



St Nicholas Catholic Primary School

Religious Education Policy

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1. Our Mission Statement

At St Nicholas School, we are called together to
Love, Live, Learn
With Jesus Christ
Love God, ourselves and each other.
Live life in response to God's call.
Learn to achieve our best in everything we do

2. General Requirements

The DES circular 3/88 stated that Religious Education 'has equal standing in relation to the core and foundation subjects within a school's curriculum.

In St Nicholas School Religious Education counts for ten per cent of the total curriculum time, as recommended by the Diocesan Director of Education.

Moreover, it is seen as the foundation of the child's whole school experience, not only in the taught curriculum.

3. Main Educational Aims

- To develop an awareness of *God's* presence in an individual's life and elicit a response to that presence; to offer the child an opportunity to reflect on this experience and strengthen this awareness.
- To help foster and develop a well formed conscience allowing the individual to make sound moral judgements in the light of their personal commitment to *God*.
- To enable children to develop their physical, moral and intellectual qualities harmoniously in order to become responsible, caring members of their community and the wider world.

- To support and develop the primary task of parents who 'are the first teachers of their child in the ways of the faith' (Rite of Baptism).

4. Religious Education Strategy

In St Nicholas School we base our long term overview and detailed short term planning on the Birmingham Archdiocese Curriculum Strategy for Religious Education in Catholic Primary Schools: 'Learning and Growing as the People of God'. This shows clear coverage of the four areas of study: Revelation, Church, Celebration and Life in Christ from the Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools, ensuring continuity and progression.

We welcome the clear expectations, detailed guidance and, most importantly, the great range of challenging activities, which allows our teachers to meet the needs of the children in our care.

We have taken great care not to select from the strategy and rework a Programme of Study, as this would be to lose the richness of the material and limit teachers to teaching in a style that may not allow them to fully engage the children in their particular Year Group.

The Diocesan Strategy is supplemented with a variety of quality resources. [Year Group listings available electronically in Network shared area].

- It is a priority to provide appropriate Bibles throughout the school.
- A wide range of ICT resources are available and are used not only in class lessons, but also in Key Stage and Whole School Assemblies and Collective Worship.

- The Veritas Scheme is still available as reference, particularly in Year 6, where the Confirmation preparation workbook, 'Gifted in the Spirit' still relies heavily on access to the Veritas textbook.
- The document 'Curriculum Mapping for R.E in Primary Schools' formed the basis of the Schemes of Work which the school has produced for each year group. Teachers have copies of these, which they may utilise in their teaching, especially with reference to feast days.

To make best use of the strategy materials we feel it is important that the pupils are encouraged to reflect, to make choices and to use their creative talents.

Teachers are encouraged to use their curriculum strengths in delivering the Religious Education programme and to devise tasks which are stimulating, challenging and differentiated, where appropriate.

5. Evaluation, Assessment and Recording

'Although its (R.E) educational focus will be formed and enhanced by the vitality of faith, the criteria by which the subject is assessed are educational.' [*Statement on Religious Education in Catholic Schools* the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales 2000].

We cannot measure commitment or personal faith. We cannot assess the child's relationship with God. Therefore our assessment of Religious Education is based on what pupils know, understand or can do with reference to the two key Attainment Targets in R.E: Learning *about* Religion and Learning *from* Religion.

Each pupil has a Religious Education book or folder where work is recorded. It can be used to provide information, for parents or anyone else who needs to know (other teachers, governors etc), on the knowledge, understanding and responses of the pupils to the learning process.

The children's work is marked in accordance with the whole school marking policy of acknowledging effort and achievement through positive teacher comments. Suggestions for raising achievement in subsequent tasks may also be made together with reference to the religious objective of the lesson and its significance in their lives.

Assessment of work in R.E is in agreement with the whole school Assessment Policy and complies with Diocesan Guidelines.

R.E. assessment is now based on the Assessing Pupil Progress (APP) model which involves sampling across the ability range within each year group and extrapolating findings.

Pupils' work may be kept in their individual Assessment Folders where appropriate, depending on the nature of the assessment focus.

Methods of assessment may include:

- Observation
- Discussion
- Work sampling
- Testing - particularly in upper juniors

We carry out a baseline assessment on entry to school which enables us to determine how best to serve the needs of the children in our teaching of R.E. and to judge progress through the Foundation Stage and beyond.

In addition we carry out moderation of R.E on a regular basis. This involves each year group teacher providing samples of work which show 'best fit' achievement across the range. These samples are shared and levels agreed.

The focus for such moderation meetings is established at a staff meeting well in advance.

Teachers are also encouraged to evaluate each unit by photocopying the end of unit sheet and reflecting, both on their own, and the children's experience of the unit.

Parents are kept informed of their child's progress and development at formal parents' evenings in the autumn and spring terms.

Written reports are sent out to parents at the end of the summer term which detail the children's progress in R.E.

Prayer

Prayer, worship and liturgical celebrations are central to our Catholic tradition. It is of prime importance however, that sound educational and pastoral principles determine the ways these are experienced in the school community.

'It is the task of the school ... to promote and develop an appreciation of and a more active participation in prayer, worship and liturgy. This must be recognised as a gradual process which takes account of the age and stages of personal, social and religious development of the pupils.'

(Evaluating the Distinctive Nature of a Catholic School)

Through prayer we aim to help the children develop a personal relationship with God. To enable this to take place we need to create a prayerful atmosphere and appreciate the value of artefacts in helping to channel the child's mind to prayer.

(e.g. crucifixes, prayer candles in every classroom and prominently displayed throughout the school; liturgical colours in cloths for prayer focal points)

Each day begins and ends in prayer, reinforcing its centrality and importance. Grace is said before and after meals.

See also Appendix 1, Guidelines on Prayer

Assemblies

The principal aim of our assemblies is worship and the active involvement of pupils is essential in order that they are engaged in a real act of worship. Playing of music on entry helps to create a positive atmosphere, teachers use appropriate visual stimuli to add further interest and children are encouraged to participate through questioning and discussion. Singing is an enriching element in worship which our children really enjoy. Assemblies may be said to be 'educational' in the sense of leading the children to a greater awareness of their faith and the world around them.

All pupils take part in a daily act of worship which takes the form of class prayers or Key Stage/Whole School assemblies. Themes for assemblies, linked to the liturgical year, key focuses within the school, parish or wider world and a rota assigning a particular teacher to lead each assembly; are devised in advance by the R.E Co-ordinator.

Suggestions for resource materials are also provided.

The Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher or Assistant Headteacher normally leads the weekly whole school assembly.

It is quite acceptable for teachers to commend and celebrate pupils' achievements and behaviour during assemblies, as this is relevant and motivating. At whole school assemblies pupils are presented with merit certificates and any other awards obtained in or out of school. Parents and families are invited to weekly whole school assemblies. General school notices are kept to an absolute minimum as assemblies are first and foremost about worship.

Sacramental Preparation

Coming to understand the Sacraments is a complex interaction of a great variety of experiences and celebrations participated in by the children during their school years.

We are fully involved with the preparation of pupils in Y3 for the first reception of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion.

Preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation is kept distinct from subsequent preparation for Holy Communion.

Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation takes place in Y6.

Although much of the work is undertaken in school, the preparation of the children for these sacraments is the shared responsibility of the school, the parents and the parish.

Photographs of all children being prepared for the sacraments are displayed in the parish church and parishioners are invited to pray for the children when they are presented to the Parish in Mass as part of their sacramental preparation.

All children of St Nicholas Parish, whether in school or not, are included in the preparatory celebrations and fully participate in the services on the actual day of reception.

We hope by our preparation of the children for these sacraments to enable them to become fully active members of the parish and diocesan communities.

See Appendix 2 for details of the Sacramental Preparation Programmes.

6. Staff of Other Faiths and Religious Education

The contribution made by staff of other faiths to the life and ethos of St Nicholas school is highly valued.

Where a teacher is of a different faith or tradition, another member of staff who is a practising Catholic will take a key role in the religious education of the pupils.

The class teacher would carry out the daily acts of collective worship with the children.

These teachers are encouraged to attend suitable courses and training programmes offered by the Catholic Partnership and other bodies, in order to deepen their awareness of the Catholic faith of the children in their care.

7. Information and Communication Technology

Children should be given opportunities to develop and apply their ICT skills in Religious Education. There are many such opportunities offered in the Curriculum Strategy and resources are updated regularly to further enhance the pupils' experience of this cross-curricular link.

Occasional samples of work are kept by the R.E Co-ordinator for reference.

8. Special Educational Needs

Each teacher is responsible for meeting the needs of specific pupils who have Special Educational Needs. Support may be provided where appropriate and available in line with the Special Educational Needs Policy.

Resources to support teachers are available in the Staff Resources section of the Library and in the R.E resource store cupboard.

9. Equal Opportunities

Each child is fully incorporated into the life of our school, treated equally with fairness and justice. Language and symbols used in the teaching of R.E are appropriate and meaningful for each age group.

Appendix 1 Guidelines on Prayer

Methods of Prayer

Pupils are helped and encouraged to discover various methods of prayer including:

- Formal and informal
- Private and communal
- Silent prayer
- Spontaneous prayer
- Prayer through gesture

All these have their place in the prayer life of the school.

Elements of Prayer

Listen to the Word of God

Use a short passage of scripture from the Bible.

By familiarising the children with Gospel stories we enable them to build up a picture of Jesus as he was in the flesh, to develop a loving relationship with him so that they may come to know the risen Christ. Listening with eyes closed helps them to be with Jesus, saying his name in their hearts and experiencing the peace of his presence.

Praise God

Introduce a line from a Psalm or a Eucharistic Prayer. Some simple Psalms and traditional prayers appropriate to the children's age should be included. Children should be made aware of phrases which may be used meaningfully and effectively.

'Hail Mary', 'Our Father', 'The Lord is my Shepherd'

Meditation

A quiet time for reflection is valuable for children (and adults) of all ages.

[posters, music, PowerPoint images and guided meditation books are available]

Intercession

Pupils may suggest their own prayers or teachers may initiate ideas.

Thanks

Prayers of thanksgiving

Sorrow or Contrition

Expressing sorrow for some fault or failing. Considering how we have failed to respond to Jesus. Silently expressing sorrow for wrongdoings in their own words. Formal prayer introduced in Year 3 as part of sacramental preparation.

Spontaneous Prayer

Prayers of adoration, intercession and petition.

Formal Prayers

See separate guidelines

Daily class prayer should not be overlong and may contain only one or two of the above elements.

Development of Prayer

In the Foundation Stage and Key Stage One the initial focus is on praying to God the Father who made us and looks after us. Children gradually become more aware of Jesus and begin to build a relationship through prayer.

All children learn gestures; sign of the cross, holding hands, joining hands: so that action becomes a prayer in itself.

As pupils progress through school they learn to be still and quiet at prayer times. They will be able to maintain this attitude for longer periods and will also learn the more traditional forms of prayer.

We build on the children's own experiences, developing and extending them. We help them to discover that the love of God calls for a response.

In Key Stage Two special times should be provided for individual or private prayer where the children have the opportunity to pray in silence.

All children are offered the opportunity of praying in church before the Blessed Sacrament during our parish day of Exposition.

By the end of Year 6 all pupils should be familiar with the experience of praying on their own. Pupils should be taught to write their own prayers from an early age.

Formal and Traditional Prayers

Children must be enabled to become active members of our worshipping community, which is the Church, and they should be familiar with many of the prayers of the Catholic Church. Formal prayers should be taught to classes in accordance with Diocesan Guidelines and the children therefore need to learn traditional prayer formulae.

It is important that the language of our formal prayers should be explained to children in a meaningful way. They should be encouraged to understand why we say the prayer and what the prayer is about.

e.g. The Rosary in October, Prayers for the Dead in November, Stations of the Cross in Lent, Marian Prayers in May.

Prayer Services

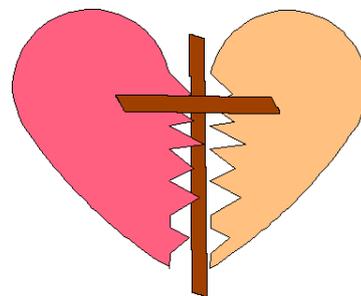
Children should experience simple structured prayer services in class from time to time. These may be led by the teacher or our Parish Priest. The end of a unit of work is often a fruitful time to hold such a service.

Prayer across the Curriculum

Prayer should not be restricted only to set times.

Opportunities will frequently arise for children to thank God or to ask God for his help, guidance and protection. They should be encouraged to share in the joys and sorrows of other children.

Appendix 2 Sacramental Preparation Programmes in St Nicholas School



Sacraments of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion

The Sacraments of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion take place with Year 3 children in March and May respectively.

The preparation of children is the shared responsibility of the school, the parents and the parish.

The foundation for the preparation of the Sacraments of Reconciliation and First Holy Communion begins in KS1 with elements of the Diocesan Strategy that relate to forgiveness and to our salvation.

The children are formally prepared for these Sacraments in Year 3. In October the first of three meetings is held in school between parents, teacher and parish priest.

This meeting is closely followed by the presentation of children by their parents. This Sunday presentation Mass celebrates the fact that through the Sacraments we are further initiating the children into the community of the Church. This ceremony includes the commitment by parents to fulfil their baptismal promises.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation

The Sacrament of Reconciliation Rite 2 takes place in March after a meeting (see above) to discuss aspects of the Sacrament and actual arrangements for the celebration of the Sacrament. The children are prepared for the Sacrament using material from the diocese, the Redemptorist sacramental programme 'I Belong' and other appropriate materials.

First Holy Communion

This sacramental celebration takes place after the children have been taught about the Eucharist in school using the materials referred to above together with supplementary activities from *God's Greatest Gift* and *Children of the Promise*.

A meeting with parents takes place prior to the celebration of this sacrament at which certain aspects of communion and Eucharist are discussed and practicalities of the celebrations are explained.

Emphasis is placed on the family aspect of this celebration; communicants receive the Sacrament under both kinds, with their families and prayer friends, during a regular parish Mass. These group celebrations are held on different weekends.

This way of receiving the Sacrament celebrates the community aspect of the Catholic faith and ensures that parishioners, who agree to support the children with prayers at the outset of the programme, are present at every First Holy Communion Mass. Photographs of the children are displayed in church.

After all the children have celebrated their First Holy Communion, a 'Going Forth' Mass is celebrated, followed by a party.

All children and parents celebrate this Mass in school which serves to emphasise that we are a Eucharistic (thankful) people who gather for Mass and who are then sent forth 'To love and serve the Lord'.

The parish priest is closely involved in the preparation for these Sacraments; holding meetings with the parents, visiting the classroom regularly, conducting prayer services with the children and celebrating different themes at Sunday Mass, as described below. There are also strong links maintained with those children of the parish who are not in St Nicholas School. The Year 3 teacher liaises regularly with the Parish Catechist and similar materials are used in their preparation. The

children are also included in each celebration and come into school for the *Going Forth Mass* and party.

MASSES AND CELEBRATIONS

Presentation Ceremony – Belonging and Celebrating

This Mass focuses on the fact that the children belong to the Christian community because their parents brought them to Baptism. Here the parents present them for another sacrament of Initiation.

We consider our invitation to celebrate with the Lord and the family of God. Pupils may bring their baptismal candles which are lit to symbolise the presence among us of the Risen Lord, who has called us together.

Listening

This theme introduces the children and their parents to the Liturgy of the Word. The parish priest may distribute a book of the Gospel to each pupil at this Mass as a supporting gift from the parish.

The children form a procession, bringing the Gospel to be read by the priest or deacon.

Caring and Giving Thanks

This Mass introduces the children and their parents to the Prayer of the Faithful. Children offer petitions to God to show their concern for those who live with them and for God's gifts of Creation. They form the Offertory procession, bringing symbolic gifts together with the bread and wine.

Making Peace

This celebration introduces the children to the Penitential Rite. The Sign of Peace is explained during this service. God's loving forgiveness is explored symbolically in exchanging a stone (sin) for a flower (new life).

Sharing a Meal

This service (held in class) introduces the children to the Eucharistic Meal.

The dramatisation of the First Eucharist is the focus of this celebration and provides immediate preparation for First Holy Communion. The children share lunch together in the classroom.

First Holy Communion

This celebration allows the children to fully participate in the Eucharist. They offer their communion preparation books to God.

Going Forth (Whole group)

This celebration emphasises that First Communion is a starting point in Christian life. We have a mission to help in building a world in which love and unity reign, nourished by the Word of God and by the Bread of Life. The children receive their First Holy Communion certificates and are applauded by the congregation.

The Headteacher and all the staff support the class teacher in the children's preparation, particularly by attending the Mass celebrations.

The Sacrament of Confirmation in St Nicholas School

The Sacrament of Confirmation is conferred annually at St Nicholas' by either the Archbishop or by one of his assistant bishops. The celebration usually takes place in June. The preparation of the Year 6 pupils is primarily the responsibility of the school in conjunction with the parents and the parish.

Pupils

Preparation begins as soon as the pupils enter Year 6 and consider their roles and responsibilities as the oldest pupils in the school. They reflect upon their uniqueness and what God might be calling them to do within the Body of Christ. The school provides each pupil with a copy of the Diocesan workbook 'Gifted in the Spirit' which supplements the Diocesan Strategy units and clearly explains the Rite of Confirmation. Those children in the parish, but not in school, who are also preparing for Confirmation, work from a range of similar materials and are included in all relevant preparations.

The children of Year 6 visit Oscott College on a special retreat day as part of their preparation, which enables them to talk to seminarians about their vocation, explore key elements of the Mass and develop their experience of meditative prayer.

The children research carefully into the life and example of their confirmation saint and produce a small booklet. They also work with partners to produce PowerPoint presentations on the Sacrament of Confirmation which they show to Year 5 pupils.

Whenever possible, the celebrant for Confirmation is invited to meet the candidates during the day of the Celebration. This provides the children with an opportunity to show what they have learned and also to ask questions about the service and

the Sacrament. The children in other schools are invited to be in school during the day and to share in some of the final preparation thoughts and prayers.

Parents

Parents are invited by the Headteacher to an evening meeting in school where the Parish Priest gives a talk about the significance of the sacrament as the completion of Christian Initiation. The class teacher explains the way in which the children are prepared for the sacrament and gives advice on sponsors.

Liturgy and Celebrations

Mass of Commitment

This is held in the early stages of preparation at a Parish Sunday Mass, usually 9.00 a.m.

All St Nicholas confirmandi for the year are presented to the congregation and make a public commitment to prepare conscientiously for the Sacrament.

Service of Light

This is a short service of preparation held in church on a Sunday afternoon one or two weeks prior to the date of Confirmation. All children, parents and sponsors are invited to attend. Children, parents and catechists are involved in the readings. The service includes the ceremony of handing on the light of faith from parent to child and children may bring their baptismal candles to reinforce the significance of this action.

Confirmation Mass

This usually takes place on a weekday evening at 7.30p.m. Children play an active part throughout the mass: welcoming the congregation; reading; singing the Responsorial Psalm; serving; and forming the Offertory procession.

Photographs of all the candidates are displayed in church and the parish are invited to remember the children in their prayers.

After the Mass, refreshments are served in the school hall to which the candidates, their families, sponsors, parishioners, teachers, catechists and celebrants are invited.

Appendix 3 Celebration of Mass

Mass has a firmly established place in the life of our school. A termly programme of Masses is worked out between our Parish Priest, Headteacher and R.E Co-ordinator. Parents and parishioners are invited to attend whether in school or church. The themes for Masses usually stem from the liturgical calendar or work undertaken by pupils. Masses on Holy Days and special occasions are celebrated with the whole school. Key Stage Masses are also valuable in enabling us to focus on the needs of differing age groups. Class Masses are celebrated where appropriate and year groups attend weekday parish Masses.

The children are encouraged to be involved in all Mass preparations. Readings and hymns are carefully chosen and practised. Children take part in the offertory procession, may write as well as read the bidding prayers, and serve the Mass. The Parish Priest is advised of the planning and the celebration of Mass is adapted appropriately to meet the needs of the children. Children who are too young to receive Holy Communion receive a special blessing. The children may write special invitations to their families to attend the celebrations.

There are many resources available in school to support teaching about the Mass, its parts and the responses.

Appendix 4

The Bible

We believe the Bible is a most important source of knowledge about the triune God. We use it as a tool for teaching moral truths, knowledge about Jesus' life, other important biblical figures and the key events of early Christianity. It is used as a basis for discussion and also a literary text.

In the Foundation Stage and Key Stage One the children learn that the Bible is God's book. Our emphasis on telling Bible stories is to assist in the development of a personal relationship with God. The children '... hear, read, explore and reflect upon a variety of Scripture imagery which speaks of God and stories of significant people in the Old and New Testament'. (Curriculum Directory for Catholic Schools)

In Key Stage Two we familiarise pupils with the books of the New Testament and major events in the Old Testament. They are taught and encouraged to find their way around the Bible, to learn of it as a library of books and to experience the different types of literature found in the Bible.

The range of bibles available in school is under constant review with the aim of providing appropriate texts for all Year Groups. Graphic Bibles and electronic versions are also available.