

THE DISTINCTIVE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER

1. DESCRIPTION OF A CATHOLIC SCHOOL

- 1.1 A Catholic school is a school community, recognised by the local Bishop, which through its general programme of education and especially its Religious Education classes and religious practices, exercises the right to live and learn the values of Jesus Christ, as upheld by the Catholic Church. Such a school provides this values-based education for the Catholic community as well as for those from the wider community who seek an education in harmony with the aims of the school.
- 1.2 The Catholic school aims:
- 1) to provide a challenging educational environment which integrates faith and culture;
 - 2) to promote the holistic growth of all learners;
 - 3) to give active witness to social concern and care for others.
- 1.3 The Catholic school achieves this through:
- 1) promoting a Catholic perspective of human life;
 - 2) a holistic approach to life;
 - 3) nurturing religious and moral formation;
 - 4) the dedication of the principal and staff to practising and promoting moral values and to a high standard of teaching and learning.
- 1.4 The Catholic school strives towards:
- 1) excellence in education, with outcomes embracing the total formation of each individual, and involving a passion for the ministry of educating;
 - 2) preparing learners to take their place in society as responsible citizens;
 - 3) respect for the uniqueness of every person and for the integrity of creation;
 - 4) a critical communication of culture, guided by a Christian concept of life centred on Jesus Christ whose life and teaching provides the model;
 - 5) transmission of values for life through the integration of faith and culture, and culture and life;
 - 6) nurturing of the faith of all members of the school community, recognising that each is at his or her own stage of faith development;
 - 7) encouraging and practising openness and dialogue between the various faith communities as a means of both education and spiritual formation and development;
 - 8) affirming and respecting the differing religious identities, backgrounds and traditions of learners while at the same time seeking to help all members of the school community to recognise and value what their different beliefs have in common as well as recognising and respecting the differences between their own beliefs and those of others;
 - 9) serving both the Catholic and the wider community with a concern for all people, especially the poor and marginalised, and for the spiritual and moral development of every individual;
 - 10) working in partnership with parents - the primary educators of their children - the local church, the wider community and the organs of civil society, for the benefit of the community it serves and of society itself;
 - 11) being a model of Christian freedom, justice and love in its administration, teaching and relationships between educators, learners, parents and community.

2. THE RECOGNISED DISTINCTIVE RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF THE SCHOOL REFERRED TO IN SUB-CLAUSE 18.1 WILL BE MAINTAINED IN THE FOLLOWING MANNER:

2.1 Through the Owner's exercising of those rights and responsibilities provided for in the Act and the relevant regulations and as spelled out in the appended agreement between the Owner/Religious Organisation and the Governing Body of the school, notably:

- (a) in recommendations for staff appointments;
- (b) in matters of the school's religious and moral policy;
- (c) in the annual evaluation of the school's distinctive religious character.
- (d) in certain safeguards against the undermining of the distinctive religious character of the school.

2.2 Through the collaboration of the Governing Body, the principal and all staff to upholding four characteristics:

1) A religious dimension to the school's life

(a) Worship:

The Catholic school expresses its community identity and ideals in its worship – religious assemblies, key events, themes, feast-days and seasons are celebrated, and prayer is built into the rhythm of school life. The quality of participation varies, naturally, with individual faith-life.

(b) Solidarity with the poor and disadvantaged:

The Catholic school is particularly sensitive to the call for a more just society and it tries to make its own contribution towards its realisation. This includes trying to put the demands of justice into practice in the daily life of the school. It also includes educating the learners to a sense of social responsibility and solidarity with the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised. In practice this takes different forms, responding wherever possible to local needs, concerns and outreach.

(c) Critical reflection:

The Catholic school takes time and trouble to evaluate its life against the challenges of its context, seen in both local and broader terms, and to confront influences that are hostile to human dignity. Both educators and learners are encouraged to acquire the skills of critical reflection and social analysis as helpful tools for the exercise of responsible citizenship.

(2) Religious education according to the broad Catholic approach

A Catholic school curriculum includes a substantial Religious Education programme, the principles, truths and ethics of which permeate whatever the school does. This programme is life-centred, broad and multi-faceted, encompassing personal growth as well as moral formation and explicitly religious exploration and practice. The programme is consistent with the Religious Education Policy for schools as approved by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference. It is rooted in the Catholic tradition but the breadth of this accommodates others from similar religious traditions, while those from different religious traditions participate in ways that nurture their own spiritual development. In general, all learners participate in this

programme in ways and at levels that are appropriate for the individual at the time. The right to religious freedom and freedom of conscience is, however, respected and special arrangements may be made in consultation with parents. The Religious Education programme attempts to address educational needs within a Christian framework. Ecclesial initiation may be left to the

learners' own families and Church communities, with the school complementing and facilitating the process, or Catholic learners may be prepared for reception of the Sacraments by their school. A learner leaving a Catholic school should have had, at the appropriate level, the opportunity for an experiential grounding in scripture, theology, morality, social justice, philosophy and spirituality of a high educational standard.

(3) Harmony with the values of the Catholic Church

The Catholic school stands in solidarity with the Catholic Church, sharing in the mission of its Bishop as principal teacher of the local Church. Ultimately, the reason for the Catholic school's existence is to incarnate and teach Gospel values for the good of its members and of the broader community. To do this assumes freedom of conscience in matters of justice and curriculum values.

(4) An understanding with each member of the school community

The Catholic school aims to be a community. All staff, as well as learners with their parents, freely choose to join, knowing what this community strives to be, what it offers, and what it expects of its members. These things should be made known to all learners' families and all staff when they apply to join the school community. It should be understood that membership of the community depends on the honouring of these terms and that while the right to freedom of religion and conscience of each individual is respected, it would not be fair to join the community simply for selected benefits seen in isolation from the school's total mission. It is not acceptable for any official of the Department, for staff, learners or parents to actively undermine the school's religious and moral values.