

Diocesan Advisory Team for Primary Religious Education Newsletter



Diocese of Clonfert
Diocese of Galway,
Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora

AUTUMN
2025



A Message from Bishop Michael

During the year gone by, our small team of Diocesan Advisors has been busy visiting our Catholic primary schools throughout the Diocese of Clonfert and the Diocese of Galway, Kilmacduagh and Kilfenora. They have also had valuable conversations with the Boards of Management.

Thank you to the principals, teachers, chairpersons, and members of the Boards of Management, along with the whole school communities, who facilitated their visits and made them so welcome. Thank you in particular to the pupils who, with their wholehearted interaction and joyful vibrancy, made a deep impression on all involved.

We are blessed to have so many committed, faith-filled people working in our Catholic schools. Their role is an important one. As they nourish young minds and hearts, they are laying solid foundations for the future of our society and the Church. Catholic schools are at the heart of our parishes. We owe a debt of gratitude to our priests and local parishioners for the time, support, and assistance they give in their ministry to our schools.

I would also like to thank those who lead in the area of primary Catholic education in our respective dioceses – Msgr Cathal Geraghty and Mr Pat Kelly. My sincere thanks also to the enthusiastic team of Diocesan Advisors involved in this mission.

I am delighted to welcome this Newsletter, which I hope will be a means of communication and interaction between our team of advisors and our school communities. It is my hope that it will be the first of many. May God continue to bless all involved.

One of the most important roles of the Patron of a school is to continually encourage the school community to put flesh on its founding vision – the fundamental reason for its existence.

The primary role of our Diocesan Advisors is to make visible and to nourish the relationship between the School's Patron and the entire school community. They do this by supporting, guiding, and advising the principal, the teachers, and the whole school community. They also engage in dialogue with the Board of Management, particularly through their support for the teaching of religious education and ethos-related programmes within the school.

An Intentional School

An intentional Catholic school is one where the Catholic ethos and values are actively nurtured and celebrated. The practice of the Catholic faith goes beyond the formal religious education programme; it is woven into every aspect of school life.

An intentional Catholic school is created through regular reflection on the Catholic ethos, the promotion of prayer at class and whole-school level, the fostering of a sense of belonging among staff, students, and families, and the living out of Gospel values in all that we do.

The Sacred Space

The sacred space in the classroom or school serves as a designated area for reflection, prayer, and connection with our Catholic faith. It can be a powerful support for the implementation of the Grow in Love programme.

This space typically incorporates symbols of faith, such as a crucifix, a Bible, a candle, holy water, a statue, Rosary beads, flowers, coloured cloths to represent the different seasons of the Liturgical year, and posters from Grow in Love covering various themes. Children should also be encouraged to contribute by creating and adding items to the sacred space, making it a more personal and meaningful place for them.

Schools may also consider having a sacred space in the main entrance area. This could serve as a guide for all classes in maintaining their own sacred spaces and as a point of connection with parents, ensuring that the whole school community is aware of the significant Liturgical events that occur throughout the year.



The Grow in Love Programme

The Grow in Love religious education programme has been developed to incorporate diverse learning methods, using stories, art, and music, while fostering a sense of community through shared learning experiences.

Key components include a children's book with stories, poems, and activities; a teacher's manual with lesson plans and guidance; online resources with supplementary materials; and family pages to encourage parental involvement.

Using the book or workbook, together with the other resources, provides a structure for teachers and children to engage with the themes on a weekly or fortnightly basis. This helps to consolidate the children's understanding of the faith concepts being taught.

As the programme is designed for use both at home and in school, the book or workbook should form part of the booklist each year for all classes. It is also important to send the books home periodically, giving parents opportunities to support their child's faith formation.

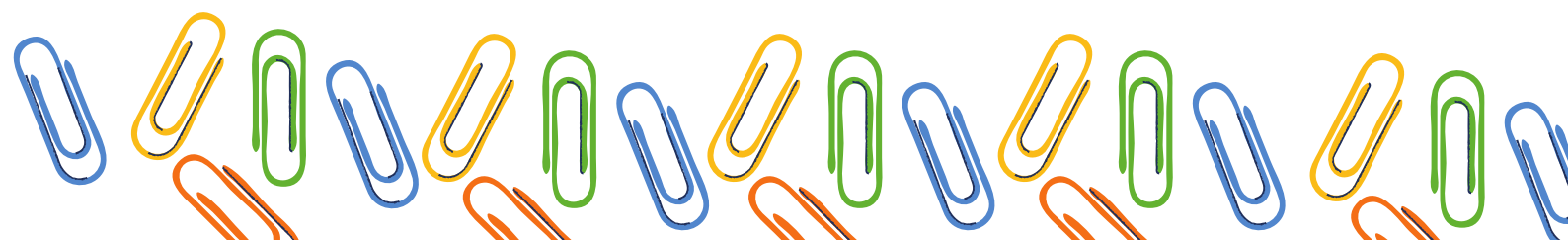
Post of Responsibility – Religious Education Coordinator

It is encouraging to note that some schools in the Diocese have designated the role of Religious Education Coordinator as part of a management position or post of responsibility within their schools.

This person manages and supervises the delivery of the religious education curriculum, reporting to the principal, and serves as a point of contact and support for all teachers in matters relating to religious education.

The role of the RE Coordinator has many aspects. These include organising school-wide religious events, maintaining a school noticeboard or display area for religious matters, ensuring that sufficient time is allocated for the subject, and providing appropriate resources and support for teachers.

Having a Religious Education Coordinator within a school fosters a more consistent approach to the delivery of the religious education programme and demonstrates a school's commitment to upholding the Catholic ethos.



Documenting Learning in Primary Religious Education

On our visits to schools, we have seen a great variety of effective, meaningful, and age-appropriate ways of documenting learning in RE which we share with you here.

Written work: Journals, religion copies, and workbooks show a wonderful record of the material covered through the use of assignments, artwork, and extra resources.

Visual displays and project work such as posters, drawings, and models based on various themes – biblical characters, Christian heroes, sacraments – clearly show the children's engagement, knowledge, and development.

Digital documentation: Photos and videos of children's participation in liturgies, prayer services, dramas, charity work, or classroom religious activities – like making St Brigid's crosses – shared on schools' websites, blogs, newsletters, and other platforms, as well as being displayed in the schools.

Oral work: Class discussions and oral contributions during our visits show the children's knowledge and understanding of the topics taught in RE.

Music and Religious Education

Pupils are participating in some beautiful singing and playing as part of their religious education classes, and some sing throughout their school day!

It is important to remember that all themes of Grow in Love are supported by enjoyable teacher- and pupil-friendly songs and musical pieces. The songs being taught and enjoyed should be age-appropriate and from the Grow in Love programme rather than from Alive-O or other older programmes. Children in all classes love the songs from Grow in Love and they reinforce the message of Jesus. Keep singing.

“To sing is to pray twice.” – St Augustine



“In the family, faith is handed on together with life, generation after generation. It is shared like food at the family table and like the love in our hearts. In this way, families become privileged places in which to encounter Jesus, who loves us and desires our good, always”
(*Mass for the Jubilee of Families, 2025*)

Linking School and Parish

The link between school and parish enriches religious education and helps children experience faith in action. Schools are doing this in many ways:

- The priest's visits to the school are very important as the children become familiar with him and he gets the opportunity to include the school in parish celebrations and talk to classes, especially those preparing for sacraments.
- Classes attending a weekday Mass in the church, visiting the church for quiet reflective times or at special times of the year build familiarity with the liturgy and traditions of the Church, provide opportunities to witness the community's respectful and prayerful participation, and bring the subject alive for the children – seeing in the church what they are learning in school helps consolidate their learning and gives a feeling of belonging to the local church community.
- Encouraging children in senior classes to participate in church activities like serving at Mass, joining the choir, reading prayers of the faithful, or in children's liturgies when available.
- Featuring parish activities relating to the children in the school newsletters and participating in parish events (e.g. Nativity plays at Christmas celebrations) creates a joyful connection between school and parish.
- Schools encouraging children to use their talents to serve others and to think of those who are in need by undertaking visits to nursing homes or by fundraising for worthy organisations in their parish. Visual displays and project work such as posters, drawings, and models based on various themes – biblical characters, Christian heroes, sacraments – clearly show the children's engagement, knowledge, and development.
- Digital documentation: Photos and videos of children's participation in liturgies, prayer services, dramas, charity work, or classroom religious activities – like making St Brigid's crosses – shared on schools' websites, blogs, newsletters, and other platforms, as well as being displayed in the schools.
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Learning How to Pray

The “Grow in Love” programme emphasises prayer as a means of communicating with God, fostering a relationship with Him, and responding to His love through actions. The programme teaches children traditional prayers (vocal prayer), encourages the concept of meditative prayer, where children can talk to God privately, and highlights that prayer is also about responding to God’s love by showing love and respect to others and to God’s creation.

Children are encouraged to express gratitude, pray for guidance, and intercede for those in need. Seasonal prayers relevant to Liturgical celebrations – Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter – are included, and participation in communal prayer is encouraged. Grow in Love aims to help children develop a personal relationship with God through prayer, connects prayer with Scripture, and the Gospels in particular, as a way to understand God’s word and live by it. A prayer space in classrooms is very important to support the theme of prayer, as is the use of all the programme’s resources and the involvement of parents to reinforce the lessons learned in school.

School Mission Statement

Has your school a clear statement of its mission? Does this include your school’s Catholic roots, its core values, and how, as a learning community, you aim to put flesh on those values in everyday life? Was your school’s mission statement the fruit of a discernment process that included all of your stakeholders? Is your school’s mission statement clearly displayed? How does it inform your school’s policies? How does it shape your daily activities? Have you planned times in the year when you return to your mission statement, to be inspired by it? When did you last review and revise it?

A Human Connection

Diocesan Advisors provide a human connection between the Patron and the entire school community. This is particularly true in the case of the Board of Management, the principal, teachers, and pupils. The role seeks to strengthen communication between all these stakeholders and to support and encourage all involved for the benefit of the school.

In a special way, the Diocesan Advisors are also tasked with supporting the Patron’s programme (Grow in Love) in the classrooms of Catholic schools in the dioceses. This involves affirming the pupils’ joyful participation, while also supporting teachers and schools in presenting the programme as faithfully as possible, using Bible stories, prayers, and songs of praise at the appropriate level for each class.



The Board of Management and the Diocesan Advisor

The Governance Manual for Primary Schools outlines the purpose, functions, and origin of a school board of management. The board is the body appointed by the Patron to manage the school on the Patron's behalf. The functions of the board of management are set out in section 15 of the Education Act 1998, which provides, inter alia, that it shall be the duty of the board to "manage the school on behalf of the patron and for the benefit of the students and their parents and to provide or cause to be provided an appropriate education for each student at the school for which that board has responsibility."

Given that the board carries out its work on behalf of the Patron, it was decided that the Diocesan Advisors, as well as visiting the classes, should also attend a board meeting. The purpose of attending a board meeting is to provide feedback on the school visit and guidance to the board in relation to its responsibility for the Catholic ethos of the school. This was the first time that the Diocesan Advisors were asked to take on this additional task. We have learned from the experience that best practice is to have an in-person visit to each board. This was not possible in all cases, and where the Diocesan Advisor attended the board meeting via Zoom or telephone, the interaction was not as satisfactory as when the Diocesan Advisor was able to attend in person. We will work on improving this for the new school year.

The Diocesan Advisor provides a valuable link between the school and the Patron in relation to the Catholic ethos of the school. In the past, when there was a priest on every board and a resident priest in every parish, he was seen as the person ensuring the Catholic ethos of the school, supported by the board, the school principal, and staff. Now the board must take ownership of fostering, promoting, and maintaining the Catholic ethos with the cooperation of the principal and staff. The Diocesan Advisor can provide valuable advice on Catholic ethos and acts as a direct link between the school and the Patron.

We are grateful to the Boards of Management for accommodating the Diocesan Advisors' visits. It is hoped that we will learn from the experience of last year's visits, improve where needed, and highlight the good practices and strong Catholic ethos present in so many of our schools.

Our Catholic schools are communities of faith and learning. They are places where the Gospel is lived each day, where prayer and celebration mark the seasons of the Church, and where children encounter the richness of our tradition. In classrooms, in sacred spaces, and in the rhythms of daily life, the Catholic ethos is made visible and alive." Bishop Michael



A Catholic School

A Catholic School ...

- welcomes the seeker and the searcher on the journey of life.
- respects the God-given dignity of each and every human being.
- celebrates the unique identity of each student and every staff member.
- is inspired by a vision of life and style of living based on the person and wisdom of Jesus Christ.
- holds faith and reason, religion and science as good friends not ancient foes.
- fosters the inquisitive nature of the human mind.
- engages with the deepest desires of the human heart.
- encourages the best of scientific and academic endeavour.
- dialogues with the world and the culture in which it exists.
- nourishes an understanding of religion and a religious understanding of life.
- seeks to develop the whole person – body, mind and spirit.
- marks with prayer the feasts and seasons of the Christian liturgical year.
- recognises the role of parents as primary educators in matters of life and faith.
- fosters good relationships within a creative, nurturing and supportive learning faith community.
- is a place of love - a place of second chances.
- sees itself as an integral part of the wider community that is the Church.
- welcomes, respects and learns from other religious traditions and secular world views.
- instils in its students a desire to be agents of positive self, community and global transformation.
- has a special concern for the weak, the poor, the underprivileged and the marginalised.
- cares for the earth and promotes ecological responsibility.

“In short, this means forming the head, hands and heart together: preserving and enhancing the link between learning, doing and feeling in the noblest sense. In this way, you will be able to offer not only an excellent academic curriculum, but also a coherent vision of life inspired by the teachings of Christ.” (Pope Francis, Speech to the Grace Project Participants, 2022)



Key Emerging Themes

Catholic Ethos at the Centre

- Schools are called to be intentional Catholic schools, where faith is woven into every aspect of daily life.
- Sacred spaces, liturgies, prayer, Gospel values, and visible signs of faith keep ethos present and alive.

School as a Community of Faith and Learning

- Schools are more than places of education; they are communities where children encounter faith in action.
- The link with the parish enriches school life and fosters belonging to the wider Church.

Partnership with the Patron

- Diocesan Advisors strengthen the relationship between the Patron and the school.
- They support the teaching of religious education, encourage ethos, and provide a human connection.

Formation through Curriculum and Practice

- The Grow in Love programme is central, providing resources for school and home.
- Music, art, digital media, written work, and oral contributions all document and deepen pupils' engagement with faith.

Leadership and Responsibility

- Boards of Management share responsibility for sustaining the Catholic ethos.
- Some schools have created posts of responsibility for Religious Education Coordinators, ensuring consistency and support.

Prayer and Worship as Daily Practice

- Prayer is taught as communication with God, supported by traditional, meditative, and seasonal forms.
- Communal worship, parish links, and classroom prayer spaces help root children in lived faith.

MEET OUR TEAM



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