

St. Columba's College Stranorlar



Religious Education & Faith Inclusion Policy

November 2025

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1. Introduction and Rationale

1.1 Mission Statement and Ethos (CEIST)

St. Columba's College is a Mercy Catholic Voluntary Secondary School under the Trusteeship of **CEIST (Catholic Education an Irish Schools Trust)**. The College is committed to **'The pursuit of excellence in a caring environment,'** which includes the spiritual and holistic development of every student, guided by the CEIST core values of promoting spiritual development, achieving quality in teaching, showing respect for every person, creating a caring community, and inspiring a shared vision.

1.2 Rationale and Legal Context

In accordance with S.15 (2) (b) of the Education Act, 1998, the Board of Management of St. Columba's College shall uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school. **'Catholic Ethos'** in the context of a Catholic voluntary secondary school, means the ethos and characteristic spirit of the Roman Catholic Church which aims to promote:

- the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person, including the intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual aspects,
- a living relationship with God and with other people,
- a philosophy of life inspired by belief in God and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus; and the formation of the pupils in the Catholic faith in accordance with the doctrines, practices and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church, and/or such ethos and/or characteristic spirit as may be determined or interpreted from time to time by the Irish Episcopal Conference.

St. Columba's College draws on the richness of the religious and cultural heritage of the past, interpreted and lived out for students living in today's world. The charism of our founders, the Sisters of Mercy who began this school is of very significant importance in the life of the school.

As a CEIST school, St. Columba's College values teaching as one of the most important of all human activities. Our school seeks to build a quality learning community that welcomes, and

bears witness to the Gospel values of Jesus Christ, expressed through the lens of the **CEIST Charter**. These are encapsulated in the **core values** which are intended to support and nourish the lives of the people who are at the heart of our schools.

- **Promoting Spiritual and Human Development**
- **Achieving Quality in Teaching and Learning**
- **Showing Respect for Every Person**
- **Creating Community**
- **Being Just and Responsible**

As a Catholic school, Religious Education is central to our curriculum. Alongside Religious Education, the school supports the formation in faith of our students through many school-based experiences of prayer and ritual. All students' spiritual growth is further enhanced through such areas as sport, language, nature, art, poetry and music.

1.3 Scope and Application

This policy applies to all aspects of school life where the Catholic ethos is expressed, including:

- The formal **Religious Education (RE) Curriculum** (Section 2).
- Liturgical Services (e.g., school Mass, Carol Service, prayer services) (Section 3).
- The general **Pastoral Care** and environment of the College.

2. The RE Curriculum and Ethos

2.1 The Aims of Religious Education

Religious Education is a compulsory academic subject offered to all students and taught in a spirit of inclusiveness. The aims of the RE curriculum are to:

- Encourage students to explore and reflect on the Catholic Christian faith and tradition.
- Promote understanding and tolerance of the world's major religions and belief systems, including Humanism and Atheism.
- Develop students' spiritual, moral, and ethical awareness.
- Facilitate personal reflection and the search for meaning in life.

2.2 The Catholic Ethos in School Life

The Catholic ethos is expressed through:

- **Pastoral Care:** A supportive, Christ-centred environment focusing on dignity, respect, and social justice.
- **Community Prayer:** Simple prayers and moments of reflection may be used at the beginning or end of meetings, assemblies, or classes.
- **School Events:** Commemoration of significant religious festivals (e.g., Advent, Lent) through appropriate displays, liturgies, and services.

2.3 Fostering Intercultural and Inter-Religious Dialogue

The College actively supports intercultural dialogue. The Religious Education Department, in conjunction with the Pastoral Team, ensures that students of minority faiths or no faith feel safe, respected, and valued, and that their beliefs are treated with dignity within the classroom and the wider school community.

3. Inclusion and Participation in Religious Observance

3.1 Principle of Inclusivity

St. Columba's College welcomes students of all faiths and none. While the school's religious identity is Catholic, it does not discriminate against any student based on their religious background. All students are expected to adhere to the **Code of Behaviour** and treat all faith-based activities and observances with respect.

3.2 Policy on School Mass and Ceremonies

School Masses, reconciliation services, or whole-school faith ceremonies (including retreat days) are central expressions of the College's ethos and usually involve the entire school community.

- **Participation for Catholic Students:** Full participation is expected.
- **Participation for Non-Catholic Students:** Non-Catholic students or students who have been formally withdrawn from religious instruction are **not compelled to attend or participate** in these ceremonies.
 - **Respectful Presence:** Students who are non-Catholic but wish to attend the ceremony are expected to remain respectful and non-disruptive throughout the event, regardless of their personal beliefs.
 - **Alternative Arrangements:** In the event of a class-time religious observance (such as a visit to the Oratory), arrangements will be made to ensure continuous supervision. Students who have been formally withdrawn will **remain within the immediate physical vicinity of the main group** (e.g., seated quietly at the back of the Oratory or the designated location) and engage in **silent, non-participatory activity** (such as silent reading or private study).

In the event of a school Mass or ceremony, alternative arrangements will be provided for students whose parents/guardians have exercised their constitutional right to withdraw them. This will typically involve supervised, quiet study or designated reading/reflection in an area away from the ceremony.

3.3 Right to Withdrawal from Religious Education Classes

Parents/guardians have the constitutional right to request that their child be withdrawn from formal religious instruction (RE classes) and/or religious observances.

- **Formal Request:** A request for withdrawal must be made in writing to the **Principal** at the time of enrolment or at the beginning of the school year.
- **Accommodated:** Students who wish to withdraw from the activities RE class will be accommodated at the back of the classroom where they can continue with study in another subject area. Alternative, parents can sign out and collect their son/daughter before RE class and return them to school for the next lesson.

4. Implementation and Integration

4.1 Responsibilities of Staff and Management

- **Board of Management (BoM):** Ensures the policy is ratified and reviewed, and that the curriculum and facilities reflect the needs of all students. Also the Board of Management is responsible for recruiting suitably qualified staff to teaching Religious Education
- **Principal and Deputy Principal:** Ensures staff training and consistent implementation of the withdrawal policy and alternative arrangements for school ceremonies.
- **RE Department:** Leads the RE curriculum and promotes inclusive teaching practices that respect all faiths and none.
- **All Staff:** Models respect, inclusivity, and tolerance in all interactions, upholding the school's commitment to a caring environment.

4.2 Relationship to Other Policies

This policy is to be read in conjunction with the following College documents:

- **Code of Behaviour (CoB):** Standards of respectful conduct apply to all discussions and activities relating to religion and belief.
- **Acceptable Use Policy (AUP):** Rules concerning digital communication apply to all online interactions regarding faith or belief, preventing misuse or harassment.
- **Data Protection Policy:** Ensures the protection of special category data concerning students' religious beliefs.
- **Bí-Cinealta Policy:** Ensures that students are not bullied or harassed due to their religious beliefs

5. Ratification and Review

5.1 Implementation of Policy

St. Columba's College Religious Education (RE) and Faith Inclusion Policy has been ratified by the Board of Management and formally adopted on **3rd December 2025**.

We commit to ensuring its implementation in a manner that upholds the College's Catholic identity while fully respecting the rights and dignity of every student.

Signature: P. J. McGowan
(Chairperson, Board of Management)

Date: 3/12/25

Signature: Jan Rowe
(Principal)

Date: 03/12/2025

5.2 Review of Policy

The school will monitor / review on a regular basis, and evaluate the policy and all related work and procedures to ensure legal compliance and the maintenance of best practices.

Date for Review: November 2027