

POLICY: RELIGION AND EDUCATION  
SEPTEMBER 2003

# A Guide for Catholic Schools

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CATHOLIC INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION  
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## FOREWORD

This guide gives a synopsis of the policy, *Religion and Education*. It uses the actual language of the policy, except in the section headed A NOTE FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS, and is clearly referenced to the policy's actual paragraph numbers, which appear in brackets.

## A NOTE FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

The policy, *Religion and Education*, concerns all schools, whether they are public or independent. In the first place, Religion Education, as part of the already determined National Curriculum, is mandatory for all schools. This is not a problem for Catholic schools, as they have for many years both encouraged and practised the fostering of understanding and appreciation of other religions in their curricula.

Secondly, the requirements for Religious Instruction and Religious Observances prescribed by the policy do not pertain to independent schools (Paragraph 16). The same holds true for public schools on private property with a recognised religious character.

Clearly, the policy does not call for a change of best practice with regard to religion in the Catholic school. It does, however, serve as a reminder to us of what the Church itself teaches, namely the need to respect religious freedom and to treat all religions with dignity.

In many places, the policy for Religion Education goes way beyond the formal requirements of the National Curriculum. (See paragraphs 7, 8, 18, 19, 20, 21, 31, 40, which stress the need to address the spiritual and moral dimensions of the person in a way that affirms personal religious identity, while developing understanding and appreciation of others.) Religion Education, in this broader view, begins to take on significant dimensions of what Catholic Schools will identify as Religious Education. The latter activity goes beyond the informative (about religion), to incorporate formative and transformative aspects. It incorporates Religion Education as well as certain aspects of Religious Instruction that are relevant to all learners.

Catholic schools have the special task of demonstrating the worth of Religious Education, as they understand it, as an integral part of a balanced school curriculum, and of modelling best practice with respect to religious observances. Sharing in the mission of the Church, as the Catholic school is called to do, means being a prophetic witness in the world, acting as a source of healing and growth for all who touch the school, and taking the lead in offering students access to the rich resources of religious tradition for the transformation of themselves and of society.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE POLICY ON RELIGION AND EDUCATION

### ***The Context***

South Africa is a multi-religious country. In the most profound matters of life orientation, therefore, diversity is a fact of our national life. (9)

This policy for the role of religion in education is driven by the dual mandate of celebrating diversity and building national unity. (10)

### ***The Relationship between Religion and Education***

The policy sets out to shape the relationship between religion and education, in a manner that is in accordance with the values of our South African Constitution. It identifies the distinctive contribution that religion can make to education, and that education can make to teaching and learning about religion. (1)

The policy is not prescriptive, but provides a broad framework for schools to determine policies, and for parents and communities to be better informed of their rights and responsibilities in regard to religion and education. The policy genuinely advances the interests of religion, by advocating a broad-based range of religious activities in the school. (2)

In regard to the relationship between religion and public education, we propose that the cooperative model provides a framework that is best for religion and best for education in a democratic South Africa. In the *cooperative* model, both the principle of legal separation and the possibility of creative interaction are affirmed. Separate spheres for religion and the state are established by the Constitution, but there is scope for interaction between the two. (3, 4)

Under the constitutional guarantee of freedom of religion, the state, neither advancing nor inhibiting religion, must assume a position of fairness, informed by a parity of esteem for all religions, and worldviews. This positive impartiality carries a profound appreciation of spirituality and religion in its many manifestations, as reflected by the deference to God in the preamble to our Constitution, but does not impose these. (5)

This policy links religion and education with new initiatives in cultural rebirth (the African Renaissance), moral regeneration, and the promotion of values in our schools. Religion can play a significant role in preserving our heritage, respecting our diversity, and building a future based on progressive values. (7)

### ***Guiding Values***

This policy for the role of religion in education flows directly from the Constitutional values of citizenship, human rights, equality, freedom from discrimination, and freedom for conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion. By enshrining these basic values, the Constitution provides the framework for determining the relationship between religion and education in a democratic society. (11)

Our Constitution has worked out a careful balance between freedom for religious belief and expression and freedom from religious coercion and discrimination. (12)

The South African Schools Act (Act 84 of 1996) upholds the constitutional rights of all citizens to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion, and freedom from unfair discrimination on any grounds whatsoever, including religion, in public education institutions. (13)

Within this constitutional framework, public schools have a calling to promote the core values of a democratic society, through the curriculum, through extra-curricular activities, and in the way that they approach religious festivals, school uniforms and even diets. As identified in the report of the ministerial committee on values in education, these core values include equity, tolerance, multilingualism, openness, accountability, and social honour. (14)

Schools must create an overall environment – a social, intellectual, emotional, behavioural, organisational, and structural environment - that engenders a sense of acceptance, security, and respect for pupils with differing values, cultural backgrounds, and religious traditions. (30)

## THE POLICY

### ***Application***

The policy covers the different aspects of Religion Education, Religious Instruction and Religious Observances, and is applicable in all public schools. (15)

In both independent schools and public schools on private property with a recognised religious character, 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 character<sup>1</sup> are required to achieve the minimum outcomes for Religion Education. (16)

### ***Religion Education***

- Religion Education is a curricular programme. (17)
- Religion Education, with educational outcomes, is the responsibility of the school. (19)
- Religion Education shall include teaching and learning about the religions of the world, with particular attention to the religions of South Africa, as well as worldviews. (19)
- Religion Education shall place adequate emphasis on values and moral education. (19)
- Religion Education must affirm the pupils' own identity, while leading them to an informed understanding of the religious identities of others. (19)
- The teaching of Religion Education is encapsulated in the relevant outcome and assessment standards showing how the outcome is to be achieved in the Life Orientation learning area. (32)
- Religion Education must be tested, examined, and assessed by the same methods used in other Learning Areas. (53)
- The teaching of Religion Education in schools is to be done by appropriately trained professional educators registered with the South African Council of Educators (SACE). (34)
- Representatives of religious organisations who are registered with SACE could be engaged, and as with other learning areas, occasional guest facilitators from various religions may be utilised, provided that this is done on an equitable basis. (34)
- If called upon to do so, professional educators must accommodate this reality, in an impartial manner, regardless of their personal views. However, the utilisation of teachers in a school is managed by the school, and as with any other learning area, should take account of the interests, capabilities and sensitivities of each teacher. (35)
- Guidelines and resources will be made available to assist teachers in dealing with issues of religion in the classroom, and religious organisations will be requested to assist in the training of teachers. (37)
- The Department of Education will establish representative voluntary bodies to develop illustrative learning programmes in Religion Education for different levels. (49)
- While firm on the principles and parameters of Religion Education, which require attention to the rich variety of religions in South Africa and the world, any learning

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<sup>1</sup> As provided for in Section 57 of the South African Schools Act

programme must allow space for dealing with local and regional concerns, and be in accordance with the ethos of the school. (49)

- A new subject called Religious Studies shall also be introduced in the FET band for matriculation (or FETC) purposes, as an optional, specialised, and examinable subject. (33)

### ***Religious Instruction***

- Religious Instruction is understood to include instruction in a particular faith or belief, with a view to the inculcation of adherence to that faith or belief. (54)
- Religious Instruction is primarily the responsibility of the home, the family, and the religious community. (55)
- Religious Instruction would in most cases be provided by clergy, or other persons accredited by faith communities to do so. (55)
- Religious Instruction may not be part of the formal school programme, as constituted by the National Curriculum Statement. (55)
- Schools are encouraged to allow the use of their facilities for such programmes, in a manner that does not interrupt or detract from the core educational purposes of the school. (55)
- The possibility of a "release time" for pupils to attend Religious Observances or Instruction off the school property may be considered by schools, but in each case provision must be made to catch up any loss of teaching and learning time. (56)
- Opportunities for Religious Instruction must be afforded in an equitable manner to all religious bodies represented in a school. (57)
- No denigration or caricaturing of any other religion may take place. (57)
- Attendance at such instruction should be voluntary. (57)
- Persons offering Religious Instruction would do so under the authority of the religious body, and would not be required to be registered with the South African Council for Educators. (57)

### ***Religious Observances***

- The Governing Bodies of public schools may make their facilities available for religious observances, in the context of free and voluntary association, and provided that facilities are made available on an equitable basis. (58)
- Voluntary religious observances in which the public participates should be encouraged. Although such religious observances take place on the school property, they are not part of the official educational function of the public school. (60)
- School Governing Bodies are required to determine the nature and content of religious observances for teachers and pupils, such that coherence and alignment with this policy and applicable legislation is ensured. (61)
- Where religious observances are held, these may be at any time determined by the school, and may be part of a school assembly. (61)
- Where a religious observance is organised, as an official part of the school day, it must accommodate and reflect the multi-religious nature of the school community. (61,62)
- Where a religious observance is included in a school assembly, pupils may be excused on grounds of conscience from attending a religious observance component, and equitable arrangements must be made for these pupils. (63)

## CONCLUSION

This policy firstly establishes a broad, religion-friendly basis for Religion Education, taken care of by professional teachers. It also encourages the equitable practice of Religious Observances at school, and the involvement of clergy in the extra-curricular Religious Instruction of pupils, and as guest facilitators for Religion Education. In this manner the complementary, cooperative principle as regards the relationship between the state and organised religion is given substance in education, and optimised in the best interests of both spheres. (66)

Although the goal of unity in diversity must be achieved within the formal learning programmes of the curriculum, our policy also has clear implications for the role of religion in the broader life of a public school. In particular, our policy clarifies the role that might be given to Religious Observances, and to Religious Instruction. This policy for Religion and Education upholds the principles of a cooperative model for relations between religion and the state, by maintaining a constitutional impartiality in the formal activities of the school, but encouraging voluntary interaction outside of this. (71)

## DEFINITIONS

- *Religion* is used to describe the comprehensive and fundamental orientation in the world, mostly with regard to ideas of divinity, spiritual and non-secular beliefs and requiring ultimate commitment, including (but not restricted to) organised forms of religion and certain worldviews, as well as being used collectively to refer to those organisations which are established in order to protect and promote these beliefs.
- *Confessional or sectarian approaches* are used to describe those approaches to religion which take as a starting point a particular set of beliefs, or a particular perspective informed by these beliefs, and advance a position that is narrowly based on these beliefs and perspectives.
- *Religion Education* describes a set of curriculum outcomes which define what a pupil should know about religion. Further definition is provided in paragraphs 17 to 19 of the policy.
- *Religious Observances* are those activities and behaviours which recognise and express the views, beliefs and commitments of a particular religion, and may include gatherings of adherents, prayer times, dress and diets.
- *Religious instruction* refers to a programme of instruction which is aimed at providing information regarding a particular set of religious beliefs with a view to promoting adherence thereto.
- *Religious Studies* is a subject which is being proposed for the Further Education and Training band (Grades 10-12), in which pupils undertake the study of religion and religions in general, with the possibility of specialisation in one or more in that context.
- *The School Day* entails that portion of each day in which it is compulsory for teachers and pupils to be at school. The seven hours of contact time that is expected of teachers is part of the school day, but the latter also includes breaks and compulsory activities, including assemblies, designated extra —mural activities and possible disciplinary sanctions. No pupil or teacher may be absent from school during the school day, without permission.

## APPENDIX TO THE POLICY ON RELIGION AND EDUCATION

### ***The National Curriculum Statement and Religion Education***

Religion Education forms one part of the Life Orientation Learning Area of the National Curriculum Statement. This Learning Area has five broad Outcomes:

- Health Promotion
- Social Development
- Personal Development
- Physical Development and Movement, and
- An Orientation to the World of Work (Senior phase only).

Religion Education is contained within Outcome 2, in relation to Social Development, which requires that: *The learner will be able to demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to constitutional rights and responsibilities, and to show an understanding of diverse cultures and religions.*

The Assessment Standards for this part of the Learning Area are as follows:

We know this when the learner

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| Grade R | Identifies and names symbols linked to own religion.                                       |
| Grade 1 | Matches symbols associated with a range of religions in South Africa.                      |
| Grade 2 | Describes important days from diverse religions.   |
| Grade 3 | Discusses diet, clothing and decorations in a variety of religions.                        |
| Grade 4 | Discusses significant places and buildings in a variety of religions.                      |
| Grade 5 | Discusses festivals and customs from a variety of religions.                               |
| Grade 6 | Discusses the dignity of the person in a variety of religions.                             |
| Grade 7 | Explains the role of oral traditions and scriptures in a range of the world's religions.   |
| Grade 8 | Discusses the contributions of organisations from various religions to social development. |
| Grade 9 | Reflects on and discusses the contributions of various religions in promoting peace.       |