to-day life of the school.

- **The faith traditions of the diocese are promoted**

Each diocese has grown through the faith lives of all the followers of Jesus Christ who have contributed to the work of the diocese down through the years. School communities should pay tribute to their diocesan and school traditions by connecting with the diocese and with parishes for major feasts and community events. Remembering friends and colleagues who have departed this life strengthens our sense of being an intergenerational and loving community conscious of God's care for all.



NOTE

A charter is defined as a document outlining the formal organisation of a corporate body. It is recommended that each diocese/bishop, as trustee, should use this charter statement for a Catholic diocesan secondary school to engage with the diocesan secondary school (s) under its/his trusteeship. Such an engagement will encourage each school community to explore and renew its founding intention and in so doing actively engage in reflection on ways in which it can respond to the key elements of a diocesan secondary school as outlined in this charter statement.

The charter statement will facilitate each school in considering what the school stands for in the light of its founding intention and its role and purpose today. The outcome of this process will allow schools to capture their unique history, culture, values and traditions.

The Catholic Schools Partnership Process, 'Understanding and Living the Ethos in a Catholic Voluntary Secondary School – A Process Centred on Conversations', will be of assistance to schools in this work – see www.catholicschools.ie.

