

# The Religious Character of the Catholic School

## RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### REQUIREMENTS OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL

**Religious Observances** are not compulsory, but they may be offered as an official part of the school day, provided that they accommodate and reflect the multi-religious nature of the school community. Where a religious observance is included in a school assembly, pupils may be excused on grounds of conscience from attending that component, and equitable arrangements must be made for these pupils.

**Religion Education** is a mandatory part of the National Curriculum concerned chiefly with teaching and learning about the religions of South Africa, as well as worldviews. Religion Education aims to deliver that aspect of Life Orientation that is concerned with an understanding of diverse cultures and religions.

**Religious Instruction** in a particular faith or belief may be offered as long as it is afforded in an equitable manner to all religious bodies represented in a school, and attendance is voluntary. It may not, however, be part of the formal school programme, as constituted by the National Curriculum Statement

**Religious Studies** is an elective subject in the Further Education and Training and (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.

### REQUIREMENTS OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

#### **Religious Observances**

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. (Schedule 3)

#### **Religious Education**

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. (Schedule 3)

### COMPARISON

#### **Religious Education = Religion Education + Religious Instruction**

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. Religion Education “according to the broad Catholic approach” (Schedule 3) therefore already offers Religion Education. It also includes a dimension of Religious Instruction in that it is rooted in the Catholic tradition. However the tradition is offered in such a way that it “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” (Schedule 3).

However, Religion Education may be part of the formal school programme in Catholic public schools with a recognised religious character since the requirements for Religious Instruction (and Religious Observances) prescribed by the policy *Religion and Education* do not pertain to them, or to independent schools (Paragraph 16).

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