



Written Submissions

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics

Written Submissions

Written submissions are an important part of the NCCA consultation process. During consultation NCCA received 174 written submissions in total, 172 of which are available in this publication. Two contributors specifically requested not to be published.

Aighneachtaí Scríofa

Is cuid thábhachtach de phróiseas comhairliúcháin an CNCM iad na haighneachtaí scríofa. Le linn an chomhairliúcháin fuair an CNCM 174 aighneacht scríofa ar fad, a bhfuil 172 díobh ar fáil san fhoilseachán seo. Bhí beirt ar leith a chuir aighneachtaí isteach agus a d'iarr nach bhfoilseofaí a n-aighneacht.

Contributors

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- [Aine O Connell](#)
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- [Ann Moran](#)
- [Anne Cunningham](#)
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Contributor

Aine O'Connell

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

I have found in my classroom that faith development, more so than any other subject, gives children an opportunity to critically think. They reflect on who they are, how they should behave, what is important to them and ultimately about the meaning of their lives and their role in the world. This year we have had many heated debates in the classroom, about the meaning of life and what is ultimately important.

Simply giving the children information on different religions around the world is no substitution for faith development. Children need to be encouraged to search for real meaning in their lives instead of superficially learning about different religions and traditions.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents

- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

The themes and methodologies outlined in this new subject are very similar to those outlined in the SPHE curriculum. I think it would be far more efficient if new aspects of this curriculum were incorporated into the existing SPHE curriculum as teachers are under serious pressure with time.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

I have found that prayer has been a very positive influence on all the children in my class. It has helped them to relax, to reflect and most importantly to think of others. Prayer encourages the children to be grateful for what they have, pray for who they love and think about the suffering of others in the world on a daily basis. Prayer also helps children to reflect on what they want in life and what would may potentially fulfill them.

Children in my classroom of all faiths have expressed how helpful engaging in daily prayer and meditation was in helping them to deal with problems in their lives.

If children are simply learning about faith instead of developing and forming their own faith, their personal and spiritual growth will be seriously affected.





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Contributor

Alice O'Connor, Bernadette O'Connor



Ala O'Connor
Downings North
Prosperous
Naas
Co. Kildare
19th March 2016

subject: ERB and Ethics Consultation

To whom it may concern,

1. It would be totally confusing for children to be taught Religion from a non-faith approach.
2. The human rights of parents are being trampled over in this proposed State course and it should not be imposed. It is basically atheist, secularist indoctrination and has the effect of destroying religious belief/faith in children. This program is completely inappropriate for children under 7.
3. The course is that of a secular atheist belief system, that is fine if you're an atheist, but not if you are another religion. Human rights and the Catechism state that it is immoral to coerce others in to your beliefs.
4. There is little mandate for this proposal, when from the last census statistics state that 84% are Catholic? With no mandate and little visible consultation with parents, I propose that the Minister revisits the Consultation for the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism immediately regarding the seriousness of the new curriculum.
5. There is currently an opt-out option for children who do not want to study any faith within primary education, so this course is not fixing any problem, just creating one that affects parents human right to hand on their faith, by contradicting it with this course.
6. Our Catholic Schools are already places where children learn about other religious traditions particularly those of the children of other faiths in our schools.
7. Provision is made for ethics in terms of school policies, school ethos, leadership, religious education and other curricula areas.
8. Intellectually a child aged 5, 6, or 7 cannot be expected to be defend their faith, this course is therefore from an adult based approach.
9. Religious education in faith-based schools is inseparable from the characteristic spirit of the school. The Education Act specifically requires the Minister to have regard for the characteristic spirit of the school in exercising his or her functions with regard to curriculum (section 30(2)(b)).

10. Parents with religious convictions have a right to give send their children to faith-based schools which adopt a child-centred, holistic approach to education where religious belief is not just a subject but fully acknowledged as part of lived reality for these parents, families and children.
11. It overloads primary school children with concerns they are too young to handle. The content of this program should be learned by osmosis from a happy school and family.
12. Catholic schools are owned by the parish, and are indeed parish schools, which the State has no right to interfere with.
13. It takes up children's time needlessly.
14. It is offensive to teachers, as adults, and who have the right to their beliefs, this is what the course proposes to do: "Through this reflection process it becomes clear that teachers may be on their own educational journey, learning more about their own personal convictions and assumptions; thus coming to a better understanding of themselves, their world and their place in it."

What is Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB)?

... It does not nurture the belief or practice of any one religion; instead it focuses on fostering an informed awareness of the main theist, non-theist, and **secular beliefs** including key aspects of their cultural manifestations.

15. Pluralism, which any moral person would agree with that it is only right to embrace others in their beliefs, however secularism is a belief system that puts all faiths under the microscope, and that this proposal clearly states the course is secular is an outrageous contradiction to embracing others in their beliefs.
16. Furthermore calling our faith "a cultural manifestation" is also outrageous, and I am offended with this.

Yours faithfully, Alice O'Connor (parent)
Ronald O'Connor (parent)



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Contributor

**Alma Leonard, Majella McCarthy,
Thelma Gileran, Colum
Hammond, Barry Tierney**



Friday, March 11th 2016

To whom it concerns,

We, the undersigned, being representative of principals in The Diocese in Co. Carlow from rural and urban schools, DEIS and non-DEIS schools, large staffs of 30++ to staffs of just 7, write to you to voice our opinions on the proposed new Curriculum on Religious Beliefs and Ethics as outlined on the NCCA website.

Firstly, we are not sure as to why this curriculum is being proposed. Is it by way of a response to the non-Catholic children currently enrolled in our schools who are not partaking in Religion classes? Currently in our six schools are Muslims, Protestants, Taoists, Christians, non-believers andapsed Catholics. Their parents are happy for them to be in our Catholic schools. They are accommodated in our Mission Statements: "We cherish every child equally, from all religions and none, and we believe in the holistic development of the child". They are happy to sit and not take part in our religious classes, if that is what they wish; they are not coerced into receiving the sacraments. We allow the Muslim children both a space and a time to pray each day. Having non-Catholic children in our schools is not a problem, so why suddenly do we have to introduce a new curriculum to accommodate these pupils when they are already being catered for and are happy with the current situation?

Catholic schools nationally are extremely inclusive-almost 90% of them accept Traveller children, children from a disadvantage background, Special Needs pupils, Non-Irish pupils as well as non-Catholics. Our curriculum is broad and inclusive of all. Our SPHE programme includes themes such as: My Family, My Home, My Community, People Who help us etc. The new Catholic Religious programme, Grow in Love, teaches about the same themes. The NCCA objectives of this proposed new curriculum encourages pupils to realise their self-worth, to grow in personal understanding, to develop good relationships with others, to develop tolerance and understanding of others – all of these objectives are already being taught in both the Religious programme and the SPHE programme. Furthermore our own distinct Catholic ethos encourages the same values – tolerance, understanding, self worth, respect, valuing human existence – indeed the Christian slogan 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you' encompasses all the objectives of this new proposed Religious Beliefs and Ethics Curriculum.

The Education Act of 1998 requires the Minister of Education to have regard for the characteristic spirit of a school, and must allow for reasonable instruction during the day on that spirit. Indeed the characteristic spirit of a Catholic school permeates the entire day by teaching tolerance and respect in the classroom and on the yard, with prayer spaces where all may contribute, by allowing time for prayers. This new proposed curriculum would now compartmentalise religion, make it more of a subject, and could even confuse children who are already happy learning as they are.

Religious Education is not the remit of the NCCA. As with Relationships and Sexuality Education, a part of the SPHE curriculum, it is explicitly acknowledged that the RSE component must be interpreted in the context of the school's characteristic spirit. Our characteristic Catholic spirit encompasses all pupils and therefore there is no need for a further Religious and Ethics programme.

Really, in this age of School Self Evaluation and Transparency, where is the evidence that we need a new ERB curriculum? On the other hand we do have evidence that the current system is working and that parents, pupils and teachers are happy with it. Our schools are inclusive of all children whether religious or non-religious. We wonder for whom is this proposed new curriculum? The majority of our parents and pupils are happy, so why change what is already working and with which all our educational partners are happy.

It is incredible that in this year of the 1916 commemorations that we would be introducing confusion and upset into an already inclusive school community. The NCCA would be advised to read many of our children's own proclamations, which they will share on Tuesday March 15th, Proclamation Day. The pupils express in their thinking a society which is diverse and inclusive, and in their schools they can see current evidence of this good practice.

We would ask the NCCA to reconsider introducing a new ERB curriculum into an already overloaded school day where many of the new proposed objectives are currently being met. Our school communities are happy with things as they are. Lack of inclusiveness is not an issue in our schools. Please leave the school curriculum as it is.

Yours sincerely,



Alma Leonard,
St. Clare's N.S.,
Cavan Town,
Co. Cavan.



Majella McCarthy,
St. Michael's N.S.,
Castell,
Co. Cavan.



Thelma Gilman,
Convent of Mercy, N.S.
Rathfriland,
Co. Cavan.



Colm Hammond,
St. Patrick's N.S.,
Sherrock,
Co. Cavan.



Barry Farnley,
St. Feller's N.S.,
Cavan Town,
Co. Cavan.



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Contributor
An Forás Pátrúnachta

Ceisteanna agus Mollai an Fhorais Pátrúnachta (AFP)

1. Molann AFP an t-berce leithen a thugtar sa chálúlas comhairliúcháin ar ctitheacht rotha idirnáisiúnta.
2. Molann AFP go mbeadh sé náite go sábháil go bhfuil scoileanna againn sa trí dhéire.
3. Molann AFP go mbeadh cruinniú le taidéar an Fhorais sula bhfoláirítear an tairisí d'áireamhach le caitiú nach bhfuil eolas míchruinn inti.
4. Molann AFP go ndéanfaid an CNM scapadh ar thairghe AFP ar chéadnaí na h-áireamhach (scoileanna áireamhach an Fhorais, 2010 – 2012)
5. Molann AFP go mbeadh Gaeilge d'ardchaighdeán ina cáipéis a chuirtear ar caitiú an gheall?
6. Úsáidtear scoileanna áireamhach AFP curadom eitice/ staidéar réiligiún atá bunaithe ar churadom Scoilochta le Chéile. Molann AFP go bhfuil curadom Scoilochta le Chéile oiriúnach mar churadom náisiúnta ach creid a bheith ag na pátrúin na scoileanna/ scoil foghlaim a dhur in oiriún d'áireamhach.
7. Molann AFP go mbeadh curadom eitice náisiúnta mar chuid de CSPS agus go mbeadh curadom náisiúnta staidéar réiligiún mar chuid den áireamhach 'creidtear' ar an gcuradom agus é náite lastigh de na h-áireamhach a bhaineann leis na hábhair sin.
8. Molann AFP go mbeadh riagha ag na pátrúin scoile cén cónaí creidimh gur mian leo a thabhairt ar áireamhach agus iad ag cur curadom staidéar réiligiún in oiriún d'áireamhach féin.
9. Molann AFP go mbeadh soléireacht ann ón CNM mar gheall ar d'áireamhach bunreachtáil tairisíneoirí mar gheall ar churadom creidimh/ staidéar réiligiún, ach nach mbeadh an áireamhach a d'áireamhach eitice/ CSPS.
10. Molann AFP go mbeadh an t-airisí áireamhach na h-áireamhach tagairt don áireamhach in ar scoileanna sa tairisíneoir d'áireamhach.
11. Molann AFP gur chóir go mbeadh áireamhach Gaeilge curtha ar fáil go comhairleach don churadom eitice/ staidéar réiligiún.
12. Molann AFP go mbeadh oiliúint curtha ar fáil do 'chaitiú náisiúnta sa chéad sula thagann áireamhach i bhfoláir.
13. Molann AFP go mbeadh Éitic agus Teagasc trí Ghairige mar áireamhach eigeantacha ina caitiú áireamhach Teagasc Náisiúnta.

1. Dúla:

"Tá náite scoileanna ann atá faoi phátrúnacht an Fhorais Pátrúnachta agus a dhéanann éiceid idirnáisiúnta ar fáil." ...ach faoi phátrúnacht áireamhach áireamhach Scoilochta le Chéile ach ní ann tagairt don Fhorais Pátrúnachta, cuireann sé seo leis an míbháil nach bhfuil scoileanna áireamhach ann a dhéanann in Gaeilge.

Note: An Fhorais Pátrúnachta: An Fhorais Pátrúnachta aims to develop, strengthen and promote education through the medium of Irish throughout the country. An Fhorais Pátrúnachta provides a holistic education, developing and nurturing pupils through the medium of Irish. An Fhorais Pátrúnachta has schools of both denominational and inter-denominational ethos. The patron gives recommendations to Boards of management of schools in relation to the provision of the Irish language and faith education.

*Sampla den Gaeilge

*Cáine a chaitiú an trí oiriún le h-áireamhach



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Contributor

Ann Moran

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

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- Other aspects you would like to see included.

I believe that the proposed aims of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics would be greatly beneficial to education in Ireland and to children's learning and character development in general. In fact, the reason I am contacting you within this consultation process is that I am very interested and active in this area of education, in particular within the area of Human Values in Education.

A sixth theme called Human Values within the Ethics area of this subject might favourably complement the existing five proposed themes. Having said that, I personally believe that the subject of Human Values would be a very useful and empowering subject of its own on the primary curriculum and perhaps that is something that may be taken into consideration within this process or indeed again at another time should further changes in this area be taking place. I will elaborate further on this in the final section below (Q3).

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents

- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

I believe that a curriculum in ERB and Ethics (especially incorporating, or alongside, a curriculum in Values) would offer great benefits to the experience of children, parents, teachers and indeed the whole school community. I have seen this first hand through the teaching of values. I am not entirely sure how to address the issue of time allocation in the curriculum.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

As I mentioned above, I believe that a curriculum in ERB and Ethics would be greatly beneficial to education in Ireland and to children's learning and character development in general. I am particularly interested in the area of Values in Education, and think that 'Human Values' would make a useful sixth theme within the Ethics component of ERB and Ethics, if not a valuable subject in its own right.

There are many countries around the world that incorporate the teaching of human values into their education system and I think that this would be a great addition to our own curriculum here in Ireland if it were to be incorporated in some form.

I have been teaching human values in my classroom, integrated through SPHE and Religion, since I began teaching thirteen years ago and every year I have seen striking and immediate positive consequences as a result. The behaviour and self-esteem of the children change dramatically.

I'll briefly explain how I approach the teaching of values in my classroom. At the beginning of each week a new 'value' is chosen. This value might be, for example, 'kindness'. (Or truth, love, tolerance, non-violence, right conduct, self-control, peace, forgiveness, patience etc.) Over the course of the week the value is brought into focus, discussed and observed in action. Each child reflects on a time when he/she has used the value and writes the reflection into his/her 'Values Copy' as homework (encouraging discussion around the value at home also). It is very simple and very effective. The children quickly and visibly grow in confidence, self-awareness and dependability, as they realise that they embody all of the good qualities or values that we are studying.

There already exists a large base of free resources, lesson plans, songs, stories, posters etc. online to assist in the teaching of values, along with many models of values-based education to draw from around the world.

A very informative and concise video from a UK school explaining their experience of Values-based Education can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlyG48rtclg>

Another Values-based programme can be found at:

<http://www.sathyasaiehv.org.uk/methodology.htm> This site also contains a full list of over one hundred values drawn from five main values of right conduct, peace, truth, love and non-violence. Every lesson here uses the teaching methodologies of silent sitting, story-telling, group song and group activity.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like me to elaborate further on the subject of Values in Education. I would be more than happy to discuss or become involved with the development of a programme for our curriculum around Values. I can also put you in touch with a number of experts in the field of Values in Education, should you be interested in exploring this further.

Sincerely,

Ann Moran.





Home

Contributor

Anne Cunningham

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education

Respondent's details

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[or](#) email submissions to curriculum@ncca.ie

Response to the consultation paper on Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School.

As a parent of four children who currently attend or who have attended Catholic Primary Schools, I have grave reservations regarding the proposed curriculum area of Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics. I feel the proposed subject area will misdirect money, resources and teaching time from schools and pupils who have greater needs in areas which aren't currently being addressed by governing bodies.

The proposed subject area is already being substantially addressed across multiple subject areas such as Geography, History, SPHE and English. I see the ERB and Ethics programme as an added, unnecessary and unwanted layer to an already overloaded curriculum. There is no need to implement a programme to cover topics, concepts and learning which is already taking place in every primary school in the country each and every day.

I would assert that at the core of all schools' mission statements is the commitment to a positive, just and nurturing ethos. This can only be achieved by ensuring the school's ethos permeates every aspect of school life and not just be constrained within a single subject area. It is already interwoven in the many strands of the primary school experience - academics, social interaction, playtime and community participation.

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The NCCA's proposed ERB and Ethics curriculum for primary schools: a response.

Executive Summary

1. The nature of what children learn from religion is determined by the pedagogical framework teachers adopt. The NCCA consultation paper proposes an approach to religious education that is incompatible with the Catholic approach to religious education. It is underpinned by philosophical principles and proposes pedagogical approaches that would undermine the right to religious freedom of Catholic children. This is because the Catholic Christian worldview and the secular postmodern worldview (on which this proposal is founded) are grounded in fundamentally incompatible ontological foundations.

2. The fundamental problem with the NCCA proposal for ERB is that it is based on a different and contradictory construction/ representation of religion (and beliefs) than that offered by Catholic religious education. The construction of religion and beliefs proposed by the NCCA will support a relativist approach to truth and to morality, thereby undermining the approach to religion adopted in faith-based schools.

3. If the State prescribes a secular approach to religious education and ethics for all schools it will be in direct violation of the human rights of religious children whose parents have chosen denominational schools for the distinctive religious education *and* ethics they offer. The approach to teaching about pluralism in denominational schools should not directly undermine the distinctive approach to religion and to ethics which gives those very schools their *raison d'être*.

4. The NCCA proposal seems to assume that active-pluralist non-confessional religious education is the only way the goals of respect, tolerance, inclusion, elimination of prejudice, racism and discrimination, and social justice can be achieved in Irish society. This is a wrong assumption. Most of the specific aims for the proposed ERBE programme (pages 13-14 of the consultation paper) are amply covered in the new *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (2015). Catholic primary religious education promotes justice, freedom and fairness; teaches children about other religions and stances for living; includes human rights education and challenges prejudice, racism, intolerance and discrimination. By denying the fact that faith-based approaches to religious education might achieve these goals, the proposed NCCA curriculum would seek to deny any real pluralism in Irish primary religious education. Instead, the State would impose its approach to pluralism - pluralistic relativism-- on all.

5. The provision of a *syllabus* or *guidelines* for ERB in the Irish primary school, by the NCCA, is an endeavour I would support. It is right and good that the State seek to outline a *minimum*

level of engagement in this area for *all* primary schools. Regardless of the type of school children attend, it is desirable that young people be able to relate their convictions and beliefs to the values of a democratic society and that they would exercise their right to religious freedom in the context of a developing concept of active citizenship at national, European and even world levels. However, schools must be given the autonomy to interpret any such guidelines or requirements in line with the philosophy of education (faith-based *or* secular) on which the school is based.

Introduction.

The content of this response will be structured as follows. First, I will comment on the type of religious education proposed by the NCCA and the ways in which it is fundamentally incompatible with a Catholic approach to religious education.¹ Second, I will argue that Catholic primary school teachers will educate for tolerance, respect for difference and social cohesion when they teach the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015)* (hereafter CPPREC). Third, I will argue that the proposed NCCA curriculum would constitute a denial of real pluralism in Irish Primary schools, by imposing one hegemonic approach to religion and to ethics on all. Finally, I will make a brief comment on the ethical dimension of the proposed curriculum.

A: Type of Religious Education proposed by the NCCA.

The proposed ERB curriculum seems to be based on a combination of the socio-cultural and historical-political paradigms of religious education.² The close association of the historical-political with the socio-cultural paradigm is evident in the consultation paper's theoretical modelling of 'beliefs' as a source of social bonding and personal identity. Both of these approaches may be suitable for use in multi-denominational and non-denominational school settings. However, they are not suitable for Catholic schools for reasons that will be set out below.

Socio-cultural model

The key model here is Robert Jackson's (Ethnographic) *Interpretive Approach*, which draws on ideas from cultural anthropology. The interpretive approach aims to help children find their own positions within a pluralist context where there are many differing beliefs and stances for living. Drawing on socio-cultural models which assert the complexity of representation of religions and other stances for living, religious traditions are seen as contested wholes and an emphasis is placed on difference, pluralism and fragmentation. The approach privileges individual expressions of belief over communal beliefs and much focus is

¹ Many of the comments made would be applicable to all types of faith-based religious education, but I will focus on the Catholic approach here.

² Liam Gearon, *Masterclass in Religious Education*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

placed on students' clarification of their own sense of personal identity. This model is based on the postmodern understanding that linguistic meaning and truth are solely social constructions.³ This explains the primacy which is given in the NCCA consultation document to children's own expression and naming of their beliefs.

Historical –Political model

Liam Gearon summarizes the concerns of this paradigm:

The historical-political paradigm emphasizes understanding present-day use of religion in education as a means of achieving broad political goals. These are largely secular in origin and language. Religion in education serves the principles of liberal democracy in responding to a culturally and religiously diverse populace. Teaching and learning in this model is directed towards ameliorating any potential conflicts inherent amidst such pluralism. The philosophy for this originates directly from political liberalism; its validation for enforcement is in those legal frameworks which underpin liberal democracies, particularly through human rights frameworks which stress equality under the law, which through constraining (as laws do) are also guided by the principle that the law should not overly restrict individual and collective freedoms.⁴

Problems with the Socio-cultural and Historical-Political approaches from a Catholic perspective:

1. These approaches do not represent religion fairly or correctly. In the NCCA proposal children are being invited to see religious identity as the holding of beliefs interpreted by them. This leaves little place for an understanding of the transcendental meaning in religion, the normativity of religious beliefs, the sense of community engendered by religion and the emotional and ritual aspects of religion. Postmodern approaches to religious education such as the *Interpretative Approach* reject the metanarratives of religions and their claims to objective truth. As with all other religious people, Catholics claim universal application and validity for their religious beliefs. Postmodern approaches encourage children to see their religion simply as one among many standpoints which have equal validity. If children are invited to see their religious tradition as a set of cultural beliefs, it will undermine the way in which religion is presented in the Catholic school. The Catholic school exists to educate children in a Catholic religious way of life and in Catholic religious beliefs which are normative for them. These beliefs are rooted in revelation and therefore

³ The influence of postmodern philosophers such as Jacques Derrida can be discerned in the approach to meaning and to knowledge adopted in the NCCA consultation paper. For Derrida, "meaning becomes exclusively contextual and one of the most important (if not the most important) determinants of context is the human subject that interprets from his or her own unique perspective". L. Philip Barnes, *Education Religion and Diversity*, London: Routledge, 2014, 161.

⁴ Gearon, *ibid*, 132.

have an epistemic status that is denied to cultural beliefs constructed by children themselves (see the note on constructivism below).

2. The extent to which children's views are a key determinant of pedagogy is problematic. The postmodern pedagogical process suggested by the NCCA may form children in the view that *they* are the most important determinants of the meaning of their own beliefs. Children's voices are not given such precedence in any other subject in the curriculum. As Liam Gearon argues, "the primacy of student voice is arguably not an entirely authoritative source for the representation of the religions themselves."⁵ If you ask school children to define their beliefs, their explanation of their beliefs is not the best informed and is likely to be a little confused. Young children are not best placed to represent the actual commitments of their families and of their religious traditions. Further, there is a danger that young children could be given the impression that beliefs are things which they create themselves, as if human beings were the source of religious beliefs.

A further problem with this approach to curriculum content is that it ignores research into the spiritual development of the small child. Children in primary school are either at the magical or the mythic-literal stages of spiritual intelligence.⁶ Up to the age of about nine or ten, spiritual development is mainly imaginative, emotional and intuitive, so it makes very little sense to ask children under ten to articulate their beliefs! Primary school religious education is primarily a place where young children learn the practices, stories and myths of their religious or other community of conviction. These myths and stories will be interpreted literally, as befits the psychological development of the young child. This stage cannot be bypassed in normal human development. It is only later that a full rational and critical understanding of one's worldview, stance for living or 'faith' emerges.

3. The proposed approach fails to take difference in religious and non-religious truth claims seriously. The truth or otherwise of what children believe will not be addressed. As Liam Gearon has pointed out, when children are invited to articulate their 'beliefs' and when the pedagogy doesn't concern itself with the quest for truth, "it operates *de facto* as if all beliefs are equally true; or rather as if children are legally entitled to hold that their beliefs are true".⁷ Postmodern thought tends to make us sceptical about beliefs concerning truth. In the approach proposed by the NCCA, there are no epistemological grounds on which to assume the *a priori* basis of religious truth. This leaves open the discussion of beliefs but neither acceptance of these beliefs, nor the means for the adjudication on such beliefs can be provided. In practice, therefore, there is a presumed sceptical neutrality of reason in

⁵ Gearon, *ibid*, 133.

⁶ See Ken Wilber on the cross-cultural universal validity of these stages in the Psychological-spiritual development of the child: Ken Wilber, *Integral Psychology: consciousness, spirit, psychology, therapy*, (Boston: Shambhala, 2000), and Ken Wilber, *Integral Spirituality: a startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World*, (Boston: Integral Books, 2007).

⁷ Gearon, *ibid*, 134.

relation to religious beliefs.⁸ This is problematic for all religious persons because religious meaning and commitment is determined by what one believes to be true. It could be argued that for the NCCA there is only one truth, namely, the truth of pluralistic relativism. Is this truth to be imposed on all children without any regard for their actual religious commitments or other life stances? To do so would be a direct violation of the right to religious freedom of Catholic parents and their children.

4. In the socio-cultural and liberal approaches to religious education, reason is primary. Children are invited to stand back from religions and beliefs. In Catholic schools, revelation is primary and the learner’s experience and reason are brought into dialogue with it. The NCCA curriculum will invite Catholic children to engage in the domain of religion in a way that undermines their capacity to immerse themselves in their own religion through faith *and* reason.

5. The socio-cultural and historical-political models of religious education require *teachers* to adopt and promote a secularist approach to religion. For the Catholic teacher this is an approach to religion that goes against his/her deepest convictions for all the reasons outlined above. The notion that teachers would teach religions and beliefs from a secular perspective one day, and then switch to teaching from a faith perspective another day is very strange. It is also deeply disrespectful to teachers as professionals and as persons with clear life commitments, whether they are religious or not.

The table below illustrates some of the ways in which the NCCA approach to ERB and the Catholic approach are fundamentally incompatible.

Summary Chart: Some differences between the proposed NCCA approach to Religious Education (ERB) and Catholic Religious Education

ERB	Catholic RE
<p>Secular socio-cultural and historical-political models of Religious Education.</p> <p>Pedagogies are inquiry-based and constructivist.</p> <p>An education in religion that begins with sceptical reason. Non-realist approach to religion</p>	<p>Christianity is a revealed religion, linked to a way of life.</p> <p>Pedagogies are often underpinned by realist epistemologies and where constructivism is used it comes <i>after</i> the primary communication of religious truth.</p> <p>An education in the Christian religion begins with experience, revelation and belief. Realist approach to religion.</p>

⁸ Gearon, *Ibid*, 143.

<p>Reason seeking an understanding of beliefs: emphasis on rational thought critical evaluation and skills of self-determination.</p> <p>Judgements about religions can only be made from a secular, non-religious position so that no one religion is privileged.</p> <p>Religions presented as cultural belief systems. Religions and beliefs are instrumentalised in the service of political goals: tolerance, citizenship, social harmony.</p> <p>Reduces religious education to something akin to philosophical discussion about beliefs rather than substantive study of religious doctrines and practices. May convey the idea that being religious is an intellectual proposal.</p> <p>Promotes secular postmodern judgements of religion. May give tacit support to a form of religious relativism.</p> <p>Promotes a <i>pluralist</i> approach to religion. May form children in a view of religion as cultural belief systems in a 'confessional manner': postmodern liberal confessionalism.</p>	<p>Faith seeking understanding: Learner reflects critically and creatively on a lived Christian faith. Rationality informed by revelation. Reason illumined by faith.</p> <p>Religious authority comes from revelation, sacred texts, and a living tradition.</p> <p>Religion presented as a revealed source of grace and transformation, and as a way of life lived in company with others. Community and a sense of belonging plays a key role in Christianity</p> <p>Conveys the idea that religious faith is a dynamic response to experience and revelation which involves cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions.</p> <p>Forms children in knowledge and appreciation of the Christian religion as true, thus safeguarding their religious freedom.</p> <p>Does not adopt a pluralist approach to religion though children are taught to respect and learn from the religions of others. Seeks to contribute to citizenship, inter-religious harmony and the common good <i>via</i> commitment to the Catholic religion.</p>
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Note on Constructivism v Critical Realism: differing approaches to plurality.

There is a world of difference between approaching religion as revealed or as something constructed. The proposed NCCA curriculum is closely allied with the philosophy of constructivism. The uniquely Catholic approach to pluralism is critical realism. In a constructivist approach to religion, religious beliefs and values are understood as a human constructs which are subject to multiple interpretations. Religious beliefs or truth claims, in this view, are internal to the language game being played. In a constructivist approach to religious education, therefore, the whole idea of a search for ultimate truth will be rejected or at the very least, side-lined. Students are encouraged to use their developing skills to organise and take control of their lives, but in so doing run the risk of losing touch with the whole of reality, including the possibility of encountering a truth that comes from outside of themselves. Rather than seeking the 'truth out there' constructivists encourage students to construct their own subjective truths.⁹ Catholics approach religion as having its origins in a divine truth revealed by God, while at the same time not neglecting to reflect on and understand the experiential nature of what it means to be fully human. The educational activity of the Church addresses the faith of hearers who, through God's grace, freely accept the good news of God's salvation by a personal faith response. Therefore, in Catholic religious education, religious beliefs possess an epistemic status and normative quality that is denied to beliefs understood merely as cultural constructions.¹⁰

B: Educating for tolerance, respect and social cohesion

There seems to be a general consensus among Irish educators that religious and ethical difference should not only be allowed or tolerated in schools, but that children should be taught to value difference and to learn from it. All schools should promote social justice (including religious tolerance), knowledge about religions, and also dialogue and interaction between pupils of different stances for living. In modern pluralist societies children observe cultural and religious differences, at a very early age, as well as different moral standpoints. Therefore 'initiation' and 'reflection on difference' will be integrated into any sensible approach to the religious education for young children in the Twenty-First Century.

However, there are two main difficulties with the NCCA proposal here:

a) It seems to be assumed that we have a significant problem with racism, prejudice and discrimination in our primary schools and

⁹ Elina Wright and Andrew Wright, "Thinking Skills" in L. Philip Barnes, ed., *Debates in Religious Education*, (London: Routledge, 2012), 227.

¹⁰ Barnes, *Ibid*, 204.

b) It seems to be assumed that denominational religious education cannot achieve the goals of tolerance and respect for people of differing religious and other stances for living.

There is no evidence provided for either of these assumptions. Catholic religious education also seeks to achieve the goals of respect, tolerance, inclusion, elimination of prejudice, racism and discrimination, and social justice. Most of the specific aims for the proposed ERBE programme (pages 13-14 of the consultation paper) are amply covered in the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015)* (hereafter CPPREC). The way in which many of the key themes of the NCCA document already form part of CPPREC are discussed below.

1. **Sensitising to personal relations is at the heart of the CPPREC.** Children are taught about their dignity as children of God and of the dignity of all persons created by God. They are taught that to be a person is to be a person-in-relationship. This fundamental understanding underpins the entire educational process in Catholic schools. It underpins teaching for tolerance and respect as well as the call to engage in dialogue with those who have different beliefs and life stances to my own (CPPREC, p. 17).

The CPPREC requires that programmes and resources developed to support the Religious Education curriculum “will reflect social and cultural diversity within the school and within society as a whole. They will provide positive images of religious and ethnic groups, gender and disability” (CPPREC, p. 21). Further, the curriculum states that “the connections between racism and religious prejudice will be explored where appropriate. Pupils will be educated, in accordance with gospel values, for good community relations, for respect, for understanding, and for social justice” (CPPREC, p. 22).

2. The CPPREC aims to help children to **have a strong sense of social justice and to contribute to the common good.** Children in Catholic schools will be invited to see themselves as having an ethical call to serve one another, regardless of the person’s culture, religion or gender. The main areas of the CPPREC which underpin Catholic teaching for the common good include development and respect for the environment, the Christian option for the poor, the universal destination of earthly goods, fundamental human rights, peacemaking and reconciliation. Through the CPPREC, Children are invited to get involved in practical activities associated with Christian charity, stewardship of creation and social justice, so that they grow in moral awareness and authentic Christian concern for the poor, for human equality and the integrity of creation.

Catholic schools put a particular emphasis on education for faith that does justice and for peace through justice. Children are invited to study justice issues in the local community such as care of the aged, the homeless, equality issues, poverty, consumerism and the environment. They are also invited to study people and organisations which work for peace and justice in the world (e.g. Trócaire, Red Cross, Catholic Commission for Justice, Peace and Ecology, International Women’s Day, Christian non-violence movement, Children Helping Children). Through the CPPREC children are invited to get involved in practical activities associated with Christian charity, stewardship of creation and social justice, so that they grow in moral awareness and

authentic Christian concern for the poor, for human equality and the integrity of creation. The CPPREC incorporates a development education approach. Through this approach, children are introduced to the concepts of solidarity, the option for the poor, compassion, generosity, inclusion, empathy and responsibility.

3. **Children in Catholic schools are taught about human rights.** The ethics of Catholic Christianity has a strong tradition of insisting that there are universal and binding moral principles which can be known by human reason, unaided by revelation. Therefore, Catholic educators will be to the forefront in teaching how people of differing religious and non-religious backgrounds can come together in discerning universal ethical principles which can be agreed upon by all. In the Catholic school children are taught that the discourse of human rights is an important language through which Catholics can converse with others in society about the notion of the human dignity of every person, respect for human freedom, the relationship between human freedom and the common good and the need for co-operation between communities in our response to suffering and injustice in the world. Human rights education is integral to the CPPREC (discrete teaching on human rights on an abstract level is found at level 4 p. 127, but the attitudinal and conceptual underpinnings for rights education are found at all levels). Opportunities to highlight shared values and commitments will be taken where possible, e.g. the shared commitment of faith communities to work for justice, to build up local communities, to protect the environment locally, nationally and internationally.

4. Through the CPPREC, children are taught that their Christian faith calls them **to profound respect for and dialogue with people of other religions and beliefs.** In the Catholic primary school, children can lay the foundations for understanding the place of religious and philosophical beliefs and practices in human life by learning to appreciate their importance in the lives of people in their own families, schools and communities. They are taught how to express their own faith in the presence of others and how to respect the expression of faith and/or belief on the part of others. They are helped to develop an understanding of how religious beliefs can lead to ethical behaviour and of how people of belief can work together to create a better world (CPPREC, p. 17).

In the Catholic school, children are taught that Christians who take their own **religious freedom** seriously are called to an even more conscientious respect for the religious freedom of others. The CPPREC teaches that Catholics are called by God to respect the beliefs of others, to respect religious freedom, and to honour differences. Children are also taught that the Church reproves discrimination against people on the basis of race, colour or religion and that Catholics are called to go even further in extending “respect and love” to those who think or act differently than they do in religious matters (CPPREC, pp. 69, 88, 112-113).

The CPPREC includes specific **skills of inter-religious literacy** which will enable children to be able to speak the public language of religion, to comprehend and appreciate the place of religious and philosophical beliefs and practices in human life, to develop powers of empathy for and sensitivity towards people of other religions and cultures, to explore the beliefs and practices of other world religions, to enter into dialogue with people of other religions and beliefs and to foster awareness of shared values such as justice, peace, solidarity, tolerance, the dignity of the human person and freedom (CPPREC, pp.37, 69, 88, 112-113).

An example of a concept from level 3 of the CPPREC is 'Catholics are called by God to respect the beliefs of others, to respect religious freedom, to honour difference and to work for unity' (CPPREC, p. 88). Examples of concepts from level 4 are: 'Respect and love ought to be extended to those who think or act differently than we do in religious matters' and 'The Church reproves discrimination against people on the basis of race, colour or religion' (CPPREC, p. 112).

5. One of the strands of the CPPREC is dedicated to **moral and ethical education**. Here children are supported in developing and reflecting upon their values and their capacity for moral judgement (CPPREC, PP. 61-62, 78-80, 100-102, 126-130). Moral education aims to develop the skill of making moral decisions with an informed conscience (CPPREC, p. 27). Furthermore, children are encouraged to think critically and evaluate their own and other's views in a reasoned and informed manner (CPPREC, p. 17). Some of the notable virtues, values and attitudes which the curriculum promotes include "non-violence, justice, interdependence, respect for God, self and others, fair-mindedness, integrity, enquiry and critical thought, social awareness and moral responsibility, confidence in one's own religious identity while valuing difference and diversity" (CPPREC, p 22). The curriculum explicitly includes the requirement that children are invited to engage with 'stories that encourage an awareness of others and respect for diversity and difference' and stories that convey Christian moral values such as 'welcoming the stranger, and 'care of the earth' (*Moral Strand, level 1 p. 62*).

6. **Teaching respect for the environment is an integral part of the CPPREC at every level.** It is important to note however that in the Catholic school, ecological respect and concern are rooted in a scripturally-based theology of creation and related ethical considerations. Environmental education in Catholic schools cannot be divorced from the Christian world-view of the school. For Christians, God creates and gives us the gift of creation to care for and celebrate, and the Christian hope for the final renewal of all creation at the end of time encourages our commitment to cultivate and care for the earth (CPPREC, p. 24).

Specific aims and learning outcomes from the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015)* that are directly related to the NCCA goals of awareness, tolerance, respect for and celebration of the beliefs and values of others are listed below.

That the children should be enabled to:

Become aware of, value and respect the cultural and religious identities of self and other (*Christian Faith Strand, Level 1, p. 52*).

Understand and appreciate difference and diversity and value and respect people with particular abilities and needs (*Moral Strand, level1, p. 61*).

Respect and respond to difference and diversity among peers (*Moral Strand, level 2, p. 78*).

Develop a growing awareness of diversity in beliefs (*Christian Faith Strand, level 2, p. 66*).

Identify his/her own religious identity and religious and/or cultural identity of others (*Christian Faith Strand, level 2, p. 66*).

Identify Christian and other faith communities in his/her locality (*Christian Faith Strand, level 2, p. 66*).

Listen to and discuss stories about children in a Christian or other faith community (*Christian Faith Strand, level 2, p. 66*).

Develop respect for the views, feelings and possession of others, in their own community and in other communities (*Moral Strand, level 2, p. 78*).

Begin to explore other Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities, developing respect for how they worship (*Moral Strand, level, p. 78*).

Begin to distinguish between a religious and non-religious worldview, showing sensitivity and respect for people who hold beliefs different from their own (*Christian Faith Strand, level 3, p. 84*).

Discuss the importance of religious or philosophical beliefs in the lives of people in his/her community (*Christian Faith Strand, level 3, p. 84*).

Investigate the religious practice of children in other Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities in Ireland and relating it to his/her own religious practice (*Christian Faith Strand, level 3, p. 84*).

Practice effective interpersonal skills in order to relate to others in peaceful, tolerant, and non-discriminatory ways (*Moral Strand, level 3, p. 100*).

Develop an understanding of the importance of ecumenical activity and inter-religious dialogue and of how religious people work together to create a better world (*Christian Faith Strand, level 4, p. 106*).

Understand how to express their own faith in the presence of others and to respect the expression of faith and/or belief on the part of others (*Christian Faith Strand, level 4, p. 106*).

Develop respect for family and community values in other religious traditions (*Christian Faith Strand, level 4, p. 106*).

Develop knowledge and appropriate vocabulary for the beliefs, holy people, writings and celebrations of local Christian communities and the Jewish and Muslim communities in Ireland. (*Christian Faith Strand, level 4, p. 106*).

Research one Christian and one other religious faith community (*Christian Faith Strand, level 4, p. 106*).

Investigate ways of respecting and learning about and from people who adhere to other religions or stances for living in Ireland (*Christian Faith Strand, level 4, p. 106*).

Engage in ecumenical and interfaith activities (*Christian Faith Strand, level 4, p. 106*).

Specific aims and learning outcomes from the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015)* that directly relate to the NCCA aims in the area of Ethical Education include:

That the children should be enabled to:

Show respect towards self and others (*Moral Strand: level1, p. 61*).

Develop their conscience (*Moral Strand: level1, p. 61*).

Develop a positive awareness of the value of self, of their gender, of their bodies and of the importance of their own well-being (*Moral Strand, level1, p. 61*).

Develop their concern for others, for animals and for the natural environment (moral awareness, ecological awareness; mission and social justice orientation (*Moral Strand, level1, p. 61*).

Reflect on their emotions, decisions and actions and on those of characters in stories (moral agency, critical moral orientation, emotional development; empathy; moral sensitivity) (*Moral Strand, level1, p. 61*).

Develop an understanding of rules and of right and wrong behaviour (*Moral Strand, level1, p. 61*).

Follow rules and respect legitimate authority, make choices and develop autonomy (*Moral Strand, level1, p. 61*).

Examine the effects of words and actions and their reciprocal implications (*Moral Strand, level1, p. 61*).

Identify, debate, resolve and evaluate moral dilemmas in life, in story and other texts (Moral sensitivity, moral reasoning) (*Moral Strand, level1, p. 61*).

Explore and respect the environment (*Moral Strand, level1, p. 61*).

Engage in moral discussion and debate using arguments (conversational virtues) (*Moral Strand, level1, p. 61*).

Develop their understanding of objective morality by reflecting on the reasons for moral precepts, rules and actions (*Moral Strand, level 2 p. 78*).

Develop a sense of interdependence, of justice and of fairness as reciprocity (*Moral Strand, level 2 p. 78*).

Understand that they are accountable for their decisions and responsible for their words and actions (moral agency) (*Moral Strand, level 2 p. 78*).

Reflect on their freedom to make choices and the relationship between choice and consequence (freedom of choice and human responsibility; agency, self-reflection; moral judgement) (*Moral Strand, level 2 p. 78*).

Explore their responsibility to care for and preserve the local environment (*Moral Strand, level 2 p. 78*).

Identify ways of caring for creation (*Moral Strand, level 2 p. 78*).

Justify moral choices made (moral agency, critical moral orientation) (*Moral Strand, level 2 p. 78*).

Develop their understanding of freedom of choice, sin, moral judgement and human responsibility (critical moral orientation, development of conscience) (*Moral Strand, level 3 p. 100*).

Begin to develop an ethic that respects, defends, and promotes the rights and wellbeing of every person regardless of gender, race, social status, personal achievement or social contribution (justice orientation) (*Moral Strand, level 3, p. 100*).

Continue to develop an ecological ethic (*Moral Strand, level 3, p. 100*).

Develop an awareness of social justice, ecological justice, universal solidarity and responsibility (*Moral Strand, Level 4, p. 126*).

Develop strategies to promote a more just society and world (moral agency and imagination). (*Moral Strand, Level 4, p. 126*).

Justify moral choices made (moral agency, critical moral orientation) (*Moral Strand; level 2, p. 78*).

C: NCCA Proposal: a denial of real pluralism in Irish Primary Religious Education

The NCCA proposal seems to assume that active-pluralist non-confessional religious education is the only way the goals of tolerance, inclusion and social justice can be achieved in Irish society. As Terrence Merrigan has pointed out, the danger inherent in this idea is that a subtle shift has occurred from (epistemological) pluralism as an acceptance of the right to exist of differing religions, beliefs and life stances (which no sensible person disagrees with), to an ideological pluralism that has, as its ultimate goal, the neutralisation of all real difference by the imposition of one hegemonic understanding of truth: the truth of pluralistic relativism.¹¹ Any *real* respect for pluralism in a liberal democratic society must take plurality seriously, acknowledging clear

¹¹ See Terrence Merrigan, 'Religion, Education and the Appeal to Plurality: Theological Considerations on the Contemporary European Context', in Gareth Byrne and Patricia Kieran eds., *Toward Mutual Ground: Pluralism, Religious Education and Diversity in Irish Schools*, (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2013), pp 57-68.

differences between religions and world-views, recognising that respect for pluralism is possible while being committed to a particular religious tradition or other stance for living. Indeed, those who are most committed to their own tradition of conviction may be best placed to dialogue with those who are equally committed to their own life stance.

The irony in the proposed NCCA approach is that all forms of conviction are accommodated but not the (religious) form that bases its teachings on revelation, that considers those teachings to be true and to have universal application and that inspires followers of that religion to seek to build a community in faithfulness to these teachings. Real pluralism would require that the NCCA provides a set of *guidelines* in the area of ERB that would allow for denominational, multi-denominational and non-denominational schools to enable children to gain an understanding of diversity and to challenge any prejudice, intolerance and discrimination that actually exists. These guidelines should enable schools to continue to respect the philosophical and religious traditions on which their approaches to religious education are founded, traditions that are based on incommensurable metaphysical positions.

D: The proposal to develop a State Curriculum in Ethics

There are so many unanswered questions about the approach to ethics suggested in the NCCA consultation paper that it is almost impossible to comment on the proposal. A large number of crucial questions remain unanswered in the paper: Which ethical frameworks are going to be used? What will the philosophical underpinnings of these frameworks be? What sources are children going to be invited to use for the making of ethical decisions? Is a secular liberal ethical framework to be imposed on children in denominational schools in clear violation of the right of their parents to choose a distinctive type of ethical education for their children?

From a Catholic perspective the following key points should be noted by the NCCA. In the Catholic school ethics are taught in the context of the religious formation of the person as it is believed that ethics cannot be separated out from the person's religious life.¹² Therefore, religious education has an *essential* role in the moral education of students. Catholic moral education is sustained by the Christian narrative that provides norms, ideals and a sense of meaning, purpose and hope. This narrative is offered to children as a source of illumination and motivation for their moral lives. So, for example, while Catholic schools will share a commitment to social justice with other schools, this commitment is based on a vision of justice and social transformation that goes beyond human effort and rests on God's promise of justice for the victims of history. There is one

¹² This would be true of other religions too. It is noteworthy that research on the spirituality of children has shown that there is a natural overlap between the moral life and the religious life of young children, as is the case with grown-ups (e.g Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992). To artificially sever the two domains would be a grave injustice to religious children whose parents have chosen a faith-based ethical education for their children.

crucial difference between secular ethics and Christian ethics: Christians believe that they need God's help to live ethically; the person of secular conviction does not.

I'm guessing that whatever approach is adopted by the NCCA, it will approach morality as something which relies on the sole powers of human nature, particularly reason, and that the development of autonomy and of children's own powers of rational decision-making will take centre stage. This would be perfectly acceptable in a secular non-denominational State school. However, in a Catholic school, children are taught about the objective reality of the moral law in general and they are aided in forming their consciences on the specific Christian moral precepts, as affirmed by Church teaching. To force Catholic children to adopt a secular ethical framework for their lives would be clear violation of their human rights.

Note on the Author: Anne Hession M.Ed, C. A. E.S is a lecturer in religious education at St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin. She was the writer and editor, for the Irish Episcopal Conference, of the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (2015). Her most recent publication is *Catholic Primary Religious Education in a Pluralist Environment*, Dublin: Veritas, 2015.



Home

Contributor

Anne Marie Kavanagh, Niamh McGuirk

St. Patrick's College
Drumcondra,
Dublin 9,
31/03/2016 To whom it may concern,

We would like to commend NCCA on the work evidenced in the *Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper*. In particular, we welcome that the curriculum will be inclusive of all children and will be reflective of the varying manifestations of diversity evident in Irish society. The consultation paper clearly foregrounds the needs, rights and wellbeing of all children so that they can be afforded equal status within the Irish primary school system. We believe that the proposed curriculum will foster in children (and teachers alike) a respectful acceptance of the right to hold particular beliefs, attitudes and worldviews. We fully support the proposal that the curriculum will be underpinned by a critical, pluralist and inquiry-based epistemology. We agree that children should be encouraged to think critically, to question, and to recognise and reflect on multiple perspectives and multiple interpretations of reality. We believe that reflecting upon the factors which influence their own and other people's worldviews will enable children to gain a deeper understanding of themselves, their peers and members of the wider community. It will also encourage an acceptance of and respect for the rights of others to hold divergent and opposing views. The primary classroom should be a space where all voices are welcomed, listened to and engaged with, and where children are encouraged to apply the skills of critical reflection and critical judgement. We believe that an ERB and Ethics curriculum can facilitate the creation of this space.

Curriculum

We advocate that ERB and Ethics should be a distinct curriculum. We oppose the notion that it would exist as a framework only, as this runs the risk of concepts not being taught in an explicit way. We believe the curriculum should include ERB and Ethics as having both discrete and integrated components as is proposed in the consultation paper. To address concerns about time-allocation and curriculum overload, it is imperative to maximise the opportunities for linkage and integration. It is essential that linkage and integration opportunities are explicitly named, with clear identification of how aims and objectives from the ERB and Ethics curriculum relate and connect to aims and objectives from specific strands and strand units in other curricular areas. A distinct feature of ethics education is the

emphasis placed on critical thinking and enabling children to explore their own and others' value systems through respectful dialogue. Maintaining ERB and Ethics as a distinct curriculum would protect this vital aspect of ethics education. Furthermore, we advocate an equal weighting be given to ERB and Ethics.

The proposed themes for the new Ethics curriculum¹ suggest that the themes named for 3rd-6th class are unsuitable for children below 3rd class. Children in the younger classes should also have the opportunity to explore concepts such as citizenship, and equality and justice in an age and stage appropriate manner. In line with the rest of the primary school curriculum, we believe that it is possible for the Ethics curriculum to have a spiral approach; offering overarching themes from JI-6th with age-appropriate foci and content.

Concerns

The ERB and Ethics consultation paper identifies the need to enable children to 'develop empathy and positive attitudes toward different cultural, racial, and ethnic groups in an increasingly pluralistic environment'². As we live in a diverse and democratic society, we concur that it is necessary to enable children to develop empathy and positive attitudes towards difference. However, we argue that children also need to be enabled to recognise and resist stereotypes, prejudice, racism and religious discrimination so that they are empowered to take action as proactive citizens. We believe the proposed curriculum should place more emphasis on empowering children to take action to promote equality and resist inequality.

We advocate an ERB and Ethics curriculum 'grounded in a pluralist and values education perspective'³. We have concerns about the practical implementation of the curriculum for teachers and schools in multi-denominational, equality-based and denominational contexts. For multi-denominational and equality-based schools, consideration needs to be given to how the proposed ERB and Ethics curriculum sits alongside the ethical curricula *in situ*.

¹ NCCA, 2015, p. 20

² NCCA, 2015, p. 20

³ NCCA, 2015, p. 29

For denominational schools, we recognise the difficulty that may arise for some teachers as they aim to shift their position from a teacher of faith formation to a teacher of ERB from a pluralist perspective. The *Toledo Guiding Principles* remind us that ‘teaching about religions and beliefs should be sensitive, balanced, inclusive, non-doctrinal, impartial, and based on human rights principles relating to freedom of religion or belief’⁴. It is relevant to consider how inadvertently teaching ERB and Ethics content from a particular faith perspective could result in the mis-recognition and/or non-recognition of the belief systems and worldviews of some children and parents in a school community. It could also result in the ‘othering’ of minority belief systems within schools. Consideration needs to be given to the language used to teach and discuss ERB and to how ERB is presented in discrete lessons and in the class in general.

In an ERB and Ethics curriculum, a strong emphasis should be placed on diversity in society and we believe that the curriculum should include aims that will enable children to form relationships with and respect people from all racial, ethnic social, cultural and religious groups. In this regard, further emphasis needs to be given to the benefits of cultivating effective relationships and partnerships between parents (from majority and minority ethnic/religious groups) and teachers/schools. A whole school approach to diversity and inclusion will foster a sense of belonging for children and parents and will support community building.

Although the content of the curriculum should, as proposed, reflect the major theist and non-theist belief systems, there should also be space for teachers and schools to divert from this content if appropriate. This is particularly relevant in cases where there may be a need for teachers and schools to respond to the various belief systems that may be represented within the school community but are not included in the curriculum.

We encourage the curriculum to be as explicit as possible. There are a small number of grey areas that need further explanation or clarification. These include:

- On a number of occasions, the consultation paper refers to ‘the common good’. People can have different interpretations of what attitudes, dispositions, behaviours and actions are considered as appropriate or acceptable in achieving ‘the common good’. It is important that this concept is problematized, as it can be loaded. What does this concept mean? What is considered ‘the common good’; whose perception of ‘the common good’ is considered right or valued?

⁴ ODIHR, 2007, p. 40

- The consultation paper encourages the ‘development of skills and dispositions required to live and contribute in a positive way to a diverse society’⁵. An example of the types of skills and dispositions should be listed or an example of what this might look like in practice should be provided.
- The consultation paper suggests that the children will ‘debate, investigate, imagine, predict, record and critically analyse ethical tensions that arise from living in a diverse society’⁶. What kind(s) of ethical tensions are referred to here?
- There are some notable omissions that perhaps would have been included in a later stage of the curriculum development process. However, we believe it is relevant to name such concepts to ensure their inclusion in an explicit way; Children’s Rights, the Nine Grounds of Discrimination, and identity-based bullying (in particular, homophobic and transphobic bullying).

Pre-service, in-service and Continuous Professional Development

We acknowledge that classrooms and schools are busy places and that teachers are busy people. We also acknowledge the significant pressures that teachers face when trying to implement an overloaded curriculum.

In relation to a new ERB and Ethics curriculum, we support its delivery in a manner consistent with the *Toledo Guiding Principles* which implies a form of teaching that is ‘objective, critical and pluralist’⁷. We wish to highlight the importance of effective professional development that would support teachers in implementing such teaching. We concur with NCCA’s assertion that teachers do not need to be experts to deliver new content about ERB and Ethics. Nonetheless, care needs to be taken to prevent oversimplification of the complexities of people’s belief systems and experiences. In relation to this, we would like to raise a number of considerations:

- Teacher reflexivity: As is highlighted in the consultation paper, ‘reflexivity and selfawareness requires active and in-depth reflection’⁸ and that ‘no subject or teaching is value free’⁹. Opportunities should be made available for teachers to reflect on and

⁵ NCCA, 2015, p. 10

⁶ NCCA, 2015, p. 25

⁷ ODIHR, 2007, pp. 68, 88, 104

⁸ NCCA, 2015, p. 11

⁹ NCCA, 2015, p. 22

question their own assumptions, prejudices and bias so that the teaching of ERB and Ethics can be as neutral as possible.

- Teaching approach: We advocate the implementation of Jackson's (2006) interpretive approach to support the teaching of ERB. Opportunities should be made available to support teachers in implement this approach in line with what is considered informed practice in this area. For example, how do teachers deliver lessons in a sensitive way which include the lived experiences of children? How do teachers avoid reinforcing generalisations of the various belief systems? There is a need to consider 'religions as dynamic and changing, and as a series of relationships rather than rigid and homogeneous systems of belief'¹⁰.
- Methodologies:
 - The consultation paper rightly advocates the development of children's critical thinking skills. Including Socratic questioning¹¹ as a methodology will facilitate critical thinking. Opportunities should be made available for teachers to develop their skills in this technique so that they can create a classroom culture that promotes active, creative, critical, and reflective thinking.
 - The consultation paper indicates that dialogue will be a feature of the new curriculum. We believe that assisting children in developing the skills necessary for effective dialogue is essential and part of this process involves encouraging children to ask as many questions as possible. Elder and Paul (1998) argue that children are only really thinking and learning when they are asking questions themselves. They state 'students need questions to turn on their intellectual engines, and they must themselves generate questions from our questions to get their thinking to go somewhere'¹². An inquiry approach to ERB and Ethics, (as is proposed by the consultation paper) will facilitate the development of these skills.
- Ethical tensions: The consultation paper suggests that ethical tensions arise from living in a diverse society¹³. Providing information and guidance on the kind(s) of ethical tensions that may arise will support schools and teachers in navigating discussions in these areas. For example, how should teachers and schools respond to the tensions that may arise when presenting children (and parents) with multiple interpretations of reality?

¹⁰ Jackson, 2006, p. 411

¹¹ See Fisher, 2008; Elder & Paul, 2007; Paul & Elder, 2007, 2008

¹² Elder & Paul, 1998, p. 297

¹³ NCCA, 2015, p. 25

- Appropriate language: The consultation paper highlights the need for schools, teachers and children to use ‘accurate language for human differences’¹⁴. Opportunities should be made available for teachers to discuss appropriate and inappropriate terminology so that ‘accurate language’ can be identified and promoted during the roll-out phase of the curriculum.

Concluding comments

We believe that this curriculum is an important step towards respecting children’s right to freedom from discrimination, and their right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion¹⁵. An ERB and Ethics curriculum underpinned by critical, pluralist and inquirybased epistemology has the potential to have a transformative effect. It can enable children not only to identify and challenge negative stereotypes but it could also empower children to resist the reproduction of stereotypes and motivate them to take action to challenge inequality and to promote equality. We welcome the introduction of an ERB and Ethics curriculum that acknowledges that ‘learning about and understanding the lives, values and traditions of friends, classmates, and members of the wider community is an important aspect of a child’s education in order to prepare them to live [and be a proactive citizen] in a democratic society’¹⁶.

Kind regards,

Anne Marie Kavanagh and Niamh McGuirk
Lecturers in Ethical and Intercultural Education

References

¹⁴ NCCA, 2015, p. 12

¹⁵ Council of Europe, (1950)

¹⁶ NCCA, 2015, p. 9

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Home

Contributor

Anne O' Brien

Domini
Carrigatohar
Nough
Co. Tipperary

Domini Carrigatohar
Nough Co. Tipperary



Dear Colleagues,

Having recently read the Proclamation of the Provisional Government written one hundred years ago in 1916, I was inspired with pride and with the realisation of how long we have struggled with and resisted the foreign invader of our country. That foreign people and government took our land, our language, our rights to be educated and our right to our religious faith and beliefs. In the document afore mentioned the Irish provisional government Uelaims our entitlement to and guarantees our rights as an Irish nation to RELIGIOUS AND CIVIL LIBERTY, equal rights and equal opportunities..... oblivious of the degradation imposed and fostered by that alien government.

Please note that Religious liberty was first to be guaranteed. With pride and admiration I recall our historical past how we held on to our religious faith and beliefs and practices availing of Mass in hidden places with a "look-out" watching for the alien troops coming to attack the congregation attending the Mass, the hiding the of visiting priest, and all through those times maintaining the teaching of "Jesus Christ." They knocked our monasteries took our churches, and still we kept our religious beliefs in our hearts and minds passing them to the generations of the future.

We, today, own our country the Republic of Ireland we own our language, our rights to an education our civil liberties and our religious freedom. We own our faith and beliefs since the 4th -5th century.

Now today 2015-2016 we are faced with a new power not alien but of our own country who wish to dilute the time allocated to religious education perhaps by half, to facilitate the knowledge of the other major religions and cultures in the time allocated to the instruction of our own faith. Why does

the N.C.C.A. WANT TO DENY OUR NATI^{ONS} CHILDREN 30 minutes a school day to learn about their catholic faith. Education comes from the latin E-DUCO which means to lead out the whole person, to educate means to impart knowledge to cultivate the moral intellectual spiritual and physical abilities of the whole person, if the child has a true ethical grounding and understanding of christian ethics and beliefs it has respect, love=sharing and caring, compassion, peace in its heart mind and body, justice ,mercy, forgiveness, integrity, inclusion, and is able to engage with people and people of all beliefs colour and culture

The N.C.C.A. has presented this idea as a noble act for inclusion of "foreign" people into our societies, BUT this proposal is a very deeply intellectual philosophical topic way above the comprehension ,the understanding of young children in primary school. May I suggest that a mild introduction could be included at geography time when learning about middle eastern countries or at civics instruction or if at English time the opportunity arose to speak on the religious beliefs culture and traditions of the people in those countries.

Here I am going to ask a question. How does the N.C.C.A. Propose to speak on how Islam treats its women and children. Why have women such limited rights if any? Why do women have to cover themselves from head to toe and have other constraints on their rights? How do they propose to speak on the rights in other major religions? Do they teach about Christianity in their countries?

Away from that and on to another. Today we have a new foreign power more invasive and damaging than any army. Its name? Its name is Mammon with a sub-division named "Secularism" It comes through the visual media. It is with us with the flick of a switch. We know that what we see and

watch with the eyes lodges in the mind and soul unless it is filtered, cast out as evil, kept as good.

What is Good? What is evil?

A brief definition is, Good is lawful and right for all that compiles the human person. Evil is unlawful mocking stomping on and transgressing that which is good for the human person. Mammon appears to the youth mainly with a smile. It appeals to the youth, giving them pop idols, pop stars, sports people, fashion designers, drugs, alcohol pornography, et cetera. If the child has a solid healthy grounding it should be able to select that which is good.

How is this done? Through parental example and guidance. If the baby-child is treated with kindness gentleness love and patience and respect and on through its primary schooling into its adolescent years it will be a person with discretion all to be had through christian morals and ethics.

In the multi denominational schools the project is different. With this last thought I will finish.

When in Rome do as Rome does. True or false?

The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world?

True or false?

Thank you for reading my thoughts and judgements.

I remain,

Anne O'Brien, a retired national school teacher.

Anne O'Brien



Home

Contributor

Anonymous

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS



Respondent's details:

Name:	
Position (if applicable):	Múinteoir + Ceismitheoir
Organisation (if applicable):	
Address:	
Telephone:	
Email:	
Date:	7/3/16

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAQ-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35
Flowerhill Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to ncsa@ncsa.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- ① The proposed scope of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- ② The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- ③ The proposed features for the curriculum
- ④ Other aspects you would like to see included.

- ① Scope of E, R & E already covered in new R.E. "Grow in Love" Programme and part in S.P.B.E
- ② Contribution It will potentially confuse children. On the one hand children are given a belief in a God/Faith and E.R.E has the notion of God, which is another faith (belief). → Pluralism.
- ③ Features are already well covered in schools, especially in the current R.E. programmes and under S.P.B.E in curriculum.
- ④ Aspects all already covered. See ①, ②, ③ above.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- ① Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- ② Contribution to school communities
- ③ Contribution to the role of teachers

Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

- ① Negative to the experience of children/students as it is taking from existing beliefs, ie that there is an implication in E.R.A. that existing beliefs are falling short.
- ② Schools may end up polarized by E.R.A. and see it as imposed/forced on them by bureaucracy or by people who do not appreciate their religious values/attitudes.
- ③ Understanding teachers, E.R.A. shows lack of understanding of the inclusive way the current curriculum works. Teachers already have overloaded curriculum and are overburdened to cope.

2. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

- ① Why bother do what is already being done.
- ② No need to re invent the wheel, which is already in good working condition. If it is o'k broken don't fix it.
- ③ Who is pushing E.R.B. And why now?



Home

Contributor

**Association of Trustees of Catholic
Schools**



To whom it may concern,

Please find a written submission made by the Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS) to the NCCA ERB and Ethics consultation process enclosed.

Thank you for taking the time to read our response to the proposed ERB and Ethics curriculum as outlined in the NCCA consultation paper.

Yours Sincerely,

Sr Marie Celine Clegg (Chairperson)

Dr Ellis Humphreys (Hon. Secretary)

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS)
Position (if applicable)	
Organisation (if applicable)	
Address	New House, St Patrick's College, Maynooth, Co. Kildare Contact Person: Mr David Normandy
Telephone	01-5063162
Email	info@atcs.ie
Date	29 th March 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS) Submission to NCCA ERB and Ethics Consultation Process

Introduction

ATCS is the 'Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools'. This association represents members who comprise the Trust Bodies, Dioceses, Orders and Congregations who operate schools under their respective Trusteeship in the Republic of Ireland. In this submission paper,¹ ATCS addresses the following: (1) Philosophical and Pedagogical approach taken by the proposed curriculum and (2) Trustee and Patron Legal Concerns.

1. Philosophical and Pedagogical approach taken by the proposed curriculum

Having read the NCCA consultation paper, ATCS believes that there are criticisms relating to the philosophical foundations underpinning the pedagogical approach utilised by the proposed ERB and Ethics programme which merit attention. In particular, ATCS takes issue with the approach taken by the proposed curriculum to religious and philosophical truth claims. We believe that problems emerge when the approach taken by the proposed curriculum is considered within the context of the Catholic vision of education which is rooted in its 'Christian concept of life centred on Jesus Christ, he is the One who unites people, gives meaning to human life, and is the model which the Catholic school offers to its pupils.'² The proposed curriculum's understanding of religious truth develops from a secular postmodern worldview. The ontological foundation of such a worldview is fundamentally incompatible with that of the Catholic Christian worldview. This incompatibility finds ample expression in the approach taken by the proposed curriculum to 'objectivity' and 'pluralism' which underpins its understanding of the value of religious truth claims.

While the NCCA consultation paper acknowledges that "no subject or teaching is value free" (pp.22), the paper suggests that the proposed curriculum will make no claim about the value of religious or philosophical truth (pp.6, 11). However, the proposed ERB component views the various religious and philosophical truth claims under discussion as being of equal truth value. Such a stance presents a substantial form of neutrality. Therefore, it becomes clear that the approach taken by the proposed curriculum makes a particular value judgment or claim

¹ See Appendix for a critique of the NCCA survey instrument, the insights of which led ATCS to make a 'written' submission.

² Irish Episcopal Conference, *Catholic Primary and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (Dublin: Veritas, 2015), 12.

about religious truth, one that is agnostic in character. From this standpoint, ATCS believes the approach of the proposed curriculum is not neutral in relation to religious and philosophical truth precisely because it makes a specific claim about ultimate truth, i.e. that all religious and philosophical truth claims are of equal truth value.³

ATCS argues that the approach taken by the proposed curriculum is incompatible with a Catholic pedagogical approach to religious education. The pedagogical approach of the proposed curriculum is inquiry-based and constructivist which begins from a sceptical firm of reason. Contrary to such an approach, a Catholic pedagogical approach to religious education develops from realist epistemologies, which begins with experience, revelation and belief. While constructivism is utilised within a Catholic pedagogical approach, it is employed after the primary communication of religious truth. This approach develops from the fact that Christianity is a revealed religion and the value of the Truth revealed is not solely subjective in character, that is to say, it is not constructed internally, rather, it has an inherently objective character as the Truth revealed to the human person is communicated by God. This understanding of religious Truth runs contrary to the approach taken by the proposed curriculum.

The consultation paper makes clear that the proposed curriculum presents religious truth as a social construction. From this standpoint, meaning and truth become exclusively dependent on the context in which they are encountered. Such a perspective emphasises the human subject as the most significant determinant of context, a context which he/she interprets from his/her own individual perspective.⁴ However, such an approach does not fairly or correctly represent religion and what it means to be religious because it understands religious identity as the holding of beliefs interpreted by individuals. ATCS believes that the problem with this approach is two-fold: (1) it eradicates any space for an understanding of the transcendental meaning in religion, the normativity of religious beliefs, the sense of community that is engendered by religion, the emotional and ritual aspects of religion (to name but a few aspects) and (2) it impodes on the right of the child to religious freedom by calling on the child to negate their right to claim the universal application and validity of their Catholic

³ Liam O'Brien, *Materialism in Religious Education: Deconstructing Teaching and Learning* (Barnsley, London, 2013), 134.

⁴ L. Philip Barnes, *Education, Religion and Diversity: Developing A New Model of Religious Education* (Routledge, London, 2014), 101.

beliefs.⁵ This point finds much support when one gives further consideration to the consultation paper approach.

The consultation paper emphasises the importance of using a pluralist approach to religious education. The consultation paper states that "Pluralism places value on a range of views rather than a single approach or method of interpretation of life" (pp.20). Such an approach to religious education is relativistic and fails to respect or engage with religious difference in any significant way because it presents all religious and philosophical truth claims as being equal in value. However, "genuine pluralism should not require of children that they relinquish their particular religious, spiritual or ethical commitments. It should allow them to be distinctly themselves in relationship to others and be clear about their differences from others while acknowledging their similarities."⁶ Therefore, the approach taken by the proposed curriculum fails to provide a sufficient base or foundation for effective inter-religious or inter-cultural dialogue because it presents an understanding of the value of religious and philosophical truth claims that does not correlate with the lived reality of a person who is living out the Catholic faith.

The relativist approach to religious education outlined above is clearly evident when one observes the emphasis placed by the proposed curriculum on the primacy of children's own expression and naming of their beliefs. ATCS takes issue with such an approach as it presupposes that children, who are at such an early stage in their development, possess a coherent conception of their beliefs.⁷ This pedagogical process places significant emphasis on the child's voice. Such authority is not given to the child's voice in any other subject in the curriculum. While the child's voice is important, the extent to which children's views are a key determinant of pedagogy is problematic, especially within the context of religious education as "the primacy of student voice is arguably not an entirely authoritative source for the representation of the religions themselves."⁸

⁵ Sylvia Langford, 'The Right of the Child to Religious Freedom in International Law', *International Studies in Human Rights* Volume 01 (Boston: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2007), 3-17, 15-16, 245-255. See also, L.L. Mueller, 'Religious Rights of Children: A Gallery of Judicial Views' (1986) 14 *Review of Law and Social Change*, 325-351, at 327-328.

⁶ Anna Heenan, *Children's Primacy: Religious Education in a Pluralist Environment* (Dulida, Victoria, 2015), 30.

⁷ David Ekins, 'The Child's Conception of his Religious Denomination: II. The Catholic Child' (1962) 101 *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 183-191. See also, Y. Bowen, 'Redefining the Child's Right to Identity' (2014) 18(2) *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, 60-171, at 147.

⁸ Geenan, *Methodism in Religious Education: Transforming Teaching and Learning*, 133.

Furthermore, there is an inherent danger with such a pedagogical approach, that young children could be given the impression that beliefs are things which they create themselves which would infer that human beings are the source of religious beliefs and not God. This is why in a Catholic pedagogical approach Revelation is primary and the student's experience and reason are brought into dialogue with it. It is important to highlight that research has shown that "the child's reality is different than adult's."¹⁰ Educational psychologists, such as James W. Fowler, have made clear in their research that children between the ages of 5 to 12 years do not possess the level of conceptual coherency in relation to their religious or philosophical beliefs that is necessary to facilitate or enable children to constructively participate in the pedagogical approach proposed by the ERB and Ethics consultation paper.¹¹

The NCCA consultation paper implies that Catholic schools are not inclusive environments (pp.11) and that the CPPREC falls short with regard to ERB (pp.9). However, research has shown that Catholic primary schools are some of the most inclusive schools in the country with up to 52 nationalities to be found within them.¹² Research such as that presented in the document *Forum on Plurilingual and Pluricultural in the Primary Sector: Progress to Date and Future Directions*¹³ and the *Chief Inspector's Report 2010-12*¹⁴ as well as the research carried out by EERI and Educate Together¹⁵ demonstrates clearly that Catholic primary schools are leaders in social inclusion, special needs education and Traveller education. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the new *Catholic Preschool and Primary School Religious Education Curriculum* (2015) (hereafter, CPPREC) there is significant emphasis on inclusion, ERB and Ethics. ATCS argues that the NCCA's analysis reaches its conclusion about the limitations of the CPPREC's ERB discussion simply because it limits its analysis of the content of the CPPREC which relates to the broad goals of the proposed curriculum's ERB component (pp.10) to the *inter-religious learning outcomes and content in the Christian Faith strand* (pp.33-39). The consultation papers fails to recognise that many of the aims and learning outcomes from the CPPREC relate directly to the NCCA goals of awareness, tolerance, respect for and celebration of the beliefs, values and customs for living of others

¹⁰ DAVIS (1984), *The Child's Reality: Their Developmental Themes* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Erlbaum, 1978), 129.

¹¹ James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1995), 133.

¹² EERI and Educate Together, *School Sector Forum Among Primary Schools in Ireland* (2012), 30-36.

¹³ Department of Education and Skills, *Forum on Plurilingual and Pluricultural in the Primary Sector: Progress to Date and Future Directions* (Dublin, 2014), available online at www.education.gov.ie

¹⁴ Department of Education and Skills, *Chief Inspector's Report 2010-12* (Dublin, 2012), 34-34.

¹⁵ *School Sector Forum Among Primary Schools in Ireland*, 41-43.

(pp.44-46). ATCS believe that NCCA consultation paper failed to acknowledge the following content within the EHB and Ethics consultation paper:

- i. Understand and appreciate difference and diversity and value and respect people with particular abilities and needs (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 1*, pp. 61)
- ii. Respect and respond to difference and diversity among peers (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 2*, pp. 73)
- iii. Develop respect for the views, feelings and possessions of others, in their own community and in other communities (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 2*, pp.73)
- iv. Begin to explore other Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities, developing respect for how they worship (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 2*, pp. 78)
- v. Begin to distinguish between a religious and non-religious world-view, showing sensitivity and respect for people who hold beliefs different from their own (CPPREC, *Christian Strand, Level 3*, pp.84)
- vi. Practice effective interpersonal skills in order to relate to others in peaceful, tolerant, and non-discriminatory ways (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 3*, pp. 100)
- vii. Develop an understanding of the importance of ecumenical activity and inter-religious dialogue and of how religious people work together to create a better world (CPPREC, *Christian Faith Strand, Level 4*, pp. 106)

Likewise, with regard to the Ethics component of the proposed curriculum, the NCCA consultation paper fails to recognise key areas of the CPPREC (pp.44-46) which relate directly to themes within the Ethics component of the proposed curriculum such as, *Human dignity and freedom, Human rights, social justice and the common good*. ATCS believes that the following aspects, which relate specifically to the themes outlined above, were excluded from the NCCA consultation paper:

- i. Understanding their dignity and worth as created in God's image (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 1*, pp. 61)
- ii. Respect and respond to difference and diversity among peers (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 1*, pp.61)
- iii. Develop their concern for others, for animals and for the natural environment (moral awareness, ecological awareness, mission and social justice orientation) (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 1*, pp.61)

- iv. Develop empathy, a sense of justice, fairness, friendship, healthy attitudes to diversity and powermaking skills (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 1, pp.81*)
- v. Understanding and appreciate difference and diversity and value and respect people with particular abilities and needs (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 1, pp.81*)
- vi. Show respect towards self and others (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 1, pp.81*)
- vii. Respect and respond to difference and diversity among peers (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 2, pp.78*)
- viii. Develop a sense of interdependence, of justice and of fairness as reciprocity (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 2, pp.78*)
- ix. Reflect on their freedom to make choices and the relationship between choice and consequence (freedom of choice and human responsibility; agency, self-reflection, moral judgment) (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 2, pp.78*)
- x. Explore their responsibility to care for and preserve the local environment (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 2, pp.78*)
- xi. Develop their understanding of freedom of choice, sin, moral judgment and human responsibility (critical moral orientation, freedom, development of conscience) (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 3, pp.100*)
- xii. Practice effective interpersonal skills in order to relate to others in peaceful, tolerant, and non-discriminatory ways (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 3, pp.100*)
- xiii. Begin to develop an ethic that respects, defends, and promotes the rights and wellbeing of every person regardless of gender, race, social status, personal achievement or social contribution (justice orientation) (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 3, pp.100*)
- xiv. Develop an awareness of social justice, ecological justice, universal solidarity and responsibility (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 4, pp.126*)
- xv. Develop strategies to promote a more just society and world (moral agency and imagination) (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 4, pp.126*)

Catholic schools exist to educate children in Catholic religious life and in Catholic religious beliefs which are normative for them, beliefs that have been revealed by God. Therefore, the non-fidai problem outlined above (pp.3) has a direct impact on Catholic schools because Catholic beliefs have ontogenic status, a status which they possess precisely because they have been revealed by God. The proposed curriculum invites children to comprise their Catholic identity by undermining their right to claim the universal application and validity of

their beliefs by utilising a relativist approach to religious education which presumes all religious and philosophical truth claims to be of equal value. From this standpoint then, it is clear that the approach of the proposed curriculum may be suitable for use in a non-denominational school setting, but it is not suitable for Catholic schools.

2. Trustee and Patron Legal Concerns:

ATCS would also like to draw attention to a number of concerns from a legal perspective. In the following sections ATCS have sought to outline the difficulties that will be experienced in practice from breach of Constitutional rights, trustee legal right and employer/employee contractual rights. This section outlines potential conflicting rights and realises that this curriculum proposal does not address and will lead to a legal quagmire into the future for all stakeholders. These may be summarised as follows:

- 1) The NCCA wishes to introduce a new curriculum in ERH and Ethics at primary level.

Ethics is defined as including, "the formation and the protection of a personal commitment to dignity and freedom of all human beings, the importance of human rights¹¹ and responsibilities, the place of justice within society and the service of the common good".

Are the human rights which are to form part of this process the 'human rights' as defined by the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, or by the Human Rights and Equality Commission or perhaps by the United Nation Committee in Geneva?¹² There is a lack of clarity underpinning this rationale for this proposed curriculum that is not evident in the criteria set out by the NCCA.

¹¹ In the context of the Human rights of parents, please see judgement in *Campaign in Separate Church and Base Ltd v Minister for Education* (1996) Mr. Justice Costello referred to the protection afforded by Article 42 of the Constitution and stated:

"This Article entitles 'Education' to freely exercise an acknowledgement that the primary and natural education of the child is the Family and a guarantee that the State will respect the "inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual physical and social education of their children". In making this acknowledgement and in recognising that the desire of parents to pass on their religious beliefs to their children is a right which is entitled to be legally protected the Irish Constitution is by no means unique. The state - parties to the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognise Article 16 that the Family (which is declared to be the natural and fundamental group unit of society) should be protected "particularly while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children" and the State - parties undertake Article 17 to respect the liberty of parents "to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in accordance with their own convictions". The parties to the First Protocol of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms agreed that States when assuming functions in relation to education "shall respect the rights of parents to ensure such education and teaching in accordance with their own religious and philosophical convictions" (Article 2)

- 2) In regard to the Characteristic spirit, the Board of Management manages the school on behalf of the Patron, not on behalf of the Minister for Education and Skills. The Education Act (1998) places an obligation on the Board to uphold the "characteristic spirit" of the school. It is for the Patron, and through the Patron, that the Board decides what that characteristic spirit is and how it is best upheld.

The secular world view referred by the NCCA proposal is completely at odds with that of the Catholic-Christian view. The proposal suggests that children should look at religious beliefs and traditions as something to be interpreted by them and encourages children to see their religious identity or belief as just one among many others or with equal weight and validity. There is no space for the child to be formed by the experience of a specific religious identity. The approach emphasises aspects of the human condition which in themselves are of course wonderful and fulfilling but which are to be inculcated outside the context of any faith tradition. As stated earlier in this submission, the proposed curriculum is potentially suitable for a non-denominational school but inappropriate for use in a Catholic school.

It is the sincere contention of the ATCS that a faith based school cannot be required to teach a programme that is fundamentally at odds with its own world view and pedagogical approach; for the DES to do so would be an infringement of the Patron's statutory right and duty to educate in accordance with their own ethos and effectively breach the Education Act 1998.

1) The Curriculum & the Characteristic Spirit

Section 30 of the Education Act allows the Minister to set out the syllabus for each subject and the amount of instruction time to be allotted to each subject. The Minister must, however, have regard to the *characteristic spirit* of a school in exercising his or her functions under the section. In addition the Minister must allow a sufficient amount of time to cater for the teaching to uphold the *characteristic spirit* in a school. This merely recognises the Constitutional reality. The Minister must substantively take the characteristic spirit into account. Any curriculum provisions which do not, on a substantive basis, have regard to the characteristic spirit of a school are *ultra vires* the Minister. The fact that the Minister is meant to take account the *characteristic spirit* of a school seems to have been overlooked or disregarded by the NCCA in its consultation paper, as it is planned to teach fundamentally conflicting curricula by the same teachers. It is the belief of the ATCS that the course being considered by the NCCA, is in fact, beyond the powers of the Minister to enforce.

4) High and Supreme court decisions

Case law supports the view that the Constitution protects the rights of religious groups to exercise their beliefs and that the State, far from impeding those rights, should rather 'batten' them. This is evidenced in various High and Supreme Court decisions as briefly outlined in the following:

- a) Mr. Justice Walsh in giving judgment in the case of *Grove's Supermarket Limited and Another v. The Attorney General and Others* (1972), (which involved favourable treatment being afforded to kosher teachers in state-run open air otherwise prohibited areas to compensate for their closure for religious reasons on a Saturday), stated:

"It would be completely contrary to the spirit and intention of the provision of Article 44.2 to permit the government against discrimination on the ground of religious profession or belief to be made the very means of restricting or preventing the free profession or practice of religion. The primary purpose of the guarantee against discrimination is to ensure the freedom of practice of religion. Any law which by virtue of the generality of its application will by its effect restrict or prevent the free profession and practice of religion by any person or persons would be invalid having regard to the provision of the Constitution, unless it contained provisions which arose from such restriction or prevention the practice of religion of the person or persons who would otherwise be so restricted or prevented."

- b) And again:-

In *McGeehan v. Massachusetts College* (1979), Harty J., in the Supreme Court, stated:

"The constitutional provision involved here (Article 44.2) must be construed in the terms of its purpose, in preventing disabilities and discriminations on the hands of the State on the ground of religious profession. And in doing so, the primary aim of the constitutional guarantee is to give reality, independence and freedom to religion. To construe the provision literally, without due regard to its underlying objective, would lead to a sapping and debilitation of the freedom and independence given by the Constitution to the doctrinal and organisational requirements and prescriptions which are inherent in all organised religions. Far from relieving the internal disabilities and discriminations which flow from the mere existence of a particular religion, the State would in practice intensify and worsen them. For such disabilities and discriminations do not derive from the State; it cannot be said that it is the State that imposed or made them; they are part of the nature and essence of the particular religion; so that the State, in order to comply with the spirit and purpose inherent in the constitutional guarantee, may justifiably lend its weight to what may be thought to be disabilities and discriminations deriving from within a particular religion."

- 1) The Parent/Trustee legal obligations concerning the rights of parents in the matter of religious and moral formation

The Constitution is very clear about the rights of parents in regard to the education and religious formation of their children:

In the case known as *Campaign to Separate Church and State Ltd v Minister for Education* (1996) Mr. Justice Costello referred to the protections afforded by Article 42 of the Constitution and stated:

"This Article (entitled 'Education') clearly contains an acknowledgment that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family, and a guarantee that the State will respect the 'inalienable right and duty of parents in private, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education, of their children'. In making this acknowledgment and in recognizing that the desire of parents to pass on their religious beliefs to their children is a right which is entitled to be legally protected the Irish Constitution is by no means unique. The same - parties to the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognize Article 16 that the Family (which is declared to be the natural and fundamental group unit of society) should be protected 'particularly while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children' and the State - parties maintain Article 14) to respect the liberty of parents 'to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in accordance with their own convictions'. The parties to the First Protocol of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms agreed that States when assuming functions in relation to education 'shall respect the rights of parents to ensure such education and teaching in accordance with their own religious and philosophical convictions' (Article 2). The Irish Constitution has developed the significance of these parental rights and in addition has imposed obligations on the State in relation to them. It declares (in sub-paragraph 2 of this Article) that parents are to be free to provide for the education of their children in their homes, or in private schools or in schools recognized or established by the State; that the State shall not oblige parents in violation of their convictions to send their children to schools established or designated by the State; and that the State shall require (in view of general conditions) that children receive a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social. The article contains a final sub-paragraph (sub-paragraph 4) as follows:-

"The State shall provide for free primary education and shall encourage its expansion and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiatives and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation."

I have underlined the words 'religious and moral formation' in above citation (in the fact that this article recognizes that parents have rights not only to provide for the religious education of their children (sub-paragraph (2)) but also rights in the matter of their religious formation (sub-paragraph (4)) and that it specifically requires the State when providing educational facilities to have regard to both these distinct rights.

The difference between these two concepts is not difficult to identify. Broadly speaking, the religious education of a child is concerned with the teaching of religious doctrine, apologetics, religious history and comparative religions, whilst the religious formation of a child involves indoctrinating the child not just with religious

differs but such religious practice (by attendance at religious services) and developing the child's spiritual and religious life by prayer.

Conclude I stated that the "Constitution should be construed so as to reflect this meaning" and ATCS implement upon the NCCA to uphold the two distinct rights referred to in this judgement.

We submit the case of parents who profess the Catholic faith, the religious formation of their children involves ensuring that their children receive a clear religious education as proposed by the aforementioned "Grow in Love" programme, that they may attend Mass, and that they pray and receive the sacraments on a regular basis. To introduce the NCCA curriculum into any faith based school, as proposed, has the capacity to undermine this important aforementioned parental legal rights expected from the Patron of a clear 'religious formation' in their school and in turn will lead to the Patron breaching it's legal and statutory responsibilities to parents and children in a school as outlined by Mr. Justice Costelloe.

Parental Constitutional and Legal Rights

The position of parents has been dealt with in respect of the duties of Trustees to state in respect of 'religious formation' as outlined cogently above by the High Court and Supreme Court. In addition, it is also worth reflecting on the Constitutional position. The parents of children in the State have a constitutional right to the provision 'for' education by the State under Article 42 of the Irish Constitution.

Article 41 of the Constitution of Ireland

41. The State acknowledges that the primary and natural education of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.

41.2. Parents shall be free to provide this education in their homes or in private schools or in schools recognised or established by the State. The State shall not oblige parents in violation of their conscience and lawful preference to send their children to schools established by the State, or to any particular type of school designated by the State.

The State shall, however, as guardian of the common good, require in view of actual conditions that the children receive a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social.

The State shall provide for free primary education and shall maintain or supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiatives, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation.

In exceptional cases, where the parents for physical or moral reasons fail in their duty towards their children, the State as guardian of the common good, by appropriate means shall endeavour to supply the place of the parents, but always with due regard for the natural and inalienable rights of the child.¹⁶

It is worth reading this article in the present context, as it sets out the fact that the primary educators are the parents, not the State. The State merely seeks to facilitate the provision of education as sought by the parents.

Hence, the development of the Pluralist Patronage model system which sets out to achieve some. Alternatively, parents can 'home school' their children, if they so wish, which also illustrates the constitutionally protected role of parents in educating their children. Other Patronage models are provided including Protestant and other faith Patronage to include Jewish and Muslim schools. A non-denominational Patronage is seen in the Educate Together model. The ETB sectors in community national schools also have their different Patronage model which is a multi-denominational one. These are all distinct from the Catholic Patronage model, which this ATCS submission is solely concerned with. However, any new curriculum will need to take account of all of the various Patronage programmes (denominational, non-denominational or multi-denominational) and their underlying Ethos respectively.

Catholic Parents, communities and benefactors have provided Catholic schools from sites, personnel and parish contributions as well as funds from taxpayers (largely Catholic) that were raised in the past and disbursed by the State in per the aforementioned Constitution. This model also includes the substantial voluntary involvement of Parents, Laity, Religious Orders, Congregations and Bishops in the management and administration of national schools and property in accordance with Educational and Charitable Trust legal principles.

Parents send their children to a Catholic school expecting them to receive teaching in respect of Religious education as an 'objective truth' rooted in Jesus Christ. Other denominations have a different criterion. All schools that represent to parents that they are Catholic have an obligation to carry out this 'revealed' teaching, in accordance with the 'Characteristic spirit'¹⁷ of the respective school. Any school that does not fulfill this criteria¹⁷ or purposely seeks to

¹⁶ See section 1(1)(1) of The Education Act.

¹⁷ Should a school decide that they do not wish to operate under the Catholic ethos or Characteristic spirit, due to sufficient demand, then such a school can be invited to consider a change of Patronage to another Patronage of a non-denominational kind. This option will be part of the ongoing Diocesan discussion between DCS and various Catholic Patronage of the moment.

would it, are in effect misrepresenting themselves to parents and are in breach of legal duties owed to parents and pupils.

It is the function of the Diocesan Secretariat to send out primary Diocesan schools advisors to support and monitor the teaching of Religious education and the overall 'Characteristic spirit' in a school. This is an important function of the Education secretariat across each diocese in the country. It is done as comprehensively as possible, on behalf of the local Ordinary or Bishop, who is unilaterally obliged to fulfill this function. For those parents who decide to send their children to a Catholic school, but do not wish to receive religious education, schools have sought to make provision for them, where the said pupils are allowed to 'opt out' of religious education and parental requests are accommodated by schools¹⁸ in accommodating such a parental choice.

For Catholic schools, there is an express and implied duty that the children attending will be educated in the fullness of the faith. As mentioned, Catholic schools are prominent in being inclusive¹⁹ and welcoming, to all communities especially the most marginalised. Parents realise this and believe it stems from the ethical formation received rooted in the Christian principles exemplified by the person of Jesus Christ. Paramount concepts such as Community, Family, Christian Values, the Common Good, 'Love thy neighbour', 'Do unto others as you would like them to do unto you', the Commandments etc... are all explored and explained to assist in forming young pupils in their ethical formation. Denominational schools are obliged to respect the rights of parents and to fulfil their obligations in that regard. Catholic schools warrant and represent that such an education will actually happen and Parents have a right to expect that their child will receive a clear religious education in a Catholic school, in their expression of their religious choice and beliefs.

The recently launched 'Grow in love' Catholic pre-school and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland programme covers the main areas raised by the proposed new NCCA curriculum as set out herein. It educates children about Ethics and learning about different religions. If the said programme needs to be enhanced further, to take on some of the NCCA areas, then this can also be discussed with the NCCA. We reiterate that the 'Grow in love' programme, as a new programme has already been launched to deal with the issues contemplated by the Ethics and ERB programme for Catholic schools.

¹⁸ See article 44.2.4 of the Irish Constitution and CSP document 'Sharing good practice on inclusion of all pupils' pp. 15.

¹⁹ Department and Education and Skills Chief Inspector report 2010-2011 p.34

The new NCCA programme is composed from a sociocultural model and historical-political model. This may be suitable in a non-discriminational setting but unfortunately not in a Catholic school. This is because a Catholic school is statutorily obliged under the Education act 1998 to uphold a distinct 'characteristic spirit' and has represented same to parents who have enrolled their children in such a school in pursuance of their aforementioned constitutional rights. In addition, the local Ordinary/Bishop also has a unilateral duty to maintain the Ethos in a Catholic school from a Charitable Trust and a Legal perspective.

The Board of Management are statutorily responsible under the Education act 1998 to be accountable to the Patron (not the Department of Education) in matters concerning the 'Characteristic Spirit'. This proposal will mean that the Board of Management of schools will be in breach of the statutory duties enshrined in the Education act, if compelled to teach this new programme.

As stated, the proposal of the curriculum on NCCA, ERB and Ethics is from a completely different perspective. The NCCA ethics programme is a compartmentalised proposal and is not part of a holistic lived reality of faith in action in the families and the school respectively, which Catholic parents expect, demand and wish their children to participate in. From the research undertaken on the NCCA material, this proposed pupil subjectivity about objective truth will not only conflict with the Ethos in a school, but will confuse children in their religious formation.

Parents will now be in a position that their children's rights to a their education will be substantially impaired and reduced. A conflicting and seriously flawed model is now proposed. Core Faith principles such as, the transcendent meaning of religion, coherency of religious beliefs, the sense of community engendered by religion are not comprehended and understood within this NCCA proposal. Parents would be correct in stating that this type of teaching is flawed and effectively potentially a misrepresentation. Catholic Patrons and Trustees cannot be accused of latent negligence, in failing to carry out their respective duties to parents, if compelled to proceed with this proposal.

In addition, we do feel that parents will be dissatisfied with the fundamental concept that religious identity can be simply viewed as the holding of beliefs interpreted by the young primary pupils themselves. In no other subject is this apparent. We are unable to accept this proposed child subjective thinking, more akin to adulthood, and will not recommend it to the parents of the pupils in our schools that represent themselves as Catholic.

Catholic schools are extremely inclusive as is illustrated by the ESRJ research. However, in parallel, Catholic schools are unilaterally obliged to strengthen and to seek to improve their Ethos which invigorates the school day. This is either misunderstood or deliberately overlooked by the new NCCA proposal. Apart from very little detail as to how the programme will work in an overloaded school day, this proposal could undermine the position of Catholic Patrons and Trustees in seeking to exercise their respective legal rights also.

We feel that parents that send their children to our schools expect an education that is objective and clear. Primary school children need clear guidance and clarity in their learning at this age. Imposed confusion and unclear thinking cannot be simply acquiesced or agreed to, by Catholic Patrons or trustees. It is unworkable in a Catholic school and unfortunately we cannot therefore support this proposal as framed. It is for that reason that we feel we would breach our constitutional duty to parents to educate pupils, if we do not educate about the revealed objective truth that will ground the ethics of future citizens in a modern Irish society. We cannot recommend to the parents of children in our schools that they would support this new planned programme and as representatives of the Trustees of the said schools we have no choice but to sensibly object to same. It is clear that this proposal is a direct attack on Article 42 and the need to support religious formation as outlined by the High Court.

Board and Teacher Rights Conflict in Denominational schools

At every job interview for a teacher, they are made aware of the Ethos or the aforementioned 'characteristic spirit' in a denominational school. A copy of the schedule²² is furnished to all employees in Catholic schools. All teachers in a Catholic school are expected to be qualified to teach in Catholic primary schools. It is for that reason that they are educated in religious education pedagogy also.

A new NCCA curriculum will lead to conflict for teachers in their teaching methods and Pedagogy. They will be teaching the children from one perspective in respect of the faith content as objective truth revealed by God and then from another perspective of a normal point of view in respect of ethics etc. Is this possible or achievable from a professional teaching perspective? Is this desirable from a Patron's or Trustee perspective?

²² Schedule as agreed with all of the educational stakeholders.

This will lead to further confusion on behalf of the children. It will also lead to confusion on behalf of the teacher, where one is imparting knowledge through the 'eyes of faith' at one part of the course but then passively imparting information at another part of the course in learning about Religions.

For teachers, that have taken a job in a denominational school because of its Ethos it will be a direct attack on their reason for teaching in a denominational school. You cannot have a lived 'reality of faith' in December but in January it is suddenly up to the young pupils to 'co-learn' with their teachers as 'co-learners' and implicitly decide for themselves.

This is a flawed proposal and as stated may be suitable in the context of a non-denominational context but not in a denominational school. ATCS believes it fundamentally changes the role of the teacher in a Catholic school¹¹. The NCCA consultation paper itself, in fact, emphasises the fundamental flaw for denominational schools where a teacher one week has to teach a 'denominational programme and faith-forming' and the next week 'teach about religions and beliefs from a pluralist perspective'.

In the same way, those parents of children in a school have rights and expectations regarding religious education in a Catholic school, similar criteria are expected from teachers engaged on Contract to teach Religious education in a denominational school. The teacher's legal rights are Contractual rights, whereas the aforementioned parents' legal rights are Constitutional rights. The Patron or Trustee has to be aware of their inherent Legal and Trust rights and responsibilities, in dealing with the said parents and teachers' legal rights. The potential legal and contractual implications for teaching staff have been misunderstood by the NCCA proposal. Alternatively, they have simply been overlooked.

Whilst it is not clear how the proposal will be implemented, in all likelihood, it is contemplated that some of teachers employed in denominational schools will be required to teach same and therefore it is reasonable to raise the said concerns.

This is a real factor for circa 2,900 separate Employers/Boards of management in Catholic schools across the country, (acting in a voluntary capacity), seeking to manage a complex

¹¹ The NCCA itself refers to same and acknowledges that this is a real and substantial issue for school patron and trustees with reference to 'great demand on a teachers self-efficacy, professional ethics, knowledge and skills. There is also the challenge for teachers who will be engaged in teaching denominational programmes on the one hand and teaching about religions and beliefs from a pluralist perspective on the other'. NCCA consultation paper page 23.

school environment, with various stakeholders and educational partners in accordance with curriculum requirements. This will also be a serious issue for Muslims, Protestant or Jewish faith communities also and their respective Boards of Management.

As stated each Board of Management is a separate employer seeking to manage a workplace with employee rights and responsibilities. This proposal will fundamentally impinge on the employment status of boards of management, in their relationships with respective staff members, and cause implicit disruption and disharmony for management as well as the explicit breach of legal rights already stated.

Where is the school sector, if a teacher or a group of teachers consciously objects to teach NCCA ERB and ETHICS in a Catholic school from a child centred subjective view point that conflicts with sincerely held beliefs that objective truth is revealed by God?

How is the Patron/Trustee as employer, expected to deal with such a conscientious and complex situation?

The same principle could be said to apply to other faith communities? Will the Protestant, Jewish or Muslim schools be compelled to teach about a subjective view of faith also?

How will this operate if the Protestant Jewish or Muslim teachers object in some? Is there a provision for an 'opt out' for such a school?

Where is the school, as employers, if some of the parents require the Patron not to teach this curriculum proposal in a Catholic school?

Where is the school, as employers, if some of the parents do want this taught in denominational schools, but teachers object?

Where is the Board as a separate corporate body seeking to uphold the Ethics in a denominational school and accountable to the Patron?

3. Conclusion

The Patron's 'Grow in Love' programme has detailed content on Ethics and ERB already, which is based from the Patron's perspective. ATCS support the 'Grow in Love' programme and its intentions. If the said programme needs to be enhanced further, to take on some of the NCCA aims, that this can also be discussed with the NCCA and considered. The evidence from the Chief Inspector report and the ESRI report support the contention that

Catholic schools are very inclusive and supportive of those pupils attending their schools and other marginalised groups. This is because the school experience is a lived reality of faith supported by the Revealed teaching of Jesus Christ.

In *McGraw v. Massachusetts College* (1979), Hensch J, in the Supreme Court, stated:

To construe the provision literally, without due regard to its underlying objective, would lead to a sapping and debilitation of the freedom and independence given by the Constitution to the distinct and organisational requirements and prescriptions which are inherent in all organised religions.

And also importantly,

*For those averring the internal disabilities and discriminations which flow from the tenets of a particular religion, the State must not recognise and buttress them.*²⁷

Hensch J in the Supreme Court clearly sets out that the State must effectively support religion education in the educational setting for a faith based or denominational school as set out in the Constitution. In this case, the NCCA proposal has failed to 'Recognize or Buttress the tenets' of religion taught in Catholic schools. This recognition for a schools' Ethos will be seriously undermined in this proposal. It will also have the effect of leading to the 'sapping and debilitating'²⁸ of the religious education in a school. It will leave schools trying to grapple with two parallel conflicting curricula²⁹ in an overloaded space, with the certainty to cause confusion in the minds of primary school going children and their teachers. The aforementioned 'religious formation' will also be seriously damaged and undermined. The various Pedagogical reasons and Philosophical rationale and concerns have been explained in this document. Various legal rights will be comprehensively breached under this new curriculum and in conclusion, ATES are not prepared to support the NCCA proposal in their schools.

²⁷ See *McGraw v. Massachusetts College* (1979), Hensch J, in the Supreme Court.

²⁸ It is unclear as to how this will be implemented but it is clear that it is contemplated that certain parts will include 'denominational education and faith forming' and other parts will be related to a pluralist model as per page 25 of the NCCA Consultation paper.

Appendix

Basis for written submission

ATCS decided to make a written submission to the ERB and Ethics committees rather than answering the questionnaire provided by the NCCA. This is because the methodology of the questionnaire does not follow best practice. Dr Kerry Greer (BSc, PhD [Psychology, University College London], Grad. Dip. Applied Criminology, [Cambridge], CPsychol, AFBPS, Head of Psychology, Mary Immaculate College – University of Limerick) has critiqued the questionnaire and ATCS believes that her comments should be considered by the NCCA.

Dr Greer's critique makes clear that many of the survey questions involve a complex series of propositions which themselves contain ambiguous and unsatisfactorily defined concepts. Such questions can be read in any number of ways. Take for example the following proposition: "I would like my child to express empathy and joy with human diversity and form deep, caring human connections." "Empathy", "human diversity", and "human connections" are such complex concepts with a range of philosophical meanings, some of which contain strongly secularist presuppositions. Furthermore, the proposition contains multiple sub-propositions and therefore it is unclear whether the person who is responding to the question is answering one, some, or all of the following:

- i. "I would like my child to express empathy with human diversity."
- ii. "I would like my child to express joy with human diversity."
- iii. "I would like my child to express both empathy and joy (presumably at the same time) with human diversity."
- iv. "I would like my child to form deep connections."
- v. "I would like my child to form caring human connections."
- vi. "I would like my child to form deep (and) caring human connections."

From Dr Greer's critique it is apparent that the survey questions are framed in a way that makes response bias unavoidable because the socially correct answer to each of the survey questions (other than those that request the person responding to prioritise choices from a list of options) is "yes". Dr Greer explains quite clearly that the NCCA survey could just as easily be framed to suit other narratives. She suggests that one could take the abrupt explanation under the "Aims" and "Items" paragraph which precedes the survey questions,

rephrase it in terms of a curriculum according to an explicitly Christian ethos, adjust the questions accordingly, and one would almost certainly get the same distribution of answers to the survey questions. Based on these insights, the NCCA questionnaire does not provide any basis for substantiating claims in relation to need or demand for the ERB and Ethics course.

Therefore, it is with the above criticisms of the survey instrument in mind that ATCS decided to make a written submission to the NCCA consultation rather than answering the provided questionnaire.



Home

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Atheist Ireland

Atheist Ireland

Catholic ethos schools will not objectively teach new ERBE course — 2nd Submission to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment on proposed new course



From the Toledo Guiding Principles:

“In the process of involving stakeholders, it is vital to strike an appropriate balance. A fundamental consideration is that teaching about religion should be based on sound scholarship, and not merely on what religious communities want said about themselves and others. Furthermore, while it is important to ensure that representatives of religious communities are allowed to give input and advice, this should not be taken to the extreme of giving them too much decision-making power at the cost of abdicating State responsibility. The European Court of Human Rights has made it clear that excessive involvement of religious authorities from one community in decisions that affect the rights of those belonging to another community may itself amount to a violation of the right to freedom of religion or belief.”

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1. Introduction and our previous submission

This Submission from Atheist Ireland follows on from our Document in March 2015 on the proposed course and our two meetings with the NCCA on the course.

<http://www.teachdontpreach.ie/2015/03/ncca-erb-ethics-course/>

Atheist Ireland supports the Recommendation from the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism on teaching **ABOUT** religions, beliefs and ethics in schools.

The Recommendation from the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism regarding ERB and ethics reads: ¹

“The Advisory Group is of the view that all children have the right to receive education in ERB and Ethics and the State has the responsibility to ensure that this is provided. The Advisory Group requests that the NCCA, with assistance from the partners and mindful of existing programmes, should develop curriculum and teacher guidelines for ERB and Ethics, in line with the Toledo Principles, the RedCo, and the Cambridge Primary Review.”

Given the legal framework in Ireland, and the fact that we have direct experience of a Religious Education course at second level, we have already requested that our right to exempt our children from this course is recognised and guaranteed.

From the Toledo Guiding Principles: ²

“The state may satisfy this duty of neutrality either by designing a curriculum that is itself sufficiently impartial and balanced, or, in those instances in which the state provides instruction in a particular religion or belief, by granting rights to opt out on the ground of conscientious objection. This right must be realisable in practice, and not a mere theoretical possibility. Moreover, the requisite neutrality would be compromised if pupils were subjected to any disadvantage, discrimination or stigma on account of the exercise of this right to be exempted from such classes, or elements of classes”.

We cannot see how this proposed course will promote respect for our human rights, given the fact that the NCCA have no power to ensure that schools deliver this course in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner and in accordance with the Toledo Guiding Principles and human rights law.

Our views on this matter have not changed and at the moment we do not accept the assurances of the NCCA that the School Inspectorate will ensure that the Education about religions, beliefs and ethics course will be delivered in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner and in accordance with human rights law.

We have already been informed by the NCCA (in writing) that they have no control over how any course is delivered and consequently we have no alternative but to seek an exemption. None of the Documents published as a result of this consultation changes that view.

The Catholic Church has rejected the Toledo Guiding Principles and they have control over the ethos (Characteristic Spirit) of the vast majority of Primary Schools in the country.

In this Submission we will set out our reasons for believing that our human and constitutional rights will not be guaranteed and protected. We would welcome any clarification from the NCCA.

2. Obligation of the NCCA to promote human rights

The NCCA is an ‘organ of the state’ and as such under the European Convention on Human Rights Act 2003 is obliged to do the following: ³

Section 3.—(1) Subject to any statutory provision (other than this Act) or rule of law, every organ of the State shall perform its functions in a manner compatible with the State's obligations under the Convention provisions.

In the Action Plan submitted by Ireland to the Council of Europe in the Louise O’Keeffe case, it stated that: ⁴

“Section 3(1) of the European Convention on Human Rights Act 2003 requires an organ of State (defined as a body established by law or through which any of the legislative, executive or judicial powers of the State are exercised) to perform its functions in a manner compatible with the State’s obligation under the Convention provisions. Organs of the State include Government Departments such as the Department of Education and Skills, the Health Service Executive, the Child and Family Agency and the police force, An Garda Síochána. Therefore, by way of further protection for such a litigant, Section 3(2) of the 2003 Act provides that a person who has suffered injury, loss or damage as a result of a contravention of subsection (1), may, if no other remedy in damages is available, institute proceedings to recover damages in respect of the contravention. This specific right of action relates to any State failing from 31st December 2003 when the Act came into operation. Section 2 of the Act requires courts when interpreting and applying any statutory provision or rule of law, in so far as is possible, subject to the rules of law relating to such interpretation and application, to do so in a manner compatible with the State’s obligations under the Convention.”

It is clear that as an ‘organ of the state’, the NCCA must uphold the State’s obligations under the European Convention. The NCCA has no option but to recommend the proposed ERB and ethics courses be delivered in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner as per Article II of Protocol 1 of the European Convention.

The NCCA has no legal power to oblige schools to deliver the proposed ERB and ethics course in a manner compatible with the European Convention. However, the NCCA does have a legal obligation to recognise, acknowledge and make Recommendations on the changes needed to ensure human rights are respected and protected in all our schools.

Legislative change is needed to ensure that the proposed course reflects the Recommendation from the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism, Recommendation from IHREC and human rights law. The Minister for Education & Skills cannot make any Regulations (Section 33 Education Act 1998) to oblige schools to deliver the ERB and ethics course in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner without amending Section 15 – 2 (b) of the Education Act 1998.

3. Statutory function of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission in relation to public bodies such as the NCCA

At a meeting in January 2016 with the NCCA, we were disappointed to learn that the NCCA had not met with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and had no plans at the time to do so. We asked that the NCCA meet with the Commission in relation to the proposed ERB & Ethics course and also asked that the proposed course would be ‘human rights proofed’. The Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission has already done a substantial amount of work in this regard (See Report Religion & Education; A Human Rights perspective ⁵).

The Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission has made the following recommendations in relation to the delivery of the state curriculum.

In their Report on Religion & Education; A Human Rights Perspective they recommended that: ⁶

“Section 15 of the Education Act should be amended to provide for modifications to the integrated curriculum to ensure that the rights of minority faith or non faith children are also recognised therein. In this regard, the State must take sufficient care that information and knowledge included in the curriculum is conveyed in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner with the aim of enabling pupils to develop a critical mind with regard to religion in a calm atmosphere which is free of any misplaced proselytism.”

The also stated that:-

“The key phrase here is the requirement on the State to take “sufficient care that information and knowledge included in the curriculum be conveyed in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner for the purposes of Article 2 of Protocol No 1. The meaning of the term “objective, critical and pluralistic” is repeated throughout the Court’s case law. As stated, its purpose is to enable pupils to develop a critical mind with regard to religion in a calm atmosphere which is free of any misplaced proselytism.”(para 256, p 83)

The IHREC recommended in their submission on the Education (Admissions) to Schools Bill that: ⁷

“The Commission recommends that the new section 62(6) to be inserted into the Education Act should be amended to the effect that, in setting out the characteristic spirit and general objectives of the school, outside the specific context of faith formation and religious instruction which parents wish to avail of and where exemptions apply, regard shall be had to providing information in relation to religion in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner that avoids indoctrination.”

As the NCCA have not met with IHREC or made a decision to human rights proof the proposed course, it is clear to us that the recommendations from the body that are obliged to promote human rights are being ignored.

The Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission is a statutory body set up under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014. The statutory purpose of the Commission is to:

- “(a) to protect and promote human rights and equality,
- (b) to encourage the development of a culture of respect for human rights, equality, and intercultural understanding in the State,
- (c) to promote understanding and awareness of the importance of human rights and equality in the State.”

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission have a statutory function in relation to public bodies such as the NCCA (see Section 42 – 3,4 Human Rights & Equality Commission Act 2014). The NCCA are obliged under the Act to set out in their strategic plan an assessment of the human rights and equality issues it believes are relevant to the functions and purpose of the body. The NCCA are also obliged to show policies, plans and actions that are to be put in place to address those issues.

We have been unable to locate any policies or plans in relation to how the NCCA will, as an organ of the state, address its obligation to uphold human rights.

4. Objects and functions of the NCCA under the Education Act 1998

Section 41 – 3 (d) of the Education Act 1998 obliges the NCCA in carrying out its functions to:

“have regard to the practicalities of implementation of any advice which it proposes to give to the Minister.”

The practicalities of giving advice to the Minister in relation to the proposed new course on Education about Religions and beliefs means that the NCCA must ensure that any advice highlights the difficulties in relation to protecting the human rights of all in the education system.

The NCCA cannot just ignore the human rights issues in relation to the implementation of the course. The NCCA must recognise the fact that the statutory body established to uphold human rights in the country, IHREC, has made recommendations in relation to the delivery of the curriculum in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner in order to uphold human rights.

Those recommendations are about amending the Section 15 of the Education Act 1998 and they do not refer to the Inspectorate (Section 13 (1) of the Education Act 1998).

Informing us that the Inspectorate will ensure that the delivery of the proposed course on ERB and ethics is delivered in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner does not make sense to us and we would appreciate the NCCA expanding on this analysis.

It seems to us that this analysis is at variance with the Recommendation of IHREC. Why would IHREC make recommendations to amend the Education Act 1998 to ensure that the curriculum was delivered in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner if the School Inspectorate could guarantee that this would happen?

This is a fundamental issue that the NCCA must deal with as it relates to human rights and the obligations of the NCCA under the European Convention on Human Rights Act 2003 and the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission Act 2014.

The only way of ensuring compliance with the Recommendation from the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism (the Toledo Guiding Principles) and the European Convention is to amend the Education Act 1998 as per the Recommendations from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

5. Powers of the Inspectorate under the Education Act 1998

Under Section 13 of the Education Act 1998 the Inspectorate does not have any powers in relation to ethos (Characteristic spirit). The Inspectorate cannot oblige schools to deliver the proposed course (or any course under the curriculum) in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner as the Minister cannot make any Regulations in relation to ethos under Section 33 of the Act unless Section 15 – 2 (b) of the Act is amended.

The Supreme Court decision in the Louise O’Keeffe case noted that:⁸

32. Accordingly, Fennelly J concluded that the State Defendants were not vicariously liable for the acts of LH or, for the same reasons, for the failure of O to report the 1971 complaint to the State. LH was not employed by the State Defendants but he was, in law, the employee of the Manager, S. While LH had to have the qualifications laid down by the Minister and to observe the provisions of the Rules for National Schools and while the State had disciplinary powers in relation to him pursuant to those Rules, he was not engaged by the State and the State did not have the power to dismiss him:

“The scheme of the Rules and the consistent history of national schools is that the day-to-day running of the schools is in the hands of the manager. The inspection regime does not alter that. The department inspectors do not have power to direct teachers in the carrying out of their duties. ... On normal principles, the State has no vicarious liability for the acts of a teacher appointed by the manager of a national school under the system of management of national schools.”

6. Education Act 1998 — Powers of the Minister to prescribe the curriculum

Under the Education Act 1998 the Minister must have regard to the Characteristic Spirit of the School when prescribing the curriculum. Claiming that the Inspectorate will deal with this issue and ensure that the ERB and ethics course is delivered in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner simply cannot happen given the functions of the Board under Section 15 – 2 (b) of the Act.

Section 30 (1) of the Education Act States that:-

“The Minister may, from time to time, following such consultation with patrons of schools, national associations of parents, recognised school management organisations and recognised trade unions and staff associations representing teachers, as the Minister considers appropriate, prescribe the curriculum for recognised schools, namely –

- (a) the subjects to be offered in recognised schools,
- (b) the syllabus of each subject,
- (c) the amount of instruction time to be allotted to each subject, and
- (d) the guidance and counselling provision to be offered in schools.

(2) Without prejudice to the generality of the subsection (1), the Minister -

(a) shall have regard to the desirability of assisting schools to exercise their powers as provided for under subsection (4).

(b) shall have regard to the characteristic spirit of a school or class of school in exercising his or her functions under this section,

(c) may give directions to schools, where he or she considers it appropriate, to ensure that the subjects and syllabuses pursued in those schools are appropriate and relevant to the educational and vocational needs of the students in those schools,

(d) shall ensure that the amount of instruction time to be allotted to subjects on the curriculum as determined by the Minister in each school day shall be such as to allow for such reasonable instruction time, as the board with the consent of the patron determines, for subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school, and

(e) shall not require any student to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student or in the case of a student who has reached the age of 18 years, the student.”

7. Amending Section 15 of the Education Act 1998 is not on the political agenda

Amending Section 15 – 2 (b) of the Education Act 1998 is not part of the Education Admissions to Schools Bill. It is clear from recent Documents emanating from the Department of Education & Skills that there is no proposals to amend Section 15 2 (b) of the Educations Act to comply with the Recommendations of IHREC. It is also clear that the Department of Education intend to leave it up to each individual school to uphold human rights.

That means that schools must continue to interpret human rights according to the ethos of their patron. Respecting parents' convictions means whatever a patron body says it means and it is not based on the interpretation of the European Court of Human Rights.

In a recent Document on Advancing School Autonomy the Dept of Education & Skills outlined these issues:⁹

“Ethos, patronage and legislation

In all primary and post-primary schools, the school's stated ethos (or characteristic spirit as it is termed in the legislation) is decided by the owners or patrons/trustees of the school and not by central government. Autonomy over ethos does not exist at the level of the school board, principal or teachers. Indeed, one of the specific duties of a board is to uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school. Thus, depending on the unit of analysis, schools may be viewed as fully autonomous in respect of ethos, or partly autonomous if the unit of analysis in an individual school operating within a specific ethos.

While, as noted above, the operating rules for schools are largely set by the State, the ethos espoused by the trustees/ patrons can inform aspects of how those operating rules are acted upon in schools. For example, a denominational primary school may determine the content of its religious education curriculum on the basis of the school's religious ethos. It is important to highlight that choice of ethos in Ireland is an area in which there is much independence.”

The ethos of the Catholic Church (the majority patron body) can inform aspects of how the operating rules (set by the state) are acted upon in schools. This means that the proposed new ERB and ethics course can be delivered through the lens of the Catholic Church and indeed any Patron body. It has happened with regard to the second level Religious Education Course and nothing has been done about that.

It is clear from the Governance Manual for Primary Schools issued by the Dept of Education & Skills that Patron bodies (mainly the Catholic Church) have complete control over how the operating rules set by the state are acted on in schools. It is also clear that the State have no control over the Characteristic Spirit (ethos) of any school.¹⁰

The Department of Education & Skills recognises that upholding the rights of all minorities in schools is an important responsibility of the State. Unfortunately they are not prepared to be prescriptive with regard to obliging schools to protect and uphold the human rights of minorities.

In a paper published in July 2014 called 'Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector: Progress to Date and Future Directions', the Department Education & Skills just 'encourages' schools to look at their own practices critically. It is clear from this Document that the State has no intention of amending legislation or obliging schools to deliver the ERB and ethics course in accordance with the Toledo Guiding Principles and human rights law.

“Respecting and upholding the rights of all minorities in schools is an important responsibility of the state”

“The paper does not set out to be prescriptive and recognises that each school has its own ethos and operates in a particular context. Therefore, it encourages schools to consider their own practices critically and to consult meaningfully with their own communities and stakeholders in formulating policies and developing practice in this area. It also envisages that such policies and practices would evolve and develop as the school and the environment in which it operates continue to change and develop.”

The state has no plans to amend Section 15 of the Education Act 1998 to oblige schools to deliver the curriculum in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner. We do not accept that our rights will be protected if this does not happen. This proposed course on Education about Religions and beliefs is not available to atheist and secular families as our human rights cannot be guaranteed and protected.

8. Section 33 Education Act 1998 – Regulations

There is nothing in this Section of the Education Act 1998 that permits the Minister to make regulations regarding the ethos (Characteristic Spirit) of the school/Patron. The Minister can make regulations under Section (l) in relation to the curriculum of school but he/she still cannot oblige schools to deliver the curriculum in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner if that is not in accordance with the ethos of the Patron.

9. The Catholic Church rejects teaching about Religions and Beliefs in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner

Delivering education about Religions and beliefs in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner is not in accordance with the ethos of schools (the vast majority) under the patronage of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church has rejected the Toledo Guiding Principles and control schools under their patronage on the understanding that: ¹²

The Council for Education of the Irish Episcopal Conference has stated that:

“The preliminary report makes no mention of the characteristic spirit of the school whereas the Education Act and subsequent policies and circulars are all premised on the principle that the characteristic spirit informs all dimensions of the life of the school and finds expression in manifold different ways, both tangible and intangible.”

“The integrated curriculum and the Religious Education programme must give expression to the characteristic spirit of the school. How, for instance could Social, Personal and Health Education be conceived of independently of the Religious Education programme? While students can opt out of particular subjects in accordance with the law, they cannot opt out of the culture and characteristic spirit of the school whether it is non-denominational, multi-denominational or denominational.” (page 3 Submission to Forum on Patronage and Pluralism)

Ethos (Characteristic spirit) is not just about religious instruction and education, it can and does have consequences for all the subjects under the curriculum and the daily life of the school, and it also has consequences for the delivery of the state curriculum.

10. The proposed new Education about Religions, Beliefs and Ethics course will be mainly delivered by Catholic Teachers

From the Toledo Guiding Principles:

“An individual’s personal religious (or non-religious) beliefs cannot be sufficient reason to exclude that person from teaching about religions and beliefs. The most important considerations in this regard relate to professional expertise, as well as to basic attitudes towards or commitment to human rights in general and freedom of religion or belief in particular, rather than religious affiliation or conviction.”

In Ireland an individual’s personal religious (or non-religious) beliefs is a sufficient reason to exclude that person from accessing the teaching profession. The recent changes to the Employment Equality Act retain the right of schools to discriminate on the ground of religion.

Minorities find it difficult to get a job teaching if they are not prepared to teach Catholic religious instruction in Primary Schools, the vast majority of schools are under Catholic patronage. Teachers are trained to teach Catholic Religious Instruction in schools (Certificate in Religious Studies) and they are legally obliged to uphold the ethos of the Patron.

The fact of the matter is that teachers from minority faiths, atheists or secular traditions cannot get access to the teaching profession because they are not Catholic. The State will now have a course called Education About Religions and Beliefs and Ethics and it will be mainly Catholics who are hired to teach it. This is not pluralism and diversity, it is religious discrimination.

From the Report by the Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission;-

“94. However, the aforementioned religious curriculum course is compulsory for those opting to take the voluntary Certificate in Religious Studies. In turn, the Certificate in Religious Studies appears to be a requirement for teaching posts in many primary schools managed by the Catholic Church, although this is a requirement at the discretion of individual patrons. Therefore, in practical terms it is difficult for student teachers to opt out of the curriculum religion. To do so means limiting a teacher’s employment prospects in the State, because as previously noted 97% of Irish primary schools are under denominational patronage, with over 92% under Roman Catholic patronage.”

11. The proposed course has the potential to make things more difficult for atheist and secular families

There are now nine Recommendations from various United Nations and Council of Europe bodies in relation to protecting the Human Rights of minorities in the Irish Education system. The Primary School Curriculum does not respect the rights of atheist and secular parents as it is not impartial and neutral toward various religions, faiths and beliefs.

Promoting the moral and spiritual development of all students through religious education is not a neutral and impartial stance. It is difficult to understand how the NCCA can support pluralism while at the same time supporting the Primary School Curriculum and the Religious Education Course at second level.

In their Report on Religion and Education; A Human Rights perspective IHREC stated that:

“259. However, the Court reiterated that:

“it has always stressed that, in a pluralist democratic society, the State’s duty of impartiality and neutrality towards various religions, faiths and beliefs is incompatible with any assessment by the State of the legitimacy of religious beliefs and the ways in which those beliefs are expressed.” (page 84)

It is difficult to understand how the NCCA can respect the philosophical convictions of atheist and secular parents and their children in the proposed new course when it continues to support promoting the moral and spiritual development of our children through religious education and bringing them to a knowledge of God.

All recognised schools in Ireland are obliged by the Education Act 1998 to operate in accordance with legislation, policy and curriculum as determined by the Minister for Education & Skills, Section 9 – (b) Education Act 1998).

The legislation, policy and curriculum oblige schools to promote the spiritual development of students (Section 9 – (d) Education Act 1998), while having regard to the Characteristic spirit (ethos) of the school.

“promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, have regard to the characteristic spirit of the school,”

One of the key areas of the Primary School Curriculum is to promote the spiritual dimension of life. The concept of spirituality is not defined in the Education Act 1998 and in the Primary School Curriculum it is assumed that it based on a transcendent element within human experience. Spirituality is linked to religious education and developing spiritual and moral values and a knowledge of god.

In the Introduction to the Primary School Curriculum it states that:

“The spiritual dimension of life expresses itself in a search for truth and in the quest for a transcendent element within human experience. The importance that the curriculum attributes to the child’s spiritual development is expressed through the breadth of learning experiences the curriculum offers, through the inclusion of religious education as one of the areas of the curriculum, and through the child’s engagement with the aesthetic and affective domains of learning.” (Introduction Primary School Curriculum, page 27)

“The spiritual dimension is a fundamental aspect of individual experience, and its religious and cultural expression is an inextricable part of Irish culture and history. Religious education specifically enables the child to develop spiritual and moral values and to come to a knowledge of God.” (Primary School Curriculum Page 58)

Promoting the moral and spiritual of our children through religious education and bringing them to a knowledge of God breaches our Constitutional and Human Rights as it disrespects our philosophical convictions. As stated by the Irish Episcopal Conference “The integrated curriculum and the Religious Education programme must give expression to the characteristic spirit of the school”.

Atheist and secular parents cannot identify the various areas of the curriculum where religion is integrated and where exactly schools are promoting the moral and spiritual education of our children and consequently we cannot ensure that the teaching of our children is in conformity with our convictions. For example if our children come home saying that god made the world (as some do now), how will we identify where that was taught?

- Was it while they were sitting at the back of the Religious Instruction class?
- Was it during the Education about Religions, Beliefs and Ethics class?
- Was it during another subject such as ‘nature’?
- Was it while they were attending a religious service because there was no supervision?
- Was it during prayer time? Did they just pick it up during the school day?

Schools are not legally obliged to write down exactly where they are integrating their ethos into the various subjects under the curriculum and during the school day. Small children cannot explain and identify how and when they were taught/evangelised to live their lives according to the teachings of a particular god. The very purpose of a religious ethos is to influence children into a religious way of life.

In their Report Religion & Education; A Human Rights Perspective the Irish Human Rights Commission pointed out that:

229. Nonetheless, Barrington J's observation in relation to a child's being influenced by the religious ethos of a school raises a number of questions in the context of this consultation. The use of the phrase "to some degree" might suggest that a school may in fact have some obligation to avoid undue religious influence on a child not of the same religious persuasion as the school, but this is not absolute. In addition, the Court refers to a child who "chooses" to attend the school, and therefore the question arises as to whether this view might have been different if considered in the context of a child with no choice but to attend a denomination school where there is no other option reasonably available where they reside. The case did not explicitly consider the exercise of choice by parents who do not wish to have denominational education for their children, or would seek education in a denomination not available to them which is presumable must equally be protected by Article 42.

230. If Barrington J's judgment suggests that a child of a minority religion, or from a non faith background, with no choice but to attend a Roman Catholic school other than withdrawing from formal religion classes, must in effect accept a form of religious education which offends their convictions, then this would appear to elevate one form of parental choice over another, with the majority religion always dictating the outcome. This could hardly respect the rights conferred on all parents by virtue of Article 42 of the Constitution."

The State has put in place legislation that supports the mission of private Patron bodies to influence children to 'any degree'. The operating rules for schools are set by the State but the Patron controls how those rules are acted upon in schools. Failing to put in place laws and policy that oblige schools to deliver the curriculum in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner is pursuing an aim of indoctrination. We believe that the Irish State is pursuing an aim of indoctrinating by not protecting our human rights and we are concerned that this proposed course will help achieve that aim.

12. Conclusion

We are still extremely concerned with regard to the course and still are seeking an opt out as the legal framework is not in place to ensure respect for the philosophical convictions of atheist/ secular parents. Given the legal framework in Ireland and the fact that we have direct experience of a Religious Education course at second level we request that our right to exempt our children from this course is recognised and guaranteed.

We cannot see how this course will promote respect for our human rights given the fact that the NCCA have no power to ensure that schools deliver this course in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner and in accordance with the Toledo Guiding Principles and human rights law.

Atheist and secular families cannot ensure that the teaching of their children is in conformity with their philosophical convictions given the power that various Patron bodies have over ethos (Characteristic spirit), the Board of Management, the hiring of teachers and school policies. We have no effective remedy to vindicate our rights and we really cannot see how the School Inspectorate has the legal power to ensure that our rights are guaranteed and protected.

The State is not taking sufficient care if they introduce the ERB and ethics course without a legal guarantee that it will be delivered in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner and by ensuring that we have an effective remedy to vindicate our human rights. We are all aware of the issues around ethos and the fact that the Catholic Church objects to the teaching about religion and ethics in an objective manner.

If this new course goes ahead without a legal guarantee then the State will be pursuing an aim of indoctrination by not respecting the philosophical convictions of atheist and secular families as it will not have taken 'sufficient care'. It is on those grounds that we are seeking an opt out from the ERB and Ethics course.

Our experience in relation to the second level Religious Education Course suggests that as an 'organ of the state' the NCCA is not committed to Pluralism and Human Rights. The NCCA continue to stand over the second level RE course when it is clear that it breaches human rights law and disrespects our philosophical convictions.

At the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism the Irish Episcopal Conference stated about this second level RE Course that: ¹³

"does give leeway for, definitely open to the concept in its interpretation by way of how a particular school can deliver the programme to the faith formation approach to religious education which is fundamentally would have to be the case from a catholic perspective... (55.20)"

When developing this course the NCCA were aware that the nearly all schools would combine the state course with Catholic religious instruction. In many schools this course is compulsory and it is hard for us to believe that the NCCA did not realise that this would happen and especially given their obligation under Section 41 – 3 (d) of the Education Act 1998. The result of the introduction of this course is that many schools made religion compulsory.

The Education Act 1998 and the Primary School Curriculum guarantees that this proposed new course (ERB and ethics) will not be objective and will undermine our human rights and pluralism in the state. Our education system is structured in a manner which means the practical application of our Constitutional and human rights are ignored.

There are now nine Recommendations from various United Nations and Council of Europe bodies. The State has ignored these Recommendations and continues to disrespect the philosophical convictions of atheist and secular families. Introducing the ERB and Ethics course without amending the Education Act 1998 means that atheist and secular families will have to opt out their children from two courses during the school day. Our children could go from sitting at the back of the class during Religious Instruction straight into sitting at the back of ERB & Ethics with the same teacher.

Patron bodies in Ireland, mainly the Catholic Church have too much control over our Constitutional and Human Rights as the state have abdicated responsibility. We ask again that our right to opt out is recognised and that are children are not forced to take a course where the Catholic Church and other private bodies have excessive control over our rights.

Notes

- 1 <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Events/Patronage-and-Pluralism-in-the-Primary-Sector/The-Forum-on-Patronage-and-Pluralism-in-the-Primary-Sector-Report-of-the-Forums-Advisory-Group.pdf>
- 2 <http://www.osce.org/odihr/29154?download=true> (p.69)
- 3 <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2003/act/20/enacted/en/print#sec3>
- 4 <https://wcd.coe.int/com.instranet.InstraServlet?command=com.instranet.CmdBlobGet&InstranetImage=2880760&SecMode=1&DocId=2352880&Usage=2>
- 5 <http://www.ihrec.ie/publications/list/religion-and-education-a-human-rights-perspective/>
- 6 <http://www.ihrec.ie/publications/list/religion-and-education-a-human-rights-perspective/> (page 104)
- 7 http://www.ihrec.ie/download/pdf/ihrec_observations_on_education_admission_to_schools_bill_2015.pdf
- 8 Fifth Section - Decision - Application no. 35810/09 Louise O’Keeffe against Ireland
- 9 <https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Events/Advancing-School-Autonomy-in-Ireland/School-Autonomy-Research-Paper.pdf>
- 10 <http://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Boards-of-Management/Governance-Manual-for-Primary-Schools-2015-2019.pdf>
- 11 <http://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2014-Press-Releases/PR14-07-01.html>
- 12 https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Events/Patronage-and-Pluralism-in-the-Primary-Sector/Patronage-Forum-Submissions-November-2011-/fpp_ceiec_17nov2011.pdf
- 13 <https://media.heanet.ie/page/945a5fbb23e1461ebc8efa87272fd930>



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Contributor

**Ballinasloe & District Council Knights of
St. Columbanus**

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Date	March 31 st 2016.

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Introduction

This submission represents the views of a group of Catholic men in East Galway, including fathers and grandfathers of children of school-going age, for whom faith and trust in God are integral to happiness and well-being. In offering this submission we are mindful that:

- (i) all our members favour age appropriate Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics.
- (ii) our local schools, which are predominantly but not exclusively Catholic, have served children of more than twenty-two nationalities and of various faith backgrounds (and of none) for more than a decade.
- (iii) our local schools are to the fore in our communities in fostering tolerance, acceptance, mutual respect, appreciation and friendship among pupils of varying backgrounds and their families. Moreover inter-cultural events organised by them have served to copper-fasten the sterling efforts of our principals, teachers and of Boards of Management in fostering and upholding human and Christian values of solidarity, friendship, mutual respect, care and reconciliation. This receives expression in our homes, especially during birthday parties, when children of varying faith traditions, emergent belief systems, e.g. secular humanist, and of none, freely socialise and play together.
- (iv) our local schools, in keeping with their Christian characteristic spirit, would not seek to be any other way as they are deeply imbued in Christian Gospel values and in a Catholic Education tradition.
- (v) the views expressed below are shared by our spouses, mothers and grandmothers, and by other adults in our communities with whom we have spoken.

By way of submission we respectfully request that the NCCA:

- (i) give more consideration to all that is happening on an ongoing basis in Catholic schools throughout the country ... we feel the consultation document has been written without any real sense of this.
- (ii) invite those who will take this initiative forward to become familiar with:
 - a. The Irish Episcopal Conference's *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*, Veritas, Dublin (2015).
 - b. The Catholic School Partnership's *Catholic Primary Schools in a Changing Ireland: Sharing Good Practice on Inclusion of All Pupils*, Catholic Schools Partnership, Maynooth (2015).

These publications identify how ERB is already part of our Patron's programme, i.e. in a manner that pleases and reassures us as Catholic parents and grandparents and members of our local communities, and how the characteristic spirit of our schools has and will continue to give expression to the aims and objectives of the proposed NCCA ERB curriculum.

- (iii) advance the next phase of this consultation in a manner that truly values diversity. The fact that Christianity is a revealed religion is very dear to us and will ever be something that we and other committed Christians will want honoured in our children's education and in consultations of this nature.
- (iv) bear in mind the developmental stage our children and grandchildren are at when they attend primary school. In short, we are concerned that the NCCA's proposals, if realised, will give rise to confusion in the minds of our children and grandchildren and that an injustice will be done to all major world religions by reducing them to cultural phenomena. Furthermore, those in our group familiar with the NCCA's Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus felt that a number of the aims of the proposed ERB curriculum are adequately addressed through this.
- (v) separate ERB from Ethics. We could never favour an ethical influence in the lives of our children likely to cause them concern inappropriate to their age and stage of development or inconsistent with our Catholic faith and their spiritual development. We appreciate the NCCA does not want this either ... but our concern here lies with unintended consequences as the consultation document appears to be bordering on a secular liberal approach to morality with limited concern for the common good.
- (vi) be mindful that we will only be comfortable with ERB across other curricular areas in so far as provision is consistent and in keeping with the characteristic spirit of our Catholic schools (under the patronage of our bishop and subject to the moderating influence of each school's Board of Management) and our approved (by the competent religious authorities) faith-based Religious Education programme.
- (vii) convene a forum that would include faith-based education patrons and parent representatives to explore the possibility of co-developing a set of ERB guidelines that all schools could sign up to.
- (viii) oversee the development of a suite of resources for the minority of pupils in faith-based schools who have been withdrawn from the patron's programme and whose parents and teachers would welcome support in contributing to their moral and spiritual formation by an alternate means.
- (ix) be mindful that the Education Act specifically requires the Minister to have regard for the characteristic spirit of each school in exercising his or her functions with regard to curriculum (section 30(2)(b)) and that we, as parents and grandparents, value the fact that the curriculum must be interpreted in the context of characteristic spirit.



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Contributor

Bishop Alphonsus Cullinan



Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35
Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

It is not possible to have a generic approach to ethics and religion. Religions are not all the same. This is the clear implication of the ERB + E as it stands.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

The ERB + E as it stands will undermine the relationship between children and parents. Tolerance of all different positions means that no one position is right. Right and wrong, then, is a matter of opinion. Authority, then, eg. that of parents, is undermined.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

While I applauded the attempt to produce a 'one size fits-all' programme, I found the ERB+E very disappointing.

In its current form it would be impossible to implement it in Catholic schools under my patronage.
Kind regards,

+ Maurice Collins

NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnaí Coimisiún na n-Éireann
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment





Home

Contributor

Bishop Denis Nulty



RESPONSE TO NCCA CONSULTATION ON ERB AND ETHICS

INTRODUCTION

I respectfully make this submission as Patron of one hundred and sixty-four Catholic primary schools in Kildare and Leighlin Diocese. At the outset, I need to situate my background and experience in the area of Primary School education, an experience that shapes my outlook and thinking now in one of the larger dioceses. I was Parish Priest of a very large parish in St. Mary's, Drogheda for fifteen years: 1998 - 2013. As Parish Priest, I was immersed completely in the provision of education at both primary and second level in a typical commuter belt parish, where like many of its sister parishes in the early and mid naughties, the provision of school places was very much secondary to the residential building boom.

Similar to other towns, St. Mary's Drogheda had two large single sex schools, one of them housed in a Dickensian building built in 1858, the second a more modern Boyd Barrett structure but without any footprint to expand. I am aware of the value and special place of the local primary school in the life of a parish community, a value and a place that is rooted in its culture and ethos, and I recognise the contribution which single sex schools have made, and continue to make. I also firmly believe in the value of coeducation, and over the years in the parish, I steered an amalgamation project that witnessed the two schools becoming one on a greenfield site provided by the parish in a bespoke building generously funded by the Department with the help of European Structural Funds. I have no doubt that today it is the largest single primary school in the country with a pupil roll in excess of 3,100 pupils. It is aptly described by many as "a big school with a familial feeling". I believe firmly in the value and special place of the local primary school in the life of a parish community, a value and a place that is rooted in its culture and ethos.

Returning to my role as patron of one hundred and sixty-four Catholic primary schools, there are a further nine schools in Kildare & Leighlin Diocese, whilst under different patronage, have requested recognition as Catholic schools and avail of the full support of the Diocesan Education Office. Within these 173 schools there are 2139 teachers and a total of 37, 962 pupils. The schools in my diocese serve the most diverse of populations from the largest which has more than 2000 pupils, 67 staff, caters for 12 different faiths from 15 nationalities, to the smallest with one teacher and just 14 pupils. We believe that each child in our schools is wonderfully made in the image and likeness of God. It is this understanding, together with an ethos that roots us in gospel values, that charges us with the responsibility of enabling each and every child to become the very best they can be spiritually, intellectually, morally, physically and culturally, and to begin to form people who will serve the common good and

work for a just society where all are truly equal. This understanding of Catholic education is further articulated by the Irish Episcopal Conference as follows:

Catholic schools in Ireland are a living expression of a long and varied tradition of education inspired by the life of Christ as lived in the Church. Such schools emphasise the dignity of the human person as a child of God called to work with other persons in creating an inclusive community in service of the common good; where knowledge is sought and respected while faith is nurtured and challenged.²

As Patron, I am ultimately responsible for protecting the ethos or characteristic spirit of the schools in my diocese. The Education Act (1998), Section 8: 12b) states that the Board of Management

‘shall, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school.’

It is my duty to ensure that the Boards of Management of those schools of which I am Patron are empowered to do this work. I believe that the current NCCA proposal to introduce Education about Religion and Belief and Ethics represents a threat to the ethos of Catholic schools and will make the work of upholding the characteristic spirit of our faith based schools almost impossible. I also find it difficult to imagine what ethical issues that are compatible with a Catholic ethos are not already being taught in our schools. I propose to confine my remarks in this submission to the concerns that arise from this area of the proposal.

KEY CONCERNS

CONFLICTING WORLD VIEWS

The NCCA proposal is underpinned by a secular post-modern world view. Within this postmodern world truth can be created, no single religious tradition has a privileged position, reason seeks an understanding of belief and the emphasis is firmly placed on rational thought, self-determination and critical evaluation. In our Catholic faith tradition, truth is revealed by God, faith seeks understanding, critical reflection is on a lived experience of faith and reason is enlightened by faith. The NCCA proposal suggests that children look at religious beliefs and traditions as something to be interpreted by them. This approach encourages children to see their religious identity or belief as just one among many others, all with equal weight and validity. There is no space for the child to be formed by the experience of a specific religious identity as currently happens in a faith based school. The postmodern world view promotes a pluralist approach to religion while in a faith based system children are taught to both respect and learn from other religious traditions. The new Pre-school and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland formalises the learning about other religious traditions within the

Patron's programme in an age-appropriate and educationally sound manner. At the same time informal learning about each other's faith traditions is part and parcel of everyday life in the increasingly large number of our schools that are inclusive of children of all faiths and other stances for living. The NCCA Consultation Document posits that 'ERB and Ethics will recognise the role of teachers as nurturing children's dispositions.' (p22) The document goes further when it states that:

'A child-centred approach requires the teacher to be a facilitator in the child's learning process; to listen effectively and facilitate good questioning among children. Empowering children to lead aspects of lessons by relating teaching to their personal experience of religion and beliefs provides an environment where teachers and children are partners in education. Staying open-minded, fair, balanced and non-judgmental is important. Teachers when dealing with their 'unknowingness' of religions, beliefs and cultures become co-learners in this dynamic, fostering a disposition of openness and flexibility.' (p22)

I believe that this is nothing new, it is already happening in our Catholic Schools. Our teachers are leaders in facilitating the integration of children of all faiths and different stances for living into the welcoming and hospitable environment that is the Catholic School. They have already become co-learners with the children in their classrooms as they learn from one another about different ways of living in the world. Their classrooms are places of mutual respect, tolerance and more importantly care for one another. Our Catholic schools are recognised as places of inclusion and welcome and this is affirmed by the *Report of the Chief Inspector (2010-2012)* when he states that

'During notified WSEs 96% of schools were found to be managing their pupils effectively by, for example, fostering respectful pupil-teacher interactions, by cultivating an inclusive, child-centred ethos and by using positive strategies to promote good behaviour. Incidental inspections similarly found that the management of pupils was effective in practically all (96%) of the classrooms visited.'

Given that almost 93% of primary schools were under the patronage of the Catholic Church during that time period it seems fair to extrapolate that the vast majority of our schools were among that 96%. I am led to wonder again what ERB and Ethics will add to the classroom experience in the Catholic school, except perhaps to cause confusion and increase an acknowledged already overloaded curriculum.

THE TEACHER

As Patron I am concerned about the teacher in the Catholic school who will be required to teach out of the conflicting philosophy of education proposed by the NCCA in relation to ERB

and Ethics. In speaking to principals and teachers, I have heard their concerns as people of faith being asked to teach children about religion from a position of sceptical reason, from a position where no one faith tradition is privileged, where truth is merely a social construction rather than something revealed and living, and where children and adults are co-authors of the framework within which they live and find meaning, rather than finding meaning for life because of the faith tradition in which they live. The NCCA Consultation document acknowledges that the introduction of a separate subject that requires teachers to teach out of a pluralist approach during one part of the day, will be particularly demanding of the teacher in the denominational school whose task it is to maintain the ethos of the faith based school in which he/she teaches.

There is also the challenge for teachers who will be engaged in teaching structured/programmed and faith forming on the one hand, and teaching about religions and beliefs from a pluralist perspective on the other.' (p.23)

The teachers in our schools believe that they are already attaining most of what is contained in the proposed REB and Ethics programmes of learning through their engagement with the Religious Education, SPSC, SESE curricula and the Green Schools' programme and cannot see the need for another curriculum area.

The Parent

Catholic parents have an inalienable right to faith based education for their children. This right is enshrined in our Constitution (42.1) and reiterated as recently as 2012 in a government report:

*Religious groups are free to establish their own schools to cater for members of their particular faith. This religious freedom is a core element in our system at primary and secondary level.*¹⁰

In a faith based school, religious education cannot be compartmentalised but must be fully acknowledged as part of the lived reality of the Catholic families who desire that children be educated in this way. Parents have a right to expect that the ethos of the school that they have chosen for their child will be supported at all times. The proposal that at some point of the school day, children and their teachers will be expected to suspend their belief system and construct a different reality is problematic for parents who believe that the Catholic school is there to support them as the primary educators of their children in the ways of faith.

The Child

Finally, I wish to come to the person at the centre of all that we do in Catholic education, the child and his/her relationship with Jesus Christ which we are called to foster and develop throughout the journey through the primary school. I have already referred to the fact that

Catholic schools also seek to help children to become adults who have respect for, and are eager to understand and enter dialogue with those who have different stances for living. Pope Francis states that

An authentic faith which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.¹

It is this authentic faith that we seek to develop in our Catholic schools. In order to grow in this kind of faith, children need to learn in an environment that supports their faith and the faith of their family and the community in which they live. The approach suggested by the NCCA will require children to stand back from their faith, to engage with their faith in a way that may actually undermine their ability to immerse themselves in their own religious tradition. This cannot be acceptable in a Catholic school.

In speaking of the child, I also wish to speak of those children in our Catholic schools whose parents do not wish them to participate in the Patron's programme of Religious Education. This is a very small group; 1.2% in a recent survey conducted by our Diocesan Education Office. However, despite the small numbers, I am very conscious that there is a need to find an appropriate way to engage these children in thinking and learning about Religious Education. I remain convinced that the proposed ERB and Ethics is not the approach required for those children in faith based schools. Perhaps what is needed is a set of guidelines which could then be adapted and implemented by the Patrons with parental approval for the Catholic school context.

I welcome the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the NCCA in this consultation process, and can only pray that the concerns, opinions and suggestions offered from a faith based perspective will be received in the spirit in which they are submitted.

✠ Denis Mally

Bishop of Kilmore & Leighlin

¹ Catholic Schools Partnership, *Catholic Primary Schools Looking to the Future*, 2012

² Department of Education and Skills, *Chief Inspector's Report 2010-12* (Dublin, 2012), p. 34.

³ Government of Ireland, *Ireland's Fourth Periodic Report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (2012), p. 188.

⁴ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Italian City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013), 816C.



Home

Contributor

Breandán Ó Bric

Comment on NCCA Consultation Paper on Education about Religions, Beliefs and Ethics.

This paper on the above matter is one of the developments arising from recommendations of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector(2012)

It acknowledges that the focus should be on what children should learn and for what purpose in all schools beyond 2016. It is significant that the title to this consultation paper uses the term " about religions" - a rather vague "one size fits all" approach which is in marked contrast to the recognised right of schools to operate in accordance a stated ethos (that is, the values and principles it promotes and is decided by the owners or patrons/trustees of the school and not by Central Government; (Ref. DES, Advancing School Autonomy in The Irish School System, December, 2015 p.19)

Has NCCA been in communication with its own Department in recent times?

The ethos of a school is given expression in many different ways throughout the school day from morning assembly to dismissal time during which the school's characteristic spirit is always in evidence. It underlines a continuum of practice of the values from home to school in countless , enabling the child to experience at first hand the Christian vision of the human person with a clear respect for all people, irrespective of faiths.

The school is a an expression of the community it serves.

The deletion of Rule 68 and 69 from the Rules for National Schools by the current Minister of Education is more a futile gesture of a discredited political philosophy than any genuine effort at curriculum reform.

Catholic Primary school, managed by Boards of Management comprised of parents, teachers, community representatives and Patrons nominees have a vital role in determining the quality and direction of the education being provided in the schools which they manage.

It underlines the nature of these schools as being embedded in their local community where daily interaction is ongoing both inside and outside the school.

Efforts by a minority of a minority to contradict this fact are disingenuous.

Surveys indicate that there is a very high level of parental satisfaction with the operation of these schools and in particular with the daily practice of an ethos which respects all members of the school community irrespective of social background, education/special needs or racial origin.

It is not surprising that many Catholic schools are sought after by parents who may not subscribe to Catholic values but nonetheless wish to have their children enrolled in such schools because of the positive emphasis on respect for the dignity of the person, the inclusiveness and fairness in operation in these schools.

Some points from the consultation paper should not go amiss on NCCA. It says on page 1 of the document " the issue of time is an important one"- any of the thousands of primary teachers will attest to this fact as evident from repeated statements from INTO IPPN and CPSMA where curriculum overload is regularly highlighted. The "New" Curriculum in 1971 which was a welcome reform of an outdated curriculum failed to address the time issue in the implementation of the curriculum and was further complicated by the Modified Curriculum of 1999 which again, unfortunately, failed to address the paucity of time in providing for the appropriate resources for proper implementation of such a curriculum.

NCCA should be to the forefront of addressing this fact by engaging in some research on the time issue rather than further attempting to overload an already overloaded curriculum.

I suggest that this proposed further layer of unnecessary material be assigned to the back burner and the time issue be given the overdue attention it merits in the best interests of all concerned with Primary Schools.

Breandán Ó Bric, Bóthar na Bóinne, An Uaimh, Co na Mí.



Home

Contributor

Breda Holmes, Helen Leacy, Sr Maureen
Matthews SP

Subject: Submission to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

Date: 16th March 2016

From: Mrs Breda Holmes, Miss Helen Leacy and Sister Maureen Matthews SP,
Primary Diocesan Advisers, Education Secretariat, Archdiocese of Dublin

The Primary Diocesan Advisers for the Archdiocese of Dublin believe that the proposed curriculum for *Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics* is unnecessary.

The curriculum in *ERB and Ethics* suggests that it 'will contribute to the development of the child in five key areas'.¹ Catholic primary schools already provide an education that contributes to 'all aspects of the person of the pupil'.²

The Primary Diocesan Advisers for the Archdiocese of Dublin believe that:

- The proposals for the *ERB and Ethics* curriculum are inspired more by an adult, intellectual critique of religions rather than the experience of a child attending primary school. Each school patron has a right to develop a programme that supports and contributes to the ethos of their school.³ The philosophy of *ERB and Ethics* is in direct conflict with the philosophy of Religious Education in Catholic primary schools, where Religious Education is based on a faith commitment. Teachers would find themselves delivering mixed messages. Teachers teaching the objective truth of the Catholic faith would appear to be contradicting themselves if delivering an alternative programme based on the proposal for *ERB and Ethics*. This could lead to serious confusion amongst children as young as four years of age who are at the initial stages of faith formation.

¹ *Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper*, (Dublin: NCCA, 2016) p.10

² *Agreed Schedule for a Catholic Primary School in the Republic of Ireland*

³ *Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper*, (Dublin: NCCA, 2016) p.7

- Parents are the primary educators of their children.⁴ As the primary educators of their children, many parents have chosen a Catholic education with the expectation that their children’s faith will be developed and nourished in school. The ethos of a Catholic school permeates the whole day. The proposal of *ERB and Ethics* conflicts with the objective truth that is central to the Catholic faith. Therefore, the proposal would substantially undermine the expressed wishes of parents and guardians who choose Catholic education for their children.

- Ethics are intrinsic to the ethos of a Catholic school where Jesus Christ is at the heart of all activity. In a Catholic school, the ethical framework reflects the social teaching of the Church. All Catholic schools already promote the values of respect, love, compassion, peace, justice, equality, unity, service, mercy, forgiveness, integrity and inclusion and engage with people of all beliefs. Children attending Catholic Primary schools **are** enabled to:
 - appreciate the importance of responsibilities as well as rights;
 - develop a sense of conscience and promote tolerance;
 - develop the skills necessary for good moral decision making;
 - understand the destructive power of discrimination, racism and bullying;
 - develop respect for the environment;
 - think critically;
 - understand human rights, equality, culture, social justice and social inclusivity.

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(See Appendix 1 for evidence of where these points are addressed in the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*.)

- The proposal states that *ERB and Ethics* will ‘value the child as a curious, capable, confident and caring individual.’ This philosophy is already at the heart of all teaching

⁴ *Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper*, (Dublin: NCCA, 2016) p.10

⁵ *Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper*, (Dublin: NCCA, 2016) p.14

and learning activities in a Catholic school. All children are valued as curious, capable, confident and caring individuals. These values are also reflected in the following:

- The Education Act 1998, which requires that a school shall ‘promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school.’⁶
 - The Schedule for the Roman Catholic School, which “aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person of the pupil: intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual”
 - Catholic schools’ ethos and mission statements
 - Many school policies which Boards of Management review regularly, for example:
 - Code of Behaviour
 - Anti-bullying
 - Child Protection
 - Critical Incident Management
 - Several aspects of subjects in the Primary Curriculum, including Religious Education informed by the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*.
- One of the aims of the proposed *ERB and Ethics* curriculum is: ‘to foster a respect for, understanding of and empathy with members of different religions, beliefs and worldviews.’⁷ Catholic schools are by their very nature inclusive, open and hospitable communities and make provision for inter-religious and inter-cultural awareness. They bear witness to an attitude of respect and appreciation of other faith beliefs or other stances for living, while educating in the distinctive beliefs, values and practices of the Catholic community. This is evident in their policies, ethos and leadership. Teachers are already working with an overloaded curriculum. The suggested themes

⁶ Education Act (Government of Ireland 1998) 9d

⁷ *Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics, Consultation Information for Teachers* (Dublin: NCCA, 2016) p.3

for *ERB and Ethics* are already being taught at all levels, across many subjects in the Catholic primary school.⁸ Many curricular areas, such as: Religion, SESE, SPHE, English, PE, Art, Drama and Music provide opportunities to explore inter-religious and inter-cultural awareness.

- Through the implementation of the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*, all pupils are enabled to learn about and from the beliefs, teachings and practices of other religious traditions.⁹ The *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* includes education on *Other Religious Traditions* and recognises the importance of inter-religious dialogue. Inter-religious literacy is one of the five key skills in the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum*. Through developing skills of inter-religious literacy the children **are** enabled 'to develop powers of empathy for and sensitivity towards people of other religions and beliefs.....and to foster awareness of shared values such as justice, peace...'¹⁰ This continues to be developed in the new programme for Religious Education, *Grow in Love*, as it is implemented in all classes in the Catholic primary school.

In conclusion, the Primary Diocesan Advisers for the Archdiocese of Dublin believe that the proposal of 'a national curriculum in *ERB and Ethics* based on a more pluralist epistemology which explores different faiths and beliefs without promoting one faith perspective above another'¹¹ is totally incompatible with the mission, the vision and the ethos of a Catholic school.

⁸ *Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper*, (Dublin: NCCA, 2016) pp.15-16

⁹ *Catholic Primary Schools in a Changing Ireland, Sharing Good Practice on Inclusion of All Pupils* (Maynooth: Catholic Schools P, 2015)

¹⁰ *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*, Irish Episcopal Conference (Dublin: Veritas, 2015) p.37

¹¹ *Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper*, (Dublin: NCCA, 2016) p.29

Appendix 1

Children in Catholic schools are taught that, “The golden rule is ‘In everything do to others as you would have them do to you’ (Mt 7:12; Lk 6:31; CCC 1970)”.¹²

The Primary Diocesan Advisers for the Archdiocese of Dublin believe that the concepts on ethics, as proposed by the NCCA in *ERB and Ethics*, are already intrinsic to Religious Education in Catholic primary schools. The following table outlines the concepts from the proposal and compares them to a range of aims, skills, knowledge and concepts included in the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*. This curriculum is the foundation document for Religious Education in Catholic primary schools.

Concepts in the proposed curriculum for <i>ERB and Ethics</i>	Aims, Skills, Knowledge and Concepts from the <i>Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland</i>
appreciate responsibilities as well as rights	<p><u>RSE in a Christian Context (p.80):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Each member of a family has responsibilities to the others (CCC 2201).</i> • <i>Stories that facilitate an understanding of fair reciprocity (i.e., developing a concept of fairness as requiring the reciprocal co-ordination of two or more points of view).</i> <p><u>RSE in a Christian Context (p.102):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The importance of looking after ourselves physically, emotionally and spiritually.</i> <p><u>Social Teaching of the Church (pp.128-129):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Include some of the following: Justice issues in the local community (environmental, economic, cultural, political, infrastructure, social) e.g. care of the aged, homelessness, equality issues, poverty, consumerism and the environment.</i> • <i>Study of people and organisations working for peace and justice in the world (e.g. Trócaire, Red Cross, Catholic Commission for Justice, Peace and Ecology, International Women’s Day etc.).</i>

¹² *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*, Irish Episcopal Conference (Dublin: Veritas, 2015) p.101

<p>develop a sense of conscience and promote tolerance</p>	<p><u>Aims of Christian Faith (p.66):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Children will develop a growing awareness of diversity in beliefs.</i> <p><u>Aims of Christian Faith (p.84):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Children will begin to distinguish between a religious and non-religious worldview, showing sensitivity and respect for people who hold beliefs different from their own (CSRE 2).</i> <p><u>Aims of Christian Morality (p78):</u> <i>Children will:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>develop their understanding of objective morality by reflecting on the reasons for moral precepts, rules and actions</i> • <i>develop a sense of interdependence, of justice and of fairness as reciprocity.</i> <p><u>Christian Faith, Skills of Religious Literacy (p.66):</u> <i>Children should be enabled to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>explore awareness of the presence of God in self, others and world</i> • <i>identify his/her own religious identity and religious and/or cultural identity of others</i> • <i>identify Christian and other faith communities in his/her locality</i> • <i>listen to and discuss stories about children in a Christian or other faith community.</i> <p><u>Social Teaching of the Church (pp.128-129):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Every kind of discrimination whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion is against God’s will (GS 29).</i> <p><u>Other Religious Traditions (p.112)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Respect and love ought to be extended to those who think or act differently than we do in Religious matters (GS 28).</i>
<p>develop the skills for good moral decision making</p>	<p><u>Aims of Christian Morality (p.78):</u> <i>Children will:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>understand that they are accountable for their decisions and responsible for their words and actions (moral agency)</i> • <i>reflect on their freedom to make choices and the relationship between choice and consequence (freedom of choice and human responsibility; agency, self-reflection; moral judgement)</i> • <i>develop respect for the views, feelings and possessions of others, in their own community and in other communities.</i> <p><u>Aims of Christian Morality Strand (p.126):</u> <i>Children will:</i></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>develop their understanding of factors that call for, influence and promote moral behaviour</i> • <i>begin to incorporate moral ideals of conduct into their identity (moral self-reflection)</i> • <i>develop an awareness of social justice, ecological justice, universal solidarity and responsibility.</i> <p><u>Christian Morality, Skill of Religious Literacy (p.78):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Children should be enabled to respect and respond to difference and diversity among peers.</i> <p><u>Christian Morality, Skills of Religious Literacy (p.126):</u> <i>Children should be enabled to :</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>investigate and evaluate models for their own moral life, making connections between the decisions and personal attributes of moral models and their own sense of moral self (moral character: integrity and responsibility)</i> • <i>discern and evaluate values, attitudes and expectations with which they are surrounded in contemporary culture</i> • <i>develop strategies to promote a more just society and world (moral agency and imagination).</i>
<p>understand the destructive power of discrimination, racism and bullying</p>	<p><u>Social Teaching of the Church (p.102):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Every kind of discrimination whether based on sex, race, colour, social condition, language or religion is against God’s will (GS 29).</i> <p><u>Other Religious Traditions (pp.112-113):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Respect and love ought to be extended to those who think or act differently than we do in religious matters (GS 28).</i> • <i>The Church reproves discrimination against people on the basis of race, colour or religion (NA 5).</i> • <i>Dialogue is an honest witnessing to our belief and a sincere listening to the belief of the other person.</i> <p><u>Human Dignity (p.127):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Christians respect the fundamental rights of each person (CCC 1944, 2479, 2507, 1782, 2106).</i> • <i>Every human being has a right to life, food, clothing, and shelter, education, employment, to respect, to appropriate information, to act according to one’s own conscience, to privacy and freedom of religion (GS 26; PT 11-27, 106).</i> • <i>A person is more precious for who s/he is than for what s/he has (GS 35).</i>
<p>develop respect for the environment</p>	<p><u>Aims of Christian Morality (p.78):</u></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Children will explore their responsibility to care for and preserve the local environment (CSRE 3d).</i> <p><u>Aims of Christian Morality (p.100):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Children will continue to develop an ecological ethic.</i> <p><u>Social Teaching of the Church (p.79):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Each person has a responsibility to care for the environment (CCC 373; 2402, 2456; RH 15).</i> • <i>God gave us the intelligence and skill to care for the earth.</i> <p><u>Social Teaching of the Church (pp.128-129):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Include some of the following: Justice Issues in the local community (environmental, economic, cultural, political, infrastructure, social) e.g. care of the aged, homelessness, equality issues, poverty, consumerism and the environment.</i> • <i>Study of people and organisations working for peace and justice in the world (e.g. Trócaire, Red Cross, Catholic Commission for Justice, Peace and Ecology, International Women’s Day etc.).</i>
think critically	<p><u>Christian Morality, Skills of Religious Literacy (p.78):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Children should be enabled to justify moral choices made (moral agency, critical moral orientation).</i> <p><u>Christian Faith, Skills of Religious Literacy (p.106):</u> <i>Children should be enabled to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>justify judgements and decisions about religious concepts and beliefs</i> • <i>explore challenges that have emerged in relation to his/her own religion/spirituality.</i> <p><u>Christian Morality, Skills of Religious Literacy (p.126):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Children should be enabled to discern and evaluate values, attitudes and expectations with which they are surrounded in contemporary culture.</i>
understand human rights, equality, culture, social justice and social inclusivity	<p><u>Aims of Christian Morality (p.100):</u> <i>Children will:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>grow in understanding of their own growth and development, emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually and the support they receive from others for that growth</i> • <i>begin to develop an ethic that respects, defends, and promotes the rights and wellbeing of every person regardless of gender, race, social status, personal achievement or social contribution (justice orientation)</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>co-ordinate concerns for equity (taking into account the special needs, situations or contributions of others) with reciprocity in structuring moral decisions.</i> <p><u>Christian Morality, Skill of Religious Literacy (p.78):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Children should be enabled to respect and respond to difference and diversity among peers.</i> <p><u>Christian Faith, Skill of Religious Literacy (p.84):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Children should be enabled to discuss the importance of religious or philosophical beliefs in the lives of people in his/her community.</i> <p><u>Christian Morality, Skill of Religious Literacy (p.100):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Children should be enabled to practice effective interpersonal skills in order to relate to others in peaceful, tolerant, and non-discriminatory ways.</i> <p><u>Other Religious Traditions (p.69):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We are members of one human family and community on earth.</i> <p><u>Social Teaching of the Church (pp.128-129):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Include some of the following: Justice Issues in the local community (environmental, economic, cultural, political, infrastructure, social) e.g. care of the aged, homelessness, equality issues, poverty, consumerism and the environment.</i> • <i>Study of people and organisations working for peace and justice in the world (e.g. Trócaire, Red Cross, Catholic Commission for Justice, Peace and Ecology, International Women’s Day etc.).</i>
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Home

Contributor

Brian Caball

“**ERB**... does not seek to nurture the belief or practice of any one religion.”

GIVING CHILDREN A LITTLE BIT OF EVERYTHING WILL, IN FACT, MEAN NOT GIVING ANY RELIGION. WILL THE CHRISTIAN CHILD BE TAUGHT TO PRAY TO GOD, TO LEARN THE STORY (eg) OF CHRIST, etc? THIS IS A SYSTEM TO ‘WATER DOWN’ BELIEF IN GOD...THE ESPOUSED WISHES OF CERTAIN POLITICIANS, IDOLOGIES, etc!

“ERB...emphasises the importance of **human rights**...”

HUMAN RIGHTS, OF COURSE BUT WHAT ABOUT THE *HUMAN RIGHT* TO LEARN ABOUT AND WORSHIP GOD?

“Each school **patron has a right to develop a programme that supports and contributes to the ethos of their school.**”

THIS IS WHAT I WANT FOR RELIGIOUS ETHOS SCHOOLS.....BUT THE QUESTION OF TIME IS MENTIONED.....e.g. NOT ENOUGH TIME IN THE SCHOOL DAY FOR RELIGION? OUTSIDE SCHOOL HOURS?...CUTTING BACK RELIGION HOURS? THE ‘RUAIRÍ QUINN SURVEYS’ BEING ‘*MISINTERPRETED*’!

“**ERB and Ethics** is separate to these programmes and is in no sense intended to replace the patron’s programme or faith formation education in denominational schools.”

NOT MY IMPRESSION (IN PARTICULAR, HAVING EXPERIENCED RECENT MINISTERS FOR EDUCATION)! DOES THIS MEAN THAT TWO ‘RELIGIOUS’ PROGRAMMES WILL BE IN SCHOOLS? WHY NOT TEACH A RELIGION? ANY ‘PROPER’ RELIGION *WILL TEACH* ‘RESPECT’ FOR PEOPLE WITH OTHER RELIGIONS OR WITH NONE....e.g...THE 10 COMMANDMENTS COVER QUITE A LOT AND THEY ARE A SET OF RULES THAT HAVE STOOD THE TEST OF TIME.....3,000 YEARS!

“**ERB and Ethics** is part of a new phase of work to develop the primary curriculum that includes the areas of Language and Mathematics. A key priority of curriculum development in these areas is the need to address, and ultimately to reduce, curriculum overload.”

THIS IS THE EQUIVALENT OF BILOCATION!

“The curriculum will seek to develop five key areas: *personal understanding, mutual understanding, character education, connection to the wider world* and *spiritual awareness*.”

‘SOUNDS’ VERY ACCEPTABLE.....but DOES *spiritual awareness* INCLUDE PRAYER? COMMUNICATING WITH GOD? OR DOES IT MEAN FOLLOWING THE TRENDS OF ‘PLAYING DOWN GOD’?

“To ensure the good practices that already take place in schools are recognized we are developing a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics.”

NÍ THUIGIM! RELIGION IS BEING PUSHED OUT TO BRING IN ‘HISTORY OF RELIGIONS’!!

“Supporting teachers to enable children to:-

develop self-awareness, confidence, **personal beliefs** and positive social identities # have knowledge and understanding of how **religious and non religious worldviews** have contributed to the culture in which we live, and continue to have an impact on individuals and relationships between individuals and their communities # express comfort, empathy and joy with human diversity, use **accurate language for human differences**, and form deep, caring human connections # recognise unfairness, injustice and inequality and understand the relationship between **rights and responsibilities** # appreciate the impact of prejudice and discriminatory actions on others.”

LOVELY ‘FLOWERY’ LANGUAGE FOR THE REMOVAL OF PROPER RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, MORAL TEACHING, RESPECT FOR PEOPLE, LEADING CHILDREN (HAVING ALREADY INFLUENCED STUDENTS IN TEACHER TRAINING COLLEGES) TO MAKE UP THEIR OWN **personal beliefs.**

RE rights and responsibilities: DOES THAT MEAN THAT THEY WOULD BE TAUGHT SUCH THINGS AS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RIGHT TO LIFE OF THE UNBORN (AS TAUGHT BY MANY RELIGIONS) OR THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ‘FATHERS’ NOT TO ABANDON THEIR CHILDREN WHILE GAINING

FINANCIALLY [e.g.....‘MY ‘DADDY’ CREATED ME AND THEN SOLD ME!’].

“For Consideration:

Which of these methodologies/strategies do you perceive as being important in the teaching of ERB and Ethics? Choose up to 5.

Whole class discussion Thinking Time (Philosophy with children informal method) Debates Games Small group work External Visits Circle time Links with local community organisations/groups Pair work Practical projects Drama Education methods – role play etc. Visual arts Assemblies Media analysis Integrated/cross-curricular projects Connecting with parents and the community.”

“SCADÁN DEARG”...!!!

“In **Massachusetts** (and across the USA) the US Constitution enshrines the right of freedom of belief, there is no officially recognised state religion and **no particular religion may be taught in publicly-funded schools.**”

WHY NOT?

“The Constitution does, however, protect religious activity that is initiated by private individuals, meaning that **there is nothing in the Constitution to prohibit any student in a publicly-funded school from voluntarily praying at any time before, during, or after the school day.** Students may also pray with fellow students during the school day on the same terms and conditions that they may engage in other conversation or speech.”

ISN'T IT A FACT THAT TEACHERS ARE AT PRESENT UNDER SUSPESION IN THE US....ONE BECAUSE OF PRAYING PRIVATELY BUT IN ‘PUBLIC’ VIEW? SURELY WE DON'T WANT THAT!

“Legislation makes it explicit that the locally agreed syllabus devised by each local authority in **England** must not be designed to **convert pupils.**”

“What is your hope/expectations for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics?”

PROPER RELIGIOUS TEACHING OF FAITH AND MORALS.....NOT BITS OF THIS AND BITS OF THAT AS ENVISAGED BY ERB & E.

“What would you like to teach children in ERB and Ethics?”

PROPER RELIGIOUS TEACHING OF FAITH AND MORALS.



Home

Contributor

Brigid Bennet, Collette Hyland, Mairead
Johnston

St. Patrick's National School

Clonsillaheen, Tullamore, Co. Offaly
E-Mail: stpatricksschoolclonsillaheen@gmail.com

Tel: 044-9731022
Roll Number: 123234



Clonsillaheen
11/03/2016

A chra,

Please find enclosed our submission
regarding the proposed SLL and other Curricula.

Le nua,
Daryl Bennett.

Encl 1.

We, the principals of the schools in the Catholic Parish of Clonsillaque, Co Offaly, wish to make a submission to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) with regard to the proposed curriculum about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics.

We welcome the attention being paid to ERB and Ethics by the NCCA, in so far as that attention implicitly recognises that such aspects of education are of fundamental importance to the development of the child. We are glad to see Irish primary education being re-thought in a more holistic sense than the narrow STEM/Literacy and Numeracy focus of recent years might suggest. We acknowledge the value of an ERB and Ethics curriculum for schools operating from multi-denominational or non-denominational perspectives, where it might usefully contribute to the Person's Programme. However, as Catholic educators, we have concerns about the ERB curriculum in its proposed format.

From a practical point of view, we are very concerned about the proposal that ERB be treated as a discrete curriculum, given the problems of curriculum overload that schools have grappled with since the introduction of the 1999 Revised Curriculum, and that indeed were acknowledged (albeit not satisfactorily ameliorated) in the 2011 Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. It is our opinion that primary schools do not have the scope, in their current circumstances, to provide an additional curricular area to pupils.

If, however, ERB is not treated as a discrete curricular area, it is difficult to see how it will not impinge on the characteristic spirit of the Catholic school, and the faith-based Catholic education we provide. The proposed ERB curriculum, with its post-modern stance, integrated across the curriculum areas, would directly challenge the Catholic view of education which understands Catholicism to be a reality lived out in every aspect of the school. It would be inherently contradictory for schools to attempt to interpret the curriculum in the context both of a Catholic characteristic spirit, and a characteristic spirit that privileges no particular religious tradition or viewpoint. The proposed integrated ERB and Ethics curriculum could therefore deny parents the right to choose a faith-based education for their children, contrary to Article 42 of *Bunreacht na hÉireann*.

We write this as principals of schools that, while Catholic in ethos and catering to predominantly Catholic communities, welcome children of all faiths and none. We are challenged as Catholic educators to fully live out our Christian calling everyday of our professional lives. The debate that is occurring around the place of religion and ethics in our primary schools as a result of the NCCA publication of the consultation paper is therefore welcome, as it encourages us to reflect more deeply on what it is to be a Catholic-Christian educator in modern Ireland.

Collette Hyland (Principal, Scoil Naomh Mhuire, Walsh Island)

Máiread Johnson (Principal, St Brigid's National School, Blackrath)

Brigid Bennett (Principal, St Patrick's National School, Clonsillaque)



Home

Contributor

Callystown NS



Callystown N.S.

Roll No. 14252G

14-04-2018

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment,
15 Fitzwilliam Square,
Dublin 2.



Dear Sir or Madam,

The Board of Management of Callystown National School, Dagherhead, Co. Louth met on Monday April 11th and discussed the document "Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics". Following this discussion the Board wishes to make a submission as part of the consultation process.

Callystown National School is a Catholic school and is under the patronage of the Archbishop of Armagh. The Board believes that the Catholic ethos of our school is critical to its identity and is the foundation of all that is good in our school. Our Catholic ethos informs our whole day at school, not only the religion class, but it is at the heart of the academic, social, personal and spiritual work of the school. The Board believes that the introduction of the proposed new subject Education about Religions and Beliefs would compromise this ethos. It feels that a new and separate religion subject that is based only on knowledge and does not deal with spiritual development would create confusion and uncertainty with our young pupils.

The Board also has concerns regarding the addition of another subject to an already overloaded curriculum. It does not see how a new subject can be added without other subjects being significantly affected.

The Board would encourage NCCA to engage with the Patrons of schools to ensure that the concern expressed here and no doubt by many other Catholic schools is resolved.

The Board understands that the date for submissions has just recently passed, however it would be grateful if you would take the views expressed here into consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Fr. Martin Mc Veigh, Chairperson,

On behalf of

Board of Management of Callystown National School.



Home

Contributor

Carmel Magee

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Carmel Magee
Position (if applicable)	Primary Teacher
Organisation (if applicable)	
Address	Creevy NS, Ballyshannon, Co Donegal
Telephone	
Email	cmageecreevy@gmail.com
Date	30 th March 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

In my opinion the proposed aims of ERB and Ethics are already being covered in the existing RE curriculum and other curricular areas such as SPHE.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

At present all teachers are aware and struggling in the everyday teaching within the classroom to cover all aspects of an already overloaded curriculum. I cannot see how it will be possible to include a curriculum in ERB and Ethics as well as the current RE curriculum. I cannot see how the proposed curriculum in ERB and Ethics will add to the experience of children, parents or the school community when I see it is already being covered elsewhere.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

As I have already stated I feel that the proposed aims of the curriculum in ERB and Ethics is already being well covered. Inter-religious education in as well as education in values or moral education is already an important part of the school curriculum. These are already being taught in ways that are relevant and appropriate to the school ethos which in my opinion is important.

I believe that our schools are already making provision for the ever-changing school population in regard to religious beliefs. Provision is made for children who wish to opt out of RE and this has been the case for the last 20 years since I began teaching.

Our faith-based school takes on a child-centred and holistic approach to education and religious belief is not something that can be compartmentalised. RE is part of the school spirit and ethos and cannot be separated from this.

There are children and parents of children within our faith-based school who decide to opt-out of RE. This has never posed a problem and provision has always been made with the child and parents to arrange this.

For me it seems that it would be impossible to implement a discrete curriculum for ERB and Ethics in our already over-loaded curriculum. It also seems unnecessary and unfair to ask teachers to implement this when it is already being covered in school.





Home

Contributor
Carmel Magner

Submission by Mrs Carmel Magner, Killeedy Parish

Curriculum Development in ERB and Ethics should include a separate subject on ERB as well as integrating it into the wider curriculum.

Church needs to ask "what does it want to achieve" and always keep the end goal in mind. Once it has answered that question it will be able to reach its goal step by step.

With regard to teaching methodology the emphasis should be living it and applying it. Stories are a great way of conveying a message that people and children will remember. After each lesson there should be a discussion around real life case studies involving children's lives and challenges. Discuss how a child could apply what s/he has learned from the class topic and how the child's decision-making would be influenced by the topic.

The church should consider running classes independently of the primary schools e.g. weekends/Sundays to teach ERB to children and adults. These classes should be given by people who are passionate about religion to ensure the faith is handed on.





Home

Contributor

Caroline Tully

To whom it may concern, our staff has discussed the proposed introduction of ERB and Ethics Curriculum into schools. We have concerns, namely:

- We feel there would be a conflict between the ERB curriculum and the ethos and faith instruction of our faith based primary school.
- The teaching of ethics and morals in our school is across other curricular areas including religious education. Teaching ethics separately with a secular approach would conflict with this.
- We are aware that many of our families would opt out of this subject creating a difficulty for supervision etc.
- Our class teachers feel it is impractical to consider introducing another subject into the already overloaded curriculum.
- Our teachers feel from a personal perspective that it is unrealistic to expect them to teach faith formation on the one hand and then have the knowledge and confidence to teach about other religions and beliefs on the other.
- We feel that introducing the ERB curriculum in a faith based primary school would create total confusion in children at this young age.

Kind Regards,

Caroline Tully, Principal

St. Mary's NS. Knockcroghery, Co. Roscommon.

Ph. 0906661963.



Home

Contributor

**Catholic Primary Schools Management
Association**

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
Consultation on Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics
Submission on behalf of the
Catholic Primary Schools Management Association
March 2016

Introduction

“Catholic schools seek to reflect a distinctive vision of life and a corresponding philosophy of education. This is based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”¹

This statement of mission is one which is practised and aspired to everyday in Catholic Schools across Ireland. They aspire “to create an open, happy, stimulating, and mutually respectful community environment in which young people are able to develop the full range of their abilities and talents in a balanced, integrated and generous way”².

CPSMA provides over 2,900 Catholic Primary Schools with practical support in their work to build these happy and inclusive school communities. We engage on their behalf with the various educational bodies in relation to issues which can impact the running and management of our schools. CPSMA views as essential, the critical engagement in the consultation process on ***Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics*** as part of this work. This document outlines our response to the consultation material and the rationale behind the consultation process.

The Consultation Documentation

Upon engagement with the consultation materials for this process, CPSMA would like to note that the on-line questionnaire in relation to ERB and Ethics was, in our view, poorly devised and does not allow for in-depth or real consultation with the proposals by parents, teachers or other interested parties. Moving forward however, having considered what is proposed in the published documentation, we, as the Catholic management body must conclude that what is proposed raises serious concerns for

¹ Vision 08, A Vision for Catholic Education in Ireland, A Pastoral Letter from the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 2008, p.2.

² Ibid.

Catholic primary schools in Ireland. Our views are founded upon a number of core issues which we would like to outline:

1. Inter-cultural dialogue already at work in Catholic primary schools

The consultation material on ERB and Ethics takes little account of the inter-cultural awareness and knowledge which is already happening in schools. The rationale that all pupils should be enabled to learn about different faiths and engage with pupils of other and no faith, is one which has long since been a hallmark of Catholic primary education. Each day, Catholic schools embrace the reality of supporting all pupils in culturally diverse situations.

Based on their core values and the centrality of the person of Jesus Christ, Catholic primary schools are by their very nature inclusive environments. Among the pupils who attend Catholic schools in Ireland, are pupils who come from a huge variety of cultural and religious backgrounds. "In a more culturally diverse society, Catholic schools welcome all that is positive in this new reality, instil an attitude of respect for the good of the other and welcome pupils of other faiths and none."³ Although not sharing the Catholic Faith, many parents of other faith and non-faith backgrounds opt for Catholic education as they value the underpinning morals and vision which is communicated by Catholic schools. Inclusion cannot be reduced to the single issue of religion within a school, "inclusion must also take nationality, ethnicity, socio-economic background and ability into consideration."⁴ These five criteria reach the very centre of the purpose of Catholic Schools, which is to reach out to those children and families who are the most marginalised in our society and provide them with a place where they are fully included and cherished.

Catholic Schools respect and acknowledge the rights of parents as the primary educators of their child. They respect their right to remove their child from religious instruction and willingly facilitate, as much as possible, parents and pupils who are opting out of Religious Education. On a practical level, this has meant that school management has taken care in formulating procedures which allow parents to exercise this right while trying to ensure that all pupils are included and cherished in their school environment. While endeavouring to accommodate pupils and parents who wish to opt-out of RE, Catholic schools actively promote inter-cultural learning and awareness. On the ground this can be seen in the inter-cultural notice boards, the marking of major religious festivals of other faiths and in

³ Catholic Schools in a changing Ireland; Sharing Good practice on inclusion of all pupils, Catholic School Partnership 2015, p11.

⁴ Catholic Primary Schools Management Association: AGM Report 2016, p.28.

the level of respect and support that our teachers, staff and management strive to cultivate in our pupils for those of the same faith, other faiths and no faiths alike. These practices which are long since considered part of the daily work of Catholic schools, are now explored and proposed as best practice in a document by The Catholic Schools Partnership entitled “Catholic Primary Schools in a Changing Ireland; Sharing Good practice on inclusion of all pupils.”

2. Building on inter-cultural dialogue already at work

The launch of the Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (CPPRECI) in 2015 was a further formalising of the commitment of Catholic schools to inter-cultural learning and awareness. One of its key objectives is to ensure on-going engagement with education about religions, beliefs and ethics. The “Ecumenical and Inter-religious Perspective”⁵ is in fact one of the defining features of the curriculum where we are reminded to “acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among people of other faiths”⁶. The NCCA consultation documentation provides a narrow view of the content and outcomes of the CPPRECI which relate to the NCCA definition of ERB. These are not limited within the strand of Christian Faith as asserted in the NCCA overview document of “ERB and Ethics in Patrons’ Programmes”. Inter-religious learning outcomes directly related to the NCCA goals of awareness, tolerance, respect for and celebration of the beliefs, values and stances of living of others are also clearly evident in the Moral Strand of the CPPRECI.

3. The underpinning approach to Religious Education

CPSMA have identified significant philosophical problems with the NCCA proposals on ERB and Ethics. These propose a post-modern approach to religion where pupils are invited to see religious identity as the holding of beliefs interpreted by them. It encourages pupils to see their religion as one among many standpoints which have equal validity. This arguably encourages a form of religious relativism. This pedagogical process suggested by NCCA is completely at odds with the way in which religious education is taught in Catholic schools. Catholic religious education invites Catholic pupils to immerse themselves in the Catholic faith tradition and forms them in faith around the person of Jesus Christ. Pupils are called to encounter religion with the emphasis on reason informed by revelation. This

⁵ Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland: Veritas, 2015, p21.

⁶ Ibid: Referencing Nostra Aetate - Vatican II.

encounter is not just limited to religious education but is evident in every aspect of school life; it is an essential element in the characteristic spirit of a Catholic school.

4. The Characteristic Spirit of Catholic Schools

The NCCA documentation highlights that the development of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics is not intended to replace or indeed impinge on the programmes of individual Patrons. It is essential to state that in faith-based schools religious education is inseparable from the ethos (characteristic spirit) of the school. As explored in Section 3 of this document, the approach to religious education in Catholic schools does not just occur in a single lesson or subject area but permeates all activities in the school. In a Catholic school our “raison-d’etre begins with God”⁷. Everything espoused and taught in Catholic schools therefore should communicate the same understanding of the human person and of life that is present in the Ethos or Characteristic spirit of the school.

The Education Act (1998) specifically requires the Minister to have regard for the characteristic spirit of the school in exercising his or her functions with regard to curriculum {section 30(2)(b)}. Further, the Minister must allow reasonable instruction time in the school day for subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school {section 30(2)(d)}. Based on this, the development of NCCA proposals in areas impinging on religious education and the characteristic spirit of the school are of a different nature than other NCCA proposals. This is already acknowledged in the area of Relationships and Sexuality Education as part of the NCCA SPHE curriculum where it is explicitly acknowledged that the curriculum must be interpreted in the context of the characteristic spirit of the school. Education about Religious Beliefs and Ethics is another such area. As a curricular area it does not lend itself to a one size fits all approach. Due regard must be given to faith-based schools who communicate a particular understanding of the human person and who are forming pupils in faith as opposed to teaching a pluralist approach to religion.

If the current proposals of the NCCA were to be introduced into Irish primary schools, the reality on the ground would be one of contradictions and confusion. A teacher in a Catholic school could, in a religious education lesson communicate to pupils that Jesus Christ is “*The way, the truth and the life*” (John 14:6) at the beginning of the day and in accordance with the proposed ERB and Ethics curriculum teach that *Jesus is a way, a truth and a life* at the end of the day. This practical example highlights how

⁷ Hession. Anne, Catholic Primary Religious Education in a Pluralist Environment, Veritas: 2015, p.65.

a separate or even integrated curriculum in line with the current ERB and Ethics proposals would completely undermine the approach to RE in Catholic schools and threaten their Characteristic spirit.

5. Time Allocation

Primary schools are experiencing curriculum overload. This pressure increased in 2011 with the introduction of *The Literacy and Numeracy Strategy*. While NCCA have indicated that this year will see a review of curriculum time allocations, this issue is one which is consistently brought to our attention by members. Members continue to highlight the strengths of the 1999 curriculum as a child-centred curriculum, which allows teachers a good level of flexibility but are concerned about the amount of content to be covered. Schools continue to try and reach curriculum objectives through the integration of subjects, however the presentation of the current curriculum in does not lend itself well to this approach. The addition of another subject in the form of ERB and Ethics will only add increased pressure to curriculum overload.

6. Opt-Out

It would appear that the impetus for the current ERB and Ethics initiative comes from the Report of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism of 2012, which proposed a common curriculum in the area for all children. However, while a programme may be created for all pupils in order to eliminate or decrease the numbers of parents seeking to opt-out of RE in schools, it will not diminish their parental right to do so. This right is enshrined in the 1998 Education Act, Section 30 (2) – (e) which permits this opt-out if the subject is contrary to the conscience of the parent.

CPSMA understands that the numbers seeking to opt out of RE in Catholic schools is relatively small and that these pupils and parents are willingly accommodated by individual schools in line with their intrinsic inclusive ethos. The implementation of any curriculum in ERB and Ethics which is at odds with the Ethos of Catholic schools, could in fact cause an increase in the number of parents opting-out, in particular by parents seeking a Catholic education for their children. From a management perspective this could place increased pressure on schools in terms of policy development, the facilitation of pupils and supervision to name but a few.

Summary of observations and concerns

CPSMA, having reviewed the consultation material published by the NCCA, can only conclude that the development of a curriculum for **Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics** as currently proposed is unworkable for Catholic schools. What has been proposed takes little account of the level of inclusivity in our schools. The approach it adopts to RE is at odds with how RE is taught in Catholic schools and it seeks to undermine their characteristic spirit. CPSMA also have further concerns in relation to curriculum overload and the future management of pupils who opt-out of any proposed curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Moving forward

CPSMA recommends instead the development of ERB and Ethics Guidelines in consultation with school Patrons. These guidelines would enable individual Patrons to ensure “that appropriate provision in this field is made available”⁸. This approach would allow schools to implement a set of national standards but in a manner consistent with their own approach to RE and taking into account their characteristic spirit.

CPSMA asserts that ERB and Ethics in all Irish primary schools simply cannot work as a one-size fits approach. Catholic schools must continue to seek to reflect a distinctive vision of life and a corresponding philosophy of education within their schools. This is based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Deenihan', with a horizontal line above the first few letters.

Rev. Dr. Tom Deenihan
General Secretary

⁸. The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, Report of the Forum’s Advisory Group report: 2014, p.112.



Home

Contributor

Cathy Burke

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Date	31 April 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum • Other aspects you would like to see included.

The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum

The proposed aims are already addressed in the *Alive-O/Grow in Love* programme along with *SPHE* (incorporating *Walk Tall* and *Stay Safe*) and *Drama* education. Catholic schools are accustomed to working in an inclusive environment and providing creatively for those of other faiths and none. Discussion about other faiths occurs in *Social, Environmental and Science Education* through exploration of other cultures and places, through class discussion when celebrations for children of other faiths occur, through news time and assembly when the significant news of all children is shared. The aims of ERB and Ethics are already incorporated in the integrated curriculum, shared across a number of subject areas.

The new Catholic RE programme will integrate learning about other faiths while also accepting that some will choose no faith, as was a feature in Jesus' time also. This acceptance of other faiths and none is a Gospel based value, alongside the nurturance of the faith of those who choose any faith.

With regard to Catholic schools, the denomination from which I am responding, there is no obvious benefit to this added subject with the exception of being a resource when pupils of other faiths or none are withdrawn from RE class time to another classroom with a teacher who will teach the ERB and Ethics content as an alternative to RE.

The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning

ERB and Ethics content would foster empathy, understanding respect, self-esteem, acceptance of diversity, inclusivity, etc. However, it would do it with no greater effect than does *SPHE*, *SESE*, *Drama* and *RE* combined.

The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

Contribution to the experience of children and parents

- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

Contribution to the experience of all parties concerned

The emphasis on living ethical and moral lives from an existential perspective, as part of and separate from religion, is of value to all parties. This is already incorporated into guided and open, objective discussion through *Stay Safe, Walk Tall, SESE, Drama*, assembly focus on school rules, the *Green Schools* process, etc. The *Golden Rule* is discussed by all school communities regardless of ethos or denomination.

Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

The curriculum is heavily over-loaded already, so it is necessary to consider how the aims of the *ERB and Ethics* proposal are already incorporated and integrated in each of the various curricular areas. The aspirations and content of *ERB and Ethics* are already contained in the regular teaching of the curriculum and so the time allocation could be found in the strands of the concerned subjects without stretching further into a new curricular area.

Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

The proposed curriculum is inclusive and objective addressing the social, emotional and knowledge of the foundations and life of diverse religions and none. However, as these attitudes and values are already being taught in Catholic schools already from both a faith basis and civic basis in various curricular areas, this proposed curriculum creates a complexity with regard to its use and the use of the already established curricular areas and strands. Perhaps it would be of greater value for each school/or denomination to establish how the aims of the proposed curriculum are already being addressed and where they find that they may be augmented. In this manner, a new curricular area is not necessary, yet inclusion and diversity along with ethics and morality are named priorities anew in our broader current cultural and educational context.





Home

Contributor
Cecelia Gavigan

Proposal (aims regarding the curriculum generally, contribution to children's learning, proposed features, what else should be included?)

In general the introduction of ERB and Ethics for primary schools would seem to be a positive step. Learning of this kind will not only complement what is happening already as part of the national curriculum (most especially in SPHE, Geography and the objective of learning about people from other religious backgrounds in the History curriculum) but will also assist in the further development of analytical thinking (as different beliefs are explored and similarities between them encountered) and awareness of multiple perspectives (which may increase the understanding and empathy shown by the children). I would also be hopeful that additional work in this area might help to decrease negative behaviour based on difference and increase acceptance of others regardless of identity (LGBT, membership of Travelling community, skin colour, disability etc)

At the minute, the current curriculum makes no provision for children to learn about other religions. Consequently, in the absence of direct contact in their community, the images children have of particular groups can be solely reliant on how they are portrayed in the media. This can lead to stereotyping and negative attitudes (e.g. Islamophobia). Exposure to accurate information about different religions would help to decrease the stereotypes held by the children.

The Ethics portion of this new curriculum (dependent upon its specific objectives) could allow teachers to engage in more work around global citizenship and would tie in with issues of climate change, fair trade, global inequality etc which are all important for children to understand in order to participate in an increasingly global society.

In examining the aims of the primary curriculum, it would seem that a programme in this area would be especially suited to enabling children to 'contribute to the good of society'.

In looking at the proposed features, it would appear that the areas or strand of this programme link very strongly with those in place in the current SPHE curriculum (Personal Understanding: Myself, Mutual Understanding: Myself and Other, Connection to Wider World: Myself and the Wider World.)

We would hope that specific objectives relating to LGBT identity would be considered to be included as part of the Mutual Understanding strand. At the moment, raising the children's awareness of this is at the discretion of parents and teachers but if we are trying to build a better and more ethical society, it's vital that ALL children get a chance to discuss and explore issues related to discrimination in this area.

As part of the Spiritual Awareness strand, it mentions the importance of 'inner well being'. In a world where children are increasingly suffering from stress, this would seem to be a great opportunity to include specific objectives to enable the children to develop good strategies to deal with unwanted emotions and generally introduce the concept of mental health.

In the context of high profile cases where those in authority showed a distinct lack of morality or ethics, the Character Education strand would appear to be sorely needed for the good of our future society.

Potential Contribution (for children/parents, school communities, teachers, suggestions regarding time allocation and curriculum overload)

The introduction of Ethics/Character Education in primary schools (if properly implemented) will be good for schools, but also the society at large as it is beneficial for citizens to have well-developed personal ethics. This is true whether the children attend a school with a religious or multi-denominational patron body. As such, the universal nature of the programme is welcomed strongly.

The benefits for parents would seem to be strongest for those who are currently in choose which do not match their own personal belief systems. While it is not a perfect solution by any means, it may be an improvement on the current provision.

The programme may also contribute to teachers' development as reflective practitioners but they will need significant support and training in order for the programme to be implemented properly. The more comfortable they are with it, the more likely it is to be taught and the higher the quality of teaching will be. Materials will definitely need to be created and provided as although the idea of teacher as 'co-learner' sounds well in theory, in reality, it is extremely difficult to independently ascertain accurately what the beliefs of a particular religious group are. Information available online cannot be trusted to be representative of the mainstream and so 'sanctioned' materials must be made available.

Teachers will also need to be supported in the development of teaching methodologies suitable for teaching Ethics. If the aim is one of independent minded students with a strong personal ethic, the lessons must require and encourage the children to think themselves; it cannot be simply a case of the teacher saying what is 'good' and 'bad'. The different approach needed here might be an area of particular challenge. It could be useful to consider linking with the ideas of Philosophy For/With Children here.

In terms of curricular time, a suggestion might be to combine the proposed programme with the current SPHE one (possibly to be renamed Citizenship Education or something of the like) and increase the weekly time to 1 hour (with the extra 30 minutes coming from the patron programme time) While more time would be desirable, in terms of obtaining agreement and buy-in from all parties, 30 minute seems like a reasonable amount.

Own views

While the programme is generally welcome as a positive step towards creating acceptance of our diverse society, in no way can it be considered an alternative to a programme of extensive divestment. Parents and teachers (especially LGBT teachers) continue to require much greater choice of schools (especially outside of the Dublin region). This point cannot be made strongly enough.

The link to the second level Religious Education curriculum is sensible. However, given the apparent theistic focus of this, it will be important to ensure that at primary level, the programme is inclusive of those with atheistic/no belief.

While integration of ethics seems like a easy way to ensure it will 'fit in', it should be remembered that the lack of concrete objectives will reduce the chance that the content will be covered in an appropriate fashion.

The decision on when to introduce discrete ERB will be important. While the focus on the prevalent religion in younger classes is understandable, it does mean that those from minority and no faith backgrounds may not hear any reference to their lives in the classroom until 3rd class. The negative effects of this kind of erasure must be considered when making the final decision in this regard.



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Contributor

Celine Lynch



Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 33
Fitwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie



3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

As a mainstream teacher in a rural Roman Catholic school, I wish to express concern over the above proposal. NCCA defines ERB as helping children to know and understand the cultural heritage of the major forms of religion, belief traditions and worldviews in today's society. This proposal suggests that the teaching of ERB commences at Infant level. HOW can a child of 4/5 years of age engage in the cultural analysis of another faith whilst learning of their own faith? Thus my main concern would be the implementation of such a curriculum on a young mind.

ERB has the potential to enable children understand more about social identities, personal beliefs and cultural traditions in our community. BUT, the new 'Catholic, Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum' outlines Inter-religious Literacy as one of the 5 Key Skills in their Core + Love series which has already been implemented in Roman Catholic schools. Catholic schools also make provision for ethics in terms of school policies, ethics and across other curricular areas. The curriculum is already overloaded and the above proposal should not be implemented.

NCCA

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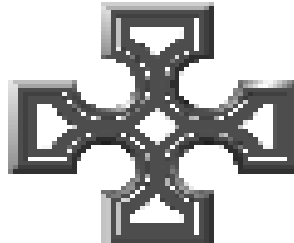


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Contributor

Church Of Ireland General Synod Board
of Education

**THE CHURCH OF IRELAND GENERAL SYNOD
BOARD OF EDUCATION (RI)**



From: The General Synod Board of Education of the Church
of Ireland (Republic of Ireland).

Submission to: the NCCA from the General Synod Board of Education (RI)
(referred hereafter as “the Board”)

In relation to: a proposed new curriculum from regarding Education about
‘Religion and Beliefs and Ethics’ (ERB and Ethics).

Scriptural Context:

Psalm 78:

“Give ear, O my people: incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter sayings of old:

Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us.

We will not hide them from our children, showing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.

For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children:

That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children:

That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God”.

Luke 5: 27-28

“After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, ‘Follow Me’, and he got up, left everything, and followed him”.

1. Introductory Remarks:

The involvement of the Church in education has been traced back to early Christian times. The modern structure, shape and involvement of the Church of Ireland in the field of primary education is a product of various initiatives of both Church and State in the nineteenth century. The role of the Church Education Society and the Kildare Place Society, both formed in the nineteenth century, did much to facilitate the current provision of Church of Ireland primary schools. The Church of Ireland was therefore a key force in the creation of the modern structure of provision of primary education in Ireland and has a long tradition of involvement in the field of education generally. Together with the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches and Religious Society of Friends (Quaker), it has provided primary education in Ireland for nearly two centuries. The Church of Ireland (collectively through its ten individual school patrons) currently has one hundred and seventy three primary schools under its patronage, making it the second largest number of primary schools in Ireland. There are a further twenty four Presbyterian primary schools and one Methodist and two Religious Society of Friends (Quaker) primary schools. There are approximately 500 teachers and 15,500 children attending Church of Ireland, Methodist and Presbyterian primary schools which are located in all parts of the Republic of Ireland.

2. Context for the teaching of Religious Education (RE) in our primary schools:

As a community of faith, the Church of Ireland values its primary schools as a meaningful outworking into society of the faith the Church. The RE curriculum, *Follow Me*, is taught in Church of Ireland schools on behalf of the patrons of the schools and reflects the faith held by the Church as a community of faith in Jesus Christ as “the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). However, the Follow Me RE curriculum is not a programme of either specific denominational faith formation or a programme of catechetical instruction (although both of those elements are present at various stages). In the Church of Ireland context, both of these functions are the responsibility of the parish. Preparation for the sacrament of Confirmation, for example, usually takes place in a parish context at an age later than that of primary level pupils. The RE curriculum in Church of Ireland primary schools seeks to provide a faith context in which the encounter with “things divine” can be explored. The Church of Ireland has a duty to pass the faith in God and inherited tradition of faith, from one generation to another (as expressed in Psalm 78). In Church of Ireland primary schools, this is done through the Follow Me RE curriculum. While the Church of Ireland is unapologetic about proclaiming the Kingdom of God, the context for the delivery of RE in schools differs from that which

is taught through worship, ministry to children or through the local Sunday school. There is an obvious symbiotic connection, but the epistemological context for both differs.

3. Religious Diversity in schools:

Diversity (in its many faceted forms) is a key characteristic of the student bodies in primary schools under Church of Ireland patronage. Most primary schools will have pupils from a range of different of Christian religious denominations, non-Christian faiths and of no belief. This religious diversity was outlined in a survey of all Church of Ireland and Protestant primary schools, published in 2012.

85% of pupils from the infants and sixth class's in 166 schools out of a total number of 196 schools participated in the "Our School Community"¹ survey.

The religious affiliation breakdown was as follows:

Main Protestant	38%
Roman Catholic	22.5%
Christian (unspecified)	20%
Other Protestant (e.g. Pentecostal, Baptist, Quaker)	5.6%
Other Faith (e.g.: Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist).	1.1%
No religion	7.4%
No information supplied	5.3%

The RE curriculum is an agreed curriculum having been drafted in consultation with the other Reformed Protestant primary schools patrons (Presbyterian, Methodist and Religious Society of Friends (Quaker)).

4. Curricula perspective:

The Follow Me curriculum, reflecting the Reformed Christian ethos of Church of Ireland and Protestant primary schools, offers an invitation to each pupil to understand that faith is not merely a superficial study of religion from a detached anthropological, sociological or historically objectified perspective, but is a deeply personal experience of exploring the mystery of the incarnate God.

The Church of Ireland Board of Education ("the Board") has no difficulty with the generality of what is described in pages 12 to 18 of the NCCA Consultation paper. However, the Board is concerned that the general perspective of the proposed ERB and Ethics curriculum sits incongruously with the perspective of the existing Follow Me RE curriculum. The Follow Me RE curriculum is delivered in Church of Ireland primary schools in fulfilment of the expectations of the parents who choose

¹ Tuohy, D., Lodge, A., Our School Community – Values and Attitudes of Parents in Irish Protestant Primary Schools, May 2011. (GSBOE/CICE/CIPSMA).

Church of Ireland schools. Such a choice and expectation is premised on there being an RE curriculum in place that delivers RE in a Christian context.

While much of the general aims of the ERB and Ethics curriculum, as outlined by the NCCA, are positive and compatible with the existing patrons' RE curriculum, the approach taken with regard to religious belief itself seems to begin from an objectified position. The Board views this differing perspective as a cause for difficulty.

5. Understanding of specific terms:

In addition, the Board is unclear as to whether the NCCA would share with the Church of Ireland the theological understandings of certain terms and concepts (e.g. conscience, character, truth/Truth, spiritual development) and is unclear how the State might propose to define such theological terms. Similarly, while the Board welcomes and agrees with the definition of pluralism used by the NCCA, the Board has a concern that the introduction of a pluralistic approach at such a young age does not allow for the child to develop his/her identity within his/her own religious belief, context and culture. The Board wishes to re-emphasise that parents have legitimate expectations from religious denominational schools in this respect. The involvement of the Church of Ireland in the provision of schools and their on-going management and operations is a reflection of the desire of the Church of Ireland community to implement this expectation. The teaching of an appropriate RE curriculum is a core function of Church of Ireland schools in this regard.

6. Separate Curriculum Delivery:

In relation to the delivery of the proposed NCCA ERB and Ethics curriculum and the role of teachers, the Board is concerned that there may be a state mandated requirement for teachers to teach a separate RE programme with a different epistemological approach to the RE curriculum provided by the patron. The Board is of the view that such an approach would give rise to a number of legal and Constitutional issues.

The Board notes that Rule 56 (7) of the Rules for National Schools refers to pupils attending religious exercises under arrangements sanctioned by the manager (since expanded to a Board of Management).

The NCCA will be aware that there is an obligation on the school Boards of Management to uphold the characteristic spirit of the school and that each Board is accountable to the patron of the school in this regard (Education Act 1998, section 15, 1, b). In addition, section 30, inter alia, of the Education Act 1998 requires the Minister to have regard to the characteristic spirit of the school

when setting out any curriculum or syllabus. The Board notes, in particular, section 30, 2, (d) in this regard: that the Minister:

“Shall ensure that the amount of instruction time to be allocated to subjects on the curriculum as determined by the Minister in each school day shall be such as to allow for such reasonable instruction time, as the board (of management) with the consent of the patron determines, for subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school, etc...”

Church of Ireland schools provide education to members of the Church of Ireland community in an ethos and context that reflects the wishes of the parents of that community. Article 42:2:2 of the Constitution specifically provides for the State to facilitate education in this manner. The Board is greatly concerned that the introduction of a separate RE curriculum by the State (in what-ever form that might take) would interfere with the rights of parents as enumerated in the Constitution and would undermine the ability of school Boards of Management to fulfil their obligations to the patron and to the community in upholding the religious denomination and characteristic spirit of the school. The Board would therefore strongly suggest that the NCCA satisfy itself that the State has the legal and constitutional basis to introduce a separate RE curriculum which may conflict with the existing RE curriculum provided by religious patrons in denominational schools (The Board understands that this is a common concern of all its Ecumenical partners). In summary, the Board is greatly concerned at any attempt by the State to circumscribe the right of patrons to deliver an RE curriculum in Church of Ireland schools in accordance with the Church of Ireland beliefs, traditions and culture. The Board would welcome clarity from the NCCA in relation to its expectations regarding a separate RE curricular delivery and the likely impact of such a separate curriculum on the time allocation for denominational RE.

7. Starting point for considering the NCCA proposals:

Notwithstanding the above comments, the Board is of the view that conceptually the proposed ERB and Ethics curriculum contains much that is positive. Clearly, the NCCA has the child at the centre of its conceptualisation of this proposed curriculum and the Board commends the NCCA in this regard. The Board welcomes the affirmation by NCCA that RE is a subject which contributes to literacy development and also welcomes the affirmation and respect of the role of RE as an essential part of the development of the person and as an important element of engaging with self-knowledge and self-understanding within the world. The Board further welcomes the affirmation by the NCCA that

RE has an essential role to play in the curriculum at primary level and that it should not have its essential role in the life of the school displaced.

In seeking a way forward on this matter, the Board wishes to re-iterate that it remains interested in active engagement with the NCCA on how the current RE curriculum, Follow Me, might be reviewed to reflect the specific elements in the proposed ERB and Ethics programme that are compatible and/or complementary with the Follow Me programme.

Views of educational practitioners in COI primary schools: results from consultations:

The Board engaged in consultations on the proposed ERB and Ethics curriculum with over sixty teachers drawn from a range of Church of Ireland primary schools. These consultations took place in Cork, Dublin, Kilkenny and Cavan. Teachers were requested to have read the relevant documentation relating to the new curriculum in Education about Religion & Beliefs and Ethics prior to attending.

During each session teachers were introduced to the background of the consultation process. They were then led through the vision, approaches, content and practical time management of the ERB and Ethics curriculum. This was presented with reference to Follow Me, the patron's programme, taught in Church of Ireland schools. Questions were raised during the presentation to encourage the teachers to consider this new programme in their own school contexts and in relation to Follow Me.

Teachers then broke into discussion groups to consider the content of the presentation and to formulate a response on how they envisage ERB, Ethics and RE (Follow Me) in the future. These responses were then combined and presented to the teachers at the close of the session as an agreed representation of their discussions.

The following are the key responses from the consultations:

1. Teachers appreciate the vision and aims of the ERB and Ethics curriculum. They are very relevant for schools in Ireland in 2016.
2. Teachers note that Church of Ireland schools have always been very inclusive in outlook and that they have traditionally had children of other faiths and none in their classrooms. Respect for those of other beliefs and none is part of most schools' ethos statements and is a key aim of the Follow Me programme. Teachers recognise many of the proposed topics in ERB as connecting well with the content of Follow Me.
3. Teachers have concerns about the timetabling of ERB and Ethics and the need to safeguard time allocated to Follow Me. They do not want to see the status of Follow Me being diminished and note that children attending Church of Ireland schools may use their 'knowledge and understanding of the Christian faith' to engage in dialogue between people of different cultural, religious and nonreligious backgrounds using methods such as the interpretive approach as advocated by the NCCA document. Having a knowledge and understanding of one's own concepts and experiences is critical for the success of this approach.

4. Teachers see a large overlap between the Ethics programme and Social, Political and Health Education (SPHE) and some strands of Social, Environmental, Scientific Education/History. It is recommended that either the new Ethics programme be absorbed into SPHE or that a discrete module of Ethics be created from the new programme and the Ethics components of SPHE. The latter proposal would have the dual purpose of reducing the current high volume of content of SPHE and providing a clear programme which could take a similar form to the Stay Safe Programme.
5. All teachers in the four venues recommend that if it is accepted that the NCCA's ERB curriculum should be introduced, that it should be located in a redeveloped Follow Me RE curriculum. It is recognised that the ERB methodology (pluralist/ critical inquiry) must be adhered to in lessons focussed on this content. Teachers expressed the view that this could be achieved through a block of lessons for some topics and the extension of other lessons (thematic) to allow for a broader range of views and a pluralist approach. Teachers comment that they are already doing this in practice as there are a variety of viewpoints in their classrooms, including a growing number of children who self-identify as having no religion. It is also acknowledged that ERB content would need to be introduced throughout the Follow Me programme as currently such topics as other religions are only in senior (5th and 6th) classes. Although teachers instinctively include children of different religious beliefs and none in discussions in RE lessons, this might need to be clearly expressed in any new textbook.
6. Although the content of Follow Me is clearly Christian in focus, teachers teaching it are aware that it 'is not intended to compromise the beliefs of an individual teacher or to require a spiritual commitment of any particular form' (Working Out, p. v). Teachers are practised at enabling children discuss, debate, think and reflect on issues of belief without feeling that they are responsible for passing on the Christian faith.
7. Teachers note that School Assembly, church services and other experiential aspects of RE are very much part of the ethos of a Church of Ireland school and are valued by the school community.
8. Teachers commented on the importance of not duplicating the content that pupils would engage with in secondary school and also emphasised the need for resources and in-service training to accompany any material that is introduced.

To conclude, it was obvious in the consultation process that whereas teachers broadly welcome the rationale and vision for the ERB and Ethics programmes, they call for caution in relation to how it might be provided for in the timetable. All teachers would see the benefit in a discrete approach to Ethics (or absorbed into SPHE). However it is seen as achievable to include ERB in a developed patron's programme which contains appropriate pluralist approaches for the ERB Curriculum.

Ends.../..

Contact:

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Home

Contributor

Ciaran Burke

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children’s learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

The ERB and Ethics initiative is to be welcomed as it recognises that the composition of Irish society has changed. Ireland was never a mono-cultural society however it is now more diverse and multi-ethnic than at any time in its history. The proposals express the need to engage with the new environment that exists and to constitute a dialogue between the different communities in the joint definition of our identity. “An understanding of multiple perspectives addresses a pressing educational question for the 21st century: How can we learn to engage constructively with those who are not like ourselves?” (Banks et al, 2005). I believe that ERB and Ethics can make a valuable contribution to children’s learning and will require the development of a set of skills and competencies from students to fully engage with the programme.

A culturally self-contained life is virtually impossible in the modern world (Parekh, 2000). The constitution of the primary school system in Ireland has resulted in the dominance of the Catholic church in school patronage. The patron programmes in the schools with religious

patronage, currently 96% of schools, does not reflect the cultural diversity of the modern Irish state. An additional programme/subject is necessary to introduce a dialogue between the different cultures in our society and to educate each other about the beliefs and values of these different cultures. I noted that in the focus group meeting on ERB and Ethics at Drumcondra Education Centre, Wednesday 25th November, that the basis for the values and ethics of the programme will be western democratic values. If we are to exercise democracy effectively then there should be a common experience in schools to bring the democratic way of life in the culture and curriculum of the school (Apple and Beane, 2007). These democratic values based on human rights and espousing the open flow of ideas, contribution of all elements of society to the common good and the need for people to be fully informed to participate in society will benefit children and the wider community if implemented in a unified way in the curriculum.

Children's learning will benefit from the skills that they will learn through engaging with ERB and Ethics. The consultation document states that "patrons' programmes tend to draw on a realist epistemology while many suggest that ERB and Ethics should draw on a critical, pluralist and inquiry based epistemology." Working in this type of environment will require the development of skills such as: analytical and critical thinking; using persuasive language; logical argument; perception and understanding of differing viewpoints; negotiation and conflict resolution. Children will also develop their own identity through their interaction with and engagement with different cultures and opinions. It should be noted that the currently existing multi-cultural primary school sector in Ireland would already promote critical inquiry based methods in their patron programmes. A limitation of what children may learn from the ERB element of the programme is that some schools do not have the population of children from different religions to contribute authentic individual knowledge of daily practice of their religion to ERB classes. The consultation document promotes this idea of gaining insight from peers and

examining different ideas of truth in the classroom in the notion of reflexivity. This is an ideal situation however the Primary School system has developed along lines that have led in some areas particularly those areas with large communities of children of migrant families to the concentration of children of migrant families in the newer multi-denominational schools. The requirement for baptismal certificates as an enrolment requirement restricts the diversity of some existing Catholic Schools and there is also the uniquely Irish situation that Gaelscoileanna are by their nature almost exclusively 'white Irish' in ethnic composition. This may lead to the situation that those children who will learn most from the ERB programme and be most enriched by the ERB programme are those children who already learn in a multi-denominational educational environment.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

The experience of children and parents should be that they all feel that they are engaging with their school community and their local community. It requires that the parents and children are open to the influence of and be willing to learn from others (Parekh, 2000). Parents and children should feel that they are part of the school community and through that involvement that they feel that they are part of the wider community. Recently we have had some secondary school students working in the school as part of their transition year programme. One of the students a Muslim girl stated how much she enjoyed being in a school that recognised her festivals and talked about the belief systems of different religions. She said that she had felt odd at her Primary school, a Catholic school, as her religion was never acknowledged in the day to day activities of the school. A child, and indeed a parent, should not feel separate from the community of the school. While the ERB and Ethics programme cannot eliminate totally this feeling it can provide an opportunity and space for children to discuss and recognise different religions within their school community.

There are two elements to the ethos of a school: there is the explicit content of the curriculum implemented in the school, including the patron programme; and there is the implicit or hidden curriculum which is the set of implicit messages transmitted by the school's

culture and by the institutional and interpersonal relations between all the educational stakeholders, including the relations established by the school with the families and community (Rodino, 2012). In order to properly implement ERB and Ethics the children must engage in reflection and constructive criticism. This is difficult to achieve in an environment that features a top down model of school management where this environment of engagement and dialogue is not encouraged with the teaching staff or with the wider school community. Ideally it would be hoped that ERB and Ethics would encourage schools to adopt a more dialogic and democratic approach to its engagement with the whole school community but it is a danger that the programme will not operate effectively in a non-conducive environment.

There will be a significant challenge for teachers in the implementation of ERB and Ethics. Teaching in multi-denominational schools has only been part of the teacher education process for the last few years. Teachers who have qualified before this time have all been educated in a religious ethos teacher training college. The aims of the ERB and Ethic programme will require knowledge of the main tenets and beliefs of different religions and will require teachers to moderate and manage discussions on ethical and moral dilemmas within their classrooms. This involves the development of effective professional development courses that will ensure that each teacher can feel confident to deliver the course. I believe that this will take considerable time and investment to bring teacher up to this level of confidence. If there is doubt within the teachers mind entering the classroom they will not risk debating possible controversial issues within the classroom. The possibility that children can contribute their own questions raises the threat of touching on issues that reveal ethical and political contradictions that permeate our society (Apple and Bean, 2007). Apart from the essential instruction in knowledge of religious beliefs becoming a key part of teacher education there is a further requirement to provide support to schools in

terms of resources and materials to deliver the programme and to encourage schools to plan for inclusion across different elements of the school's everyday practice (Smyth et al, 2009).

A common contribution at the focus group meeting was that teachers did not have sufficient time within the current timetable to deliver their patrons programme for the proscribed time each week. The demands of the current Primary School Curriculum meant that most teachers have reduced the time allocated to the patron's programme. This must be taken into account when considering how to situate ERB and Ethics within the curriculum. The feeling from most teachers is that the curriculum is currently overcrowded. I feel that trying to incorporate ERB and Ethics into existing subjects such as a combination of SPHE, English and SESE would dilute the effectiveness of the programme. I would rather see that the subject of ERB and Ethics be incorporated in the new Primary Curriculum being developed and that within this process allocated time across all subjects is reviewed and cross-curricular activities are encouraged and some timings left to the discretion of teachers to implement activities of this nature.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

Overall I am very much in favour of the ERB and Ethics project. I believe that it can provide a unifying vision for education on religious diversity and ethics. Our society should be looking to provide opportunities to develop ideas of unity within our community. This does not exclude diversity but rather welcomes it as a means of developing ideas and unifying values through critical evaluation and discussion. Communities must feel that they are recognised and valued within a nation for their contributions in order to become part of the democratic process of that nation. Democratic nation states must find a way to balance unity and diversity (Banks et al, 2005). We can develop this unity through discussion of values, not all of which may be agreed by all communities but which are at least understood and recognised as forming part of the legal statutes of the state. The marriage referendum would provide one example of a case where the democratic values of equality and justice may conflict with religious values of some belief systems but that there is a basis for them in our recognition of conventions on human rights. Human rights principles provide an ethical code and ground rules for negotiating conflicting rights within a multi-cultural society (Parekh, 2000).

The ERB and Ethics project has developed from the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector (Coolahan et al, 2012). The forum report recommended the development of a subject along these lines as a response to the fact that diversity of religion and belief systems are not being reflected in some current school patron programmes. The forum believed that it was necessary for a democratic society to reflect, acknowledge and engage with children of all belief systems and none in order for our society to truly engage in a constructive dialogue. However it remains that the project aims to address a lack in the current education system. My fear for ERB

and Ethics is that it will fail because of lack of engagement, and indeed possibly opposition, from existing stakeholders in the education system particularly schools under religious patronage. The history of school reforms would show that many have failed because of the social conditions surrounding the schools (Apple and Beane, 2007). There needs to be an accompanying process of encouraging schools to become more democratic in nature and to promote the value of critical dialogue to strengthen children's identity in their own faith or beliefs. A school's ethos must also reflect the values that an ethics programme would encourage in the children.

The other main danger to the project is buy-in from teachers. Overall I think teachers are very supportive of the initiative however as it comes closer to implementation teachers may become wary of the challenges that ERB and Ethics will provide to their practice. By its nature the programme will involve discussion and critical evaluation of ethical issues that could lead to controversy or conflict within the classroom. This danger can only be eliminated by a well-constructed programme of professional development in advance of any planned implementation of the programme. These issues are currently discussed within ethics strands of current multi-denominational school programmes and so there is a level of experience to be drawn on there.

I believe that the challenges can be overcome and that it is important for our society to balance the twin demands of unity and diversity. All modern western societies face this challenge and it is dangerous to ignore it. Some countries have gone with an emphasis on one cultural experience as being defined as superior and are demanding that this superiority be taught as the defining thread through the curriculum. This policy is one of exclusion and involves no possibility of dialogue and collaborative learning. I believe the ERB and Ethics programme

allows us to develop an educational environment that can progress our individual, communal and national sense of identity welcoming diversity as an essential element of that identity.



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Home

Contributor

Claire (Surname not provided)

To Whom it may Concern,

I hereby wish to inform you that I believe that the proposal to introduce this programme into Primary Schools is unnecessary. The pupils in our schools have an excellent RE Programme Grow in Love being developed at the moment. It is in our schools presently for Junior and Senior Infants and First and Second is ready for September 2016. It has lessons on different religions which are suitable for primary School children.

Certainly I don't think there is need for a programme about Religion. Personally I'd find it very difficult to teach about RE rather than RE. One doesn't teach about History one teaches History.

All schools also have a programme on Ethics suitable to the Ethos of that school and much is covered in SPHE.

Schools suffer from an overload as it is without placing another Programme on them.

I found your questionnaire very directed and would not give the real response.

Children in our Catholic Schools are entitled to receive RE as set out by the Patron.

Please reconsider your decision re ERB and Ethics.

Le meas,

Claire (DA)



Home

Contributor

Clare O'Callaghan

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organization?

Personal view

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

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Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

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- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

See part 3.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers

- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

See part 3

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

I am a primary school teacher in a Catholic school in Dublin with children from diverse backgrounds attending our school.

I believe that the aim of the ERB course whereby children learn about other faiths and beliefs is a well-intentioned one, however I am concerned that the proposed new ERB & Ethics subject could have the unintended effect of undermining the distinctive ethos of denominational schools.

The information booklet for teachers' states in relation to ERB that: **It does not seek to nurture the belief or practice of any one religion.** A denominational school **does** seek to nurture the belief and practice of one religion. Unfortunately, there is a clash here whereby a teacher is asked to promote a particular faith in the religion class and then in the ERB class be careful not to promote this faith. The ethos of the denominational school permeates the whole day and so having to teach something that runs directly contrary to this ethos puts teachers in a difficult position.

I believe also that the teaching of faiths and religions cannot be done from a 'neutral' stand point. Even if a programme claims that it will teach about **all** religions equally I'm not sure that it can do this effectively, as a religion is not something that can simply be taught, it is something that is experienced at a deep, spiritual level. In a denominational school this element can be explored through prayer sessions etc but this would presumably not be a possibility in an ERB class.

By giving each religion an 'equal say' in the new ERB course it could be argued that this is in fact teaching an implicitly agnostic view of religion. The teacher is saying that there is a menu of beliefs out there which may or may not be true and because the teacher is not promoting one particular viewpoint a child is left with the impression that one belief is as good as another. Again, this impression would run counter to a denominational ethos.

I believe that children at primary level are liable to get confused when taught about the different beliefs of various religions instead of learning about the basics of their own faith until 6th class. At secondary level young people are more mature and capable of critical thinking and grappling with more complex ideas and philosophies. At primary level I believe that pupils need to learn the basics about the faith of the school that their parents choose to send them to first.

In relation to the Ethics programme the information material states that: **The teaching of ethics includes the formation in and the promotion of a personal commitment to the dignity and freedom of all human beings. It emphasises the importance of human rights and responsibilities, the place of justice within society, and the service of the common good.** These are very laudable aims however I would have concern as to what the principles underlying the ethics programme are. A denominational programme has the 10 commandments and the new commandment of love in the New Testament which underpin its moral/ethical code. Since this is a religious approach which presumably wouldn't be used in the new Ethics programme I would worry about what objective criteria would be used when teaching about decision making etc. and again, would have concern that these criteria could run counter to a denominational ethos.

I would respectfully suggest that the ERB & Ethics course be run in multi-denominational schools and to allow denominational schools to teach about other faiths within the context of their own faith as the new 'Grow in Love' programme does. In this way the aim of the NCCA whereby children learn about other faiths is met in a way that does not undermine the ethos of the denominational school.

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission and I hope that you will consider the points that I have put forward in it.





Home

Contributor
Clooneyquinn NS



Clooneyquinn N.S.

Elphin,

Castleroa,

Co. Roscommon

10th May 2016

To whom it may concern,

We, the BOM of Clooneyquinn N.S do not support the implementation of the new ERBE programme.

Thanking you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lorna Keaveney".

Lorna Keaveney

Principal and Secretary of BOM



Home

Contributor

Cloontagh NS



Cloonlough N.S.
Clonmany
Co. Donegal
24.3.16
Roll No. 17180W

A share,

The Board of Management of Cloonlough N.S. discussed the proposed introduction of the new subject 'Education about Religion and Beliefs ERB and Ethics' at our meeting on 15.3.16. It was agreed to forward our concerns and submit a submission to the NCCA. The following points were agreed.

- In our school we already make provision for inter-religious and intercultural learning and awareness in terms of our policies, ethos and in our Religious Education programmes.
- The aim of the ERBE and the outlined programme content is already covered in Primary schools in such subjects as Geography, SPHE, Religious Education etc.
- The introduction of a new subject will cause confusion for parents and children.
- The present Primary school curriculum is very overloaded and this will add to the overload.
- The introduction of ERBE as a discrete subject

area that is subject to inspection by Department of Education Inspectors creates an imbalance between the status and the status of the Patron R.E. Program. Further consultation should take place between the NECA and patrons of Faith based schools - how the concerns behind the NECA proposals might be addressed.

Thanking you

Eibhlin M. Coakley

(on behalf of the B.O.M. of St. Mary's H.S.)



Home

Contributor

Colette Savage

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum
in
**Education about
RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS**

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

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- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

As a qualified teacher and having recently completed a PGCE focused on 'values in education' at Sussex University my key input here is for the ethics curriculum. However, I feel there is coupling with the ERB in a number of areas.

I have also been involved for nearly ten years on a voluntary basis with a universal human values based education system which has an ethical, moral and spiritual (pluralistic) element so offering a complete and holistic approach to ethical development.

As part of my post graduate studies I connected with an inner city state primary school (750 pupils) in Leicester (Abbey Community Primary School) where the particular values based approach has been integrated into the curriculum with exceptional results in terms of pupil relationships and personal development and academical measurements. This has now become a teacher training school.

My personal interest in values in education has developed as a result of growing up in the North of Ireland through the 'troubles' and coming to realise that there must be a more unifying connection for human beings rather than the division religion can and does create in societies around the world.

I believe that a values based ethical and moral approach to character development provides a pluralistic approach which supports critical thinking and reflexivity based on innate goodness and truth which offers a higher level unifying connection in today's diverse society.

(My personal professional educational background is in computer science, having lectured in Brunel university for over ten years and taught in to secondary schools in London)

In reviewing the stated aims of this curriculum development it is proposing to enable a child to develop an open awareness of human life and wholly know themselves, relate sensitively to others, make ethical decisions with discernment, be open and tolerant of diverse cultures and religions and recognise the need to contribute to society.

I wonder if the ERB and ethics curriculum framework and/or delivery was based on values, this would provide a unifying and integrated approach, which connects ethics, religion and beliefs rather than separating them and thus presenting unity within the diversity, something which I would have found extremely useful in my childhood). Perhaps by utilising tools such as critical thinking, inner awareness and reflexivity it would be possible to combine these curriculum areas and lead with ethics and morals, demonstrating how these underpin religions and beliefs and yet sit above them to delineate humans from other species on the planet.

Personally I believe these curriculum areas are critical in today's society. In my own research I became aware of the tensions for children today because of familial, community, religious, societal and more recently through the prevalence of the internet global values. They run the risk of being bombarded with values and not equipped to reflect, critically appraise and choose their own values.

I am not sure how much moral development is intended in this curriculum, I did notice mention of the conscience as a moral tool, I believe values based moral and ethical development provides both a tool in its own right and a way of understanding and appreciating religions and what we can learn from them. It may be given the ensuing controversy when the word moral is included that this is encompassed within the ethics title?

If not I would like to suggest this for inclusion as a pluralistic approach to engaging with many topics including religion, beliefs, self-awareness.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in REB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

In my experience in interviewing children, parents and teachers including this in the curriculum provision has a clear, positive and warmly welcomed impact on both children and parents. Everybody enjoys living in universal values based community. There is much evidence from the Abbey school in particular but other schools in Leicester including faith schools which have adopted or are adopting this programme say the same thing about the positive impact. The Abbey school has nearly doubled since the integration of a values based curriculum and risen from near the bottom to near the top of the school league tables and this in turn has lead to incredible support in the community for the school. The teachers I spoke to said they enjoyed working with the values themselves and the respectful classrooms in which they were teaching. My suggestion for integration would be both the discrete and integrated approaches . This has worked exceptionally well at Abbey.

1. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

Both the academic research I carried out and the experience working with a universal values system and primary school children points to the need for this curriculum for both mental and emotional wellness. Having an understanding of others religious conditions and beliefs is essential in supporting more tolerant and connected citizens in a pluralistic society.

I believe that using values to bring cohesion to both the ethics and religious beliefs areas of the curriculum is possible and enables a higher level framework to seamlessly connect the two.

Presenting these not as discrete but as one cohesive curriculum would offer the opportunity to include religious beliefs as part of something bigger requiring both critical thinking and reflection in order to use discernment in decision making.

I also believe that greater self-awareness underpins an understanding of others and making ethical and moral choices, which this curriculum is endeavouring to address.

In terms of delivery, I am not a primary school teacher but have participated in a number of week long camps with primary children at schools in the UK for children aged 5-11 and the values club run at Abbey Community Primary school.

The universal human values system upon which they were based utilised 5 specific teaching techniques together with a cause and effect discipline system where children were given an opportunity to consider the effect of their behaviour rather than an admonishment for perceived wrong doing.

The 5 teaching techniques employed are quiet, silent sitting/quiet reflective time, story, activity and song. This enables the delivery of an inclusive curriculum integrated and tailored to differing cultures and beliefs of the children. There are incidentally 5 values in this particular human values approach, love, peace, truth, right-action and non-violence, which are apparent in all of the main religious teachings and thus offer a possible unifying approach to religions and beliefs.

My experiences in Leicester schools, having a diverse cultural mix, demonstrated clearly how well this works and is acceptable to children of many faiths or none.

As mentioned earlier the head teachers I have personally spoken too all recognised the opportunity of this values based approach in the widely diverse demographics of their pupils.

I noticed that spiritual awareness was included as one of the aims of the curriculum and this connection to our innate goodness is one of the fundamental principles of the human value system I have worked with. Recognising that when we connect to this we will be coming from truth with a peaceful and loving approach where we would check our actions and ensure we are not harming others.

I hope my comments offer some ideas for consideration, and there are head teachers from the UK I can connect you with and who would be happy to offer their experiences should this be of any use.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like me to elaborate further on any points made and I would be more than happy to discuss or become involved with the development of this new curriculum should this be helpful.

Sincerely,
Colette Savage



Home

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16th March 2018

The Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics Consultation
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
35 Fitzwilliam Square
Dublin 2
Ireland

To whom it may concern

I wish to voice my deep reservations to the proposed ERB & Ethics curriculum.

In choosing a Catholic education for my children, I was making a conscious decision to entrust them to a process that would not merely instruct them about a plethora of belief systems, but would allow them to grow in their own faith by being immersed in a faith community, which is what I believe a Catholic school to be.

I do not think that it is necessary to strip the Catholic schools i.e. of their long established curriculum heritage in order to accommodate the changing Irish landscape of religious belief. Whilst I understand and support the need to offer a non-denominational path for those families who require it, this does not necessitate destruction of the ethos of the Catholic schools. I suggest there is an alternative existing pathway in the 'Educate Together' Schools who could teach this curriculum. Increase the number of these schools if necessary, and permit the Catholic schools to be true to their mission without watering it down or diluting it of its consistency and clarity of message.

It beggars belief, and is quite insulting to propose, that Catholic schools need to offer any further ethical education than what is already being provided so excellently. Having lived in Scotland for most of my life, and having also observed Catholic education in England, I have seen the phenomenal growth in the popularity of the Catholic schooling sector in recent years. It is worth noting, that very many of those clamoring to attend are not Catholic themselves, but want their children to gain a place, such is the status in which these schools are held. In both countries the RE programme remains firmly in the Catholic tradition with Scotland having a syllabus approved by Rome in the past 5 years. This syllabus is supported and respected by all Local Education Authorities in Scotland and it co-exists with the non-denominational programmes of the other schools. The uniqueness of each system is upheld, and although the Catholic schools are in the minority, parents can rest in the assurance that the schools syllabus is what they would wish for their child and not a poor shadow of what their faith tradition offers, steeped as it is in a over millennium of experience and scholastic rigor.



Colin J.A. O'Brien



Home

Contributor

**Commission for Education and
Formation of the Irish Episcopal
Conference**

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Personal

Organisation

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
Consultation on Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics
Submission on behalf of the
Commission for Education and Formation of the Irish Episcopal Conference
March 2016

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Introduction

The desire to create more inclusive schools and welcoming communities speaks to a tradition within the Catholic Church of inter-religious engagement and learning. Because of this tradition, Catholic religious education, particularly since the Second Vatican Council, is committed to teaching and learning about and from other religions, not as an option but as something intrinsic to the definition of Christian identity.

Catholic Schools are as inclusive as any other type of school. The 'on the ground' experience across the country of Catholic schools as inclusive is borne out by the Economic and Social Research Institute publication on *School Sector Variation in Ireland* (2012). In this study, it was found that there were no significant differences in pupils' perspectives on their school experience across the three sectors (Catholic, Multi-denominational and Minority Faith) surveyed. The research found that most children across the three sectors liked their school and their teachers and reported doing well in their schoolwork. Worth noting is that pupils who were particularly positive about the school and teachers came from a wide variety of different backgrounds.

Faith schools exist because there are parents who wish to have their children educated in accordance with their religious convictions. Catholic primary schools are embedded in parishes and local communities throughout the country. All surveys demonstrate a very high level of parental satisfaction with the service provided by these schools. Some recent comment on them is a caricature of their real contribution to Irish life.

Inspired by Christian faith and love, Catholic schools strive to be caring and inclusive communities. They have adapted to demographic change with significant net migration into Ireland and many of them have led the way in integrating migrants into local communities. They have been leaders in areas such as social inclusion, special needs and traveller education.

Every school has a particular ethos or characteristic spirit. The ethos of a school is given expression in multiple ways and it informs all aspects of the life of the school. These include the understanding of the human person. This anthropological question is central: what vision of the human person underpins educational endeavours?

Children today inhabit a world in which they are bombarded with messages dominated by a consumer and material vision. Catholic schools seek to provide space, both intellectual and emotional, where pupils can explore and imagine a world with a spiritual horizon. This points to the possibility, the invitation, of understanding the human person in solidarity with other people, especially those most in need, being responsible for the world in which we live and open to a relationship with God.

1. The ethos of faith-based schools

Parents are the primary educators of their children. Irish and international human rights law recognises this expressly. Article 42 of *Bunreacht na hÉireann* emphasises the rights of parents with regard to the religious education and religious formation of their children. In Ireland there is a demonstrated and significant demand among parents for denominational schooling. Catholic schools serve the needs and wishes of parents in this regard and, in seeking to uphold the legal right of schools to a vibrant religious ethos, are acting out of respect for and in order to protect, as a matter of legal and ethical principle, the rights and interests of parents in respect of their children's education. For, in a society such as Ireland's, where parents can establish schools and State funding is allocated according to procedures and conditions which, by law, must be free from religious discrimination, an important aspect of the right of parents and children to an education in conformity with their religious and philosophical convictions is expressed and upheld by the right of a school to protect and maintain its own ethos. Irish Constitutional law endorses a pluralistic approach to education which is built upon the core principle of the primacy of parental choice and responsibility in education together with a realistic recognition of the important function of ethos in schooling. The freedom of schools to maintain an ethos is also a vital and concrete manifestation of the religious, associational and expressive freedoms enjoyed by all persons and recognised in national and international human rights law.

Religious education in faith-based schools is inseparable from the ethos (characteristic spirit) of the school. The Education Act (1998) specifically requires the Minister to have regard for the characteristic spirit of the school in exercising his or her functions with regard to curriculum {section 30(2)(b)}. Further, the Minister must allow reasonable instruction time in the school day for subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school {section 30(2)(d)}. Thus NCCA proposals in areas impinging on religious education and the characteristic spirit of the school are of a different nature than other NCCA proposals. This is already acknowledged in the area of Relationships and Sexuality Education as part of the NCCA SPHE curriculum where it is explicitly acknowledged that the curriculum must be interpreted in the context of the characteristic spirit of

the school. Similarly, NCCA proposals in areas such as religion and ethics should accord with the characteristic spirit of the school.

The determination of the ethos or characteristic spirit of a school is not the function of the NCCA or the Minister but rests with the Patron. Curriculum proposals in sensitive areas should take account of the fact that faith-based schools are committed to a particular understanding of the human person. The proposals made by the NCCA in the areas of ERB and Ethics must be read in this context.

2. Pluralism and freedom of religion

The principle of freedom of religion is part of the bedrock upon which western democracies are constructed. It finds succinct expression and support in article 44 of *Bunreacht na hÉireann*. The legally recognised human right referred to as ‘freedom of religion’ can be thought of as comprising two distinct but equally important dimensions or moral rights. It is both a positive freedom *for* religion, e.g. the freedom to practice, manifest and share one’s religious commitments, and a negative freedom *from* religious coercion (including anti-religious creeds), e.g. the freedom from coercion by public or private parties to *assent to or deny* any particular religious or philosophical proposition.

It is a mistake to reduce the right to religious freedom in education, enjoyed by parents and, in so far as is appropriate for their age and ability, their children, to an absolute but merely negative freedom from coercion. Such an interpretation has no objective grounding in the texts of human rights law which are clearly formulated to include both the positive and negative dimensions of religious freedom. Connected with this approach is a tendency to extend the meaning of ‘coercion’, ‘proselytism’ or ‘indoctrination’ to include any form of uninvited contact with the religious belief or practices of fellow members of one’s school community.

Some scholars speak of a contrast between epistemological and ideological pluralism:

epistemological pluralism is the recognition of the right to existence of contradictory truth claims (e.g. Christianity, Islam, atheism) while ideological pluralism is the insistence that the only truth is pluralism. A truly pluralist society must surely learn to live with, and respect, difference while fostering loyalty to the nation and support for democratic structures of government.

Catholic parents have the human right to form their children in accord with their philosophical and religious convictions. Religious education has nothing in common with indoctrination which amounts to a deliberate harming of students by undermining their natural ability to reason. In contrast, Catholic schools are committed to the deepest respect for both faith and reason and as such they

contribute significantly to the formation of rational and mature citizens of our democratic society. To support and build on the religious faith to which children have already been introduced at home is not proselytism or indoctrination but education.

There is a temptation in contemporary Irish discourse to dismiss religious belief as inherently irrational, divisive, and anti-intellectual. Some go so far as to say that schools with a Catholic ethos cannot create a sense of civic virtue. This runs completely contrary to the Catholic education tradition which is built on a respect for faith and reason. Those who dismiss schools with a religious ethos as little more than proselytising and indoctrinating tools of religious authorities show little sense of the long evolution of Catholic schools over many centuries, the rich diversity within the Catholic sector and the principles which underpin such education today.

Parental rights in education and the right to religious freedom are closely related. Too often, however, religious faith is analysed, for the purposes of legal and human rights discourse, from a sceptical, external perspective rather than from a committed, internal perspective. Worse, the former is sometimes asserted to be 'neutral'. From the external perspective, however, it is hard to appreciate how religious faith can be experienced by believers as a source of hope and enlightenment (not a restriction on their moral and intellectual vision), a gift (not a choice or acquisition) and a blessing (not a burden or constraint). Understood as such a fundamental human good, religious faith is something which believers naturally want to share with others, including their own children – indeed especially their children, for it is the very mark of parental love to give to one's children one's own most treasured gifts, be that one's time, insight, material resources or appreciation of religious faith. Parents, families and children with religious convictions have a right to give expression to these in faith-based schools. Such schools adopt a child-centred, holistic approach to education where religious belief is not compartmentalised but is fully acknowledged as part of lived reality for these parents, families and children.

3. Philosophical foundations

The Consultation document rightly identifies the diverse philosophical perspectives underpinning different approaches. The argument is made that while ERB and Ethics can happen in a patron's programme, it happens through a 'faith lens', whereas the approach being suggested by NCCA is based on "a critical, pluralist and inquiry based epistemology." An important question to ask in terms of any patron's programme or curriculum is through what else other than a 'faith lens' would or could religious education be done in a faith school?

There are, then, significant philosophical difficulties and resulting educational challenges. These include:

1. In the NCCA proposal children are being invited to see religious identity as the holding of beliefs interpreted by them. Postmodern approaches to religious education reject the meta-narratives of religions and their claims to objective truth. As Catholics we understand our Christian faith as a coherent tradition through which objective truth can be found. The Catholic school exists to educate children in Catholic religious life and in Catholic religious beliefs which are normative for them. For Catholics, the main problem with postmodern forms of Religious Education is that of relativism as it relates to truth and to morality.
2. Children's perceptions can make an important contribution to pedagogy. However, the postmodern pedagogical process suggested by the NCCA may form children in the view that *they* are the most important determinants of the meaning of their own beliefs. It is likely that young children could be given the impression that beliefs are things which they create themselves, as if human beings were the source of religious beliefs. This approach contradicts the method followed in other subjects and could therefore create considerable confusion for the young child in particular.
3. In these secular approaches to Religious Education, reason is primary. Children are invited to stand back from religions and beliefs. In Catholic schools, Revelation is primary and the learner's experience and reason are brought into dialogue with it. The NCCA curriculum will invite Catholic children to engage in the domain of religion in a way that undermines their capacity to immerse themselves in their own religion.
4. There is a presumed sceptical neutrality of reason in relation to religious beliefs. This is problematic for Catholic religious education because it suggests that religious meaning is determined by what one believes to be true.
5. These approaches require teachers to adopt and promote a pluralist approach to religion. This is an approach to religion that goes against the philosophical basis of Catholic religious education. Such a contradiction would place teachers in a very difficult position where conflicting philosophical approaches to religious education would have the potential to create significant confusion.

Given the serious nature of these philosophical concerns this paper will now propose a way forward based on valuing the current provision of Religious Education in Catholic schools, respecting the rights of parents who wish to have faith-based education for their children, developing an ever deeper sense of care and love for all pupils, and supporting schools in living out their ethos.

4. Catholic schools and intercultural dialogue

Catholic schools in Ireland form part of a large international network of such schools throughout the world. These schools are committed to respect for human dignity and religious freedom. These principles are founded on the belief that the human person is made in the image and likeness of God. At the Second Vatican Council there was renewed emphasis on human dignity, religious freedom, respect for conscience, the dialogue with the modern world, inter-church and inter-religious dialogue. All of these were based on the fundamental teaching of the eternal destiny of every human person as made in God's image. It is precisely because of this that Catholic schools must respect the personal dignity and human freedom of all members of the school community.

Ever since the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Christian Education* the Holy See has published many important documents on Catholic education. The most recent is entitled *Education to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools* (2013). It provides important reflections on what it is to be a Catholic school in a globalized world characterised by cultural and religious pluralism. Education is the key to mutual understanding and to building a civilisation of peace in such a complex world. The document challenges Catholic schools to engage in dialogue through facing the reality of a culturally diverse situation, by overcoming prejudices and by education through encounter with the other. It notes that "schools are privileged places for intercultural dialogue" (no.6).

What is this intercultural dialogue? It is not cultural relativism which suggests that all cultures and traditions are essentially the same and often seeks to quarantine related practices within a purely private sphere of life. Nor is it religious fundamentalism which fails to engage with that which is other and withdraws into a ghetto secure in its own unchallenged identity. Rather it is an invitation to engagement with the other person's faith and culture based on innovative and courageous fidelity to one's own faith and culture. Such dialogue is not just talking but it includes all interreligious relationships with both individuals and communities. It seeks common ethical values which are the foundations of justice and peace. The aim of this dialogue is not to abandon one's own inherited faith and practices but to rediscover them in a deeper way through encounter with the other. This is the opposite of relativism.

The relativistic model is founded on the value of tolerance, but limits itself to accepting the other person, excluding the possibility of dialogue and recognition of each other in mutual transformation. Such an idea of tolerance, in fact, leads to a substantially passive meaning of relationship with whoever has a different culture. It does not demand that one take an interest in the needs and sufferings of others, nor that their reasons may be heard; there is no self-comparison with their values, and even less sense of developing love for them. (no.22)

How can a Catholic school be a vehicle of such intercultural dialogue? The document notes four types of dialogue: the dialogue of life; the dialogue of works; theological dialogue; the dialogue of religious experience. The dialogue of life reflects on the joys, challenges and sorrows of life especially in the context of the fundamental realities of family, language and culture. The dialogue of works encourages those involved to collaborate in the holistic development of all men and women. Theological dialogue demands knowledge of the beliefs of various religious traditions and their mutual interaction. The dialogue of religious experience is based on the lived encounter of various faiths, not on intellectual abstractions, but rather on the actual lives of the faithful. A Catholic primary school should facilitate the dialogue of life, the dialogue of works and the dialogue of religious experience; it is not the time or place in life for theological dialogue. The dialogue of life, the dialogue of works and the dialogue of religious experience can involve all faith traditions present in the school. Pupils whose parents wish them to have no faith affiliation can be invited to share in the dialogue of life and works.

In 2015 the Catholic Schools Partnership issued *Catholic Primary Schools in a Changing Ireland: Sharing good practice on inclusion of all pupils*. It proposes practical steps that schools can take to enhance their commitment to intercultural dialogue and it highlights the important role that the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* will play in Catholic schools.

5. Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland

The *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (CPPRECI) was launched in September 2015. A new Primary Religious Education programme, *Grow in Love*, is being developed that will meet the aims, principles and outcomes of the new Catholic curriculum. *Grow in Love* has been introduced to Junior infants and Senior infants from September 2015. The programme will be developed up to sixth class on a phased basis, over the coming three years. Among other key objectives, the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* seeks to ensure the on-going engagement in Catholic schools in education about religions and beliefs and ethics.

5.1 Ecumenical and Inter-religious Perspective

‘Inter-belief’ and ‘inter-cultural’ dialogue is highlighted in the NCCA consultation material as a key aim of any new Curriculum in ERB and Ethics (Consultation Paper, pp. 21–23). In terms of the new Catholic Primary RE Curriculum, the “Ecumenical and Inter-religious Perspective” is listed and explained as one of the defining features of the curriculum (CPPRECI p. 21). Catholic schools are reminded that Christians are called to “acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods” found among people of other faiths” (p. 21). Teaching about different religions and beliefs should be “carried out in a fair and balanced manner in Catholic schools” (p. 21). Such ecumenical and inter-religious learning, within the context particularly of developing skills of inter-religious literacy will enable the child to develop as a “capable, confident, curious and caring individual” (NCCA, ERB and Ethics Consultation Paper, p. 19) in his/her engagements and interactions with those who have different beliefs and life stances to the child’s own.

When the CPPRECI is examined in more adequate detail and indeed in a more balanced way than the review contained in the NCCA document, “An Overview of Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics Content in Patrons’ Programmes”, (pp. 25, 28 – 31, 38 ff) it becomes clear how this teaching of other religions and beliefs is to be carried out.

The NCCA analysis of the CPPRECI narrows its examination of the CPPRECI’s content relating to these broad goals to the *interreligious learning outcomes and content* contained only in the *Christian Faith* strand. However, the interreligious learning outcomes and their related content in this strand do not reflect *all* of the content and outcomes in the curriculum that relate to the NCCA definition of ERB across the other three strands (CPPRECI, p. 33). This is a significant omission. There are specific aims and learning outcomes from the CPPRECI that are directly related to the NCCA goals of awareness, tolerance, respect for and celebration of the beliefs, values and stances for living of others and which are listed among the stated general aims of a Curriculum in ERB (NCCA Consultation Paper, p. 12). These are not included in the NCCA document - ‘An Overview of Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics content in Patrons’ Programmes’. They are outlined below.

That the children should be enabled to:

- Understand and appreciate difference and diversity and value and respect people with particular abilities and needs (*Moral Strand, level1, p. 61*).
- Respect and respond to difference and diversity among peers (*Moral Strand, level 2, p. 78*).
- Develop respect for the views, feelings and possessions of others, in their own community and in other communities (*Moral Strand, level 2, p. 78*).
- Begin to explore other Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities, developing respect for how they worship (*Moral Strand, level2, p. 78*).
- Begin to distinguish between a religious and non-religious worldview, showing sensitivity and respect for people who hold beliefs different from their own (*Christian Faith Strand, level 3, p. 84*).
- Practice effective interpersonal skills in order to relate to others in peaceful, tolerant, and non-discriminatory ways (*Moral Strand, level 3, p. 100*).
- Develop an understanding of the importance of ecumenical activity and inter-religious dialogue and of how religious people work together to create a better world (*Christian Faith Strand, level 4, p. 106*).

It is important to note this material for the following reasons:

(a) While it is correct to say that discrete learning *about* religions and beliefs represents a small amount of the total time allocated for Religious Education in the CPPRECI, the time and attention given to goals similar to those of ERB in the CPPRECI is much longer than this. Given that some of the outcomes listed above are 'core outcomes' and therefore return at every level of a spiral curriculum, the time allocated to teaching respect for difference and diversity in the Catholic curriculum is much stronger than the NCCA paper would lead readers to believe.

(b) It is important not to exclude the aim that children be introduced to non-religious worldviews (P. 84). This aim is left out of the NCCA review. This particular aim is important because it leads to the teaching about atheism (Level 4 p. 85). The NCCA review gives the incorrect impression that the CPPRECI only teaches about monotheistic faiths. The study of atheism is included in the CPPRECI though not in the inter-religious learning sections which formed the focus of the NCCA review.

5.2 Education in Ethics and the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*

The CCPRECI, in terms of what it sees as its defining features, stresses the central importance of the “Christian Moral Perspective” (p. 22). There are also significant justice and ecological perspectives that are identified as defining features (p. 20, 24). Within the Christian moral perspective key virtues, values and attitudes permeating the entire primary RE Curriculum are similar to the many key values and attitudes listed in the NCCA Consultation paper relating to ethics education, including, for example, in terms of the CPPRECI, citizenship, non-violence, justice, social awareness and moral responsibility (for example, outlined in Table 2, NCCA Consultation Paper, page 16).

Again, in terms of the document, “An Overview of Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics content in Patrons’ Programmes”, what is presented is arguably a narrow sample of aims from the Christian Morality strand of the CPPRECI. This does not constitute an overview of the entire ethics content in the CPPRECI. In relation to the key areas mentioned in the NCCA definition of ethics - human dignity and freedom, human rights, social justice and the common good - the following aspects of CPPRECI should be noted in any review.

5.2.1 Human dignity and human rights

In the Catholic curriculum, children are taught about their dignity as children of God and of the dignity of all persons created by God. This fundamental understanding of the human person as created by God and called to loving relationship with others is why Catholic schools teach tolerance and respect. It is also why Catholic schools are called to facilitate pupils to enter into dialogue with those who have different beliefs to their own. This belief underpins all relationships within the school, engagement with parents and with the community in which schools exist, and with charitable causes with which children are invited to engage. It also impacts on policy formation, communication, leadership and school management. Not surprisingly, this belief also inspires the writers not only of the CPPRECI but also religious education programme writers. These programmes are called to “reflect social and cultural diversity within the school and within society as a whole. They are required to provide positive images of religious and ethnic groups, gender and disability” (CPPRECI, p. 21). Further, the CPPRECI states that “the connections between racism and religious prejudice will be explored where appropriate.” (CPPRECI, p. 22). For this reason, the CPPRECI teaches children that Christians are called to go beyond simple tolerance of others. Christians are called to show “respect and love” to those who think or act differently than they do in religious matters (pp. 69, 88, 112-113).

This understanding of the inherent dignity of all people finds further expression in the belief that there are universal and binding moral principles which can be known by human reason, unaided by revelation. These universal and binding moral principles expressed as human rights are richly addressed in the CPPRECI. While discrete teaching on human rights on an abstract level is found at level 4 (p. 127), the core underpinnings for rights education are found at every level with opportunities for children to explore together shared values and commitments. The NCCA Consultation, similarly, in terms of Ethics education, emphasises the importance of developing in children their understanding of the important place of human rights in their own ethical formation (Consultation paper, pp. 6, 9, 14, 25).

5.2.2 Human freedom and decision making

The CPPRECI emphasises for children that every human person is free and that we are responsible for our moral actions and decisions (for example, Moral Strand, Level 2, p. 78). This important emphasis on freedom is also highlighted in the Consultation Paper as core to any worthwhile ethical education. (Consultation paper, p. 20, 37). Some important skills of the Catholic moral curriculum which lay the foundations for a mature Christian understanding of freedom and judicious decision making include: helping children to understand that they are accountable for their decisions and responsible for their words and actions; enabling children to reflect on their freedom to make choices and the relationship between choice and consequences; teaching children to recognise their conscience and to develop the skill of making moral decisions with an informed conscience. (CPPRECI, 61-62, 78-80, 100-102, 126-130).

5.2.3 The common good and social justice

The concept of the 'common good' provides an important balance against too strong an individualism by emphasising the social aspect of the human person. It is an obvious social expression of the belief in the dignity of the human person. For this reason, the common good is understood to be at the heart of good religious education. For example, in the CPPRECI, children are encouraged to have a strong sense of social justice and to contribute to the common good. This emphasis on the common good also reflects, in part, the understanding of ethics education contained in the NCCA Consultation Paper with its similar emphasis on "service of the common good" (pp. 6, 37, 43).

For Catholic schools, this emphasis is not simply theoretical. Children in Catholic schools are invited to put their understanding and learning into practice in activities associated with Christian charity, stewardship of creation and social justice, so that they grow in moral awareness and authentic Christian concern for the poor, for human equality and for care of the earth.

A sample of aims and learning outcomes from the CPPRECI that directly relate to the NCCA understanding of Ethical Education includes the following. Students will

- Understand their dignity and worth as created in God's image (Morality strand, level 1, p. 61).
- Respect and respond to difference and diversity among peers (Morality strand, level 1 p. 61)
- Develop their concern for others, for animals and for the natural environment (moral awareness, ecological awareness; mission and social justice orientation) (Morality strand, level 1 p. 61).
- Develop empathy, a sense of justice, fairness, friendship, healthy attitudes to diversity and peace-making skills (Morality strand, level 1, p. 61).
- Understand and appreciate difference and diversity and value and respect people with particular abilities and needs (Morality Strand, level 1 p. 61).
- Show respect towards self and others (Morality strand, level 1, p. 61).
- Develop a sense of interdependence, of justice and of fairness as reciprocity (*Moral Strand, level 2 p. 78*).
- Reflect on their freedom to make choices and the relationship between choice and consequence (freedom of choice and human responsibility; agency, self-reflection; moral judgement) (*Moral Strand, level 2 p. 78*).
- Explore their responsibility to care for and preserve the local environment (*Moral Strand, level 2 p. 78*).
- Develop their understanding of freedom of choice, sin, moral judgement and human responsibility (critical moral orientation, freedom, development of conscience) (*Moral Strand, level 3 p. 100*).
- Practice effective interpersonal skills in order to relate to others in peaceful, tolerant, and non-discriminatory ways (Moral Strand, Level 3 p. 100).
- Begin to develop an ethic that respects, defends, and promotes the rights and wellbeing of every person regardless of gender, race, social status, personal achievement or social contribution (justice orientation) (*Moral Strand, level 3, p. 100*).
- Develop an awareness of social justice, ecological justice, universal solidarity and responsibility (*Moral Strand, Level 4, p. 126*).
- Develop strategies to promote a more just society and world (moral agency and imagination). (*Moral Strand, Level 4, p. 126*).

6. ERB and Ethics and the Catholic Patron's Programme

It is arguable that the CPPRECI, and the programmes developed from it, meet many of the aims of ERB and Ethics as outlined in the Consultation Paper, that is “to enhance the personal, moral, cultural and spiritual development of children, while also contributing to developing those skills, capabilities, attitudes and dispositions which they will need for life and work in an increasingly complex and diverse world” (p. 12). This is in line with the 1999 curriculum, *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009) and the *Intercultural Education in the Primary School Guidelines* (NCCA, 2004) and indeed the specific aims outlined in the Consultation paper as they relate (for the ERB component) to personal understanding, mutual understanding, spiritual awareness, and character education and connection to the wider world (for the Ethics component). Notwithstanding all of the above, there appears within the Consultation Document a reluctance to explore more fully the option of ensuring the aims of ERB and ethics contained in the Consultation document are met through the patron's programme. However, in the NCCA document, “Encountering Children in a Curriculum for Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics – a review” (p. 22) it suggests that the NCCA and patrons could work in partnership to deal with the issues raised by a proposed curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

It is important to note that the approach suggested by the CPPRECI is in line with the 1999 Primary Curriculum, and shares the view contained in the NCCA consultation material on ERB and Ethics of the child as capable, confident, curious and caring. The CPPRECI takes into consideration children's feelings, values and attitudes, and the contemporary social and cultural context in which the child lives (CPPRECI, p.23). The Curriculum also acknowledges that “teachers too are representative of the diversity of our multi-cultural society, bringing to the task a wide variety of experience” (CPPRECI, p. 14). Through the teacher, the child is encouraged to question the worldview of the curriculum; “hence the importance placed on encouraging critical reasoning and real engagement with children's culture in the curriculum” (CPPRECI, p. 23). Indeed, the first and most important guidelines provided for teachers engaging with the CPPRECI, is that “Catholic primary religious education entails true freedom”. Therefore, while taught through a faith lens, like all good education, the Catholic school and Catholic religious education respect and support the freedom of children in the classroom, and indeed the rights and freedom of their parents.

Conclusion

It is in the context of valuing the current provision for Religious Education in Catholic schools, of respecting the rights of parents who wish to have faith-based education for their children, of developing an ever deeper sense of care and love for all pupils, and of supporting schools in living

out their ethos that the Commission for Education and Formation of the Irish Episcopal Conference makes this submission to the NCCA consultation process. The Commission would welcome further dialogue with the NCCA concerning the complex issues raised in the consultation process and how these might be addressed.



Home

Contributor

**Community National School
Management Groups**

Response from the Community National Schools Management Group (CMG) to the Consultation Paper on ERB and Ethics (ERBE)

Introduction

A meeting of the CMG was held on 13th April 2016 to consider and give a response to the consultation document on ERB and Ethics (ERBE). The CMG is composed of the principals and managers of the Community National Schools. The Community National Schools (CNS) are currently developing a patron's programme called Goodness Me! Goodness You! (GMGY). GMGY is a multi-belief and Ethics programme which aims to nurture children of all beliefs, secular and religious, attending the CNS. This programme is being developed under the auspices of the NCCA.

General observations

The CMG

- fully understands and supports the need for the ERB and Ethics curriculum in contemporary Irish Primary education
- applauds the aspirations and breadth of vision of the ERB and Ethics curriculum as presented in Consultation Paper and the comprehensive nature of the proposal.
- identifies the strong similarities between the content and approach in the ERB and Ethics curriculum and the GMGY curriculum

Comments on the *Introduction* to the consultation paper (pages 5 – 8)

The proposal to maintain the patron's or faith education programme alongside the ERBE curriculum is endorsed. However, given that GMGY already incorporates many of the approaches and much of the content of ERBE in its programme care needs to be taken to ensure that unnecessary overlap or repetition is imposed on children who are following the GMGY and ERBE.

Comments on the *Rationale* for ERBE (pages 9-10)

The CMG can testify to the value of *learning from* religions which forms part of the GMGY programme. The consultation paper points to the role of the *children as the constructors of knowledge* in such a learning framework. As the child's experience of belief is usually shaped and influenced the family, the CMG affirms the need to highlight the role of the parents in ERBE.

The distinction between ERB and Ethics and their mutual complementarities is recognised by the CMG. The CMG also supports the need for the inclusion of Ethics in the curriculum proposals. The consultation paper correctly places emphasis on the need for *reflection* as an inherent element in the child's growth in ethical understanding and practice. Based on its

experience of GMGY, the CMG strongly advocates the role of a reflective process within the curriculum. Apart from its value as a pillar of ethical development in a child, the CMG can also testify to the benefit and enjoyment that children derive from the process of reflection.

Comments on the *Vision* for ERBE (pages 10 – 11)

The CMG supports the vision for ERBE as contributing to “a pluralist and values based education”. The CMG also agrees that ERBE can contribute to “the development of the child in the five key areas: personal understanding, mutual understanding, character education, connection to the wider world and spiritual awareness”. The CMG suggests ERBE can also contribute to the development of the child’s awareness and understanding of a secular belief framework.

It is affirming to see the role of the parents being mentioned within the section of the consultation paper dealing with *Aims*. However, there is very little reference to this in the remainder of the consultation paper. Although the consultation paper refers to the role of the parent as primary educator, it is surprising to see little or no mention of the parental role in relation to Teaching Methods and Curriculum Features. Based on the experience of the CNS, it is difficult to engage parents in actively supporting their children in relation to belief issues. Discussing their beliefs with their children is a practice that the majority of Irish parents have not had to engage in as it has traditionally been a role for schools. Given that ERBE intends to engage the parents, it is important that the curriculum should clearly outline how it will engage and support parents in playing their role. Teachers have an important role to play in encouraging and explaining to parents their role in relation to ERBE.

The Consultation Paper proposes that teachers will adopt the Toledo Principles of teaching ERBE in a manner that is *objective, critical and pluralist*. These qualities would not have been the hallmarks of faith based teaching and will require significant CPD for the teachers.

The importance of developing an inclusive school ethos is fully supported by the CMG. The development of inclusive school ethos demands inclusivity is reflected in the school policies, curricula and practices. The decision within the CNS to develop a multi-belief programme was motivated by the desire to make real what was stated in their inclusive admissions policy. The need to have an inclusive attitude is not limited to schools with a multi-belief and/or multi-cultural enrolment but is essential in all schools within an increasingly diverse society.

Comments on the *Aims* of ERBE (pages 12 – 18)

The CMG appreciates the clear links between the general aims of ERBE and those of the 1999 curriculum and Aistear. The CMG also concurs with the *General Aims* of the ERBE curriculum.

The CMG endorses the presentation of the *Specific Aims* of the ERB curriculum under the headings of: *Personal Understanding; Mutual Understanding and Spiritual Awareness*. An awareness and understanding of a child's own belief provides the basis for mutual understanding as well as contributing to the child's recognition of their own uniqueness and self-worth. The articulation of the child's own belief and values will on the one hand help the child to appreciate and understand other beliefs and values and give the child the skills to communicate with others and exchange information about issues that would not usually be the subject of conversation among children. While the importance of *Spiritual Awareness* for the development of mutual understanding between children of a faith tradition and children of a secular tradition, it is suggested that ERB curriculum should also have *Secular Awareness* as one of its specific aims. In addition to two learning outcomes specified within the specific aim of *Mutual Understanding*, it is suggested that mutual understanding of different beliefs would also be enhanced by realising how the different beliefs have so much in common.

The presentation of the *Aims* of the Ethics curriculum into *Character Education and Connection to the Wider World* provides balance to the Ethics curriculum.

In reading through the list of *Possible Themes* for ERB, one is struck by the strong similarities between the themes and those being developed within the senior programme of GMGY. It is likely that when the junior part of GMGY is reviewed an even greater degree of similarity between the two programmes will appear. Given the close relationship between the aims of both programmes and the shared need that has given rise to their development, it is not surprising that these similarities appear. It is for this reason that a great degree of flexibility is required in introducing ERBE into the primary school's curriculum alongside the patron's programme.

When the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism first proposed the introduction of ERBE, it did so in order to have a meaningful alternative curriculum for children whose belief excluded them from the denominational teaching of religion in a denominational school. Subsequently, it was decided to develop ERBE as a curriculum for all primary schools running in tandem with the patron's programme. The CMG believes that greater cognisance should be taken of the nature and contents of the Patron's Programme before introducing the programme into schools under different patrons. Failure to do so will lead to unnecessary overlap – highly undesirable in a crowded school curriculum.

Comments on Curriculum Features (pages 19 -26)

The CMG accepts the statement that ERB and Ethics are separate yet distinct. Although they are significant areas of study in their own right, requiring different skills, knowledge and approaches, they both have the same aim of nurturing skills and dispositions to enable young people to live in and contribute to a diverse society.

The CMG suggests the need to base Ethics on the principles of equality. The emphasis should be on inclusion and should focus particularly on those aspects of inclusion that are most relevant in a primary school setting. All forms of bullying, whether it is based on race, sexual orientation belief or disability, should be recurring themes within the Ethics curriculum.

The CNS have found that stories about children or about subjects that are of interest to children are an excellent media for bringing ethical issues to life in the classroom. Apart from the value of stories in presenting ethical issues to children, the CNS have also found that stories are an attractive and child-centred way of making issues come alive for the young learner. In view of the value of stories in a curriculum of this nature, it is surprising there is no mention of stories in Figure 3 in the Consultation Paper.

The Consultation Paper underlines the role of the teacher in nurturing children's dispositions. The Paper also suggests a very different role for the teacher in comparison to the teacher's role in other curriculum subjects. Using the child's experience of belief, encouraging the child to reflect on that experience are but two of the dispositions that the teacher or ERBE will have to nurture in the child. Teaching of ERBE will also present a challenge to teachers who are accustomed to teach a faith based religious education programme. These changes in the role of the teacher will require significant CPD.

One way of reducing the CPD while at the same time upskilling the teachers is to provide a teacher friendly programme with elaborate notes for teachers and incorporating all the resources in the programme. However, there is evidence that this approach to teacher education can result in a significant number of teachers, teaching the lesson with minimal preparation and as a consequence failing to have ownership of the lesson. Given the challenges presented to teachers by ERBE, it is advocated that CPD should be delivered through the PDST system. This centralised system for the delivery of CPD is best suited to deliver the radically different approaches that will be necessary to upskill teachers in the new approaches envisaged for ERBE. Once the initial phase of CPD has been delivered and the new approaches are firmly rooted, CPD could be delivered through in-school ERBE coordinators. Through the in-school coordinator CPD can be delivered on site to the whole school staff and at a time that is convenient to the school. This latter approach to CPD has been found to be very effective in upskilling teachers in the GMGY programme in the CNS.

Comments on *Approaches to curriculum development* (pages 27 – 32)

The issue of time allocation during the school day is a challenging one and it is not surprising that many of the respondents to the Consultation Paper have raised this issue. It is welcome and timely that the NCCA is currently in the process of advising the Minister on revising allocations outlined in the 1999 Primary School Curriculum. It is precisely because of the concern with possible overload that greater cognisance should be taken of the need to

avoid unnecessary repetition between the patron's programme in the various patronage models and ERBE.

In exploring approaches to curriculum development, the Consultation Paper outlines four different strategies. Of the four strategies, the one that seems to be most favoured in the Consultation Paper is the 3rd one: *ERB and Ethics as a distinct curriculum*. The CMG endorses the rationale provided for this approach and outlined in the Paper. In view of the very different approaches to ERBE as opposed to many of the patron's programmes, it is necessary to allocate ERBE as a distinct curriculum with the primary school curriculum.

However, treating ERBE as a distinct curriculum does not answer the problem created by the different patron's programmes and the consequent difficulty of overlap between the patron's programme and ERBE. The considerable overlap between ERBE and GMGY has already been mentioned. The CMG is not in a position to comment on the extent of overlap between ERBE and the patron's programme in schools other than CNS. However, the CMG would advocate the need to give careful consideration to the patron's programme in other patron models in order to avoid any unnecessary duplication between existing programmes and ERBE. As it is the intention to maintain the patron's programmes and as these programmes are quite different in their aims, themes and approaches, it is clear that a one size fits all approach cannot be adopted when planning to build ERBE into the primary school curriculum.

One way of meeting this challenge would be to divide ERBE and the patron's programme into a number of strands and stand units and define each strand unit in terms of aims, themes and learning outcomes. This would enable patron bodies to determine if their programme already included the aims and outcomes included in ERBE and to reduce the ERBE curriculum accordingly. Such an approach would enable schools to avoid overload and duplication as well as retaining the Patron's programme and integrating it with ERBE and ensuring that learning outcomes were similar in all schools, irrespective of patronage.

Conclusion

The CMG is fully aware of the need to further enhance the educational experience of primary school children in Ireland by the introduction of ERBE into the primary school curriculum. The growing diversity of our society is reflected in our schools and needs to find expression in our school curricula. By far the greatest challenge to the inclusion of ERBE in the primary school curriculum is the danger of curriculum overload and the need to avoid unnecessary repetition particularly between ERBE and the current patron's programme. By presenting these two curriculum areas in terms of aims, themes and learning outcomes, overlap could be avoided and curriculum growth minimalised. Whatever approach is adopted to curriculum development, it is clear that a one size fits all approach cannot be adopted to the inclusion of ERBE in the primary school curriculum.

Reflecting on the experience gained from the development of GMGY, the CMG endorses the approach to ERBE as outlined in the Consultation Paper. In relation to the proposals contained in the Paper, the CMG wishes to make the following suggestions:

- the role of parents is critical to ERBE and should be given greater prominence as the ERBE curriculum is developed;
- consideration should be given to the development of a reflective process within the ERBE curriculum;
- the need to give children from a faith background an understanding of the secular perspective, in addition to the other specific aims mentioned in the Paper, should also be one of the aims within the ERBE curriculum;
- as a means of underpinning the inclusive aim of the ERBE curriculum, in treating of the ERB components within the curriculum, greater emphasis should be placed on what the different belief systems have in common;
- in developing the Ethics component of the curriculum, care should be taken to make use of stories as a means of creating situations within which the child can exercise and develop his/her reflective judgement skills;
- the content of the Ethics curriculum should focus on issues that are within the realm of a primary school-going child's experience;
- in developing the new curriculum, particular attention needs to be given to CPD for teachers;
- from the outset and until such time as the new curriculum is firmly rooted in the schools, CPD should be delivered from a centralised system, such as the PDST network. At a later stage the appointment of an ERBE coordinator in each school would enable CPD to be delivered at a local level and at a time that was convenient for the school.



Home

Contributor

David Bracken, Maebh Enright



David Bracken and
Maith Enright,
13 Presentation Court,
Seaton Street,
Limerick City

Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics Consultation,
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment,
35 Fitzwilliam Square,
Dublin 2.

To whom it may concern,

We are parents of three children under the age of nine, one of whom currently attends a Catholic primary school in Limerick city, the others will begin their primary education in the coming years and it is our hope that they too will be educated in a Catholic setting.

We write to express serious concerns regarding the proposed introduction of the ERBE programme to primary schools. We are concerned that the programme, if introduced, will have a profound impact on the characteristic ethos of the Catholic school in the medium to long term. In addition, the introduction of ERBE will inevitably lead to a diminution of the time available to teach our children about their own religious tradition, also adding to the existing problem of curriculum overload.

We live in a multicultural community in the centre of Limerick city. The Catholic schools in our community are at centre of efforts to reach out to our new neighbours from North Africa, Asia and elsewhere, promoting respect, justice, integrity and inclusion, and engaging with people of all beliefs and none. Given our experience of Catholic education in Limerick, we would strongly reject any suggestion to the contrary.

Should ERBE be introduced, we will be forced to seriously consider opting out of the programme, with consequent difficulties for all concerned. We respectfully suggest that the aims of the programme could be achieved through the introduction of guidelines which could be implemented by schools without compromising their characteristic ethos.

Le gath dea ghal.

David Bracken and Maith Enright



Home

Contributor

Deirdre Fahey

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education

Respondent's details

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Date	22-3-2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to

Response to the consultation paper on Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School

The Catholic understanding of religious education is committed to inter-religious dialogue. In a changing socio-demographic context in Ireland awareness needs to be heightened of this important dimension of denominational religious education.

Catholic schools currently make provision for inter-religious and inter-cultural awareness in terms of their policies, ethos, leadership, the programme in religious education and across other curricular areas.

Points for discussion:

- Diversity within a school
- Religious Education
- Educating to Intercultural Dialogue
- Intercultural Dialogue – Some Suggestions

The Dialogue of Life

The Dialogue of Works

The Dialogue of Religious Experience

Diversity within a school:

Even though in some schools students who attend are not Catholic, however, parents opt for this type of education and welcome the ethos and values of these schools. This raises the question of opting out of some classes. Article 44.2.4 of the Irish Constitution acknowledges the right of a child not to attend religious instruction in a school. How such opt outs are facilitated is up to the available resources of the school. The vast majority of Catholic schools handle the issue of diversity with sensitivity and respect. Indeed, it has been found that the majority of parents and pupils find their schools to be well managed and welcoming.

Religious Education:

Religious education is an integral part of the revised Primary School Curriculum. Children should be enabled to develop a knowledge and understanding of his or her own religious traditions and beliefs, with respect for religious traditions and beliefs of others.

- Catholic schools are inclusive of Catholics and pupils of other traditions.
- Catholic schools will respect religious traditions of other students
- Catholic schools seek to co-operate with parents of other traditions to provide religious instruction for children in their own tradition.

Educating to Intercultural Dialogue:

'Schools are privileged places for intercultural dialogue'. Intercultural dialogue is an invitation to engagement with the other person's faith and culture. It seeks common ethical values.

Intercultural Dialogue:

Some intercultural approaches to dialogue are suggested here.

The Dialogue of Life:

- Pupils in the school are made to feel welcome, e.g welcome notices in various languages or flags of the various countries represented.
- Self-evaluation by the BCM and school community to ensure school retains its inclusivity.
- Cultural days
- When conflict and bullying situations arise, children can be taught to be reconciled with one another in a respectful way.
- The school provides mentoring opportunities for new international pupils and their parents
- Children and parents are invited to display their national costumes and traditions on appropriate occasions
- The PA should encourage parents from other traditions to get involved.
- Key materials can be translated as resources allow.

The Dialogue of Works:

Collaboration in the holistic development of all.

- School assemblies seek to awaken a sense of common responsibility for the future of humanity
- Awaken a sense of responsibility towards those who are most in need

- Support local charities
- Sense of respect and care for the other person
- All pupils participate in Green Flag and similar projects
- Develop environmental awareness of pupils
- Form links with a school in a developing country

The Dialogue of Religious Experience

This is based on the actual lives of the faithful.

- The school assemblies acknowledge major festivals of other faiths/traditions present in the school
- Children are encouraged to share their beliefs and cultural experiences.
- Using the internet children can become more aware of other faiths and cultures
- Children make presentations for various projects and topics of interest related to other faiths and cultures
- Children of different beliefs are given the opportunity to explain their beliefs to their classmates
- Children are educated about other faiths
- The children celebrates an intercultural week each year highlighting faiths/cultures
- All students are invited to participate in sacramental events/ceremonies.

Deirdre Fahy

Board of Management member (Community Nominee)

March 2018



Home

Contributor

Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation,
National Council of Curriculum and Assessment,
35, Fitzwilliam Square,
Dublin 2

Please find attached a written submission regarding the current consultative process on the proposed curriculum for ERB and Ethics.

Respondents Details:

Name: Thérèse Ferry

Role: Diocesan Advisor for Primary Schools

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Email: tferry@derrydiocese.org

Date: 30th March 2016

This submission is made: on behalf of the Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre

Yours faithfully,

Thérèse Ferry

Diocesan Advisor for Primary Schools.

ERBE Submission

Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre

Together, in partnership with schools, homes and parishes, the Derry Diocesan Catechetical Centre aims to help young people grow in relationship with Jesus Christ so they can be active members of the Body Christ in a rapidly changing world today. The Catechetical Centre works in partnership with 37 national schools in the diocese which will be impacted upon if the proposed NCCA ERB and Ethics curriculum is introduced.

In *Share the Good News, the National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland*, it states, '*The Catholic school is identifiable by its Catholic ethos. It 'models, and transmits a philosophy of life inspired by belief in God and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.'* *The whole school is rooted in and moved by the Gospel values of respect for life, love, solidarity, truth and justice. The Catholic school promotes the dignity, self-esteem and full development of each person, made in God's image and uniquely loved by God. It welcomes, is respectful of, and engages with, people of all beliefs.'*

In light of this understanding of the nature of Catholic Education and Catholic Schools, the proposed new ERBE curriculum raises a number of concerns for the Catechetical Centre and we would suggest that further consultation between the NCCA and the patrons of Catholic schools in Ireland is of the utmost importance.

Key areas of Concern

- In a Catholic school context, Jesus is at the centre of everything that happens, be it policy documents, religious education, curriculum matters, relationships, pastoral care, inter religious and intercultural dialogue and education etc. Everything is viewed through the lens of faith. The NCCA is proposing that ERB and Ethics be taught from a secular, pluralist, world view which is incompatible with that of the Catholic-Christian view. The Catholic-Christian view believes a child is formed by their specific religious identity and the virtues and values espoused by them are therefore informed by a commitment to their Catholic faith. Pupils in Catholic schools learn daily to live in communion with God and with one another. Communion has at its foundation, equality, respect and love for all people. Children in Catholic schools are taught tolerance and respect for other religions and how they may learn from other religious traditions. They learn that the gift of faith, given them by God and strengthened through prayer, through the sacraments, through community living, calls them to serve the common good, informed by the Gospel values of Jesus Christ. Catholic Education enables people to be rooted in the reality of who they are so that they can bear fruit in the society in which they live. Teaching ERB and Ethics in the manner suggested by the consultation document would be a contradiction of the Catholic-Christian world view.
- The NCCA, proposals seeks to promote a secular approach to religious and moral truths. However in Catholic schools, as children grow in their relationship with Jesus, they come to know Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life. Christianity has always recognised that religious and moral truth is objective. In other words, there are truths that are the same for all human beings living in every century, culture, and circumstances. (For example through the patrons' programmes in schools children are taught that "Jesus Christ is God," that "Human life begins at conception.")
- The *Education Act, 1998* confirms the requirement that schools promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students...in consultation with their parents, having regard for the characteristic spirit of the school. Parents are the first and primary educators of their children. Parents, families and children who have particular religious convictions have a right to give expression to these in faith-based schools. The Education Act requires the Minister to have regard for the characteristic

spirit of the school in exercising his or her functions with regard to curriculum {section 30(2),(b)}. The introduction of the proposed curriculum would be incompatible with the characteristic spirit of the school which in its endeavours, reflects the Catholic Church's understanding of the nature of education, whereby the integrity of the principles and methods of the many branches of knowledge are upheld, but are still taught in the light of the Gospel.

- Religious education in faith-based schools is inseparable from the characteristic spirit of the school. The Education Act requires the Minister to allow reasonable instruction time in the school day for subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school {section 30(2),(d)}. Thus NCCA proposals in areas impinging on religious education and the characteristic spirit of the school are of a different nature than other NCCA proposals such as RSE, where it is acknowledged it must be interpreted in the context of the characteristic spirit of the school. (Schools already have RSE Programmes in place which reflect the characteristic spirit of the school.)

- The Catholic understanding of religious education is already committed to inter-religious dialogue (Inter religious literacy is one of the 5 Key Skills in the new Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland and is reflected in the Religious Education programmes being developed for National Schools.) Close examination of ethos, policies, leadership and programmes show the extent to which Catholic Schools already make provision for inter-religious and inter-cultural awareness. Catholic schools are open, hospitable and inclusive. Children of other faiths, of no faith, children of different cultures are all welcomed into Catholic school communities. Their religious and cultural differences are acknowledged and respected and schools celebrate the richness that having children from diverse backgrounds adds to their community. Catholic schools currently make provision for ethics through school policies, school ethos, school leadership, religious education and across other curricular areas. Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics are already well taught across the curriculum, again informed by Gospel values.



Home

Contributor

Desmond Sutton, Anne Buggy, Enda
Hickey

To whom it may concern,

We welcome the debate and discussion on education about religious beliefs and ethics. We are writing to you as concerned Principal teachers who wish to see the Catholic ethos remain as part of our schools. We believe that the Catholic ethos should be very much part of this discussion.

It is very difficult to define what exactly a Catholic ethos means. We are certain that it is not a set of rules and regulations that have to be followed strictly. This would go against what is intrinsic in the ethos. A school where a Catholic ethos exists would follow the spirit of Jesus Christ and try to live as he did. His teachings of love and his values would be the bedrock of the spirit that would be felt in the school. The school would feel that God's Spirit could transform itself and the world.

In a Catholic Ethos the school community is called to be a good news people. The following beliefs would be very important to create a Catholic ethos in our schools. We believe we are called to be caretakers of creation. We are called to look after and care for all of God's people and creation. We believe we are called to keep our hearts and minds open and attentive to God's will. We are called to be followers of Christ. We believe we are called to be God's hands to the poor, the oppressed, and people at the margins. We believe we are called to immerse ourselves in the culture in which we live and work. We are agents of personal growth and social transformation. We believe in a community which is prayerful, inclusive, tolerant and welcoming. The school is a Christian community. We believe it is in facing our own vulnerability that we can accompany others in theirs. We believe in sharing Eucharist and reconciliation that we are drawn beyond ourselves to the mystery of God. We hear the call to live justly, love tenderly and to walk humbly with our God.

On a practical level we believe that the school should have a right to display its religious emblems pictures statues etc. Prayer and meditation would be very much part of the school day. Religion class would be part of the curriculum. The school would liaise with the parish and parents in facilitating the pupils receiving the sacraments. Parents would have a major role to play in the religious formation of their children. The school would be seen to be open and inclusive. The practice of the Catholic faith in our schools would not interfere with children practicing other beliefs – indeed we would see it as enhancing and enriching the spirit of the school. We note that in the SPHE curriculum under the strand of “Myself and the Wider World” most of the issues regarding ethics are covered.

We feel that it is very important that schools would be allowed to have a Catholic Ethos if that was the wish of the school community. We see it as enhancing the school and it would be a much poorer school if this ethos was not allowed to operate.

We very much look forward to the debate and the decisions that will follow the debate. We hope that you will take our views into account and we look forward to working with you in the future. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need any further information

Yours sincerely,

Mr Desmond Sutton – St. Paul’s School -18828H (Roll Number.)

Ms Anne Buggie - Scoil Mhuire -19286C

Mr Enda Hickey - Sacred Heart - 13386W



Home

Contributor
Diocese of Elphin

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

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Date	March 26 th 2016.

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Preamble

The Elphin Diocesan Education Secretariat supports one hundred and fourteen Catholic Primary School communities in counties Sligo, Roscommon, Leitrim and East Galway. Approximately 14% of the pupils of these schools are of other faiths or none and individually and collectively these school communities continue to work hard, in keeping with their Catholic characteristic spirit and Christian ethos, to be welcoming, inclusive and accommodating of all pupils.

On learning of the NCCA's proposals for a curriculum about ERB and Ethics the Education Secretariat hosted two exploratory meetings for interested principals, teachers, Board of Management members, Parent Association members and other interested parents. We also invited comment via email etc. by those who could not attend.

Both meetings and related correspondence welcomed the NCCA consultation and deemed it timely, recognising the importance of Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics to Catholic Education going forward and recent work in this area within the Catholic community.

Both meetings also concluded with expressions of weighty concern and with a high degree of surprise as to how poorly current faith-based education, and more specifically Catholic Education, appears to be recognised, understood and presented in the NCCA Consultation document and associated questionnaires. In this context grave disappointment and displeasure were expressed at the questionnaires set by the NCCA to gather information from parents and guardians, education professionals and other interested persons.

Whilst we praise the NCCA for its effort to advance discussion with regard to ERB and Ethics, we are somewhat shocked that the proposals appear, unintentionally or otherwise, to denigrate faith and Christian faith-based education going forward. The underpinning agnostic / post-modern view of pluralism was identified as a key concern, particularly owing to its failure to value difference and /or any major faith-based world view.

By way of submission we respectfully request that the NCCA:

- (i) Give further consideration, as many faith schools do on an ongoing basis, to the childhood experience of living in a world informed by religious and other beliefs, as distinct from a rather secularised intellectual adult critique of religions and other belief systems.
- (ii) Become familiar with the Irish Episcopal Conference's *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*, Veritas, Dublin (2015). It identifies how many of the aims and objectives underpinning the NCCA proposals are being met with Catholic pupils and will be met in Catholic Schools over the coming years.
- (iii) Become acquainted with the Catholic School Partnership's *Catholic Primary Schools in a Changing Ireland: Sharing Good Practice on Inclusion of All Pupils*, Catholic Schools Partnership, Maynooth (2015). It identifies how the matter of

school ethos dovetails with the NCCA's proposed ERB curricular aims and objectives. Unless the characteristic spirit of each school consolidates such curricular objectives, they are unlikely to be realised.

- (iv) Separate ERB from Ethics. As proposed ERB and Ethics is virtually certain to conflict with the characteristic spirit of all faith-based schools and faith instruction within schools. No Catholic parent who desires a faith-based education for their child (*or patronage body that seeks to support them*) can support an Ethics programme based on an ideological standpoint contrary to that faith. Our reading of the consultation document has given rise to concern that the NCCA is bordering on endorsing a secular liberal approach to morality, i.e. where individual moral autonomy is considered an ultimate end in itself. This is wholly incompatible with Christian teaching, the Christian approach to the common good and community well-being.
- (v) Be mindful that while everyone is likely to sign up to an ethical system which promotes "a personal commitment to the dignity and freedom of all human beings, the importance of human rights and responsibilities, the place of justice within society, and the service of the common good" (*p. 37 of consultation document*) we are unlikely to agree on the specifics, e.g. the fundamental right to life.
- (vi) Recognise that the specific aims identified with the Ethics component (*p. 14 of consultation document*) are already met in most Catholic schools ... and that at a time characterised by curriculum overload, it is difficult to see the need for another course with the same aims, ... unless the NCCA has plans to introduce a secularist approach to such matters in faith-based schools?
- (vii) Seek to ground the proposed ERB curriculum in an epistemological foundation amenable to Christian faith. We could never endorse a constructivist and pluralist epistemology that argues there is no objective truth or way of knowing something to be objectively true. The NCCA's current proposals fail to recognise Christianity and Judaism as revealed religions and consequently are incompatible with current religious formation in faith-based schools.
- (viii) Revisit the assumption (as alluded to in the NCCA questionnaires and the overall thrust of the consultation document) that the proposed ERB and Ethics curriculum is necessary to foster inclusivity, conscientious and critical thinking, and a sense of social justice. This conveys no comprehension of the sterling and excellent work that is on-going in faith-based schools in these areas of human development.
- (ix) Recognise that teachers, principals and parents have real concerns that the proposed NCCA ETB provision, outside agreed Patron programmes that were themselves the subject of much consultation, e.g. Grow in Love, will confuse children and serve to undermine their religious and spiritual development.

- (x) Explicitly acknowledge, as you have done in the area of Relationships and Sexuality Education as part of the NCCA SPHE curriculum, that any future ERB curriculum and Ethics curriculum must be interpreted in the context of characteristic spirit.
Parents and teachers who participated in our meetings were very strong that they did not want the Catholic Faith presented as one religious identity or belief among others, all equal in weight and validity. The role of faith schools in assisting to form children in the faith continues to be greatly valued by many parents, as is the capacity of the faith school to promote critical reflection enlightened by faith and reason.
- (xi) Be mindful that teachers who have chosen to work in faith-based schools and parents who have chosen Catholic schools for their child's education will be comfortable with ERB across other curricular areas only in so far as provision is consistent and in keeping with the characteristic spirit of their faith-based school and, in Catholic Schools, compatible with The Irish Episcopal Conference's *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (2015).
- (xii) Be aware that the version of pluralism that appears to pervade this consultation document is acrimonious to Catholic religious education. While acknowledging the "challenge" for teachers "who will be engaged in teaching denominational programmes and faith forming on the one hand; and teaching about religions and beliefs from a pluralist perspective on the other" the NCCA consultation document proceeds to ask the same teachers to be "non-judgmental" in relation to the truth claims of the belief systems under discussion (p. 23). Surely this makes a point for deferring elements of the proposed curriculum until pupils are older ... a point made by a number of parents and teachers.
- (xiii) Acknowledge in any future publication relating to this topic that many faith-based schools have an excellent track record in fostering genuine inclusivity within the classroom and the playground and are ever mindful of the age and maturity of their pupils.
- (xiv) Offer direction in relation to the resolution of the curriculum overload issue before returning to school communities and their representative bodies with a revised and more considered set of suggestions. If you choose not to, a concern will remain that this programme is a means of undermining the characteristic spirit of our schools and our patron's religious education programme.
- (xv) Further this consultation with representatives of the patrons of faith-based education providers and representatives of parent bodies that seek faith-based education, around developing:
- a. an initial set of guidelines in relation to ERB, exclusive of Ethics, that is cognisant of the current contributions of patrons' programmes in this area.
 - b. a suite of resources for the minority of pupils in faith-based schools who have been withdrawn from the patron's programme and whose teachers would

welcome support in contributing to their moral and spiritual formation by an alternate means.



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Contributor

Dr Barbara O Toole

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Date	11 th March 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

1. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

I welcome the publication of this consultation paper on the development of a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the primary sector in Ireland. The proposed programme is timely, given current debates about the place of religion and religious education in the primary school. There are some elements of the proposal to which I would like to draw attention:

1. Implications for pre-service and in-service teacher education

The consultation and background papers state that ‘primary school teachers should be aware of their own personal convictions and should be sensitive to the diversity of religions and beliefs within their classroom and school community’ (Page 19, *Encountering Children in a Curriculum for Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics – A Review*) and ‘teachers need to be conscious of their own convictions and beliefs and how these influence their approach to the teaching of the proposed curriculum in ERB and Ethics’ (Pages 22-23 *Consultation Paper: ERB and Ethics*).

I agree with the necessity of self-awareness on the part of teachers; however, this places great demands on those teachers, most of whom have attended denominational primary and secondary schools, and have graduated from denominational teacher education colleges. By the very nature of these institutions, the ethoi centered on the truth claims of one religious faith. The consultation document states that ‘staying open-minded, fair, balanced and non-judgmental is important’ (Page 23 *ERB and Ethics*). This raises the question as to how teachers who have been brought through a denominational educational system, with an emphasis on the truth of one religion, can be asked to be open-minded and non-judgmental. The tensions between the truth claims of religious faiths and the requirement for openness in an ERB and Ethics programme need to be teased out.

This is relevant at pre-service as well as at in-service, with implications for colleges of education and CPD providers, and with denominational colleges perhaps facing particular challenges so that the preparation for teaching an ERB and Ethics programme is carried out in a neutral manner – incorporating a number of perspectives and worldviews, including those that are secular.

Master of Education Studies (Intercultural Education) at MIE:

MIE has developed a model of teaching and exploration on the MES in Intercultural Education, specifically on the module entitled ‘Religious diversity and intercultural education’. This Master’s programme is embedded in the principles of critical multiculturalism, which places emphasis on interrogation of societal power relations and which recognises the rights of minority groups in terms of culture, language and religion.

As part of the module on religious diversity, participants are encouraged to take a critical literacy stance towards a broad range of perspectives and worldviews. We use the model of critical literacy developed by Vanessa Andreotti, which calls on the individual to ask certain questions to probe beneath the surface of accepted truth claims. For example: What are the assumptions behind the statements? How does the author (or speaker) understand reality? What is shaping his / her understanding? Who decides (what is real, can be known or needs to be done) in this context? In

whose name and for whose benefit? What are the implications of these claims? What are the sanctioned ignorances (blind spots) and contradictions of this perspective? The focus of such a critical literacy stance is on assumptions, knowledge production, power, representations and implications. (www.osdemethodology.org.uk)

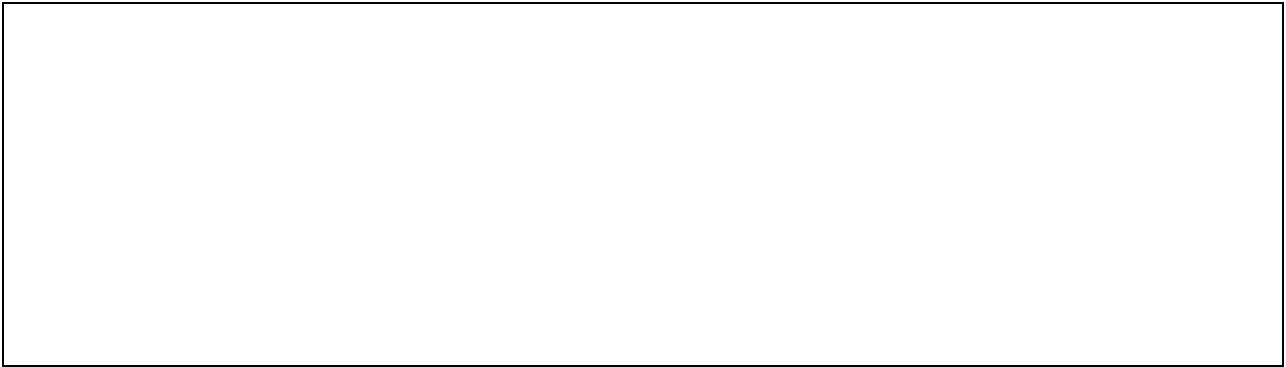
Further, participants are encouraged to make conscious and then to reflect upon their own beliefs. The rationale is that looking inwards is a crucial step to take before exploring 'difference' or 'other'. Otherwise, the possibility is that exploring religious diversity becomes exoticisation, or empty gazing, or a judgmental exercise of comparison with one's own beliefs (intact). The aim is to increase understandings of one's own beliefs – whether these are rooted in faith or secularism, in order to lead to greater / truer engagement with difference. This work is carried out from an experiential rather than an information-giving perspective, and the investigative stance is pluralist in nature, in that it recognises 'the right to the existence of contradictory truth claims' (Page 39, *ERB and Ethics*). Such a model, based on the concept of critical literacy, might usefully be further examined as a template for proposed CPD for teachers who will be implementing the ERB and Ethics programme in schools.

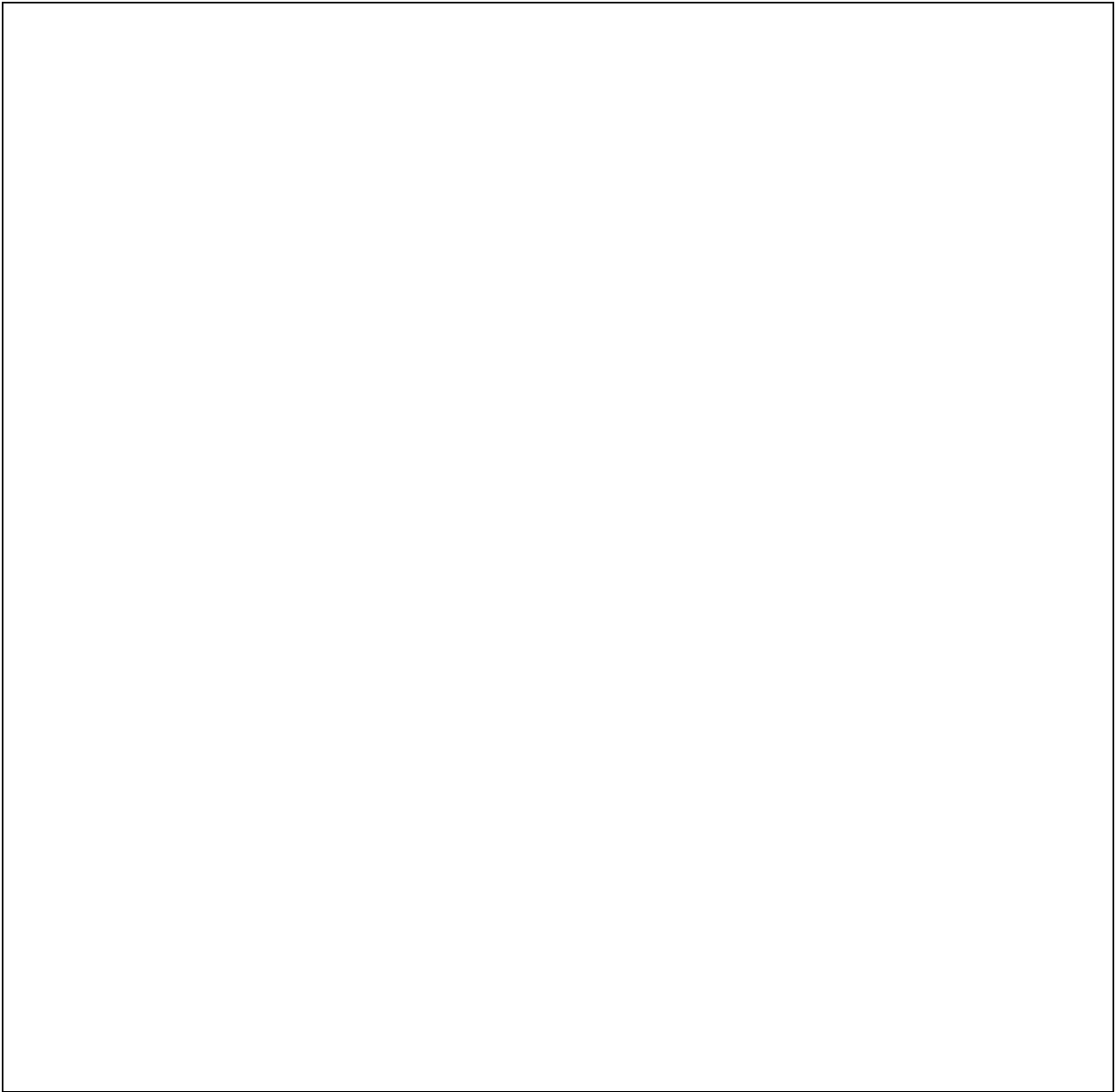
2. Where does the 'truth' lie?

The relationship between confessional RE and the ERB and Ethics programme needs to be explored – will teachers be expected to shift from teaching that one particular religion is 'truth' during one part of the day, and then move to an objective stance later in the same day, whereby children are taught that many belief systems and worldviews are possible?

3. Relationship with 'intercultural' education

This aspect of the proposed programme needs some further thought. Page 22 of the background paper: *Encountering Children in ERB and Ethics*, states that 'ERB as a part of the broad understanding of RE can contribute to such school policies of intercultural education and inclusion'. It goes on to state that intercultural education involves 'being open to, interested in, curious about and empathetic towards people from other cultures.....' (Page 22, *ibid*). This statement points to what could be a naïve understanding of some of the complexities associated with intercultural education. For instance, by definition, interculturalism places an emphasis on interaction between people of differing cultures and beliefs. The implication is that we can no longer be onlookers, but that we must engage and interact with difference. What happens when we encounter beliefs and / or practices that run counter to our own? What happens then to the 'inter' dimension of interculturalism? Do we retreat to assimilationism and expect that people conform to the dominant values of the state? Do we take a laissez-faire, hands-off approach? Do we engage in dialogue? If this is the territory that the future ERB and Ethics programme proposes to enter, it is essential that naïve interculturalism is not put forward as a recommended solution to these very complex societal issues, which will invariably come to the fore when a programme such as this is implemented in schools. It is imperative that questions such as those asked above, are approached with openness and with a genuine attempt to tease them out and to engage in dialogue and debate.







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Contributor

Dr Daniel O'Connell

'Education about Religions and Beliefs ERB and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper' A Response

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March 2016

Summary

1. While there is clearly a need for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics for children who 'opt out' of Religious Education, no evidence has been given to show why *every* child has to take ERB and Ethics.
2. The vision for Catholic education already promotes a learning about and from other religions and worldviews.
3. There is already a great deal being done in the area of ERB and Ethics in Catholic schools that goes unmentioned and unnoticed in this document.
4. There is a lack of clarity regarding the nature of the Ethics being proposed in this paper. While ERB is a learning 'about' different religious traditions, the Ethics is concerned about forming the character of children – given the lack of clarity regarding the Ethics, this is problematic. There is also a great deal of overlap between the aims of the Ethics in this paper and what is already happening in Catholic schools.
5. Three reports indicate a high degree of satisfaction with Catholic education in primary schools – where is the need for *every* child to take ERB and Ethics?
6. Many of the philosophical and pedagogical presuppositions for ERB and Ethics are incompatible with Catholic schools.
7. The online questionnaire is hardly 'objective' and 'critical', rather it displays a clear bias towards a particular outcome of answer.
8. It is inevitable that if ERB and Ethics comes into schools that the time for Religious Education will be shortened.
9. I believe that none of the four outlined approaches would work in Catholic schools. The NCCA ought to back and speak with the patrons' of denominational schools, recognise the work already being done regarding ERB and Ethics in these schools and find a way to address their concerns that would be in keeping with the characteristic spirit of the school.

1. From 'some' to 'every'

The 'Education about Religions and Beliefs ERB and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper' proposes a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics for all children and schools in the state. The general aims of this curriculum in ERB are:

- develop self-awareness, confidence, personal beliefs and positive social identities
- have knowledge and understanding of how religious and non-religious worldviews

have contributed to the culture in which we live, and continue to have an impact on individuals and relationships between individuals and their communities

- express comfort, empathy and joy with human diversity,
- use accurate language for human differences, and form deep, caring human connections
- recognise unfairness, injustice and inequality and understand the relationship between rights and responsibilities
- appreciate the impact of prejudice and discriminatory actions on others

Specific aims follow on and are set out in three areas: Personal understanding, Mutual understanding and Spiritual understanding. It is difficult to see how any of these general aims are not already part of the educational environment of schools.

The Introduction to the document mentions SPHE and SESE as places where 'many children already engage in learning about religions in their communities and across the globe' (5) and then how in the patrons' programmes in religions and ethical education 'children learn how beliefs shape actions, and how decision-making and choices reflect personal and community values, and that respect for the other and the different is fundamental to living together' (5). And so there is some acknowledgment that these aims are already being met. However, the NCCA believes that this is not enough, hence this proposal. In outlining its rationale for the new curriculum, it says that 'An important aspect of a child's education involves learning about and understanding the lives, values and traditions of friends, classmates and members of the wider community' (9). It points out that such learning already takes place in SPHE, Drama, the patrons' programme and 'indeed across elements of the entire primary curriculum' (9). But it then says that 'to ensure that *every* (emphasis added) child has access to structured, coherent and incremental learning in this area, and to ensure the good practices that already take place in schools are recognised and supported, the NCCA is developing a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics' (9).

This emphasis on 'every' child is very important. This was recognised by the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector (Coolahan et al, 2012:92). The authors felt that all children have a right to ERB and Ethics and that the NCCA should develop curriculum guidelines for this. It was their recommendation that these guidelines could act as a help to programmes where the content of ERB and Ethics was already being met. But they had a

particular concern for 'those children who do not participate in religious programmes in denominational schools...For these children the proposed programme in ERB and Ethics are of central importance' (Coolahan et al, 2012:92).

There is no doubt that there needs to be an appropriate alternative to the patrons programme for those children who opt out of it. I fully agree with the Forum and the Consultation paper on this matter. However, I'm concerned that this clear need articulated by the Forum has expanded from those children who 'opt out' of the patrons' programme to now include 'every child' (9). The Consultation paper does not provide any adequate rationale for this expansion in its reach. Why do all children now have to take part in ERB and Ethics, even when they are taking part in Religious Education? What are the deficiencies in Religious Education at the moment, that require every child to now take ERB and Ethics? Where is the research on this matter?

2. Vision of Catholic Education

My expertise is in Catholic education and I'll confine my comments to this sphere. The NCCA is clearly of the view that the provision of Christian Religious Education is not sufficient to meet the needs and aims of ERB and Ethics. I don't agree with this view. Allow me to take a step backward from the text of the proposal and say a way about the vision in the Catholic school that is pertinent to this discussion. Catholic schools are rooted in a tradition that informs the current life of the school. I will make brief reference to two Vatican documents which inspire and shape current practice in Catholic primary schools today: *Nostra aetate* (1965) and *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools, Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* (2013).

Nostra aetate (1965) refers to the Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions of the Second Vatican Council. This document fosters the Church's recognition of the spiritual value and truth within other religious traditions. While not pretending that differences do not exist, *Nostra aetate* urges Catholics to 'turn [their] attention chiefly to what things human beings have in common and what things tend to bring them together (*Nostra aetate*, #4). Catholic primary schools are full of the sorts of activities that do just that, from working together to achieve a green or yellow flag, fundraising for people who are marginalised, organising quiz nights to raise funds for the school, rituals and activities that celebrate the uniqueness and value of each student, etc. In these sorts of

activities, children and adults can discover the identity of the other in an indirect manner. In working together, conversations emerge about where one is from, why one is involved in the project, and what gives life to the other person.

These ideas are echoed in the Vatican's recent document entitled *Educating to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools, Living in Harmony for a Civilization of Love* (2013). The 'givenness' of difference within Catholic schools is taken for granted and this reality is greeted with excitement and expectation at to what can be learnt through dialogue with one another. The second sentence of the document says 'The overlapping presence of different cultures is a great resource, as long as the encounter between those different cultures is seen as a source of mutual enrichment' (*Educating for Intercultural Dialogue, Introduction*, 2013). The centrality and importance of real dialogue between different worldviews is at the heart of the document. It is rooted in the 'an awareness of each individual's dignity and of the unity of all people in a common humanity, with the aim of sharing and building up together a common destiny' (Ibid., #21). This 'inter-cultural' dialogue is essential so that people are not separated into autonomous and impermeable cultural spheres, rather, the Catholic school needs to promote an encounter between those who are different, through dialogue so that there can be 'mutual transformation' (Ibid., #28). Such dialogue and encounter, in the Catholic school, can happen because 'pride of place *must* (emphasis added) be given to the knowledge of different cultures, with attention given to helping the students encounter and compare the various cultures' many different viewpoints' (Ibid., #66). One's own identity, assumptions, presuppositions and prejudices need to be brought into sustained, critical conversation with 'other visions of life' (Ibid., #70).

3. Practice in Catholic schools

Much of these ideas might be summed up in a phrase used by Pope Francis, when he talks about promoting a 'culture of 'encounter.' This is one of his most popular phrases.

According to John Allen, 'Francis seems to intend the idea of reaching out, fostering dialogue and friendship even outside the usual circles, and making a special point of encountering people who are neglected and ignored by the wider world' (Allen, 2013). Such a vision inspires and shapes the culture in Catholic schools and are very much in keeping with the general aims of ERB and Ethics.

The following is taken from a submission by the Holy Rosary School (Catholic) to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector.

...we have sought ways to respect, acknowledge and celebrate the different ethnic and religious groups reflected in the school community. This has been done through a range of activities and programmes that have evolved over the years. Among these we can highlight sports, games, music, choirs, family fun days, recipe books featuring meals from over forty countries, a festival of faith, the annual arts week, meetings organised between parents and teachers to discuss curricular and educational concerns and the use of church rooms for instruction in other faiths. The net results of these activities is that the children do not see cultural or religious differences as a source of tension. Exploring difference offers an opportunity to grow in respect for traditions and cultures other than our own. The parents and teachers also acknowledge that the efforts to constantly promote a respectful dialogue have been a source of learning and greater understanding and have strengthened the sense of belonging in the local community (Tuohy, 2013:283).

The same submission reflected on the schools efforts in providing Christian Religious Education, the practical arrangements that were made to accommodate and integrate others:

By and large the experience has been positive. The Catholic identity of the school and its close links with the parish has not been compromised by the religious diversity within the school population. On the contrary the situation has led to a growing culture of respect and understanding. The major feasts of the great religions are acknowledged while children of other faiths have shared in the celebrations surrounding the first Holy Communion and Confirmation classes. There has been an effort to cater for the RE needs of other faith groups and this has included the use of the church premises by the Muslim community for classes. The Muslim parents have expressed their appreciation for the efforts of the school and parish to assist them in providing for the religious formation of their children. A recent delegation of educators from Saudi Arabia who were sent to the school on a visit by the Department of Education expressed their amazement at the use of the Church for Muslim Instruction and the easy integration of the Muslim children in the school community (Tuohy, 2013:283).

And so, when I look at the general and specific aims of ERB in this consultation document, I'm convinced that these are shared by Catholic schools also. However, there appears little acknowledgement of what is already being done in Catholic schools in this paper. The danger then is that this paper is proposing a solution to a problem that does not exist. Again, the paper lacks a sufficiently clear analysis about how Catholic schools are failing in their approach to ERB and Ethics currently in order to warrant such change in approach – which one public commentator referred to as a ‘game changer’!

4. Whose Ethics

Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics are separated in this proposal. While an argument can be made for an integrity to Ethics as independent to Religions and Beliefs, there is no integrity to Religions and Beliefs without Ethics. As outlined in the consultation

paper, ERB is concerned with beliefs, worship, symbols and celebrations. However, to leave out ethics as an integral element in any religious or worldview is a fatal flaw in this paper. In this proposal Ethics is distinct and will not be taught as a component part of a religious tradition. As proposed, the Ethics as outlined appears to be a liberal secular one (emphasis on the autonomous self leads this way, although this is little clarity as to what sort of ethics is being proposed) - not rooted in any one religious tradition. And so, it seems very strange to teach children about the beliefs and customs and rituals in different religions and worldviews but *without* any explicit reference as to what these beliefs might require of their adherents in regard to their responsibility to themselves, others, God (for those who are theist) and creation. While others will contend that they will receive an education in Ethics in this discrete strand, the educational flaw is that it is unconnected with the religious traditions and worldviews just studied. There is no effort to uncover the ethic from within a religion or worldview, one that makes sense and is in accord with the beliefs of that particular religion or worldview. Further, it is highly likely that children will pick up the impression that ethics is something separate to religions and worldviews – since it is in a parallel stance to them. This will be part of the 'hidden curriculum' and simply inadequate educationally. Ethics are an integral part of religions and worldviews – to remove ethics in this way, is to misinform children.

The specific aims for an Ethics curriculum are:

Character Education

- Ethics can play an important part in promoting character education and instilling an understanding of right and wrong by supporting the teacher to enable the child to-
- appreciate that people's rights also imply responsibilities, to understand that by taking
- responsibility for their actions, developing a pro active spirit and empowering themselves they can contribute to their world
- develop a sense of conscience, recognise the importance of personal integrity and promote an
- active tolerance and respect across religious/cultural divides
- develop the skills of reflection, discernment, critical thinking and decision-making when making moral decisions.

Connection to the wider world

- Ethics can play an important part in promoting the child's connection to their wider world and their awareness and understanding of diversity in local and global communities. The curriculum will support the teacher to enable the child to
- foster good relationships, respect difference between people and understand the destructive
- power of prejudice, discrimination, racism and bullying
- develop an awareness and respect for the environment and understand the concept of
- sustainable development and stewardship for the environment
- investigate and think about topical spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues and
- challenges of living in a changing democratic society as well justifying and defending personal opinions and beliefs
- develop a critical knowledge, understanding and awareness of human rights, equality, culture,
- social justice and social inclusivity (14).

And as with the point I made above with regard to ERB and the Catholic school, I will make the same one again - there is nothing to suggest that Catholic schools are not already meeting these objectives. For instance, there are four strands in the new Religious Education Curriculum for Catholic schools: Christian Faith, Word of God, Liturgy and Prayer and Christian Morality. Within the Christian Morality strand for Level 4, some of its aims are as follows:

- develop an awareness of social justice, ecological justice, universal solidarity and responsibility (126);
- develop their understanding of factors that call for, influence and promote moral behaviour (126);
- investigate and evaluate models for their own moral life, making connections between the decisions and personal attributes of moral models and their own sense of moral self (126);
- be inspired to work together with people of other faiths to promote human rights, social justice, good
- morals, peace and freedom (126);
- discern and evaluate values, attitudes and expectations with which they are surrounded in contemporary culture (126);

- develop strategies to promote a more just society and world (moral agency and imagination) (126).

So, while there is much overlap in aim between ERB and Ethics and what is happening in Catholic primary schools, my question remains – why require *every* child to take ERB and Ethics if much of the Ethics is already been covered in a Catholic school? Clearly, there is need for a formal curriculum in ERB and Ethics for children who ‘opt out’ of Religious Education but this paper has not established the need for all children to take ERB and Ethics.

The Consultation document states that ERB

helps children to know about and understand the cultural heritage of the major forms of religions, belief traditions and worldviews which have been embraced by humankind. It does not nurture the belief or practice of any one religion; instead it focuses on an informed awareness of the main theist, non-theist, and secular beliefs including key aspects of their cultural manifestations’ (6).

However, when it comes to Ethics, the approach changes. The document states ‘

The teaching of ethics includes the formation and the promotion of a personal commitment to the dignity and freedom of all human beings, the importance of human rights and responsibilities, the place of justice within society, and the service of the common good... Learning about ethics is important for all but developing modes of ethical behaviour is of central importance to children’s development (6).

Where the ERB aspect of the curriculum is simply information ‘about’ traditions, without any judgments either way, the Ethics component is concerned with the ‘formation’ and ‘character’ of the child. It is interesting to notice the difference in approach being adopted for ERB and for Ethics. The paper works out of a pluralist approach which ‘equally recognises the diversity of beliefs, values and aspirations of all religious and cultural groups in society’ (20) but it is less agnostic when it comes to Ethics, despite the diversity of beliefs about what constitutes a good life and what is right or wrong, good or bad. However, when we go below the surface of Ethics, it is not as straightforward as it seems.

While there can be little argument about the importance of forming children in having a commitment to dignity, freedom, justice and service to the common good, the problems emerge when we try to tease out what does it mean in practical matters to honour dignity, respect freedom, work for justice and serve the common good. There is a content to ethics, it is not neutral or objective – nor should it be and it cannot be all things to all people. The ethics as outlined in the Consultation paper is too broad and not very clear in what it means in

practice. What sort of ethic is being proposed? To oversimplify, older theories of justice sought to maximize virtue, whereas modern theories start with freedom. Many modern theories of justice place great emphasis on one's personal autonomy and non interference from others and the state – this might be called a libertarian approach. Others counter that with an approach that might be called communitarian, where the well-being of community and relationships are of great concern. Then others seek to maximize one's welfare and well being and is best referred to as utilitarianism. What sort of ethics is being promoted in this paper? Is it one that seeks to privilege the autonomous self or one that works from more of a communitarian bias? Then to complicate matters further, there are all sorts of ethics: social ethics, virtue ethics, bio-ethics, sexual ethics and feminist ethics, etc.

The paper lacks the specificity as to where the ethics it proposes belongs – is it more utilitarian, libertarian, communitarian, concerned with personal and public virtue in approach? It would be problematic in a Catholic school to have a course in Ethics that might be at odds with the ethics the children are learning as part of the overall ethos of the school in general and in Religious Education in particular. We need to explore how the proposed Ethics would 'fit' within a Catholic school. Would the Christian approach to ethics find a complementary partner in the Ethics being proposed or would it find a rival in approach – one that privileges personal autonomy over all other goods, with less of an emphasis on natural law and objective moral norms and one that contributes to a culture of relativism? Were this to be the case, then these two approaches to ethics would be incompatible.

The paper is not clear nor does it explain the nature of the difficulty of the ethics currently practiced and taught in Catholic schools and so the solution, a course in secular ethics for all children, makes little sense. However, it is clear that children who 'opt out' of Christian Religious Education need to have some formal study of ethics but to make this compulsory for everyone is problematic, to say the least.

5. What is the nature of the problem?

The development of ERB and Ethics for *every* child might give the impression that there are serious problems with Catholic schools (considering that they are almost 90% of the patrons' of primary schools in the state) concerning inclusive learning environments where children learn about and from each other, world religions, worldviews and ethics. However, some recent reports would suggest otherwise. The report from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), entitled *School Sector Variation Among Primary Schools in Ireland 2012*,

points out that Catholic primary schools are indeed very inclusive. It shows that they are more likely to have students from working class backgrounds and the Traveller community and it states that the “widest spread of nationalities was evident in Catholic schools” (7). The issue of inclusion is complex and no school can be all things to all people, but it does appear that Catholic schools are more inclusive than they are regularly portrayed. Inclusion necessarily means that children of different religions and worldviews have a sense of being recognized and welcomed into the school. Also, it is worth noting what the *Inspector General’s Report* said about parents’ views of primary schools. “High proportions (95%) of the parents surveyed as part of the WSE process during 2010-2012 agree that schools are welcoming of them” (2013:38). And it goes on to finish by saying, “Primary schools were found to be managing their pupils well and the vast majority of parents were happy with their child’s school” (2013:105). If there were serious problems that required *every* pupil to take a new course in ERB and Ethics, surely there would be some indication of this issue in these reports? In October 2012 and again in April 2013 the DES carried out surveys in 43 areas around the country, asking parents about their preference for school patronage. The report found that somewhere between 0.6% of parents (in Roscrea) and 8% of parents (in Portmarnock) with children in school would avail of another form of patronage (See Catholic Schools Partnership, ‘Response to the Reports from the Department of Education and Skills on Surveys of Parental Preferences in 43 Areas’, 2013). This is hardly a ringing endorsement for change.

6. Philosophical and Pedagogical Approaches to ERB

The new curriculum in ERB and Ethics subscribes to a ‘pluralist approach’ (20), one that ‘equally recognizes the diversity of beliefs, values and aspirations of all religious and cultural groups in society’ (20). However, it does not go into any detail of what it means to recognize the diversity of beliefs. It seems to suggest that we display and observe the different worldviews without any attention being paid to what is true and trustworthy within them. What are the sources of life and humanization that can be found in these traditions and worldviews and what is there in these religious traditions and worldviews that might undermine the dignity of the human person? This, however, begs the question about the nature of the human person, what it means to live a good life and if there is a transcendent dimension to life. For young children, there is an element of nurture that is required when it comes to helping them make sense of their lives and the world around them. It is not appropriate to simply make visible the different world views and have children talk about

them, locate one that makes most sense to them, with the teacher acting as facilitator. This might be more appropriate at second level education but much less so, when it comes to primary school and young children. There needs to be guidance from the school and the teacher on what are trustworthy ways and approaches to making sense of the world. There is already, in every school, a way of making sense of the world. There are values that are operative and all sorts of practices and activities arising out of these values, in the hope that the children will also find these values important. Schools don't start from nowhere when teaching children – they are not 'objective' places and they are 'teaching' children all the time, hence the phrase the 'hidden curriculum'. Can you seriously omit the schools own way of making sense of reality from ERB and leave it up to the children?

The paper takes a very 'hands off' approach when it comes to teaching ERB to children. It suggests teachers be facilitators (and 'do not need to be experts, p.23 – I wonder would such a phrase be used for other subjects like English and Maths?). It suggests that teachers be facilitators in the child's learning process and while it places great emphasis on children exploring their own experience (which is very positive), there is little mention of what or how the learning takes place. Is it simply to share experiences of religions and beliefs with others? Or, how are children going to learn about and from these religions and beliefs for their own lives? Is there any place for these religious traditions and worldviews to challenge and interrogate the views of children?

Part of the answer to his question emerges when the paper says that the pedagogies are 'constructivist' (23). This will be problematic in a Catholic school. At a very basic level, this approach rejects the possibility of objective truth. There is no mention of how, in an educational setting, the truth or trustworthiness of a religious worldview or belief might be part of the conversation with children in the classroom. I appreciate that this is a very difficult thing to do. But my fear is that, in the real world of the classroom, that we might simply make visible religions and worldviews, have children share their experience of them, facilitated by the teacher and leave it there. Is that enough?

Stanley Fish outlines the problem

The chief danger is not of any particular doctrine to which the children might be exposed but the unannounced yet powerfully assumed doctrine of exposure as a first principle, as a virtual theology. This is where the doctrine comes in, not at the level of urging this or that belief, but at the more subliminal level at which what is urged is that encountering as many ideas as possible and giving each of them a run for their

money is an absolutely good thing. What the children are being indoctrinated in is a distrust of any belief that has not been arrived at by the exercise of their unaided reason as it surveys all the alternatives before choosing one freely with no guidance from any external authority (Fish, 1997:2289-90).

Is there not a danger today with the centring on the self, that children will come to think that they determine for themselves *alone* what is significant in their lives and the world around them. Many people today believe that significance is conferred by the very act of choosing; choice itself is the good – not so much what is chosen but the very act of choosing. Some believe that all options are equally valid and worth is conferred on something by the very act of it being chosen in the first place. However, this is to deny the pre-existence of horizons of significance, where some things are more valuable than others, even before we get to choose them, some things are good in and of themselves, regardless of what we think about them. There are some choices which are better than others (this is allowed for in the Ethics dimension of the suggested curriculum), are there some perspectives that are more helpful in interpreting reality and the world around us? Or are they all equally valid and if not, how do we try to undertake the difficult and sensitive task of finding reliable ways, in an educational setting, to search for the full meaning of being a human person? What are trustworthy ways of making sense of the world and our lives within it? Without a background or horizon of significance, choice becomes meaningless. Is something true or trustworthy simply because I think or believe it to be so or can I bring my own beliefs into critical conversation with horizons of significance in a way that can be transformative?

I believe as currently outlined, the approach to ERB (and it is very vague) will clash with the approach to Religious Education in Catholic schools, which is rooted more in a realist epistemology. This clash is acknowledged in the paper (23). It would be peculiar for Catholic children to be taught their own faith tradition in a particular manner (realist epistemology) and then learn about it from a secular point of view. This may be appropriate for a second level school, where young people have the intellectual development and maturity to make sense of these two approaches in the one school – such an approach would just be confusing for young children. This peculiarity would grow through the years, as children in Christian Religious Education will also be learning about other faith traditions and worldviews from within their own tradition (inter-religious literacy is one of the 5 key skills in the new curriculum for Catholic Religious Education see *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*, 2015) and then learning about them from a so called

‘objective, critical and pluralist’ (23) perspective. This twin track approach to Religious Education would be very problematic in Catholic primary schools.

While the paper purports to teach ERB in an ‘objective’ fashion, I think that this is misleading. There is no starting point that is free of particularity and bias, there is always some ‘privileging of some epistemic and ontological presuppositions’ (D’Costa 2013:115). To study religions and beliefs from a so called objective view point is to favour a secularist approach – which in itself is neither good nor bad but it’s not objective. We are not looking at these beliefs from nowhere. Inevitably secular beliefs and judgments are promoted in this approach. This is to say, that objectivity favours secularity. And the danger with this approach is that no value judgement is allowed or possible. This is to say that critical judgment is then minimised.

7. Online Questionnaire

The online questionnaire for the consultation could hardly be described as ‘objective’ or ‘critical’. The questions are very vague and no one could possibly disagree with many of the proposals – they appear self-evident, given the bias in the propositions. There is no effort at all to tease out any of the complexity of the issues involved. The lack of proper research questions removes the integrity of the online consultation process and I hope this will be borne in mind when collating these responses.

8. Time allocation for Religious Education

While the paper states that ERB and Ethics 'is in no way intended to replace the patron's programme or faith formation education in denominational schools' (7) it is inconceivable that parents would stand for two and a half hours of Christian Religious Education on the one hand and then perhaps, an hour or more of ERB and Ethics on the other. If ERB and Ethics comes into the school day for all children, it is inevitable that there will be less time given for Christian Religious Education during the school day. On this point, it is interesting to note that the Forum Report suggested that ‘that inter-faith and inter-cultural initiatives work best in schools where the Catholic students and parents are most committed to their own religious practice’ (Coolahan et al, 2012:93). There is a value to fostering commitment to faith traditions of children – ironically, there is a danger that the very introduction of ERB and Ethics—through taking time away from Religious Education—might lessen the very learning that is sought after – more inter-faith and inter-cultural initiatives.

9. Which approach ?

I do not believe that a discrete subject ERB and Ethics ought to come into denominational schools for the reasons outlined above and given the reality of curriculum overload. There is a difficulty in imagining ERB and Ethics as integrated across the curriculum, as its approach would clash with that of the characteristic spirit of the school. Within denominational schools, there are horizons of significance – there is a ‘givenness’ to the reality of God who is love and revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and present in the world today through the power of the Holy Spirit, there is a particular understanding of the human person and their place in the world. This is not to say that there is not much to be learned from and with other faiths and worldviews but rather to point out that there is a particularity to the denominational school (there is a particularity to all schools). I think a lot of the concerns behind the proposed new curriculum in ERB and Ethics are shared by many in denominational schools and are being currently engaged with in a meaningful and worthwhile manner but the *how* as suggested by this document is fraught with problems for denominational schools. Perhaps the NCCA could consult further with patrons of denominational schools to find ways that will address their concerns but that are in keeping with the characteristic spirit of denominational schools.

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**SUBMISSION TO THE NCCA
CONSULTATION ON
ERB and ETHICS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

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RESPONSE TO THE NCCA CONSULTATIVE DOCUMENTS ON ERB and ETHICS PUBLISHED IN NOVEMBER 2015

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1. A WELCOME FOR THE NCCA DOCUMENTS.

I wish to begin by welcoming the NCCA consultative process and papers. Clearly a lot of research has gone into the production of the different consultative documents: Consultation Paper, Overview of ERB and Ethics in Patron's Programmes, Encountering Children in ERB and Ethics, Information Booklet for Teachers, and the Questionnaire.

There are a number of positive dimensions to the consultative documents that should be put up in red lights:

- that ERB and Ethics is not intended to replace the patrons programme
- that ERB and Ethics could supplement the patrons programmes
- "that in due course a curriculum developed by the NCCA in relation to ERB and Ethics may be incorporated and embedded into future patron programs"(Encountering children in a curriculum for ERB and Ethics- A Review, p. 22)
- a recognition that "good practices... already take place in schools"(Information booklet for Teachers p.6).

The proposed NCCA program offers a unique opportunity to improve the quality of primary education and enhance the provision of intercultural and interreligious education in schools. It could do this by learning from the mistakes made in the UK which adopted a philosophy of Multiculturalism and the mistakes made in France which imposed rigid and secularist policies of Assimilation. These approaches in the UK and in France have often resulted in the ghettoization of ethnic minorities, the development of a growing Islamophobia, the radicalisation of small numbers of young people, the emergence of religious fundamentalism, and the rise of anti-Semitism.

The NCCA is uniquely positioned to come up with suggestions that are distinctly Irish, building on past successes and mistakes, and learning from the UK and EU experiences. In this way the Irish primary education system could move beyond the provisions in the UK and the EU by designing programmes that are at once denominational or nondenominational, multid denominational or secular, inclusive, intercultural, and interreligious. In other words, education 'about' religion also requires education 'from' religion and education 'into' a particular religious tradition. There is a consensus that those who belong to a particular religious tradition or a secular conviction contribute more to interfaith understanding and respect, and have a better appreciation of the strangeness of religious otherness. In other words, fostering neutrality risks the promotion of apathy or indifference or even cynicism vis-a-vis religions and changes nothing.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The context for the work of the NCCA is the wide-ranging Report on the *Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector* (April 2012). What started out as an exercise around patronage and pluralism quickly became embroiled in debates about Religious Education. The Advisory Group became concerned that, theoretically speaking, a child who opted out of religious education could end up leaving the primary school without any knowledge about or understanding of religions. This was a legitimate and laudable educational concern. Further, by opting out the child could feel left out and isolated from his or her peers.

To address this potential educational lacuna, the Advisory Group invoked the Toledo Principles (2007) which emphasises a purely phenomenological approach to the teaching of religion and this became known as Education about Religion. The Advisory Group was not altogether happy simply with education ‘about’ religion and so for that reason they added Ethics.

At the launch of the book *Towards Mutual Ground : Pluralism, Religious Education and Diversity in Irish schools* (2013) on 26 April 2013 in Marino Institute of education Professor Coolohan pointed out:

“We were uneasy with the word ‘about’, but it was the official ERB term. We saw it as ‘education’ and ‘learning’ on religions in the true sense of education. If it was just ‘information’ for young children it would be counter-productive”(paper available on the Mater Dei website, pp.6-7).

The reception, however, of the recommendation of the Advisory Group has been taken to mean simply education ‘about’ religion in a narrow phenomenological sense. The concerns of the forum were important, but their recommendation should be seen as requiring fine tuning and development – an important task for NCCA!

To suggest as some have

“ that the proposals of the Report are founded on secularists presuppositions” is, as Prof Coolohan points out,

“a grave misrepresentation of the reality”(p.7).

3. MISUNDERSTANDINGS AROUND R.E. PROGRAMMES OF PATRONS

There seems to be a view in the NCCA documents that denominational Religious Education does not seek to promote tolerance, or foster respect for difference, or develop an appreciation of the value of otherness. This simply goes against the evidence and teaching of the denominations. For example the Catholic church encourages and demands dialogue with other religions in the documents of Vatican II(1962-1965) and in more recent documents such as:

- *Education to Intercultural Dialogue in Schools: Living in Harmony for a civilisation of Love*(2013)
- *Dialogue in Truth and Charity: Pastoral Orientations for Interreligious Dialogue*(2014)
- Catholic Schools Partnership, *Catholic primary schools in a changing Ireland: Sharing good practice on Inclusion of all Pupils*, 2015.
- Irish Episcopal Conference, *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (2015).

These documents and others are quite clear and explicit about the Catholic church's commitment in theory and in practice to the promotion of mutual understanding, intercultural dialogue and interreligious exchanges. The integration of ethnic minorities into Catholic primary schools is, by and large, a success story waiting to be written. Many urban Catholic primary schools are multicultural and multireligious places of education and this has enriched the Catholic identity of the schools. Catholic schools are not exclusive or sectarian institutions that build walls around themselves; rather Catholic primary schools build bridges towards others by opening their doors to the stranger, the poor and the disadvantaged of society.(I am the patron's representative of two Catholic primary schools in Balally Parish, one of which has disadvantaged status because of its open door policy. Both schools have pupils from a variety of cultures and religious backgrounds)

Further there seems to be a perception in some of the NCCA documents that Ethics does not figure in the RE programs of patrons in primary schools. It should be noted it is Ethics that animates animates the characteristic spirit of Catholic schools. In addition, Ethics is also central to the RE programs in Catholic schools, especially in terms of what is known as the Catholic social teaching:

- the dignity of the individual
- the importance of human rights and responsibilities,
- the promotion of religious freedom
- the development of the social dimension of human identity
- a preferential option for the poor
- a commitment to social and climate justice.

At the centre of ethical education in Catholic schools there is a particular vision of what it means to be human: made in the image and likeness of God, endowed with the gift of the Holy Spirit, and called to Communion in Christ. In that vision, human identity and flourishing are shaped by a sense of the interrelatedness, interconnectedness, and interdependence of the whole of life. It is this latter sense of the unity of the world that informs the promotion of an ecological ethic in the service of our common home.

It is perhaps this apparent neglect of inter-faith dialogue and ethics in the NCCA documents that helps to explain the false impression that Catholic religious education is founded “ upon the use of a simple transmission model of

knowledge”(Encountering Children in a Curriculum for ERB and Ethics – A Review, p.20).

Equally the impression that Catholic Religious Education is primarily about faith-formation is also a misrepresentation. While faith-formation is important it cannot take place in isolation from ethics, other religions, and a sense of belonging to a worshipping community. Instead, Catholic Religious Education embraces the human, social, cultural and religious development of all pupils alongside the promotion of the freedom of the act of faith.

4. CONCERNS WITH ERB AND ETHICS.

There are a number of difficulties, educational and religious, around ERB as outlined in the NCCA documents. At the risk of being misunderstood these difficulties can only be summarised here.

ERB appears to be driven by methodologies and pedagogies that are out of sync with the methodologies and pedagogies informing Religious Education programs of patrons and that underpin the primary school curriculum. It should also be noted in passing that there is an inherent tension between ERB and the teaching of Ethics, the former being detached and neutral whereas the latter is concerned about character-formation.

ERB is built around a constructivist view of knowledge. This implies that all knowing is simply a social and cultural construct. This view, which of course does have a grain of truth in it, ignores the givenness of knowledge in language, culture and religious traditions.

Secondly, this constructivist view of knowledge assumes a neutral standpoint vis-a-vis religions and thereby reduces them to one and the same phenomenon. This approach does not do justice to the richness of religious diversity. Such a constructivist view of knowledge stands out in contrast to the philosophy of critical realism informing most religions and much of the primary school curriculum.

Furthermore, this constructivist view of knowledge informing ERB ignores the universal quest for meaning, truth and beauty; the existence of an unrestricted desire to know and love within the human heart; and the dynamic drives of human intentionality, human agency, and self-transcendence.

The underlying problem with teaching ‘about’ religion is that it is based on enlightenment model of education and informed by a specifically modern approach to religion. This approach emphasises objectivity and detachment, whereas all religions include critical elements of interiority, personal engagement and affectivity. It is doubtful that we can understand what religion is about without reference to the existential, experiential, and interpreted of dimensions of life itself.

As already noted above, the aim of ERB is to bring about a better understanding of religion in society. However, many educators are agreed that simply learning ‘about’ religion will not bring about a change of outlook.

For example, Martine Abdallah-Pretceille, a French educator, suggest that religious stereotypes and prejudices cannot be overcome simply “by disseminating more information, more knowledge, by legislating or even moralising” because “it is now generally agreed that knowledge in itself does not suffice to change attitudes”. She goes on to say that “reductionism in interpreting cultural and religious facts can only lead to dogmatism and extremism, which are always dangerous (“A Religious Dimension of Intercultural education: Challenges and Realities”, *The Religious Dimension of intercultural education*, Council of Europe publishing, 2004, pp. 55 and 53 respectively).

John Keast, editor of *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education*, published by the Council of Europe, points out that “learning about religion is insufficient in itself to produce the kind of respectful attitudes that community and school cohesion requires in a multi-faith society”(John Keast, “ Use of ‘distancing’and’simulation’, *Religious Diversity and Intercultural Education: A Reference Book for Schools*, Council of Europe publishing, 2007, p. 62).

It is doubtful that ERB, simply learning ‘about’ religion without including at least learning ‘from’ religion will bring about a change in attitudes. Learning ‘from’ religion requires personal engagement with, reflection on, and a response to the religion being studied.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the above observations I wish to conclude by offering in summary form a number of recommendations for consideration by the NCCA:

- a.) The time has come, in the light of the Paris and Brussels attacks, to move beyond the Toledo principles. The debate about ERB and Ethics in Ireland has generated too much polarisation and not enough collaboration.
- b.) There is a need to take greater account of the new *Catholic Preschool and Primary RE Curriculum for Ireland* published by the Catholic Bishops in 2015, some 3 years after the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism (2012). This new curriculum incorporates some of the concerns of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism. It also embodies many of “the aims for a curriculum in ERB” as outlined on pages 13-14 of the NCCA Consultative Document. Further, this new curriculum includes an age-appropriate introduction to intercultural and interreligious dialogue.
- c.) It would be helpful if the NCCA developed Guidelines for the implementation of the concerns of ERB and Ethics into existing RE programmes where necessary and/or into the existing SPHE and RSE programmes. It needs to be recognised, and is by and large

recognised, that RE in primary Catholic schools should have a degree of learning 'about' other religions. There can be no Catholic RE that does not include the spirit of ERB. But equally, Catholic RE goes beyond ERB to embrace learning 'from' other religions and an introduction 'into' a particular religious tradition.

- d.) It would also be helpful if these Guidelines were expressed in a way that supports the characteristic spirit of the school as recognised in the Education Act, 1998, whether that spirit be denominational or nondenominational, multid denominational or secular. Further, these Guidelines, regardless of the particular denomination, should seek to promote learning 'from' other religions in a way that develops the ethical and spiritual sensibilities of all pupils .
- e.) The NCCA could do well to have another look at the State syllabus for RE at second-level education. The NCCA Consultative Document has begun to do this on pages 17-18. It should be noted that one of the reasons for the success of that State syllabus derives from the way it is constructed to allow its delivery to be shaped by the characteristic spirit of school schools. This has the distinct advantage of devolving responsibility to the local school for the implementation of the syllabus. There are also other values attached to the State RE syllabus for second level schools, such as the aims and objectives of the syllabus and its openness to the issuing of guidelines by patron bodies for the implementation of the syllabus as happened back in 1999
- f.) One final point : some of the debate has rightly centred around concern for the child who ops out and the delivery to that child of an alternative that is educationally, ethically and religiously beneficial. It would be interesting to know if large numbers of children are opting out of RE and if so why? Further, the opt-out clause should be accompanied by an opt-in clause as happens, for example, in Germany. Accommodating the opt-out child or children will only succeed if and when it is properly resourced. At present arrangements in this regard are unsatisfactory*

*Some of the points made in this submission are available in greater depth and detail in:

Dermot A. Lane, *Religion and Education: Reimagining the Relationship* Dublin: 2013

Dermot A. Lane, *Catholic Education in the light of Vatican II and Laudato Si*, Dublin: 2015



Home

Contributor

Dr Eugene Duffy

**A Personal Response to the Consultation Paper on:
*Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School***

1. The questionnaire that was issued in conjunction with this consultation paper was not such as to elicit objective information from respondents. One was asked to agree or disagree along a continuum with ten statements; to select seven of fourteen values one regarded as important for children to acquire; one question on how one would like to see the ERBE programme contributing to the lives of children (presuming that it would). The responses could be used at a later point to indicate that all those who responded were in favour of the agenda put forward by the NCCA because it is hard to see how anyone could disagree with the questions posed. For example who could disagree with any of these statements? Children should learn to understand more about themselves and how they relate to others; Children should learn about the relationship between rights and responsibilities; The classroom should be a place where children's beliefs and values are respected.

Those who are committed to a faith based system of education and to denominational religious education as part of the core curriculum could not disagree, nor could those who might wish to see comparative religions introduced to schools as a replacement for faith-based religious education.

The questions themselves do not enquire into the experience people have with the current religious education offered in faith-based schools. They are not asked about the strengths or weaknesses of those programmes. Therefore, there is no information being gathered from this survey that could inform policy makers about how best to proceed from the current position.

It is only reasonable to expect that a statutory body would be fair and free of ideological bias when gathering information that will inform its policy-making. It is indeed ironic that on an issue where it is proposing to enhance greater neutrality in society, ensuring various opinions will be respected and honoured, that it should model a certain sleight of hand in its own methodology.

3. Parents have a right to have their children formed in the faith of their choice, where they become familiar with the beliefs, rituals and practices of their religion. This is an activity that takes time and sensitivity. If young children are being introduced to the beliefs and practices of other faiths before they have a proper grasp of the one to which they belong, then the result is likely to confuse the children about their own or any other faith. In the long run, they may have less regard for religion as a dimension of human existence and so become more intolerant of religion rather than appreciative of its centrality to the lives of most people on our planet. Atheistic or irreligious outlooks on life are a minority position in our world. They are not the norm as the underlying assumptions of this consultation paper seem to indicate because the approach being taken here is that of sociology, which may legitimately study religious beliefs and practices in an assumed non-evaluative fashion.
4. This consultation paper does not show any recognition of the work currently being done by faith-based schools to further social inclusion and facilitate those of other faiths and none

whom they accommodate generously and hospitably. This work has been evaluated and it has been shown that these are the schools most effectively advancing inclusivity and diversity in society. It is hard to see how the proposed programme can be advanced without full cognisance being taken of what is already being achieved. It is only when the shortcomings with what is in place have been properly and objectively identified that one should begin to change the system.

5. Those who are most respectful of the faith or culture of other people are those who have a solid grasp of and appreciation for their own. “Authentic pluralism”, as mentioned on page 20 of the consultation paper, which is encouraged can only be authentic if those concerned are authentic in their own tradition in the first instance. Sufficient account is not being taken of this by the document.
6. In view of the fact that religious beliefs and practices are very complex issues and take considerable time to absorb and appreciate, it seems incredible to propose that children in a primary school should be encouraged to engage in “inter-belief dialogue”. This is a very challenging project for professional theologians in various religious traditions, so why could primary school children be expected to engage in such an exercise when they are only beginning to learn something basic about their own beliefs? What is being proposed reads more like a recipe for confusion and the end result might well be greater religious intolerance rather than less.
7. This discussion document shows no awareness of how complex issues of truth, meaning and values are for contemporary people. There is an assumption that there is some neutral ground onto which children (and adults) can be moved so that conflictual positions can be erased and peace guaranteed. On the surface it looks acceptable to say that children should be educated with regard to justice and human rights. However, when it comes to deciding what constitutes justice and rights in particular situations, who will be deciding what is just and right and on what basis? For example, will it be tolerable only to teach that there are limits to the rights to life – that those who have serious physical deformities do not have the right to life beyond the womb or that those whose medical care is too expensive or burdensome do not have such rights? The superficiality of the assumptions in the paper and the lack of recognition for the complexities of the issues under discussion render it totally unsatisfactory as a basis on which to proceed.
8. Practically all teachers in primary schools are agreed that there is serious curriculum overload at the moment. Nevertheless, while discussing the possible options for the introduction of ERBE, the document seems to favour at least some discreet time being allocated for these topics. This immediately adds to the burden of the timetable and curriculum. If the DES were to insist on ERBE being taught, the existing religious education in faith-based schools would be an inevitable casualty. In view of the fact that religious and moral education are already being offered in these schools, not to mention their inclusive (genuinely catholic) nature, why burden them with adding another religious and moral dimension that is not only extra but, worse still, actually inimical to any faith-based education programme – one that is in its foundations doctrinally atheistic and morally relativistic?

9. The document shows no grounds on which the current faith-based schools are deficient in terms of religious tolerance or moral probity. There is no due recognition for their achievements to date, all of which could be counted to outweigh the achievements of any other government agency in welcoming and accommodating children from ethnically and religiously diverse backgrounds. There is more concern to honour the Toledo Principles than there is to honour the noble achievements of teachers, boards of management and patrons of our own schools who, over the past twenty-five years or more, since significant numbers of emigrants arrived in the country, have been the heroes and heroines of tolerance and inclusiveness.

10. Insofar as there are schools where there is no religious education offered then it may be useful to have an element in the curriculum that discusses religions and ethics. This could be sited in the place otherwise allocated to religious education in faith-based or other schools. However, what might be offered needs much more consideration than has yet been given to the topic.

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3 March 2016



Home

Contributor

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19950 E

Submission

ERB and Ethics curriculum development



The educational landscape has changed greatly over the past 20 years and as we know alternative models of RE, such as multibelief programmes at community national schools and educate together may be in a minority, but are growing steadily demonstrating the demand for inclusion of all religions at primary school level. This may be more apparent in larger towns and cities in Ireland today but it is also reaching smaller towns and rural schools too.

RE requires 2.5 hours per week and students who 'opt out' or do not participate in religious programmes, it leaves a gap in these childrens studies. Intergration is important to allow these students to become more involved in RE studies recognising and understanding their beliefs and values, however it is important not to forget our core beliefs and Patronage at our primary schools as we move forward.

In order to intergrate a new programme it is important to note if our teachers have the level of resources available to them in order to carry out any new programme succesfully.

Will the RE programme allocated time of 2.5 hours per week be cut in order to allow ERB and Ethics to be intergrated and will this change or dilute the make up of the future of our Catholic schools.

Parents of children with other religious beliefs and cultures must also play an important role in supporting a curriculum of ERB and Ethics.

It is important for our children to learn about diversity and to become more culturally aware. ERS and Ethics as part of the general curriculum would aim to help children to understand people of diverse religions and beliefs.

Signed on behalf of B.O.H.
Norma Pereira Parents Nominee
Mary Nora Parent
Shirley Callaway Teacher Rep.



Home

Contributor

Dublin Diocese Education Secretariat

Submission to NCCA ERB and Ethics Consultation Process

Introduction

1. Introduction

The Education Secretariat (Ed.Sec) in Dublin is concerned with carrying out the Patron's functions and management of schools in the Archdiocese of Dublin. This covers approximately 460 schools across the Diocese. The Ed Sec has practical experience in school governance and management from a patron's perspective that it wishes to bring to the attention of the NCCA.

The Education Secretariat has decided to make a written submission to the ERB and Ethics consultation rather than answering the questionnaire provided by the NCCA. This is because the methodology of the questionnaire does not follow recommended practice for the reasons set out in Appendix 1¹.

2. NCCA proposal.

Having read the NCCA consultation paper, the Ed.Sec wishes to make the following observations.

It is worth reflecting on the new *Catholic Preschool and Primary School Religious Education Curriculum* (2015) (hereafter, CPPREC) where there is significant emphasis on inclusion, ERB and Ethics and therefore suggest that there is in fact no requirement for yet another curriculum in a constrained space and time allocation for schools. The research indicates that the majority of Catholic schools are performing very well in this area and are extremely inclusive schools in practice.² This conflicts with the consultation paper which suggests that Catholic schools are not inclusive environments³ and that the CPPREC falls short with regard to ERB⁴.

¹ Dr Kerry Greer (BSc, PhD [Psychology, University College London], Grad. Dip. Applied Criminology, [Cambridge], CPsychol AFBPS, Head of Psychology, Mary Immaculate College – University of Limerick) has critiqued the questionnaire and Ed Sec believes that her comments should be considered by the NCCA.

Dr Greer's critique makes clear that many of the survey questions involve a complex series of propositions which themselves contain ambiguous and unsatisfactorily defined concepts as set out in appendix 1.

² ESRI and Educate Together School Sector Variation among Primary Schools in Ireland, 2012.

³ NCCA Consultation paper 2015 Pg 11 .

⁴ NCCA Consultation paper 2015 Pg 9.

Likewise, the NCCA analysis reaches its conclusion about the limitations of the CPPREC's ERB dimension simply because it limits its analysis of the CPPREC's content which relates to the broad goals of the proposed curriculum's ERB component⁵ to the *inter-religious learning outcomes* and content in the *Christian Faith* strand. The consultation papers fails to recognise that many of the aims and learning outcomes from the CPPREC relate directly to the NCCA goals of awareness, tolerance, respect for and celebration of the beliefs, values and stances for living of others⁶.

The Ed Sec wishes to state that the following content was not taken into account of the CPPREC in the rationale for the curriculum proposal and consultation paper:

- i. Understand and appreciate difference and diversity and value and respect people with particular abilities and needs (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 1, pp. 61*)**
- ii. Respect and respond to difference and diversity among peers (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 2, pp. 78*)**
- iii. Develop respect for the views, feelings and possessions of others, in their own community and in other communities (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 2, pp.78*)**
- iv. Begin to explore other Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities, developing respect for how they worship (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 2, pp. 78*)**
- v. Begin to distinguish between a religious and non-religious world-view, showing sensitivity and respect for people who hold beliefs different from their own (CPPREC, *Christian Strand, Level 3, pp.84*)**
- vi. Practice effective interpersonal skills in order to relate to others in peaceful, tolerant, and non-discriminatory ways (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 3, pp. 100*)**
- vii. Develop an understanding of the importance of ecumenical activity and inter-religious dialogue and of how religious people work together to create a better world (CPPREC, *Christian Faith Strand, Level 4, pp.106*)**

Likewise, with regard to the Ethics component of the proposed curriculum, the NCCA consultation paper fails to recognise key areas of the CPPREC⁷ which relate directly to themes within the Ethics component of the proposed curriculum such as, *human dignity and freedom, human rights, social justice and the common good*. The Ed Sec contends that the following

⁵ NCCA Consultation paper 2105 pg 10 .

⁶ See CPPREC *Catholic Preschool and Primary School Religious Education Curriculum* (2015) pg 44-46.

⁷ See CPPREC *Catholic Preschool and Primary School Religious Education Curriculum* (2015) pg 44-46.

aspects, which relate specifically to the themes outlined above, were not understood in the rationale for the curriculum proposal and consultation paper:

- i. Understanding their dignity and worth as created in God's image (CPPREC, *Morality Strand, Level 1, pp. 61*)
- ii. Respect and respond to difference and diversity among peers (CPPREC, *Morality Strand, Level 1, pp.61*)
- iii. Develop their concern for others, for animals and for the natural environment (moral awareness, ecological awareness; mission and social justice orientation) (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 1, pp.61*)
- iv. Develop empathy, a sense of justice, fairness, friendship, healthy attitudes to diversity and peacemaking skills (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 1, pp.61*)
- v. Understanding and appreciate difference and diversity and value and respect people with particular abilities and needs (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 1, pp.61*)
- vi. Show respect towards self and others (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 1, pp.61*)
- vii. Respect and respond to difference and diversity among peers (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 2, pp.78*)
- viii. Develop a sense of interdependence, of justice and of fairness as reciprocity (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 2, pp.78*)
- ix. Reflect on their freedom to make choices and the relationship between choice and consequence (freedom of choice and human responsibility; agency, self-reflection; moral judgment) (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 2, pp.78*)
- x. Explore their responsibility to care for and preserve the local environment (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 2, pp.78*)
- xi. Develop their understanding of freedom of choice, sin, moral judgment and human responsibility (critical moral orientation, freedom, development of conscience) (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 3, pp.100*)
- xii. Practice effective interpersonal skills in order to relate to others in peaceful, tolerant, and non-discriminatory ways (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 3, pp.100*)
- xiii. Begin to develop an ethic that respects, defends, and promotes the rights and wellbeing of every person regardless of gender, race, social status, personal achievement or social contribution (justice orientation) (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 3, pp.100*)
- xiv. Develop an awareness of social justice, ecological justice, universal solidarity and responsibility (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 4, pp.126*)
- xv. Develop strategies to promote a more just society and world (moral agency and imagination) (CPPREC, *Moral Strand, Level 4, pp.126*)

In the consultation paper, the concept that a patron's programme can accommodate the principal aims of the NCCA has been rejected unilaterally without any dialogue or consultation

taking place. Instead, the NCCA have proposed their pre-agreed ideals, which will cause difficult issues in denominational schools for a number of reasons principally concerned with Pedagogy, Philosophy, Religion as social construction and the role of the primary school going child in Religious education in a denominational school.

Philosophy:

The Ed Sec understands that the NCCA proposal is principally based on an agnostic model which is secular in its outlook. This will be in direct conflict with the Catholic-Christian worldview in Catholic schools. This will also cause conflict and harm development and support of the 'characteristic spirit' in denominational schools and breaches the role of the Patron as determined under the Education Act.

The Ed Sec believes that there are criticisms relating to the philosophical foundations underpinning the pedagogical approach, utilised by the proposed ERB and Ethics programme which need to be understood in the present consultation period. While the NCCA consultation paper acknowledges that "no subject or teaching is value free"⁸, the paper suggests that the proposed curriculum will make no claim about the value of religious or philosophical truth⁹. The proposed ERB component views the various religious and philosophical truth claims under discussion as being of equal truth value. Therefore, it becomes clear that the approach taken by the proposed curriculum makes a particular value judgment or claim about religious truth, one that is agnostic in character. From this standpoint, Ed Sec believes the approach of the proposed curriculum is not neutral in relation to religious truth, precisely because it makes a specific claim about ultimate truth, i.e. that all religious truth claims are of equal truth value.¹⁰ In any event, such a viewpoint will conflict with the concept of objective truth and moral goods in Catholic schools.

⁸ NCCA consultation paper 2015 pg 22.

⁹ NCCA consultation paper 2015 pg 6 and 11.

¹⁰ Liam Gearon, *Masterclass in Religious Education: Transforming Teaching and Learning* (Bloomsbury: London, 2013), 134.

In a catholic school, this consequential rejection of objective truth as revealed by God for an agnostic viewpoint of relativism undermines the schools ethos or ‘characteristic spirit’ based on gospel values and the teachings of Jesus Christ. We suggest that the curriculum as framed will be incompatible and unworkable, when the proposed curriculum is considered within the context of the Catholic vision of education which is rooted in its “Christian concept of life centred on Jesus Christ: he is the One who ennobles people, gives meaning to human life, and is the model which the Catholic school offers to its pupils.”¹¹

Pedagogy:

The Ed Sec also observes that the approach taken by the proposed curriculum is incompatible with a Catholic pedagogical approach to religious education. The pedagogical approach of the proposed NCCA curriculum is inquiry-based and constructivist which begins from a sceptical form of Reason. Contrary to such an approach, a Catholic pedagogical approach to religious education develops from realist epistemologies, which begins with experience, revelation and belief. Catholic teaching is derived from Revelation, whereas this NCCA curriculum is based on subjective thinking principally.

While constructivism is utilised within a Catholic pedagogical approach, it is employed after the primary communication of religious truth. This approach develops from the fact that Christianity is a revealed religion and the value of the Truth revealed is not solely subjective in character; that is to say, it is not constructed internally, rather, it has an inherently objective character as the Truth revealed to the human person is communicated by God. This understanding of religious Truth runs contrary to the approach taken by the proposed curriculum.

Denominational school’s exists to educate children in religious life and in religious beliefs which are normative for them, beliefs that have been revealed by God. Therefore the solely constructivist and pluralist epistemologies analysis have a direct impact on denominational schools because denominational beliefs have realist epistemologies, which they possess

¹¹ Irish Episcopal Conference, *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (Dublin: Veritas, 2015), 12.

precisely because they believe as they have been revealed by God. The two systems are incompatible, primarily as one believes in objective truth within a 'lived reality of faith' and the other adheres to a subjective truth system which is 'co-constructed'¹².

Teaching itself

They are two conflicting positions which the NCCA consultation paper¹³ itself admits will cause 'challenges' in teaching religious education in a denominational school or to be more specific, in any of the 460 catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Dublin. The NCCA consultation paper indicates a difficulty and conflict in the teaching of religious education from 'denominational and faith-forming'¹⁴ perspective at one point of the child's learning to a 'teaching about religions and beliefs from a pluralist perspective'¹⁵ including co-learner by the teacher, a number of weeks or days later. Effectively, this proposal will undermine religious truth claims in our schools e.g. where objective truth is potentially taught in January but subjective ideas are then taught in February, which will in turn undermine the previous months teaching. Confusion rather than clarity in the mind of a primary school child will be the result. From a Patron's perspective, this will also leads to confusion for denominational teachers employed to teach about their religion in a denominational school.

Child confusion

Further confusion will arise where the proposed NCCA curriculum invites children to comprise their identity by undermining their right to claim the universal application and validity of their beliefs by utilising a relativist approach to religious education which presents all religious and philosophical truth claims to be of equal value. The relativist approach to religious education outlined in the consultation paper is clearly evident when one observes the emphasis placed by

¹² NCCA Consultation paper 2015 pg 21.

¹³ See NCCA Consultation paper Page 23

¹⁴ NCCA Consultation paper Page 23.

¹⁵ NCCA Consultation paper Page 23.

the proposed curriculum on the primacy of children's own expression and naming of their beliefs. The Ed Sec believes that this conflicts with the some educational psychologists' view of religious formation for children in primary schools. It presupposes that children¹⁶, who are at such an early stage in their development, possess the coherent conception of their beliefs.¹⁷ James Fowler, renowned educational psychologist, in his writings on 'Stages of Faith' would disagree with the NCCA proposal where certainty and clarity are needed at a young age, with the capacity to critique from 12 years of age onwards. The NCCA proposal of teacher as 'facilitator', where children and teachers are 'partners in education', seeking primary children to evaluate and critique religious education would be something that our pupil's parents would also have serious obvious reservations about.

The NCCA document favours a 'child-centred' approach that leads to 'co-construct their knowledge identity and culture with peers and adults'¹⁸ and in turn generate their own meaning and knowledge¹⁹. The idea that a 6 year old child can simply discern about religious matters as proposed in the NCCA model is not substantiated and conflicts with the concept of a child learning from within their own tradition or community and then moving to evaluate or critique in the later years.

Finally, to say that the teachers of a new curriculum require one to stay 'open-minded, fair, balanced and non-judgemental' implies that the present system means that the teachers are unfair, closed- minded, unbalanced and judgemental. This is language that undermines the present system of religious education in a denominational setting and must be rebutted for its own 'unfairness and lack of balance'.

It is clear that approach of the proposed curriculum is possibly suitable for use in multi-denominational and non-denominational school settings, but it is not suitable for Catholic schools.

¹⁶ This pedagogical process places significant emphasis on the child's voice. Such authority is not given to the child's voice in any other subject in the curriculum. The extent to which children's views are a key determinant of pedagogy is problematic, especially within the context of religious education as "the primacy of student voice is arguably not an entirely authoritative source for the representation of the religions themselves." Likewise, there is an inherent danger with such a pedagogical approach, that young children could be given the impression that beliefs are things which they create themselves, as if human beings were the source of religious beliefs and not God. This is why in a Catholic pedagogical approach Revelation is primary and the student's experience and reason are brought into dialogue with it.

¹⁷ David Elkind, 'The Child's Conception of his Religious Denomination: II. The Catholic Child' (1962) 101 *Journal of Genetic Psychology*, 185-193.

¹⁸ NCCA Consultation paper Page 21 .

¹⁹ NCCA Consultation paper Page 24 footnote 3.

Religion as social construct:

A further issue with the consultation paper is that it indicates the proposed curriculum presents religious truth as a social construction. From this standpoint, meaning and truth become exclusively dependent on the context in which they are encountered. Such a perspective emphasises the human subject as the most significant determinant of context, a context which he/she interprets from his/her own individual perspective.²⁰ However, such an approach does not fairly or correctly represent religion and what it means to be religious, because it understands religious identity as the holding of beliefs interpreted by individuals. It incorrectly overlooks the lived reality of faith in denominational schools. The Ed Sec contend that the NCCA proposal reduces and undermines the broader elements of religious education, where it limits the understanding of the transcendental meaning in religion, the normativity of religious beliefs, the sense of community that is engendered by religion and the emotional and ritual aspects of religion.

Quasi-pluralism?

Pluralism is seen as an important objective in the consultation process paper where it states that “Pluralism places value on a range of views rather than a single approach or method of interpretation of life”²¹. Such an approach to religious education is relativistic and fails to respect or engage with religious difference in any significant way because it presents all religious and philosophical truth claims as being equal in value. However, the Ed sec questions this approach where ‘genuine pluralism should not require of children that they relinquish their particular religious, spiritual or ethical commitments. It should allow them to be distinctly themselves in relationship to others and be clear about their differences from others while reaffirming their similarities.’²² Is the consultation proposal really about attaining genuine pluralism in schools, when it is proposes Constructivist epistemologies incompatible with the Catholic-Christian viewpoint?

3. Trustee and Patron Legal Concerns:

²⁰ L. Philip Barnes, *Education Religion and Diversity: Developing A New Model of Religious Education* (Routledge: London, 2014), 161.

²¹ NCCA Consultation paper Page 20 .

²² Anne Hession, *Catholic Primary Religious Education in a Pluralist Environment* (Dublin, Veritas, 2015), 20.

The Ed Sec would also like to draw attention to a number of concerns from a legal perspective. In the following sections, the Ed Sec have sought to outline the considerable difficulties that will be experienced in practice from breach of Constitutional rights, Trustee legal rights and Employer/employee Contractual rights. This section outlines potential conflicting rights and realities that this curriculum proposal does not address and will lead to a legal quagmire into the future for all educational stakeholders.

These may be summarised as follows:

- 1) The NCCA wishes to introduce a new curriculum in ERB and Ethics at primary level.

Ethics is defined as including *“the formation and the promotion of a personal commitment to dignity and freedom of all human beings, the importance of human rights²³ and responsibilities, the place of justice within society and the service of the common good”*.

Are the *human rights* which are to form part of this process the ‘human rights’ as defined by the Irish Council for Civil Liberties, or by the Human Rights and Equality Commission or perhaps by the United Nation Committees in Geneva? There is a lack of clarity underpinning this rationale for this proposed curriculum that is not evident in the criteria set out by the NCCA.

- 2) In regard to the Characteristic spirit, the Board of Management manages the school on behalf of the Patron, not on behalf of the Minister for Education and Skills. The

²³ In the context of the Human rights of parents, please see judgement in *Campaign to Separate Church and State Ltd v Minister for Education* (1996) Mr. Justice Costello referred to the protections afforded by Article 42 of the Constitution and stated:

“This Article (entitled "Education") firstly contains an acknowledgement that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and a guarantee that the State will respect the "inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual physical and social education, of their children". In making this acknowledgement and in recognising that the desire of parents to pass on their religious beliefs to their children is a right which is entitled to be legally protected the Irish Constitution is by no means unique. The state - parties to the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognise (Article 10) that the Family (which is declared to be the natural and fundamental group unit of society) should be protected "particularly while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children" and the State - parties undertake (Article 13) to respect the liberty of parents "to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in accordance with their own convictions". The parties to the First Protocol of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms agreed that States when assuming functions in relation to education "shall respect the rights of parents to ensure such education and teaching in accordance with their own religious and philosophical convictions" (Article 2).

Education Act (1998) places an obligation on the Board to uphold the “*characteristic spirit*” of the school. It is for the Patron, and through the Patron, that the Board decides what that characteristic spirit is and how it is best upheld.

As stated, the secular world view offered by the NCCA proposal is completely at variance with that of the Catholic-Christian view. The proposal suggests that children should look at religious beliefs and traditions as something to be interpreted by them and encourages children to see their religious identity or belief as just one among many others or with equal weight and validity. There is no space for the child to be formed by the experience of a specific religious identity. They will ‘co-construct’ their own identity. The approach emphasises aspects of the human condition which in themselves may be suitable for a non-denominational context but which are to be inoculated outside the context of any faith tradition. As stated, potentially suitable for a non-denominational school but inappropriate in a denominational school.

It is the sincere contention of the Ed Sec that a faith based school cannot be required to teach a programme that is **fundamentally at odds with its own world view and pedagogical approach**; for the DES to do so would be an infringement of the Patron’s statutory right and duty to educate in accordance with their own ethos and effectively breach the Education Act 1998.

3) The Curriculum & the Characteristic Spirit

Section 30 of the Education Act allows the Minister to set out the syllabus for each subject and the amount of instruction time to be allotted to each subject. The Minister must, however, have regard to the *characteristic spirit* of a school in exercising his or her functions under the section. In addition the Minister must allot a sufficient amount of time to cater for the teaching to uphold the *characteristic spirit* in a school. This merely recognises the Constitutional reality. The Minister must substantively take the ‘characteristic spirit’ into account when framing a curriculum and we contend that there are real and fundamental concerns with the NCCA proposal for denominational schools. Any curriculum provisions which do not, on a substantive basis, have regard to the characteristic spirit of a school are *ultra vires* the Minister.

The fact that the Minister is meant to take account the *characteristic spirit* of a school seems to have been overlooked or disregarded by the NCCA in its consultation paper, as it is planned to teach fundamentally conflicting curricula by the same teachers. It is the belief of the Ed Sec that the course being considered by the NCCA, is in fact, beyond the powers of the Minister to enforce.

4) High and Supreme court decisions

Case law supports the view that the Constitution protects the rights of religious groups to exercise their beliefs and that the State, far from impeding those rights, should rather ‘buttress’ them. This is evidenced in various High and Supreme Court decisions as briefly outlined in the following.

- a) Mr. Justice Walsh in giving judgment in the case of *Quinn’s Supermarket Limited and Another v. The Attorney General and Others* (1972), (which involved favourable treatment being afforded to kosher butchers to enable them open at otherwise prohibited times to compensate for their closure for religious reasons on a Saturday), stated:

*“It would be completely contrary to the spirit and intendment of the provisions of Article 44.2 to permit the guarantee against discrimination on the ground of religious profession or belief to be made the very means of restricting or preventing the free profession or practice of religion. **The primary purpose of the guarantee against discrimination is to ensure the freedom of practice of religion.** Any law which by virtue of the generality of its application will by its effect restrict or prevent the free profession and practice of religion by any person or persons would be invalid having regard to the provisions of the Constitution, unless it contained provisions which saved from such restriction or prevention the practice of religion of the person or persons who would otherwise be so restricted or prevented.”*

- b) And again:

In *McGrath v. Maynooth College* (1979), Henchy J., in the Supreme Court, stated:

*“The constitutional provision invoked here [Article 44.2.3] must be construed in the terms of its purpose. In prescribing disabilities and discriminations at the hands of the State on the ground of religious profession, belief or status, the primary aim of the constitutional guarantee is to give vitality, independence and freedom to religion. To construe the provision literally, without due regard to its underlying objective, would lead to a **sapping and debilitation of the freedom and independence given by the Constitution** to the doctrinal and organisational requirements and prescriptions which are inherent in all organised religions. **Far from eschewing the internal disabilities and discriminations which flow from the tenets of a particular religion, the State must on occasion recognise and buttress them.** For such disabilities and discrimination do not derive from the State; it cannot be said that it is the State that imposed or made them; they are part of the texture and essence of the particular religion; so that the State, in order to comply with the spirit and purpose inherent in this constitutional guarantee, may justifiably lend its weight to what may be thought to be disabilities and discriminations deriving from within a particular religion.”*

5) The Diocesan Patron legal obligations concerning the rights of parents in the matter of religious and moral formation

The Constitution is very clear about the rights of parents in regard to the education and religious formation of their children.

In the case known as *Campaign to Separate Church and State Ltd v Minister for Education* (1996) Mr. Justice Costello referred to the protections afforded by Article 42 of the Constitution and stated:

“This Article (entitled "Education") firstly contains an acknowledgement that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and a guarantee that the State will respect the "inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual physical and social education, of their children". In making this acknowledgement and in recognising that the desire of parents to pass on their religious beliefs to their children is a right which is entitled to be legally protected the Irish Constitution is by no means unique. The state - parties to the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognise (Article 10) that the Family (which is declared to be the natural and fundamental group unit of society) should be protected "particularly while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children" and the State - parties undertake (Article 13) to respect the liberty of parents "to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in accordance with their own convictions". The parties to the First Protocol of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms agreed that States when assuming functions in relation to education "shall respect the rights of parents to ensure such education and teaching in accordance with their own religious and philosophical convictions" (Article 2). The Irish Constitution has developed the significance of these parental rights and in addition has imposed obligations on the State in relation to them. It declares (in sub-paragraph 2 of this Article) that parents are to be free to provide for the education of their children in their homes, or in private schools or in schools recognised or established by the State, that the State

shall not oblige parents in violation of their conscience to send their children to schools established or designated by the State, and that the State shall require (in view of actual conditions) that children receive a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social. The article contains a final sub-paragraph (sub-paragraph 4) as follows:-

*"The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, **for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation**" .*

*'I have underlined the words 'religious and moral formation' to draw attention to the fact that this article recognises that **parents have rights not only to provide for the religious education of their children (sub-paragraph (1) but also rights in the matter of their religious formation (sub-paragraph (4) and that it specifically enjoins the State when providing educational facilities to have regard to both these distinct rights.***

*The difference between these two concepts is not difficult to identify; broadly speaking, **the religious education of a child is concerned with the teaching of religious doctrine, apologetics, religious history and comparative religions, whilst the religious formation of a child involves familiarising the child not just with religious doctrine but with religious practice (by attendance at religious services) and developing the child's spiritual and religious life by prayer**'.*

Costelloe J stated that the 'Constitution should be construed so as to reflect this meaning' and Ed Sec implore upon the NCCA to uphold the two distinct rights referred to in this judgement.

We submit the case of parents who profess a denominational faith, the religious formation of their children involves ensuring that their children receive a clear religious education as proposed by the aforementioned 'Grow in Love' programme, that they may attend Mass, and that they pray and receive the sacraments on a regular basis.

To introduce the NCCA curriculum into any faith based school, as proposed, has the capacity to undermine this important aforementioned parental legal rights expected from the Patron of a clear 'religious formation' in their school and in turn will lead to the Patron breaching it's legal and statutory responsibilities to parents and children in a school as outlined by Mr. Justice Costelloe.

Parental Constitutional and Legal Rights

The position of parents has been dealt with in respect of the duties of Patrons to same in respect of 'religious formation' as outlined cogently above by the High Court and Supreme Court. In addition, it is also worth it is also worth reflecting on the Constitutional position. The parents of children in the State have a constitutional right to the provision 'for' education by the State under Article 42 of the Irish Constitution.

Article 42 of the Constitution of Ireland.

42: The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.

42.2: Parents shall be free to provide this education in their homes or in private schools or in schools recognised or established by the State. The State shall not oblige parents in violation of their conscience and lawful preference to send their children to schools established by the State, or to any particular type of school designated by the State.

The State shall, however, as guardian of the common good, require in view of actual conditions that the children receive a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social.

The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation.

In exceptional cases, where the parents for physical or moral reasons fail in their duty towards their children, the State as guardian of the common good, by appropriate means shall endeavour to supply the place of the parents, but always with due regard for the natural and imprescriptible rights of the child."

It is worth reading this article in the present context, as it sets out the fact that the primary educators are the parents, not the State. The State seeks to facilitate the provision of education as sought by the parents.

Hence, the development of the Pluralist Patronage model system which sets out to achieve same. Alternatively, parents can 'home school' their children, if they so wish, which also illustrates the constitutionally protected role of parents in educating their children. Other Patrons' models are provided including Catholic, Protestant and other faith Patrons to include Jewish and Muslim schools. A non – denominational Patronage is seen in the Educate Together

model. The ETB sectors in community national schools also have their different Patronage model which is a multi-denominational one. However, any new curriculum will need to take account of all of the various Patrons' programmes denominational, non-denominational or multi-denominational and their underlying Ethos respectively.

Denominational Parents, communities and benefactors have provided schools from sites, personnel and parish contributions as well as funds from taxpayers (largely denominational) that were raised in the past and disbursed by the State as per the aforementioned Constitution. This model also includes the substantial voluntary involvement of Parents, Laity, Religious Orders, Congregations and Bishops in the management and administration of national schools and property in accordance with Educational and Charitable Trust legal principles.

Parents send their children to a catholic school expecting them to receive teaching in respect of Religious education as an 'objective truth' rooted in Jesus Christ. Other denominations have a different criterion. All schools that represent to parents that they are Catholic have an obligation to carry out this 'revealed' teaching, in accordance with the 'Characteristic spirit'²⁴ of the respective school. Any school that does not fulfil this criteria²⁵ or purposely seeks to avoid it, are in effect misrepresenting themselves to parents and are in breach of legal duties owed to parents and pupils.

It is the function of the Diocesan Secretariat to send out primary Diocesan schools advisors to support and monitor the teaching of Religious education and the overall 'Characteristic spirit' in a school. This is an important function of the Education secretariat across each diocese in the country. It is done as comprehensively as possible, on behalf of the local Ordinary or Bishop, who is unilaterally obliged to fulfil this function. For those parents who decide to send their children to a Catholic school, but do not wish to receive religious education, schools have sought to make provision for them, where the said pupils are allowed to 'opt out' of religious education and parental requests are accommodated by schools²⁶ in adhering to parental choice.

²⁴ See section 15(2) (b) of the Education Act.

²⁵ Should a school decide that they do not wish to operate under the Catholic ethos or Characteristic spirit, due to sufficient demand, then such a school can be invited to consider a change of Patronage to another Patronage of a non-denominational kind. This option will be part of the ongoing Divestment discussion between DES and various Catholic Patrons at the moment.

²⁶ See article 44.2.4 of the Irish Constitution and CSP document 'sharing good practice on inclusion of all pupils' pg. 15.

For Catholic schools, there is an express and implied duty that the children attending will be educated in the fullness of the faith. As mentioned, catholic schools are prominent in been inclusive²⁷ and welcoming, to all communities especially the most marginalised. Parents realise this and believe it stems from the ethical formation received rooted in the Christian principles exemplified by the person of Jesus Christ. Paramount concepts such as Community, Family, Christian Values, the Common Good, ‘Love thy neighbour’, ‘Do onto others as you would like them to do onto you’, the Commandments etc are all explored and explained to assist in forming young pupils in their ethical formation.

Denominational schools are obliged to respect the rights of parents and to fulfil their obligations in that regard. Denominational schools warrant and represent that such an education will actually happen and Parents have a right to expect that their child will receive a clear religious education in one of our Catholic schools, in their expression of their religious choice and beliefs.

The recently launched ‘Grow in love’ *Catholic pre-school and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland programme* covers the main areas raised by the proposed new NCCA curriculum as set out herein. If the said programme needs to be enhanced further, to take on some of the NCCA aims, then this can also be discussed with the NCCA.

In the ‘Grow in Love’ programme, the pedagogy is substantially different from the new NCCA proposal, as in the ‘Grow in love’ programme, it is carried out from a position of ‘revealed faith’. The NCCA Ethics programme is grounded in a secular post-modern worldview which is in direct contrast with the Catholic Christian worldview. Effectively, they are both grounded in incompatible and conflicting ontological foundations and that is a real fundamental issue for catholic schools and their duty to parents.

The new NCCA programme is composed from a sociocultural model and historical-political model. This may be suitable in a non-denominational setting but unfortunately not in a catholic school. This is because a catholic school is statutorily obliged under the Education act 1998 to uphold a distinct ‘characteristic spirit’ and has represented same to parents who have enrolled their children in such a school in pursuance of their aforementioned constitutional rights. In addition, the local Ordinary/Bishop also has a unilateral duty to maintain the Ethos in a catholic school from a Charitable Trust and a Legal perspective.

²⁷ Department and Education and Skills Chief Inspectors report 2010-2012 p.34

The Board of Management are statutorily responsible under the Education act 1998 to be accountable to the Patron (not the Department of Education) in matters concerning the '*Characteristic Spirit*'. This proposal will mean that the Board of Management of schools will be in breach of the statutory duties enshrined in the Education act, if compelled to teach this new programme as it will be based on an incompatible constructivist epistemology.

The NCCA curriculum is a compartmentalised proposal and is not part of a holistic lived reality of faith in action in the families and the school respectively, which catholic parents expect, demand and wish their children to participate in as faith permeates the school day. From the research undertaken on the NCCA material, this proposed pupil subjectivity about objective truth will not only conflict with the Ethos in a school, but will confuse children in their religious formation as previously outlined.

Parents will now be in a position that their children's rights to their education will be substantially impaired and reduced. A conflicting and seriously flawed model is now proposed. Core Faith principles such as, the transcendent meaning of religion, normativity of religious beliefs, the sense of community engendered by religion are not comprehended and understood within this NCCA proposal. Parents would be correct in stating that this type of teaching is flawed and effectively potentially a misrepresentation. Catholic Patrons and Trustees cannot be accused of potential negligence, in failing to carry out their respective duties to parents, if compelled to proceed with this proposal.

Catholic schools are extremely inclusive as is illustrated by the ESRI research. However, in parallel, catholic schools are unilaterally obliged to strengthen and to seek to improve their Ethos which invigorates the school day. This is either misunderstood or deliberately overlooked by the new NCCA proposal.

In the proposed NCCA programme, subjective thinking is primary but from a denominational or catholic school perspective, Revelation is primary and the pupils experience and reasons are brought into dialogue with it. Effectively, there is no seeking of truth in this proposed NCCA model; with the result all beliefs will be deemed to be True. This type of education fundamentally conflicts with the true purpose of a catholic education, rooted in Jesus Christ and Gospel values where He is the model of Christian living in a modern society.

We feel that parents that send their children to our schools expect an education that is objective and clear. Primary school children need clear guidance and clarity in their learning at this age²⁸. Imposed confusion and unclear thinking cannot be simply acquiesced or agreed to, by the Ed Sec. It is in all likelihood unworkable in a Catholic school and unfortunately we cannot therefore support this proposal as framed. It is for that reason that we feel we would breach our constitutional duty to parents to educate pupils, if we do not educate about the revealed objective truth that will ground the ethics of future citizens in a modern Irish society.

We cannot recommend to the parents of children in our schools that they would support this new planned programme and as representatives of the Patron in our Diocesan schools we have no choice but to reasonably object to same.

Board and Teacher Rights Conflict in Denominational schools.

At every job interview for a teacher, they are made aware of the Ethos or the aforementioned ‘characteristic spirit’ in a denominational school. A copy of the Schedule²⁹ is furnished to all employees in Catholic schools. All teachers in a catholic school are expected to be qualified to teach in catholic primary schools and they are qualified in religious education pedagogy.

A new NCCA curriculum will lead to conflict for teachers in their teaching methods and Pedagogy. They will be teaching the children from one perspective in respect of the faith content as objective truth revealed by God and then from another perspective of a neutral point of view in respect of ethics etc. Is this possible or achievable from a professional teaching perspective? Is this desirable from a Patrons’ or Trustee perspective? Teachers will now be ‘Facilitators’ seeking to ‘co-construct’ a child’s own meaning and knowledge upholding ‘the right to the existence of contradictory truth’³⁰.

²⁸ In addition, we do feel that parents will be dissatisfied with the fundamental concept that religious identity can be simply viewed as the holding of beliefs interpreted by the young primary pupils themselves. In no other subject is this apparent. We are unable to accept this proposed child subjective thinking, more akin to adulthood, and cannot recommend it to the parents of the pupils in our schools that represent themselves as Catholic.

²⁹ Schedule as agreed with all of the educational stakeholders. ‘A Roman Catholic school (which is established in connection with the Minister) aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person of the pupil: intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual including a living relationship with God and with other people. The school models itself and promotes a philosophy of life inspired by belief in God and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The catholic school provides religious education for the pupils in accordance with the doctrines practices and tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and promotes the formation of the pupils in the Catholic Faith.

³⁰ NCCA consultation paper Page 39 .

This will lead to confusions on behalf of the children and further confusion on behalf of the teacher, where one is imparting knowledge through the ‘eyes of faith’ at one part of the course but then passively imparting information at another part of the course in learning about Religions. As stated the NCCA consultation paper outlines the ‘challenges’³¹ that will be experienced by teachers and also Patrons as their employers.

For teachers, that have taken a job in a denominational school because of its Ethos it will be a direct attack on their reason for teaching in a denominational school. You cannot have a lived ‘reality of faith’ in December but in January it is suddenly up to the young pupils to ‘co –learn’ with their teachers as ‘co-learners’ and implicitly decide for themselves.

This is a flawed proposal and as stated may be suitable in the context of a non- denominational context but not in a denominational school. The Ed Sec believes it fundamentally changes the role of the teacher in a catholic school³². The NCCA consultation paper itself, in fact, emphasises the fundamental flaw for denominational schools where a teacher one week has to teach a ‘denominational programme and faith forming’ and the next week ‘teach about religions and beliefs from a pluralist perspective’³³.

In the same way, those parents of children in a school have rights and expectations regarding religious education in a catholic school, similar criteria are expected from teachers engaged on Contract to teach Religious education in a denominational school. The teacher’s legal rights are Contractual rights, whereas the aforementioned parents’ legal rights are Constitutional rights. The Patron or Trustee has to be aware of their inherent Legal and Trust rights and responsibilities, in dealing with the said parents and teachers’ legal rights. The potential legal and contractual implications for teaching staff have been misunderstood by the NCCA proposal. Whilst it is not clear how the proposal will be implemented, in all likelihood, it is contemplated that some of teachers employed in denominational schools will be required to teach same and therefore it is reasonable to raise the said concerns.

This is a real factor for circa 2,900 separate Employers/Boards of management in catholic schools across the country, (acting in a voluntary capacity), seeking to manage a complex

³¹ Page 23 NCCA consultation paper.

³² The NCCA briefly refers to same and acknowledges that this is a real and substantial issue for school patrons and trustees with reference to ‘great demand on a teachers self-efficacy, professional ethics, knowledge and skills. There is also the challenge for teachers who will be engaged in teaching denominational programmes on the one hand: and teaching about religions and beliefs from a pluralist perspective on the other’. NCCA consultation paper page 23.

³³ Page 23 NCCA paper

school environment, with various stakeholders and educational partners in accordance with curriculum requirements. This will also be a serious issue for Muslims, Protestant or Jewish faith communities also and their respective Boards of Management.

As stated each Board of Management is a separate employer seeking to manage a workplace with employee rights and responsibilities. This proposal will fundamentally impinge on the employment status of boards of management, in their relationships with respective staff members, and cause implicit disruption and disharmony for management as well as the explicit breach of legal rights already stated.

Where is the school sector, if a teacher or a group of teachers consciously objects to teach NCCA ERB and ETHICS in a catholic school from a child centred subjective view point that conflicts with sincerely held beliefs that objective truth is revealed by God?

How is the Patron/Trustee as employer, expected to deal with such a conscientious and complex situation?

The same principle could be said to apply to other faith communities? Will the Protestant, Jewish or Muslim schools be compelled to teach about a subjective view of faith also?

How will this operate if the Protestant Jewish or Muslim teachers object to same? Is there a provision for an 'opt out' for such a school?

Where is the school, as employers, if some of the parents require the Patron not to teach this curriculum proposal in a catholic school?

Where is the school, as employers, if some of the parents do want this taught in denominational schools, but teachers object?

Where is the Board as a separate corporate body seeking to uphold the Ethos in a denominational school and accountable to the Patron?

4. Conclusion

The Patron's 'Grow in Love' programme has detailed content on Ethics and ERB already, which is framed from the Patron's perspective. The Ed Sec support the 'Grow in Love'

programme and its intentions. If the said programme needs to be enhanced further, to take on some of the NCCA aims, then this can also be discussed with the NCCA and considered. The evidence from the Chief Inspectors report and the ESRI report support the contention that catholic schools are very inclusive and supportive of those pupils attending their schools and other marginalised groups. This is because the school experience is a lived reality of faith supported by the Revealed teaching of Jesus Christ.

In *McGrath v. Maynooth College* (1979), Henchy J., in the Supreme Court, stated:

‘To construe the provision literally, without due regard to its underlying objective, would lead to a sapping and debilitation of the freedom and independence given by the Constitution to the doctrinal and organisational requirements and prescriptions which are inherent in all organised religions.

And also importantly,

‘Far from eschewing the internal disabilities and discriminations which flow from the tenets of a particular religion, the State must on occasion recognise and buttress them’

Henchy J in the Supreme Court clearly sets out that the State must effectively support religion education in the educational setting for a faith based or denominational school as set out in the Constitution. In this case, the NCCA proposal has failed to ‘recognise or Buttress the tenets’ of religion taught in catholic schools. This recognition for a schools’ Ethos will be seriously undermined in this proposal. Most importantly, it will also have the effect of leading to the ‘sapping and debilitating’³⁴ of the religious education in a school.

It will leave schools trying to grapple with two parallel conflicting curricula³⁵ in an overloaded space, with the certainty to cause confusion in the minds of primary school going children and their teachers. The aforementioned ‘religious formation’ will also be seriously damaged and undermined.

The various Pedagogical reasons and Philosophical rationale and concerns have been explained in this document. Constitutional and Statutory legal rights will be comprehensively breached

³⁴ See *McGrath v. Maynooth College* (1979), Henchy J., in the Supreme Court.

³⁵ It is unclear as to how this will be implemented but it is clear that it is contemplated that certain parts will include ‘denominational education and faith forming’ and other parts will be reduced to a pluralist model as per page 23 of the NCCA Consultation paper.

under this new curriculum and in conclusion, the Ed Sec cannot support this NCCA proposal as framed, in their schools.

Dr Kerry Greer (BSc, PhD [Psychology, University College London], Grad. Dip. Applied Criminology, [Cambridge], CPsychol AFBPS, Head of Psychology, Mary Immaculate College – University of Limerick) has critiqued the questionnaire and the Ed. Sec. believes that her comments should be considered by the NCCA.

Dr Greer’s critique makes clear that many of the survey questions involve a complex series of propositions which themselves contain ambiguous and unsatisfactorily defined concepts.

Such questions can be read in any number of ways. Take for example the following proposition: “I would like my child to express empathy and joy with human diversity and form deep, caring human connections.” “Empathy”, “human diversity”, and “human connections” are each complex concepts with a range of philosophical meanings, some of which contain strongly secularist presuppositions. Furthermore, the proposition combines multiple sub-propositions and therefore it is unclear whether the person who is responding to the question is answering one, some, or all of the following:

- i. “I would like my child to express empathy with human diversity.”
- ii. “I would like my child to express joy with human diversity.”
- iii. “I would like my child to express both empathy and joy (presumably at the same time) with human diversity.
- iv. “I would like my child to form deep connections.”
- v. “I would like my child to form caring human connections.”
- vi. “I would like my child to form deep (and) caring human connections.”

From Dr Greer’s critique it is apparent that the survey questions are framed in a way that makes response bias unavoidable because the socially correct answer to each of the survey questions (other than those that request the person responding to prioritise choices from a list of options) is “yes”. Dr Greer explains quite clearly that the NCCA survey could just as easily be framed to suit other narratives. She suggests that one could take the abrupt explanation under the “Aims” and “Ideas” paragraph which precedes the survey questions, rephrase it in terms of a curriculum according to an explicitly Christian ethos, adjust the questions accordingly, and one would almost certainly get the same distribution of answers to the survey questions. Based on these insights, the NCCA questionnaire does not provide any basis for substantiating claims in relation to need or demand for the ERB and Ethics course.

Therefore, it is with the above criticisms of the survey instrument in mind, that education secretariat of the Archdiocese of Dublin decided to make a written submission to the NCCA consultation rather than answering the provided questionnaire.



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Contributor

Éamonn Mac Localainn

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Date	

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

See below

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers

- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

See below

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

The cultural, ethical, social and spiritual development of the children of Ireland is not just about learning ABOUT culture, ethics, social matters and religion; true development in these areas has to include experience and involvement. Therefore I believe, for example, in the development of Catholic children that the preparation for and participation in the sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation is an essential ingredient of that development. These are important elements in the subject 'Religion' in schools with a Catholic sponsorship, and do not seem to be included in the proposed new subject. Therefore I am opposed to getting rid of the subject 'Religion', which seems to include practically all the elements of the proposed new subject, with which I have no problem.

Mise le meas

Éamonn Mac Lochlainn

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Home

Contributor

Éanna Johnson Phd

Response to NCCA Proposal for Education about Religions & Beliefs & Ethics

Éanna Johnson PhD, March 2016

Introduction

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) recently launched a 'consultation paper' on a proposed new curriculum for all primary schools, titled 'Education about Religions & Beliefs & Ethics' (ERBE). The proposed curriculum is presented as having two component parts: a 'Religions & Beliefs' component and an 'Ethics' component.

The NCCA is to be commended in having a consultation process in relation to its ERBE proposals, but the process falls short of satisfactory. Responses are invited to the ERBE curriculum proposals: by completing a questionnaire, making a written submission or attending a consultation event. Unfortunately, the questionnaires are not designed in an objective professional manner but are biased towards yielding positive responses to the proposals. It is good that written submissions are also invited, but this option is more difficult and time-consuming and therefore less likely to be chosen than completion of a questionnaire.

Principal Conclusions

The ERBE consultation materials are biased towards eliciting support for the proposed curriculum, rather than to providing opportunities for a truly objective response:

- The questionnaires are structured to give responses favourable to the proposed ERBE curriculum.
- There is a daunting volume of material provided in the consultation documentation, but also significant gaps in relevant information, especially relating to the serious implications of implementing ERBE in faith-based schools.
- The consultation materials contain an inordinate amount of optimistic predictions, which are in fact no more than wishful aspirations.

NCCA's stated Aims and Aspirations for ERBE are already substantially being met in Irish primary schools, so that ERBE is a 'solution' to a problem that does not exist; in fact, ERBE is more likely to cause problems.

ERBE separates Ethics from Religions & Beliefs, which is contrary to the approach of the religions, logic and human experience. ERBE then proposes to teach only one system of ethics, that of contemporary liberal secularism.

ERBE claims to be pluralist, but is not, because it preferentially favours one perspective, that of contemporary liberal secularism.

ERBE will be in conflict with the ethos of faith-based schools, and is likely to harm the children whose parents want a faith-based education, causing confusion and identity crisis.

The proposed *compulsory* introduction of ERBE to *all* primary schools is undemocratic, violates the rights of children and parents, and undermines religious freedom.

What is 'Education about Religions & Beliefs & Ethics' as proposed by NCCA?

The NCCA proposes that ERBE will teach children about the cultural heritage of the major forms of religion, belief traditions and worldviews (theist and non-theist) that have been embraced by people around the world, and will teach children to make choices and decisions in a way that considers the effect on others.

ERBE is proposed for all primary school children in the Republic of Ireland, irrespective of school patronage.

Curriculum Perspective

ERBE claims a pluralist and objective approach to the main theist, non-theist and secular beliefs. Such an approach would require a factual presentation on each belief as it exists and understands itself. However, ERBE does not do this. ERBE treats all religions as essentially cultural phenomena, without reference to religious belief in the transcendent or supernatural, even defining 'spiritual' as essentially material (see 'Education about Religions and Beliefs [ERB] and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper, November 2015. Appendix 1: Glossary p.39).

ERBE's perspective is therefore secularist: either atheistic (which is disbelief in the existence of any god or the supernatural) or agnostic (the view that nothing is known or knowable of the existence of God or anything beyond material phenomena, which in practice is hardly distinguishable from atheism). Therefore, it will be impossible for ERBE to give objective or adequate treatment to any particular religion or religions in general, and ERBE cannot validly claim to be 'objective and pluralist'. ERBE will inevitably invite and influence children to absorb a worldview or mind-set of secularism.

Genuine pluralism involves respect and equitable treatment for all sections of a society, whether majority or minority.

The great majority of primary schools in Ireland are under the patronage of the Catholic Church. Over the years this was due to a fruitful partnership between the Church and the State, very much to the benefit of the State. Huge resources were given by Catholics to build up a primary school system of which any nation could be proud, resources of time, professional expertise, voluntary effort and also of finance (through State contributions which came from Catholics – the majority of tax-payers – voluntary contributions of Catholic parishioners and parents, and the contributions of religious orders).

In Ireland, and around the world, Catholic schools are inclusive to a high degree in teaching love of 'neighbour' (which means everyone), accepting pupils from all backgrounds (religious, ethnic, socio-economic, male&female), providing them with a high quality education and treating them with respect. There has traditionally been a good working relationship between Catholic schools and the State, but the NCCA's proposals for ERBE unfortunately risk introducing a relationship of conflict.

One of the marks of true pluralism is that minorities are treated with fairness and respect, to ensure they are disadvantaged as little as possible due to their minority status. Faith-based primary schools other than Catholic (other Christian denominations, Jewish and Muslim) face particular challenges because they are few in number. These minority faith-based schools will be especially disadvantaged by imposition of compulsory religious education with an agnostic/atheistic ethos. This is unjust and unworthy of a caring inclusive democracy that Ireland aspires to be.

Separation of Ethics from Religions & Beliefs

NCCA proposes that 'Religions & Beliefs' is a complementary yet distinct area of learning from Ethics. In practice the NCCA presents these two areas as very separate aspects of the proposed curriculum. This is problematic. Logic and human experience show an integral connection between religion and belief-systems on the one hand and ethics on the other hand. This intimate connection is evident in the religious education programmes in use in faith-based schools in Ireland – Christian, Jewish and Muslim (see 'An Overview of

Education about Religions and Beliefs [ERB] and Ethics content in Patrons' Programmes'. NCCA November 2015, p.16-20).

One can see a reason why NCCA would want to treat Religions & Beliefs so separately from Ethics. As noted above ERBE's perspective is atheistic/agnostic. From an atheist perspective human existence is essentially meaningless, therefore atheism *per se* cannot provide any foundation for ethics. Consequently ERBE must look to other sources to find a basis for ethics.

NCCA proposes that ERBE will include teaching children to make choices and decisions in a way that considers the effect on others, the formation in and the promotion of a personal commitment to the dignity and freedom of all human beings, the importance of human rights and responsibilities, the place of justice within society, and the service of the common good. These proposals are in harmony with many, if not most, ethical systems. However, ERBE goes on to state that 'Ethics education contributes to the development of autonomous individuals, capable of exercising critical judgment, while also fostering dialogue and community life in a pluralist society'. This is the ethics of contemporary liberal secularism, which sees individual autonomy as the primary good and the good which all other goods must serve.

The contemporary liberal secular approach to ethics is seriously at variance with a Christian understanding of ethics. It is not consistent with true pluralism for the NCCA to require all children of this nation to learn an ethical approach which is contrary to the ethical heritage of the great majority of citizens of this country and the heritage which has shaped our culture; this is the Judaeo-Christian approach to ethics, which incorporates the best of the rich Greco-Roman culture. The liberal secular approach to ethics is also at variance with other religions.

Another problematic feature of requiring all primary school children to learn the ethics of contemporary liberal secularism is that such a system of ethics is open to constant change, influenced by public opinion, the thinking of dominant elites, positive law, and other factors.

Important Information missing from Consultation Documentation.

It is good that the NCCA has provided a range of material in its consultation documentation. However, the sheer volume of material provided is daunting for many, perhaps most, of those from whom NCCA wishes a response. Another problem is that the consultation materials are replete with optimistic Aspirations, expressed as confident statements of what will happen resulting from the introduction of ERBE, while missing out on much important information on the proposed curriculum.

Many questions arise concerning ERBE, which should be addressed in the consultation materials but are not, including:

- A curriculum is only the basis for a programme which will be taught to the children. Will there be a single compulsory programme provided by the Department of Education, or will publishers be invited to produce programmes that comply with the new Curriculum?
- What will be the phasing of teaching the ERBE curriculum, in relation to age and maturity of the students?
- Will schools be free to teach the curriculum in ways of their own choosing?
- As the curriculum is compulsory for all children, how will the Department of Education enforce this requirement – what penalties will be imposed on schools and teachers that fail to comply?
- What arrangements will there be for training teachers in ERBE?
- What arrangements for Learning Assessment will be put in place? What will be the criteria and standards of assessment? Who will carry out the Assessment? What action

will be taken if the Assessment shows a failure to achieve the standards, in general or in particular schools?

- What concrete goals will be set for ERBE, and how will achievement of those goals be evaluated by the Department of Education?
- Will there be time allocation requirements for ERBE set by the Department of Education, in terms of time per day, week, term or year?
- Where will the time for ERBE come from? What other areas of primary school education will lose out?

Why introduce ‘Education about Religions & Beliefs & Ethics’?

The ERBE consultation materials contain statements which could be considered the Aims of the curriculum, summarised as: to teach about diverse religions, beliefs and world views, in a way that will foster respect, understanding and empathy, helping children to understand the lives, values and traditions of friends, classmates and members of the wider community. Along with these Aims are a very large number of Aspirations, wished-for or hoped-for outcomes, but expressed as definitive statements as to what *will* happen as a result of the introduction of ERBE.

The Aims and Aspirations for ERBE are generally expressed in terms with which most people would agree, thereby tending to win agreement for introduction of ERBE. However, there are problematic aspects.

It is good for NCCA to state that ERBE should ‘support the good practices already taking place in schools’. However, there is no recognition that the Aims and Aspirations are already substantially being fulfilled in Irish primary schools, meaning that there is no need for the introduction of ERBE.

NCCA claims that ERBE will not conflict with Patrons’ own programmes of religious education. However, this is not so in a faith-based school, which gives religious education based on the premise that its religion is spiritual truth; teaching on other religions and non-religious options is given from that perspective, and if done so in a respectful way constitutes authentic pluralism and inclusivity. The Patron’s religious teaching and school ethos will be severely undermined and compromised by an ERBE programme which treats the Patron’s religion as just one of many cultural phenomena.

Therefore, ERBE’s stated Aims and Aspirations are more likely to be hindered, rather than promoted, by the introduction of ERBE into faith-based schools. ERBE will likely foster confusion, conflict and identity crisis among children, parents and teachers. Making ERBE a requirement in all primary schools is effectively treating secularism like a State religion, undermining religious freedom

A particular problem that will arise in faith-based schools is competition for time in the school day. The ERBE consultation materials refer several times to the problem of finding time for ERBE given the existing curriculum overload, but no solution is put forward to resolve the looming problem. If ERBE is a requirement and the Patron’s own religious education programme is optional, the likely outcome is that ERBE will get preference and the Patron’s programme will be marginalised.

Note on Author: Éanna Johnson BE MIE CEng FIEI PhD is a parent and grandparent with wide experience in education, at second and third level and as a professional consultant in education and training to major public and private sector clients. His PhD in Theology at St Patrick’s Pontifical University Maynooth involved an in-depth analysis, theological and pedagogical, of the RE programme in Catholic primary schools. He has personally given, planned and supervised religious education to children, youth and adults.



Home

Contributor

**Education Secretariat for the
Archdioceses of Cashel & Emily and
Dioceses of Kerry**

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about

RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Fiona Shanley, Director Michelle O'Riordan, Assistant Director
Position (if applicable)	
Organisation (if applicable)	St. Senan's Education Office, Catholic Primary School Education Secretariat for the Archdiocese of Cashel & Emly & Dioceses of Kerry, Killaloe and Limerick
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Email	sseo@ldo.ie
Date	31 st March 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

Please see 3. below

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities

- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

Please see 3. below

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

1. Introduction

Catholic teachings recognise the rights of a parent/guardian to determine what constitutes the best education for their children. This right goes beyond a privilege granted in law being instead an innate entitlement and freedom enabling a parent/guardian to carry out their natural duty to care for their children. Therefore, we would like to clearly state, at the outset, that nothing in this submission should be interpreted as detracting from the rights of a parent/guardian to have their children educated in a school with an ethos that is reflective of their beliefs, whether those beliefs are of faith or no faith.

In this country, the Constitution makes provision for the State funding of schools and parents can rightly expect support from the State in meeting their responsibilities as primary educators of their children. The State is a servant or function of society and, as such, should, in so far as is possible, reflect the composition of society in its education provision. Faith-based schools, non-denominational schools and multi-denominational schools all have a rightful place in Irish Society in that they are reflective of the pluralist make-up of that society.

The introduction to *Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper* (herein referred to as the *Consultation Paper*), while acknowledging the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector

(Coolahan et al, 2012), seeks to distance itself from the issue of school patronage and diversity of primary school provision. Given that the impetus for the development of the ERBE curriculum has its origin in the recommendations of the Forum, it is difficult to understand how such a distinction is being made.

We would like to further clarify that education about other religions and beliefs is compatible with the ethos of a Catholic school. Education that helps to encourage respect, understanding and mutual tolerance is reflective of Catholic values and contributes, in part, to making the ethos a living reality. This is reflected in the new Catholic Pre-School & Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (herein referred to as *the new curriculum*) which makes provision for Inter-religious literacy. It is further reflected in the fact that Catholic schools have proven themselves to be open and welcoming to children of all faiths or no faith. The real question is not why children should learn about other religions and beliefs but how such a subject should be taught.

We have a number of concerns in relation to some of the principles advocated in the *Consultation Paper* and in relation to certain other aspects of the proposed ERBE Curriculum. These are elaborated on in this submission.

2. Catholic Primary Schools

“Catholic Schools seek to reflect a distinctive vision of life and a corresponding philosophy of education.”

Vision 08, Irish Catholic Bishop’s Conference

This vision is based on the *Good News* message and values of the Gospel. Through these values Catholic schools seek to, inspire the individual human lives of its pupils and through them, the wider society that they will help build.

A Catholic school seeks to expand the horizons of the individual beyond the secular and material. It seeks to assist in the development of the individual through the Gospel’s message of hope, joy, affirmation and love that speaks of the freedom, beauty and dignity of every human being. It seeks to promote the attributes of kindness, compassion, charity, respect, excellence as desirable human characteristics.

A Catholic school endeavors to create a living environment based on the principles of equality, truth, justice, forgiveness, community and belonging where pupils are given the opportunity to thrive and realise their potential.

The Catholic schools seek to assist in the development of world citizens for the future. Through *Catholic Social Teaching* the school promotes:

- Principle of the Dignity of the Human Person: Every human person is of infinite dignity. All of society must be directed towards the well-being of the human person.
- Principle of Association: Human persons are meant to be in community and have a right to freely associate with one another to achieve the common good.
- Principle of Subsidiarity: No higher-level body should take over what a lower-level body can do for itself, so that people can develop and flourish.
- Principle of Participation: All human persons have right and duty to take action in what determines their well-being and future.
- Principle of the Common Good: We must seek the good of the broader community – that is, each person, every person and the whole person – and not just our own interests. We have a contribution to make!
- Principle of the Universal Destination of Goods: God intended for all the world's resources to be enjoyed by everyone, and not just a few people.
- Principle of Solidarity: Every human person is deeply connected to every other person. We are called to stand together as one human family.
- Principle of the Dignity of Human Work: The human person's intrinsic dignity means that human work is holy as well. Moreover, everyone should have working conditions worthy of the children of God.
- Principle of the Dignity of Creation: Creation is holy because this is the place where we relate to God. We are the earth's stewards, helping to bring the world towards salvation.
- Principle of the Promotion of Peace: We have a duty to seek true and lasting peace, which implies right relationships all round – with God, self, others and all creation.

The ethos of a Catholic school is not a discrete element of school life confined only to formal religious instruction. Ethos is a living thing that finds expression through relationships, policies, practices attitudes and the work of a school.

Faith schools exist because there are parents who wish to have their children educated in accordance with their religious convictions. Catholic primary schools are embedded in parishes and local communities throughout the country. Inspired by Christian faith and love, Catholic schools strive to be caring and inclusive communities. They have adapted to demographic change with significant net migration into Ireland and many of them have led the way in integrating migrants into local communities. They have been leaders in areas such as social inclusion, special needs and traveller education. They will, subject to parental demand, continue to be opening and welcoming to all children.

3. ERBE Curriculum supported by teaching that is “objective, critical and pluralist”

A Religious faith is a belief system based on principles and values that are the ‘truth’ to members of the faith. This does not prevent a person of faith from recognising, accepting and respecting that another person may not share their beliefs. However, such recognition does not detract from the ‘truth’ as perceived by that believer. One of the keystones of the proposed ERBE curriculum is that, “*The teaching of ERB and Ethics according to the Toledo Principles should be supported by teaching that is ‘objective, critical and pluralist’*”. For schools with a faith based ethos, such an approach is contrary to what those schools hold to be true. The *Consultation Paper* States “*ERB and Ethics is in no sense intended to replace the patron’s programme or faith formation education in denominational schools*”. However, in its proposed format, the ERBE curriculum fails to respect that schools of faith have a defined ‘truth’ perspective. Furthermore, in a faith based school, or indeed for a person of faith, information about other religions can neither be taught nor learned from a neutral perspective. Indeed, it could be argued that there is no such thing as a neutral perspective. The *Consultation Paper* itself acknowledges this flaw, when discussing how the teaching of the proposed curriculum should be approached, by stating, “*No subject or teaching is value-free*”. The *Consultation Paper* suggests that the remedy for this is teacher education, however, it is difficult to see how professional development can neutralise individual belief, experience and perspective for a subject which for many is intrinsic to their life.

4. Recommendation that ERBE commences at Junior Infant Level

The *Consultation Paper* recommends that the teaching of ERBE would commence at Junior Infant Level. For children participating in a faith based programme, this could lead to confusion. It is difficult to imagine how a 4 or 5 year old child, being at a stage of initial formation in their own faith, could engage in the critical analysis of another faith. It is imposing an adult, intellectual critique to childhood experience.

5. Separation of ERB and Ethics

The proposal in respect of “*the separation of ERB and Ethics as two complementary yet distinct areas of education*” begs the question as to what philosophy or belief system will underpin the Ethics curriculum. Who will be involved in determining the ethical standards to be set?

In a faith based school, the ethical framework is provided for, not only in the formal Religious Education programme, but also by the characteristic spirit of the school. In a Catholic school, the characteristic spirit includes values such as respect, love,

compassion, charity, peace, justice, mercy, forgiveness and integrity, to name but a few. Ethical provision in Catholic primary schools is further enhanced by school policies, school ethos and school leadership. A Catholic school defines itself as being at the service of a community and fosters, through its social teachings, a sense of belonging, citizenship and societal contribution in its pupils.

The Consultation Paper makes the following Statement: *“Although some patrons’ programmes refer to moral and ethical content to a significant extent, some of these are developed from a faith perspective in denominational schools. In contrast, the moral and ethical content of the proposed curriculum for ERB and Ethics is intended to be grounded in a pluralist and values education perspective. In this way a curriculum for ERB and Ethics will be inclusive of all children regardless of their belief tradition.”*

It is difficult to see how the ethical content of the proposed curriculum can be grounded in a pluralist perspective and be inclusive of all children regardless of their belief tradition. A common morality that ignores or contradicts teachings on moral or ethical issues of specific religious traditions cannot be inclusive. Furthermore, as acknowledged in the *Consultation Paper*, important teachings of morality and values are provided for in faith-based schools in their Religious Education programmes. To replicate such teaching, even if only in part, is to duplicate knowledge and information in a time-pressed environment that is already subject to curriculum overload.

6. Imbalance between ERBE and Patron’s programme

If ERBE is introduced as a discrete curriculum, it will be subject to inspection by the Department of Education and Skills. This will create an imbalance between its status and the status of the Patron’s RE Curriculum in faith based schools as the Patron’s Curriculum is not subject to the same inspection.

7. Education Act, 1998

Section 30 of the Act states that in prescribing a curriculum for schools, the Minister *“shall have regard to the characteristic spirit of a school”*.

It is difficult to see how these obligations can be fulfilled in a faith based school in circumstances where both the philosophical approach to ERBE and, in certain circumstances the content of the ERBE curriculum itself may be contradictory to aspects of an RE Curriculum. We submit that the ERBE curriculum would have to be interpreted in accordance with the characteristic spirit of a school.

8. Curriculum Approaches to ERBE

The *Consultation Paper* explores four approaches to curriculum development for ERBE. These are as follows:-

- (i) ERBE as part of the Patron's programme;
- (ii) ERBE integrated across curriculum areas;
- (iii) ERBE as a distinct curriculum; and
- (iv) ERBE as having both discrete and integrated components.

Each of the four approaches is briefly discussed in the *Consultation Paper*. In discussing the development of ERBE as part of the Patron's programme, it describes the approach as "*ineffective*". While certain disadvantages to the approaches at (ii) and (iii) above are also set out in the *Consultation Paper*, none of those go so far as being described as "*ineffective*". Unlike the discussion of the other three approaches, the *Consultation Paper* does not set out any negative aspects to ERBE as a distinct curriculum. This is not a balanced exploration of the four possible approaches. As outlined in this submission, there are difficulties with ERBE as a distinct curriculum, particularly for faith based schools. The *Consultation Paper* should have described each of the approaches in a more balanced way.

9. Provision for Children of Other Faiths or no Faith

Just as the proposals on ERBE cannot be considered in isolation from the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, neither can they be considered in isolation from the lack of adequate primary school provision for children of no faith or other faiths. Currently, if enrolled in a faith school, these children or their parent/guardian on their behalf, have the right to opt-out of formal religious education. Catholic schools have done everything possible within the confines of their resources to accommodate this. However, meaningful provision should be made for these children during that time. Indeed, from a Christian perspective, it could be argued that the only real equality of provision would be formal instruction in their own belief system. ERBE, if seen as a one-size fits all solution, fails to provide parity of provision for these children. It also increases the potential of schools having to accommodate pupils that choose to opt out of the ERBE curriculum.

10. Conclusion

In its opening paragraph, the *Consultation Paper* refers to the significant milestones contributed by the NCCA to the development of Irish primary education in recent years. The introduction continues by stating that the consultation is "*breaking further*

new ground in proposing” ERBE. This is, if anything, an understatement of the potential importance of the questions and challenges arising from what has been proposed.

Over the last two decades, Irish society has experienced a period of significant and radical change. As a society, and particularly in the area of primary school education, we now find ourselves faced with the challenges of meeting the needs of a multi-cultural, pluralist State. Such a challenge provides a real opportunity to GET IT RIGHT. However, ERBE as a one size fits all solution may in reality prove to be a bad-fit for all.





Home

Contributor

Elizabeth Byrt

Dear Sir / Madam,

I would like to offer my input as a parent of 3 primary school going children.
They attend a local village school with approximately 170 children.

I feel that religious education within the school curriculum is essential to all children.

The syllabus as it is taught, i feel focuses on moral beliefs of respect, inclusion,
love and caring for ones family and friends and community.

These are essential skills and beliefs for all growing children.

They are attitudes that are common across most recognised religions.

The syllabus as it is taught, offers an excellent framework for young people
to learn a good moral compass and important attitudes for the future.

This is true for all children even if they are not of the Catholic faith.

I will finish by saying I am Catholic and faith is important in our home.

I wish your well in your endeavor of inclusion within religious education.

Yours sincerely

Elizabeth Byrt



Home

Contributor

Enda Burke

To whom it concerns

Please find my submission on the introduction of the ERB and Ethics programme.

The report on the introduction of the ERB and Ethics programme itself says that there would be difficulties in presenting any curriculum in a manner that is impartial and free of bias. This would be one of my concerns. How are parents to know what the children will be learning, it will be wholly dependent on the teachers views and could be the polar opposite to the parents wishes.

It says later in the report 'Teachers when dealing with their unknowingness of religious beliefs and cultures become co learners in this dynamic' This statement is incredulous...one is to put a programme together that will be so that the teacher of the subject is excused for not knowing the content of the subject. This is not right on many levels and I would question the reasons for introducing a subject to children which is to have an effect on their core principles, where the teacher is excused from not fully knowing the content of what she/he is teaching.

Not to mind that one would have to question if those putting together a curriculum on ERB and Ethics would feel it ok to put a justification such as this (its ok for the teacher not to know her/his subject matter as she/he can learn it from the children!!!) in a report promoting the introduction of the subject.

The teacher is also to teach the children to question the beliefs and ideals that parents wish for their children. This is open to manipulation by the the answers which may or may not be provided by the educator.

This subject is taught in second level where students are more ready for it why is it being taught twice.

I also think that the topics to be covered for example 'The journey of life and death' are very different things for persons of different religions and of no religion. They are too complex and open to influence depending on how an educator would present their interpretation of things. If this is taught to children in school how are parents to know what version of life or death, view of when life began, views of when life should end, views of what the after life is.. has been taught and (we are talking about small children not teenagers) it would be open to the educator and not the parent of the child, who ultimately has the childs best interests at heart to, to present their preferred versions of life and death

I find this course too open to personal opinion and too open to manipulation. The consequences of introducing a course that is so complex to primary school children, setting out the differences between them at such a young age will cause more harm then good. Children don't see differences unless pointed out to them, they like their friends if they play football or hockey like music or art they never ask each other what religion they are or do they have a religion. Let children get to know each other first before pointing out their differences, (which ultimately this course will unwittingly

do) this course is done in second level anyway, where teenagers know each other for who they are not what they are.

Kind Regards

Enda Burke

Kinsale Co. Cork

Parent and second level teacher

0872205129



Home

Contributor

EQUATE



EQUATE broadly welcomes the concept of a new Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics curriculum being introduced to primary schools in Ireland.

We are very appreciative of the time that the NCCA gave us when we met to discuss the consultation and the opportunity to submit a written document further to this discussion.

About EQUATE

EQUATE is a children's rights organisation that advocates for a substantial change in how primary and secondary school education is delivered in Ireland.

We want all children to experience equality in their local school so that no child is isolated because of their identity, family background, religion or non-religion. Our education system should reflect the diversity of twenty first century Ireland.

A recent national opinion poll carried out by Behaviour and Attitudes on behalf of EQUATE shows that people across the country want changes to the religious nature of our school system.

The results include:

- 46% would not chose a Christian school for their child if they had a choice locally.
- 84% think the Irish education system should be reformed so that no child is excluded because of their religion or non-religion.
- 77% do not think a school should have right to refuse admission to a child who has a different religion to that of the school's patron.
- 82% of people think Ireland should do all it can to honour its international human rights obligations to ensure equality in our education system.

These opinion poll results show a clear desire among people for an inclusive school curriculum for all children regardless of their religion or non-religion.

Our submission to this consultation is framed around the principle of children's rights and the importance for the State, in this case through the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, in safeguarding and developing those rights.

Overview

The introduction of an Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics curriculum that supports and celebrates diversity in our society and schools is welcomed.

EQUATE agree with the NCCA that an Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics curriculum could “contribute to and support the development of inclusive school communities.”¹

Our constitutional and international human rights obligations should guide the development of this new curriculum. They are an opportunity to ensure that children are seen as rights holders and every effort made to keep the curriculum material as inclusive as possible.

To do this the curriculum needs to honour our international human rights obligations and constitutional rights of our citizens.

It will have to adhere to the principles of an *objective, critical and pluralistic* curriculum as set out in Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention of Human Rights to be fully inclusive of all children in our classrooms.²

¹ Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper, NCCA, November 2015, p7

² Kjeldsen, Busk Madsen and Pedersen v Denmark, December 7, 1976, <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=00157509> (para 53); Folgerø v Norway, June 29, 2007, <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-81356> (para. 84).

The State is also obliged to adhere and comply with the principles and provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which, as it stands, has not been fully incorporated into our laws and the Education Act 1998 in particular.

As stated by the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) in their April 2015 report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, the status of Irish children "as individual rights-holders and as active agents in shaping their own education is not reflected in Irish law at present."³⁴

The Children's Rights Alliance furthers this point when it draws attention to the state's constitutional as well international obligations to provide an inclusive curriculum for all children.⁴

Ireland was reviewed under the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child this year. In their concluding observations the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child made reference to the denominational nature of our school system. Religious freedom in education was referenced twice and the importance of adequate alternatives to doctrinal religious instruction was emphasised.⁵

Any introduction of a new curriculum into primary schools needs to recognise children as individual rights holders and make sure that all children are able to be active participants in every part of the school day. This should be further enhanced by the fact that this curriculum is being introduced as part of the state curriculum for all children.

This submission will address concerns in 5 key areas:

³ Report of the Ombudsman for Children to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the occasion of the examination of Ireland's consolidated Third and Fourth Report to the Committee, April 2015 p.38 section 9.1.1.

⁴ Children's Rights Alliance Government Report Card, March 2016, p43

⁵ Committee on the Rights of the Child Concluding observations on the combined third and fourth periodic reports of Ireland, February 2016, p8 section 36, p14 section 64

1. Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics.
2. Focus between Education about Religions and Beliefs and Education about Ethics.
3. Legislative impediments.
4. Opt-out for teachers.
5. Specific responses to questions posed by the consultation document.

Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics

The concept of an Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics curriculum being introduced to our primary schools came from the recommendations of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism.

When the Forum was set up the then Minister for Education and Skills said: “What we all want are strong schools that provide good quality education to current and future generations of pupils - schools that respect them as citizens.”⁶

One of the key recommendations from the Forum, following its consultation with education stakeholders, was for the creation of a state curriculum on Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics.

In its report it stated that:

“The Advisory Group requests that the NCCA, with the assistance from the partners and mindful of existing programmes, should develop curriculum and teacher guidelines for ERB and Ethics, in line with the Toledo Principles, the RedCo and the Cambridge Review.”⁷

⁶ <http://www.merrionstreet.ie/en/Category-Index/Education/Schools/address-by-the-minister-for-educationand-skills-mr-ruairi-quinn-td-at-the-launch-of-forum-on-patronage-and-pluralism-in-the-primarysector.html#sthash.rDNjBAvQ.dpuf>

⁷ Report of Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, April 2012, p111 ⁸ <http://www.osce.org/odihr/29154?download=true>, p9

The Toledo Guiding Principles came from a decision by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) to deal with the roots of intolerance and discrimination in our society through our schools.⁸

“The Guiding Principles offer practical guidance for preparing curricula for teaching about religions and beliefs, preferred procedures for assuring fairness in the development of curricula, and standards for how they could be implemented.”⁸

The Toledo Guiding Principles set out ten guidelines on what steps should be taken “whenever teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools is provided in OSCE participating States.”⁹

The RedCo project was a European Union funded research project which aimed to “... identify approaches that can contribute to making religion in education a factor promoting dialogue in the context of European development.”¹⁰ Through the projects work it sought to “... encourage openness towards others and mutual respect across religious and cultural differences...”¹¹

The Cambridge Review is a major piece of research undertaken by Cambridge University which looked at the strengths and weaknesses of the English state curriculum. The research included interviews with children, parents, education stakeholders and international bodies.¹²

We are concerned that the consultation document has only two direct references to Toledo Guidelines and none to either the RedCo project or the Cambridge Review.

⁸ Ibid, p10

⁹ Ibid, p150 - 151

¹⁰ http://cordis.europa.eu/result/rcn/47525_en.html

¹¹ Ibid

¹² http://cprtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/CURRICULUM_BRIEFING_REVISIED_2_11.pdf

It is concerning because not only did the Forum stipulate a need for them to be directly referenced in the development but also because as an OSCE country we have signed up to honour the Toledo Guiding Principles.

The development of this curriculum is an opportunity to honour the guidelines and include an international human rights perspective in our curriculum.

We strongly urge the NCCA to include the Toledo Guiding Principles, RedCo project and Cambridge Review in the further development of this curriculum.

Focus between Education about Religions and Beliefs and Education about Ethics

From the beginning of the consultation document it appears a decision has been taken to separate Education about Religions and Beliefs from Education about Ethics and consider them as individual segments as opposed to one concrete curriculum.

This is emphasised by the statement in the consultation document that:

“While conventional understanding of ERB refers to ‘belief’ and emphasises a ‘comparative religious’ dimension, Ethics (or Ethics Education) is seen as much broader in scope; ethics education can take place within and across many curriculum areas.”¹³

Although reference is made to further exploration of them as a joint programme later on in the document, when aims and features of the different areas are set out, it appears that Ethics is seen as a smaller element in comparison to Education about Religion and Beliefs.

¹³ Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper, NCCA, November 2015, p7

This concept is further emphasised given the larger number of aims and themes suggested for an Education about Religions and Beliefs curriculum against the smaller number of aims and themes for an Ethics curriculum.¹⁴

Further to this in the 'Aims and Themes' section of the consultation document there is limited development of aims and themes for a combined curriculum of Education about Religions and Beliefs & Ethics.

The document states in the curriculum features section that:

"For the purposes of curriculum development, it is of interest, and indeed necessary, to consider ERB and Ethics as two related but distinct areas of education."¹⁵

While we welcome the development of an Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics Curriculum for all children we ask for clarification as to why the consultation document consistently separates Education about Religious Beliefs and Education about Ethics - creating two distinct modules as opposed to one curriculum.

Legislative impediments

We are concerned that the consultation document makes reference to but does not suggest a solution to the legislative impediments that the Education Act 1998 creates to the introduction of an Education about Religions and Beliefs & Ethics curriculum.

While the consultation document makes reference to section 30 (2) (d) of the Education Act which requires that a 'reasonable amount' of time is set aside in each school day for "subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school"¹⁷ it does not deal with the practical consequences of this.

¹⁴ Ibid, p13 - 14

¹⁵ Ibid, p19

¹⁷ Ibid, p7

The consultation document also does not deal with section 9 (d)¹⁶ or Section 15 (2) (c)¹⁷ of the Education Act which give school patrons and Boards of Management explicit rights over what is taught in their schools along with a set amount of time that is given to patron's own programmes.

The former Irish Human Rights Commission in a discussion paper on Religion and Education in 2010 said this about the curriculum as currently set out:

"It might be argued that the centrality given to the 'Christian heritage and tradition in the Irish experience', in the Curriculum seems to be somewhat at odds with the pluralist ethos also promoted by the Curriculum..."¹⁸

It also made this observation:

"However in the context of religion this would allow religious instruction to be incorporated into the teaching of other subjects. It is also noted that the Primary School Curriculum leaves it to each individual school to design and deliver its own religious curriculum."¹⁹

To be confident that the new curriculum will maintain the constitutional and internationally agreed human rights of every child in every classroom, assurances need to be given that whatever form this Education about Religions and Beliefs & Ethics curriculum takes, it will be delivered as an independent, integral state curriculum separate from any patron programme.

EQUATE recommends that the NCCA and the patrons along with the Minister for Education and Skills agree that there will be no blending of the patron's programme with any new curriculum.

¹⁶ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/51/section/9/enacted/en/html#sec9>

¹⁷ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/51/section/15/enacted/en/html#sec15>

¹⁸ Irish Human Rights Commission Religion and Education: A Human Rights Perspective, November 2010, p5

¹⁹ Ibid, p6

Opt-out for teachers

The introduction of an Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics curriculum will, if implemented correctly, improve and enhance the diverse, modern classroom.

We are opposed to any addition of an opt-out for teachers from teaching this curriculum. Currently it is possible for teachers to opt out of teaching the RSE module of SPHE if they feel uncomfortable teaching that module.

We do not believe that the addition of a similar opt-out would be in the best interest of children in the classroom. An opt-out would have a negative effect on the overall vision and aims of a curriculum that is being developed to create an inclusive school environment.

We also do not believe the inclusion of such an opt-out would be in keeping with the Intercultural Education in the Primary School, Guidelines for Schools which the NCCA issued in 2005.

The introduction of this document states that:

“The aim of these guidelines is to contribute to the development of Ireland as an intercultural society based on a shared sense that language, culture and ethnic diversity is valuable.”²⁰

It would also undermine the core message of inclusivity in both the school community along with the wider community that hopefully will emanate from the curriculum as set out by the NCCA:

“ERB and Ethics is a key element in developing, contributing to and supporting inclusive school communities, requiring a whole school approach.”²¹

²⁰ Intercultural Education in the Primary School, Guidelines for Schools, NCCA 2006, p8

²¹ Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper, NCCA, November 2015, p11

The European Court of Human Rights has made the judgement that while an opt-out from a programme of doctrinal instruction is necessary to the protection of religious freedom, an opt-out from a programme of objective, critical and pluralistic information is not.²²

We recommend that the NCCA does not provide for an opt-out for teachers from any new curriculum on Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics.

Specific responses to questions posed by the consultation document:

The proposed aims of the ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum:

We believe, along with a vast majority of the Irish people, that a modern Irish classroom should not discriminate against any child on the basis of religion.

Our Behaviour and Attitudes research shows that 84% of people think the Irish education system should be reformed so that no child is excluded because of their religion or non-religion.

The NCCA needs to be very clear about where the new curriculum will fit and that schools are not allowed to blend it into their programmes or ignore it. The new Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics should not lose out due to Section 30 (2) (d) of the Education Act.

It is important the NCCA state how the proposed curriculum will fit into the school day.

The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning

The consultation document states that the Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics will "... foster a sense of identity and belonging in children by developing their self-awareness, self-confidence, self-esteem, and, ultimately, their happiness."²³ This

²² Folgerø v Norway, June 29, 2007, <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-81356>

²³ Ibid, p10

would have a positive effect not only on the child in this subject but across their school days and outside school lives.

It is also very positive to see the thematic approach of Aistear being considered. The stated aim of Aistear is “to help all children develop as competent and confident learners within loving relationships with others recognising that each child is unique with his/her own set of strengths, abilities, interests and needs.”²⁴

The proposed features for the curriculum

The first of the five features suggest it would be necessary that Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics is split into two different subjects. We were surprised by this feature since it was before any consultation was undertaken.

A key feature of any proposed curriculum will have to be that it is objective, critical and pluralistic as set out in Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention of Human Rights.²⁵

Any proposed curriculum needs to abide by the ten Toledo Guiding Principles so as to be in keeping with Ireland’s international obligations.²⁶

Contributions of a curriculum of children and parents

We welcome the NCCA’s proposal that a new curriculum “...will help foster a sense of identity and belonging in children by developing their self-awareness, self-confidence, self-esteem and, ultimately, their happiness.”^{27,28}

²⁴ Ibid, p12

²⁵ Kjeldsen, Busk Madsen and Pedersen v Denmark, December 7, 1976, <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=00157509> (para 53); Folgerø v Norway, June 29, 2007, <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-81356> (para. 84).

²⁶ <http://www.osce.org/odihr/29154?download=true>

²⁷ Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper, NCCA, November

²⁸ , P10

The NCCA has also set out the benefits that intercultural education can bring to a child in a classroom in their 2005 document *Intercultural Education in the Primary School* document.

It lists the 5 benefits of intercultural education for all children as:

1. It encourages the child's curiosity about cultural and social difference.
2. It helps to develop and support the child's imagination by normalising difference.
3. It helps to develop the child's critical thinking by enabling the child to gain perspectives on, and to question, his/her own cultural practices.
4. It helps to develop sensitivity in the child.
5. It helps to prevent racism.²⁹

Any new curriculum that deals with intercultural education should seek to convey these 5 benefits into the classroom.

Contribution to school communities

The Toledo Guiding Principles set out the benefits to communities from the teaching of religions and beliefs in an open and non-critical fashion:

“first, there is positive value in teaching that emphasizes respect for everyone’s right to freedom of religion and belief, and second, that teaching about religions and beliefs can reduce harmful misunderstandings and stereotypes.”³⁰

As our population grows ever more diverse, fostering school environments that are inclusive of all children is increasingly urgent. A curriculum that helps build children's community's understanding of diversity is to be welcomed.

Contribution to the role of teachers

²⁹ <http://www.ncca.ie/uploadedfiles/Publications/Intercultural.pdf>, p21

³⁰ <http://www.osce.org/odihr/29154?download=true>, p12

The positive reference to the Toledo Guiding Principles in this section is important and such an approach could have positive effects on teachers' delivery of other subjects throughout the school day.

Conclusion

EQUATE welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the debate on a new Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics with the NCCA.

We all want the best educational outcomes for all our children. In this context, we need to recognise that the Irish classroom is changing and that our curriculum needs to be adapt to this change.

EQUATE looks forward to working closely with the NCCA and the other education stakeholders as this consultation process moves into the next stage.

Key recommendations:

- Our constitutional and international human rights obligations should guide the development of this new curriculum.
- We strongly urge the NCCA to include the Toledo Guiding Principles, RedCo project and Cambridge Primary Review in the development of this curriculum.
- We believe that the NCCA should further explore the benefits and disadvantages of separating Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics as two distinct modules as opposed to one curriculum.
- EQUATE recommends that the NCCA and the patrons along with the Minister for Education and Skills agree that there will be no blending of the patron's programme with any new curriculum.
- We recommend that the NCCA does not provide for an opt-out for teachers from any new curriculum on Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics.

Contact details:

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Home

Contributor

Fr Brendan Kyne

Phone No: 061/377170
Mobile No: 087/2025038

The Spa,
Castlecornell,
Co. Limerick

4th March 2016.

National Council of Curriculum and Assessment,
35 Fitzwilliam Square,
Dublin 2



TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Primary Schools in the Parish

1. Castlecornell N.S.
2. Lisnagry N.S.
3. Ahane N.S.
4. St. Vincents, Lisnagry N.S.

Re: The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) Consultation on Education about Religious and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics.

Having responsibility for ensuring the smooth running of the above mentioned schools in our parish and presently residing on the Board of Management of Castlecornell and Ahane National Schools, I have been requested by many parents and teachers to state that the introduction of a discrete ERBE curriculum will just add to the existing problems of curriculum overload.

Our schools promote the values of respect, compassion, mercy, justice, integrity, and inclusion and engages with peoples of all beliefs. In a faith-based school, the ethical framework is provided for by the characteristic spirit of the school. We believe further consultation should take place between the NCCA and patrons of faith-based schools on how the concerns behind NCCA proposals might be addressed through the patrons programmes and by a set of guidelines for all schools.


Brendan Kyne

Parish Priest.



Home

Contributor

Fr Daniel Reynolds LC

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Fr Daniel Reynolds LC
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Organisation (if applicable)	Legionaries of Christ
Address	Legionaries of Christ Leopardstown Rd Foxrock, Dublin 18 D18 FF64
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Date	30 March 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal X

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

The consultation paper presents the need for a new curriculum development on the basis of the increased pluralism in society, but does not analyze real cases of intolerance, nor the ways in which intolerance is already being dealt with by the schools. There is a vague appreciation that much already takes place in the schools to resolve these issues. The justification for the development of the new curriculum is inadequate.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities

- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

The general thrust of the consultation paper foreshadows a curriculum that could dilute the ethos of the schools, thus undermining the option of the families that have chosen that particular school.

The ethos of the different schools is where the true basis for tolerance and understanding in a pluralist society should be built.

The consultation paper takes note of the possible dichotomy in teachers who are committed to promoting a particular ethos in the school where they serve, and at the same time will be expected to promote a curriculum that could very easily tend towards an “all beliefs are equal” mindset. The ethos of the particular school is the basis for promoting understanding and respect, and should not be weakened by a new curriculum development at cross-purposes with it.

School communities, with their families and children, teachers and staff, could benefit from support in creating an atmosphere that would foster positive attitudes in a pluralist society from the strong basis of their own ethos, without the imposition of a new curriculum development that would unavoidably aggravate curriculum overload.

The ethos of the particular school is the best place to determine learning objectives and any accompanying course development.

The objectives of tolerance and understanding should be met through the already existing core areas, thus avoiding curriculum overload.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

While increasing pluralism is a challenge for Irish society, my own limited observation is that Irish society is well equipped to rise to this challenge, and is in fact managing the issues related to the new pluralism respectably well. The remedy of the development of the new curriculum as it is presented in the consultation paper betrays a fundamental mistrust of the ethos of the different schools, which is precisely where the best on-going solution lies. The schools could best benefit from a spirit of service from the Department of Education and Skills in support of their respective ethos, without the imposition of a new curriculum development in conflict with the identity of the different schools and in detriment to the core areas that are already beset with curriculum overload. The best service that the Department of Education and Skills can provide to promote tolerance and respect is to support the schools in their own self-identity from the basis of their respective ethos.





Home

Contributor

Fr Francis Nolan

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I AM TOTALLY OPPOSED TO THE INTRODUCTION OF THIS PROGRAMME INTO OUR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS - THE MATERIAL IN THIS PROGRAMME IS ALREADY BEING COVERED VERY WELL THROUGH OTHER SUBJECTS EG RSE - IT IS BEING COVERED VERY WELL IN OUR RELIGION PROGRAMME GROW IN LOVE AND IT WILL CONTINUE TO BE COVERED AS IT IS INTRODUCED TO ALL THE CLASSES IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS - WHY DUPLICATE AND PUT MORE WORK ON TEACHERS IN AN ALREADY OVER LOADED CURRICULUM

THERE IS A MORE SERIOUS REASON WHY I AM OPPOSED TO THIS PROGRAMME - BECAUSE THE WORDS PRAYER, CHRISTIANITY, PRAYER AND SACRED TEXTS ARE NOT EVEN MENTIONED - RELIGION AND ETHICS IS ALREADY BEING COVERED IN OURS SCHOOLS TAKING INTO ACCOUNT OUR CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN ETHOS - I BELIEVE THIS PROGRAMME IS A CONCERTED EFFORT TO UNDERMINE THIS AND I BELIEVE SHOULD NOW BE STOPPED

IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PARTICULAR CHURCH TO PROVIDE THE CURRICULUM FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR ITS SCHOOLS AND ALSO PROVIDE INSPECTION FOR IT - THE CATHOLIC CHURCH HAS DONE THIS WITH GREAT SUCCESS SINCE THE 1800 TAKING INTO ACCOUNT RESPECT FOR CHILDREN OF ALL FAITHS - I HAVE NEVER IN THIRTY YEARS GOING INTO SCHOOLS SEEN A CHILD OF ANOTHER FAITH NOT BEING RESPECTED AND INCLUDED WITHOUT DISCRIMINATION - SO THIS PROGRAMME IS NOT NEEDED AT THIS TIME

THE GROW IN LOVE PROGRAMME IS NOW BEING INTRODUCED INTO OURSCHOOLS AT THE PRESENT TIME AND WILL REACH 2ND CLASS BY NEXT SEPTEMBER AND WILL COVER ALL THIS MATERIAL IN THE PROPER WAY -

FINALLY AS SOMEONE WITH AN MA IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION I CONSIDER THIS PROGRAMME TOTALLY INAPPROPRIATE FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS - YOU CANNOT PRODUCE A PROGRAMME TO FIT ALL SCHOOLS - THE PARTICULAR ETHOS MUST BE RESPECTED IN DESIGNING PROGRAMMES WHICH IS NOT I BELIEVE BEING HONOURED HERE

SINCERELY

FR FRANCIS NOLAN
ST JOHNS PARISH TRALEE CO KERRY 087 2100273



Home

Contributor

Fr Jim Kileen

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education

RELIGION AND BELIEFS

ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Date	22-3-2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35
Fitwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to ethics@ncca.ie.

Response to the consultation paper Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School

Preliminary observation:

- It is not clear why the two areas of ERB and Ethics are treated as one. Presumably ERB is mainly concerned with the imparting of information, whereas Ethics would be concerned with the fostering of certain ethical values and behaviours.

General points:

The majority of schools in Ireland are under the patronage of religious bodies. Whereas this may be largely for historic reasons, it is also true that many parents, who are the persons primarily responsible for the education of all our children, want their children to attend schools which reflect and foster the religious belief which they themselves share.

It is recognised that there is now a greater diversity of religious and philosophical belief systems in Ireland than previously, and that all schools must do what they can to reflect that reality and ensure that the belief systems of all the children in the school are respected. In fact, many schools under religious patronage are already making great progress in this area. The new Catholic Religious Education curriculum contains much material on other world religions and belief systems.

The proposed new ERB curriculum aims to help children "to know about and understand the cultural heritage of the major forms of religion...it fosters an informed awareness of the main tenets, non-tenets, and secular beliefs including key aspects of their cultural manifestations." In so doing, it appears to be reductionist in its approach and to have little appreciation of the reality of lived faith as expressed and encouraged in the day to day life of a faith school. Whereas faith is mediated through culture, they are not the same thing. In sum, the proposed curriculum seems to promote a secular view of religion in general which would not be compatible with the ethos of any faith school.

The understanding of spirituality as outlined in the 'Aims' section on page 13/14 is seriously impoverished, having no reference whatever to a relationship with the transcendent, which is the basis for all religious belief systems and, at least arguably, for spirituality.

The document itself admits that the epistemological approach for ERB would be different from that used in the patron's programme. It is unclear how the same subject area, i.e. religion, can be approached with two such different approaches.

On a pedagogical level, the proposed curriculum appears to demand a level of formal reasoning which is usually not found in children until the early years of second level education.

The present school system in Ireland is not perfect, but great efforts are being made in most faith schools to accommodate those children who do not share the faith ethos of that school. For Catholic schools this is motivated by their efforts to embody the teaching of Jesus Christ in the school, and to respect each pupil as first and foremost a child of God. The question of

pupils who opt out of religious education will not be solved by introducing ERB and Ethics, and may in fact exacerbate it.

The primary school curriculum is already a very full one. It is difficult to see where time can be found for one or possibly two new subjects, namely ERB and Ethics. Encroaching on the time already allocated for the patrons' programmes would not be an acceptable solution.

Much of what the proposed curriculum wishes to achieve is already being implemented in Catholic schools. The new *Catholic Pre-school and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* contains a great deal of relevant material, and practical approaches to some of the situations on the ground are to be found in the Catholic Schools Partnership leaflet *Catholic Schools in a Changing Ireland: Sharing Good Practice in the Inclusion of all Pupils*.

Allowing the proposed new subject to be filtered through the existing patrons' programmes would appear to be by far the better option. Further consultation with the patron bodies is essential in order to progress this matter in an orderly manner. A 'one size fits all' approach is unlikely to meet with any significant degree of success.

Ft. Jim Killeen, C.C.
Board of Management (Patron's Nominee)
March 2016



Home

Contributor

Fr John Bane

To whom it may concern.

In a faith based school like Broadford & Kilbane N.S., Broadford, Co. Clare, the ethical framework is provided for by the characteristic spirit of the school. In a Catholic school the ethical framework reflects the social teaching of the Church. Our school promotes values of respect, love, compassion, peace, justice, mercy, forgiveness, integrity, inclusion and engages with people of all beliefs and none.

Fr. John Bane, P.P.

Member of Broadford & Kilbane N.S. Board of Management.



Home

Contributor

Fr John O'Keefe



Birch Hill
Tipperary

3/3/2016

Submission Re. Consultation
Paper, November 2015 ERE and
Ethics

In Catholic Schools
Religious Education is more
about faith formation than
information; faith formation
based on the life and teachings
of Jesus Christ and the values
he espoused in the Gospels.
So there is an ideological,
theological, and spiritual content

inbuilt into the P.E. Programme
which resonates with the pupils

ERP and Games will only be
and comprise the specific areas
of what is currently taught
in Catholic Schools in the
context of P.E.

J. O'Keefe, P.E.
Mungret, Bandon, Co. Cork
Parish



Home

Contributor

Fr Malachy Conlon

Parish of Cooley

Peninsula Pastoral Area



NCCA,
35 Fitzwilliam Square,
Dublin D02 KH36

1st February 2016

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write in my capacity as Education Secretary for the Archdiocese of Armagh in response to your consultation on Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and ethics.

It should be acknowledged that a faith-based education is a very different experience from other models. The school takes its place at the heart of the community and is managed by volunteers committed to the characteristic spirit of the school and under the patronage of the local Catholic bishop. Our Catholic faith and its spirit permeate all that happens in the school community.

Too often the Catholic school is presented as exclusive to those baptized Catholic – nothing could be further from the truth. Catholic Education has a proven track record of being inclusive of children of other faiths and those of no faith at all. There are many examples of this throughout rural Ireland. As Catholic schools we are constantly reviewing what we can do so that we can be more inclusive and ever committed to cherishing all the children of the nation. Energised by God's Spirit we strive to work at ways in which faith in all its forms is encouraged and nurtured.

Finding an ethical way of living and encouraging responsible citizenship is a priority throughout the Catholic education system and part of the religious programmes being offered. Indeed responsibility for the environment and appreciation of the beauty of all creation is instilled in pupils throughout the curriculum. Throughout our programmes we endeavor to be inclusive globally, embracing and celebrating difference.

*To act justly, to love tenderly
and to walk humbly with God*

Parishal House, The Park,
Callaghan, Co. Louth

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lrussell@cooleyparish.com

It must also be stated strongly in the consultation that parents, family and children have a right to give expression to their Catholic faith in our schools. Catholic Educators are committed to a holistic view of the world and see the child at the heart of the educational process. Their faith brings richness to life and living. It is not just about Sunday worship but a lived reality in their lives.

The Education Act specifically states that the Minister of Education should have regard for the characteristic spirit of the school and is obliged to support programmes that develop the characteristic spirit of the school.

In reviewing the NCCA proposals it would seem that little cognisance was taken of what is currently offered in the curriculum of Catholic schools and in particular the content of the catechetical programmes and the broad reach of their pedagogy beyond a faith context and very relevant to the whole of society. Given that the curriculum currently offered is already giving rise to concerns about overload and that the philosophy that underpins the NCCA proposal is in some cases in conflict with the characteristic spirit of Catholic education a more meaningful dialogue needs to happen between all the stakeholders.

Yours sincerely,



Fr Malachy Conlan,
Chairperson



Home

Contributor

Fr Michael Kennedy

Introduction of Education about Religions & Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics

1. ERB -

Helping children to know and understand the cultural heritage of the major forms of religion, belief traditions and worldviews in today's society.

2. *By teaching that is objective, critical and pluralist.*

Comments

- a. Education has to do with the harmonious and progressive development of the whole person.
- b. In an age of growing secularism and in a time of rapid and confusing cultural and social change, Catholic Schools are proposing faith in God as the source of all that exists and as a source of direction for living and the foundation of all that we do..

Are we going to add to the confusion at a tender age when the seed of faith sown in baptism needs more help than ever to bed down and put down roots?
- c. Teaching from a denominational standpoint and then switching to a pluralist standpoint at this tender age is surely a recipe for disaster!
- d. Junior Cycle R.E. Syllabus Section C "Major World Religions" -the ERB area is to some extent covered in this section and is in my opinion more suited to the particular stage of psychological development of the early adolescent. So, I would argue we should leave ERB to the Post Primary level.

3. Ethics

– defined as including the formation and the promotion of a personal commitment to dignity and freedom of all human beings, the importance of human rights and responsibilities, the place of justice within society and the service of the common good.

4. By teaching that is objective, critical and pluralist.

A. The problem with ethical issues (such as whether capital punishment should be allowed or the morality of euthanasia) is that there is generally no single accepted answer. Another recipe for confusion at this tender age!

B. Conclusion: as you can see I am definitely not in favour of introducing ERB & Ethics into the teaching of Catholic children in Primary Schools.

Submitted by Fr. Michael Kennedy (D.A.)

Parochial House

New Inn

Cashel. Co. Tipperary

087/4147229

frmk62@gmail.com



Home

Contributor

Frank Harrington



64. Cloondara,
Ballinacare,
Co. Sligo
30/3/2016

To Whom it may concern.

I disagree with the
Introduction of ERB & Ethics into Roman Catholic
& faith based schools in general.

Catholic schools make
provisions for inter religious & inter cultural awareness
and other in terms of their policies, ethos & leadership.

Parents, families and children
with a religious conviction have a right to express
themselves in faith based schools.

These proposals have more in
common with a curriculum in inter-cultural studies
than in religious education.

II

The NCCA proposals infringe upon religious Education and the characteristic spirit of the school.

The minister must have regard for the characteristic spirit of the school in exercising the functions with regard to curriculum.
Section C30 (2)(b)

Given the time constraints and demands of this addition to the Curriculum would impact negatively upon the characteristic spirit of the school.

I also see this initiative as a vehicle to colorably give equality to all religious beliefs. In reality, it is an effort to remove Catholic/Christian teachings & Ethics from our schools.

This it would seem, is the plan of our Secular minded Governments at the behest of the most secular of all - E.U.

Yours sincerely,
Frank Haerington



Home

Contributor

Frank Murphy

Dear Sirs,

I have read the Consultation Paper on *Education for Religions and Beliefs and Ethics* and also the on-line Questionnaire

In a number of places in the Consultation Document it is indicated that much of the proposed programme is already included in the existing SPHE programmes. It is also indicated that there are time constraints in the present Primary School curriculum and that the inclusion of the additional programme would present further problems in that regard. It is difficult to understand, therefore, why this new programme is being introduced at all. It would appear that there must be another unspecified agenda.

This would seem to be confirmed when one examines the on-line Questionnaire. It is clear that this has been drafted in a way to produce the result which the drafters of the Questionnaire wanted to achieve. Any reasonable person would give a positive answer to all the questions posed, while there is no evidence to suggest that the proposed programme would achieve any of the laudatory aims set out in Questionnaire. Because of the lack of objectivity in the framing of the questions, the results of the Questionnaire should not be taken as a criterion for deciding the issue one way or another.

This suggested new programme is reminiscent of the programmes which were introduced into Primary Schools by the Health Boards many years ago under the guise of *Life Skills*. Those programmes had been banned by the American Supreme Court because of a proven connection between an increased suicide rate, particularly in young males, of those who had taken part in them. There is no doubt that they played a significant part in many of the social problems which beset our Country today.

In summary, I consider that existing Religious and SHPE programmes are providing adequate training for our young people. The additional costs and time constraints cannot reasonably be justified. The recognised adage *If it's not broken, don't fix it* applies here.

Frank Murphy,
Strandhil Road,
Sligo.

Telephone 071-9160579



Home

Contributor

Gillian Crowley

To whom it may concern,

I attended the INTO education conference last weekend and heard a presentation by Patrick Sullivan about the proposed introduction of the new ERB course.

He advised us all to "engage with the consultation process". Following his advice I have just read some of the consultation paper and looked at the questionnaire for teachers. I am shocked to say the least. The questions are all totally leading. On the first page alone it would be impossible not to tick "strongly agree" to all of the questions. Who could possibly disagree with any these statements? It appears that these questions were phrased in such a way to convince us all that this course is a good idea. As teachers we have a right to be involved in education policy in a meaningful way and for our voices to be heard.

It is very disappointing to see the NCCA operating in this way. Why are we as teachers and of course also the parents not being presented with arguments for and against this proposed course? Surely there is a better way of asking people for their opinions. The questionnaires are just seeking to win support for the new course. As teachers we deserve better.

Yours sincerely,

Gillian Crowley
Principal
Dromore N.S
Dromore,
Bantry,
Co. Cork



Home

Contributor

Global Citizenship School

Global Citizenship School

www.into.ie (Global) & G.C.S., c/o INTO, 35 Parnell Sq. Dublin 1.

=====

Submission to NCCA re ERB & Ethics from Global Citizenship School.

Global Citizenship School (G.C.S.) is a support for teachers and schools who are committed to a fairer, more equitable and sustainable world for all. G.C.S. is a volunteer network with professional INTO back-up and is part of INTO Global Solidarity which is affiliated to ICTU Global Solidarity & Education International. We also link with the Centre for Global Education in Northern Ireland, I.D.E.A., Dóchas, Cómhlámh and UNESCO Education For All.

This short submission is from our Steering Committee.

According to NCCA/E.R.B & Ethics documentation under the heading: “*What is Ethics Education?*” It states as follows:

*“The teaching of ethics includes the formation and the promotion of a personal commitment to the **dignity and freedom of all human beings**, the importance of **human rights and responsibilities**, the **place of justice** within society, and the **service of the common good**. These are all essential to **education for citizenship** and the proper **functioning of democracy**. Learning about ethics is important for all but developing modes of ethical behaviour is of central importance to children’s development.”*

We in Global Citizenship School are delighted that the above NCCA statement re ETHICS is to be developed into the mainstream of the primary school curriculum. Global Citizenship Schools raison d’être is to support all teachers, schools and whole school communities in learning about and acting upon global citizenship based upon the underlying principles of Justice, Equality & Sustainability.

Please note our signage below, to which G.C.S. schools put on display and make a public commitment to, contains the following statement:

“We are working for a fairer and better world for everyone, and it starts with me. Ní neart go cur le chéile.”



A1 Global School poster (AMG)2.pdf

Currently, we support teachers & national schools in teaching about Global Citizenship / Human Rights / Development Education in a cross curricular fashion that suits individual schools modus operandi. All lessons taught in school must fit the Department of Education / individual schools own annual and short term planning and recording and evaluation procedures.

Global Citizenship School is part of INTO GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

www.into.ie/GlobalSolidarity



Global Citizenship School



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The INTO website, InTouch, INTO e-letters and structures (Annual Congress, Education Conference, District & Branch committees and staff rep. communications etc.) are used by G.C.S. to support teachers and schools. We promote lesson plans and resources from Amnesty, Trócaire, Christian Aid, The Ombudsman, Irish Aid, Dev.Ed.ie etc and these are freely available on-line on www.into.ie. (Global Citizenship School).

We note that:

“ERB and Ethics is in no sense intended to replace the patron’s programme or faith formation education in denominational schools (and) a curriculum for ERB and Ethics, for all children, is separate from these programmes and is part of a new phase of work.”

In this context we wish to submit the following suggestions:

1. The new ERB & Ethics curriculum is implemented in all national schools and for all class grades.
2. ERB & Ethics includes Global Citizenship Rights and Responsibilities, Development Education and Human Rights strands.
3. Realistic time is allocated to above subject taking account of current curriculum overload expressions. It may be possible to restructure the state curriculum time slots using SPHE, SESE, Languages time etc. It may be possible to re-allocate some patron time to ERB & Ethics in recognition of overlapping content e.g. ‘Other Religions’ in denominational programmes.
4. ERB & Ethics may possibly merge with SPHE in providing a comprehensive Personal and Global Education (PAGE) for all pupils.
5. The Department of Education / NCCA would produce / oversee ERB & Ethics lesson plans & teaching resources being developed or collated.
6. C.P.D. and Teacher Training College modules in ERB & Ethics would be organised/facilitated by the Department of Education in consultation with other departments e.g. D. F.A. (Irish Aid) and all the partners in education.

Le gach dea mhéin,

John O Brien, Chairperson & Maurice Hurley, Coordinator

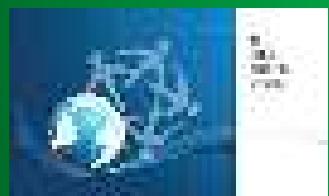
On behalf of Global Citizenship School Steering Committee.

Global Citizenship School is not a Charity.

G.C.S. is about schools committing themselves to learning, acting appropriately in a non-fundraising manner and promoting global citizenship rights & responsibilities.

Please consider JOINING G.C.S. & help us all to become better global citizens.

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Home

Contributor

**Global Schools: Primary Education for a
Just World**

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about

RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Project : Global Schools : Primary Education for a Just World

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Global Schools: Primary Education for a Just World

Global Schools: Primary Education for a Just World is a project co-financed by the Development Education and Awareness Raising Programme (DEAR) of the European Commission, and marks the latest in a fruitful and long standing partnership between DCU St. Patrick's Campus, Drumcondra and Trócaire. The project is based in the context of the European Year for Development, 2015. As part of a European consortium of ten countries and 17 partners, *Global Schools: Primary Education for a Just World* aims to meaningfully embed Global Citizenship Education (GCE) into Primary Education, both in Ireland and across Europe, through teacher and student education, public engagement, and the training of Local Authorities and Civil Society Organisations. The project also facilitates the production of GCE resources, and is supported and informed by an ongoing research component across four countries, including Ireland, which analyses GCE policy and practice in order to identify potential space for GCE in primary schools and curricula.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

As stated in the information provided by the NCCA 'ERB helps children to know about and to understand cultural heritage of some of the major forms of religion, belief traditions and worldviews in today's society'. It is for this reason that Global Schools not see a definite/ specific place for self-awareness and personal beliefs (as outlined in aim 1) within the aims. We believe that this is an area that belongs in patron programmes. This curriculum should strive to provide knowledge about various religions. Global Schools is suggesting the following aims:

Aim 1

Develop a knowledge and understanding or a wide range of world religions and world views.

Aim 2

Have knowledge and understanding of religious and non-religious world views have contributed to the culture in which we live, and continue to have an impact on individuals and relationships between their communities.

Aims 1 and 2 encapsulate the need for children begin their exploration about world religions from outside their world and look in, to remain more objective.

Aim 3

Identify and explore global justice issues, recognising injustice and inequality in order to develop empathy and embrace human diversity

Aim 4

Understand the relationship between rights and responsibilities from a global, local and personal perspective

Again Global Schools believes that the child should begin with the wider world and work in. Aims 3 and 4 encourages children to explore injustice and inequality, human rights and diversity at a global level, to inform their understanding and behaviours with their peers.

Key skills Global Schools would like to see included are:

- Investigation
- Questioning
- Enquiry
- Articulation
- The formation, presentation and defence of view points
- Philosophy for children should be encouraged as a means of promoting democratic thinking among children.

Trócaire thinks that these aims and skills would foster an ability in children to critically examine religions different to that of their own, issues of inequality and injustice, and be able to understand the capacity for themselves as global citizens and wider society to respond to matters of injustice and inequality

Human rights, as a global moral framework, should be considered as an overarching influence in the formation of a curriculum for ethics, and indeed for education about religions and beliefs. The Toledo Principles of 2007 clearly outline the importance of human rights in this respect. The state has a responsibility, regardless of its relationship with religions structures, to educate about and present religions in a neutral and objective fashion, and in doing so to respect the freedom of the individual to choose his or her own beliefs.

In the case of ethics, it makes sense to invoke an already existing, global framework for moral behavior such as the human rights system, which outlines a universal set of behaviours which are widely accepted as being virtuous and principled. Rights, in the case of education, are often

listed alongside responsibilities. While it is important that such a curriculum does lead to action rather than solely thought and reflection, it is pertinent that this action or responsibility be looked at from a collective and societal perspective, and not as equal to rights. While it is important that children feel empowered to act and promote ethical standard and behaviours, they must also be informed as to the various societal and global forces at play, and how these can be challenged.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

Such a curriculum should serve to enhance children's knowledge of world religions and also their thoughts around morality and positive behaviours. It is important that children be objectively informed about religions other than their own, but also that children of minority beliefs in a classroom do not become "spokespeople" for their religions or be seen as tokenistic. Such a curriculum must have equal capacity in all schools – this may be a challenge where some schools have a large number of children from a diverse range of backgrounds, whereas others may be monocultural or reflect only one religion. In order to avoid disadvantage, measures should be put in place to ensure that all children may be exposed to and learn about different religions to an equal standard of objectivity and information, regardless of school context. Such a curriculum should be introduced in the junior end of primary education and continue throughout primary education in a spiral fashion. Research has shown that children of this age

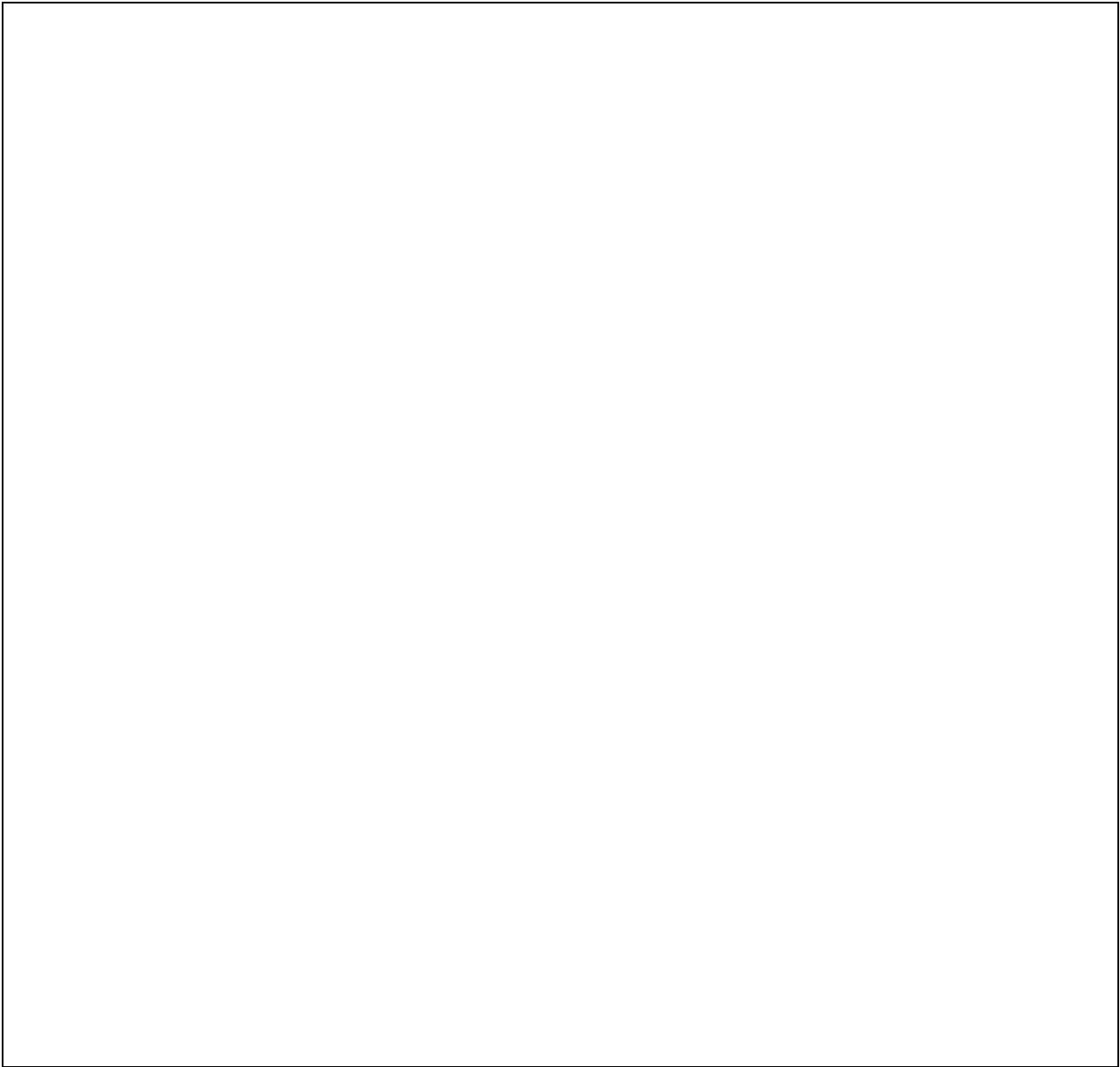
and stage are capable of engaging with global issues and issues of inequality and fairness. Thus, it is more logical to introduce such a subject before certain prejudices and stereotypes may have taken hold.

Teachers will likely need significant support in implementing curricular area such as this. Clarity will be imperative when it comes to distinguishing between this and the patron's programme, and how teachers should deal with confusion around this. Moreover, teachers are likely to encounter difficult and uncomfortable questions, particularly where a faith is taught in a school, around the connection between these subjects and other religions and the faith formation programme in their schools, from both children and parents. Similarly, a teacher may face challenges where his or her own faith conflicts with that being taught as part of this curricular area. Supports should be in place to help teachers to look at these beliefs and religions from an objective, specifically information-giving point of view, rather than the promotion of a variety of moral standpoints. Furthermore, teachers are likely to identify potential duplication with other existing subjects. Meaningful Continuous Professional Development (CPD), particularly in the area of ethics will be necessary in order to separate aspect of this subject from similar aspects of other subjects. An example is the proposed theme of climate change. This will potentially already be explored in Geography/ Science/ History. Perhaps a change of name to Climate justice would be more appropriate so that teachers and children can distinguish between the causes, effects and implications of such an issue, and how they may be dealt with in each subject with ethics looking at moral solutions and actions to be considered.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

In addition to that aforementioned, Global Schools would like to add the following suggestions and elaborations:

- Regardless of whether or not ERB and Ethics become one or two stand alone subjects, or are integrated across the curriculum, it is our view that the skills and methodologies used and developed through the implementation of these subject be present across the curriculum, both implicit and explicit, so as to inform an influence the ethical formation of the school in general, and so as to form an integral part of the child's personal and social development.
- A previously mentioned, since there is a risk of curriculum overload, it is important that teachers do not feel that the content of these subjects duplicates that already delivered through other subjects. Subjects such as SPHE and SESE must be carefully analysed so as not to double up on content, particularly in areas such as human environments, environmental awareness and care, myself and myself and the wider world.
- Since issues of a controversial, sensitive nature may be touch upon in the teaching about other religions and indeed ethics, language must of primary consideration. Appropriate and correct terms should be used when describing aspects of diversity and difference, in order to avoid stereotyping and negative connotations.
- The SPHE curriculum, which would perhaps be seen as the closest to ERB/ Ethics in terms of content, is based on the premise that learning starts with the individual and continues to the wider world. A suggestion for this curriculum would be that the emphasis begins with the global and returns to the personal. This enables the child to look at global, international and interpersonal issues, and relate them back to his or her own experiences as decisions.





Home

Contributor

Gwen O'Connell

Hello,

Firstly, thank you for consulting with us parents. I have 4 children, the youngest of whom is in 6th class currently and all of whom have attended national schools, the patron of which is a member of the Catholic church. I am delighted to read the content of the proposed new religious curriculum. I have believed for a long time that the Roman Catholic teaching of the current primary curriculum should be taken up by the church and that children should be prepared for Communion/Confirmation by the church i.e. those who wish to participate in these sacraments do so of their own volition, not because they're in a certain class/have reached a certain age. This would then allow more time for the proposed new curriculum to be implemented.

Ireland has changed enormously over the past 20 years or so and whilst recognising the contribution the church has made to our education system, I sincerely believe it is time for change. To think that on the one hand you have children being baptised, the sole purpose being to access a particular school, and on the other, baptised children of non-practicing/lapsed catholic parents, where communion and confirmation are undertaken as a matter of course, not because of a sincerely thought-out and reflected upon decision.

When questioned about the above, I decided to ask my children their opinion. My 12 year old, currently in first year of secondary school, said that he found it upsetting when his Church of Ireland friend (in primary school) was told to read a novel during Religion class, as it involved teaching of the Roman Catholic faith, thereby him being made to feel different and excluded - quite the opposite, I understand, to what this new curriculum hopes to achieve.

I could continue but hope I have made some of my opinions clear and that they will be listened to and considered.

Thank you for your time

Kind regards

Gwen O'Connell



Home

Contributor

Helen Leacy

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

I disagree with the proposed curriculum for Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics. What is proposed is already included in the primary school curriculum through subjects such as SESE, SPHE, Literacy, History, Geography, Music and Religion. The large majority of National Schools in Ireland are Catholic schools. Certainly, in my experience of those schools, the Gospel values of equality, inclusion, justice, respect and loving one another are central to all teaching in a good Catholic school.

Many of the possible themes suggested for an ERB curriculum are already covered in the programme for Religion provided by the patron to Catholic schools. Themes such as:

- Myself and my family
- Family celebrations
- My relationships with others
- Symbols
- Belonging

The possible themes suggested for an Ethics curriculum are also taught through many areas of the curriculum. For example, many schools will explore Climate Change and Equality and Justice through the resources provided to them by the charity Trócaire each year.

The *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (2015) includes knowledge and concepts that ensure children are taught about other religious traditions, not just the Catholic faith. Children are given the opportunity to learn about the beliefs and ideas of others. Pupils are taught to be sensitive towards other religions and to dialogue with people whose beliefs differ from their own.

On page 11 of the Consultation Information Booklet for Teachers on ERB and Ethics, it is stated that ‘the educational vision underpinning an ERB and Ethics curriculum is for an authentic pluralism and values education.’ I would question whether such an aim meets the desires of any parents sending their children to primary school, whether they are a family who practices a particular faith or are atheist or agnostic. Parents are their children’s first teachers and their explicit desires must be considered. Many parents specifically choose a faith school because of the ethos that permeates such a school and because of the social and moral values that are already taught so well there.

The ‘Curriculum Features’ are described on pages 11 and 12 of the Consultation Information Booklet for Teachers on ERB and Ethics. Teachers already deliver a curriculum that contributes ‘greatly to the development of respect, understanding and empathy towards others in society’. Teachers already ‘value the child as curious, capable, confident and caring.’ Teachers already create classrooms that encourage ‘secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships’. A curriculum in *ERB and Ethics* is not necessary.

Helen Leacy





Home

Contributor

Holy Family Junior Primary School



Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAC-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35
Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below:

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

The proposals do not reflect the Church's understanding of the purpose of Catholic education: which is one of 'invitation to an encounter'. Each pupil is invited to consider what ways, if any the message of the Gospel can enable them to live good and purposeful lives. A faith response may or may not be the outcome, but this is never forced. The very title of this new curricular area sets up a peculiar dichotomy between 'Ethics' and 'ERB', both of which would be inextricably linked in a Catholic School. Religious education in Catholic schools has always being committed to inter religious and inter cultural dialogue – hence this new area is unnecessary as the domain is already covered. It is noteworthy however that in a Catholic school, religious education is seen as a process that extends throughout a person's life. Not all that can be taught needs to be done by the time a child is 12 years old. Thus the curricular span is gradual. Many areas are addressed at second level when the pupil has reached an age and stage of maturity which enables them to engage in a more meaningful way with varying world views and perspectives. Thus it is very difficult to see how this proposal would contribute in any positive way to what a child is currently being offered.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in REB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

Parents are almost always concerned for their children's welfare and wish the best for their children's education. In the experience of our two schools, (spanning fifty years on the current site) we have never been asked by a parent to teach about other faiths, or indeed to offer any further ethical education than is already proudly in place. Neither have staff expressed any wish to do this. While the focus of the RE curriculum is Catholic Christianity, we also introduce the children to the other 2 great monotheistic religions: Judaism and Islam. And all of this before they are yet 12 years old! We are however secure in the knowledge that their education in this area will continue to deepen and evolve in Secondary school. A Catholic school also works from the principle that parents are the first educators of their children. Catholic Schools stress working in partnership with parents who can offer further educational supports and curricular extension to pupils outside of school if they so wish.

Parents, families and children with religious convictions have a right to give expression to these in faith based schools. For those attending our Catholic schools, a child centered integral approach to religious education is adopted, where religious belief is not compartmentalized but is fully acknowledged as part of lived reality for these parents, families and children. Children and families of other faiths are welcomed warmly and offered opportunities to share something of their own faith tradition if they so wish.

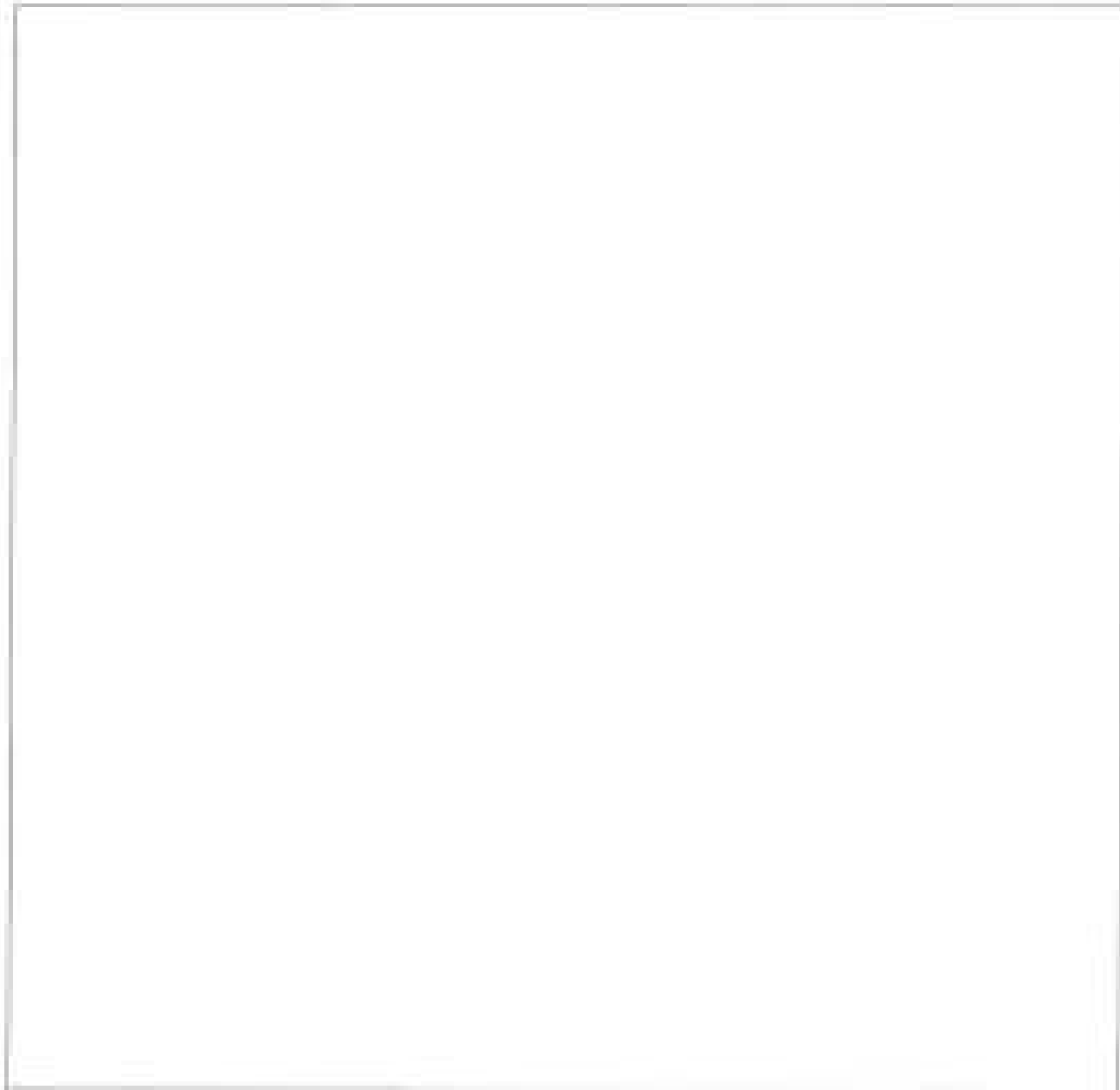
If such a curriculum was to ever emerge, significant CPD would need to be given to the majority of staff who would never have been trained to teach this curricular area. What is being proposed is more than just a change of curriculum however, but asking for a change of attitude, process, and methodology. The Catholic educator sees their role as one of 'vocation' and this vocational calling invites them to form and inform pupils, not just educationally, but also spiritually. This opportunity has added (and continues to add) a depth and a profound intertwining between the professional and the spiritual in many teachers lives. Many teachers enjoy sharing their faith experience with their pupils and have been trained to do so. It is in a

sense 'what they signed up for'. It is not something which should be lightly removed from them as it is a fundamental change in their working conditions.

Issues of time allocation and curricular overload will not be an issue if such a curriculum is reserved for emerging multidenominational and community schools. If the demand for such schools increase, then the proposed programme would be beneficial to such schools. It is impossible however to see how it would complement what we currently offer in our two catholic schools as the foundational principles underpinning R.E in a Catholic school, and what is now being proposed are contradictory. The introduction of the new curricular aspects would lead simply to a significant amount of overlap, conflicting and confusing messages and an inevitable dilution of both curricular areas.

1. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

As in questions 1 and 2.





Home

Contributor

INTO



Submission to the NCCA

ERB and Ethics

On behalf of the INTO

11 April 2016

Introduction

The INTO welcomes the opportunity to contribute to discussions on the proposals for a curriculum for Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics in the primary school. The INTO has, on previous occasions, recommended the introduction of a programme in religious education in primary schools (INTO, 1992; INTO, 2002). The INTO reiterated its call for such a programme in its contribution to the Forum on Pluralism and Patronage.

In preparation of this submission, Patrick Sullivan, Director of Curriculum and Assessment, NCCA was invited to present at the Consultative Conference on Education in November 2015. Two discussion sessions were facilitated in order to inform INTO's submission.

There are many views among teachers regarding the proposals for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics in primary schools. Teachers welcome the positive focus on acknowledging and celebrating inclusion, diversity and multiculturalism in our schools. A curriculum for ERB and Ethics has the potential to provide an opportunity to develop a moral compass and instil greater empathy, tolerance and respect in children. It is envisaged that such a curriculum in ERB and Ethics would enhance children's understanding and acceptance of diverse backgrounds and belief systems and foster a greater sense of belonging. Introducing a curriculum in ERB and Ethics has the potential to create a more cohesive and inclusive school culture. It is also likely to enhance a culture of acceptance and tolerance, and positively influence behaviour and discipline in schools. The implementation of the proposals would allow for increased opportunity to celebrate the diverse range of cultural and religious festivals within the school year.

Challenges

There are, of course, many challenges, associated with the introduction of a curriculum for ERB and Ethics. The main challenge relates to time constraint. Teachers are already experiencing an overloaded curriculum. Before the introduction of a curriculum for ERB and Ethics is introduced, teachers require clarification regarding time allocation, planning and resources.

The relationship between a curriculum for ERB and Ethics and the patrons' programmes for Religion needs to be clarified. The content of a curriculum for ERB and Ethics has the potential to create conflict with the ethos of a school. There is concern among teachers that religious traditions and celebrations, such as the school mass or carol services, could be compromised in schools, if there was a tension between the Patrons' programmes and the State curriculum. Pupils currently can opt out of patrons' religious programmes, should their parents choose. It would be expected that pupils would not opt out of a State curriculum in ERB and Ethics, however, this issue would need to be clarified. Pupils can opt out of curriculum subjects if they have a conscientious objection to a particular subject.

Handling ethical issues and teaching about religions and beliefs risk intruding on the personal domain of the teacher. Teachers' value systems and experiences of diversity may influence their teaching of ERB and Ethics. Significant consideration needs to be given to the potential for bias and pre-conceived beliefs being communicated to the children by the teacher. High quality professional development would be required to support teachers to address issues that may conflict with or challenge their own beliefs. Teaching a curriculum in ERB and Ethics from a constructivist perspective is challenging for teachers, in that they become facilitators of learning in a complex area of curriculum. However, with adequate professional development support, teachers can teach ERB and Ethics in a non-judgemental and professional manner even if the content is not compatible with the teacher's own beliefs and faith. Teachers can develop an awareness of the possible tensions that may exist and teach in a way that is empathetic and respectful of all religions.

School communities differ in terms of their levels of diversity. How schools respond to ERB and Ethics in the curriculum will depend on their experiences of diversity in their communities. Teachers play a pertinent role in modelling attitudes and behaviours of tolerance, acceptance and respect, and make genuine efforts in their schools to accommodate the growing religious diversity present in Irish classrooms. In many schools, children are afforded the opportunity to share their various faith experiences and to engage in faith projects. Schools already promote

multiculturalism by taking cognisance of the interfaith calendar and by celebrating the various international and religious festivals. In particular, SESE allows for an in-depth insight into the different cultures and traditions around the world.

Recommendations

The INTO supports the inclusion of ERB and Ethics in the primary school curriculum. In order to acknowledge the diversity within primary schools and to ensure that all children access a broad and balanced curriculum, it is time for the State to provide a curriculum in ERB and Ethics for all pupils. Learning about ethics is important for all pupils as is the development of modes of ethical behaviour.

In progressing a curriculum for ERB and Ethics in primary schools, cognisance should be taken of the content of the current primary curriculum. There are many areas suggested for a curriculum in Ethics that feature in the current SPHE curriculum. This is particularly the case for the junior classes. In drawing up a revised framework for the primary curriculum, consideration could be given to expanding the SPHE curriculum to include ethical education. However, an expanded SPHE curriculum would require additional time. It is important also to acknowledge that ethical issues permeate the whole curriculum.

There are aspects of ERB that could be taught as part of SESE. However, a curriculum in ERB would benefit from discrete time allocation, particularly in the senior classes. How much time, will depend on what emerges as appropriate curriculum content.

The inclusion of curriculum in ERB and Ethics in the primary school curriculum should be facilitated in the overall review of the primary curriculum. The INTO is adamant that there is no room in the current curriculum for additional content or subjects. It is only by reducing the content of the current primary school curriculum that time will be available for the inclusion of ERB and Ethics. The status and time allocated to patrons' programmes should be considered in the context of the overall review of the curriculum.

It will not be possible to introduce a curriculum in ERB and Ethics in primary schools without comprehensive professional development support for teachers. The teaching of ERB and Ethics makes challenging demands on teachers in relation to how to accommodate their own beliefs within their teaching, while respecting their own integrity as teachers and that of their school community and pupils.

It is also important to acknowledge that the introduction of curriculum in ERB and Ethics is part of the broader debate regarding patronage of schools and the place of religion in the state school system. This broader policy context will influence the development of curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

The INTO is of the view that sufficient time should be available to engage thoroughly with the concept of introducing ERB and Ethics to the primary school curriculum.



Home

Contributor

Irish Centre for Religious Education
(ICRE)

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Organisation

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The Irish Centre for Religious Education (ICRE)

Response to ERB Consultation

New questions concerning the intersections between religion and education arise in every generation at local, national, and global levels. Such questions about the identity and function of religious education are especially relevant in contemporary Ireland. In this context the Irish Centre for Religious Education (ICRE)¹ welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultative process and seeks to do so in a positive spirit as the State considers how best to address the needs of a changing Ireland.

While the State is now taking a more explicit interest in values, ethics, and beliefs education at primary level it is building on the strong tradition of the various patron bodies which have traditionally taken on the responsibility for the moral, ethical, religious and spiritual education of all children. The State can also be informed by the expertise that has accrued in the post-primary sector since the introduction of the *Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus* (2000), the *Leaving Certificate Religious Education Syllabus* (2003) and the *Curriculum Framework for Senior Cycle Religious Education* (2005). It is with this background in mind that the ICRE wishes to respond to the Consultation Document.

¹ The ICRE, hosted at Mater Dei Institute of Education, was established in 2011 to actively support educators, researchers and leaders in developing the academic discipline of religious education (RE) in Ireland. Our mission is to promote and develop a dynamic research community that is recognised nationally and internationally for the quality of its research, for its strong global and local networks and collaborations and for its contribution to public discourse. The Centre fosters RE as an academic discipline grounded in robust research. It seeks to investigate and build appropriate theoretical frameworks for the variety of forms of religious education present and emerging in Ireland. The ICRE provides and promotes the generation of reliable qualitative and quantitative data that contributes to an evolving public discourse about the nature, role and purpose of RE in Irish society.

Core principles of the ICRE's understanding of religious education that can contribute to the discourse about ERB and Ethics

- Religious education contributes to understanding and appreciating the significance of religion in the lives of many people and the impulse that religion offers to act in particular ways.
- Religious education takes a variety of forms – teaching people to be religious in a particular way, teaching people to understand religion in as great a way as possible, teaching people to appreciate a religious apprehension of reality, teaching people to be respectful of the place and role of religion in society, teaching people to respectfully welcome and engage with religious plurality, teaching people to respectfully welcome and engage with beliefs and worldviews that do not come from a religious frame. Each of these forms is distinct yet interrelated. Each form finds expression in different approaches to the engagement between religion and education.
- Religious education, in whatever form it takes, is not a private activity but occurs in the public space. It must be educationally grounded, exhibit an interreligious character, respond to the needs of the learner (appropriate to their developmental phase and experience) and contribute to their search for meaning and value both as an individual and in the context of any community of faith or conviction with which they are associated.
- Every form of religious education should allow children to encounter religions and beliefs (their own and others) and engage with religions and beliefs (their own and others) in a manner that is characterised by openness, generosity, respect and mutuality.
- Individuals, communities and societies have a right to a quality religious education.
- The rights of the child as a citizen and the importance of mutual respect, active citizenship and social cohesion in a democratic society require an educational foundation in religious education (at a minimum 'learning about religion and beliefs').

- In an appropriate form religious education should be provided for all children in all schools, religious or secular, irrespective of patron, in a manner that acknowledges freedom of religion and belief.
- The State has the right and the responsibility to provide for an appropriate form of religious education for all its citizens
- All schools, irrespective of patron, must appropriately respond to multi-cultural diversity, including diversity of religion and beliefs, within their educational community.
- Any approach to religious education should facilitate young people bringing their religion and beliefs with them appropriately into the classroom.
- Religious education is a dialogical activity that aims for mutual ground between varying viewpoints. All teachers should be educated to help young people encounter and engage with religion and belief within a variety of religious education contexts.

Considerations in response to the Consultation document

Terminology

1. We welcome the recognition of the contested nature of terminology (p. 16) and suggest that greater clarity and agreement about terminology would help to determine the approach to be taken.
2. We have concerns about the proposed title of the curriculum and suggest that this requires further reflection in light of the current consultation process.
3. We share the general concern that learning 'about' could be construed as implying a cold or detached study of the phenomenon of religion with little attention paid to the role of the learner. While information about a topic is a necessary condition for any learning we understand this to be a useful, but on its own an inadequate, approach.
4. We question the decision to present a curriculum that addresses an education **for** ethics but an education **about** religions. There are underlying assumptions here that need greater conceptual clarity.

5. What is meant by the term religion(s)? Religions can be thought of as responses to divine revelation, as clearly definable and separate phenomena with their own claims to truth, or as constructed elements of culture. To only understand religion(s) from a socio-cultural perspective is to neglect the self-understanding of the religions themselves.
6. Is it possible for a child to separate 'understanding religions' from 'religious understanding'? Is such a separation educationally justified in a context where this is not done in any other subject area?
7. How is the term 'beliefs' defined? If it is understood only to describe non-religious views then there is a danger that children do not understand that religious people also have beliefs. We have a concern that distinguishing between religions and beliefs in this manner may contribute to some children still being considered as 'other'.
8. How will a balance between religions and beliefs be achieved? How, and on what grounds will this be determined?
9. The definition of authentic pluralism requires a more in-depth articulation. As presented in the documentation the definition is not robust enough to act as the philosophical rationale for the proposed curriculum.²

Children and Parents

1. The development of the proposed curriculum is concerned with what children should learn in primary schools and for what purpose. We have a concern that the purpose of all education concerning religions and beliefs, whilst responsive to issues about tolerance, social cohesion and personal development must necessarily be rooted in existential questions about human flourishing, self-actualisation, self-transcendence, identity formation, societal flourishing, and creating and securing a future that celebrates plurality and distinctiveness.

² For a helpful analysis of the philosophical understandings of pluralism and plurality as this applies to religion see Terrence Merrigan's reflection on 'Religion, Education and Plurality', in *Toward Mutual Ground: Pluralism, Religious Education and Diversity in Irish Schools*, ed. by Gareth Byrne and Patricia Kieran (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2013), pp. 57-70.

2. We welcome the emphasis on the child as agent in their own learning but suggest that this agency cannot be independent of an educating community – family, school, group, environment, tradition
3. The document states that children and young people will have their voices heard – how? The implication is that this does not happen already.
4. How are the rights of parents as the primary educators of their children respected in the proposed curriculum? There is an implication that ERB and Ethics will recognise parents and guardians as primary educators more than other programmes. There is also an implication that ERB is going to be more child-centred than what currently exists in patrons’ programmes. These are not helpful inferences.
5. Where does the child’s own religious background and personal understanding fit in to the aims? Is there a danger that a child is educated ‘away’ from the values of the parents?
6. Will parents have the right to withdraw a child from ERB if it is not consistent with their religious vision? e.g. If an inquiry based approach is incongruent with their religious understanding of the concepts of truth, revelation and God?
7. Are the aims of the curriculum consistent with development theory (Piaget, Kohlberg, Gilligan, Fowler)? Are some of the suggested cognitive aims attainable for children at this stage of development? Are children ready for comparative education? Is this appropriate to their age and stage?

Curriculum content

1. The concept of learning ‘about’ religions and beliefs is at odds with the holistic and experiential approach of the rest of the primary curriculum and is therefore at risk of being utilitarian in nature.
2. While there is a spiritual and religious contribution to wellbeing, subsuming the study of religion under wellbeing (be it personal or societal) avoids questions about truth claims which are at the heart of what religions are about and should not be avoided. Avoiding such questions leads to a weak caricature of the hold religion has on people and will cause some religious communities to avoid an ERB approach.

3. What is the source of the curriculum? The philosophical rationale for this appears quite limited and merits further consideration. The statement that 'no subject or teaching is value-free' (p.23) begs the question: what/whose values informs this curriculum? Who speaks for the varying viewpoints? Whose voice is heard in the design of the curriculum?
4. People of deeply felt convictions, religious or otherwise, cannot deal with questions about religions and beliefs from a 'neutral' or objective stance because of issues of truth claims that the document does not address.
5. Teaching young people to be well disposed to their own religion and beliefs and to that of others cannot be done without reference to what the content of the learning will be. Discussion of content is necessary and should not be conceived of as only cognitive but include intellectual, emotional and active learning appropriate to children.
6. We note the dependence of the curriculum on the Interpretive Approach.³ Though helpful, a curriculum cannot be so dependent on one approach without a contextual critique. A significant aim of the Interpretive Approach is 'edification' which is essentially personally transformative. This sense is absent from the consultation document.
7. The link to *Aistear* is well made however the links to the rest of the primary curriculum needs to be better supported.
8. The section on RE at second level requires attention. Listing the names of sections is insufficient for anyone to glean a sense of the purpose of JCRE. A better approach would be to consider the rationale and aims of JCRE and LCRE which allows an individual (i) to both learn about as well as learn from religion and (ii) to approach the syllabus from the perspective of a particular religious tradition. Consideration should also be given to how RE contributes to the eight key skills and twenty-four Statements of Learning designated by the Framework for Junior Cycle (2012).

³ Note: The Interpretive Approach is inaccurately named in the consultation document (p. 24).

9. The documentation states that the proposed curriculum will not replace patrons' programmes; but if both are available, how do they differ? If patrons can follow their own existing curricula, then who is this curriculum for?

Ethics

1. Will ERB be separate from Ethics? If so why? There is an implication that ethics is somehow superior if it is separated from religion.
2. What is the source of ethics underpinning the document? While a Human Rights approach contributes to the expression of contemporary ethics this is built on ethical traditions developed over centuries. The complexity arising from this needs to be acknowledged and elaborated upon.
3. The separation between religion and ethics is not possible for religious traditions where ethics is understood to be the living out of one's religious apprehension about the nature of human existence and one's way of being in the world. We cannot agree with the assertion on p. 7 that 'ethics is broader in scope'. Ethics is a core element of religion but religions cannot be reduced to ethics or subsumed within it.
4. In its presentation of ERB the concept of nurture in relation to religion is seen as problematic whereas the phrase 'nurturing children's dispositions' is used freely in relation to ethics. We are concerned about the discrepancy between ERB with its detached tone and ethics which it is suggested is formative in nature. This is problematic as it seems to assume that ethics are agreed on by everyone.
5. Who decides what is appropriate in terms of nurture as values are not context or content free?
6. 'Education for ethics involves fostering ethical behaviour in young people. Within Western thinking, the study of ethics is not just about the provision of information; it is deeply concerned with character formation and human development.' (*Encountering Children in ERB and Ethics*, p. 5) Such fostering is also done in the context of religions and belief systems. There seems to be a positive concern to nurture an ethical disposition in all young people. This cannot be done without reference to the religion and beliefs of the students and their families.

7. The documentation does not refer to 'teaching about ethics' but recognises a holistic approach to the education of the child. There is a lack of consistency between this and emphasis on 'teaching about religions and beliefs'.
8. The State may be over-reaching in terms of its educational remit if it is deciding what particular ethics are taught? This could undermine the role of parents

Resources

1. Teachers are the key resource for any curriculum change – who will teach ERB?
2. What philosophical resources will underpin the selection of the academic content of ITE and CPD programmes?
3. Do teachers have the right to refuse to teach this? On the grounds of conscientious objection to anything to do with religion or, from a contrary position, because the type of approach proposed here conflicts with their personal religious convictions?
4. What qualification would a teacher need to have to teach either ERB or Ethics? What would be the subject content of such a qualification?
5. What criteria are used to select teaching resources?
6. What is the basis for Assessment, both AoL and AfL?
7. How will the curriculum be evaluated?

Concluding Remarks

The consultation documentation on ERB and Ethics raises many questions. The ICRE welcomes debate in this area and by highlighting these questions seeks to contribute positively to this timely discussion.

As a result of working with the documentation, it has become clear to us that a more robust, nuanced and inclusive rationale is necessary for the introduction of ERB and Ethics into Irish schools.

- If the introduction of ERB and Ethics is designed to ensure that all pupils will have a minimum of reflection about religions, beliefs and ethics this is being provided for by the patrons' programmes responding in their own way to religious education as a designated subject area in the 1999 Primary Curriculum
- If it designed to ensure that schools working under the variety of patron bodies include in their programmes recognition for the diversity of pupils this would perhaps be best attended to by issuing a framework or guidelines which all schools would need to respond to appropriately in their curriculum and for which schools would be accountable to the State
- If it is designed to ensure that those who are not participating in a patron's religious education programme are given a grounding in what religions, beliefs and ethics contribute to personal and societal flourishing then this should be addressed in addition to and in dialogue with patrons' programmes.

In each of these scenarios, there must be a clear rationale, aim and outcomes, key concepts and suggested content themes, and indicators of assessment modes and evaluation processes.

The ICRE appreciates this opportunity to contribute to this significant debate and is available and willing to contribute further to ongoing dialogue in this regard. For information about the ICRE please see www.materdei.ie/icre

To contact the ICRE please email: mdi.icre@dcu.ie

Selected resources from the ICRE that pertain to this consultation (2013-2016)

Anderson, B., G. Byrne, and S. Cullen. 'Religious Pluralism, Education, and Citizenship in Ireland', in Aslan, E., Ebrahim, R., Hermansen, M. (eds), *Islam, Religions, and Pluralism in Europe* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2016).

Byrne, G. 'Religious Education in Catholic Second-level Schools in Ireland Today: An Invitation to Love, Understanding, Commitment, Hospitality and Dialogue' in M. Shanahan (ed.) *Does Religious Education Matter?* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, forthcoming 2016).

Byrne, G. 'Religious Education Helps Create a Cohesive Society' in *Irish Times* 3 July, 2014.

Byrne, G., and P. Kieran, *Toward Mutual Ground: Pluralism, Religious Education and Diversity in Irish Schools* (Dublin: Columba, 2013).

Cullen, S. 'Interpreting between Spheres: Religious Education as a Conversational Activity', in Shanahan, M. (ed.) 'Does Religious Education Matter?' (Farnham: Ashgate, forthcoming 2016).

Cullen, S. 'Religious Education in the Republic of Ireland: A snapshot of the contemporary discussion', published as: Cullen, S. 'Religionsundervising i den irske republikken-et glimt inn i aktuell debatt', *Religion og Livssyn*, 2014.

Francis, L., G. Byrne, B. Sweetman and G. Penny. 'Growing up Female and Catholic in the Republic of Ireland and Scotland: The Intersectionality of Religious Identity, Religious Saliency, and Nationality'. In L. J. Francis and J. Astley (eds.), *Diversity and Intersectionality: Studies in Religion, Education, and Values* (Oxford: Peter Lang, forthcoming, 2016).



Home

Contributor

James Walsh

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing in response to the new proposed religious education curriculum for Primary schools in Ireland. As a father of two young boys in our local national school, I have some concerns about the proposed curriculum.

I have two major problems with this proposed curriculum;

First of all is the practical matter of time. The school day is already very tightly stretched. You are now proposing to add another subject to an already very crowded schedule. Where will the time come from? I am assuming the school day won't be lengthened to add additional time to the day.

The most likely consequence of the introduction of this new curriculum will be the reduction in the time available for faith formation. It is unlikely that other subjects, such as Maths or English will be affected.

My second problem with this new proposed curriculum is that it is very secular in its outlook. It treats all religions as equal and objectively reviews and discusses them in an abstract sort of way, rather like a science subject. While it is beneficial for all pupils to learn about the different world religions, children in a Catholic school should be taught that their Catholic faith is the one true faith and that all religions are not equal. Religious education and faith formation are already subjects in Catholic run schools and I can see no reason for any change to the existing policy.

Overall I feel that this new proposed curriculum is unnecessary and potentially damaging to the faith formation of our children.

I would like to add that my comments only apply to schools that fall under the patronage of the Catholic Church. I have no problem with this curriculum being applied to secular state schools.

Yours Faithfully,

James Walsh,

Donaghmoyne House,

Kiltown,

The Rower,

Co. Kilkenny



Home

Contributor

Jim and Breda Holmes

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Jim and Breda Holmes
Position (if applicable)	Parents
Organisation (if applicable)	
Address	82 Beechpark Lucan Co. Dublin
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Email	jimholmes1968@eircom.net
Date	31 March 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

We, as parents, disagree with the proposal to introduce a curriculum in *Education about Religious Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics* into primary schools in Ireland.

It is important that parents are recognised as the primary educators of our children. At primary school level parents are directly involved in, and support, the learning experiences of their children. From literacy to numeracy, from Gaeilge to projects on 1916, parents are informed about and involved in all school-based experiences. This is why, as parents, we feel that the proposals for *ERB* will present content that may not be within the experience of our family or indeed within our Catholic faith.

The proposal for *ERB and Ethics* suggests that children need to learn about other religious beliefs in order to emphasise “...worth of diversity....difference across belief systems...the common good”. This already informs the practices and content of many of the subjects that the children learn in primary school. The specific aims, as suggested on page 13 of the Consultation Paper, inform many areas of the Curriculum for Primary Schools, for example SESE, SPHE Art, PE, Literacy and Music. What is most obvious is that the aims, as they are suggested, inform the inclusive characteristics of our Catholic schools.

Another objection to the proposal is the suggestion that children will “develop curiosity and questioning so that his/her own views on and ideas about religious and spiritual matters can be developed and consolidated”. While the Consultation Paper (page 14), does not provide details as to how this might/may be developed, it is a massive leap in cognitive and emotional development for the child. Our experience, as parents, is that our children’s faith journey continues to be developed and nourished through the experience of a lived faith. Stories *about* our Catholic faith would not have consolidated our children’s knowledge and views about religious beliefs or their religious spirituality. Children of primary school age are coming to terms with their own reality and developing the knowledge, skills and rationale that are crucial and critical for them to take their place in their faith community and society. Presenting children at such a young age with opportunities to question their reality would lead to great distress and upset. It would lead to confusion and conflict where it is neither appropriate nor necessary.

We acknowledge the importance and value of teaching children about other faiths and stances for living. We believe that the content of the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (2015) provides teachers in Catholic schools with the content that they can share with the children to achieve this aim. However, we disagree with the school helping our children “to develop personal beliefs”. (p. 1, *Information for Parents* leaflet). This is the prerogative of the parents.

On page 24 of the Consultation Paper it is proposed that children will have an opportunity to compare and contrast beliefs. It is preferential that children do not focus on differences but on common shared practices, values and perspectives.

It is also suggested (on page 23) that children will be empowered “to lead aspects of lessons...” One concern is that there is an assumption in the proposal that all children’s religious experiences are cognisant with the teachings of those beliefs or with others with different stances for living. We find this proposal worrying.

The specific aims for a curriculum in *Ethics*, as outlined on page 14 of the Consultation Paper, are also included in many subjects at primary school. However, teaching children that there is no such thing as objective truth contradicts the essence of Catholic teaching. Children cannot be taught mixed messages. We believe that this would be considered a hindrance to their moral, spiritual and religious development.

In conclusion, we believe that the proposals outlined in the curriculum in *ERB and Ethics* would not support the holistic education of children attending a Catholic primary school.

Jim and Breda Holmes





Home

Contributor

Jim O'Connell



HOLY FAMILY PARISH

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Roskilde, Co. Louth
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Website: www.roskilde.ie

22nd February, 2016

Dear Sir/Madam,

I write in relation to the proposed changes in THE RULES FOR NATIONAL SCHOOLS announced by Minister Ian O'Sullivan on January 28th.

The ethos of any Primary School is not based on THE RULES FOR NATIONAL SCHOOLS but is decided by the owners or patrons of the school and not by central government. It informs all aspects of school life.

There are three primary schools in my parish. The Christian vision of the human person prevails in each of them with its respect for all people irrespective of their faith. All of these schools have many non Catholic children. I am not aware of a single instance of complaint concerning lack of respect for non-Catholic children. It seems to me that the experience of day to day living with children of different faiths will be of great value to them in the Europe in which they will spend their lives.

Faith schools exist only because the parents of the children want those schools. Thankfully, we live in a country where these rights have been respected. If the religious education in schools is undermined then the rights of parents are also undermined.

The determination of the ethos of a school is not the function of the NCA or the Minister.

Religious education in faith-based schools is inseparable from the characteristic spirit of the school. The Minister must allow reasonable instruction time in the school day for subjects relating to that ethos.

Yours faithfully,


Jim O'Connell, s.m., Administrator



Home

Contributor

Jim Boyle



IMN BOYLE

NEWTOWN MILLS

NEENAH

CO. TIPPERARY

28.03.2016

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

FULLY SUPPORT THE RESPONSE OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP TO THE NCCA DISCUSSION PAPER (TWO POINTS) WOULD LIKE TO EMPHASISE :

ETHICS : THE ETHICS OF THE SOCIETY IN WHICH WE LIVE IN A DEMOCRACY SUCH AS OURS, IS ENCAPSULATED IN THE LAW OF THE LAND. THE LEGISLATURE HAS THE DUTY AND FUNCTION TO PROMULGATE THESE LAWS FOR THE COMMON GOOD. THESE LAWS ARE REVISED AND AMENDED AS REQUIRED BY A FUNCTIONING DEMOCRACY. THE PERSONAL RIGHTS OF AN INDIVIDUAL TO FAITH AND AN EXPRESSION OF SUCH, IS THEREBY GUARANTEED. NOTHING SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN ANY SCHOOL TO INFRISE THESE RIGHTS. CHILDREN ARE TAUGHT TO OBEY THE LAW OF THE LAND.

ETHOS : WITHIN A FAITH SCHOOL THE ETHOS IS BASED UPON THE TENETS OF A PARTICULAR BELIEF SYSTEM. THE FACT THAT THERE ARE DIFFERENT BELIEF SYSTEMS MAY BE ACKNOWLEDGED, BUT IT IS TRULY ABSURD FOR ANY SYSTEM BASED ON FAITH TO ACCEPT THE VALIDITY OF ANOTHER BELIEF SYSTEM. TOLERANCE OF DIVERSITY MUST BE ALLOWED. NOTHING FURTHER IS CALLED FOR, OTHERWISE YOU END UP WITH A SMORGRASBOORD OF IL-DEFINED RELIGIOUS CONCEPTS (CONFUSION WHICH, OF COURSE, MIGHT WELL SUIT THE AGNOSTICS.)

YOURS FAITHFULLY,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Imn Boyle".



Home

Contributor

Joan King

CREEVAGH NATIONAL SCHOOL

Carrigrohane-Creehan, Ballina, Co. Mayo.

Phone: 086-34577

Email: ccreevagh@eircom.net

Del. Number: 146733

22/2/16



Dear Sir/ Madam

As a Catholic school I feel that we are currently covering many of the areas to be included in the new ERB curriculum. These are explored in RE, SPHE and RSE as well as within the daily embodiment of the school ethos.

The time constraints already existing in the Primary classroom are also a matter of concern when considering the introduction of another subject.

I would be of the opinion that the ethical lessons of the ESR curriculum are already inculcated in the very nature of and ethos of the Catholic school.

Thank you for including my opinions in your deliberation.

Yours Sincerely,

Joan King

Joan King
Principal



Home

Contributor

Joan Whelan

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Joan Whelan
Position (if applicable)	Principal
Organisation (if applicable)	RMDS (Educate Together national school_)
Address	Ranelagh Rd D6
Telephone	01 4961722
Email	principal@rmds.ie
Date	25 th Jan 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers

- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

Thank you for this opportunity. I have been principal of a multi-denominational school for over 20 years. Our school went through a collaborative process especially in the early years to come up with what we call our Core Curriculum, that is what I consider to be a programme of education about religions and beliefs and ethics in the primary school. In our case, as an early Educate Together school, this programme predates the Learn Together Curriculum, upon which we draw extensively as well.

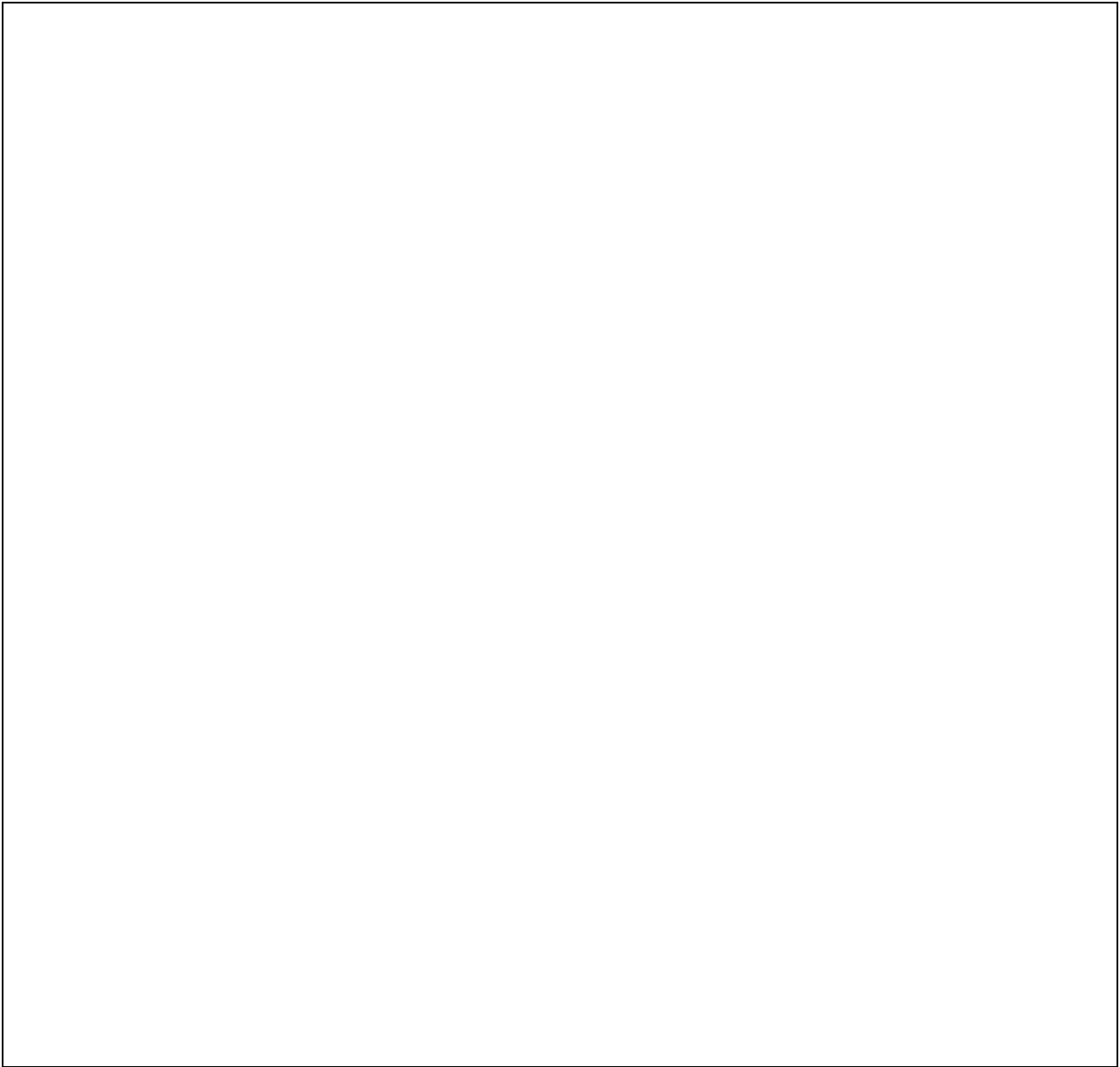
Without wishing to be in any dismissive of the consultation paper, might I suggest that the Learn Together programme or programmes such as our Core Curriculum are just what is being proposed in your paper? I have read it a few times and my position has not changed!

I do appreciate there may be political difficulties with putting forward the idea that the Learn Together programme should be adopted for all schools – I understand that, but it has to be acknowledged that it does provide exactly what is proposed? There may need to be some fine tuning to dovetail with the curricular revisions underway (Aistear and the Language Curriculum) but these are minor. For me it seems like the elephant in the room?

Furthermore, programmes like ours were developed with a high level of collaboration between parents and teachers and boards/patrons – a process that can be difficult, and fraught, and takes time – but one that is an essential and a key element of successful adoption and development of a programme such as this. While many schools have undertaken such processes as part of their development, I suggest that the Educate Together schools have a particular expertise in this regard that must be tapped into, to move your consultation process along?

For me if this is not done, it is a missed opportunity. Our school website contains more details of our programmes and approach to ethical education. www.rmds.ie

Joan Whelan





Home

Contributor

Joe Humphreys

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Joe Humphreys
Position (if applicable)	Journalist and author (Assistant News Editor with The Irish Times but writing in a personal capacity)
Organisation (if applicable)	-----
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Email	jhumphreys@irishtimes.com
Date	January 5 th 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal  YES

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

I'm writing in my personal capacity rather than as an Irish Times journalist but in a previous life – or so it now seems - I wrote a book on the role of foundational religious stories in inter-faith dialogue and education. It strikes me that there's great potential for utilising story-telling in conveying a greater understanding of world religions through the ERB and Ethics programme.

To summarise my own reflections on the issue: The traditional (Christian-centric) way of exploring the teachings of different religious traditions is to study the customs and doctrines of each faith, and compare and contrast them against Christianity (the faith which we in Ireland know best). A problem with this, from an educational viewpoint, is that it tends to exaggerate differences between faiths. The customs and doctrines of one religion tend to be quite alien from another, even if the underlying moral teaching is similar.

An alternative approach is to look at the foundational stories, myths and parables underpinning religious belief. This has the advantage of going straight to the ethical thinking that behind religious teachings. It also makes for a more accessible means of learning (after all, everyone can relate to a story), and it offers potential for students to draw their own parallels between the teachings of different faiths, and to reach their own conclusions about the compatibility of different world views.

I posted a copy of the book which I wrote on this theme, called 'The Story of Virtue' published by Liffey Press in 2005 (See: <http://joehumphreys.com/reviews/>), to Patrick Sullivan in September 2014 as I understood he was the point person for the consultation but alas I didn't receive a reply and it may have got lost in the post. Never mind, though, I'm attaching a few chapters from the book electronically to give you a gist of the sort of

stories that could be incorporated into a syllabus. The book examines the stories of different faiths under the heading of 14 virtues, from empathy to mercy. The three chapters attached relate to compassion, loyalty and self-discipline.

Obviously, a certain amount of research would have to be done to ensure you achieved a representative sample of “foundational stories” or myths. You may in any event find the material attached a useful addition to your work.

In a classroom setting, a foundational story, moral fable, myth or “noble lie” can act a jumping off point for discussion about ethics. The teachings of different religions could be examined and questioned through this medium of story-telling, comparing the “messages” that are contained within religious narratives; e.g. What does ‘The Good Samaritan’ say about the role of charity in Christianity? How does Islam balance justice and mercy in its foundational stories? One could also contrast the religious “morals” in such stories to a secular, or non-religious body of literature from Aesop’s Fables to contemporary novels.

I’m aware in this context of the European shift towards the Toledo Principles in religious and ethics education. Examining religions through the shared themes, morals and plot-lines of their foundational stories can’t but help highlight “the confluence rather than the clash of civilizations”, as emphasised in the goals of Toledo.

From a teaching viewpoint, focusing on stories rather than doctrine also provides the opportunity for cross-disciplinary engagement. For example, parables could be examined from a religion/ethics perspective and then an English/literature perspective. Students might be asked: How does the style and tone of “The Good Samaritan” compare to stories which share the same message in a different religion?

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

My own view is that schools have a duty to teach students about a variety of world religions and belief systems, including how concrete ethical principals can be developed in non-religious frameworks. The logical extension of that is that faith formation should take place outside of schools.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

Again, the only point I wished to highlight was the potential value of exploring the foundational stories and myths of religions in an educational setting.

I'd be more than happy to share any further thoughts if you think I could be of assistance – again I stress in a personal capacity. Kind regards, Joe



COMPASSION



There was once a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him up, leaving him half dead. It so happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by, on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came along, went over and looked at the man, and then walked on by, on the other side. But a Samaritan who was travelling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, “and when I come back this way, I will pay you whatever else you spend on him”.ⁱ

Had the world’s faiths nothing else in common but a shared belief in empathy there would be much to work on. Followers and non-followers of different faiths would have a basic standard — a standard of humanity — against which to measure their actions. A person of any faith would rightly be exposed to criticism if he or she failed to empathise.

In reality, however, the world’s major faiths have more in common than a plea for “something to be done” in the face of human suffering. Each faith offers a similar remedy — a remedy known generically as the Golden Rule. In Christianity it is, “do unto others as you would have them do unto you”;ⁱⁱ in Buddhism, “consider others as yourself”;ⁱⁱⁱ in Judaism “What is hateful to you do not do to your fellow”^{iv}; in Islam, “none of you truly believes until he wishes for his brother what he wishes for himself”.^v

The Golden Rule informs our desire for justice, fairness and the equal treatment of innocents — of which we shall read more in later chapters. In the first instance, however, the rule provides us with a definition of compassion. To treat others as you would wish them to treat you is the compassionate ideal as embodied in classic morality tales like *The Good Samaritan*.

In the story, the Samaritan — a stranger in the land — does not discriminate against the man whom he encounters even though they are from different countries. Nor does the Samaritan ask what led the man to being beaten up and stripped naked. *Perhaps the man was a bandit who fell out with fellow thieves. Perhaps he was a blasphemer who had been rightly punished for his crimes. Perhaps the man was asking for it.* These thoughts never crossed the mind of the Samaritan. But can the same be said for the Levite, or the priest? Understanding why they did not stop is as important to the morality tale as appreciating why the Samaritan did so.

It is possible that both the Levite and the priest empathised with the beaten man, and maybe even shed a tear as they walked past. The priest could have been inspired by the pitiful sight to give a sermon against robbery. The Levite could have been inspired — like the Buddha — to search for an answer to the question of human suffering in the world. At some point, however, as they saw the man on the side of the road, both the priest and the Levite thought of an excuse not to help.

Their prevarication and ultimate failure to act are all too resonant of social norms today. How many of us even blink when we encounter people in need in our daily lives, let alone stop to help in the manner of a Good Samaritan? We are full of “good excuses” as to why we can’t assist others. *I’m too busy. Someone else will do it. I can’t make a difference.* Such thoughts constantly run through our minds, perhaps chief among them the latter.

The defeatist notion that we are incapable of affecting change has been particularly dominant in our approach to the Third World. For many years, we tended to blame the ills of Africa on “acts of God” over which we supposedly had no control. Today, we blame them largely on corruption - an undoubted problem in developing countries but surely not an excuse not to help. The fatalist view that we can’t alleviate human suffering can be seen as a form of the ancient belief that we are all pawns in some divine chess game, with no control over our own destinies. Ironically, or perhaps not, religion has the potential to fuel such thoughts by suggesting God has “willed” everything that happens in the world, whether it be good or evil.

Different faiths use different means of squaring the circle of human freedom in a God-given world, the Christian theory of “free will” among them. None, however, endorses fatalism as a guide to life even though we may be, in some kind of divine sense, all part of God’s “plan”. In Judaism, the dilemma is resolved in a Talmudic story about a dialogue between Jewish scholars. In the story, the first scholar suggests that man’s duty is — symbolically speaking — to pass the man on the road to Jericho.

“Suppose,” the scholar postulates, “an earthly king was angry with his servant and put him in prison and ordered that he should be given no food or drink, and a man went and gave him food and drink. If the king heard, would he not be angry with him? And you are called ‘servants’, as it is written, ‘For unto me the children of Israel are servants.’”

But the second scholar presents a rival scenario: “Suppose an earthly king was angry with his son, and put him in prison and ordered that no food or drink should be given to him, and someone went and gave him food and drink. If the king heard of it, would he not send him a gift? And we are called ‘sons’, as it is written, ‘Sons are ye to the Lord your God.’”^{vi}

In the telling of the story, the second view wins out. “The fact that God’s judgement has condemned an individual to poverty does not allow us to sit in judgement on that person and to desist from giving help; on the contrary, we are challenged to vigorous ethical response to his or her situation.”^{vii}

Aside from (wrongly) blaming “God’s will”, what other “good excuses” against helping could the priest or Levite have come up with on the road to Jericho? One was the thought — and it remains a common thought today — that man’s duty was merely to avoid causing

harm, rather than actually to help someone who had been harmed. This convenient belief can be strengthened by negative formulations of the Golden Rule, which speak only about *not* reciprocating harm rather than reciprocating good.

Certain faiths are more closely associated with the negative rule than the positive one, Confucianism being a notable example. Modesty is a core virtue within the faith and because of this there can be a tendency in Confucian thought towards a minimalist, non-interventionist, ethic. “Doing unto others what you wish done unto you” appears all too presumptuous for some Confucian tastes. An added factor in Confucianism is the influence of Mencius, who believed man to be innately good.^{viii} Such a positive view of human nature inevitably leads to an ethic which emphasises avoiding harm rather than doing good. (Why, after all, be concerned about doing good if one is good already?) A contrasting opinion can be found in Roman Catholicism, whose doctrine of “original sin” paints a gloomy picture of man’s basic instincts. According to orthodox Catholic teaching, as endorsed by St Augustine, people are inherently flawed and can only be saved from a life of sin, not to mention eternal damnation, by conversion to Christianity and the performance of good works. The theory goes that baptism “purges” man of his original sin but doesn’t guarantee him Heaven; that comes only if he lives a good life on earth, and in particular avoids mortal sin. Notwithstanding Mencius’s influence, however, Confucianism has a place for both negative and positive Golden Rules, translating them respectively as *shu* (altruism) and *chung* (conscientiousness). The former undoubtedly has a special place in Confucian thought, as illustrated by this oft-quoted passage from the *Analects*:

Confucius was asked by his student Tzu-kung, “Is there one word which can serve as the guiding principle for conduct throughout life?” Confucius replied, “It is the word altruism (*shu*). Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you.”^{ix}

But does that mean *shu* should be ranked ahead of *chung* (“do unto other what you wish done unto you”) in some sort of ethical hierarchy? Confucius was loath to answer in the affirmative. Indeed, having defined *shu* and *chung*, as alternative manifestations of *jen*, the over-arching virtue of human-heartedness, Confucius tended to blend the two together when it came to expanding on their meaning. Another exchange in the *Analects* illustrates the point:

Chung-kung asked about humanity (*jen*). Confucius said, “When you go abroad, behave to everyone as if you were receiving a great guest. Employ the people as if you were assisting at a great sacrifice. Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you. Then there will be no complaint against you in the state or in the family.”^x

Elsewhere, “the Master” seemed to elevate “positive” manifestations of *jen* above negative ones. He is reported in the *Analects*, for example, saying:

“The man of *jen* is one who, desiring to sustain himself, sustains others, and desiring to develop himself, develops others. To be able from one’s own self to draw a parallel for the treatment of others; that may be called the way to practise *jen*.”^{xi}

And, in the *Doctrine of the Mean*, Confucius is found to remark:

There are four things in the Way of the superior man . . . To serve my father as I would expect my son to serve me . . . To serve my ruler as I would expect my ministers to serve me . . . To serve my elder brothers as I would expect my younger brothers to serve me. . . . To be the first to treat friends as I would expect them to treat me. . . . In practising the ordinary virtues and in the exercise of care in ordinary conversation, when there is deficiency, the superior man never fails to make further effort, and when there is excess, never dares to go to the limit.^{xii}

The difficulty in maintaining a distinction between “positive” and “negative” Golden Rules is understandable, given “not harming someone” can require the performance of certain acts. To avoid causing a pauper to starve, for example, a debt-collector may have to cancel the poor person’s debt. Similarly, helping someone out of trouble can require inactivity. A child who steals to feed his family, for instance, may be helped by not reporting the theft. Or, for a more colourful example, consider this Palestinian Arab folktale of Mary — a revered figure in Islam, as in Christianity — as she fled from persecution with the infant Jesus:

One night, “Our Lady” came to a sheepfold and hid among the ewes which were penned in there. They didn’t stir or utter a sound as she slept, and when she left the next morning she thanked the animals for their protection.

The next night, however, she crept among a herd of goats which, at once, began to bleat. Mary cursed the goats, and straightaway their tails, which up to then were hanging down like those of other animals, lifted and curled upwards.

Since that day, all goats walk with their shameful parts uncovered for all to see.^{xiii}

Compassion sometimes means doing nothing but not always; on this the world’s great faiths do agree. Each faith may lend itself towards either a positive or a negative version of the Golden Rule. But no faith adheres solely to a negative one. Indeed, the focus of religious and moral teaching worldwide seems to be as much on the performance of “good works” as on the non-performance of bad ones.

What “good works” are we talking about? Each faith has its favourites. Islam is replete with stories about the value of aiding beggars and of neighbourly affection. In Buddhism, a distinguishing theme is comforting the bereaved over their loss, while Christianity is notable for its focus on visiting the sick and, perhaps uniquely, prisoners.

Such differences can be over-stated, however, and more often than not, the same “good works” are celebrated in different faiths. “Whoever would tend me, he should tend the sick,” said the Buddha — using a line that could have come straight from the Bible.^{xiv}

Where faiths do differ is in the scope of their compassion, most notably in respect to animals. A clear dichotomy exists between eastern and western faiths regarding care and consideration towards lesser beasts than man. Those faiths that believe man is reborn as animal, and *vice versa*, in a near-endless cycle of reincarnation, are unsurprisingly less discriminatory in their compassion. Where other faiths limit the Golden Rule of reciprocity to the human race, Jainism, Hinduism and Buddhism extend it to all living creatures. “Since all beings seek happiness and shun suffering, one should never do anything to another that one would not like to be done to oneself,” runs one Buddhist text.^{xv}

This moral is hammered home in the *Jakata Stories* where characters are celebrated or condemned, depending on the scope of their compassion. One tale describes a king’s

impalement for a theft he did not commit. As he lay dying, he became aware of his past lives and realised his grisly fate was punishment, not for the alleged theft, but for impaling an insect with an ebony splinter in a former existence.^{xvi}

The Buddha himself provided followers with a positive example of compassion, showing care and consideration towards an injured swan as a child. The then Prince Siddhartha wanted to heal the swan while his cousin Devadatta wanted to execute it, having initially shot it down with an arrow. The king settled the dispute in favour of the prince, and future Buddha, when an elderly sage advised: “No one wants to feel pain or die, and it’s just the same for animals . . .”^{xvii}

For both Buddhists and Hindus, a guiding principle is *ahimsa*, or respect for the sanctity of life — *all* life. Gandhi, for one, was devoted to this principle, as illustrated by many an episode in his autobiography. Once, some Bengali friends invited him to dinner and served up lamb.

“To my mind,” Gandhi told his hosts, “the life of a lamb is no less precious than that of a human being. I should be unwilling to take the life of a lamb for the sake of the human body. I hold that, the more helpless a creature, the more entitled it is to protection by man from the cruelty of man.”^{xviii}

Gandhi’s compassion for all living creatures was taken to extraordinary, and some might say irresponsible, extremes. On more than one occasion, he refused to allow family members who had fallen ill to be treated with animal foods, like chicken broth, eggs or even milk, despite the best advice of local doctors.

“Rightly or wrongly,” he explained, “it is part of my religious conviction that man may not eat meat, eggs, and the like. There should be a limit even to the means of keeping ourselves alive.”^{xix}

Gandhi’s may be a minority view in western faiths. Yet they too discourage cruelty to animals. Islam is perhaps more explicit than Christianity in this regard, with the Qur’an referring to “all the beasts that roam the earth and all the birds that fly with wings” as “nations like your own [which will be] gathered before their Lord [on Judgement Day]”.^{xx}

A textbook on Islamic morals describes a Muslim’s duty thus: “Mercy and kindness should characterise all aspects of the treatment of animals.”^{xxi} The same sentiment is reflected in a *hadith*, or saying attributed to Muhammad, which runs:

A man walking along a path felt very thirsty. Reaching a well, he descended into it, drank his fill, and came up. Then he saw a dog with its tongue hanging out, trying to lick up mud to quench its thirst. The man said, “This dog is feeling the same thirst that I felt.” So he went down into the well again, filled his shoe with water, and gave the dog a drink. So, God thanked him and forgave his sins. The Prophet was asked, “Messenger of God, are we rewarded for kindness towards animals?” He said, “There is a reward for kindness to every living animal or human.”^{xxii}

In contrast, Jesus said little about caring for animals, although many Christians believe such caring to be an essential part of the faith. In recent years, PETA, the lobby group for the ethical treatment of animals, ran a campaign on the theme “Jesus was a vegetarian”, relying

mainly on quotes from the Old Testament about the meat-free Garden of Eden as “God’s perfect world”. The evidence was fairly flimsy and countered by other references in the Bible to the value of fishing, and Jesus’ own practice of meat-eating. But, ultimately, PETA wasn’t trying to rewrite history. Rather, it was seeking to question a tendency to limit the scope of Christian compassion to human beings alone.

Jesus’ message is one of love and compassion [ran PETA’s campaign literature]. Yet there is nothing loving or compassionate about factory farms and slaughter-houses, where billions of animals live miserable lives and die violent, bloody deaths.^{xxiii}

However one defines the Christian position on animal welfare, it should be pointed out that Christianity is not alone in ranking human beings ahead of other life forms in its moral outlook. As one expert in Buddhist ethics points out:

Human beings remain the primary focus of Buddhist teachings and since the basic aim of Buddhism is to guide human beings from the darkness of suffering (*dukkha*) to the light of liberation, this should come as no surprise. In adopting what is in many respects an anthropomorphic position (the view that value belongs to humans alone and nature is to be protected for their sake and no other), the Buddhist view of nature may not be as far removed from the Christian one as is sometimes thought.^{xxiv}

Comparing stances on animal welfare raises a more fundamental question about compassion within the world’s main faiths: How inclusive should it be? And, in particular, are there people undeserving of compassion? Members of rival faiths, for instance? Or foreigners?

All religions seem to have blind-spots, where one category of individual is singled out — to a greater or lesser degree — for special treatment, or rather ill-treatment, because of race, gender or faith. With Confucianism it is women; Hinduism “Untouchables”; Islam apostates, or Muslims who renounce their faith; Catholics Protestants and Protestants Catholics. But is such discrimination inherent to religion? Or is it man-made — a product of human interpretation, or rather misinterpretation, of holy texts?

Debate rages within each faith on these questions. In Hinduism, for example, conservatives claim that each caste has its own moral responsibilities or duties (*dharma*), and that these must be practised distinctly. But reformers, such as Gandhi, argued that all people were subjected to the same universal ethic. Gandhi led by example in this regard, inviting “untouchables” to live with him at his commune home despite the threat of boycotts from other castes.

While some Hindus found a resolution to this dispute that satisfied their beliefs, others did not. Among the latter was Dr B.R. Ambedkar, who believed Hinduism to be hopelessly discriminatory. “To get human treatment, convert yourselves,” he told *dalits* (untouchables). “Convert for securing equality. Convert for getting liberty. . . . Why do you remain in that religion which prohibits you from entering a temple . . . from drinking water from a public well? Why do you remain in that religion which insults you at every step?” asked the politician and social activist, who himself converted to Buddhism before his death.^{xxv}

Defining the scope of compassion has proved equally problematic in other faiths. All historically have discriminated against certain groups. All have chosen, at one time or another, to exclude certain people from their application of the Golden Rule. But before we

rush to judgement on whether one faith is more or less discriminating than another we should consider the example set by the wider world.

When have humans ever applied the Golden Rule universally? As the Australian philosopher Peter Singer points out, there has always been a preference in so-called civilised societies for those “of our own kind”, be it family, friends, or countrymen. Singer argues that there is an “impartial justification” for approving of parental love, as well as friendship, for, he says, “to suppress these partial affections would destroy something of great value”. But, he asks, why should we show more compassion to a neighbour’s child, ten yards away from us, than to a starving Bengali child whose name we shall never know, ten thousand miles away? Singer challenges us to come up with a rational answer to the question, and he does so by picturing scenarios like the following:

[I]magine that on my way to give a lecture, I pass a shallow pond. As I do so, I see a small child fall into it and realise that she is in danger of drowning. I could easily wade in and pull her out, but that would get my shoes and trousers wet and muddy. I would need to go home and change, I’d have to cancel the lecture, and my shoes might never recover. . . . [T]he vast majority of us living in the developed nations of the world have disposable income that we spend on frivolities and luxuries, things of no more importance to us than avoiding getting our shoes and trousers muddy. If we do this when people are in danger of dying of starvation and when there are agencies that can, with reasonable efficiency, turn our modest donations of money into life-saving food and basic medicines, how can we consider ourselves any better than the person who sees the child fall in the pond and walks on?^{xxvi}

Western industrialised nations have proven particularly adept at excluding Africa from their application of the Golden Rule. In areas like trade, development aid and security, we never treat Africans in the manner in which we would like them to treat us. As Bono remarked in the run-up to the 2005 G8 Summit:

Africa makes a fool of our idea of justice; it makes a farce of our idea of equality. It mocks our pieties, it doubts our concern, it questions our commitment. Because there’s no way we can look at Africa — a continent bursting into flames — and if we’re honest conclude that it would ever be allowed to happen anywhere else. You see, deep down, if we really accepted the Africans were equal to us, we would all do more to put the fire out.^{xxvii}

No faith, nor society, should be hasty to claim a monopoly on compassion. Each faith may support the Golden Rule but all have had trouble implementing it universally. That perhaps is how it must be for the Golden Rule is an ideal, and human beings — as the priest and Levite showed — are fallible.

Endnotes

ⁱ Luke 10: 25-37

ⁱⁱ Luke 6.31

ⁱⁱⁱ Dhammapada 10.1 as quoted in Borg, M. (eds) (1997), *Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings*. Berkeley, California: Ulysses Press, p. 15.

^{iv} *Shabbat* 31a.

^v *Hadith of al-Bukhari.*

^{vi} Adapted from translation of Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Batra* 10a, as quoted in Solomon, N. (1994), "Judaism" in J. Holm (ed.) *Making Moral Decisions*, London & New York: Continuum, p. 125-6.

^{vii} Solomon, N., *op. cit.*, p. 126.

^{viii} Mencius's positive view of human nature has never been universally accepted in Confucianism. Another immediate disciple of Confucius, Hsun Tzu, believed people to be inherently flawed, as will be discussed in the chapter on Loyalty. The difference in opinion, however, did not produce any major schism in Confucian ethics. The relative supporters of both Mencius and Hsun Tzu have come to similar conclusions about how people should ideally be.

^{ix} *The Analects* 15:23.

^x *The Analects* 12:2.

^{xi} *The Analects* 6:28.

^{xii} *The Doctrine of the Mean* 13.

^{xiii} Bushnaq, I. (1986), *Arab Folktales*. London & New York: Penguin Books, p. 298-9.

^{xiv} Vinaya, Mahavagga 8.26.3 as quoted in Borg, M. *op. cit.*, p. 21.

^{xv} Keown, D. (1996), *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, pp. 95-6.

^{xvi} Garrett Jones, J. (1979), *Tales and Teachings of the Buddha*, London: George Allen & Unwin, p. 41.

^{xvii} Ganeri, A. (2001), *Buddhist Stories*, London: Evans, pp. 9-10.

^{xviii} Gandhi, M.K. (1927), *An Autobiography: or The Story of My Experiments With Truth*. Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Trust, p. 197.

^{xix} Gandhi, M.K., *op. cit.* p. 206.

^{xx} Qur'an 6:38.

^{xxi} Al-Kaysi, M. I. (1986), *Morals and Manners in Islam*. Leicester, England: The Islamic Foundation, p. 193.

^{xxii} Hadith of al-Bukhari as quoted in O'Sullivan, O. (2002), *One God, Three Faiths*. Dublin: Columba, p. 34.

^{xxiii} See: www.jesusveg.com.

^{xxiv} Keown, D. (2005) *Buddhist Ethics*. Oxford University Press, p.40.

^{xxv} Knott, K. (1998), *Hinduism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, pp. 89-90.

^{xxvi} Singer, P. (2004), *One World, The Ethics of Globalization* (second edition). New Haven & London: Yale University Press, pp. 156-7.

^{xxvii} Keynote speech to British Labour Party conference, 2004, quoted in *The Irish Times*, 30 September 2004.

SELF-DISCIPLINE



Once a samurai came to the master Hakuin and asked, “Master, tell me, is there really such a thing as heaven and hell?”

The master was quiet for some time while gazing at the man. “Who are you?” he asked at last.

“I am a samurai swordsman, and a member of the emperor’s personal guard.”

“You a samurai!” said Hakuin doubtfully. “What kind of emperor would have you for a guard? You look more like a beggar!”

“What?” the samurai stammered, growing red in the face and reaching for his sword.

“Oho!” said Hakuin. “So you have a sword, do you! I’ll bet it’s much too dull to cut off my head!”

The samurai could no longer contain himself. He drew his sword and readied to strike the master.

Hakuin responded quickly, “That is hell!”

The samurai, understanding the truth in the master’s words and the risk he had taken, sheathed his sword and bowed. “Now,” said the master, “That is heaven.”^{xxvii}

Each faith has one virtue with which it is particularly closely associated. With Christianity it is love, with Islam justice, and with Buddhism self-discipline. Of the three, the final pairing is perhaps the best fit. Whereas the other associations are controversial outside of their respective faiths, the link between self-discipline and Buddhism is universally accepted — so much so that the faith’s reputation has suffered.

Many outsiders view Buddhism as an overwhelmingly negative and austere philosophy — a philosophy which, because of its focus on self-restraint, allows, in short, for the least fun. Buddhism’s focus on self-restraint is undeniably intense, and is justified by the *Second Noble Truth*, which states that human suffering is caused by acquisitiveness. Greed, hatred and delusion are the “three roots of evil”, represented in Buddhist artwork by the cock, pig and snake chasing one another.

How Buddhists are meant to deal with their natural impulses is explained in the penultimate and final noble truths: *The Truth of Cessation* and *The Truth of the Path*, both calling for the sublimation of cravings and the focusing on higher ideals. “People compelled by craving crawl like snared rabbits,” said the Buddha. “Those whose compulsions are gone, who are not

attached to food, whose sphere is emptiness, singleness, and liberation, are hard to track, like birds in the sky.”^{xxvii}

Like other faiths based on belief in reincarnation, Buddhism exaggerates the consequences of human faults on the ground that sins cannot be wiped away by confession. Rather, one carries the burden of one’s wrongdoing through this life and the next. The lesson is hammered home in countless morality tales where people are condemned for seemingly minor acts of indiscipline. In the *Jakata Stories*, for example, a king who scolds a leper for obstructing his path is reborn as a leper himself.

The ideal within Buddhism is the ascetic monk, someone like Jajali, “who could perform the severest austerities without flinching”. As legend has it, he once let a family of Kilinga birds make a nest in his tangled and matted hair — and stood still until the chicks had hatched and flown the nest.^{xxvii}

Such bodhisattvas, who try to follow in the footsteps of the Buddha, are compelled not just to take a vow of poverty but one of celibacy. Thus, among trainee monks, “the contemplation of the foul constituents of the body (bile, phlegm, urine, spittle, snot, etc.) was commonly advocated and widely practised.”^{xxvii} The Buddha led by example in this regard, with one story telling of his encounter with a troupe of erotic dancers. The then Prince Siddhartha, “his heart being estranged from sin, took no pleasure in the spectacle and fell asleep.” When he awoke, he saw the women had lain down around him amid “lamps fed with sweet-smelling oil”. As legend has it:

The Bodisat . . . sat cross-legged on the couch, and saw those women with their music truck laid aside and sleeping — some drivelling at the mouth spittle-besprinkled, some grinding their teeth, some snoring, some muttering in their sleep, some gaping, and some with their dress in disorder — plainly revealed as mere horrible occasions of worldly ways.^{xxvii}

Meditative self-restraint is particularly associated with Zen, a form of Buddhism which traces its ancestry through a Chinese branch of the faith called Ch’an. Both the story which opened this chapter, and the following tale, are attributed to Zen Buddhism:

Two monks encountered a young woman trying to cross a stream. The elder monk offered to carry her across, and the woman accepted with gratitude.

On the other side, the two monks bade the woman farewell and continued on their journey in silence for a couple of miles.

Then, the younger monk piped up accusingly: “Why did you pick up that young woman? You know monks are not supposed to go near women?”

To which the older monk replied: “You mean you are still carrying her? I left her at the stream.”^{xxvii}

Non-attachment is recommended not just towards transitory goods, like the pleasures of the flesh. A good bodhisattva is supposed to retreat from all aspects of society — even if it means abandoning friends and family. A salutary tale concerns king Bharata, a sagely ascetic who performed his religious duties beside the Gandaki river until one day he witnessed a pregnant doe fall into the water. There, the doe gave birth and in her misfortune and fright died. The story continues:

Knowing the newborn deer which was floating down the stream to be motherless, Bharata stepped into the stream and rescued the fawn, then started back to his hermitage with the deer under his arm. Although his spiritual duties were numerous, Bharata found time to care for the fawn. Day after day Bharata's affection for the fawn grew as he continued to provide grass and water for its nourishment. . . . Bharata became more and more attached to the young deer as the occasions of fondling or an affectionate kiss multiplied. In the process of showing compassion to the motherless fawn, Bharata finally forgot his spiritual duties and practices and the spiritual advancement that was their goal . . .

When Bharata was near death, he saw the deer sitting by his side exactly like a son lamenting his father's death. As death's veil was spread across Bharata's vision, his mind was fully engrossed with thoughts of the deer and, as a result, he acquired the form of a deer in his new birth! . . . Remembering his past life, Bharata began to lament, "What misfortune I have brought upon myself. I have fallen from the path of the self-realised renouncers. I gave up my wife, family, and kingdom to seek eternal peace in the forest and to become detached from transitory affections and attachments. Instead, I became attached to a deer! Now I have obtained the body of a deer and have fallen far from my devotional practices." Thinking this way, Bharata left his deer family and went off to a forest hermitage to resume his devotional and ascetic practices.^{xxvii}

Bharata is not condemned because he showed compassion to the fawn — nothing less is expected of a bodhisattva — but rather because he became obsessed, consumed, by it. A balancing act is thus required whereby one avoids the extremes of both indifference and devotion towards other beings. Moderation is the key, said the Buddha, in this and all endeavours.

The Buddha spoke from experience, having once almost starved himself to death in a failed effort to gain enlightenment. After falling ill through the experiment, he tried gorging himself on life's pleasures but this proved no more productive. In the end, he concluded one should stay away from extremes, and this he taught to his disciples.

The lesson was particularly relevant for monks who had taken to self-flagellation — an understandable lapse in any faith that idealises hardship. Perhaps the most demanding form of Buddhism is Jainism, whose followers are required to ascend through fourteen stages of difficulty, "from the lowest phase of worldliness" to the "final state of bodiless enlightenment". At the tenth such stage, the Jaina practitioner must overcome fourteen separate afflictions, namely: "Hunger, thirst, cold, heat, bites of flies and mosquitoes, travel, learning, lack of intelligence, lack of gain, (rough) sleeping place, injury, ailment, touch of thorny grass and dirt".^{xxvii}

One monk who relished in such deprivation was Sona, a contemporary of the Buddha who lacerated his feet so that wherever he walked was "dabbled with blood like a butcher's shambles". The Buddha, however, sat him down and said:

"Now how say you, Sona? Formerly when you dwelt at home, were you not skilled at playing stringed music on the lute?"

"Yes Lord."

"Now how say you, Sona? When your lute strings were overtaut, did your lute then give out a sound, was it fit to play upon?"

“No, Lord.”

“Now how say you, Sona? When your lute strings were neither overtaut nor overslack, but evenly strung, did your lute then give out a sound, was it fit to play upon?”

“It was, Lord.”

“. . . [E]xcess of zeal makes one liable to self-exaltation, while lack of zeal makes one liable to sluggishness. . . . Sona, persist in evenness of zeal, be master of your faculties and make that your mark.”^{xxvii}

In advocating moderation, the Buddha echoed the teachings of another eastern sage, Confucius. In the *Doctrine of the Mean*, Confucius argued for the middle course as a benchmark in all actions. “The superior man does what is proper to his position and does not want to go beyond this,” he said.^{xxvii} Instead of drifting from one ambition to the next, people should be “centred” on what else but *jen*, the virtue of human-heartedness. To Confucius, simplicity and restraint were key.

A well-known Chinese story which reinforces the lesson describes how two men once competed in the drawing of a snake. A prize was to go to the artist who finished his drawing first. One of the men, having finished his drawing, saw that his rival was still far behind, and so decided to “improve” his snake by adding feet to it. Thereupon the other man said: “You have lost the competition, for a snake has no feet.”^{xxvii}

By so calling for balance, Confucius frowned on the self-punishment which was associated with eastern religions. Instead of celebrating poverty, he argued that he would make people rich before trying to teach them — this despite being a great believer in education. Crucially, however, he said, poverty must not be avoided if it means “violation of moral principles”. He said: “With coarse rice to eat, with water to drink and with bent arm for a pillow, there is still joy. Wealth and honour obtained through unrighteousness are but floating clouds to me.”^{xxvii}

Both Confucianism and Buddhism, thus, call for self-discipline. But the virtues they advocate differ in degree. On a spectrum between self-indulgence and self-deprivation, Buddhism tends towards the latter, while Confucianism does so less. The same could be said of Christianity and Islam respectively in a western context. Islam is seen, or at least claims, to be more “balanced” in its approach to key desires, like sexual appetite and the desire for wealth, than its Abrahamic counterpart. Whereas Christianity tends towards prohibition, Islam advocates assimilation. Or, as one author puts it, with reference to sexual desire, “Whereas the . . . ideal of Christianity involves a progressive sublimation of the instincts, that in Islam [and Judaism, which it more closely resembles] is a symbol of cosmic harmony.”^{xxvii}

The contrasting approach stems in no small part from the example of the faiths’ founders. According to orthodox Christian teaching, Jesus was a celibate ascetic who condemned wealth. Muhammad, in contrast, took between five and twelve wives (there is some debate over the total), and had a successful career in business. Is it any surprise, therefore, that Islam has a more pragmatic, and perhaps less demanding, ethic? Muslims prefer to call this ethic “just” — and contrast it with the otherworldly and “impractical” ethic of rival faiths. As one Muslim scholar comments, in relation to sexual desire:

Sex is a strong driving force in the human being which demands satisfaction and fulfilment. . . . One way is to satisfy one's sexual need freely with whomever is available and whenever one pleases, without any restraints of religion, morality, or custom. This is the position of the advocates of free sex. . . . The second approach is to suppress, and try to annihilate, the sexual drive; this approach is advocated by ascetic religions and other-worldly philosophies, approaches which lead toward monasticism and an escape from the world. Such advocacy of suppression of a natural appetite, or rather annihilation of its functioning, is contrary to Allah's plan and purpose. . . . The third approach is to regulate the satisfaction of this urge, allowing it to operate within certain limits, neither suppressing it nor giving it free rein. . . . This is the just and intermediate position.^{xxvii}

Christianity, particularly that form of the faith which celebrates celibacy and monasticism, is regarded as somewhat "other-worldly" by Islam, and Jesus as something of an eccentric. One Muslim tale describes how Jesus took shelter in a tent during a violent storm of heavy rain and wind. When he discovered there were women inside, he fled as fast as he could and "being a confirmed bachelor" spent the night instead crouched beside a lion in a nearby cave.^{xxvii}

Islam also claims to have a more balanced approach to wealth than Christianity, counselling against greed and exploitation without demonising the desire for material self-advancement. Commerce is regarded as an integral part of Islamic life, and several passages of the Qur'an detail rules of fair trading. Exploitation, including the earning of interest off the borrowings of fellow Muslims, may be banned. But the accumulation of riches itself is not. This stems in part from a recognition of the dehumanising effects of poverty.

Muslims are reminded in the Qur'an that their ancestors were once driven to killing their children to spare them the certainty of starvation. One scholar of Arab literature remarks: "Perhaps the most touching lines in [pre-Islamic] Arabian poetry are those in which a father struggling with poverty wishes that his daughter may die before him and thus be saved from the hard mercies of her relatives."^{xxvii} A poem from the era, *The Poor Man's Daughter*, opens one of its verses with the words: "She wishes me to live, but I must wish her dead. . . ."^{xxvii}

The Qur'an thus advises Muslims to lift themselves out of poverty. But it warns against turning that "just" desire into greed. Muhammad himself lived a very simple life, shunning the accumulation of luxuries or grand displays of wealth. Among other things, he was perhaps the first great prophet to identify the obscenity of lavish weddings. It is recalled:

In those days, before the spread of Islam, many Arabs gave feasts when their daughters were married. A large number of guests came to the wedding feasts, and the eating and merry-making often went on all night. Rich and costly presents were also given to the newly married couple. But the Prophet (may peace be upon him) was a man of simple tastes. He thought it was wrong to spend money on feasts when many people were too poor to buy bread. So the marriage of Fatima and Ali took place quietly in Medina. The Prophet gave his daughter simple and useful presents. Instead of gold and jewels, he gave Fatima dishes for her house and sheets for her bed.^{xxvii}

Like Muhammad, Jesus condemned greed but his answer to the vice was more radical. “Sell all your belongings and give the money to the poor. I tell you not to worry about the food you need to stay alive or about the clothes you need for your body. Life is much more important than food, and the body much more important than clothes,” Jesus told his disciples.^{xxvii}

In Matthew’s Gospel, Christ famously encountered a wealthy young man who asked, “What good thing must I do to receive eternal life?” Jesus answered:

“If you want to be perfect, go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me.”

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he was very rich.

Jesus then said to his disciples, “I assure you: it will be very hard for rich people to enter the Kingdom of heaven. I repeat: it is much harder for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God than for a camel to go through the eye of a needle.”^{xxvii}

Jesus further promised that “everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters of father or mother or children or fields for my sake, will receive a hundred times more and will be given eternal life”. Urging his disciples to lead by example, he said, “Don’t take anything on your journey except a stick — no bread, no beggar’s bag, no money in your pockets. Wear sandals, but don’t carry an extra shirt.”^{xxvii}

Within Islam, such asceticism is viewed as somewhat extreme. Jesus’ own vow of poverty, like his vow of celibacy, is portrayed in Muslim stories as an eccentric, if not comical, commitment. One such tale runs:

Jesus owned nothing but a comb and a cup. He once saw a man combing his beard with his fingers, so Jesus threw away the comb. He saw another drinking from a river with his hands cupped, so Jesus threw away the cup.^{xxvii}

But how extreme is Jesus’ plea for asceticism? Some Christians believe the “eye of the needle” alluded to in the Gospel is not a metaphor but an actual gate in Jerusalem through which traders passed. As legend has it, a camel could only enter the gate unencumbered and crawling on its knees. If this is true (and it is a big “if” as there is little historic evidence of the gate’s existence) Jesus’ parable takes on a new meaning: A rich man is capable of entering heaven but only if he first disposes of his worldly goods and prostrates himself before God.

A further argument against extreme asceticism in Christianity is that Jesus never meant all followers to meet the same exacting standards of devotion as his disciples. The argument justifies the differing demands made of clergy and laity in Christian churches. The case for limited asceticism is further supported by references in the Old Testament for people to “be fruitful and increase in number” (Genesis 1:28) (something which, if pursued, would be incompatible with celibacy), and to “show restraint” when trying to get rich (Proverbs 23:4–5). It is telling, however, that Christianity contains no parables in which Jesus warns against over-zealous asceticism. This contrasts with Islam, where Jesus (the Muslim prophet) can be found rebuking converts who wept and tore at their clothes. “What sins have your clothes committed? Turn instead to your hearts and reprove them,” the prophet said. Another tale from Islam runs:

Jesus met a man and asked him, “What are you doing?”

“I am devoting myself to God,” the man replied.
Jesus asked, “Who is caring for you?”
“My brother,” replied the man.
Jesus says, “Your brother is more devoted to God than you are.”^{xxvii}

To some readers, many of the above teachings will seem extreme, and many of the ascetic practices advocated in those teachings unattractive. But does that mean we should dismiss what the world’s faiths have to say about self-discipline?

Arguably, we have never been so free in the West; we are free to engage in any number of sexual pleasures, consume no end of alcohol and drugs, make all the money we can and then drown in a sea of luxuries. Perhaps too we have never been so unwilling to listen to religious authorities — with good reason, in some instances, given their recent record of hypocrisy over such matters as sexual morality. But by turning our back on religious instruction, along with its instructors, we perhaps punish ourselves most. One thing is for certain: as religious leaders no longer have the power to discipline us over matters of “personal morality” we must police ourselves. With freedom comes responsibility; this applies as much in the private as in the public sphere. In other words, if we want our lives ethically we cannot merely be slaves to our passions.

A final thought on self-discipline. It is, as we have seen, an antidote, not just to one vice but to many. We have spoken much about greed and lust, and later we shall read how self-discipline — encapsulated in the virtue of mercy — conquers anger. But before we turn to the next virtue, a final vice of indiscipline deserves mention, if only because it is so pervasive in society today, and that is gossip. The vice should not be confused with slander, for whereas the latter involves the telling of malicious falsehoods about others, gossip is the practice of engaging in idle, unconstrained or reckless speech. It is, in short, a folly but a folly with moral consequences. The lesson is hammered home in the *Jakata Stories* in which we read of a tortoise who struck up a friendship with some wild geese.

One day they said to him: “Master tortoise, we two live on Himalaya, on the slope of Bright Peak, a lovely spot, in a golden cave. Do you come thither along with us?”

“Why friends, how could I get there?”

“We will seize hold of you and go along. If only you can keep your mouth shut, there’s nothing you can’t do.”

“Oh, I’ll keep it shut all right,” said the tortoise. “Take me up, and off we go!”

“Good!” said they, and took a stick and made the tortoise grip it with his teeth. Then they two, seizing hold of each end of the stick, mounted up into the air.

As they flew along, some village boys saw him being carried by the wild geese and shouted: “Look! Look! A tortoise carried on a stick by two wild geese!”

Then the tortoise, longing to reply: “What is it to you where my friends are taking me, you rascally rogues?” — just when, thanks to the rapid flight of the wild geese, they were right over the Raja’s palace at Benares — opened his mouth, let go the stick, fell into the open court of the palace and was split in two.

As the story goes, the sudden crash silenced the Raja, a man known for “boundless babbling”. The bodhisattva then spoke:

“O sure the shellback slew himself,
Striving his thoughts to tell.
Safe was he while he grasped the stick,
But when he spoke, he fell.

“O best of energetic men,
Let words be wise and few!
Thou seest how to chattering
This shellback’s death was due.”^{xxvii}

Silence, in the form of meditation, is, of course, a core dimension of Buddhist practice. By sitting still in quiet contemplation, the Buddhist develops feelings of calmness and detachment which he or she takes into ordinary life. Buddhism, however, is not alone in celebrating the virtue of silence. “The man who is simple and slow to speak is near to humanity,” said Confucius.^{xxvii} “Piety is nine-tenths silence and one-tenth fleeing from people,” said Jesus, according to Islamic scripture.^{xxvii} “When one comes to think of it,” said Gandhi, “one cannot help feeling that nearly half the misery of the world would disappear if we, fretting mortals, knew the virtue of silence.”^{xxvii}

On few other matters are the world’s great faiths in such concordance. In unison, they declare — hailing the virtue of self-discipline — that there is a time to speak and a time to shut up. On which note . . .

Endnotes

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^{xxvii} *Dhammapada* 7:3-4 and 24:9 as quoted in Borg, M. (eds) (1997), *Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings*, Berkeley, California: Ulysses Press, p. 43 and 89.

^{xxvii} Amore R.C. and Shinn L.D., (1981), *Lustful Maidens and Ascetic Kings, Buddhist and Hindu Stories of Life*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 148–50.

^{xxvii} Garrett Jones J. (1979), *Tales and Teachings of the Buddha: The Jakata Stories in Relation to the Pali Canon*, London: George Allen & Unwin, p. 76.

^{xxvii} Rhys-Davids, C.A.F. (1998), *Buddhist Birth-Stories*, New Delhi: Srishti Publishers and Distributors, p. 171.

^{xxvii} For another version of this story see: Fashing, D.J. and Dechant D. (2001), *Comparative Religious Ethics: A Narrative Approach*, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, p. 151.

^{xxvii} Amore R.C. and Shinn L.D., *op. cit.*, pp. 174–6.

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^{xxvii} The Doctrine of the Mean 14, as quoted in Wing-Tsit Chan (1963), *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p. 101.

^{xxvii} Fung Yu-Lan (1948), *A Short history of Chinese Philosophy*, New York: The Free Press, p. 100.

^{xxvii} *The Analects* 7:15.

^{xxvii} Ruthven, M. (2000), *Islam in the World* (second edition), New York: Oxford University Press, p. 155.

^{xxvii} Al-Qaradawi Y. (1994), *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*, Indiana: American Trust Publications, pp. 148–9.

^{xxvii} Assfy, Z.H. (1977), *Islam and Christianity*, York, England: William Sessions Ltd, p. 56.

^{xxvii} Nicholson R.A. (1969), *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Cambridge University Press, p. 91.

^{xxvii} Nicholson R.A., *op. cit.*, pp. 91–2.

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- xxvii Luke 12:22–34.
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- xxvii Mark: 6:8–9.
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- xxvii Khalidi, T., *op. cit.*, p. 41 and p. 102
- xxvii Woodward, F.L., *op. cit.*, pp. 107–11.
- xxvii *The Analects* 13:27.
- xxvii Khalidi, T., *op. cit.*, p. 170.
- xxvii Harijan, 24 September 1938.

LOYALTY



Bilal was a Muslim and slave whose master, Umayya, was one of the most important men among the pagans of Mecca. Umayya was a harsh man who would not allow his slaves to follow any religion other than his own, which was the worship of idols. He decided to force Bilal to give up Islam.

Every day at noon, he had Bilal taken out of the city and made him lie on the scorching desert sand under the burning sun. Then Umayya placed a huge stone on top of his chest.

“You’ll stay like that,” he said to Bilal, “until you either die or renounce your religion.”

But Bilal could not deny his faith.

The sun burned down, and the vultures wheeled overhead. Bilal’s mouth was dry and the pain in his chest made it almost impossible for him to breathe. Nonetheless, he held firm. Raising a single finger in the air, he whispered with what seemed like his last breath: “One God, one God.”^{xxvii}

It will not come as a surprise to hear that the world’s major religions demand loyalty. But loyalty to what, or whom? To God or Allah? To a church or a preacher? To family, friends, or the state? The issue is not as straightforward as it may seem, for practising a religion may involve loyalty to a combination of the above. Take Confucianism, for example. Two fundamental virtues in the faith are filial loyalty, and loyalty to the state. It is unclear, however, which should take precedence if and when they clash.

Filial loyalty is described by Confucius as “the root of a man’s character”, and the bedrock of a civilised society. “Never disobey,” the Master said. “When parents are alive, serve them according to the rules of propriety. When they die, bury them according to the rules of propriety and sacrifice to them according to the rules of propriety.”^{xxvii} And again, “In serving his parents, a son may gently remonstrate with them. When he sees that they are not inclined to him, he should resume an attitude of reverence and not abandon his effort to serve them. He may feel worried, but does not complain.”^{xxvii}

Stories of filial devotion abound in Confucian literature. One anecdote runs:

A dutiful boy, worried that his parents would be bitten by mosquitoes, slept naked without covers to encourage the mosquitoes to feed on him, rather than on his parents.^{xxvii}

The social benefits of such loyalty are outlined in *The Great Learning*, which states: “When the individual families have become humane, then the whole country will be aroused toward humanity. When the individual families have become compliant, then the whole country will be aroused toward compliance.”^{xxvii} Mencius put it more bluntly, saying most of the world’s problems would disappear if only children listened to their parents.

As for loyalty to the state, or *li* in Confucianism, the virtue is celebrated as a necessary component of the Heavenly Way — necessary because, left to their own devices, people will inevitably drift towards anarchy. Or so says an influential branch of Confucianism, headed by Hsun Tzu (c 310–237 BCE). If humans were intrinsically good, that is “upright, reasonable and orderly . . . what need would there be for sage-kings and *li*?” he asked. Were all regulative rules removed, and respect for *li* gone “the strong would injure the weak and rob them, and many would do violence to the few and shout them down. The whole world would be in violence and disorder.”^{xxvii} Hence, Hsun Tzu, along with Confucius, encouraged citizens to serve in public office, and pledge loyalty to the state. “A man who has energy to spare after studying should serve his state. A man who has energy to spare after serving the state should study,” runs one Confucian maxim.^{xxvii}

Other faiths have mixed views on such loyalties. In Buddhism and Hinduism, excessive loyalty to either parents or friends is seen as a form of weakness, or as an obstacle on the path to enlightenment. Gandhi believed “all exclusive intimacies are to be avoided. . . . He who would be friends with God must remain alone, or make the whole world his friend.”^{xxvii} Surprisingly, perhaps, Gandhi was enthusiastic about loyalty to the state. “A willing and respectful obedience to the state laws” was a prerequisite for a *Satyagrahi*, or socially concerned religious devotee. As Gandhi put it:

A *Satyagrahi* obeys the laws of society intelligently and of his own free will, because he considers it to be his sacred duty to do so. It is only when a person has thus obeyed the laws of society scrupulously that he is in a position to judge as to which particular rules are good and just and which are unjust and iniquitous. Only then does the right accrue to him of the civil disobedience of certain laws in well-defined circumstances.^{xxvii}

Islam takes the reverse position, celebrating loyalty to friends and family, and doubting the value of loyalty to the state. As the religious scholar Malise Ruthven points out, Islamic *Shari’a*, or religious, law recognises “no corporate entities (like the church or state) which could be treated as persons in law”. A negative consequence of this “has been the lack of legitimacy accorded the public interest in the form of city, state, or any other institution standing between the individual and God.”^{xxvii} Filial loyalty, on the other hand, is seen as a core virtue in Islam, and disobeying one’s parents, particularly one’s mother, a grievous sin. It is recalled:

Once a man came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and asked, “Who is most deserving of my good companionship?” “Your mother,” replied the Prophet. “Who

next?” the man asked. “Your mother,” replied the Prophet. “Who next?” he asked. “Your mother,” replied the Prophet. “Who next?” asked the man. “Your father,” replied the Prophet.^{xxvii}

Friendship is similarly acclaimed in Islam. “A friend has the right to have the following three things forgiven,” says one Muslim scholar, “(a) A transgression in the time of anger; (b) A transgression caused by too much fondness of you, and (c) An unintentional mistake.”^{xxvii} As one Arab proverb, recommends: “If I should find my friend in the wrong, I reproach him secretly; but in the presence of company I praise him.”^{xxvii}

Christianity, likewise, allows for a combination of loyalties. The importance of filial devotion is highlighted in both Old and New Testaments. The fifth of the Ten Commandments given to Moses at Mount Sinai was “honour thy father and mother”.^{xxvii} Jesus subsequently translated this as: “Whoever curses his father or his mother is to be put to death.”^{xxvii} As for loyalty to the state, Christianity is not blind to its value. Jesus himself implicitly accepted the authority of the Roman Empire when he faced his execution without questioning the legitimacy of the sentence under Roman law. “Pay the Emperor what belongs to the Emperor, and pay God what belongs to God,” Jesus famously told his disciples, suggesting Christians can be loyal to both church and state without conflict.^{xxvii}

There is, of course, one form of loyalty that is particularly associated with religions, namely loyalty to belief. This kind of loyalty we call faith. At first glance, faith may not seem like a form of loyalty at all. One might argue it is an accident of birth rather than a chosen disposition. Yet the same can be said of loyalty to one’s family. Faith resembles other loyalties in that it demands steadfastness in the face of adversity. Just as the faults of our parents challenge our filial devotion so too do the troubles of the world challenge our faith, be it faith in God, or in some other ideal. And, as with other forms of loyalty, faith has its means of display, religious worship and prayer among them.

So understood, faith should not be confused with loyalty to a religious institution, although the lines between the two have traditionally been blurred. Indeed, religious leaders have sometimes argued that loyalty to the institution is the same as faith, or loyalty to belief, in God. For part of the last century, the Catholic Church promoted a catechism that answered the question “Who is a Christian?” with the reply: “One who obeys the Pope and the pastor appointed by him.”^{xxvii} In practice, faith and loyalty to an institution like the Catholic Church can prove to be in competition. Sometimes, Catholics give faith priority — when, for instance, they disobey or disagree with the teachings of the Vatican on the basis of their own understanding of what is right. At other times, they give loyalty to the Church priority, when, for instance, they defend actions it has committed that they know to be wrong. The Church has in recent years admitted that tensions exist between, on the one hand, loyalty to the institution and, on the other, faith in the teachings of Christ. Notwithstanding its claims of papal infallibility, it has furthermore suggested that faith should take ultimate priority, condemning its own practice of putting institutional loyalty first in handling, for example, recent clerical sexual abuse scandals.

Another characteristic of faith is that it is not strictly rational. By being loyal to a particular belief system, the faithful ignore evidence suggesting that this belief system may be

incorrect. The classic Christian parable of faith is that of *Doubting Thomas*. It is recalled that Thomas alone among the twelve disciples refused to believe Jesus had risen from the dead.

The other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.” But he said to them, “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with him. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, “Peace be with you.”

Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing.”

Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”^{xxvii}

Faith, thus, should be seen as a special type of loyalty. It is, in a sense, seeing what we want to see, rather than what is. As such, it is regarded by many secularists — particularly those of a rationalist bent — as a vice. But, before addressing such criticism, consider how the world’s religions balance faith with other loyalties. In each religion, faith is presented as a special form of loyalty — and one which generally supersedes all others. Muslims are reminded of the primacy of faith in their declaration — made many times a day — that “there is no god but God and Muhammad is the messenger of God”. Bilal, the historical character of whom we read at the opening of this chapter, provides inspiration to many followers of Islam, particularly in the United States where the Abyssinian slave became a folk-hero of the black Muslim movement. As the story goes, Bilal was rescued from certain death by Abu Bakr, a friend of Muhammad’s who had taught Bilal about Islam. The freed slave was later rewarded for his loyalty to the Prophet with the honour of calling Muslims to worship for the first time ever from the roof of the Ka’ba.

It was no small act of defiance for Bilal to follow Muhammad so. At that time, Muslims had a stark choice: Be loyal to one’s family or be loyal to Allah. Indeed, Islam traces its roots to a decision by members of the Quraish tribe from which Muhammad sprung to exchange a familial loyalty for a religious one. The Prophet’s earliest followers helped him to establish his own community, or *umma*, by raiding the caravans of their (non-Muslim) kinsmen — a radical departure from Bedouin custom. For Abu Bakr, loyalty to Islam meant going so far as facing down his own son, Abdur Rahman, in the battle of Badr. Abdur Rahman converted to Islam after the war in which the Muslims and pagans were effectively fighting by different rules, as this exchange between father and son illustrates:

Abdur Rahman looked at Abu Bakr and said, “Father, when you and I fought on opposite sides at the battle of Badr, you came within reach of my sword many times, but I did not kill you because you were my father!”

Abu Bakr replied, “My son, if you had come within reach of my sword at the battle of Badr, I would have killed you! You were an enemy of Islam then, and I would never let even my love for you come between me and Islam.”^{xxvii}

The idea of a borderless community, in which people are bound together by religious loyalty, was alien to a culture that valued family bonds above all else. Today, the notion of *umma* remains perplexing when convention decrees — in the democratic world, at least — that one’s principal loyalty should be to the state. Loyalty to *umma* explains why Muslims in the West feel particularly aggrieved at the suffering of their brethren in Palestine, and elsewhere. This notional loyalty between Muslims, however, should not be confused with loyalty to a spiritual leader or church. *Umma* is not an institution. It has no spokesperson. It is merely an idea — which forms part of Islamic belief — to the effect that Muslims are united in their worship of Allah. It is, in short, a notion of collective faith.

Loyalty to *umma*, therefore, should not be confused with *jihadism*, or the cult-like fanaticism behind such groups as Al-Qaeda. Muslim fanatics claim to be following in the footsteps of Abu Bakr and other holy warriors by turning their backs on — or turning against — their families and their communities. In reality, however, they merely create new bonds of earthly loyalty, be it to an organisation, a spiritual leader, or, worse still, a terrorist “cell”. Members of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood, for example, are grouped into “families and battalions”, while “young Palestinians who today volunteer for suicide missions are organised into ‘friendship packs’ who may act as family substitutes, while holding them to their decision.”^{xxvii} By devoting themselves to fellow extremists above all else, Muslim fanatics only go to prove their disloyalty to God, and Islam.

But what of other religions? Christianity may not have its equivalent of *umma*. Yet Jesus was unequivocal, notwithstanding what he said about filial loyalty, that family bonds must take second place to faith. “Whoever loves his father or mother more than me is not fit to be my disciple,” he said. “Whoever loves his son or daughter more than me is not fit to be my disciple.”^{xxviii}

Significantly, however, these words were spoken to the Twelve Apostles rather than to the crowds who went to hear Jesus speak. To this day, many Christians believe the Apostles — and their latter-day descendants, the clergy — must obey a different, and more exacting, ethic than other followers of Christ. It is important to note, moreover, that the theme of choosing religion over family is not as pronounced in Christian literature, if it is there at all. The contrast with Islam can be seen in the telling of the story of the great flood. In the Bible, Noah escaped with his wife and sons, who would become “the ancestors of all the people on earth”.^{xxviii} But in the Qur’an, one of the sons gets left behind and is drowned, leaving Noah somewhat dismayed. It turns out the son was secretly a disbeliever who feigned faith in public, and this fact was conveyed to Noah by Allah. According to one Islamic scholar:

Almighty Allah wanted to tell his noble prophet that his son was not of his people because he did not believe in Allah. Blood is not the true bond between people.^{xxviii}

What Islam and Christianity do have in common is a culture of martyrdom. Neither religion is short of historical examples of followers choosing to die rather than renouncing their faith. Muhammad, in fact, was admiring of the loyalty which Christians showed to their beliefs in the face of persecution by fanatical Jews in the sixth century. When Muslims were in turn being persecuted, the Prophet “consoled and encouraged his followers by the

example of the Christians at Najran, who suffered ‘for no other reason but that they believed in the mighty, the glorious God’.”^{xxvii}

Judaism, likewise, celebrates faith-inspired martyrdom, as encapsulated in figures like Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph (50–135 CE), who was arrested by the Romans, and tortured to death. It is recalled:

When Hadrian issued the decree imposing the death penalty on anyone who devoted himself to its study, Rabbi Akiba gathered his disciples wherever he could so that their studies could continue. He was asked: “Are you not afraid of the government?”

He replied with a fable: “A fox went to a river and saw the fish scurrying around in great fear. The fox said to them, ‘What do you fear and from whom are you fleeing?’ The fish replied, ‘We flee the nets which men have spread before us.’ The fox then said, ‘It would be better if you came out on dry land and we would live together just as my forefathers once lived together with your forefathers.’ But the fish answered, ‘Are you he who is reputed to be the wisest of animals? You are not the wisest but the most foolish. If we are afraid of being caught here in the water, where is the place of our life . . . how much more should we be afraid on dry land where we would die?’”

Rabbi Akiba finished his fable by saying: “The same is true of the honesty of learning. If we are in danger of being caught when we are engaged in the study of Torah, how much greater would be the danger if we should cease to devote ourselves to it?”^{xxvii}

In eastern religions, faith tends to be celebrated through deities rather than martyrs. A classic example is Yudhishtira who, at the end of the Hindu epic of the *Mahabharata*, is alone in the world but for a stray dog. Having passed every test of virtue thrown at him, Yudhishtira is greeted by the God Indra who promises to escort him to heaven. Yudhishtira won’t depart, however, unless he can take the dog with him — a request that does not go down well with Indra, as dogs are considered pollutants in traditional Indian society. The narrative continues:

“O King! [says Indra.] You have won immortality and a status equal to mine; all the felicities of Heaven are yours today. Do cast off this dog. In this there will be no cruelty.”

Yudhishtira remained unswayed. They had reached the end of the world. He saw in the helpless gaze of the dog, trembling in the stark, desolate surroundings, an appeal not to be abandoned. Filled with compassion [*anukrosha*], Yudhishtira was not able to disregard this silent cry for the sake of his own happiness. Dismayed by this unexpected obstacle to his mission, Indra lost his temper and railed:

“Not only is this concern for a dog not required of you as a paragon of justice, but it seems that you, who have been able to renounced everything — the love of kingdom, the love of a wife and brothers — have morally stumbled at this last moment and become ensnared and blinded by the irrational love [*moha*] for a dog!”

Refusing to be shamed, Yudhishtira retorted,

“O Indra, I think the sin of abandoning one who is loyal [*bhaka*] is greater than many other sins put together. I cannot leave the dog behind.”

[It was then] the dog revealed himself as *dharma* in disguise and explained the entire incident as a final test of moral worth — a test that Yudhisthira passed yet again, with flying colours . . .^{xxvii}

The lesson is the same across all faiths: People must be steadfast in their convictions, even if it hurts. As the *Bhagavad Gita* declares: “Better is one’s own law [*dharma*], though imperfectly, carried out than the law of another carried out perfectly. Better is death in the fulfilment of one’s own law, for to follow another’s law is perilous.”^{xxvii}

Secularists might concede some admiration for the spirited faith, or *loyalty to belief*, of Bilal, Rabbi Akiba and Yudhishtira. However, such loyalty tends to be perceived in the secular world as at best misplaced, and at worst downright dangerous.

That heinous crimes have been committed in the name of faith is undeniable. But is that alone a reason to condemn the virtue? In criticising faith, secularists — or more particularly rationalists — tend to ignore two facts. The first is that heinous crimes have been committed historically in the name of other loyalties, such as familial loyalty, loyalty to the state, and loyalty to what the philosopher John Gray describes as “Enlightenment ideals of progress”. Gray notes:

The role of humanist thought in shaping the past century’s worst regimes is easily demonstrable, but it is passed over, or denied, by those who harp on about the crimes of religion. Yet the mass murders of the twentieth century were not perpetrated by some latter-day version of the Spanish Inquisition. They were carried out by atheist regimes in the service of Enlightenment ideals of progress. Stalin and Mao were not believers in original sin. Even Hitler, who despised Enlightenment values of equality and freedom, shared the Enlightenment faith that a new world could be created by human will.^{xxvii}

A puzzling aspect of secular criticism of faith is that it tends to see both logic and merit in all forms of loyalty but loyalty to religious belief. The philosopher and outspoken critic of religion Peter Singer, for instance, defends familial loyalty on the grounds that it encourages loving relationships in society. He rightly points out that any attempt to eradicate parental favouritism for their children “would have high costs and would require constant supervision or coercion. . . . If we were to engage in such a campaign, we may well bring about guilt and anxiety in parents who want to do things for their children that society now regards as wrong. Such guilt will itself be a source of much unhappiness.”^{xxvii} Yet, surprisingly, Singer ignores the fact that the same argument can be made in defence of faith, or loyalty to a particular belief system.

For religious believers, faith provides the impetus for all sorts of good works, including loving and caring for family, friends, and the broader populace. Any attempt to eradicate faith would have a high cost. It would also require constant supervision or coercion and, would be unlikely, ultimately, to prove successful; not even Stalin’s communist pogroms managed to eradicate loyalty to religious belief in twentieth-century Russia. Moreover, campaigning against faith would undoubtedly bring about guilt, anxiety and unhappiness in those who wished to exercise their religious loyalty.

Rationalists, thus, appear to have a choice: either accept faith as a beguiling but necessary aspect of human life, or seek to eradicate all forms of loyalty — religious, familial, social, and so on — and reap the consequences.

This brings us to the second point ignored by secular critics of faith, namely that faith is intrinsic to all moral theories. As the philosopher Richard Rorty points out there is no way of answering the question “Why not be cruel?” without engaging in a leap of faith, be it the “leap” of creating a concept of human rights, or the “leap” of developing a notion of secular humanism. Much as we would like to think otherwise, there is “no noncircular theoretic backup for the belief that cruelty is horrible”,^{xxvii} Wittgenstein appeared to have reached the same conclusion when he wrote that, in order to achieve enlightenment, man had to “surmount” certain propositions. “He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.”^{xxvii}

That is not to say reason should be banished from the study of ethics. Rather, moral philosophers should be honest about the limits of rationality. Perhaps too they should recognise faith as the virtue it is. After all, without some continuity of thought, resilience of mind, or loyalty to belief, one is condemned to a life of equivocation and passivity, like the protagonist in the Aesopian fable of *The Boy and the Nettle*. By failing to act with conviction, take a leap of faith, and “grasp the nettle”, the boy is stung over and over again, becoming a pathetic victim of circumstance.

Logic advises against grasping the nettle; the boy knows touching it stings. But doing the logical thing — the unfaithful thing — isn’t always best. So the fable tells us, and it is not alone in doing so. Popular culture bombards us with messages about the value of “mind over matter”, or “thinking oneself into doing”. The drinks company Guinness recently ran an advertising campaign revolved around the single word, “Believe”, and coupled it with images of extraordinary human endeavours.

Such secular sermonising celebrates one brand of faith, and there are many others. But what they all share in common is a belief — a sustained, unshakeable belief — in the unbelievable. Such is faith: holding firm to one’s convictions when all the evidence — the probability of failure, for example, or the likelihood of persecution — says otherwise.

Rationalists may balk at the idea but faith is perhaps needed today more than ever. In a world of seemingly intractable conflict, endemic poverty, and insurmountable injustice, is there any virtue more urgently required than sustained, unshakeable belief in the possibility of change? Is there anyone more desperately needed than a Confucius, someone once described as “the one who knows a thing cannot be done and still wants to do it”?^{xxvii}

Where rationalist critics of faith have a point is where they criticise extreme zealotry, or *blind faith* — but in this they are not alone. Were they to open their eyes, they would find support for their case within the very religions they condemn.

Confucius, for example, said faith should be tempered by four other virtues — wisdom, propriety, righteousness, and *jen* (human-heartedness). Loyalty to belief did not define the Superior Man, said Confucius, and in doing so, the philosopher echoed the words of Jesus. The latter said:

Take the case, my brothers, of someone who has never done a single good act but claims that he has faith. Will that faith save him? If one of the brothers or one of the sisters is in need of clothes and has not enough food to live on, and one of you says to them, 'I wish you well: keep yourself warm and eat plenty,' without giving them these bare necessities of life, then what good is that? Faith is like that: if good works do not go with it, it is quite dead.^{xxvii}

In Islam, faith is also inextricably linked to good works. As one textbook on Islamic morals puts it:

The notion of "proper" conduct may not, in Islam, be separated from the notion of "good" deeds, nor from "faith" and "devotion". Faith and good deeds are both necessary in this world for a prosperous and ideal society in which there is mutual and shared responsibility. And in the Hereafter, faith and good deeds are the necessary conditions for forgiveness and salvation, for admission to Paradise.^{xxvii}

What each religion acknowledges is that faith, notwithstanding its importance, should sometimes yield to other virtues. If a believer encounters someone in need, for example, he or she should offer help rather than mere prayers. By so demonstrating charity, the believer does not abandon faith but rather opts to prioritise another virtue in that particular instance.

But charity is not the only virtue to which faith should sometimes yield. Audacity is another, and it is to it we now turn.

Endnotes

^{xxvii} Adapted from Khattab, H. (1987), *Stories from the Muslim World*, London: Macdonald, pp. 26-7.

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^{xxvii} *The Analects* 4:18.

^{xxvii} Richards, C. (1997), *Illustrated Encyclopaedia of World Religions*, Dorset: Element Books, p. 75.

^{xxvii} *The Great Learning* 9.

^{xxvii} Cua A.S. (1998), *Moral Vision and Tradition: Essays in Chinese Ethics*, Catholic University of America Press: Washington DC, pp. 296-7.

^{xxvii} *The Analects* 19:13.

^{xxvii} Gandhi, M.K. (1927), *An Autobiography: or The Story of My Experiments With Truth*, Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Trust, pp. 16-17.

^{xxvii} Gandhi, M.K., *op. cit.*, pp. 391-2.

^{xxvii} Ruthven, M. (1997), *Islam: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, pp. 88-9.

^{xxvii} Al-Qaradawi Y. (1994), *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*, Indiana: American Trust Publications, p. 232.

^{xxvii} Abu Laylah, M. (1999), *Faith, Reason and Spirit*, Cairo: Al-Falah Foundation, p. 111.

^{xxvii} Buckhardt, J.L. (1984), *Arabic Proverbs: or The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, London: Curzon Press, p. 245.

^{xxvii} Exodus 20:1-17.

^{xxvii} Matthew 15:4.

^{xxvii} Matthew 22: 15-21.

^{xxvii} Küng, H. (2001), *The Catholic Church*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, p. 183.

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- xxvii John 20:24–29.
- xxvii Whyte, R. (1966), *Ten Stories from Islam*, Lahore: Pakistan Branch, Oxford University Press, pp. 20-21.
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- xxvii *Bhagavad-Gita* III 35.
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- xxvii *The Analects* 14:41.
- xxvii James 2:14-17.
- xxvii Al-Kaysi, M. I. (1986), *Morals and Manners in Islam*, Leicester, England: The Islamic Foundation, p. 20.



Home

Contributor

Joe Searson

NCCA,
35 Fitzwilliam Square,
Dublin
D02 KF06,
04/03/2014

Joe Searson
Chairperson of
Quality National School
Ethics
County Clare

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find my reply to the consultation on Education about Religious and Beliefs(ERB) and ethics

Consultation on Education about Religious and Beliefs(ERB) and ethics

The proposed approaches to the curriculum for ERB and Ethics I believe will not be workable in Catholic schools. Catholic schools have adapted to demographic change with significant recent net migration into Ireland and many schools have shown leadership in integrating migrants into local communities. They have been to the fore in areas of social inclusion, special needs and traveller education. From the recent ESRI study, non-Catholic schools have a high proportion of children from professional, managerial and technical backgrounds and 80% of parents are of the top incomes in the country.

Catholic schools currently make provision for inter-religious and inter-cultural learning and awareness in terms of their policies, ethos, leadership, the programme in religious education and across other curricular areas. Catholic schools are committed to inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue is clearly outlined in the recently launched *Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* and in the *Veritas* programme *Grow in Love*. The ERB and Ethics proposal will not allow the opportunity for children to be formed by experience of a specific religious identity. This is a right according to the Irish Constitution, *Bunreacht na hÉireann*, article 42.1 and also parental choice is recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in United Nations and European legal instruments.

Regards


Joe Searson





Home

Contributor

John and Margaret Mallon

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	John and Margaret Mallon
Position (if applicable)	Text
Organisation (if applicable)	
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Telephone	0749139241
Email	
Date	30th March 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish

Written submissions will be published on the website of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper, will be used to develop a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, subject to the approval of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

We think that there will be enough taught about other faiths in the new Religion Programme approved by the Catholic Church for use in the Primary School.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

We think that our children will miss a lot of Catholic faith formation if it is just one of a number of religions being taught about at school. It would not be the same for children if the school was not involved in the preparation for sacraments.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

My husband and I are Catholic parents and grandparents. Our children and grandchildren all attend Catholic primary schools. We think that parents should be allowed to have their children educated in the Catholic Faith at school as well as at home and in the community. This has been the way since we were at school and we see no reason why it should change. It is a very good system. I believe there is a new Education Programme now endorsed by the church and this teaches about other religions, so the children will have their opportunity therein. We would be very worried if this new subject was brought in as it would take away from the current Religion teaching.



Home

Contributor

John Colgan

Submission to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) on a proposed addition to the subject mix in National Schools (and optionally in other primary schools which are wholly privately funded) of a subject entitled Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics (henceforth, ERB&E).

This submission is from an Irish parent and grandparent, who has no vested interest in schools of any kind.

As a prefatory observation, I note that while Constitutionally parents have the primary and an inalienable role in the matter of the education of their children, that role has been essentially usurped by bullying Church interests who are interested in the continuance of their institutional and, residually, personal welfare. Since the foundation of this State, Church and Department of Education have colluded in determining educational policy and practice and have colluded in bypassing the elected Parliament of the people, by making laws and regulations without the consideration and consent, or even acquiescence, of the Oireachtas and in breach of the Constitution and some statute law, especially the Statutory Instruments Act, 1947. A modern example is the manner in which “Community Schools” were initiated about 1970.

This is reflected in the excessive representation of Church interests, whether directly or indirectly, in the composition of your own Council. It is not surprising that the definitions you have compiled and published in your consultation paper have been drafted from a Church-interest perspective. I would ask your Council to reflect on this and make appropriate changes.

1. I share the consensus that there has been, and is, a rapid change in Ireland in the mix of religious denominations, including those practising no religion, both denominational and cultural.

I belong to the fastest growing segment of Irish folk: those who profess no religion; this segment - despite the flawed, offensive national Census question on religion and the interpretation put on the data by the CSO and the commentariat - now outnumber all the members of all the ‘Protestant’ denominations in Ireland.

2. While those members of households who have been classified (by the persons who complete the census form for all) as Catholics have grown in number between the census of 2006 and that of 2011 for the reason that the national population has grown, their market share has declined. I expect it to decline further. Moreover, there is a prospect that the census of 2021 will more realistically reflect religious practice, rather than religious ‘pie in the sky’, in the question or questions on religion it poses.
3. When contrasted with the realities of life and religion-related choices made by Irish, in the main “Catholic” residents, it’s clear that the census data is akin to wishful thinking by those who funnelled respondents into the answers given. Several groups and individuals who rely, however marginally, on census data on religion complain of, or are exasperated by, the misleading nature of the current census’s religion question’s answers. Among these groups: teachers, undertakers and allied trades; marriage solemnisers.

The religion question on the Census due to be held in April, 2016, continues to be flawed:

- *It insults a segment of those charged with answering it (for all the householders, hotel manager, etc) by presuming that everyone must have, or ought to have, a religion;*
 - *The CSO classifies those without a religion who logically pass the question “What is your religion?” by as belonging ‘other religions’ instead of belonging to the ‘having none’ segment;*
 - *It includes in the list, Islam, which is not a religious denomination;*
 - *It adds, this time, a new category ‘Orthodox’, an adjective, without stating whether they mean Orthodox Jew, Greek Orthodox or Russian Orthodox;*
 - *It lists the possible answers not in the usual alphabetical order (which tends to gain most support – or a ‘bonus’ - for the first item in the list) but starts with Catholic zealots’ preferred choice, Roman Catholic.*
 - *No written guidance is given on how to answer the question, but enumerators (in 2006) were advised to tell enquiring heads of households to fill in the religious denomination given a person near birth.. We know what that means.*
 - *It remains absurd that the religion of infants and young children are taken as a religion of choice and used for policy purposes.*
4. The changing mix of religious disposition has been brought about by the acceleration of conventional immigration from within and without the EU and the rest of the world; and emergency immigration of refugees, or economic migrants from troubled countries delivering us refugees.

It has also been brought about by the very fast decline in religious practice among the indigenous Irish and their aversion to becoming priests; the latter is the consequence of multifarious factors, including the negative correlation of religious practice and belief with a person’s standard of education, contempt for and scepticism of the predominant Church, the Roman Catholic (RC) Church, brought about by various scandals, growing awareness (since it recently described itself as a State for the purposes of avoiding scrutiny of the criminal activities of its officers) that it is a foreign, temporal power being exercised excessively in our republic; and by perceived declining standards of competence in, and consequential declining respect for, Church leaders.

It is also due to more intensive international mobility of indigenous citizens and by ready access to global communications which often promote uncivilised behaviour.

5. At the outset, I would counsel the NCCA to have regard for the Constitutional framework, which bears more heavily in Education than in most areas of legislation, for which there is a paucity. The Council's consultative document is much too thin in this respect and favours, when it suits, the definitions of Church interests when they differ from law-compliant definitions.
6. The legislative framework for primary schools still has as its bedrock, the Stanley letter of ca 1830, which constrains all National Schools, ie, primary schools in receipt of public funding to, in the main, (a) compartmentalised, and optional religious instruction – now fashionably called 'faith formation' and also known as indoctrination (RI) and secular instruction; (b) an obligation to take children as pupils without discrimination as to religious denomination; (c) and obligation not to use the school for religious advertising.
7. Elsewhere, here I write of the competing demands for a share of class-contact time in schools. The Council is reminded that "the State shall.. as guardian of the common good, require.. that children receive a certain minimum education, moral, intellectual and social." [Article 42.3.2 of the Constitution]
8. 'Religious education' is not part of the desired, minimum education which all children must receive, and, by implication, which the State must provide freely to them or for them. There is no explicit obligation on the State to provide either Religious Instruction or Religious Education; that duty lies on parents. [Article 42.1.1]. *Regrettably, the 1937 Constitution does not acknowledge the right of parents to prefer to provide, or provide for, no RE or RI for their children.*
9. In the circumstances where families who adhere to no denomination are the fastest growing in number, and who, in former times would have been bullied, inducted as infants, culturally induced or compelled to belong to a denomination where they received a moral education hitched to RI, there is now a need to provide autonomous moral education in primary schools – and probably for all - as a routine subject. The provision of publicly-funded moral education, in my view (and corroborated by the Constitution), trumps that of religious education (ie, education about religions) and RI (indoctrination in an Institutional Church's interest) in all publicly funded schools.
10. While there is merit in teaching about different religions and competing personal moral frameworks such as humanism, the necessity to do so need not be uniform across the country. Clearly in areas, such as Balbriggan, Co Dublin, where there are many immigrants with an alien culture - including religious denominations - in the local schools, there is a greater need. In contrast, there are many rural communities where the imminent need is negligible and there may be more compelling demands, such as for education in Environmental Science.
11. Optionally, there's a point about whether primary school is not the place to teach ERB&E: perhaps secondary school is the place to teach it? It is arguable that if RI was taught in a compartmentalised way as laid down in the Stanley letter, and which would be a good fit with the Constitutional provisions of Article 44.2.4, very young children need not be aware of, and made aware of, differences in the religions of their class peers.
12. While the NCCA's mooted proposals for ERB&E are made in isolation, there are pressing demands for other subjects which are also considered meritorious, perhaps more so. Among these are a European mainland language; I am very aware that we are now 43 years in the EU and still no foreign language is routinely taught in our National Schools, the optimal place to learn it. *I must ask: why has the NCCA not prioritised this? Virtually every peer-country in the EU provides for the teaching of one or more foreign languages in primary school.* Their absence here has had adverse consequences for the pattern of our emigration - which is predominantly to Anglophone countries, which are mainly outside the EU and adversely affects emigrants' pension rights.
13. Neither is science or knowledge of elementary civil rights and obligations routinely and formally taught in primary schools. *I am conscious that the latter is not taught, in part, because of a conflict of interest for Church persons, their agents and their zealous advocates who either subversively or subconsciously trump civil law with foreign law. That they are allowed to do this at the expense of the Exchequer is outrageous.*
14. Good and relevant education is perceived as a competitive factor in economic terms. We haven't got it.
15. I have familial experience of elementary schooling in Montreal, in the Province of Quebec, Canada, which I cite to contrast with Ireland. There the school week is five hours longer than in the same family's former, North Kildare, school. No RI of any kind is provided in the school; it is provided for those who want it in the church of their choosing; this effectively frees up at least another 2.5h a week for secular subjects by comparison with Ireland and it also give parents the freedom to practise and to inculcate their contemporary religious values into their children according to their wishes, without heed of birth-religion, and in the sure knowledge that whatever RI is given is authentic and properly accredited. There is a values-in-common ethos in the school. Each subject is taught by a different or specialist teacher, who may teach more or less hours than the pupil's class time in a week; this is similar to the scheme in Irish second-level schools. Every second day is entirely through French. Either Mandarin or Swimming is optional. *Self-evidently, this would not work in sub-economic rural schools as Ireland now knows them. All the neighbourhood children walk or cycle to the school, which on this account makes it larger and more viable.*

There is no bussing to different denominationally-overseen publicly-funded schools which provide scandalous, segregation of neighbouring children on a denominational basis. Irish national schools are notionally managed by, whether directly or otherwise, local priests who are beholden to State-funded teachers to provide RI. This, I contend, has meant that there is inadequate local managerial influence over working

hours and other conditions of employment as one would normally expect in any employer/employee relationship. The employer is the weaker for it.

16. There is general acceptance that there is curriculum overload in our National, and perhaps secondary schools. Adding a new subject – whatever its merits - will, without increasing the school day, involve the curtailment or displacement of other subjects, and thus be a necessary consideration for the Minister, or - with the Minister's consent with the approbation of Dail and Seanad, as the Constitution and the Statutory Instruments Act, 1947, require - the school manager.
17. It *appears* to me that there is too much cross-country uniformity in the subject mix and times given to them in Irish National Schools and, for at least the reason given above. But perhaps there is more teacher discretion exercised that I conceive of, for the reason that it escapes measurement in schools.
18. At present, a regulation, improperly and disingenuously called 'guideline', which was issued by the Minister or Department of Education, directs the Boards of Management of National Schools to provide (or provide for?) no fewer than 2.5 hours a week of time devoted to Religious Instruction (RI); I am not aware of any comparable regulation of any secular subject in the school, *which makes this one discriminatory on ground of religious status.*
19. This RI 'guideline' and all other de-facto regulations, including the ignominious Rules for National Schools, 1965, have been made by illegally disregarding the provisions of the Statutory Instruments Act, 1947, which obliges publication of any order or regulation as a Statutory Instrument (SI) to the Houses of the Oireachtas and to the public and to secure the approval of the Oireachtas for them before they become into effect.
20. SIs have the benefit of being publicly accessible, and provide within them a paper trail of under whose hand they were published, repealed or amended and so on in an orderly way. For those intent on subverting our constitutional and parliamentary system, they are an impediment to having their way. *There once was a continuing Statutory Instruments Committee of the Seanad which examined each putative SI in a critical manner and reported on it. That SI Committee has been discontinued; it ought to be restored.*
21. Regulations are secondary legislation. An unauthorised law-initiating body which by-passes the Oireachtas is in breach of Article 15.2.1 of the Constitution:

The sole and exclusive power of making laws for the State is hereby vested in the Oireachtas: no other legislative authority has power to make laws for the State.

22. Regrettably, no government has yet to put on a statutory basis specific crimes for deliberate breaches, or subversion of, the Constitution, but for the sole exception: the manner Minister for Justice Dermot Ahern created a crime for blasphemy and for the same reason: it's explicitly (or implicitly) so in the Constitution. *This has the appearance of being another incidence of discrimination on grounds of religion; in other words, if it's in the interests of the/a Church, the State will create an appropriate statutory criminal offence, but if it's not, it will be ignored and left to private initiative – expensive private initiative – to exercise.*
23. Additionally, on the face of it, by making regulations giving priority to RI in publicly funded National Schools, the Department and Minister for Education is in breach of Article 44.2.3 of the Constitution:

The State shall not impose any disabilities or make any discrimination on the ground of religious profession, belief or status.

24. RI, voluntarily taken up by pupils at their parents' or guardians' or older pupils' discretion, is reasonably seen as complementary subject to ERB&E. The NCCA is urged to make recommendations relating to both subjects to the Minister simultaneously. It would be imprudent to make firm proposals for ERB&E, while leaving a free field to RI.
25. The new subject you propose includes 'religion'. However, under the Education Act, 1998, Section 32.2 (d), the 'patron' is allowed to have a programme during school hours for a reasonable time. And your definition of Religious Education (RI) includes RI as a subset. This is totally unacceptable. It clearly sets out to circumvent, in the usual preselytising manner, the Constitutional provisions in Article 44.2.4:

"Legislation providing State aid for schools shall not discriminate between schools under the management of different religious denominations, **nor be such as to affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending religious instruction at that school.**" [My emphasis]

26. I contend that –
A child is prejudicially affected if RI is part and parcel of RE or ERB&E.
A child is prejudicially affected if public moneys are used to provide RI to some class peers of his while he is left 'twiddling his thumbs'.
A child is prejudicially affected if he is made something of a pariah of, by being left at the end of the class etc.
A child who does not attend RI is prejudicially affected if while his peers receive publicly funded RI, he does not receive a like investment for some other subject.
27. In my opinion, the kind of second-class treatment the Catholic Primary School Managers' Association envisages for children who decided they don't want RI in "their" schools. (I have in mind the CPSMA's web-based guide for priest-managers) is unconstitutional on one or more of the above grounds. Leaving

children whose parents do not want them indoctrinated to sit in a class where RI is being given at public expense is not an acceptable arrangement. It is *de facto* proselytising. A religion-independent Minister for Education would make conditions under which public funding for such schools would be withdrawn.

28. Patrons and patrons' agents ought to be restricted to RI only; the presumption that they are impartial in respect of competing life philosophies is naïve. It needs to be given at the end of the school day, along with all the other trappings of indoctrination, such as prayers, school masses, hymn-singing, whether in school or chapels and 'nativity plays'.
29. Current practice in primary schools provides for one person/teacher to teach all subjects to a class for a year. The NCCA ought to have regard for the capacity of teachers from publicly-funded teacher training colleges carrying such provocative and partisan names as "Mary Immaculate College" to provide even-handed education about religions and humanism. I invite the NCCA to recommend a kind of journeyman teacher of the proposed new subject, moving from school to school in a manner which may still apply to teachers of elocution and dancing. Many persons would feel more comfortable if there was a mix of teachers in the school of different or of no religion. The current practice of ensuring compliance among prospective teachers with the religious beliefs or disposition of the school patrons does not sit well with an open approach to the proposed new subject. What is the NCCA going to do to address this?
30. *In 1987 I had a Parliamentary Question asked of the Minister for Education about the numbers of applicants for publicly funded teacher training colleges who had met the points' requirements, and broken down by county of applicant's origin; and the numbers, ditto, who had been accepted after the then mandatory interview. I compared the results by county. Those from Dublin had a pass rate on interview which was only 60% of that of the country as a whole. Widespread social engineering was at work. I would prefer to call it corruption at work. Recruiting persons on the public payroll on the basis of their religion, or even political party allegiance, ought to be outlawed; it is reprehensible.*
31. I am conscious of the role of the NCCA played in the matter of the relatively new subject called Religious Education for the Leaving Certificate. The examination papers allow for the exercise of options on the paper. A cursory examination of a couple of these papers confirms my expectations: the paper and course is essentially a ruse or device to allow for state-funding of Christian doctrine, and facilitates the avoidance of the study and teaching of competing religions and denominations while simultaneously enabling one to pass the examination. In that it is partisan and unacceptable. The examinations need to be structured to make the teaching of the entire syllabus and the passing of all sections essential.
32. I strongly oppose facilitating a 'cherry-picking' approach, such as the NCCA proposes for the mooted Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics course. There ought to be no options offered to allow a Patron-driven, or a religiously-zealous teacher- driven, cherry-picking, approach to the course and to any examination which may follow.
33. The stake held by patrons in publicly funded National Schools is quite small. Patrons may have provided the site, albeit, as predominantly mendicants, the site being really provided by citizens in communities who were given no option but to do so if they wanted schooling for their children. The building costs, teachers' pay, teachers' pensions, equipment and furniture etc are all, by and large, funded by the exchequer, including the exchequer of imperial governments. *The Baggot Street training college established by a group of Irish women, who eventually were encouraged to become nuns, was, for example, funded by the Imperial Government, who paid an annual grant of 3% of the capital cost over 30 years to circumvent the then legal ban on the endowment of religion on that Government.*
34. At best, the typical school patron is comparable in terms of his stake as that of the 'ground landlord'. We do not hear of the ground landlord of the corner grocery store micro-managing the affairs of the grocer. In like manner, the business of the publicly-funded school is not a "Church affair" such as would warrant the protection of the Constitution to autonomous management outside of government regulation. It is an education affair and as readily and as competently provided by secular interests. If the State withdrew its funding, the patrons would be in a hopeless state. One might make a different argument if a Church school was entirely privately benefacted. *So long as the 'advancement of religion' is classified by the Revenue Commissioners as a 'charitable activity' there will be some State funding of all Church activity.*
35. It is regrettable that the NCCA chooses to call these National Schools - established under the de facto legislation known as the Stanley letter - "Denominational Schools"; they ought to be more honestly called "National Schools under Denominational (or Catholic as the case may be) Patronage". Your failure, page 37, to refer to 'national school' betrays a lack of proportion and a desire to banish the law.
36. It is regrettable that the NCCA writes of 'Denominational Religious Education', which is self-evidently an oxymoron; it is either instruction or faith formation. Please stick to the Constitutional usage of Religious Instruction, or simply Religious Education when the teaching of it is imparted by persons uncompromised by a personal religious zeal.
37. I note, too, on page 37, that you state that the ERB aims to foster a respect etc for members of diverse religions but there is no mention of a like-mannered respect for the irreligious! Whether you are aware of it or not, this is the typical approach of competitive churchmen: they bad-mouth the secular, producing an insidious, unwarranted detestation of them – low-level hatred – such as has been manifest in the many surveys of Micheal McGreil, SJ,

variously entitled “Prejudice in Ireland”. There is a hanging inference in your paper that we must all respect all religions. This has the effect of frowning on the holding of sceptical views of religion(s) or even the expression of sceptical views. Freedom of religion must mean the right to be critical or organised religion; otherwise it is not freedom.

38. *In this context I remind the NCCA of research conducted in Scotland in the mid-1980s (unfortunately I have mislaid the reference and my copy of the report). This confirmed that the propensity of Catholic boys to continue practising their religion after schooling concluded was highest among those who attended schools open and receptive to persons of all religions and none (in a competitive mix of ideas, just like life!) and who attended RI in ‘Sunday School’. This outcome was considered superior to that of those boys who attended Catholic-ethos controlled schools run by religious orders.*
39. On page 38 of your consultation paper is what appears to be a churchman’s definition of ‘ethos’. It would be prudent to have regard for different kinds of ethos. In publicly funded schools, such as our National Schools, ethos must be constrained to comply with the rights of any child – even one such – to attend that school without being indoctrinated and to not have a chapel made of the school, as Churches wish. Despite the wishes of churchmen, a school is an educational institution, not a church or chapel. It might be, that in schools which were the subject of predominantly private benefaction, that a different ethos might be legally permissible.
40. I observe that ethos is a modern invention. I believe the late Catholic-school champion, Sister Eileen Randles, was responsible for its creation in the mid-1980s. We never heard of it before that. The word ethos, nor any analogue of it, does not appear in the Constitution. Your definition incorporates images, symbols and rituals into ‘ethos’. This clearly cuts across the rights of children – who are not small adults – to not be indoctrinated in publicly-funded schools. You are out of order here and clearly wearing the true colours of the unwarranted, predominant clerical disposition of your Council. The Republic of Ireland deserves better.

John Colgan,
The Toll House,
Dublin Road,
Leixlip,
Co Kildare.

23rd March, 2016



Home

Contributor

John Murphy

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education

Respondent's details

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Date	22-3-2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAQ-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

[Or](#) email submissions to principal@middletoncbsprimary.ie

Response to the consultation paper on Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School

The following are my thoughts/comments on parents and family views on the proposed changes. This I did through discussions at home.

- It would be very important to make each parent aware at enrolment giving them an overview of the programme of religious education taking place in the school.
- Cross faith learning should be encouraged to understand the basis of other religions.
- Such learning could deepen Catholic Faith within the classroom.
- Schools could organise games, quizzes re. origins and geography of religions.
- Encourage children to tell stories, fables from their religious background.
- Teachers should have a grounding or understanding of religions of children in the class. This could help dispel fears and misunderstandings that Catholic children may have.
- Recognise and respect festival days of other religions of the children in the class.

John Murphy
Board of Management (Parent Nominee)
March 2016



Home

Contributor

John (surname unclear)



Dublin Road,
Carlow,
Co Carlow

NCCA,
15 Fitzwilliam Square,
Dublin

29 March 2018

To whom it may concern,

please find attached my submission to consultation on ERB and Ethics.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, followed by a horizontal line.

ERB and Ethics

ERB and Ethics talks about faiths but in a faith-based school, a particular faith is nurtured and a relationship with God is fostered in the tradition of that faith. This is incompatible with an approach which treats all faiths as equal. In such a system, no one faith can be singled out and nurtured.

A faith-based school cannot teach that its belief is one among many - it must teach that belief as true. This is the insight of every faith and their very rationale.

Catholic education in particular invites students to see all things through the eyes of Christ and invites them to a positive and compassionate appreciation of the world.

ERB and Ethics appears to teach young people to be spectators of the world's faiths but not participants in any. It appears to seek to teach tolerance of values without actually giving them any values of their own.

Faith-based education roots values in belief in and relationship with God. An ethics-based system has no real basis for values. Lacking a faith-base, it relies on a humanist philosophy which is ultimately impoverished because it presumes that people will share a belief in human equality and justice for all. But there is no real basis for this presumption. Without a faith-base, this system cannot be sustained because it does not ultimately challenge greed, hatred and the basic human desires that drive people to compete with one another, to be better than other, all of which contradict the basic belief in equality. If human freedom allows us to strive to be better than others, where then lies equality? If we acknowledge that humans are born equal, why then are some more obviously gifted than others, born with greater opportunities (not always because of their socio-economic background, but because of a supportive family)? Values based on any humanist system are ultimately without foundation e.g. why should we treat others as we wish them to treat us, if ultimately it's every person for themselves?

Parents choose to send their children to faith-based schools. ERB and Ethics undermines this. The State is appropriating the proper role of parents and usurping the place of faiths by deciding how and which values are to be taught. This is not an appropriate behaviour on behalf of the State.

I have a concern that this consultation is purely cosmetic and that decisions have already been made as the survey is severely skewed to give a particular result. Rumour has it that the NCCA has invested considerable resources in this matter and to quote several teachers "it's a done deal."

I am extremely concerned about the proposed introduction of HRB and Ethics, as I believe that it will undermine our existing systems of faith-based and religious education. I wonder if this is deliberate or merely accidental. At present the State is supporting schools where the practice of faith is not permitted by either staff or students. Christian belief, and Celtic spirituality in particular, sees every moment of the day as an opportunity to recognise the presence of the divine and to be thankful in it; moments of prayer cannot be alien to the life of a Christian. Similarly Islam requires 5 moments of prayer during the day. A system of education cannot hope to develop the spirituality of a young person without some faith structure. The spiritual development of young people should be part and parcel of a holistic system of education. One which seeks to encompass every form of belief teaches about spirituality rather than nurturing it; ultimately this does a disservice to the learner because it is not faithful to their particular tradition and way of life.

I feel that the documents issued by the NCCA are quite fuzzy in relation to faith education. The difficulties around language are freely admitted without any exploration of alternatives. The key issue is that faith schools, particularly Catholic faith-schools, are the most inclusive schools in the country. These are schools where all faiths, cultures and nationalities are already recognised and celebrated. The system is not broken; there is no need to fix it.



Home

Contributor

Jones Irwin

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Date	March 30 th , 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal X

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

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Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

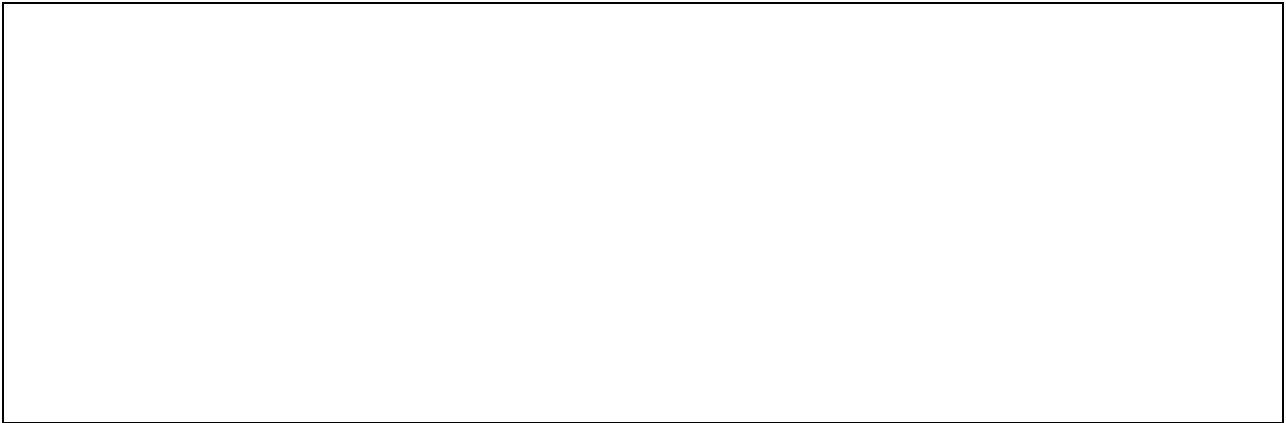
The development of ERB and Ethics is, in my view, an urgent requirement for all children in all Irish schools who are currently lacking an integrated and state based curriculum in values education and comparative beliefs and religious education. I would make the following points in relation to the proposed aims and features:

1. ERB and Ethics can stand beside existing curricular areas, including RE and SPHE, and provide a distinct but related lens with which to view the same or similar content. Here, the aims must be very clear and the distinctive feature of ERB and Ethics is that it does not seek to educate into one particular beliefs tradition but to foster a universal respect in what is held commonly across the different belief systems. Pluralism would seem to be the most suitable approach to take here, or perhaps a Human Rights universalist stance, but more work needs to be done on clarifying the philosophical basis of this. The Children's Rights approach put forward in the consultation paper sets out an excellent foundation here.
2. ERB and Ethics can be seen as a distinct epistemology but compatible with the existing epistemology of either faith or multi-d ethoi. This is crucial – that this pluralist epistemology and values approach should be seen as compatible with for example Catholic

tradition or Islamic tradition etc, as well more obviously as compatible with existing Multi-D approaches.

3. My own view is that the 'ERB' aspect of the Curriculum is not substantive enough to carry the proposed approaches. Inter-Belief pedagogy would be better employed as one main Strand of the curriculum. Ethics has a more substantive educational content and an inter-belief strand as part of an overall Values Education curriculum would make more sense. The concept of 'worldviews' might be a good way to bridge and integrate Inter-belief pedagogy into a more Values Education Curriculum, which would have a strong ethical and also political citizenship component and vision. This would also have the advantage of being less obviously confrontational for Patron bodies etc
4. ERB and Ethics thus in relation to point 3 might require some overall reconceptualization as an Ethics curriculum including ERB for example ? This would also be distinct but related to SPHE.
5. It would also be useful to think of connections between ERB/Ethics and
 - a) Aistear and Early Years Developments
 - b) the Primary Curriculum Framework Review which is proposing to include thematics/strands such as Well Being/Identity and Belonging which have strong connects to ERB/Ethics
 - c) connect to second level developments at curricular level such as Politics and Society and also Philosophy as a Short Course
6. Re the content/strands of ERB/Ethics, I would personally like to see Philosophy as a Strand within the curriculum as I think this subject is the most amenable to taking the approach required in this area of critical reflection and higher order thinking. Philosophy is also an excellent pedagogy in this area, 'standing back' and exploring different perspectives.

There is also a strong connection and compatibility between Philosophy and Religious traditions, which are seen as distinct but often compatible. For example, in St Augustine's principle of 'belief seeking understanding', foundational for both Catholic and Protestant traditions.



2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

ERB and Ethics can play a major role in addressing the changing culture of Irish schools and can and should be seen as adopting a whole school approach if and where possible, as opposed to simply a discrete curriculum. Here again the concept of nurturing the 'whole child' is key and we should steer away from too much selective emphasis on religion, beliefs etc

If the latter holistic approach is to take place however, we need a review of whole school policies in relation to enrolment, parental participation in schools and teacher rights which currently allow for discrimination on religious and ethos grounds, in relation to provisions in the Employment Equality Act.

In relation to the role of teachers and the participation of schools in the process and implementation of ERB and Ethics, I would stress the following:

1. A model of curriculum development which allows for a 'curriculum in process' and significant trialling is crucial. A Network of schools and specific co-ordinators, somewhat on the model of the GMGY curriculum, would in my view help with this process greatly

2. There needs to be a clarification of teacher pedagogies in relation to ERB and Ethics. Is the pedagogy here directive or more facilitative?
3. There needs to be room for schools to have some level of autonomy in relation to the provision of ERB and Ethics and local adaptation but this needs to be monitored so it does not simply become an excuse to sideline the Curriculum. I personally would caution against seeing ERB/Ethics as 'integrated' or 'cross-curricular' content . If ERB/Ethics is developed as a curriculum there is far less chance it will be sidelined in the longer term in Irish schools.
4. Rather than just introduce ERB and Ethics as an 'add on' curriculum with all the subsequent time allocation issues it would be good to do two things at once:
 - a) Develop ERB and Ethics, or a slightly reconceptualised version of this, as a discrete curriculum for the Senior classes of Primary school
 - b) Work with the Review of the Primary Curriculum in the earlier years to embed the vision of ERB and Ethics in the Strands of Well-Being and Identity and Belonging. SPHE as it is currently taught lacks a more explicit and substantive Values Education component. This should be seen (this Ethics dimension) as distinct but complementary to SPHE.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

The above points capture most of what I want to say in relation to the current proposals for ERB and Ethics. I think the work done on the background papers and the current proposals is excellent and highly needed in our primary schools. The ERB and Ethics team are to be highly commended on this. In conclusion:

1. In my view, some reconceptualization of the overall vision and 'naming' of ERB/Ethics needs to be done. I think that a Values Education Curriculum which included a 'worldviews' strand would be a more suitable approach. This could also be seen as a kind of 'political' or 'citizenship' education at curricular level for children which would fit with a 'state vision' of curriculum more easily than a state body getting involved too deeply in 'religious' or 'belief' matters etc
2. I would argue strongly that this should be a Curriculum in its own right and not simply 'cross-curricular' materials etc. to be integrated and potentially 'lost'.
3. Some joining up of the curricular dots between Aistear, the Primary Curriculum review and second level developments such as Philosophy and Politics and Society would be very helpful. Thinking about our overall Educational Vision for children is needed.
4. The Patronage model of Irish schools calls for a patient and ground level implementation policy in terms of this curriculum, which really requires a context specific approach. My own view is that this will take considerable time and effort but that it will also hold a much greater chance of success. Perhaps to be realistic with resources etc, certain key Network schools in each type of school ethos (Catholic, Protestant, Multi-D etc) could be identified and they could lead the trialling. This would also require a 'process curriculum' model which allows for the curriculum to adapt and change, and for some levels of local school adaptation.
5. School Co-ordinators or 'champions' are really necessary for this model to work. Again, the experience of this with GMGY might be helpful, albeit with a small group of schools.
6. Although only a small group of schools, the Islamic schools should be seen as significant in this discussion, as well as Islamic representatives in Catholic schools, CNS schools etc
7. Similarly, nonreligious or humanist representation is significant in this discussion
8. Where NCCA already has networks and experience, these would seem to be excellent 'focus groups' to develop the curricular development work with, rather than starting *ex nihilo*.
9. An understanding of ITE developments in the Colleges of Education with regard to 'Ethical' and 'Inter-belief' pedagogy is important. Keeping these channels open is important, as well ideally as providing an opportunity for CPD and ongoing Inservice education of teachers. Again, the example of the PG Cert/MTeach by Practice

with GMGY is one such example where teachers receive recognition while also the curriculum benefits from their practice.





Home

Contributor

Joseph Woulfe

Dear sir/madam.

I would like to submit my view on ethics in schools.

I would wish to see just the right and wrongs of life being educated to young people.

not and one religion being pushed.

A background to other religions and also that no religion has to be taken up.

As in our declaration to a God and it can be any but also none.

Apart from that bullying in schools would be a topic that I would wish discussed in regards to right and wrong.

I read the councils brief on the proposed ethics and it all sound good.

Thanks for your time

Joseph woulfe

Quilty

Ennis

County Clare



Home

Contributor

Josephine Ryan

Josephine Ryan,
Glenmeeda,
Borrisleigh,
Thurles,
Tipp.



NCCA,
15 Fitzwilliam Sq,
Dublin,
D00R034.

15/03/16

To whom it concerns,

As a parent, I choose to send my children to a roman catholic school, and my expectations from this is that my children will be educated about this religion primarily. I would also expect ethics to be part of this education. I certainly feel it would be also beneficial that some time would be allocated to informing my children about other major religions, in an effort to avoid exclusion, fear, prejudice, and misunderstanding, against people of different beliefs to theirs.

Next question then, is how this should be taught; surely ethics would be integrated in all components of school life, as well as RE. As to what proportion of religious teaching time would be allocated to other religions, would I expect depend on the religious ethos of the school. Church of Ireland would primarily focus on their religion, likewise with RC, whilst educate together schools would have a broader focus.

For those, that fear faith based schools would not teach from a neutral perspective, perhaps, the heads of these other religions could be tasked with providing a synopsis of what they feel encompasses their religious beliefs and practices.

Finally, if as it appears, to being suggested, RE and Ethics be treated as separate subjects, is RE specific to the ethos of the school also a separate subject? What current subject or the curriculum is to be sacrificed to facilitate RE and Ethics?

Yours sincerely,

Josephine Ryan

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Josephine Ryan'.



Home

Contributor

Kathleen O'Dowd

I'm a member of NAPDA.

I see no reason for introducing this programme into Irish Primary Schools.

The present religion programme used in primary schools in conjunction with the CSPE programme has all that is needed/ appropriate for our primary school children.

Our Catholic pupils are being taught about other religions appropriately.

I have informed myself very fully about ERB and Ethics as outlined by NCCA and I'm fully convinced that it is not needed in our Irish primary schools.

Kathleen O Dowd

Diocese of Elphin. .



Home

Contributor

Kieran Allen

Submission on the ERB & Ethnics module

Kieran Allen

Education Equality member

23/03/2016

I welcome the basic ideas of the proposed new module: secular and pluralist in essence, and inclusive of different traditions. Here are some points I would raise. (Please bear in mind that my analysis is not taking into account the age of the targeted students, I am responding to the proposed module in and of itself. I trust the expertise of the NCCA to filter my suggestions and taking what is relevant to the target age group).

1. While this may fall out of place in terms of this consultation, it is a related topic: I must stress the importance of the need for an end to discrimination on religious grounds in both schools access for children and teacher employment. There has been much comment on this topic, and I'm sure no elaboration here is required.
2. A striking shortfall of the proposal is that does not address the very real space in which elements of religious traditions or cultures clash, both with each other, and with basic human rights. There are both religious texts and practices, from most traditions, which promote hatred, violence, misogyny, homophobia, etc. These are often balanced by teachings on love, peace, and respect. However, simple denial of any link between religion and problematic practices and texts is as unhelpful as tarring entire religions based on the same problematic elements within. Any module that wishes to engage the topic of beliefs and ethnics must be willing to do so from a place of honesty and honest enquiry. There are several possible options for an approach for these issues, or which a combination may be useful. (The usual approach is the 3rd one here, but in isolation this approach can be problematic in that it avoids the issues I am raising).
 - An exploration of "literalism" and its pitfalls and dangers, and a pedagogical approach that moves away from *literalism* and towards *symbolism*. The idea of "textual analysis" is important here. Looking at the cultural and historical context of texts can help move students towards the symbolic and personal rather than literal interpretations of religious texts.
 - The secular tradition: Civil rights, equality, and human rights must be the base of shared values from which all diversity can stem. A teacher must be empowered to be able to identify divisive religious teachings, and communicate that when these teaching clash with our basic shared rights and values, the later comes out on top. The secular tradition also cherishes religion as an "individual" right. I believe this is important to emphasise: To be religious or non-religious is an individual right, and an individual choice, and never an obligation, note from a state, a community, or a family.
 - The notion that promotion of peace, love, and respect can be found in all religious traditions. The subsequent claim that this is the essence of religion is a helpful starting point for countering violent, divisive, or sectarian elements of religious

traditions and texts. (I emphasise that this approach alone is not sufficient, but is rather complementary to the honest approach I'm suggesting).

3. Finally, another shortcoming of the proposal is that it does not tackle the reality of "multiple identities". If children are taught that their first or foremost or only identity is religious, this denies the reality of other identities that everyone has. If too much emphasis is placed on religious or "belief" identities without counter balancing or acknowledging culture, family, nationality(ies), gender, age, etc. as equally important elements of identity, even the best intentioned approach may still end up divisive. The idea of shared humanity and the human identity should be included in the module.



Home

Contributor

Kilkishen NS

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Conor Harrison
Position (if applicable)	Principal and Secretary of the Board of Management
Organisation (if applicable)	Kilkishen N.S.
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Email	Principalkilkishenns@gmail.com
Date	31/3/16

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

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1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

The Board of Management seeks more informed debate on the contradictions involved for Catholic schools promoting the Catholic faith and ERBE.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

The Board of Management seeks clarification on how ERBE will be incorporated into the existing school curriculum and what subject(s) will make way for the inclusion of ERBE.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

The Board of Management seeks further debate and consultation on the introduction of ERBE and possible implications for Catholic ethos schools.





Home

Contributor

Kilmagner NS



Kilmagner National School



Phone: (025) 36892

Ferney, Co. Cork

Established 1878

email address: kilmagnerna@kilmagnerna.net

website: www.kilmagnerna.net/index.html

31st May, 2016

To whom it may concern,

Having discussed the prospect of a new subject in our Primary School (ERB), the Board of Management of Kilmagner National School, Ferney, Co. Cork have a number of concerns. We believe, having consulted teaching staff and parents, that adding another subject to the curriculum could overload both our teachers and students.

In addition we are proud of our ethos here as a Catholic School and while we welcome all religions in our school, we are concerned as to how this new subject would fit into our ethos which we have fostered here for almost 140 years.

We hope that you will take our concerns into consideration.

Yours sincerely,


Matt Hegarty

Chairperson to B.O.M.


Trevor O'Grady

School Principal



Home

Contributor

Kilmore Diocesan Education Office



Kilmore Diocesan Education Office

Pastoral Centre,
Cullin,
Cavan.

23 March 2016

Re : Education about Religion, Beliefs and Ethics

Dear Secretary,

My work as Diocesan Education Secretary for the Diocese of Kilmore involves regular contact with many of the 79 Catholic schools in the diocese.

The bigger schools have a high percentage of pupils who come from other countries bringing with them different cultures, different languages and different beliefs. These pupils have been welcomed into our Catholic schools and everything possible is being done to help them integrate into the school and the community. At enrolment time the parents of pupils of different faiths or none are given the opportunity to request that their children 'opt out' of religious education. From discussion with school principals I am informed that requests to 'opt out' are minimal and no principal has ever been asked to provide any other form of education about religion, beliefs and ethics.

Cultural days are held in the bigger schools where various cultures are celebrated. I have attended cultural days in two schools in our diocese. Children and parents dressed in their national costumes and treated us to their traditional foods, told us about their customs and entertained us with their native song and dance. I found this a wonderful experience and a perfect example of the 'inclusion' provided by a Catholic school.

It is my firm belief there is no need to introduce a new education programme about Religion, Beliefs and Ethics into our Catholic schools.

Nancy Shiels,

Diocesan Education Secretary



Home

Contributor

Laurence Cassells



Gortnaghty,

Glencar,

Sligo.

30 March 2016

A. Chara,

I am writing to your Council in relation to its proposal to introduce Education about Religion and Beliefs and Ethics (ERB and Ethics) into the curriculum in place of religion in our schools. I am personally interested in the place of religion in the syllabus of catholic schools. My views also apply to schools of other denominations and faiths.

I taught for many years and served on the Board of Management of a primary school as a parents' representative, and of a post primary school as a staff representative.

As is pointed out on the NCCA website most (if not all) of the proposed subject, ERB and Ethics, is already taught in other subject areas. Is it necessary to duplicate this content and to use this duplication as a reason to remove the teaching of religion from our schools?

It is important to note that Catholic parents send their children to Catholic schools so that they will be educated in the Catholic faith. Similarly Muslim and Jewish parents send their children to Islamic and Jewish schools. Parents from minority Christian religions do likewise, e.g. Church of Ireland parents send their children to C of I schools for the same reason. Parents have this right under Article 42 of the Constitution, as you already know.

The Minister for Education, (whatever title he or she may have at present) must also have regard for the characteristic spirit of the school in exercising the functions with regard to curriculum.

Should a situation arise where a child of a particular religion, or none, cannot be admitted to a "denominational school" because the school cannot accommodate the number of applicants for admission and gives priority to children of its own denomination the fault lies not with the denominational school but with the state for failing to provide a school to accommodate such children.

Would a subject other than religion be replaced in this way? Consider French. Replace French with "Education about France and French People". Study the geography and history and culture of France and the attitudes of people in

France to others and of others to the people of France. Will this satisfy parents who send their children to learn French so that they can speak and understand French? I think not.

I was disturbed by the questionnaire on the NCCA website. I am sure you will find that a significantly large proportion of respondents will agree with the statements provided therein. However, there is no obvious provision in the questionnaire for respondents to state if they wish to have these objectives taught as part of Religion, be that Catholic, Christian, Jewish or Islamic.

The results of the survey may well be used to state that a significant majority of respondents are in favour the introduction of the new subject. But are they? Were they asked in a similar way if they wish to retain the teaching of these objectives as part of the Religion class? As Mr. Disraeli is reported to have said "There are lies, damned lies and statistics".

When Minister Quinn suggested that 50% of schools should be divested from the patronage of the Catholic Church he found that very few parents in these schools agreed with his proposals. Do the same catholic parents who wish to retain catholic patronage wish to remove Catholic Religion from the syllabus of their schools? Was there a census or even a survey of parents to establish their views?

I disagree with the introduction of ERB and Ethics to replace Religion in our Irish schools.

Mise le meas,

Lorraine Conolly

B.A. Mathematics and Statistics.



Home

Contributor

Linda O'Shea

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education

Respondent's details

Name	Linda O'Shea
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Organisation (if applicable)	Middleton C.B.S Primary School
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Date	24-3-2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

ERB-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 95
Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to ERB@ncca.ie

Response to the Consultation Paper by NCCA on REB & Ethics in the Primary School

Background

I have been a member of the Board of Management of Middleton CBS Primary School since January 1996. I have been a member of the Parents Council of that school from 2008 to 2013, and was the chairperson for the last year. I am a parent, and a practising Solicitor.

One of the reasons I chose Middleton CBS Primary for my son's education was its Catholic pedigree. I am a practising Catholic and wanted my son to receive education from a Catholic School. I am very happy with the way the school has delivered this religious education. Whilst being a Catholic school it has given my son the identity in faith I wanted him to have in. Being a Catholic, and at the same time has instilled a good understanding of, and respect towards, those pupils who are not of the Catholic Faith.

Middleton CBS Primary school has a very diverse mix of students. It is a multi-cultural school. I believe the school is already delivering an education in ethics. It is already instilling inclusivity towards the pupils not of the Catholic Faith. It is already teaching the pupils, in an age appropriate way, about other religions & beliefs. It is not suppressing this education and it is doing it very well.

I fear the introduction of a new curriculum for REB & Ethics would only serve to over burden the teachers; detract from an already packed curriculum, and above all, would confuse young children. From what I know of the proposed REB & Ethics, I fear it would water-down the Catholic faith education and move to a more generalised secular situation.

Thank you,

Linda O'Shea



Home

Contributor

Linda Kinch

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Lorna Kinch
Position (if applicable)	Student Teacher
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Date	15 th March 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

Overall, I feel that the new addition to the curriculum, ERB and Ethics would be a very welcome idea into the Primary School curriculum. Nowadays, it has become clearer than ever that schools that follow a strict religious ethos are not as popular as they may have been in previous decades, simply because many Irish citizens of today are not as interested in Religion as they may have been before, and also because there is a sense of unity between Catholic and Protestants, more than there ever has been before. Church of Ireland Primary schools are now welcoming Catholic students, and likewise, Catholic Primary Schools are now welcoming students from a Protestant Denomination. As this is occurring more than ever, the teaching of religion needs to be more centered around various different religions, instead of focusing on one certain Religion and its beliefs and teaching the subject of Religion through that belief and that belief only. The teaching of Religion is incredibly important in schools, so that children have a background knowledge of the broad range of religions that are in Ireland and in the Greater World, as this will prove important for them as they grow and develop, and are eventually working alongside people of various different religions. I feel that ERB and Ethics will not only allow primary school children the opportunity to develop their understanding of various denominations and Religious groups throughout the world, but also learn how to be a better person through gaining knowledge in morals, and values which in today's world is just as important as having a knowledge and an interest in Religion. This new subject will not only allow the children to develop their own personal beliefs but will also give them the opportunity to gain a better understanding of themselves, through self- awareness and their responsibilities in life, depending on their age. It will give them the opportunity to think critically, and show them the importance of developing good relationships with other people. Overall, when looking at the aims of this new subject, I feel it does support those of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum, the Aistear Framework and also the Intercultural Education Guidelines. Although it is supporting the Curriculum, it is still

introducing a new way of teaching Religion into the classroom which I feel is hugely important in this ever changing country. The following proposed aim “ERB and Ethics should enable children to express comfort, empathy and joy with human diversity.” is incredibly important in today’s world, and especially in classrooms all across Ireland. It is important for children to gain a clear understanding of diversity, and accept everyone for who they are, as they grow and develop over the primary school years as this is exactly what this subject is allowing for. As today’s classrooms are hugely diverse, especially in the more built- up areas in cities across Ireland, it is important for children to understand that being different is fine. However it is important that they, as children, understand that everyone is the same and that they should accept everyone, regardless of what color skin they may have or what country they are from. The five strands or areas proposed for the curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics also need to be acknowledged. These are Personal understanding, Mutual understanding, Spiritual awareness, Character education and Connection to the wider world. I personally feel that all of these strands are equally as important as each other, and that they will all be of great addition to the new subject of ERB and Ethics. They are offering so many new ideas in the teaching of Religion and Ethics, and I feel it will be a welcome change for all teachers in Ireland as they incorporate this new subject into the classroom.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

Overall, I feel the ERB programme would be of huge benefit to both children and parents. Parents are still being considered as the main educator and the biggest influence in a child’s life and this new programme gives them the opportunity to be a part of it too, by guiding the children through the various skills and topics they will learn about and also being there to offer the children further knowledge on different things that may arise from the information children are going to learn in this subject. A subject that allows parent participation on this level will really help the child, and this link between home and school is rarely seen in any other subject in the Primary School Curriculum. Involving parents directly in the learning experiences of their

child will be an incredibly positive aspect of this new subject, and will facilitate the child's knowledge, understanding and learning. Participation in this programme from the viewpoint of the child will also be another positive aspect of the subject. As I mentioned above, children will be given the opportunity to learn new skills that will help them to be the best person that they can possibly be in an ever changing Ireland. Giving children the opportunity to recognize that it is important to form relationships with children from different ethnical backgrounds will be of huge advantage to them as they grow older and are working in an environment with a broad range of cultures and ethnical backgrounds. Unlike any other subject in the curriculum, this subject will allow children to think critically about various different topics that I feel should have been taught in the Primary School before this, in subjects such as Religion and SPHE. This will also benefit teachers as they will be able to integrate this subject into a range of other subjects through use of different methodologies and activities as part of the ERB and Ethics Programme. Through linking this subject with the Visual Arts, Drama, and English, children will be given an opportunity to learn in a way that they never will have before and it will be of huge advantage to Primary School Teachers when they are planning schemes and lesson plans for this particular subject. This subject will also create an incredibly positive classroom environment, a place where the children are not only accepting of one another, but also a place where the children will have a greater knowledge of different ethnical backgrounds. Regarding issues of time allocation and curriculum overload, I do understand how this could be a concern among primary school teachers as it is already difficult to preserve

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

Personally, I feel schools with a certain ethos may not consider this new curriculum development – many faith based schools are defined by their faith and only teach Religion through the certain views that the Religion of their school may have, regardless of the views of other Religions. The NCCA are going to require that Primary School Teachers teach this subject in an open- minded way, and not favouring any certain Religions views over the other. This new subject may not be compatible with the ethos of certain schools, so I do understand why Primary School Teachers may be against this subject. However, this subject will allow Inclusivity for all children, and the idea of a school with a certain “ethos” may slowly disappear as this subject is introduced into primary schools throughout the school.

Overall, I feel this new programme will be of a huge benefit to Primary Schools all across Ireland. As society is ever changing, and there are children with various faiths attending schools, it is important for Teachers to recognise this, and teach Religion and Ethics in a way that is incredibly open. Education about Religions and Beliefs is a positive addition to the curriculum that will not only help the children to develop a sense of respect for all, but gain a better understanding of the lives and values of various different Religious Backgrounds.





Home

Contributor

M O'Sullivan

I think it would be a shame to cut down on religion in schools. Where else will children learn basic morality and Christianity? They need to be prepared for the sacraments as well. We play up far too much to non Irish. Would THEY change their religious customs for us?? As the old people used to say we are a pack of Shoneens. We can't hang on to what was best in our country. If this government cuts down on religion they will not get my vote.

Sincerely,

M. O'Sullivan



Home

Contributor

Maeve Mahon

Response to NCCA Consultation Paper on Education about Religion and Beliefs and Ethics

I make this response to the NCCA Consultation on Education about Religion and Beliefs and Ethics as the Diocesan Advisor for Religious Education in the Diocese of Kildare & Leighlin. I have responsibility for overseeing the teaching of Religious Education in the one hundred and sixty four schools under the patronage of the Catholic bishop of Kildare & Leighlin and for nine other schools of various patronages that have requested recognition from the Diocesan Education Office to be considered schools with a Catholic ethos. I am also responsible for supporting our schools in their self understanding, assessment and ongoing development of their characteristic spirit or Catholic ethos. Within our Catholic schools there are 2139 teachers and 39 982 students. Our schools serve the most diverse communities, both urban and rural and places where students of all faiths and other stances for living are welcomed, included and celebrated in all aspects of school life.

The introduction of Education about Religion and Beliefs and Ethics as it is currently framed in the NCCA Consultation document poses some very fundamental challenges for the faith based school. The secular, post-modern, pluralist worldview underpinning the NCCA proposal is completely at odds with that of the Catholic-Christian worldview found not just in the religious education programmes currently being taught in our schools but, also, in the way of life proposed by the values and ethos that form the foundation of the life lived in the Catholic school.

In the NCCA proposal children will be invited to see religious identity as the holding of a set of beliefs to be interpreted by them. They are encouraged to be co-constructors of their worldview. This postmodern approach encourages children to see their religious tradition as simply one among a number of

points of view or stances for living all of which have equal weight and equal validity. This particular approach effectively denies the place of transcendental meaning in religion, suggests that the holding of religious beliefs is not normative and effectively invalidates the sense of community that is often engendered by religion and in the case of Catholicism that is central to our religious tradition. If children, as is implicit in the NCCA proposal, are taught that their religious tradition is just another set of cultural beliefs, it can only serve to undermine the way in which religion is presented in the Catholic school. This is because religion is not viewed chiefly as an expression of culture in the Catholic school. As Catholics we understand our Christian faith as a coherent tradition and a lens through which we interpret the world and how we live in it. Within the current proposal the space for the child to be formed by the experience of a specific religious identity will be diminished if not obliterated entirely. Consider the confusion for the primary child when they are taught in one curriculum area that Jesus offers just one way of being in the world while in another curricular area and indeed in the spirit that enlightens and underpins the life of the school children learn that Jesus is '*the light of the world*'ⁱ, that he offers us '*the way, the truth and the life.*'ⁱⁱ The NCCA document recognises that:

*'There is also the challenge for teachers who will be engaged in teaching denominational programmes and faith forming on the one hand; and teaching about religions and beliefs from a pluralist perspective on the other.'*ⁱⁱⁱ

If this challenge is true for the teacher then surely it is going to prove even more challenging for the child who attends a faith based school so that their understanding of their faith can be formed and nurtured. The quote from Grimmit and McGrady on page 9 of the NCCA document

'that the need to learn 'from' religion is a key aspect of religious education (Grimmit, 2000, Hull, 2001, McGrady, 2013). '

might be countered with the right of children in a faith based school to learn into the religion espoused by their parents. It must also be stated that children attending Catholic schools are learning into, about and from religion, the three different types of learning central to religious education identified by John Hull.^{iv} In our Catholic schools children are already taught to respect and learn from other religious traditions both formally and informally. It is also important to note that one of the aims of the new Catholic Pre-school and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland is to develop the skill of inter-religious literacy. This is achieved through the development of the inter-religious strand unit that begins at Level 2.

In my many conversations about the current NCCA consultation with school leaders, teachers and members of boards of management of our school the comment that was consistently made was one about the need for introducing ERB & E in any of the four ways proposed in the document. The vast majority of teachers believe that most of the material being proposed is being covered in what they consider to be an already overloaded curriculum. They pointed to their engagement with the Religious Education, SPHE, SESE curricula and the Green Schools' programme and cannot see the need for another curriculum area.

There is no doubt that there is a need to make provision for the small number of children (1.2 % in a recent diocesan survey) whose parents choose to withdraw them from the formal religious education classes in our schools. It is very possible that the ERB & E proposal in its current format may actually result in more children being withdrawn from this subject than have previously opted out of religious education as parents from all faiths and other stances for living consider the approach incompatible with how they wish their child to view and make sense of their world. A set of guidelines that could be developed and interpreted with the approval of the individual patrons might be a more appropriate way to proceed.

Maeve Mahon

Diocesan Advisor for Primary Religious Education

Diocese of Kildare & Leighlin

maeve.mahon@kandle.ie

ⁱ John 8:12

ⁱⁱ John 14:6

ⁱⁱⁱ p23

^{iv} John Hull; 'The Contribution of Religious Education to Religious Freedom: A Global Perspective', *Religious Education in Schools: Ideas and Experiences from Around the World*, IARF, ed (London 2001), pp1-8



Home

Contributor

Maire Corrigan

I disagree with the introduction of this new programme.

NACCA are asking too much of teachers, with new requests for more subjects ,and more varied systems, more time consuming programmes and recordings.

Subjects are well integrated as indeed life is. Nothing is taught in isolation.

Parents ,the primary educators of their children, look to their teachers for back up. Primary teachers spend an extended period of time each day with our children and are highly respected and trusted.We expect our values to be their values and that they would rear them as their own ,in honesty without falsehood ,generosity,uprightness and integrity as good idols.

We live in a Christian country .Jesus looked out for the poor, the marginalised and made them feel appreciated.Our schools reflect this ethos,they are caring environments ,encouraging kindness and helpfulness rather than ambitious overpowering.These are the type of situations that all our Christian born teachers nourish because of their own schooling. Why change , when we have the best?

I say God bless the good work!

Please don't chase our good teachers away.

Maire Corrigan



Home

Contributor

Maire Fitzgerald

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics

Respondent's details

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Organisation (if applicable)

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Date: 31/ 03/ 16

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to: FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

This consultation process due to the proposed introduction of a new curriculum on Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School (ERBE) has given me cause to reflect on my own Catholic education and the part Christianity plays in my own life. Irish people are deeply spiritual. From an early age, I could see my ancestors search for meaning through Ireland's rich archaeological evidence. Ireland's literacy culture and folk tales revealed a past rich in symbols, ritual and myth seeking to give expression to the "other", the sacred in life. In my Catholic Primary school I found the answer to this search for meaning in my Catholic faith. Through my Catholic education I developed a strong sense of identity rooted in the culture and heritage of the people who had lived before me. I was welcomed into a community of believers and given a strong foundation to nurture, to question, to seek answers and to find my identity in a safe space. I was given the Catholic knowledge, skills, attitudes and self-awareness necessary to influence my own behaviour and that of others to improve our quality of life. I was helped to develop an intimate relationship with Jesus who guides and shapes how I live my life. Because of this personal relationship, I don't just talk about "loving thy neighbour" but strive to live it out in my community, in my young adult professional life and in the world.

I am proud to be a Catholic. I am proud to say I attended a Catholic primary school where I was formed in my faith. I am proud to say I belong to a Catholic community and to a wider Christian community. I am part of a living active church doing great works right across the country through providing emotional and practical counselling services, providing shelter and hot meals to the homeless, supporting those through addiction, in debt, those suffering and grieving. I know from the most difficult times in my own life and in the lives of my friends that the kindness and support of the Church has been immeasurable. Because of our Catholic faith formation from a young age we have a deeply entrenched respect for funerals. When we have stood together by the graveside of a friend whose life has been cut short by illness, by road traffic accident, by suicide, it is our genuine belief and real relationship with God that has been of immense comfort. As a community and sympathisers it's how we express our gratitude for the individual, a once off of creation. We honour their life and show our support for their family by our physical presence, participating in something sacred and sharing in the loneliness and grief in the only way we can. It is at times like these that our faith, given to us in Primary school, has empowered us with the resilience and strength to support one another. It is because of this personal relationship with Jesus rather than an impersonal knowledge of religions that I am called to help all those in need. The consultation paper, entitled Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics (ERBE), proposes a subject "which does not nurture the belief or practice of any one religion; instead it focuses on fostering an informed awareness of the main theist, non-theist, and secular beliefs including key aspects of their cultural manifestations." How does this support a child's own personal spirituality and answer the child's search for meaning? It is because of my personal relationship with God that I am respectful and tolerant of all people, those of other religions and none. It is again because of my Catholic faith that I stand in solidarity with, and raise awareness for all those who are denied their human rights across the world.

The Catholic Curriculum which exists in Primary Schools is an empowering approach which recognises that knowing about religions is not the same as developing a meaningful spiritual relationship with the Divine. We are spiritual people. We strive for a sense of belonging. We find expression for this by living in such a way. Children will only choose to become active participants in their communities if they feel a sense of attachment to them. Social inclusion and matters of identity and values are addressed in the existing Catholic curriculum. These are the affective dimensions of active citizenship and social justice rooted in the personal encounter. Separating the theoretical from the personal and active does not promote the development and growth of the child. The new ERBE curriculum proposes; "In Education about Religions and Beliefs your child will learn about the major forms of religion, belief traditions and worldviews that have been embraced by people around the world. This learning will help your child develop a respect for, understanding of, and empathy with people of diverse religions, beliefs and worldviews." The Catholic Preschool and Primary School Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015), and its related religious programme Grow in Love already encompasses this but in a far more holistic way which embraces the biological, psychological and social wellbeing of the child. Ethics is also incorporated throughout the primary school curriculum. It is both taught and practiced in initiatives such as the Green Schools Projects and many other similar programmes.

I am a member of a Christian country which embraces, accepts, and welcomes all faiths and none. I am confident that the Catholic Curriculum has something wonderful to offer. Being educated in the Catholic faith is a fundamental value and right that all children are entitled to in Pre-school and Primary school education in Ireland. Considering the existing Patron programmes, an average of 23, 000 patrons sit on boards of managements who all fundamentally believe in what Catholic schools are about and give of their time voluntarily to support the Catholic ethos of these schools. It is not in the best interests and welfare of a child to be separated from the strong religious and spiritual sensibility that exists in Irish culture. It is irrational to expect children to comprehend the notion that based on the Patron programme in-keeping with the school ethos that there is only one true God and later that same day to understand that actually the Catholic faith is considered by some to be only one amongst many real truths to explain life. Children cannot be expected to display the same maturity and sensibility as an adult in critiquing and reviewing religious doctrines and beliefs. Teaching a child about religions makes no sense as children in and of itself. Children need to be allowed time to grow into mature adults who will then be in a position to critique the religious education they have received. There is a positive obligation on the State to respect the philosophical convictions of atheist or secular parents and their children under Article II of Protocol 1, the right to education, of the European Convention. However, there is also an obligation on the state to vindicate the right to be educated in the Catholic faith. Traditionally, the Department of Education rule allows 30 minutes a day for religion teaching in accordance with the programme drawn up by the school patron. How would the programme drawn up by the school patron and the new ERBE programme not propose contradictory messages to a child? A non-faith based approach to religion in all Primary schools not only presents practical difficulties to teachers who are expected to teach two contradictory programmes but it is unclear how the new subject could be included into an

already packed curriculum without impacting on existing subject classes. Section 30 (2) -(e) of the Education Act 1998 permits a parent to opt their child out of any subject that is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student which adds further practical problems for the school as to how these children should be accommodated should parents opt their children out of the proposed ERBE programme.

Any curriculum should be about providing children with fundamental skills sets to promote their understanding of the world. The Catholic Religious Curriculum provides children with an essential skill set in the development of a spiritual relationship with another, a higher being. The ERBE programme will not provide this fundamental skillset that already exists. Providing support, material and resources for children who opt out of the existing Catholic Religious Curriculum requires further discussion and negotiation but I strongly object to the proposed ERBE programme as a practical or positive solution to this.



Home

Contributor

Maire Sheehy, Eamonn Power

Comments: Dear Officer, I wish to respond to the proposals outlined in the document 'Consultation on Education about Religious & Beliefs (ERB) & Ethics'. As we are a Roman Catholic faith based school we are satisfied that we currently cater very well for our school community and that all our pupils are educated in a school culture and curriculum that promotes the values of respect, justice, peace, love, mercy, compassion and tolerance of difference. We achieve this currently through our Religion Programme, our SPHE programme and most importantly through the culture we create in our school for the entire school community. We value this dearly and do not wish to see any changes to the curriculum that would negatively impact on this. Therefore we strongly request that further consultation takes place to gather the views of all the education partners before new changes as proposed are implemented that may adversely affect our existing provision. Your Respectfully, Maire Sheehy, Eamonn Power, Killaloe Convent primary School.

Thanks,

Maire Sheehy



Home

Contributor

Mairead Harman

Dear Ncca

I oppose the introduction of ERB and Ethics for following reasons:

It is vital that our children are taught that our Catholic faith is THE FAITH and Not JUST ONE OF MANY. The teaching of the Catholic Faith would be compromised under ERB & ETHICS.

Schools already practice GOOD ETHICS in terms of School Policies, School Ethos and Leadership, so no need to introduce such Ethics into a "Way" the Catholic Faith already instructs us to live.

85% of pupils are Catholic and by the teaching of many faiths instead of The One True Faith the result would be a diluted and confusing curriculum for children of primary school age, in order to facilitate a small minority. Schools already work very well in accommodating children of minority faiths.

Regards

Mairead Harman



Home

Contributor

Margaret Buckley

ERB Learning About Religions.

I would like to comment on the outline ERB programme given in the teacher's document on the NCCA website. It would appear that knowledge is the only criteria that is emphasised and that no belief or practice of faith is envisaged. Young children are being asked to make up their minds with no definite guidelines to help them I can see that this programme has a big potential for confusion both for the teacher, the pupils and the parents. The vague ideas such as well-being, citizenship connection to a wider world for young children do not seem to be age appropriate. Learning about is not real education it does not ground people into the reality of life on this planet and its meaning. I learn a language so that I can use it, in everyday life. Learning about the language does not satisfy my need to communicate in that language. I find meaning in the belief system of my Community which in this land is Christianity. By its very nature Christianity is inclusive and open to other religions.

The ERBE documents does not take into account that theist beliefs involve the transcendent but treat all religions as a human culture phenomena. Spirituality seems to be a vague well-being topic of little concern. Religions see an intimate and inseparable connection between beliefs and ethics. The ethic proposed by ERBE is neither objective nor truly pluralistic. The document is like a state religion which is to be imposed on Primary Schools throughout this land overloading our wonderful primary school teachers with work. I believe this document undermines religious freedom and violates the rights of children and their parents.

I just wonder if this programme is another way of undermining the Denominational Schools in this country. While schools will be allowed to teach RE in their own schools it would appear that this programme has to be done as well .In fact the desired outcomes from the ERB programme have been happening in education for centuries. All beliefs to be viewed through secular/atheist lens is a nonsense as faith and atheism are diametrically opposed. Do we expect children to differentiate beliefs at the age of eight or nine? Respect for religious beliefs and tradition have been an inherent part of Irish society why push for secularisation by a minority of political forces

Why introduce a new programme? If the answer is to satisfy a minority then I respectfully suggest that the Government build schools for this grouping. The Education system in this country has been and still is being financed by parish communities even though the State pays the salaries of the teachers. If the State desires to have completely secular institutions then provide them where they are required. The survey carried out some years ago do not suggest that the vast majority of people in this country are in favour of secular schools. A diluted religion programme is a disaster in the making for future society. It may indicate the age of individualism where young people will have to re-learn to communicate with other human beings as everything is being driven by technological gadgets by pressing a button. It will be a cloud cuckoo land where Religious Education will have no look in.

In 1996 Cardinal Hume had the following to say on education “The purpose of education is to develop integrated human beings. The role of education is that of helping to form young people with dreams and hopes still alive with a sensitivity and a receptiveness to what lies ahead and equipped to think and act morally.” Faith in Jesus Christ is what makes Christian schools distinctive from secular education in which the religious dimension remains unacknowledged. The vision for a human person is that God is at the heart of our world. It is sad that this nation’s Christian and cultural heritage is being undermined by a programme which has more to do with politics than religion. Millions visit Trinity College to view how the monks decorated the gospel pages of the Book of Kells, these very words gave meaning to their lives just as they do today to many people on this island. The history of this country is steeped in Christian tradition so why destroy this because a vocal minority demand something that is very different. If we decide to live in other countries’ we accept their history and customs as they are and we do not expect them to change because they are different to our beliefs. The ERSE document has no place for the gems of wisdom found in the Bible it beggars belief. Equally when we listen to the brave men that gave their lives in 1916 all of them expressed their belief in God and were willing to give their lives so that we had freedom to be who we were called to be.

Every child has a right to a Religious Education programme it is their birth right and it needs to be age appropriate. At the heart of Religious education is a care for all irrespective of race or creed. For a society to function it needs to have moral codes which inform the way people live and care for our world. Respect for the individual is an essential part of Religious education as is the building of communities where tolerance is shown for others so that they can live in peace and harmony. The experience of ritual and prayer experience is important in the development of young people and where is this to be found in the ERBE programme? I take it ritual will be eliminated as anything to do with God is to be banned. Involving students in rituals develops many other skills and offers opportunities and links with other subjects: music, drama art, literacy numeracy, history, geography etc. Children learn to work in groups, they gain in confidence and become aware of who they are and learn a sense of fair play.

In a recent document Pope Francis says” if our schools are not a space where another humanity is being created where another wisdom is taking root, where another society is being created where hope and transcendence have a place then we are losing out in making an unique contribution to this historical moment”. In an ever changing society we need to take stock of what has been in the traditions and guiding principles of our Primary Schools and not throw out the baby with the bath water depriving future generations of a religious education programme which is based on the teachings of Jesus Christ.

The document ERBE should be re-named ‘Civics Curriculum in Primary Education’ I guess the new schools which operate under a variety of names and claim to be non-denominational may find this document answers their needs which I accept as their choice. However, I plead that the new RE curriculum programme ‘Grow in Love’ be the RE programme that Catholic Schools are allowed to operate with and that this new document be optional if school Boards of Management decide to adapt it to their needs.



Home

Contributor

Sr Maria Comerford

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Date	04.03.206

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

ERB and Ethics are essential for the wholistic development of the child.

The proposed features of the of the new ERB and Ethics programme are already contained in the Primary School Curriculum and in the new Religious Education Curriculum for Primary Schools in Ireland

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents

- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

In view of curriculum overload, we feel that all of the above are catered for in the SPHE, SESE and RE Curricula.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

Cannot have an ERB and Ethics programme which does not have regard for the characteristic spirit of the particular school. This is already enshrined in the Education Act which specifically requires the Minister to have regard for the characteristic spirit of the school in exercising his or her function with regard to curriculum (section 30(2)(b)).

Therefore, our preferred approach would be to integrate ERB and Ethics into the RE Curriculum in faith-based schools.

It was felt that further consultation should take place between the NCCA and the patrons of faith-based schools on how such concerns might be addressed.





Home

Contributor

Maria McSwiney

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS



Respondent's details

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Date	3 - 03 - 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

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Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35
Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to erb@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in REB and Ethics.

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- The proposed aims of REB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
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- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

Aims - Valued Child, Critical Role of Teacher, Child Centered Pedagogy, Pluralism. They have been the DNA of teaching all my life - New Curriculum, Revised Curriculum. There was always an acute awareness of these issues. Children are well aware of the needs of others, accept without question the diversity of others, all aspects which might help children become better people are already addressed. Schools are by experience made provision for inter-religious and inter-cultural understanding. ~~The potential contribution of a curriculum in REB and Ethics~~

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

Negative in my opinion - the positive good and ethics which permeates schools at present will be undermined by an emphasis on divisions and differences.

Curriculum overload is addressed using integration by the competent teacher. The proposed programme is not integration, friendly.



Home

Contributor

Marie Porter

To whom it may concern,

This is my written submission for the new religious beliefs and ethics curriculum which is in consultation at the minute.

I as a parent would disagree on adding this into an already overloaded workload in our children's school. I believe strongly that our children are just starting to find their own path in there young life in primary school and I believe that when we set out to start our family My husband and I promised to bring them up and teach them about our catholic faith and I think that at such a young age it would be confusing for them. In the school they attend and at home my children are already taught to respect everyone regardless of who they are, their race or their ethnic / religious background.

Marie Porter

Tiernasligo NS

Co.Donegal



Home

Contributor

Martina Mallen

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Martina Mallon
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Date	

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

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The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

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Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

Learning about other faiths and ethics is very important. However, it is my belief that this should be done within the context of the school's individual ethos. The new Catholic Curriculum addresses these very issues.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

I think that the contribution of this subject is limited and it will teach children in a piecemeal fashion. A school's Catholic Ethos allows us to teach these areas in a holistic way that children are more receptive to. It would rob our community of the school based sacramental celebration and preparation. This would be a great loss to the children who are made welcome in the community as they grow in the church's teaching.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

Our school was named after the locals who protected the priest and congregation at the Mass Rock during Penal Times from the British Redcoats. People risked their lives in order to continue in their faith. It would be a great dis service to the proud people of our area if I accepted this new proposal as it stands, which is why I am making a personal submission. We need more time for consultation and debate on the matter while also considering the good work done by faith schools in moulding responsible future citizens. "The baby should not be thrown out with the bath water" springs to mind. Teaching the Catholic Faith to our pupils is an honour and a very positive experience. Pearls of wisdom often come from the less academic child and this is to be rightly celebrated. Those schools who wish to retain their ethos in the light of this new subject should be allowed the opportunity of adapting content with respect to their Religious Affiliation. Thank you.





Home

Contributor

Mary Ann Collins

Submission for Consultation Process on Education about Religions & Beliefs and Ethics

Name: Mary Anne Collins

Occupation: Primary School Teacher

Email: maryannecollins9@gmail.com

Date: 30.03.16

Like many of my colleagues, I am very interested in the proposals for this new subject for primary schools. The broad aims of the subject outlined in the consultation paper are of course positive and all parents and teachers and indeed the whole of society would aspire to promote attitudes of respect, understanding and tolerance. However, the proposals fail to recognise the tremendous work which is already taking place in schools to foster these attitudes.

It is my view and that of others within education, that this new subject is not needed. It is unfair to even suggest that Irish schools are not already promoting values of inclusiveness, understanding, care, respect and tolerance amongst their school communities. Having experience of Catholic, Church of Ireland and Educate Together schools, I can say that across a spectrum of schools, the patrons, teachers, boards of management and parents all encourage and foster such attitudes.

In my experience the concept behind this proposed subject, to help children understand other faiths & beliefs and people who hold these beliefs, actually misses the realities of the life of the child. Children already learn naturally and in a developmentally appropriate way about the beliefs of their friends and classmates. Children are both curious and accepting and I know that teachers already encourage openness and respect for the beliefs and traditions of all children in the classroom.

Children need a strong sense of their own identity, as part of their family, their community and if their parents wish – their faith community. We want our children to be critical thinkers and to look at the world and question it, these are skills which are built up over time, and in order to develop these skills, a person needs to have a firm grounding in their own identity. We need a starting point from which to view the world, a lens through which to look. ERB would endeavour to impose a mature analysis of religions on children who are not developmentally ready for this type of critical study.

It would be terribly confusing and indeed upsetting for a child to be taught in one lesson that God made him or her, God made the world, God loves him or her as His own son or daughter, and then in a lesson later in the day to learn that some religions don't believe in one God, some religions don't believe in God as a loving father, and some world views don't believe in God at all. Children will be given a perception that there is no truth, that what teacher says cannot be trusted. I am quite certain that the idea of having two different subject programmes, with two very different sets of aims would not even be considered for any other school subject. It would be thought of as confusing and educationally unsound.

The nature of this new subject would require schools and teachers to teach religion in an agnostic and secular way for part of the school day. This would be a major contradiction for denominational schools and an assault on the characteristic spirit of the school. Many parents choose a school for their child with the understanding that the child will be formed and nourished in their faith. This programme would undermine the work of schools in passing on their faith as well as undermine the rights of parents who expect their child to receive an education in line with the ethos of the school.

In Ireland, we value religious freedom so much that under Irish law, parents can withdraw their children from religious education, or indeed any part of the school curriculum they find objectionable. I know that many parents, of various religious beliefs, would withdraw their children from ERBE. It could be the case that a majority of students in some schools would be withdrawn from the subject.

What about the impact of this new subject on teachers? Will their rights to freedom of conscience be respected? If this programme is implemented, all state schools will have to comply. Will arrangements be facilitated to ensure that teachers' rights are not trampled upon? What if a majority of teachers in a school refuse to teach the programme? Will the department be sanctioning teachers? What problems would this create in terms of equality and freedom?

With regard to the ethics part of the programme, any concept of ethics must be grounded in a particular philosophy. In Catholic schools, ethics would have to be grounded in Catholic moral and social teaching and based on Gospel values. In everyday situations in school pupils and teachers deal with ethical issues. This is done in a way which is in line with the ethos of the school. I am concerned that this programme would endeavour to look at ethics from a secular point of view, an impossible task in a denominational school. If faith forms part of a person's identity, it will of course affect his or her decision making and view of the world. A denominational school's task is to form their pupils in their faith, and looking at ethics from a viewpoint outside of one's own faith would be confusing and unhelpful before one is mature in their own faith or belief system.

ERBE also poses unique questions in Educate Together schools. The religious education programme taught in these schools is quite similar to ERBE. Educate Together schools would still be required to teach both programmes. In a sense, there would no longer be anything unique about Educate Together schools. It would actually take away parental choice, as some have noted that all schools would be forced into a new identity as de-facto multidenominational schools. Instead of a new subject, funding is needed for more schools in certain areas, and many of these would be multidenominational, under the Educate Together or Community National School models.

There are also concerns about curriculum overload and timetabling issues, which have been already acknowledged by the NCCA. Teachers are already using every available minute to teach the current array of subjects. Rather than implementing a new subject, perhaps a better approach would be to acknowledge where the aims of the ERBE programme are already being met, and for schools to be congratulated and encouraged in their positive work.



Home

Contributor

Mary Cosgrove

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Mary Cosgrove
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Date	31/3/2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

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Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

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- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children’s learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

I welcome the proposed ERB and Ethics module.

Properly implemented, I believe this subject could aid children in understanding the world around them and help them contextualize different topics. Learning that there are many different value ways to view the “big questions” can only assist them in questioning what they learn and developing the skills to see the other side of any proposition.

I am delighted to see Human Rights feature in the explanatory information but disappointed to see rights feature only in the “rights and responsibilities” elements of the documentation. While it is important that children are aware of their responsibilities, I would be wary of linking Human Rights to responsibilities in case it gives the suggestion that Human Rights only apply to those who are “responsible enough”. Human Rights are universal, inalienable, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated. Children should, as a starting point, learn about the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

The benefits of learning about other religions will not only benefit the students but their parents too. Many of us, educated without such a subject in our schooling, know very little about religion and belief systems other than our own. In an increasingly inter-cultural country such additional knowledge can only benefit the students, their parents and the wider community.

As noted in the assessment of the religion curriculums set by the various school patrons, some of the proposed module is already covered to some extent. I would therefore suggest that the time allocated to the patron's curriculum be reduced from the current level of 2.5 hours a week, to make room for this wider curriculum.

I would also suggest that, from first class on, the ethics element of the proposed course be integrated into other subjects rather than taught as a separate subject. Teachers and students should be encouraged when covering other subjects, such as history, science, English and Irish to consider the ethical issues that may arise for the topics/stories covered in class. This module would better reflect the role of ethics in life – it is not a separate item which can be considered on its own, but rather is an element of daily decisions in many areas.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

I have nothing further to add but to wish the NCCA well in the rolling out of this new module.





Home

Contributor

Mary Whelan

To Whom it may concern

I am writing in connection with the proposal for the development of a new programme for primary schools called 'Education about Religion and Beliefs and Ethics'.

I want to say that such a subject should not be taught in primary schools as I feel it would confuse children when they are learning their own faith. I want the 30 minutes of religion of a faith specific to that school to be maintained. Of all the subjects taught in school I feel that religion is the one that is of most benefit to young people as it gives them strength going through life.

No group should deny children learning about their own faith in their own faith school. In secondary school children are more mature and can discuss what they were taught in an ERB and Ethics school with their parents or other adults. This may not happen at primary level.

40 years ago when I was in primary school, children of another church were made most welcome and we did not have to give up what we believed in in order to make others feel included. How many parents want ERB and Ethics taught? Don't try and fix something that isn't broken.

Yours,

Mary Whelan



Home

Contributor

Maureen Hamilton

I would like to object to the proposed changes to the schools religious curriculum. The catholic faith is part of our culture and heritage and I think it is wrong to change that. Furthermore, our school has always been a catholic school and we live in a predominantly catholic area. I can't see the benefits of changing the way religion is taught in our school and I believe changing it could result in confusing children about their faith and beliefs.

I do hope you consider parents opinions before you make changes.

Sincerely

Maureen Hamilton

My child is in 3rd class in St Aengus NS, Bridgend, Co Donegal.



Home

Contributor

Maureen Matthews

I disagree with the proposal to introduce a curriculum in Education about Religious Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics into Primary Education.

I believe that the aim of ERB to foster respect for, understanding of and empathy with members of different beliefs and worldviews is already catered for in the Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland and in many other subjects in the Primary School Curriculum.

I believe the teaching of Ethics which includes the formation in the promotion of a personal commitment to the dignity and freedom of all human beings is a core value of the Gospel message in Catholic schools. Catholic schools have always emphasised the importance of human rights and responsibilities, the place of justice within society, and the service of the common good. These elements are essential core values in any Catholic school where education for citizenship and the effective functioning of democracy is of paramount importance.

Each school patron has a right to develop a programme that supports and contributes to the ethos of the school and that supports the faith formation of its pupils.

The aims of ERB and Ethics are already reflected to a large degree in our primary school curriculum. I don't see why it is necessary to duplicate and create another separate subject when the five key areas: personal understanding, mutual understanding, character education, connection to the wider world and spiritual awareness are already in the Primary School Curriculum and in the Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland. The latter curriculum fosters a sense of identity and belonging in children by developing their self-awareness, self-esteem, self-confidence - in effect, their total wellbeing. Catholic schools foster a respect for, understanding of and empathy with members of different religions, beliefs and stances for living.

Catholic schools are inclusive schools that are characterised by learning environments that reflect and show pride in the linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity that comprises the school community.

When parents choose to send their child to a Catholic school, these parents expect and wish that their child is taught in a faith environment.

It is unclear in the proposal regarding the possible introduction of ERB and Ethics how pluralist, critical teaching about religions that places a child external to the faith can develop the spiritual awareness, identity and sense of belonging of that child. A young child would be totally confused. I don't see how a young child could engage in the critical analysis of another faith. This would be imposing an adult, intellectual critique to childhood experiences and would totally confuse a child.

Inter-religious literacy is one of the five key skills in the Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland. This will be reflected in the "Grow in Love" series as it is phased in for all classes in the Catholic Primary School.

In conclusion, I wish to state that the proposal to introduce a new curriculum, ERB and Ethics, to our schools is not necessary; it would duplicate much of what is already being done in other curricular areas and it most certainly would not contribute to the holistic education of a child attending a Catholic Primary School.

Maureen Matthews

Teacher

51 Orwell Park Rise, Templeogue, Dublin 6W.

Phone: 01-4509660

email: mrn_matthews@yahoo.co.uk



Home

Contributor

Michael Quinn



Brockagh,
Carrigrohane,
Co. Galway

6-Nov-2015

Re: ERB & Ethics consultation paper

To whom it concerns:

While I believe the introduction of ERB & Ethics as a subject is a step in the right direction, I believe it does not go far enough. Schools should be placed under the patronage of the state and this subject should replace current single faith teaching. As a parent of no faith, I have been placed in the unwanted position of having to have my children baptised in order to secure their places at the local Catholic ethos primary school. I despise the fact that I have to do this and know of many parents in the same position as well as teachers who do not wish to teach religion as currently taught.

My belief is that apart from the proposed ERB & Ethics subject, the teaching of religion should be taken out of schools. This should be commenced on a phased basis with the preparation for sacraments such as communion and confirmation being immediately taken out of school hands as these cause particular problems for a parent of no or other faiths whose children are attending Catholic ethos schools.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Quinn".

Michael Quinn



Home

Contributor

**Midleton CBS Primary School
(Board of Management)**

MIDLETON CBS PRIMARY SCHOOL

Scoil na mBráithre

Rosary Place,
Middleton,
Co. Cork.



Email:

Website: middletoncbsprimary.ie

Telephone: 021 4631419/021 4633034 Mobile: 086 1266902

Roll Number: 16684W

FAC: ERB and Ethics Consultation,
National Council of Curriculum and Assessment,
15 Fitzwilliam Square,
Dublin 2.

Re: Response to the consultation paper on Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School

To Whom It May Concern,

Attached please find the response of the Board of Management of this primary school to the consultation paper on ERB and Ethics. The submission is made at once on behalf of the Board but as a collection of individual responses to the consultation paper. The author of each submission is named and the constituent group of the BOM represented by them is clearly indicated.

Should you require any further information in support of this submission, as a whole or in relation to any of the individual submissions, please contact the school using the contact details listed above. The school will re-open following the Easter break on Monday 4th April.

Thank you,

Yours faithfully,

Mary Cunningham
Principal
Secretary to the Board of Management

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education

Respondent's details

Name	Michael Ryan
Position (if applicable)	Chairperson, Board of Management
Organisation (if applicable)	Middleton CBS Primary School
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Telephone	021 - 4631419
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Date	22 - 3 - 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

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The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

REB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35
Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to curriculum@ncca.ie.

Response to the consultation paper on Education about Religious & Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School

Currently the entire content on the NCCA's web site on Religious Education is contained in one line namely 'The development and implementation of the curriculum in religious education in primary schools remains the responsibility of the relevant patron bodies.'

Current legislation requires the Minister to have regard for the characteristic spirit of the school in exercising his or her functions with regard to curriculum and to allow reasonable instruction time in the school day for subjects relating to and arising from the characteristic spirit of the school.

Hence it can be justifiably argued that religious education in faith-based schools is inseparable from the characteristic spirit of the school.

However it appears that programmes developed from a faith perspective will be at variance with the programme as envisaged by the NCCA:

"The moral and ethical content of the proposed curriculum for ERB and Ethics is intended to be grounded in a pluralist and values education perspective. In this way a curriculum for ERB and Ethics will be inclusive of all children regardless of their belief tradition." (NCCA, *see our files in a Primary School Consultation Paper*, p.26, NCCA 2019)

This sentiment would appear to be incompatible with the idea of every school having its own ethos or characteristic spirit determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values & traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school, and schools are challenged to give expression to this characteristic spirit through the lens of Catholic faith.

NCCA, in its Consultation paper, suggest four possible approaches to explore the development of a curriculum for ERB & Ethics namely:

- ERB & Ethics as part of the Patron's programme,
- ERB & Ethics integrated across curriculum areas,
- ERB & Ethics as a discrete curriculum,
- ERB & Ethics as having both discrete and integrated components.

The Consultation paper seems to favour option ii) but concludes that the final choice of approach will be informed through the consultative process.

However it is important to point out the following issues arise in the context of delivering such a programme in a Catholic school and making it compatible with an existing Religious Education programme:

- Given existing time constraints and the accepted reality of curriculum overload the stability of a discrete curriculum is questionable at best.
- Such a discrete curriculum if developed on the philosophical basis suggested in the consultation paper would undoubtedly conflict with the existing faith based religious

education programme and the characteristic spirit in Catholic schools.

- DBS & Ethics integrated across curriculum areas would arguably raise even more serious questions for the expression of the characteristic spirit of the school.
- The determination of the ethos or characteristic spirit of a school is not the function of the NCCA or indeed the Minister.

In conclusion, it may be more appropriate that the concerns behind the NCCA's proposals may be addressed by an agreed set of guidelines applicable to all schools and delivered through the various patron's programmes.

The needs of children who have opted out of the patron's programme could then be addressed using the guidelines as a template and delivered subject to additional resources being made available.

Michael Ryan

Chairperson, The Board of Management

March 2016



Home

Contributor

**Midleton CBS Primary School
(Principal)**

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in Education

Respondent's details

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35
Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to education@ncca.gov.ie

Response to the consultation paper on Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School

Context

This school is an all boys' school, under Catholic patronage and situated in a large but rural town that has experienced significant settlement of families from all over the world during the last ten years at least. There are three hundred and twelve pupils enrolled in the school, of which 19.8% are of other religions or none. The main religions represented in this 19.8% included Muslims (3.2%), Pentecostal/Apostolic Churches (4.7%), Jehovah Witnesses (2.8%), Orthodox Christians (2.2%), Church of Ireland/Anglican (0.9%), Baptists (0.9%) and "Other Religions" (2.2%). Families who indicate that their children have "no religion" account for 1.9% of the pupil cohort. While this percentage represents almost one-fifth of our pupils we must also state clearly and recognise that our faith-based school, a school that presents a clearly stated characteristic spirit based in the traditions of the Catholic Church, that delivers religious education in this context but that also delivers education in ethics in this context, is the choice of the parents of these pupils. It is also important to note that there are schools of different patronage type available in the area but these parents have chosen our school community. Secondly, it is very important to recognise and respect the choice and rights of the 80% of parents who are members of the Catholic Church and who have chosen an education for their children in a faith-based, Catholic school.

Current provision for ERB

As a Catholic School we currently make provision for inter-religious and inter-cultural awareness in terms of our policies, ethos, leadership, the programme in religious education and across other curricular areas. ERB and Ethics are vibrant, living entities in our school community where every day of the week our school functions as a respectful, ordered, inclusive community where every child is valued, where we promote personal understanding and encourage the children to feel confident about their own beliefs, opinions, identities and to be confident sharing these.

The following give expression to that reality in our school:

- Underpinning everything we do every day is our mission statement:

"..... which aims to provide a fruitful, ordered, inclusive climate of learning in which the personal development of each pupil is nurtured to its unique potential. The school strives to provide pupils with an excellent general education, which embodies high academic standards allied to a broad range of experience. Self-esteem is fostered and mutual respect is encouraged in a Christian, caring atmosphere. For Roman Catholic pupils, formation in the faith is an integral part of school. Gender equity in the school community is actively promoted. The school hopes to enhance the quality of life of its pupils by endeavouring to provide for their educational needs and by identifying and encouraging their interests and talents."

- Our enrolment policy states:

“Equity of access is the key value that determines the enrolment of children in our school. No child is refused admission for reason of ethnicity, special educational needs, disability, language/accents, traveller status, asylum seeker/refugee status, religious/ political beliefs and values, family or social circumstances.”

- The “Schedule of a Catholic School” is openly presented to parents intending to enrol their children in the school. Opportunity is given to discuss anything that may be of concern to them in terms of the inclusion of their child in our school community especially when the family is of a different religious belief or of none in the context of the characteristic spirit of our school.
- Children of Christian based faiths other than Catholicism opt to join in the programme of religious instruction delivered in the classrooms. Others do not and arrangements are made to facilitate these pupils in an agreed and meaningful manner. Pupils of other faiths and none are very respectful of but do not participate in faith-based rituals such as daily morning and evening prayer.
- Every effort is made to invite the pupils of other religions and none to present about their beliefs, rituals, and practice as the opportunity arises, or in a more formal way in the middle and senior classes.
- Non-Catholic pupils and their families are invited to join the school community on special occasions such as the party that follows the First Holy Communion Mass. On these occasions, the families receive a special invitation to join the school community and to celebrate their child’s presence in the class group. Many families have expressed their appreciation of this inclusive practice over the years. Children of other religions or none are presented with a little gift to mark their presence in the class community when the Catholic children receive special certificates and prayer cards etc. to mark their special day. Many members of other religions or none have helped the Parents’ Council in the preparation and delivery of the parties they organise to celebrate First Holy Communion, Confirmation and Graduation.
- Other very inclusive moments in the Catholic school year and our religious education programme that facilitate inter-religious dialogue and fusion include honouring the dead in November, honouring grandparents in January, welcoming the seasons of the year. These are examples that link directly to the Patron’s religious education programme.
- Currently we are embracing a new curriculum (Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland, Veritas, Irish Episcopal Conference, 2015) that presents so many more supports, opportunities, methodologies, training and content that facilitate the development of personal understanding, mutual understanding and spiritual understanding.
- Through the content and experience of the curricular programmes delivered in SPHE, SESE, Drama, Literacy, P.E. we foster personal understanding, mutual understanding and spiritual awareness. Celebration of Chinese New Year annually; African drumming, dances and songs of other lands; food sampling, intentional greetings, family trees from around the world, stories of struggles for freedom in other lands... there is an endless list of inclusive

activities engaged in by the school to value, honour, understand and include peoples of different traditions and origins. Programmes in these curricular areas are extensive and very time consuming and a deep skill base has been developed in teaching staff over many long years.

- This school is a very active participant in programmes such as the Green Flag initiative. We are a Green School having earned three flags to date and are awaiting our fourth award. Green Flags are not earned without significant time, effort, input and co-operation across every person in the school community.
- As the first school to earn an Active Flag in the local community we endeavoured to draw activities for our programmes from all the ethnic and religious traditions represented within our school. Appreciating the local environmental amenity as a means to personal exercise opportunity has led to an annual whole-school picnic and walk to a local forest. Many of the new-comer families to the area have thus been introduced to a wonderful family amenity not to mention a place of spectacular natural beauty. Together children of Catholic, other religious and non-religious backgrounds can gaze on this, experience it together and indeed live the shared reality of "wonder and awe".

Current provision for Ethics

This school already has in place a large number of policies, programmes and initiatives to promote character education and to instil an understanding of right and wrong.

- Respect is at the heart of everything we endeavour to do in our school.
- Our Code of Behaviour supports our pupils to appreciate people's rights and to understand that that implies responsibilities. The children are challenged and supported on a daily basis to understand the power and potential of taking responsibility for their actions. They are meaningfully praised and rewarded for their positive achievements and the successful navigation of the challenges they encounter along the way. Truth is placed in a place of high regard and value.
- The development of conscience, personal integrity, active tolerance and respect across religious, ethnic and cultural divides is the reality of each day lived in our school community – as such a diverse school community we could not function at all if this were not the case!
- Restorative justice methodologies underpin much of our approach to everyday disciplinary issues. Our Anti-bullying strategy is also based around this approach.

In terms of connection with the wider world as the second dimension of ethics education we are already promoting the connection between our pupils and the wider world.

- The nature and composition of our pupil cohort, existing curricula, school initiatives, national programmes etc. are already effectively developing as

awareness and understanding of the diversity in local and global communities. We are a local and at once a global community.

- SPHE, SESE, Oral Language Programmes, Religious Education Programme address prejudice, discrimination, racism, bullying
- Green Flag Programmes, Justice Entrepreneur programme, Active Flag Programme, Food Dudes and healthy eating programmes, Treasure projects, Links with CBS in Calcutta, India - address awareness and respect for the environment; concept development – sustainable development, stewardship of the environment
- Religious Education Programme, Links with Treasure and Bóthar, Oral Language programme, Drama curriculum, daily watching of kids' news on internet; engagement with news of national and international significance – encourage the children to investigate and think about topical spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues and the challenges of living in a changing democratic society as well as justifying and defending personal opinions and beliefs
- The development of critical knowledge, understanding and awareness of human rights, equality, culture, social justice and social inclusivity are facilitated, encouraged and supported through the SESE and SPHE curricula, Green Flag, Active flag, JEP, school projects to support Downs Syndrome Cork, the National Council for the Blind, schools in Calcutta, Treasure, Bóthar, local youth centre.

In conclusion

The main point, drawn from our lived experience and perspective, is that the reality of our day-to-day existence, as a Catholic school, catering for Catholic children and for children of other religions and none, is such that we are already living the theory on which ERB and Ethics appear to be based.

- We are living this journey and delivering on so many of the specific aims detailed for the proposed curriculum on ERB and Ethics and as laid out on pages 11/ 14 of the Consultation Paper, ERB and Ethics, NCCA 2015.
- Time is already at a premium. The demands of an already overloaded curriculum and school day make the thought of a discrete curriculum in ERB and Ethics loaded on top of the current demands an incomprehensible challenge and one that seems to make little sense in the context of already very successful and inclusive provision in a school.
- School self evaluation has run into difficulty in Primary schools because of overload and untenable workloads, middle management structures, that heretofore would have facilitated the reality of curriculum change on the ground, are decimated. Provision for the complex needs of schools as they have developed in recent times e.g. the end of allocation of DEIS status to any new applicants and the overburdened demands on social supports such as those services delivered by the agencies of TUSLA and the HSE are all real issues on the ground that have a very real and burdensome implications for schools on a daily basis.
- The challenges of addressing the needs of all our pupils in terms of literacy and numeracy – the very able right through to the EAL learners - are already significantly demanding.

- The imposition of a new curricular area or indeed possibly two areas would tip many school communities, including our own, to human breaking point in terms of delivery of core skills.
- We are doing a very good job. We are delivering the area and objectives of REE and Ethics so why make such sweeping changes? The proof of this is that people choose to enrol their children in our school. Sixty-two children have been enrolled for 2016/2017.
- We are reflective practitioners who constantly seek to improve our provision in as many aspects of school life as possible. A set of national guidelines on REE and Ethics that could be worked in tandem with the Patron's programme, that would link into programmes and approaches already in use and working successfully, would lend useful support, resources and direction to the provision for pupils of other religions and none who enrol in faith-based schools.

Mary Cunningham
Principal and Secretary to the Board of Management
March 2016



Home

Contributor

Miriam O'Sullivan Long

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

I see the proposed curriculum as a very positive and necessary mechanism to enable children to learn about pluralism and inclusiveness at a formative stage in their education. As proposed, the ERBE curriculum will enhance children's ability to think critically about issues which impinge on their lives now and will present significant challenges to them in the future.

I can also envisage challenges to the implementation of such a curriculum. I will elucidate these later in this document

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

The context of the individual school will have a major bearing on the implementation of ERBE. In circumstances where a school is largely white Irish, catholic and monocultural, there may be a reluctance among parents and/or teachers to engage because of the perceived threat to a culture/ethos which is known, and perceived to be under threat by such developments.

Time constraints and the issue of curriculum overload needs to be very carefully considered and stage managed in order to ensure that the proposed curriculum gets a chance to be aired or considered at all in the first instance.

In terms of time allocation, I can see from a teaching point of view, that perhaps the most appropriate curricular context for ERBE is within an extended SPHE curriculum . I think it should be kept outside discrete denominational religious education time in order to assuage any concerns about a 'watering down' of the religious ethos and values of individual schools. Perhaps it could be presented in a block of time within the school year as the Stay Safe programme is at present (eg. 12 weeks of ERBE)

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

In order to interpret my concerns, maybe I should contextualise myself a little as follows: I have been teaching since 1982. I have taught in 4 different schools in the Dublin area, two of which were developing Educate Together schools in the first 5 years of their development. I have been teaching in a Catholic school in Killarney since 2007. I have also had two periods of secondment, the first of which was in The Ark as music programmer for 3 years, and the second was 2 years spent with the PCSP as a music trainer/cuiditheoir.

Having worked in several staff contexts, I have worked with the whole spectrum of teacher outlooks in my career! There is a vast difference between the culture a rural school in the environs of an affluent town like Killarney and a large multicultural city school, not just in terms of its catchment but in terms of the culture that is fostered in the staffroom. Without wanting to pigeon-hole or stereotype, I can see from my own experience how the context of the 'parish' is a more important and vital component in the rural context, and it is a powerful force in governing the way staff think and express, or maybe more importantly, don't express personal views which may be perceived as challenging consensus. The proposed curriculum, if it is to be successful will mean the development of a culture of openness to new thinking and ideas, with which many people with traditionally held views may feel very uncomfortable. My main concern is that the ERBE curriculum will be delivered to teachers as a package in one or two training days, whereas in fact I think there needs to be a transitional period in advance of the introduction of such a curriculum where teachers are facilitated by skilled facilitators in having open discussions about values , pluralism etc. Perhaps this could be done in the Croke Park hours slot.

These views are my own personal views. I am happy to be contacted if you are seeking any development or clarification.





Home

Contributor

Moyasta NS

Moyasta N.S.,
Kilrush,
Co. Clare.
moyastans.ias@eircom.net



Having discussed the proposed ERB and ethics curriculum at a recent B.O.M. meeting, we feel it would be an unnecessary addition to an already overloaded curriculum.

Our school, like all other Primary Schools promotes values of respect, inclusion, justice fairness and engages and admits people of all beliefs and none.

Many of the proposed aims of the ethics curriculum are similar to the SPHE curriculum and our school is committed to promote 'the importance of human rights and responsibilities, the place of justice within society and the service of the common good' (Consultation Paper pg 6), by direct teaching and by the ethos of the school.

Inter-religious literacy is one of the 5 key skills addressed in the new religion programme 'Grow in Love'. Schools have been involved in piloting this series and it provides a rounded education which is respectful of other religious traditions. The vast majority of our families are practising Catholics and are committed and involved with their children's religious education. They value our Catholic ethos and the ways in which we work together to develop spiritual awareness, identity and a sense of belonging.

In conclusion, Board of Management members and Staff of Moyasta National School feel this is an unnecessary addition to the curriculum.

Caroline Bradley,
Chairperson.



Home

Contributor

Naomi McCormick

Mullanboy,
Castlefinn,
Co. Donegal

16th March 2016

Education about Religions, Beliefs and Ethics Consultation,
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment,
35 Fitzwilliam Square,
Dublin 2.

To whom it may concern,

I am writing to you to highlight some concerns I have about the introduction of ERBE into primary schools. I am currently teaching in a Catholic primary school in Co. Donegal and have been made aware of the ERBE programme through our diocesan advisor.

Religious education in faith-based schools is inseparable from the characteristic spirit of the school. The secular world view offered by the NCCA proposal is at odds with that of a Catholic school where the Catholic faith is embraced and where the Catholic children receive religious formation and not just religious knowledge. The NCCA proposal clearly states it 'does not nurture the belief or practice of any one religion'. It is the difference between saying 'Christ is the way, the truth and the life' and 'Christ is a way, a truth...'

The Education Act specifically requires the Minister to have regard for the characteristic spirit of the school in exercising his or her functions with regard to curriculum {section 30(2)(b)}. Further, the Minister must allow reasonable instruction time in the school day for subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school {section 30(2)(d)}. There is a clear concern about Curriculum overload in regard to the NCCA proposal.

Catholic Schools are already places where children learn about other religious traditions particularly those of the children of other faiths in our schools. Catholic schools strive to achieve best practice when it comes to inclusion. The actual percentage of children within Catholic primary schools who are physically 'opting out' of the traditional 'religion class' is very low. There is a clear concern that the NCCA proposal does not reflect the good practice within Catholic schools in regard to inclusion.

Regardless of where the ERB and Ethics sits in regard to the existing RE programme approved by the Catholic Church (as a stand-alone curriculum or somehow integrated with the Patron's programme), the above concerns remain. A faith school is defined by its faith. This is the very cornerstone of denominational education and indeed religious liberty. While

there is a legitimate need to increase the provision of non-faith schools (a need which the Catholic Church supports), this does not justify asking a faith school to take a secular view of religious education.

I would ask you to consider these concerns and not to proceed with the introduction of ERBE in our schools.

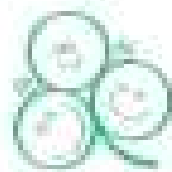
Yours sincerely,

Naomi McCormick



Home

Contributor
Ombudsman for Children



ombudsman
for children - do leanaid



Confidential

Patrick Sullivan
Director of Curriculum and Assessment
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
35 Fitzwilliam Square
Dublin 2

29th April 2016

RE: Consultation on proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics

Dear Patrick,

I write in relation to the consultation that the NCCA is undertaking with regard to proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics.

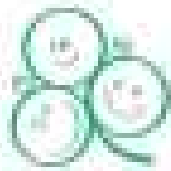
I would like to thank you for inviting the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) to participate in this consultation process.

As you know, the Ombudsman for Children's Office is an independent statutory body, which was established in 2004 under the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002. The Ombudsman for Children is independent and directly accountable to the Director in relation to the exercise of his two core roles. Provided for under the 2002 Act, these statutory functions are:

- to promote the rights and welfare of children up to the age of 18 years;
- to deal with complaints made by or on behalf of children about the administrative actions of public bodies, schools and voluntary hospitals.

Our response to the NCCA's current proposals for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics is informed by the Ombudsman for Children's positive obligations under section 7 of the 2002 Act to encourage the development of policies, practices and procedures that promote children's rights and welfare and to promote awareness of matters relating to children's rights and welfare. The observations below are also informed by our work to engage directly with children and young people and by our work to independently examine and investigate complaints.

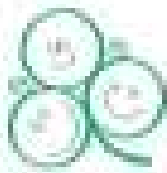
In its report of April 2012, the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector recommended that the State ensure all children receive education in ERB and Ethics



and requested the NCCA to develop a corresponding curriculum and teacher guidelines for ERB and Ethics (Coolahan et al. 2012, p.111). Mindful of this recommendation, the Office welcomes the work undertaken by the NCCA to date to develop proposals for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics in primary schools. The Office also welcomes the NCCA's consultative approach to the development of the proposals, including the NCCA's initiative to hear and take account of the views of children in the case study schools. In this regard, the OCO would encourage the NCCA to give consideration to how children might be supported to contribute further to its work to develop the current proposals.

Having reviewed the NCCA's documentation on the proposed curriculum in ERB and Ethics, the Office welcomes many elements of the current proposals, including:

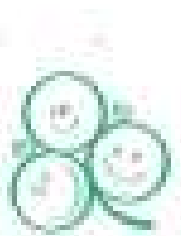
- the proposal that a curriculum in ERB and Ethics will be for all children in primary education;
- the inclusion of a review of the proposed curriculum in ERB and Ethics from a children's rights perspective in the context of work undertaken to develop the current proposals;
- the vision for and broad aims of the proposed curriculum in ERB and Ethics as set out in the NCCA's Consultation Paper (pp.30-34);
- recognition of the child as a "curious, capable, confident and caring individual" (p.21) and the corresponding promotion of a child-centred pedagogy, which includes a strong focus on experiential, inquiry-based, participative learning;
- recognition of the teacher as a facilitator and of the need for teachers to be "objective, critical and pluralist" in the context of teaching a curriculum in ERB and Ethics (p.11);
- recognition of the parent as the primary educator of the child, acknowledgement of the value to the child and his/her learning of effective partnership between parents and teachers, and the proposal that the curriculum in ERB and Ethics will seek to "involve parents directly in the learning experiences of their child" (p.11);
- the emphasis placed on promoting the development of skills and dispositions, which children need to "live and contribute in a constructive way to a diverse society" (p.10);
- recognition that ERB and Ethics requires a whole school approach and that the prospective contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics to developing, contributing to and supporting inclusive school communities needs to take account of "the visible and hidden practices of a school community" (p.11);
- cognisance of the importance of ensuring that a curriculum in ERB and Ethics is developmentally appropriate (p.18) and
- the consideration being given by the NCCA to how ERB and Ethics might connect constructively with existing curricula within primary education and how it links with elements of the Aistear curriculum in early childhood education as well as elements of the Junior Certificate and Leaving Certificate programmes at post-primary level.



Following a review of the consultation documents, the OCO wishes to make a small number of broad observations:

- The OCO appreciates the NCCA's conception of ERB and Ethics as "complementary yet distinct areas of education" (p.19). In the context of developing the current proposals, the NCCA might consider further how children could be facilitated to explore connections and commonalities between ERB and Ethics. For example, in light of the reference made to rights in the aims proposed for ERB and those proposed for Ethics, might children be supported to examine, in accordance with their evolving capacities, the extent to which core human rights concepts and values are consistent with core concepts and values embedded in "the cultural heritage of the major forms of religion, belief systems and worldviews which have been embraced by humankind" (p.10)?
- Noting that the vision for ERB and Ethics is for "a pluralist and values-based education" (p.10), the OCO would suggest that the NCCA might reflect on what guidance could assist teachers to deliver a curriculum that is pluralist yet mitigates against absolute relativism. Guidance may be particularly important and helpful in the context of teaching and learning about complex, controversial issues. In this regard, the OCO would encourage the NCCA to consider what framework(s) – for example, a human rights framework – teachers and children might appropriately employ to explore such issues in a manner that not only supports children to engage with and arrive at an understanding of conflicting perspectives, but also to consider whether and, if so, how such conflicts might be resolved.
- The Office welcomes the NCCA's proposal that a curriculum in ERB and Ethics will support children to explore the relationship between rights and responsibilities. In this regard, the OCO would suggest that it will be important that children are facilitated to understand that rights and responsibilities are interdependent and to explore how this interdependent relationship is linked to the idea that rights are universal. The manner in which a number of rights in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are defined offer concrete examples in this respect, which children might be supported to consider in accordance with their evolving capacities and in the context of an experiential approach to learning.

In its work to develop the current proposals, the OCO would encourage the NCCA to give further consideration to how children will be facilitated to engage with the concept of responsibility. An approach that focuses too narrowly on what responsibilities children might have and how children can take responsibility would constitute a missed opportunity. In this regard, the OCO would suggest that an exploration of such matters with and by children should be situated in and contextualised by a wider examination of responsibility in respect

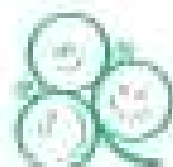


of children's rights, for example, younger children could be supported through an experiential approach to identify people in their own daily lives who participate in respecting, protecting and fulfilling different children's rights and to consider what and how they do so. Children in senior classes at primary level, meanwhile, could be introduced to concepts and vocabulary associated with responsibility ('obligation', 'duty', etc.) and facilitated in an age- and stage-appropriate way to consider:

- key groups of people (e.g. parents), institutions or entities that have responsibilities in relation to children's realisation of their rights;
 - what responsibilities they have;
 - what the nature of these responsibilities is, where they are articulated (for example, obligations provided for in law) and how they relate to one another;
 - whether and, if so, how people, institutions and entities can be held to account for their responsibilities;
 - what, if any, consequences there are for not fulfilling their responsibilities.
- The NCCA's Consultation Paper proposes that a curriculum in ER&E and Ethics will promote and support children to develop certain values and dispositions, with a strong emphasis placed on facilitating children to develop a confident sense of their own identity, self-worth and belonging and reflective, respectful, empathetic, responsible and empowered relationships with others, within their communities and with the wider world. Such objectives are welcome, in keeping as they are with the aims of education set out in Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. They are also consistent with views expressed by children and young people about what key aims of education should be in a consultation conducted by the OCO in 2014; among the main themes to emerge from this consultation with over 700 children and young people from 30 primary and post-primary schools around the country was that education should foster children and young people's personal and social development, including their self-esteem, self-confidence and capacity to build positive, respectful relationships with others.

As the NCCA's Consultation Paper recognises, the meaningful realisation of the vision and aims of the proposed curriculum in ER&E and Ethics with and for children will depend on its extension beyond teaching and learning in the classroom. It will require a whole school approach where both "the visible and hidden practices of a school community" model the dispositions and skills promoted through the curriculum and afford children opportunities to practice those dispositions and skills.

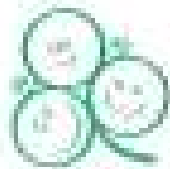
Through its engagement with schools throughout the country, the OCO is aware of the vital role played by schools in children's lives and appreciates the various ways in which



principals, teachers and other staff in schools are involved in respecting, protecting and fulfilling children's rights in school on a daily basis. In the context of developing its proposals for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics, the NCCA may wish to consider collecting and sharing examples of the diverse initiatives and practices that are already being implemented in primary schools, which are consistent with a whole school approach to supporting the dispositions and skills that it is proposed will be promoted through ERB and Ethics. The NCCA may also wish to consider how approaches to the development, implementation and review of policies and procedures in and by schools can support and be supported by the proposed curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

The largest category of complaints received by the OGD each year relates to education. Among the issues consistently raised in education-related complaints to the Office are matters concerning the handling of allegations of inappropriate professional conduct, the handling of peer-bullying in and by schools, and complaints-handling in schools. Through these and other education-related complaints, the OGD is aware of challenges schools can encounter and that there may be occasions where actions and decisions in and by schools can impact negatively on a child. In the context of developing its current proposals, the NCCA may wish to keep in mind that there will be children whose experiences in and of school may be at odds with dispositions and skills that it is proposed will be promoted by a curriculum in ERB and Ethics. One example in this regard is peer-bullying among children, which a school may not be aware of or finding challenging to address. While it is not the role of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics to resolve such matters, the NCCA may wish to consider whether there are appropriate ways in which the proposed curriculum might take account of such realities.

Similarly, the proposed curriculum envisages that teaching and learning in the classroom will extend to children's experiences within their homes and communities. The vast majority of children are likely to experience lives at home and in their communities that are consistent with the values, which the NCCA is proposing to promote through ERB and Ethics. However, there are also children whose lives at home and/or in their local communities involve very challenging experiences, some of which may present a stark contrast to these values and the dispositions and skills to be promoted through ERB and Ethics. For example, there are children who are experiencing 'hurt, harm, abuse and different forms of 'unfairness, injustice and inequality''. Clearly it is not the role of a curriculum to resolve complex and challenging issues that can arise in children's lives. However, given that children bring their lives outside school into the school and the classrooms, the OGD would encourage the NCCA to examine how the proposed curriculum in ERB and Ethics might acknowledge and take account of such realities in some children's lives. In this regard, the NCCA might explore whether the



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curriculum might incorporate appropriate guidance to teachers who are facilitating children's learning and support to children affected by such realities to navigate them in accordance with their age and evolving capacities.

I would like to thank you again for inviting the DCC to contribute to the consultation and to apologise for the delay in submitting our response. I hope the above observations and suggestions are of assistance to your work to develop the current proposals for a curriculum in IRB and Ethics.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries regarding the above observations or if the DCC can be of further assistance to your work on the proposed curriculum.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Karen McAuley

Head of Education and Participation



Home

Contributor

**Our Lady of Mercy Senior Primary
School**

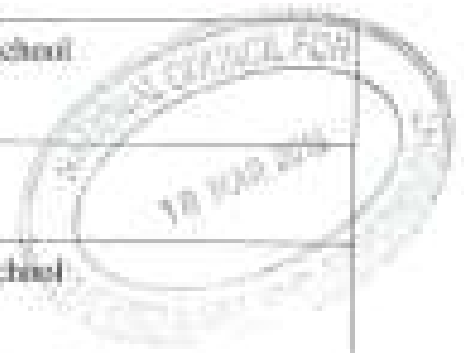


Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Our Lady of Mercy Senior Primary School
Position (if applicable)	
Organisation (if applicable)	Board of Management of the above school
Address	Military Road, Waterford
Telephone	(051) 875603
Email	info@mercywaterford.ie
Date	11.3.2016



Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAQ-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35
Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to erf@ncca.ie

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

The proposals do not reflect the Church's understanding of the purpose of Catholic education: which is one of 'invitation to an encounter'. Each pupil is invited to consider what ways, if any the message of the Gospel can enable them to live good and purposeful lives. A faith response may or may not be the outcome, but this is never forced. The very title of this new curricular area sets up a peculiar dichotomy between 'Ethics' and 'ERB', both of which would be inextricably linked in a Catholic School. Religious education in Catholic schools has always being committed to inter religious and inter cultural dialogue – hence this new area is unnecessary as the domain is already covered. It is noteworthy however that in a Catholic school, religious education is seen as a process that extends throughout a person's life. Not all that can be taught needs to be done by the time a child is 12 years old. Thus the curricular span is gradual. Many areas are addressed at second level when the pupil has reached an age and stage of maturity which enables them to engage in a more meaningful way with varying world views and perspectives. Thus it is very difficult to see how this proposal would contribute in any positive way to what a child is currently being offered.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in REB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

Parents are almost always concerned for their children's welfare and wish the best for their children's education. In the experience of our two schools, (spanning fifty years on the current site) we have never been asked by a parent to teach about other faiths, or indeed to offer any further ethical education than is already proudly in place. Neither have staff expressed any wish to do this. While the focus of the R.E curriculum is Catholic Christianity, we also introduce the children to the other 2 great monotheistic religions: Judaism and Islam. And all of this before they are yet 12 years old! We are however secure in the knowledge that their education in this area will continue to deepen and evolve in Secondary school. A Catholic school also works from the principle that parents are the first educators of their children. Catholic Schools stress working in partnership with parents who can offer further educational supports and curricular extension to pupils outside of school if they so wish.

Parents, families and children with religious convictions have a right to give expression to these in faith based schools. For those attending our Catholic schools, a child centered integral approach to religious education is adopted, where religious belief is not compartmentalised but is fully acknowledged as part of lived reality for these parents, families and children. Children and families of other faiths are welcomed warmly and offered opportunities to share something of their own faith tradition if they so wish.

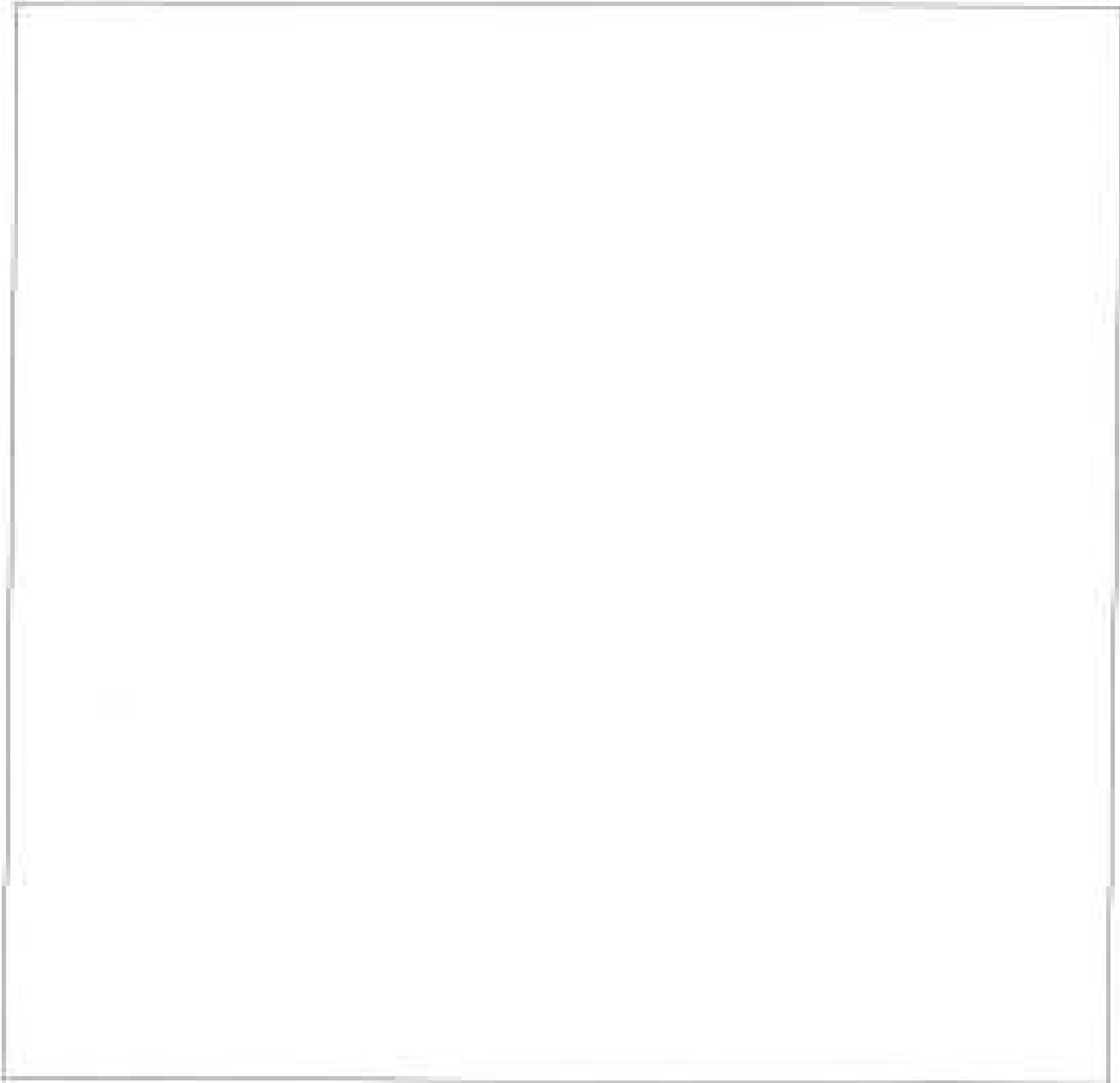
If such a curriculum was to ever emerge, significant CPD would need to be given to the majority of staff who would never have been trained to teach this curricular area. What is being proposed is more than just a change of curriculum however, but asking for a change of attitude, process, and methodology. The Catholic educator sees their role as one of 'vocation' and this vocational calling invites them to form and inform pupils, not just educationally, but also spiritually. This opportunity has added (and continues to add) a depth and a profound intertwining between the professional and the spiritual in many teachers lives. Many teachers enjoy sharing their faith experience with their pupils and have been trained to do so. It is in a

sense "what they signed up for". It is not something which should be lightly removed from them as it is a fundamental change in their working conditions.

Issues of time allocation and curricular overload will not be an issue if such a curriculum is reserved for emerging multid denominational and community schools. If the demand for such schools increase, then the proposed programme would be beneficial to such schools. It is impossible however to see how it would complement what we currently offer in our two catholic schools as the foundational principles underpinning R.E in a Catholic school, and what is now being proposed are contradictory. The introduction of the new curricular aspects would lead simply to a significant amount of overlap, conflicting and confusing messages and an inevitable dilution of both curricular areas.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

As in questions 1 and 2:



NCCA

the Division of Education, Commonwealth of Massachusetts
National Council for Excellence and Assessment





Home

Contributor

Owen Keogh, Jim Hannon

Submission

In response to NCCA plan to introduce a programme for
“Education about Beliefs” with an “Ethics” Component

We are both chairpersons of Boards of Management of primary schools under Catholic patronage. Owen taught in primary schools for over forty years, eighteen of those as principal. Jim has long experience of working in second level education, teaching various subjects including religion. In our opinion there is no need to introduce this proposed programme in faith-based schools.

As far as we can make out the programme of religious instruction in Catholic schools caters very well for all the aims and objectives envisaged for the proposed programme. The schools we are very familiar with currently make provision for inter-religions and inter-cultural teaching and learning. The emphasis on ethics, or moral education, is immediately obvious to the reader in the Religious Education programme and indeed throughout the various curricular programmes.

It would not be possible for teachers to faithfully teach their faith-based programme side by side with the new proposed programme. One programme holds/believes that there is a single loving God and an objective God given truth. The other holds, or seems to hold, that all beliefs/religions are equal. If they are equal then it is acceptable to believe in a single God, in a multitude of Gods, or in no God... at the same time.

A teacher must teach with conviction. Of course he could not teach this proposed programme with conviction as it runs counter to his belief in a single loving God.

The primary school curriculum is full, very full and occasionally overflowing and is impossible to implement fully. There are programmes for Safety on the Farm, Safety on the Roads, Seachtain na Gaeilge, Green Schools, Healthy Eating... to name but a few. These are all worthwhile and schools have to decide which ones to implement and to what extent. Schools don't need another programme to duplicate one already there.

There is a demand in Ireland for faith-based schools, as indeed there is for other types of school. We contend that there is a healthy “competition” between faith-based schools and others and it would be desirable for this to continue. We hear about the demand for denominational education

throughout the western world. Parents with religious convictions have a right to have their children educated in faith-based schools.

If the “ERB and Ethics” programme is introduced it will bring an end to faith-based schooling. Teachers and others will see a contradiction in the school curriculum, there will be a clamour to get rid of the confusion in the minds of the students, and no doubt it will be the faith-based programme that will lose out. Children wont know what to believe, there will be no objective truth, and they will end up believing in nothing. Thus the characteristic ethos of faith-based schools will disappear.

All the schools we am familiar with are inclusive. No child has ever been refused admission because of his religion or lack thereof, or because of his nationality, colour or ethnicity. Nor has any child ever been forced to receive the sacraments. Parents’ wishes in this regard are sacrosanct.

The proposed curriculum is a serious and unnecessary threat to freedom of religion and to the rights of parents.

Signed: *Owen Keogh, Jim Hannon*

Date: March 29, 2016



Home

Contributor

Páraic Mac Lochlainn

To : info@ncca.ie And to : www.ncca.ie/consultation/erbe 26th March 2016

ERB and Ethics Consultation,

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment,

35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2

Re: Religion as a subject in our schools.

A Chairde,

I understand that the NCCA proposes to introduce a new subject called “*Education about Religion and Beliefs and Ethics*” (ERB and Ethics) to replace the teaching of religion, in all schools. In our Catholic schools I would fear that this will mean the removal of teaching religion, as we know it, from the school programme and it’s replacement with this new subject.

The proposed approach seems to have more in common with a curriculum in inter-cultural studies than one of religious education.

I believe the questionnaire issued was biased in favour of the introduction of this new subject as most respondents would agree with the statements provided therein. However, there was no provision in that questionnaire for respondents to say if they wished to see these attitudes taught as part of Catholic Religion, as they are at present, or if they do not wish to introduce the new subject.

The results of the survey might be used to say that a majority of respondents want this new subject introduced, but it would probably not state that the questionnaire did not provide an opportunity for respondents to say that they wished to retain the teaching of these topics within Catholic religion classes.

Catholic schools make provision for inter-religious and inter-cultural awareness and ethics in terms of their policies, ethos and leadership, the programme in religious education and across other curricular areas.

Parents, families and children with religious convictions have a right to express these in faith-based schools. The NCCA proposals in parts impinge upon religious education; The characteristic spirit of a faith based school is of a different nature to the NCCA proposals. The Minister must have regard for the characteristic spirit of a school in exercising functions with regard to curriculum development.

I disagree with the introduction as planned of *Education about Religion and Beliefs and Ethics*.

Thank you.

Yours truly,

Páraic S. Mac Lochlainn

Páraic Mac Lochlainn

15 Knocknarea Villas, Ballydoogan Road, Sligo.



Home

Contributor

Patricia & John McGonagle

31st March 2016

To whom it may concern,

submission regarding consultation on Education about religions and beliefs and ethics

We are aware that a consultation process is taking place regarding ERBE - Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics to the primary school curriculum is underway.

We as parents of children attending Ballymena National School, have some concerns regarding this proposal.

We as a parent's value our Christian Catholic faith and have a right to an expression of this in our faith based school. We feel that it is paramount that the faith we have as a family and is part of their every day school through practice and teaching . We are aware that there are many different religions and beliefs in the world and in Modern Ireland. We do wish for our children to be open-minded and respectful of other religions and viewpoints. However we want our children to develop their own faith first. We feel that our children will be confused if they are taught about all different God's. We wish for inclusion of all children faith's and backgrounds but not the expense of our own Catholic faith. We are concerned about the fact that the curriculum is already overloaded, where will there be time to teach our Catholic faith.

Please take into account our viewpoint, when discussing any further proposals.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia Mc Gonagle

John Mc Gonagle



Home

Contributor

Patrician Primary School Newbridge



Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper

We, the Board of Management of the Patrician Primary School in Newbridge, Co. Kildare, wish to make the following submission in regard to the NCCA consultation re: *Education about Religions and Beliefs*.

Introduction:

In recent times there has been much debate about the role of Catholic Schools in Irish society. This debate is healthy and should be encouraged; however, it is important that the discussion is balanced and that all the facts are clearly outlined. It is regrettable that the full facts and balance are often missing from some media commentary. The vision underpinning Catholic education is inclusive precisely because of its Catholicism.

The vast majority of Primary Schools in Ireland are under Catholic Patronage (89%). In Newbridge we have seven Catholic Primary Schools. The vision behind these Catholic Schools is outlined by the Catholic Schools Partnership: *Catholic schools in Ireland are a living expression of a long and varied tradition of education inspired by the life of Christ as lived in the Church. Such schools emphasise the dignity of the human person as a child of God called to work with other persons in creating an inclusive community in service of the common good; where knowledge is sought and respected while faith is nurtured and challenged.*¹

This emphasis on an *'inclusive community'* is very significant. It seems that the NCCA document is in some way suggesting that the current Faith Formation programme is not responding to the needs of the diversity of children in our Primary School system. We would argue that this is far from the lived reality in our school. In the Parish of Newbridge the Catholic Primary Schools welcome children of *all faiths and none*. Catholic schools respect and acknowledge the right of parents who require that their children be excluded from religious instruction. The manner in which such an opt out is facilitated is related to available resources. Schools are committed to facilitating parents in this regard, but they can only do so as resources are made available so that the school complies with its own policies on curriculum, supervision and child safeguarding. The provision of such resources is the responsibility of the Minister for Education and Skills.² If authorities are serious about provision for all religions and none then they will have to provide schools with these necessary resources.

Further to this, concerns have been raised about the lack of choice in relation to Primary School education, especially as the demographic landscape and the cultural outlook of our country has changed. I think we all would agree that parents should have a choice if they wish to enrol their children in a non-denominational school. However, it is the responsibility of the Minister and the Government to provide schools to accommodate such choice.

¹ Catholic Primary Schools in a Changing Ireland Sharing Good Practice on inclusion of all Pupils, Pg. 15.

Observations:

1. The NCCA Consultation Document states: *"This paper presents a curriculum that will enable children to foster a sense of identity and belonging by developing their self-awareness, self-confidence, self-esteem and ultimately, their happiness."* It goes on, *"The curriculum also enables children to engage in and promote communication and dialogue between people of different cultural, religious and non-religious backgrounds and to combat prejudice and the worst effects of stereotyping."* Catholic, faith based education, encourages and develops all of the above, inspired by the Gospel message of Jesus Christ: *"I have come that they may have life and have it to the full"* John 10:10.

With this in mind, the question emerges: *What are we trying to fix?* Is it agreed by all that there is a weakness in the curriculum that needs to be addressed? The underlying premise in the NCCA document that there is some "gap" in the curriculum, needs to be looked at in far more depth. There are several references in the NCCA document to "desk" research. One would have to question whether this is the most reliable or comprehensive source to make major decisions around such important curriculum changes.

2. The 1958 Education Act requires that schools: *"promote the moral, spiritual and personal development of students... in consultation with their parents, having regard for the characteristic spirit of the school"* The "characteristic spirit" of the school is critical in faith based schools, in our case the Catholic Ethos. It is the fundamental to the life of the school and underpins all the activities in the school. The secular post-modern world view offered by the NCCA proposal is completely at odds with the Catholic-Christian characteristic spirit. This viewpoint has particular challenges for the approach to Religious Education offered by our Catholic schools. The NCCA proposal suggests that children lack all religious beliefs and traditions as something to be interpreted by them. This postmodern approach encourages children to see their religious identity or belief as just one among many others, all with equal weight and validity. It is a "watered down," one size fits-all approach. There is no space for the child to be formed by the experience of a specific religious identity. Even though faith practice has changed in our society in recent decades and many parents would not consider themselves "devout" Catholics, in our experience the vast majority wish that their children be formed in a faith based school informed by the Catholic "characteristic spirit."

3. The NCCA approach promotes a pluralist outlook to religion while in a faith based system children are taught to respect and learn from other religious traditions and we seek to teach children to serve the common good and be the best of citizens because of their commitment to their Catholic faith.

Conclusion:

Here in Newbridge there is a great tradition of Catholic education to which our school belongs. The vast majority of our parents are very supportive of this tradition. Further to this we are very fortunate to have such a committed principal and teachers who continue to pass on the faith in these changed and changing times. Our teachers do their utmost to cover what is already a very packed curriculum in our school. The NCCA proposed changes to the curriculum with regards to ERB would place further strain on our teachers.

Despite increased secularisation, so evident in our society, the passing on of a healthy faith to our children remains a critical challenge to all of us who are committed to the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. This message respects and encourages the dignity of every human person. The current debate is healthy as it has encouraged us to reflect further on the meaning and outlook of Catholic education today. The commitment and energy of the Catholic Church has given Ireland a world class education system. It is important that the State remembers this and continues to support the Church's effort by respecting the "characteristic spirit" of the Catholic ethos in our schools.

Pope Francis captures the essence and breath of Catholic education in his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*: "No one can demand that religion should be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life. An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it." (E.G. # 183).

The Board of Management,

Patrician Primary School,

Newbridge,

Co. Kildare.



Home

Contributor

Patrick Griffin

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in
EDUCATION ABOUT
RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

NAME PATRICK GEIFFIN
POSITION
Organisation ROMAN CATHOLIC
ADDRESS
ST. JUDE
& KATHBERGUE ROAD
SWEDDA
North County Dublin

PHONE
E-MAIL
DATE 30th March 2016

Present



According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church page 481 reference 2229 -

As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental.

As far as possible parents have the duty of choosing schools that will best help them in their task as Christian educators. Public authorities have the duty of guaranteeing this parental right and of ensuring the concrete conditions for its exercise.

As a product of a Catholic education myself and having sent my children through Catholic schools I fully appreciate the ethos of such schools. According to your document (page 7) "what is the relationship between ERB and Ethos and the parent's programme) "Each school has a right to develop a programme that supports and contributes to the ethos of their school, and rightly so."

All religions are not the same. The Catholic Church and the Church of England teach their own beliefs. When one is well informed about all aspects of their faith, then they may be in a better position to study others.

Religious Education is a way of life.

I feel your paper would only cause confusion as it is not compatible with Catholic beliefs.

i.e. ERB help children to learn about and understand the cultural heritage of the major forms of religions it does not nurture the belief or practice of any one religion.



Home

Contributor

Patrick J. McCabe

National Council for Curriculum + Assessment, 35 Merrion Square, Dublin 2

Re / Consultation – ERB and Ethics in Primary Schools

A Chara,

I am responding to the consultation invitation in relation to the above captioned subject.

Despite written assurances to the contrary I am of the opinion that the aim of this initiative is an underlying vision of the Government to replace current mode of teaching religion to a more radical form in Primary Schools. “Reading between the lines” can often highlight secretive aspiration of the instigator.

Should this be so I believe that it would be a retrograde step by overloading an already heavy current curriculum and timetable. In addition this would place a greater burden of teachers allocated time with pupils. That has serious consequence on all.

Teachers I suspect would not welcome a major change. It would cause disruption to work load, lead to personal frustration and stress and confusion between teaching religion on one hand and this new ERB + Ethics module. The result may be a lack of co-operation (second level opposition to Junior Cert alternatives) . This will benefit nobody and pupils and parent s will be the losers.

The existing system of religious teaching has stood the test of time. It is well accepted by parents, pupils, school management, boards of management , Patrons and Irish society in general. For example Catholic education has provided quality education over the years. WE must not forget the debt of gratitude we owe to our past dedicated and visionary religious educationalists. Where would we be to-day without their contribution to Irish society ?

I am reminded of the then Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn’s attempt, a few years ago, to change the ethos of schools through a survey of parents. The result was a singular major disappointment to him. The response was no better than 20%. This demonstrates the imperative of allowing parents to have their say – inclusivity. Have parents got an appetite for a radical change in a long standing successful religious teaching format ? Parents are a key component in their childrens’ general education and faith formation irrespective of religious beliefs and practices.

There is much talk in the media of an aimed “Evolving secularism society in Ireland “ Is this really only a myth driven by politicians and media aided at the role of Catholic religious education ? With so many social problems, issues and break down in law and order do people really concern themselves in the home with “Securarium “ as a priority ? Am I right in thinking that ERB and B is a political attempt to promote this view that secularism is what we must strive for in future ?

Patronage and Pluralism are two more issues of “New thinking” and people should see “plurism” as part of a “ new way forward”. Revising the primary school curriculum especially when religious teaching is the target seems to be espoused by a tiny minority. How will faith schools handle ERB and E should it be introduced ? One may expect serious opposition.

Action breeds reaction as we all know. Consider Islam, Jewish, Catholic and many other Christian and non-Christian school s. Parents, Patrons, teachers and Board of Management they will have a lot to say !

The emergence of ERB and E as a school module might seem to infer the failure of existing religious education, to be replaced by a “Modern” substitute. The question must be asked – Has Catholic education, which has provided quality education over the years failed and needs to be abandoned ? One wonders if there is evidence to substantiate this inference. If not, “Why fix it if it is not broken “? Parents would need convincing of this to support change.

As an educational professional I have access to much international data on current thinking, research trends and statistical output. One piece of new research results make startling reading. I wish to share it with NCCA and Minister of Education – A European survey of member States into the skills of University graduates in Ireland ranked Ireland second last in Literacy and Numeracy out of 27 nations surveyed !

The imperative is to urgently tackle this embarrassing outcome. Introducing “ERB and E” into the primary school curriculum will not do much to address this serious Literacy / Numeracy deficiency.

I heard from some colleagues that the NCCA questionnaire displays an unacceptable bias towards the aim of introducing ERB plus E into schools, to obtain a “favourable” outcome. The old adage comes to mind “He who pays the piper calls the tune !” It would be a great pity if there was any truth in this rumour.

Finally I would caution the introduction of ERB + E into Primary School curriculum for reasons which I have outlined above. More harm may be done by the change suggested or envisaged by NCCA.

Many thanks for the invitation to contribute to the consultation. Hopefully you will get a good and diverse response and common sense will prevail !

Patrick J. McCabe,

30th March 2016

‘Lakelands’ 10, Cloverhill, Bailieborough, County Cavan A82 H 582

‘Phone 042 9694706 Mobile 086 8490642 email pgjmccabe@eircom.net



Home

Contributor

PJ Bracken

Fahy,
Eyrecourt,
Co Galway,
8th November 2015.

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am a retired postprimary teacher. Our local Catholic Primary Schools are involved in formation, not just information. They are very inclusive, welcoming any child whose parents accept the ethos of the School. No child is forced to engage in any religious activity that the parents disapprove of. I reject this proposal to teach **about** religion in any faith-based primary school.

Yours truly,



P. J. Bracken





Home

Contributor

Regina Lydon

A Chara,

As a retired principal for many years and a D.A for quite a while ,I am afraid I examine with great reserve this proposal.I very definitely think, that particularly at Primary level this will prove more confusing than helpful and I know quite a lot have the same view.I fully respect other beliefs and from my experience in our diocese all children, regardless of their beliefs, are treated with the utmost respect.

Catholic parents choose to send their children to a Catholic school to assist them in their duty of passing on the faith. I reckon that this proposal will conflict with the characteristic spirit of Catholic schools.Yes, all children need to be respected and allowed to follow their own belief and the right of secularist parents may need to be vindicated but not in this way.After much consultation,research and hard work a new programme called "Grow in Love" is being launched in Catholic schools and extra materials will prove confusing and time consuming.

Away back there was a criticism that too much time was being spent preparing for the Sacraments but it didn't refer to time spent at sport ,traveling to swimming etc.I often wonder are we moving away from our reputation of being a Catholic country?I just want to share my concerns.Regina Lydon
D.A.



Home

Contributor

Rev Christopher Hayden PhD STL



Parochial House
Coolfancy
Carnon
Co Wicklow Y14 HR96

ERB and Ethics Consultation
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
35 Fitzwilliam Square
Dublin 2

March 23rd, 2016

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for inviting stakeholders and interested members of the public to make a submission to the ERB and E consultation.

As chairman of the Boards of Management of two schools under Roman Catholic patronage, I am happy to offer a submission regarding aspects of the Consultation Paper published on the ncca website.

I appreciate your attention.

Yours sincerely

Rev Christopher Hayden Ph.D., S.T.L.

A RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION PAPER, “ERB AND ETHICS”

A notable feature of the Consultation Paper, “Education about Religious Beliefs and Ethics,” (ERB and E) is the absence of an anthropology, i.e. a fundamental understanding or vision of the human person, of what constitutes human good and human flourishing. Without at least the broad outline of an anthropology, reflection on education is problematic. The teaching of ethics, for example, can hardly be more than the study of the ethical understandings held by others. Without some fundamental view of what it means to be human, there are no reasonable grounds for privileging one ethical practice over another, and without privileging one ethical practice over another, there are no grounds for assessing, less still for developing, “models of ethical behavior.” (p. 6)

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The Paper states that the teaching of ethics “includes the formation and the promotion of a personal commitment to the dignity and freedom of human beings.” (p. 6). But what constitutes human freedom and dignity, and how are they to be recognized, if not on the basis of a prior understanding of what it is to be human? Is freedom essentially a matter of having no limits set to conduct? If so, then what understanding of human nature does this reflect and foster?

Clearly, there are issues of epistemology as well as of anthropology here. The point, however, is that fundamental understandings are inescapable. In common with “faith-based” understandings, secular understandings of the human person, of freedom and dignity, are rooted in prior intellectual commitments. They are not neutral or value-free, simply because they are secular.

What both faith-based and secular understandings have in common is that they need to be able to account for themselves. It is a misunderstanding to suggest that faith-based understandings of the human person are held merely because they are understood to have been handed down by a higher authority. Rather, they constitute a reasoned – and pragmatically reasonable – vision of human nature and human flourishing. Faith-based understandings are, and should be, open to critical scrutiny by all. The same applies to secular understandings of human nature, dignity and freedom: such understandings should not be regarded as exempt from critical assessment, simply because they are secular.

If the secular understanding being espoused is that there is no such thing as a fundamental, abiding, normative human nature, then this should be stated explicitly. In addition, the basis for this fundamental intellectual commitment should be made clear. What might be the basis for an a priori disavowal of the possibility or desirability of vision of human

good, human freedom, human dignity, human flourishing? Would such a basis rest, in the last analysis, be accepted as a fundamental belief, a starting point, akin to faith?

The concern raised here regarding the disavowal of an understanding of human nature is not based simply on philosophical considerations; it is warranted by the content of the Consultation Paper. Cf. the following comment from page 29 of the document: ‘patrons’ programmes tend to draw on a realist epistemology while many suggest that ERB and Ethics should draw on a critical, pluralist and inquiry based epistemology.’ The contrast between a realist epistemology on the one hand, and a critical, pluralist and inquiry-based epistemology on the other, is simply false, since a realist epistemology is critical and inquiry-based, and can readily accommodate a pluralist framework. More important, however, is the fundamental choice between epistemological options. On what grounds might one choose between a realist epistemology and a non-realist, or idealist, epistemology? Personal preference? Ideological commitment to social and behavioural positions supported by one or the other epistemology?

Rather than uncritically privileging one epistemology over another (which is what the Consultation Paper appears to do), there should be as deep an excavation as possible of the fundamentals: where does one find the most solid ground for the appraisal and inculcation of ethical behaviour? If, on the other hand, the concept of solid ground is to be rejected in favour of a non-foundationalist approach, this too will need to be justified in detail. It is not enough merely to present the end-products of post-modernist philosophical thinking. Why should non-foundationalist or anti-foundationalist thinking be privileged over (which is to say, treated as more foundational than) foundationalist approaches?

It is clear that the Consultation Paper does not begin from a position of anthropological or epistemological neutrality (an impossibility, in any case). However, the Paper is, at the very least, somewhat ambivalent regarding its own assumptions. On the one hand it acknowledges, correctly, that “No subject or teaching is value-free.” (p. 22). But it goes on to caution against “the difficulties of presenting any curriculum in a manner that is impartial and free of bias.” (p. 22). Yet the point of ethical formation is to inculcate certain values and behaviours, and by the same token, to exclude other values and behaviours. The document evinces bias against thinking that does not match its own assumptions, and bias in favour of its intellectual commitments. In this, there is at least a tacit acknowledgment that there is no such thing as a bias-free ethical stance. Fundamentally, to be ethical is to be biased against attitudes and behaviours that one regards as unethical. Ethical formation cannot be ultimately, or radically, bias-free.

The Consultation Paper explores ways in which the teaching of a secular EBB and E programme might be combined with denominational programmes. It is wary – and quite rightly so – of the pitfalls involved. It highlights “the challenge for teachers who will be engaged in teaching denominational programmes and faith forming on the one hand, and teaching about religions and beliefs from a pluralist perspective on the other.” (p. 13) While that challenge would be very real, one can be confident that our teachers would learn to negotiate it. But what about the pupils? If an adult with a graduate knowledge of pedagogy will be challenged by teaching two fundamentally different understandings of the same material, then what about the children being taught? Is it too much to suppose that the confusion sown in their minds would neutralize the effectiveness of both approaches?

Here, the Consultation Paper really answers its own question. It all but explicitly acknowledges that a secular, value-free approach to ethical formation, based on a particular understanding of the human person (even if such an understanding is presented as the dismissal of an understanding), cannot co-exist in the same classroom with an approach that privileges, on the basis of a different understanding of human good and human flourishing, certain ethical values and behaviours. If a combined approach (however the combination works out in practice) challenges the teachers, the chances are that it will be unworkable for the pupils.

It is difficult to reconcile the correct reservation regarding the challenge to teachers with the statement that EBB and E “is in no sense intended to replace the patron’s programme or faith formation in denominational schools.” (p. 7). If the challenges involved extend to pedagogical professionals, it is reasonable to anticipate that the combination of approaches will prove unworkable, and if this turns out to be the case, then which approach will stand: the denominational approach, or the one being proposed in the Consultation Paper?

It seems fair to observe that the Consultation Paper does not accurately describe or reflect the nature of denominational education, and it seems reasonable to wonder if the paper was sufficiently informed by representatives of denominational education. Granted, it is a discussion document, and it cannot be expected to cover everything, but it would be more useful if it better reflected the nature of denominational education, and the best way to do this would be to ensure that the *self-understanding* of denominational education were taken into account.

No informed Catholic educator, for example, would make the contrast between a “faith perspective” and a “values education perspective,” as the paper does (p. 29). This contrast can be sustained only if “values education” is given the kind of tight definition which is intended to exclude faith perspectives in advance. Neither would an informed Catholic educator assert

to the reduction of Denominational Religious Education to “formation in a belief system,” or “learning how to live a life according to religious guidelines.” (p. 37) Belief systems and guidelines are not the heart of denominational education. Rather, it is in the school, as a community inserted into the wider community, that the denominational aspect is lived. The paper runs the risk of reducing denominational education to rote learning and behaviour coaching.

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In its Glossary note on Ethics, the Consultation Paper states that ethics “places an emphasis on the unavoidable exposure and immersion by all within an organisation to a prescribed set of values and beliefs.” (p. 38). Several comments are in order here.

First, the statement just quoted suggests that a value-free, belief-free educational space might be possible. It should be clear that it is not, and furthermore, an attentive reading of the Consultation Paper suggest that what is being promoted is a particular set of values, rather than a value-free educational space.

Second, the term “unavoidable exposure” suggests that a significant factor in the approach to ethics should be the containment of its possible toxic effects. Such an approach is completely at odds with the reality of denominational ethics, which is offered – and, in the vast majority of cases, gladly received by parents and guardians – as a gift.

Third there is an implication that a focus away from ethics might help prevent unavoidable exposure. In fairness to the Consultation Paper, it is clearly not suggesting that schoolchildren should be facilitated in avoiding exposure to anything that might help them to make “judicious choices” (p. 20) or to develop “modes of ethical behaviour” (p. 6); so it is not immediately clear what the concern with “unavoidable exposure” is based on.

Fourth, in the statement from p. 38 quoted above, there is a lapse into the false idea that denominational education is, in essence, a matter of external prescription (i.e. imposition) of common values. This misunderstanding tends to be attached to the further misunderstanding that the inculcation of values is at variance with critical moral thinking. In fact, there tends to be a chain of misunderstandings, in which yet another defective link is the notion that being an ethical person consists of the exercise of ethical autonomy. Nowhere does the Consultation Paper suggest that such autonomy be exercised regarding the precept of openness; and in a similar vein, no Christian denominational ethos would suggest the exercise of autonomy regarding the precepts of honesty or integrity. Ethical living is something more than the exercise of ethical autonomy.

The Consultation Paper contrasts the faith-based approach to the teaching of ethics with the variety of approaches which are to be found in multi-denominational education, and which

include “rights-based,” “Socratic” and “pluralist” approaches. Again, this contrast is defective. The denominational approach to ethics takes full account of rights. It encourages Socratic dialogue, in which pupils are encouraged to engage actively in learning. And denominational ethical formation is pluralist, in that it equips children to live as loving and compassionate members of a pluralist society (granted, denominational ethos does not subscribe to the position of hard philosophical pluralism, that every truth-claim is equal to every other; a view which, precisely as a truth-claim, is self-defeating).

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The Consultation Paper’s principal conclusion is that teaching religious beliefs and ethics from a faith-based perspective is “not a recommended approach for a national curriculum.” (pp. 45, 46). In a sense, this is a consistent and coherent conclusion, as it matches the understanding of denominational education presented in the document. However, as the present response to the Consultation Paper has sought to show, that understanding is very defective. A better understanding of denominational education would have greatly improved the value of the Consultation Paper, and it is to be hoped that the ongoing discussion will be conducted on the basis of a better understanding, while also being more forthright regarding the philosophical foundations of alternative approaches.

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Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers

- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

The Primary Curriculum is already quite loaded and a great deal of what is proposed in the ERBE is incorporated within the present roll out of primary education in our schools through the R.E. Programme and SPHE.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

I feel it would be beneficial if the proposed ERBE development was to consult and work with existing Patron bodies to incorporate the proposed development within the Religious programme of the Ethos of the school.

Working with the Patron bodies would help to achieve the aims of the proposal by incorporating its elements within the particular faith/ethos of the school.

There is a great danger that making the ERBE programme into a separate subject will undermine the variety of Ethos based programmes available in our schools at present (Catholic, Church of Ireland, Multi Denominations....etc.).

Religious Education in our primary schools has worked very effectively in developing and presenting an ethics based education for our children over the years. There is a grave danger that introducing a new “subject” as proposed into the curriculum will only add to confusion and overload in the school day.

Evidence shows that Catholic Primary schools have made a huge contribution in the past 20 years to the integration and support of the dignity of people from other cultures and faiths in Ireland. This can be further fostered and developed and integrated into the particular ethos based RE programme of the school and should be fully explored at this point.





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Contributor

Rev Prof Eamon Conway, Dr Kerry Greer, Dr John Murray, Dr Rik Van Nieuwenhove, Anne Hession, Dr Thomas Finnegan

The NCCA's proposed ERB and Ethics curriculum for primary schools: a critique

Executive Summary

1. This paper examines the compatibility of the NCCA's proposed new ERB and Ethics curriculum with the characteristic ethos or spirit of faith-based primary schools and the faith instruction that takes place in such schools.

The analysis is based on the NCCA's own understanding of its proposed course as exhibited by its consultation paper.

2. The paper argues that the NCCA's proposed new ERB component is virtually certain to conflict with the characteristic spirit of faith-based schools and faith instruction taking place in such schools.

3. The ERB component endorses constructivist and pluralist epistemologies, which entail that there is no objective truth, or at least no way of knowing objective truth. Such an approach to truth is incompatible with the realist epistemology presupposed and endorsed by all Christian denominations.

4. This paper also argues that the Ethics component will conflict with the characteristic spirit of faith-based schools and faith instruction taking place in such schools.

5. The Ethics component endorses the morality of secular liberalism wherein individual moral autonomy is considered an ultimate end in itself. Such an approach is incompatible with the emphasis Christian moral theology places on theocentric personalism, objective moral goods and norms, the virtues, and the harmony between the individual's good and the common good.

6. The NCCA assumes at the outset that its proposed curriculum is necessary to foster inclusivity, conscientious and critical thinking, and a sense of social justice. This completely overlooks the very great extent to which faith-based schools already achieve these aims.

7. The NCCA does not acknowledge the problem that faith-based patrons and parents of faith may have with its proposed course in relation to its compatibility with the characteristic spirit of faith-based schools and on-going faith instruction taking place in these schools.

8. On the basis of our analysis we cannot recommend to the patrons of faith-based schools the introduction of this curriculum in any of the ways suggested by the NCCA.

Introduction

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) recently launched a consultation paper on a proposed new curriculum for primary schools. The proposed curriculum has two component parts: a proposed “Education about Religions and Beliefs” (ERB) component and a proposed “Ethics” component.

This paper analyses how likely it is that each component part of the NCCA’s curriculum will be compatible with the current teaching of religion by primary schools with a faith-based ethos and, indeed, with the “characteristic spirit” or ethos of these schools. This analysis is based on the NCCA’s own self-understanding of its proposals as exhibited through its consultation paper.

Part I

The NCCA’s “ERB” component

Aims

Near the beginning of its paper the NCCA states that the proposed ERB component will contribute towards a faith-based school’s own ethos by “contributing to and supporting inclusive school communities” (p. 11 of the consultation paper). It goes on to state that inclusive schools “are characterised by learning environments that reflect and show pride in the linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity that characterises the school community” (p. 11). The NCCA thus seems to believe that this component is compatible with current religious instruction in faith-based primary schools, i.e. that their proposal will not in any way, directly or indirectly, undermine efforts by denominational schools to inform students about the faith that characterises the ethos of the given school.

The NCCA sees its proposed ERB component as a “pluralist” form of education (p. 10); it is to be taught in an “objective, critical and pluralist” manner (p. 11).

The aims of this “objective” and “pluralist” approach according to the NCCA are various and can be broken down into the following categories:

- (a) to realise students’ self-worth, to inculcate self-respect within students, and to develop students’ self-awareness and self-esteem (pp. 13, 15);
- (b) to enable students to grow in personal understanding and be empowered to make informed decisions (p. 13);
- (c) to enable students to develop good relationships with others and be sensitive to how their behaviour and ideas can impact on others (p. 13);
- (d) to encourage tolerance and understanding among students and to respect the religious freedom of others (pp. 13, 20);
- (e) to enable students to reflect on the precious nature of human existence and the importance of inner well-being (p. 13);

- (f) to enable students to reflect on the key questions of meaning and truth, and to develop and consolidate students' religious views (p. 14);

As an aside, it is not clear how the proposed ERB component is rationally related to pursuing any of (a), (b), (c) or (e). Further, it is false, and therefore open to rejection by stakeholders within denominational education, such as parents and patrons, to assume that each of aims (a) to (f) cannot be achieved within a faith-based religious education.

Types of objectivity

As the NCCA consultation paper itself recognises, “No subject or teaching is value-free” (p. 22). This holds for courses which self-describe as being “objective” and “pluralist”. For present purposes¹ there are two main ways in which a course on religion and its corollary pedagogy can be described as “objective” and “pluralist”:

- (i) the approach can bracket the truth claims of the various religions and worldviews with the intention of examining them sociologically and/or anthropologically and/or historically. We can refer to this as a procedural form of neutrality.

It is in principle possible for this approach to cohere with a faith-based approach to religious instruction, *but only if it the general teaching context makes it sufficiently clear that the course and its teaching do not in any way deny the truth claims upon which the school's characteristic ethos is based.*

Or

- (ii) the approach could view the various truth claims made by the religions and philosophies under discussion as basically equal in truth value. This would amount to what we can refer to as a substantial form of neutrality. Logically, since not all belief systems can be equally true, it follows that this approach amounts to an implicit scepticism or agnosticism concerning the very idea of religious truth. Paradoxically, then, in the very act of purporting to adopt a substantially neutral stance towards ultimate truth, this approach actually makes a specific claim about ultimate truth. This means that in reality this approach is anything but “neutral”.

The claim about truth this latter approach makes is one that contains a negative value judgment about the very idea of religious truth.

There is neither a practical nor a principled middle ground between these two approaches to “objectivity” and “pluralism” in religious education. Approach (i), if not appropriately contextualised according to the ethos of the given faith school will collapse into approach (ii) in the minds of students, teachers and parents. In other words, one approach or other will prevail: it is impossible to be conceptually neutral about “neutrality”.

¹ This paper examines “objectivity” in pedagogic approach primarily with reference to the concept of neutrality. This is not to deny that a pedagogic approach can be objective even while taking a substantive position in favour of some truth claim and against others, i.e. presupposing or proposing that a particular belief is objectively true. Faith-based religious education can reasonably purport to be objective in this sense. Nor is it to suggest that the proper approach to truth in the humanities is on the basis of the neutral methodology of the physical sciences. For instance, one cannot be neutral in relation to the question of whether or not God is relevant to one's life.

The meaning of the NCCA’s approach to objectivity

From examining the NCCA’s consultation paper there are very good grounds upon which to conclude that the NCCA is adopting approach (ii) to objectivity, i.e. a substantive or agnostic form of putative neutrality in relation to religious truth claims.

The NCCA states that its pluralistic approach to the subject matter “equally recognises the diversity of beliefs, values and aspirations of all religious and cultural groups in society” (p. 20) (quoting a previous NCCA document). In itself, “recognises” is an ambivalent term: it could mean “perceives” or it could approximate more to “endorses”. That the latter meaning is what is intended becomes clear with the next sentence, “Pluralism places value on a range of views rather than a single approach or method of interpretation of life” (p. 20).² The NCCA’s version of pluralism thus considers that “a range of views”, even when they involve mutually incompatible views, is more valuable than “a single ... interpretation of life”. No justification for the proposition is provided (if no single interpretation is to be recognised as true or valuable, why would a plurality of such interpretations be any better?)

The consultation paper goes on to endorse a constructivist epistemology whereby children “co-construct their knowledge, identity and culture with peers and adults” (p. 21) and generate their own meaning and knowledge (p. 24, footnote 3). The NCCA also invokes the idea of “epistemological pluralism” throughout its document, an approach to knowledge which, it says, recognises “the right to the existence of contradictory truth claims or worldviews” (p. 39). This entails that there is no objective truth, or at least no way of knowing objective truth. Constructivist and pluralist epistemologies are incompatible with the realist epistemology presupposed and endorsed by all Christian denominations (a point the NCCA itself seems to gesture towards (p. 29)³). In line with this, the concept of objective truth in religious matters is nowhere endorsed in the consultation document.

The NCCA itself seems inchoately to recognise that its version of pluralism is discordant with religious education as currently undertaken in faith-based schools. It acknowledges the “challenge” for teachers “who will be engaged in teaching denominational programmes and faith forming on the one hand; and teaching about religions and beliefs from a pluralist perspective on the other” (p. 23). It is in this context that the NCCA calls on teachers to be “non-judgmental” in relation to the truth claims of the belief systems under discussion (p. 23).⁴

² In a footnote on this page it is stated that “Authentic pluralism does not minimise religious differences by saying that ‘all religions are ultimately the same’, instead it encourages conversations and discussions across divides of difference.” (p. 20). Bearing in mind the context, this statement is best interpreted as addressing a strategy for peacefully accommodating religious differences rather than as affirming the validity of objective truth concerning competing religious and non-religious truth claims.

³ Here the NCCA draws a very sharp distinction between the two types of epistemologies.

⁴ A non-relativistic understanding of pluralism can accommodate both the idea of truth in religious matters *and* the importance of gaining a better understanding of religious truth through critical engagement with other worldviews. Notably, such critical engagement proceeds from a perspective already immersed in a worldview – “neutral” encounters with worldviews are practically and logically impossible.

The core issue

And yet the NCCA still proceeds as if its proposed ERB course is entirely compatible with current religious formation in faith-based schools, or at least as if the issue of whether it is or not is unimportant. The NCCA seems content to claim that the ERB course will contribute towards an inclusive school environment (p. 11). While it is true that inclusivity is a value shared by schools of a Christian ethos, it is neither the only value comprising this ethos nor an absolute “at-all-costs” value. Furthermore, inclusivity itself is neither univocal in how it can be understood and pursued, nor neutral as to its effects on other goods. So an agnostic approach to religious education would indeed foster a particular version of inclusivity within the classroom, but only by excluding from the classroom the truth of particular religious claims (such as the divinity of Christ or the existence of God) and, moreover, only by excluding from appropriate consideration the rights of religious parents to have their children formed in the faith while in a faith-based school.

The NCCA argues in its consultation paper that the ERB component is not intended to replace existing religious formation within denominational schools (p. 7). But the question is not whether the ERB component replaces current instruction, but whether it is compatible with it. The reality is that it is not compatible.

The NCCA simply does not engage in a sufficiently focused way with *this* matter; in fact, it seems somewhat uninterested in the question.⁵ But it is a vital question from the perspective of patrons and parents looking to not only maintain the integrity of religious instruction within faith-based schools, but also the integrity of the characteristic spirit or ethos of these schools.

Part II

The NCCA’s “Ethics” component

Aims

As with the proposed ERB component, the NCCA considers that the Ethics component will contribute to the school ethos by promoting “inclusivity” (p. 11). The consultation paper outlines a number of specific aims for the Ethics component. It will enable the child to:

⁵ The NCCA sidesteps the issue by stating that school patrons have a legal right according to s. 30(2)(d) of the Education Act 1998 “to develop a programme that supports and contributes to the ethos of their school” (p. 7). However, its proposal depends upon a mistaken interpretation of the Education Act, viz. that it requires or permits a school’s ethos to be confined to one discrete programme of religious instruction. But according to s. 9(d) of the Education Act a school shall “promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school”. Section 15(2)(b) further requires a Board of Management to “uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school, and at all times act in accordance with any Act of the Oireachtas or instrument made thereunder, deed, charter, articles of management or other such instrument relating to the establishment or operation of the school”. Several of the interventions and proposals coming from groups pressing for reform in this area also fail to take this matter sufficiently into account.

- (i) appreciate the importance of responsibilities as well as rights;
 - (ii) develop a sense of conscience and promote tolerance;
 - (iii) develop the skills necessary for good moral decision making;
 - (iv) understand the destructive power of discrimination, racism and bullying;
 - (v) develop respect for the environment;
 - (vi) think critically;
 - (vii) understand human rights, equality, culture, social justice and social inclusivity
- (p. 14).

Of course, many (if not all) patrons currently have aims similar to these and encourage pedagogic approaches which facilitate the meeting of these aims. There is no evidence to suggest that faith-based schools are not already doing a good job in this area. So it is difficult to see the need for another course to set and meet the same aims – the exercise would be highly repetitious (unless the NCCA proposes to introduce a different, thoroughly secularist approach to these matters in faith-based schools, but such a proposal would directly challenge the integrity of the schools’ characteristic spirit or ethos). Furthermore, independent research indicates that existing faith-based patrons are hugely successful at achieving genuine inclusivity within the classroom.⁶ Yet the NCCA’s consultation paper disregards this aspect to the reality of faith-based education in Ireland today.

The meaning of “pluralism” for the NCCA’s Ethics Component

A key to understanding the NCCA’s position on the teaching of Ethics is the concept of “pluralism”. In this sense the Ethics component to the proposed curriculum is similar to the ERB component. But there are differences regarding how the NCCA seems to understand the concept of pluralism in relation to the two component parts of the curriculum. As the first part of this paper indicated, pluralism in the context of the ERB component amounts to a substantially neutralist approach to belief systems generally, one which implicitly suggests that all belief systems are of equal truth value (in practice meaning that none are objectively true). Strictly speaking, this approach is not neutral in character, it is rather implicitly agnostic.

Pluralism in the context of the NCCA’s Ethics component takes a slightly different form, however. The NCCA does not suppose that all moral systems are fundamentally equal. Instead it takes a very definite stand in favour of an ethical system which promotes “a personal commitment to the dignity and freedom of all human beings, the importance of human rights and responsibilities, the place of justice within society, and the service of the common good” (p. 37).

On its face no one could object to such an ethical system. Yet, as the NCCA acknowledges, no subject or teaching is entirely neutral or value-free (p.22), and there are many diverse and even incompatible ways of understanding the precise meaning of human dignity, human rights,

⁶ A 2012 report found that Catholic schools had an above average share of children from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds. It also found that Catholic schools were more inclusive than other schools when it came to enrolling traveller children and children with special needs. ESRI and Educate Together, “School Sector Variation Among Primary Schools in Ireland” (2012), pp. 35-41. In 2013 the Chief Inspector of schools found that 96% of primary schools, that vast majority of which are Catholic, cultivate an inclusive, child-centred ethos. Department of Education and Skills, “Chief Inspector’s Report 2010–12” (2013), p. 34.

justice, and the common good. The line of philosophical inquiry incorporating such diverse thinkers as Plato, Aquinas, Hobbes, Rousseau, Nietzsche, Arendt, Rawls and MacIntyre (to name but a few) is testament to this.

Two examples illustrate the point. Ronald Dworkin appeals to dignity and human rights in order to justify unrestricted access to abortion, whereas current and recent Popes appeal to the same two categories to argue on behalf of the inherent right to life of unborn children. As a second example, John Rawls bases the right to freedom of religion on the supreme political importance of equal autonomy, whereas *Dignitatis Humanae*, the Vatican II document that deals with the issue, bases the right on the duty to seek religious truth. The two different foundations for the right necessarily result in different conceptions as to the scope and application of the right, a point relevant to the NCCA's repeated claim that its proposed new curriculum will "help children develop an acceptance of the right to hold a particular belief or attitude" (p. 10).

For its part, the NCCA provides a fairly clear answer to the question of what ethical tradition its proposals belong to, "Ethics education contributes to the development of autonomous individuals, capable of exercising critical judgment, while also fostering dialogue and community life in a pluralist society" (p. 20). This is the ethics of contemporary secular liberalism, of thinkers like Ronald Dworkin, wherein self-reflective individual autonomy is seen as the primary good and the good which all other goods must serve.

In answering this question, it becomes clearer what pluralism means for the NCCA and why it is deployed in a slightly different manner in the respective contexts of ERB and Ethics teaching.

For religion, the NCCA's commitment to pluralism entails an agnostic neutrality, but for ethics, it entails a strong prioritisation of individual moral autonomy. The NCCA's invocation of a "pluralist epistemology", whereby there is a "right to the existence of contradictory truth claims or worldviews" applies to both ethics and religion. A strongly autonomist outlook as regards both religion and morality is proposed (p. 39).

Not all ethical systems are the same

In some very important respects, the NCCA's proposed course will almost certainly clash with faith education. The first part of this paper illustrates this in the context of the NCCA's approach to religion.

And in ethics too, the NCCA's approach is incompatible with some core elements of a faith-based ethics. The ethics of contemporary secular liberalism sees only one supreme good: the good of individual autonomy in moral decision making and in fashioning an authentic life for oneself. It reduces human dignity and human rights to autonomy and autonomy rights respectively, and interprets the common good as little more than the conditions necessary for genuine autonomy in moral choice. "Community" is considered good only to the extent that it does not constrict individual moral choice.

Christianity, as a very relevant example, has a different approach, one that recognises many diverse and equally important human goods, each contributing to human flourishing and reflecting the supreme goodness of God, in whose image we are made. Autonomy, while important, is not an end in itself. Christianity sees freedom as a

“freedom for” more important goods, rather than, as contemporary liberalism sees it, a “freedom from” objective moral norms that constrain autonomy, as well as freedom from any authority that defends these norms. For Christianity, the importance of autonomy rests in the prior importance and indeed duty of seeking what is good and true. True well-being consists both in the reasonable pursuit of the various human goods, which necessarily involves abiding by objective moral norms, and in the acquisition and practice of the virtues. True well-being extends far beyond a minimalist appreciation for autonomy. There is no clash between the individual good and the common good on this understanding.

Those secular liberals who have thought through these matters recognise that a specifically Christian understanding of ethics is fundamentally incompatible with some core elements of a thoroughgoing secular liberalism. The NCCA seem entirely oblivious to this (pp. 7, 29). Contrary to its assertion, it is not the case that the proposed Ethics component “can connect directly” with how character education, moral norms, and attitudes are understood by the programmes and ethos of faith-based patrons (p. 29).

Conclusion

In terms of the ERB component, there are very good reasons to believe that the NCCA’s version of “pluralism” amounts to an agnostic or strongly secular approach to religious truth claims. As such, the implementation of the component by a Christian patron would amount to a faith school teaching an agnostic version of its own ethos. And even if the version of pluralism inherent within the ERB component happens to amount to a procedural form of neutrality (one which is in principle compatible with the given faith perspective of the school), it will still be problematic. For the implementation of the component will have the negative side-effect of encouraging both students and teachers to assimilate, consciously or subconsciously, a strongly secularist perspective on religion *unless it is made sufficiently clear that the component in no way whatsoever denies the truths foundational for the school’s ethos*. In practice, this will be extremely difficult to ensure.

In terms of the Ethics component, no approach to the area can be “neutral”. The NCCA’s own ethos – as expressed through its consultation document – is clearly that of contemporary, secular liberalism. This being the case, parts of the proposed component necessarily diverge from what many patrons and parents would regard as a sound approach to moral instruction. Patrons and other stakeholders ought to be aware not only of express differences in ethical approaches between Christian teaching and secular liberalism, but also of similar terminology masking very different interpretations of the categories in question.

Hence each components of the proposed curriculum will almost certainly undermine both a faith school’s religious instruction *and* its characteristic spirit. The NCCA seems oblivious to the importance of the compatibility issue, a point which itself suggests a certain secular presupposition on its part. Since curriculum compatibility is such a fundamental issue for the integrity of a school’s ethos, it is largely irrelevant whether the NCCA proposes that its ERB and Ethics course be delivered in a discrete or an integrated fashion (pp. 30-31): both will undermine the ethos and religious instruction of a faith school.

A further issue, only briefly touched on in this paper, is also worth considering. There is very strong evidence to suggest that, contrary to what the NCCA seems to imply, faith-based schools have an excellent track record in fostering genuine inclusivity within the classroom. The proposed curriculum is therefore a serious and unnecessary threat to freedom of religion, freedom of association, and parental rights. The NCCA is proposing a solution for a problem it has not adequately defined, and the existence of which has not sufficiently demonstrated. What is clear is that the proposed new course would, if implemented, inevitably put strain upon teachers and raise questions as regards rights under Articles 42 and 44 of the Constitution.

Postscript

We are making a written submission instead of filling out the questionnaire on the NCCA website. The reason for this is because it is apparent that the survey questions contained in the questionnaire do not follow good practice.

Aside from the fact that many of the survey questions involve a complex series of propositions which themselves contain ambiguous and poorly defined concepts, and therefore can be read in any number of ways,⁷ the questions are framed in a manner that inevitably leads to response bias. The socially correct answer to every question (other than those that request the respondent to prioritise choices from a list of options) is “yes”.

It seems clear that the NCCA intends to use the positive results from its survey as a political argument in favour of introducing the ERB and Ethics course. But this argument presupposes that the proposed course is both sufficient and necessary to achieve the aspirations inherent within positive answers to the survey questions. The survey could just as easily be framed to suit other narratives. One could take the explanatory blurb under the “Aims” and “Ideas” paragraph that precedes the survey questions, rephrase it in terms of a curriculum according to an explicitly Christian ethos, tweak the questions accordingly, and one would almost certainly get the same distribution of answers to the survey questions.

The survey is thus not a genuine and impartial search for knowledge; it functions merely as part of a political strategy. Therefore it does not provide any basis whatsoever for substantiating claims in regard to need or demand for this programme.

The construction of this survey of stakeholders in this manner is a missed opportunity, doing a disservice to the task undertaken by the NCCA and, regrettably, casting that body in a poor light.

⁷ Take for example the following proposition: “I would like my child to express empathy and joy with human diversity and form deep, caring human connections”. “Empathy”, “human diversity”, and “human connections” are each complex concepts with a range of philosophical meanings (some of which contain strongly secularist presuppositions). Furthermore, the proposition combines multiple sub-propositions. So we have no idea if the respondent is answering one, some, or all of the following:
“I would like my child to express empathy with human diversity”;
“I would like my child to express joy with human diversity”;
“I would like my child to express both empathy and joy (presumably at the same time) with human diversity”;
“I would like my child to form deep connections”;
“I would like my child to form caring human connections”;
“I would like my child to form deep (and) caring human connections”.

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Home

Contributor

Rev Thomas O'Byrne

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31st March 2016

After reading the consultation paper on Education and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School, I have some comments that I would like to make.

I have a keen interest in Education. I have been a Patron's Nominee and a Chairperson of many Boards of Management over the past twenty-eight years. I have also had multiple chaplaincies to Primary Schools.

It is regrettable that the consultation document, while it attempts to define ethos, it has shown little understanding of, or respect for the ethos of the denominational school. Critical to the formation of the Ethos of a denominational school are the traditions, faith and beliefs of the denomination. The ethos of the Roman Catholic Primary school has been articulated through a process of reflection involving pupils, parents, staff and the community, developed under the guidance of the Patron, culminating in the ethos statement which is owned, integrated and lived as the characteristic spirit of the school. This ethos is foundational and integral to the daily life of the school, to its self-understanding, to its policies and its outreach. Ethos permeates every aspect of school life; the Board of Management; daily living within the school, the schools interaction with all the partners to education, and the way the school relates to the community and to outside agencies. Ethos permeates every aspects of the Catholic School.

For the Catholic School, the person of Jesus Christ, whom we believe is the Son of God, and whom we proclaim to be the Way, the Truth and the Life is fundamental to the life of our school. Our faith is foundational to the development of our ethos. The New Testament, the Creed, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and various documents and encyclicals on Catholic education are the primary sources informing the development of the ethos of the Catholic School.

The proposed Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics in Primary Schools is foundationally and fundamentally at variance with the Christian understanding of our human identity, our understanding of life, death, vocation and mission, which is founded on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The catechetical or Religious Education

programmes that are currently taught in the Catholic School already addresses the development of the pupil in the five key areas the ERB and Ethics curriculum hope to address; “personal understanding, mutual understand, character education, connection with the wider world and spiritual awareness”.

The consultation paper fails to honestly name the foundational philosophy, values, qualities, assumptions, attitudes, judgements and beliefs that will subtend the proposed pluralistic, post-modern curriculum. This is a fundamental weakness of the NCCA Consultation Paper. The proposal, to support schools and teachers to enable the child to investigate and think about “topical spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues and the challenges of living in a changing democratic society,” as well as, “justifying and defending personal opinions and beliefs,” without indicating the philosophical and ethical thinking upon which the investigation, deliberation and exploration will be based is a grave weakness. This must be addressed if the NCCA is serious about an open and truthful consultation on the curriculum that they are proposing. To say that the proposed curriculum for ERB and ethics is intended to be pluralist in nature, that it values education perspectives and that it is inclusive, is to say nothing about the aspirations, values, judgements or assumptions on which the curriculum will be based.

The consultation paper proposes that the curriculum will be “child centred”. “Through a child’s reflection on their own beliefs and values and on those of others they will grow in a respect for themselves and others.” “Children will develop an acceptance of the right to hold a particular belief or attitude,” “Children will engage in and promote communication dialogue between peoples of different cultural, religious and non-religious backgrounds”. What is the pedagogical philosophy upon which this educational approach founded? Have children of Primary School age the resources, the experience, the maturity to reflect on these issues? Reflection on these issues will not happen in a vacuum. No programme is value neutral. Once again the question must be posed as to the values, philosophies, ethics, beliefs and critiques that underpin the ERB and Ethics curriculum.

The curriculum proposes to “discuss and reflect upon the key questions of meaning and truth”, without defining truth or indicating the philosophy or the thinking that will contribute to the concepts of meaning or truth forwarded in the curriculum.

The NCCA proposes that the curriculum will “support the teacher to enable the child to develop curiosity and questioning so that her/his own views on and ideas about spiritual matters can be developed and consolidated”. This is the area of spiritual accompaniment. Teachers, in their basic training, do not have a qualification or competence in this discipline. This is entering into the personal psycho-spiritual area of another and is not the remit of the untrained. In a Denominational School, teachers have the support, resources and expertise of the School Chaplain to advise, accompany or refer them should matters of a psycho-spiritual nature arise.

The Catholic School recognises that the primary educators of the child in their faith are parents. The school is an agent that supports the parents in their role as educators of their child. This has been stated in the documents of the Second Vatican Council. In the Catholic Primary School, the religious formation programme, which includes religious knowledge, faith formation and sacramental preparation are implemented in a partnership model of home, school and community. Fostering in the child; the ability to live a full and meaningful life; the awareness of her or his potential and giftedness; a vision of the contribution, service or ministry that she or he can make to society; the ability to articulate her or his belief; the ability to recognise and respect difference; an understanding of justice, compassion and love, which are fundamental to living as a committed disciple of Jesus.

Parent's decision to have their child educated in the religion, beliefs and ethics of their faith community must be respected. To oblige the child of parents, who have consciously made a choice to send their child to a school of their own faith, to participate in a curriculum that is foundationally, and from a content perspective is profoundly at variance with their own beliefs and faith, and to expose this child in her/his early formation to philosophies and values that are at variance with their family values and the faith of their community, is not the remit of the state.

Primary School children are not at an appropriate age to be exposed to values and philosophies that are at variance with and, in some cases, opposed to their family and communal faith perspective.

There are some pertinent questions that must be addressed. Do parents want their child exposed to a curriculum and methodology that claims to be objective, critical and pluralist, and is at variance with their personal, family and communal beliefs?

Does the Department of Education have the right to expose the child to values and beliefs that are at variance to the values and beliefs held by parents?

The Interpretative Approach (Jackson 1997) of representation, interpretation and reflexivity as a methodology must be questioned as to its appropriateness for education in Religion, Beliefs and ethics with children of Primary School age. Who articulates and interprets the Representation of the religion and beliefs of individuals or groups, whether they are concepts or personal stories? How is it ensured that such articulation and interpretations are correct, just and accurate? Where does the "insider" knowledge come from? Interpretation; who interprets, and how is the accuracy of the interpretation with the self understanding of the various religious traditions, be they theist or non theist, assured, respected and reflected? The Reflexivity is solely based on experience and not founded on knowledge. Ideas of truth and opinions about truth are not the same the truth. The Interpretative Approach is dangerous and totally inappropriate for the pre-adolescent child.

The Christian perspective is totally different from a pluralist perspective. The pluralist perspective places equal value on a range of views, it treats all religions and traditions the same. The pluralist perspective speaks to the subject as a spectator. In a pluralists model the educator's role is that of facilitator rather than an agent of formation. The envisaged dual role of teacher in a denominational school, according to the ERB and Ethics Curriculum, will be confusing to the child; and impossible for teachers who are conscientiously committed to their faith.

Education in Religion Beliefs and Ethics is the remit of the Patron in denominational schools and not the NCCA or the Department of Education. It is the Patron who has the duty and right to uphold and protect the ethos of the school on behalf of the community. The ethos is formulated upon the faith, beliefs, traditions and ethics of the sponsoring denomination. The proposed curriculum undermines the ethos of the Roman Catholic School and is fundamentally at odds with the understanding and teachings of the Catholicism. The religious programme in Roman Catholic Schools already address the key ends of the proposed curriculum; fostering a sense of identity and belonging, develops self-awareness, self-confidence, self-esteem and happiness, while being sensitive to diversity and respecting the thinking and positions held by those who are not Roman Catholic.

While I can appreciate the void in the area of Religion, Beliefs and ethics in multidenominational and non-denominational schools and the Departments desire to address these areas through the work of the NCCA. I oppose the proposed model as it fundamentally infringes on the ethos of denominational schools and on the decision of parents who have chosen to have their child or children education in the faith and the traditions of their faith community. The proposed curriculum also requires teachers to have a dual role in a denominational school and to educate on Religion, Beliefs and Ethics in a non partisan, non value judgement model which is at variances to the ethos of the school in which the teacher decided to teach.

Yours sincerely

Rev. Thomas O'Byrne



Home

Contributor

Rose Burke

St. Safan's N.S.
Drumdoit,
Castlefinn,
Co. Donegal
21/3/2016

I am writing in relation to the new proposed Education about Religion & Beliefs & ethics. I am a primary school teacher and have been teaching for over 20 years.

Firstly I am very disappointed and annoyed by the NCCA questionnaire on ERBE. It does not follow good practice. I feel that the questions are framed in such a way that it would appear unreasonable to disagree with the objectives. The questions inevitably lead to a response bias. And therefore I am submitting a written response instead of filling in your questionnaire.

The NCCA states that the proposed ERBE will contribute towards a faith-based school's own ethos by "contributing to and supporting inclusive school communities"

It is argued that this new ERBE is not intended to replace religious formation in school but the reality is that it is NOT COMPATIBLE. It is in conflict with the characteristic spirit of faith based school and the faith instruction taking place in these schools. It will only confuse children. Catholic schools teach about a God who loves us, a God who is the Way, the Truth and the life. It is suggested that ERBE would commence at junior infant level. How could a 4 or 5 year old child, being at a stage of initial formation in their own faith, engage in critical analysis of another faith.

These are children we are talking about, or has everyone forgotten that.

Parents have the right to have their child educated in the faith in which they were baptised. These parents want Catholic teachers to teach the faith to their children. This is their right. I believe that the public have little knowledge or understanding of this proposed curriculum. Schools adopt a child-centred holistic approach to education and religious belief is not compartmentalised. In faith-based schools information about other religions cannot be taught from a neutral perspective.

The Ethics component endorses the morality of secular liberalism wherein individual moral autonomy is considered an ultimate end in itself. Such an approach is incompatible with the emphasis Christian moral theology places on theocentric personalism, objective moral goods and norms, the virtues, and the harmony between the individual's good and the common good.

Catholic schools currently make provision for inter-religious and inter-cultural awareness. And in my opinion many aspects of this proposed programme are already covered in the S.P.H.E programme. Here self worth, self esteem and decision making are covered in a progressive way.

Lastly the NCCA has been gathering information on the curriculum in primary schools. They have identified that time and curriculum overload as one of the greatest challenges facing teachers. They have even published a paper on this: Curriculum Overload in Primary Schools An overview of national and international experiences February 2010. But now they propose adding to this already overloaded curriculum. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. It is time for teachers to stand up and say no.

I would have great difficulty with this programme, both as a teacher and as a parent of three children.

Sincerely,
Rose Burke



Home

Contributor

Sacred Heart NS Monaleen

Submission to NCAA regarding a curriculum in *Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB)* and *Ethics* (hereafter ERBE)

Name Dr Patrick Connolly

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Date 30 March 2016

1. The NCAA questionnaire on ERBE

I am making a written submission instead of completing the questionnaire on the NCAA website. Unfortunately, the questionnaire shows that professional, and if needs be, external, advice was not sought by the NCAA about its construction so as to avoid response bias. The survey questions include unclear and ill-defined ideas, and they can be read in several quite different ways. It is very hard not to answer “Yes” to the questions but what precisely a person means by such an answer may vary enormously according to the respondent. The questionnaire seems framed to elicit a “Yes” answer to the questions, apart from those asking one to prioritise choices from a list of options. It is a survey so unprofessionally constructed that it can only bring discredit now on any attempt to use its results in an educational or public policy context. Some years ago, the economist Prof Morgan Kelly of UCD referred scathingly to what passes for research in education. This poorly designed survey gives credence to such academic critics. That is a great pity, especially for a respected organisation like the NCAA.

2. The right to opt out of religious instruction and ERBE

Is there an assumption in the consultation document that that ERBE will be “neutral” compared to confessional religious education, and thus can be made mandatory for all pupils? Is it that simple? First, there is no such thing as a completely neutral approach to the teaching of religion. Second, if ERBE is to be a separate subject, some parents will be unhappy for their children to attend it. Why? Because it treats all religions as being of equal value and at least implies there is no way of knowing objective truth. And the Ethics component tacitly sanctions the morality of secular liberalism, not that of Christian ethics where individual moral autonomy is not an ultimate end in itself. This apparently is the dominant thinking in the consultation document (see p. 20).

The Irish Constitution explicitly protects the right of parents to opt out of “religious instruction” (not out of “religious education” per se). It can certainly be argued that ERBE is indeed another form of religious instruction, in that it entails a completely phenomenological approach to religion, wherein at best a syncretistic and at worst a secularist approach to religious belief is the paradigm. Teaching young children implicitly that religions are much the same and equally deserving of recognition is in fact a form of religious instruction, an instruction in practical scepticism, albeit more subtle than the Catholic or Protestant catechisms. ERBE is premised on an adult over-intellectualised critique of religions and at primary level this will result in a form of instruction that is inherently albeit tacitly sceptical of the truth claims of Christianity.

So some committed Christians (both Catholic and Protestant) and Muslims will regard this subject as imbuing a subtle or implicit religious indifferentism. On the other hand, some atheists or agnostics may regard it as subjecting their children to a formal education about religious beliefs which they simply don’t want. So “opt-out” arrangements for ERBE may be added to the existing arrangements for those pupils who opt out of confessional religious instruction. This would impose yet another burden on Principals and Boards of Management.

The exact legal status of ERBE as a subject remains unclear and if it is to be mandated for all children, the legal rights of those parents who won’t want their children to attend ERBE will have to be adjudicated on by the Courts.

3. How will the addition of ERBE in the ways suggested by the NCCA impact on existing faith-based schools?

The NCCA seems to assume that its proposed curriculum is crucial to foster inclusivity, critical thinking, and a sense of social justice. There is no evidence to suggest that Catholic and Protestant schools are not already doing this reasonably well. Indeed Pope Francis has pointed to the multicultural environment of many Catholic schools right across the world, where numerous students may not be Christian or do not believe, and that these schools offer an education directed at the development of the whole person, and nevertheless “they are equally called to offer to all the Christian message – respecting fully the freedom of all and the proper methods of each specific scholastic environment – namely that Jesus Christ is the meaning of life, of the cosmos and of history” (Rome, 13 February 2014).

So while being respectful of other religions, a Catholic school cannot be expected by the State to promote them *de facto*, or place them on the same level as the Catholic faith. Likewise, while being respectful to those who have no religious faith, the Catholic school as an organisation cannot be expected to present that agnostic or atheistic world-view as having the same cogency or life-giving sustenance as Christian faith. In practice, that is what now is being pushed onto Church-related schools by way of the proposed ERBE curriculum.

4. ERBE and the wider socio-political context of the teaching of religion in primary schools

Historically, the primary school system in Ireland developed as a sort of informal agreement between the Catholic and Protestant Churches and the State. The area of religion of religion was left to the various religious bodies, whereas on the other hand the administration of the schools by clerical managers and now by voluntary unpaid Boards of Management saved and continues to save the State considerable money. In the early 19th century, the Churches became involved in primary schools because of their interest in the transmission of the Christian faith and in the promotion of the common good of society through education. Now in 2016, the State directs every single detail of primary education bar the teaching and role of religion in the school, and yet continues to have little or no direct legal

responsibility for anything in the system. From the point of view of public administration and expenditure, it is difficult to envisage a cheaper system.

The historical informal agreement is now under pressure, with even the area of religion to be slowly brought under the direction of Government, while at the same time the time-consuming burdensome administrative, legal and other responsibilities still remain with the volunteer school Boards and the Patrons. In fact, new responsibilities are created by the DES for Boards year by year. Religion is now the only area of primary school life not determined by Departmental Circular.

In 2012 the divestment of schools from Church Patrons was recommended by the Advisory Group of the Forum on Patronage. There is a broad consensus shared by the Churches, the Government, other patron bodies, and other stakeholders in the system, that a number of Catholic schools should be divested, thereby ending the situation whereby too many schools are under Catholic patronage and bringing more diversity of patronage into the system. However, divestment has proceeded very slowly indeed. It would be naïve to see this slow progress thus far in as due to effective well-organised resistance by faith-based groups. It seems a lot of Irish people, when polled, favour in principle a more secular primary education almost on the French model, but paradoxically they don't want it for their own children. Divestment has met practical difficulties and often huge local resistance. Given the growing acceptance that divestment is a far more complicated process than initially envisaged by some policy makers, the real argument has now moved onto the situation of those schools which will remain under Catholic and Protestant patronage.

It is in this socio-political context of slow divestment that the public policy debate has now shifted onto ERBE. In the longer term, the concern is that ERBE is a sort of "Trojan Horse", whereby the State will eventually direct Catholic and Protestant schools about the way religion is taught in school, in the same way that the Department currently has complete control of the rest of the primary curriculum. There is an influential group of people in Irish society who wish to push confessional religious education out of all schools. This would obviously not happen overnight, but gradually over the years, as the issue of the overall time available for religion in the curriculum will lead to the elimination of everything else bar ERBE.

The current system of primary education arose out of a particular historical context which has changed enormously. If the State is now going to determine the ways how religion is taught, then the various Churches will have to give thought to their commitment to the system by way of volunteer labour, and decide if their continued involvement is now worthwhile.

If a denominational primary school has to teach a Government-mandated ERBE which inherently conflicts with its ethos, then one wonders what if any autonomy is being left to the school and what is the point of Churches or other voluntary bodies being involved in primary education at all – such schools would then be entirely creatures of the State. This would amount to the complete triumph of the ideology of “Statism”, whereby all schools are treated as State schools. From a Catholic perspective, there would be little point in continuing to put unpaid time and effort into such schools. Catholic schools exist in the first instance to support Catholic parents in a meaningful way, not as a cost-saving substitute for directly-run State schools.

Further consultation should now take place between the NCCA and the Patrons of faith-based primary schools on how the concerns behind the NCCA flawed proposals on ERBE might be addressed through the existing RE programmes and possibly by a set of general guidelines for all schools.



Home

Contributor

Scoil Bhríde, Athgarvan

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS



Respondent's details

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

*Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

*Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:



Submission to NCCA as a response to
An t-ádhacht
A plan for children
Education about Religion and Ethics (ERE) and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper¹

- 1) What are we trying to fix? Do we all agree that there is a gap in the curriculum that needs to be addressed? The NCCA repeatedly concedes that there has been little research on this subject and yet are prepared to make major decisions based on this scarce data. They also reference much desk research which would seem to be qualitatively less valuable than a field research based approach. It is not clear that the NCCA have any clear competence in this area or that it is in their remit.
- 2) The NCCA document immediately raises comments about Patronage in primary schools. To us this is going beyond their remit. It is not the role of the NCCA to make observations on the patronage of schools. It is clear that there is a vocal minority in Ireland who have deeply held views that faith based patronage should be ended. There is also a clear majority who either have no view or are quite happy with the status quo. Given the constitutional position, transposed to law in the Education act, it is clear that the current model will continue for the foreseeable future.
It is quite worrying that the NCCA would make a statement inferring that the constitutional references to "religious instruction" is now regarded as "pedagogically limiting". This seems to suggest that the constitution is somehow out of date or in error. We find it most odd that a state body would take this view of the constitution, which the state is obliged to defend on behalf of the citizens. In our view the NCCA should not attempt to promulgate Curriculum items that are at odds with a faith based view of the human person.
- 3) The Discussion paper repeatedly states that there is no clear link between Ethics and ERE, yet time and again they are proposing that these would be joined in a new curriculum. To our mind this is a deliberate attempt to muddy the waters and make those who object to ERE seem less reasonable. We would suggest that having an Ethics element in the curriculum is very valuable and to be supported and would help in promoting a tolerant society. Linking Ethics to ERE does it a great disservice. We would strongly recommend that this linkage be removed. In fact the paper states clearly that only two jurisdictions have applied this approach. This would seem to be just over 1% of all countries which is hardly a compelling argument in its favour.
- 4) The Paper is very strongly recommending a particular approach and course of action. Four approaches are suggested and three are clearly disparaged with tenuous arguments. Therefore, it is reasonable to question if there is any useful benefit in making a submission. Seems that NCCA has determined a course of action. Given that this is a discussion document it is most disappointing that all alternatives other than the preferred one are either directly rejected or strongly argued against. For example, one of the main arguments against ERP and Ethics having both discrete and integrated components is curriculum overload. This is neither backed up with argument nor is there any clear explanation why this would be less preferable than ERE and Ethics as a distinct curriculum where a similar curriculum overload is likely to obtain.
- 5) The NCCA seem to be clearly advocating a policy to ensure that the Patronage elements of the curriculum are reduced (referring curriculum time reserved for patron's programme in both Canada and Australia) and replaced by their definition of pluralism.
- 6) Faith Formation: Faith in a child is developed over many years continuing into adulthood. However, it is at its most fragile in younger children who are particularly open to being

influenced by authority figures such as teachers. The Junior Cycle Second Level Religion Curriculum currently introduces many world religions. In my opinion this is a more suitable time to introduce this.

- 7) NCCA Document references the education of the child as a "curious, capable, confident and caring individual". I would argue that given the nature of faith development a primary school child is not "capable" to deal with being introduced to the tenets of a multitude of different religions. It is doubtful that primary school children have developed the critical thinking skills needed to analyse multiple belief systems. NCCA specifically call out that most patron programs focus on mono-theistic religions. This is to be expected as at least there is some commonality.
- 8) Teaching of religion without a faith basis can be seen as simply an exercise in history or sociology. In fact without faith, religions only differ in the number of members they have. The NCCA document acknowledges that the history and sociology components are often covered in SPFL. Therefore, it seems odd therefore that no consideration is given to formalizing this approach as part of an integration into current curriculum.
- 9) NCCA Document acknowledges that teaching an ERB curriculum would be challenging for teachers, therefore, pre-training of teachers would be essential in advance of any introduction of new material. It should also be acknowledged that teachers in faith based schools are required to support and run the patrons programme as directed by the Board of Management who typically serve at the pleasure of the Patrons. As ERB programmes potentially puts the teacher in the invidious position of being stuck in the middle with conflicting guidance from both the patron and the NCCA.
- 10) Time on curriculum. NCCA acknowledges that this is problematic, but yet propose that this will be addressed "next year". Surely it makes more sense to act upon time overload in advance of adding additional content to the existing overburdened timetable.

From: Seán Shride Board of management

Athginsan
The Curragh
Co. Kildare



Home

Contributor

Scoil Bhríde, Midleton

Our Current Practice/ Policy on Dealing with Minority Groups in Scoil Bhríde

Scoil Bhríde is a large, urban, mixed Infant school and a girls-only school from First to Sixth Class inclusive. Currently we have 625 pupils enrolled.

Scoil Bhríde is a Roman Catholic school. The teaching of Religion is central to our curriculum. We share this task with the parents, clergy and the wider parish community. Children are prepared for the Sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Confirmation. All children are given many opportunities to participate in prayer services during the year. Each year, the Sixth Class girls go on retreat in preparation for Confirmation. Throughout the year Prayer Services are held to mark the important Liturgical Feasts e.g. Holy Rosary, All Saints', Presentation of Our Lady, Christmas, Lá le Bríde (St. Brigid's Day), Lá Le Pádraig (St. Patrick's Day), Easter. Pupils attend Mass to celebrate the beginning and end of the school year, Christmas, Ash Wednesday and on the occasion of the death of a parent/ pupil/ sibling and on other occasions throughout the year.

Even though Scoil Bhríde is a school with a strong Roman Catholic ethos, pupils from different religious denominations and none are welcomed and cherished. These pupils come to Scoil Bhríde even though there are alternative education providers in the area. Pupils who do not participate in the Religious Education classes stay in their classroom and may read or complete other work or they may be withdrawn from the classroom by parents for the duration of the Religion class. The timetable is organised close to a break to accommodate that choice. These children know they are welcome to attend school Masses in the church if they so wish but in the event that they choose not to they are accommodated in the Infant Classrooms, where they help out the teacher or do their own pre-assigned work i.e. reading etc. When prayer services/ assemblies take place in the school, pupils who do not wish to participate are freely accommodated and know they are welcome, while they are neither expected nor obliged to participate. Furthermore, these pupils are given ample opportunities to share about their own culture and traditions, especially when we celebrate international days. Most choose to stay with their class and go to the prayer service or to the church. We have never had a parent, whose background is not Catholic, being offended by the content of the religious programme or the approaches/accommodations we offer.

On First Communion Day, pupils not receiving the Sacrament are invited to attend the ceremony and the party. In preparation for Confirmation the pupils go on retreat for a day. Again, pupils not receiving the Sacrament are welcome to join their class peers. Generally, they go. Likewise, at the Confirmation Ceremony and the Confirmation Party, pupils not receiving the Sacrament are welcome to attend and in general they choose to celebrate with their friends. They feel included.

Some even prepare a Confirmation Copy, like their friends, particularly if they are Christian but not Catholic.

All parents: parents of pupils from different religious backgrounds and parents of pupils of no religious background are made aware of the above at enrolment, i.e. at the information evening, this is explained verbally and it is also written in the information booklet.

In Scoil Bhríde, we have created a very visually rich environment, which includes many Religious images, posters, etc. Parents/Guardians know what ethos we offer before they choose to enrol their child.

We have **never** turned away a pupil because of his/her religious or non-religious beliefs. In fact, we have **never** not accepted a pupil for **any** reason. Baptismal certificates are **not** requested at enrolment. They are only sought if children are presented for the Sacraments of First Penance, First Holy Communion & Confirmation.

We have had quite a number of pupils over the years, from non-Catholic backgrounds request the Sacraments. This situation is dealt with, on an individual basis, at parish level.

It has been our experience that pupils feel very included and welcomed in our school. In the recent past we have had pupils from over thirty different countries of origin. Pupils know that they are **genuinely included** as they often get the lead roles in plays, represent the school in all kinds of competitions including: Scór na bPáistí; Robotics; Athletics; Choirs; School Band; Quiz Teams; School Plays; Musicals; Spelling Bee etc. etc.

The Management and Staff of Scoil Bhríde endeavour to provide a caring, learning environment which facilitates the nurturing of each pupil's full educational potential. The achievement of this aim informs all of the planning.

Some points worth mentioning re the proposed new programme:

- Happily, in our town, parents/guardians have the opportunity to send our pupils to other schools if they wish to achieve a different education. Pupils are present in Scoil Bhríde by choice!
- Surely the morality and ethics of the Gospel is universally acknowledged as inclusive! In our experience pupils love the Gospel stories.
- To introduce pupils to different Religions in Primary School, at such a young age, we believe would confuse them. It would appear to be an "à la carte" approach and that pupils could choose whatever they like. Parents of Catholic children may not be happy with this exposure. We know some who have expressed reservations about same.
- The curriculum is already overloaded. We do not have enough time to get everything covered. Our fear is that this new programme would take precedence over Religious

Education as it now stands, or at a very minimum, that it would be taught during Religious Education time and that what we have would be substantially diluted. We cannot imagine both programmes being properly taught! Realistically, this would not happen!

- People understand what Scoil Bhríde stands for and have expressed themselves as being happy with it. To change it would change something that is inherently authentic.



Home

Contributor

**Scoil Mhuire Senior Primary School,
Newbridge**



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Ballymory
Newbridge
County Kildare

NCCA
35 Fitzwilliam Square
Dublin
D02 EKH8

24th March 2018

**Re: Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School:
Consultation Paper.**

Dear Sir/Madam,

We have taken time to review and consider your consultation paper addressing curriculum needs in the area of religion, beliefs and ethics and we wish to make the following submission. At the outset we should acknowledge that we are a Catholic ethos school and this is very much reflected in our submission.

You have clearly stated in your introductory remarks the focus of your proposed new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics thus: "...the focus of the NCCA's work, and of this consultation, is on what children **should** learn and for what purpose **in all schools** beyond 2018." (emphasis added). It is somewhat surprising that a state initiative with a stated objective such as this has failed to acknowledge or discuss how such a policy is consistent with the constitutional status of religious education and in particular the rights conferred in Article 42 of our Constitution; including the right for our children to receive free, state sponsored, primary education and to supplement private and corporate educational initiative so as to respect the right of parents to provide as they see fit for their children's religious and moral formation. This fundamental concept is reinforced in the Education Act, 1998 which requires schools to "promote the moral, spiritual and personal development of students... in consultation with their parents, having regard for the characteristic spirit of the school". Under section 30 of the 1998 Act the Minister is charged with responsibility for prescribing the school curriculum and under section 41 the NCCA is established to advise the Minister in particular matters; however, in exercising these functions both the Minister and the NCCA must "have regard to the characteristic spirit of a school or class of school". We are at a loss to see how an ERB and ethics curriculum such as the one which you have proposed is consistent with these fundamental principles and indeed by suggesting it **'should'** be taught **'in all schools'** entirely flies in the face of these principles.

As a catholic ethos school we have faced and met the challenges of our evolving multi-cultural society and will continue to do so. The fact that the majority of school places are within catholic ethos schools is a reflection of the cultural and historical association between the catholic faith, our country and State. That there has been significant cultural diversification in our society in recent years is acknowledged, as is the need to embrace and foster this diversification; however, the vast majority of our communities are of the catholic faith and, while many may not consider themselves as 'devout' or 'practising' Catholics, in our experience the majority wish for their children to receive faith based catholic instruction in our schools.

As mentioned the right of parents to direct the religious and moral education of their children is enshrined in our Constitution as indeed is the right of parents to elect that their children, in attending a school of a particular religious ethos, has the right to opt-out of religious instruction. Our school, as with all other catholic ethos schools, facilitates the 'opting-out' from religious instruction and respects parents and children's rights in this regard. In developing the *Catholic Primary and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* the Irish Episcopal Conference has developed a broad curriculum, while undoubtedly grounded in faith based catholic teaching, is also inclusive, fosters understanding and respect for persons of different faiths and beliefs and endeavours to instil Christian moral values which, given our history, is unsurprisingly reflective of the wider moral standards and norms of Irish society.

With respect, if, as a response to the diversification of our society, you were to introduce a 'one size fits all' religious curriculum as proposed, you run the risk of reducing religious education in our country to a detached study of religions and atheist beliefs and in so doing undermine the faith based teaching of religious ethos schools, such as ours, where the majority of the pupils parents selected the school based on the religious ethos and with a desire for their children to be instructed in their chosen faith and moral code.

In your paper you have proposed four possible ways of introducing the proposed ERB and ethic curriculum, although there appears to be a clear preference to the introduction of the proposed ERB and ethic curriculum as a distinct stand-alone subject recognising "the need for all children to have teaching in ERB and Ethics". While we would not necessarily disagree with this sentiment, any such proposal, in the absence of a right for parents to elect for their children to "opt-out" of such a programme, would not respect the foremost right of parents to direct the religious and moral formation of their children. Indeed, such a proposal would inevitably lead to a situation where some children will elect to engage in both the parent and State programmes, some in one but not the other and others in neither. We fail to see here this would be a reasonable or practicable response in our diversifying society.

Of the other three options, you have acknowledged that the proposed curriculum, "grounded in a pluralist and rather subjective perspective"; is inconsistent with faith based parent programmes and therefore integration of both programmes is not feasible. The other two options both involve the integration of the programme across curricular areas and, to the extent that any such instruction is inconsistent with the ethos of a particular school (whether religious, agnostic or atheist), would conflict the wishes of those parents who have elected to enrol their children in a particular school based on the particular ethos or none.

It may very well be the case that a requirement exists for state sponsored schools catering for parents who wish for their children to receive a more general instructional education with respect to religion but to

impose a compulsory, generalised religious education programme on all is not, in our respectful submission, appropriate and would be a retrograde step.

Yours faithfully,



Stuart Corry
Chairman
Board of Management
St. Michael's Senior School



Home

Contributor

Scoil Mhuire Sóisearach Newbridge

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20/03/2015

**Education about Religions & Beliefs & Ethics Consultation
National Council for Curriculum & Assessment
35 Fitzwilliam Square
Dublin 2**

Please find attached the Response of our Board of Management to the ERB & Ethics discussion document.

With kind regards

**Eileen Hall
Chairperson.**

Response of Seol Mhairi Sámaraich Board of Management to ERB and Ethics discussion document.

NCCA has responded well to its brief to address the questions raised by the letters on patronage and pluralism. It is seeking to facilitate an open discussion in regard to Education about Religions & Beliefs and Ethics. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this discussion. The focus of this submission will be on the practicalities for a school of seeking to teach about religion as distinct from teaching the practice of a religion.

The document makes a series of statements such as 'Participation in ERB and Ethics will help foster a sense of identity and belonging in children by developing their self-awareness, self-confidence, self-esteem and, ultimately, their well-being.' No person could disagree with or want to argue against such positive assertions. One must however challenge the assumptions that such fostering will occur if the Irish Curriculum seeks to foster such development by teaching 'about' religions.

A very fundamental element of Catholic religious teaching is that self-awareness, self-confidence and self-esteem in the child is fostered through the experience of a spirituality and a religious truth. The NCCA discussion document whether intentionally or otherwise undermines this view. Its proposition is fundamentally at odds with the maintenance of a Catholic ethos in a school.

There is an assumption also that if one is teaching and practising one religion one is disrespecting or undermining the view of a child with an alternative practice or no religious belief. A Catholic school engages these children in an inclusive manner as is practicable.

The parents of no religion might well say that this is discriminatory, unfair or simply not appropriate in a state funded system. For us as a Catholic school two wrongs will not make a right. By adopting a program that teaches 'about religion' one seeks to correct the first wrong with a second one. As a practising Catholic one cannot accept the second wrong. One is reminded of the old adage 'Two wrongs never made a right'.

The document states that the vision is 'for an authentic pluralism and values education'. The assumption is that if a child is informed, given and explanation of or is believed in a plurality of religions the child will somehow become pluralist and adopt a set of values. When teaching

young children, it is recognised from psychological research, they learn best by having real experiences. The Catholic religious education programme provides these experiences, application of the ethics and values espoused by Jesus Christ let them develop religious values. From the security and confidence of their experienced perspective they are better positioned to view and understand other perspectives. If there is an authentic commitment to child centred pedagogy one has to take this into account.

The document states 'Disagreement and tension are features of human interaction and the proposed curriculum will promote active tolerance and respectful disagreement with those of opposing views'. The Catholic religious education Curriculum states on page 21 The teaching with regard to Other Faiths which arises from the Second Vatican Council and also from the more recent Church pronouncements, also affects the kind of Religious Education and formation carried out in Catholic Primary schools, cf. *Dialogue of the Church towards the Followers of Other Religions*. The message is that the Catholic tradition has a long and committed practice to addressing the tensions being considered in the ERH and Ethics Curriculum. If something is not broken why are we trying to fix it?

While we welcome the assertion that 'each parent has the right to develop a programme that supports and contributes to the ethos of the school.' The material being proposed in the discussion document is already comprehensively addressed in the *Catholic Primary and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*. We commonly find great difficulty in managing the time constraints in regard to the implementation of the 12 subjects that the school is committed to. There is certainly not enough evidence in this document to cause further pressure on already narrow time constraints.

The premise that assumes that if schools 'give understandings' about all religions it will result in a pluralist outcome is not a sound one. An analogy could be that in a school like ours with almost a quarter of the four hundred population coming from 22 countries we should treat each child equally and teach the children about all the languages. Were one to say to parents that we will teach the children about the languages but we will not teach any language. The NCCA staff would not find this acceptable as it would undermine their revised language curriculum. Parents would not find this acceptable. Why is the NCCA applying one standard to Languages and a different standard to the teaching of religion?

Our Principal was introduced to curriculum approved by the Catholic Patron recently. It is a comprehensive and by all accounts an exciting document. It meets all of the demands that would be required by the ERB and Ethics proposal. It is our view that the NCCA should endorse this programme as a pattern's programme and encourage other patrons to do the same in regard to Religious education.

This submission is the response from The Board Of Management of Seol Mhuire Scoil, Ballymany, Newbridge Co. Kildare.

Yours sincerely



Eileen Hall Chairperson.



Home

Contributor

Scoil Mhuire, Birr



Scoil Muire
Dunkerrin
Birr



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29th March 2016

Submission from the Board of Management of Scoil Muire, Dunkerrin, Birr
in response to the Consultation paper on ERBE

To whom it may concern:

At the meeting of the Board of Management of Scoil Muire held on 10th January 2016, the consultation paper on Education about Religion and Ethics was thoroughly discussed. It was strongly felt that such a component of the curriculum was, at least unnecessary, and at most confusing and conflicting with parts of the current Religious Education programme and general ethos of our school.

To suggest that the teaching of ERBE would begin with 4/5 year olds seemed totally unreasonable where such children are being initiated into the Faith of their parents' choice, and would be utterly confused by the introduction of other beliefs at this stage.

In our school, the ethical framework is provided by the spirit and ethos of the school which reflects the social teaching of the Catholic Church which, in turn, is based on the teaching of Jesus Christ. As such the school promotes the values of respect, love, compassion, peace, justice, mercy, forgiveness, integrity including engaging with people of all faiths and none. This is reflected in all the school policies and school leadership. The Principal strongly felt that the suggestion that such an additional component to the curriculum was necessary was an affront to himself and the teaching staff.

Inter-religion literacy is one of the five key skills in the new Catholic Pre-school and Primary Religious Education Curriculum. All of this is reflected in the 'Grow in Love' series which is currently being introduced into our school.

It is therefore felt that ERBE as a separate subject is totally unnecessary and will just add to the problem of an overloaded curriculum.

I trust that you will take our views into consideration when deciding on the future curriculum of our schools.

Yours sincerely

Sister Margaret Dobbin

Chairperson of the Board of Management.



Home

Contributor

Scoil Mhuire Lourdes, Tullow

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Anne Kennelly
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Date	March 30 th 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation #

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment,
35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

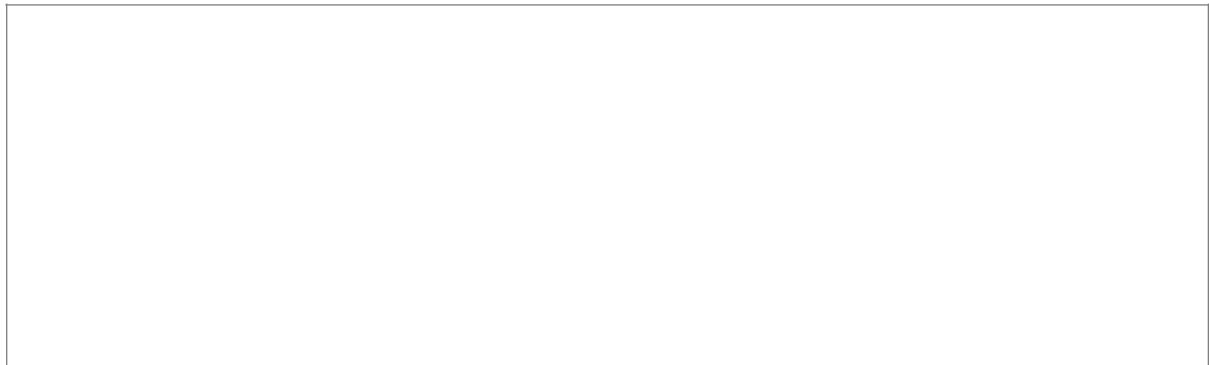
Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.



2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities

- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

Let us teach our patron's programmewithout any other being added.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

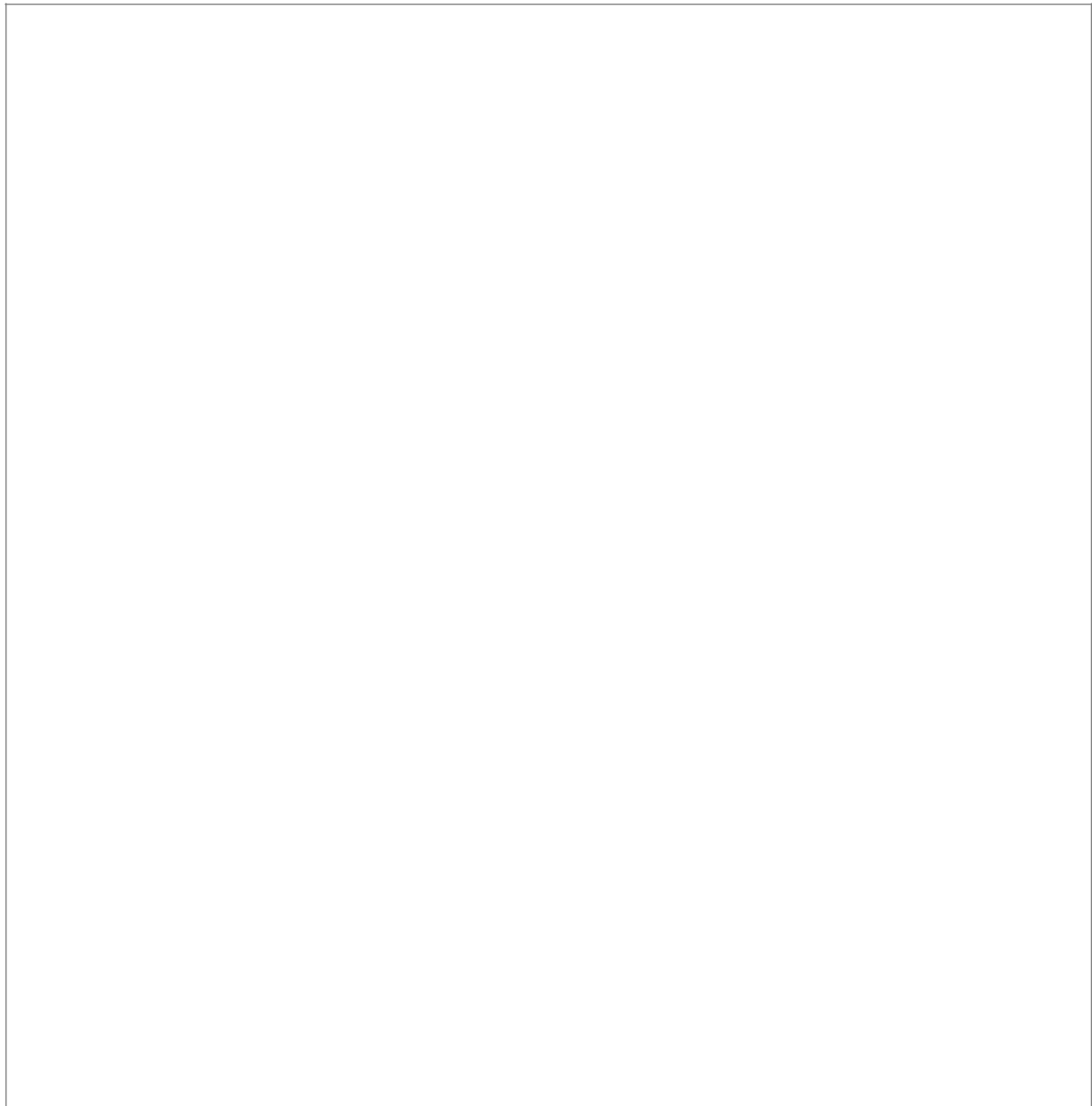
The secular post-modern world view offered by the NCCA proposal is completely at odds with that of the Catholic-Christian view. This viewpoint has particular challenges for the approach to Religious Education offered by our Catholic school. The approach suggested by NCCA is that children see their religious identity/belief as just one among many others. There is no space for the child to be formed by the experience of a specific religious identity.

The NCCA suggestion promotes a pluralist approach to religion while currently our pupils are taught to respect and learn from other religious traditions. We seek to teach the children to serve the common good and be the best of citizens because of their commitment to their catholic faith.

Parents who wish to have their children educated in a faith based school have a right to this. In a faith-based school, religion cannot be compartmentalized. In faith-based schools religious education is inseparable from the characteristic spirit of the school.

Pg. 6 of the consultation booklet poses a particular problem for our staff....."The teaching.....is required to be objective, critical and pluralist... involves reflexivity from the teacher, checking and adapting their own knowledge to ensure that it meets the needs of the children".

Curriculum overload.....timetable overload!!!! Need I say more on this?





Home

Contributor

Scoil na Naomh Uiligh, Newbridge



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Response to ERB and Ethics Proposal

The ERB and Ethics proposal has laudable aims and objectives. Among the many outcomes envisaged are those that will see children become more self-aware, more self-confident, possess increased self-esteem and be happier. Children will also be enabled to respect and empathise with others, be more tolerant of differences, understand diversity, develop a strong moral sense. In short they will become curious, capable, confident and caring individuals.

Realistically such expectations appear overly optimistic. Whether such a programme is suitable for primary school children is questionable. Is it really age appropriate? How do we have children at a very vulnerable age that need firm foundations and certainty in their lives. The emphasis seems to be on knowing rather than being. Knowing about many world religions and beliefs is deemed to be more educationally important than being guided by the tenets of one religion. The study of other religions and beliefs as an academic, secular and dispassionate exercise may be acceptable as an element in a Junior Cycle curriculum where exam success might outweigh ethical or moral development in pupils.

Pope Francis frequently speaks of a “throw-away culture” in the modern world where values and traditions are cast aside. In the ERB and Ethics document a denominational approach to education is deemed to be somewhat out of date. There is barely an acknowledgement of the contribution of denominational schools to inclusivity and an inference that such inclusivity has only lately come on stream. Whereas it is claimed that ERB and Ethics will lead to real inclusivity. In fact the ethos of most Catholic schools commits to the inclusion of pupils from all backgrounds – social, ethnic, special needs and religious.

Great emphasis is given in the proposal to understanding pluralism and diversity and that is fine. However with young children attempts to understand issues that are at odds with their own experience may open up avenues of enlightenment but equally in many cases can lead to confusion. At this age emphasis on what children have in common should outweigh any approach that points to differences between them. By all means children should be taught to respect others of different religions and cultures but first of all allow them to acknowledge each other as friends and classmates. It is possible that education about diversity even when using a constructivist approach that involves pupils and teachers creating knowledge and learning from one another might instead of enabling children to understand and respect differences, lead to discussion and bullying.

The role of the teacher as facilitator appears vague. According to the proposal teachers do require knowledge about the different religions and beliefs in their classrooms but they do not require to be experts in the various beliefs and traditions. Which begs the question – that is bound to arise “do the teachers know what they are talking about in the ERB and Ethics class”? Demands that will be placed on teachers regarding pedagogical approaches that incorporate a variety of interactive techniques will require extensive teacher education and professional support that historically has not always been forthcoming.

There is bound to be a lack of consistency in the learning experience in different schools. Schools that are rich in the variety of religions and cultures represented by the pupils will according to the document be able to engage in a child-centred pedagogy and constructivist approach. In denominational schools where the vast majority belong to one religion there will be a reliance on the use of literature, media, teacher knowledge, teacher and pupil research.

Will the inclusion of ERB and Ethics in the curriculum be compulsory for all primary schools whether they be denominational, multi-denominational, non-denominational or non-theist? While there is



Home

Contributor

**Scoil Náisiúnta Muire gan Smál,
Termonfeckin**



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Wroghoda,
Co. Leath
MEOG

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18th March 2016

We, the Board of Management of SN Mairéagáin Scolaí, Carrigan, Ternanleakin, Co. Leath wish to make the following observations in relation to the NCCA's proposed new programme, EB3 & Ethics:

1. We are a Catholic School and have a faith programme which we have a right to have a 'reasonable amount of time set aside to teach' (Education Act 30 (2) (c)). By adding another programme on top of this, the NCCA are putting more pressure on an already over-loaded curriculum.
2. We are confident that Catholic schools already make provision for inter-religious and inter-cultural awareness in terms of policies, ethos and leadership in our religious programme, which includes a study of Judaism and Islamic faiths, for example, our S.P.H.E. programme covers respect for others and their beliefs and cultures.
3. Parents, families and children with religious convictions have a right to give expression to these in faith-based schools. Such schools adopt a child-centred, holistic approach to education, where religious belief is not compartmentalised but is fully acknowledged as part of lived reality for those parents, families and children.
4. Religious education in faith-based school is inseparable from the characteristic spirit of the school.
5. As a Catholic school, we know we are inclusive of others but have our own identity which we believe is good for society as a whole.
6. Finally, we believe that the determination of the ethos or characteristic spirit of a school is not the function of the NCCA or the Minister.

We hope you will take our observations into account in your deliberations on the new programme.

Yours sincerely,

Eoin Vintery

[Secretary BOM]



Home

Contributor

Seán Corkery



Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Date	21 st March 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35
Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Written Submission on ERB and Ethics Consultation

To: FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation,
National Council of Curriculum and Assessment,
35, Fitzwilliam Square,
Dublin 2

Respondents Details:

Rev Sean Corbery (Diocesan Adviser on Primary Education)
On behalf of the Diocese of Cloyne,
Cloyne Pastoral Centre,
Cobh,
Co-Cork

Telephone: 021 4811430

Email: info@cloynediocese.ie

Date: 21st March 2016

Introduction and Executive Summary

The diocese appreciates the opportunity to make this submission to the ERB and Ethics Consultation currently underway by the NCCA. We trust our views will be given due consideration in charting any future action by the NCCA in this regard. The contents of what follows can be summarised as follows:

Catholic Patrons are very much cognisant of the multicultural milieu in which Primary Schools operate in the contemporary Irish context. The evidence on the ground states that in both policy and policy implementation, work is underway on interreligious dialogue and inclusion. It is approached from a faith perspective that is respectful of all faiths and none. Proposals for an ERB and Ethics Curriculum would be a disingenuous attempt to nullify the work that is already taking place in our schools. What we believe is needed at this time is not another curriculum but a supportive dialogue at policy level between the DES, the NCCA, and the Patron Bodies so that where genuine matters of concern arise, they can be worked out to the satisfaction of all the education partners. Proselytism of any type and by any grouping – religious or secular – is intolerable in our society. Therefore, enforcing a curriculum of “beliefs and ethics” which contravenes the characteristic spirit of a school and/or the rights of parents and guardians would be a grave error of judgement, and possibly a breach of their constitutional protections.

Immediate Sense of Conflict

Given the content of the NCCA's discussion document, the proposed new curriculum is certain to conflict with the characteristic spirit of faith-based schools, and the faith instruction taking place in such schools.

- The ERB component endorses constructivist and pluralist epistemologies (where no objective truth can ultimately be advocated or known). This approach to truth-claims is incompatible with a realist epistemology as understood by the Christian denominations.
- The Ethics component endorses secular liberalism (i.e. individual moral autonomy is considered an ultimate end in itself). This is incompatible with the theocentric personalism of the Christian moral tradition where the emphasis falls on objective moral goods and norms, the life of virtue, and fruitful harmony between the individual and the common good.

From the outset the NCCA assumes that its proposed curriculum provides a corrective to the relative absence of inclusivity, conscious and critical thinking, and the sense of social justice in the Irish primary school sector. It is as though these aims were currently not being worked towards by the primary school sector in Irish society. We would dispute such an assumption. It is false to assume that such aims are not, or cannot be achieved within faith-based religious education. It is worth noting the NCCA consultation paper does not acknowledge the problem which the proposed ERB and Ethics Curriculum poses in terms of compatibility with the characteristic spirit of faith-based schools and the on-going faith formation taking place in these schools.

Were there to be a roll-out of an ERB and Ethics programme in faith-based schools, truth claims made in a faith-based religious education programme would be undermined by subsequently subscribing to the view that all the religions and philosophies under discussion were basically equal in truth value. This undermines the very *raison d'être* of faith-based schooling. Such conflicting messages would be very confusing for children at primary level. Could teachers employed in the faith-based schooling sector conscientiously provide such mixed messages to their students? Would such a pedagogical approach be age-appropriate for primary school children?

In an already crowded school day, there could easily be a justifiable concern among patrons, teachers, parents, and other relevant stakeholders, that "something will have to give" so why have two "parallel" subjects in the school day (the Patron's Religious Education Programme and the DES's ERB and Ethics). The reality of course is that these are not "parallel" subjects in the strict sense, but fundamentally conflicting epistemological narratives. Nevertheless, concern about conflicting messages reaching primary school students is a legitimate reservation, and an argument that is likely to gain traction should there be an attempt to compel faith based schools to countenance an ERB and Ethics curriculum as envisaged in the NCCA's discussion document.

New Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum

It is important to note that in recent years, Catholic Patrons have developed a new curriculum in the area of Religious Education which is conscious of special needs education, pre-school education, differentiation in learning, conscious and critical thinking, inter-religious dialogue, inclusivity in general, and a sense of social justice. This is a response to the cultural demands of contemporary Irish Society. A Religious Education programme which reflects this curriculum is currently being rolled out in Primary Schools under Catholic Patronage. A further document by Catholic Schools Partnership gives an important lead on the approach of Catholic Patrons to the contemporary Irish cultural situation.

The following references from the New Curriculum are relevant should the NECA desire to give a hearing to Catholic Patrons' policy in the area of "Beliefs and Ethics".

- A. **Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland** (Veritas: Irish Episcopal Conference, 2015), available at http://www.veritasbooks.ie/medias/ways/way/RE_Curriculum_Introduction_web.pdf

- Page 14: Responding to a religious and cultural change
- Page 15: Inclusion of all children in the Catholic school
- Pages 16-17: The Contribution of Catholic Religious Education to the Primary School Curriculum (1999)
- Pages 21: Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Perspective
- Pages 21-22: Inter-Cultural Perspective

The following references from the Catholic Patrons RE Programme, Grow in Love, are relevant should the NECA desire to give a hearing to Catholic Patrons' policy in the area of "Beliefs and Ethics".

- B. **Grow in Love Teacher Manual, Junior & Senior Infants** (Veritas, 2015)

- Page 13: Religious Education Outcomes and Faith Formation Goals¹
- Pages 14: Developing Inter-Religious Literacy
- Page 15: The Role of Culture

¹ It is possible in any given religious education classroom situation to learn "about" a religion, another, where appropriate, to be formed "in" a particular faith. In other words, critical education and faith formation are distinct, interrelated elements of formal religious education in a faith-based school setting. It is wholly undesirable to separate them in a faith-based setting, because religious education in faith-based schools is inseparable from the characteristic spirit of the school. A person with or without a religious affiliation can learn "about" a religion, but such a person will never be formed "in" a religion (i.e. do not follow).

The following references from the Catholic Schools Partnership document on inclusion are relevant should the NCCA desire to give a hearing to Catholic Patrons' policy in the area of "Beliefs and Ethics":

- C. CSP, *Catholic Primary Schools in a Changing Ireland – Sharing Good Practice on Inclusion of All Pupils*. Mynooth 2015, available at <http://www.catholicschools.ie/2015/03/12/catholic-primary-schools-in-a-changing-ireland/>
- Page 13: Admissions Policy and Mission Statement
Inclusion in Religious Education
 - Pages 25: Sample Information for Parents Regarding the Nature of Religious Education in the Catholic Primary School
 - Page 26: Management of "Opt-out" from Religious Education
 - Pages 17: Sacramental Preparation
Intercultural Dialogue – Some Suggestions

Fundamentally, the issue is not whether *ERP and Ethics* would replace current instruction, but whether it is compatible. A constructivist approach to religious education achieves a particular version of inclusivity by excluding the truth of particular religious claims from the classroom and, moreover, by excluding from appropriate consideration the rights of faith-based parents to have their children formed in the faith while in a faith-based school. The reality is that an *ERP and Ethics* curriculum as set out is incompatible with current Religious Education and faith-formation practices in schools under Catholic patronage.

Ideological Inconsistency in the Proposed Curriculum

There is an inherent inconsistency built into the NCCA proposal which is indicative of secular liberal positions in general:

- On the one hand, in relation to the **religions and beliefs component**, "pluralism places value on a range of views rather than a single approach or method or interpretation of life" (NCCA Consultation Document, p. 22). In practice this entails "the right to the existence of contradictory truth claims or worldviews" (NCCA Consultation Document, p. 29).
- On the other hand, in relation to the **ethics component**, a very strong prioritisation of one view – namely that of individual moral autonomy – is proposed: "Ethics education contributes to the development of autonomous individuals, capable of exercising critical judgement while also fostering dialogue and community life in a pluralist society" (NCCA, p. 20). This is wholly inconsistent with the agnostic neutrality claimed in the 'beliefs' component. **Autonomist ethics** conflicts with

virtue ethics and Catholic Social Teaching which are embedded in the **Catholic moral tradition**. For the latter (Catholic moral tradition), individual autonomy is not an end in itself, whereas, for the former (Autonomist ethics), it may not always intend it, but *de facto*, that is the result. This is because the common good is little more than the condition necessary for genuine autonomy is moral choice. "Community" is a good only to the extent that it does not constrict individual moral choice.

As the NCCA's consultation paper itself recognises, "No subject or teaching is value-free" (p. 22). This is incontestable since, on the one hand, it is impossible to be conceptually neutral about "neutrality" while, on the other hand, it is impossible to be conceptually neutral about the human moral agent.

The Faith School Perspective

The implementation by a Christian Patron of *IRS and Ethics* as proposed in the NCCA discussion document would amount to a faith school teaching an agnostic version of its own ethos. This would undermine the faith which it dares to hold and profess; and it would violate the moral tradition of the faith community it seeks to serve by promoting a dogmatic secular liberalism that contravenes the Christian view of the human being, the family and society.

The point here, seems well summarised by Professor Eamon Conway of Mary Immaculate College who has said the proposal was bizarre, adding that "a faith-based school would be required to offer what is essentially a secularist understanding of religious faith. . . [t]he introduction in faith-based schools will undoubtedly adversely affect religious instruction and a faith-based school's characteristic ethos. The issue needs careful and urgent attention."¹

Conclusion

The NCCA is proposing a solution for a problem it has not adequately defined, and the existence of which it has not sufficiently demonstrated. Our experience in the diocese of Cloyne is that contrary to what the NCCA seems to imply, faith based schools have an commendable track record in fostering genuine inclusivity within the classroom. The proposed curriculum is therefore a serious and unnecessary threat to freedom of religion, freedom of association, and parental rights. Were the proposed new course to be implemented, it would inevitably put strain upon teachers and raise questions about the contravention of rights under Articles 42 and 44 of the Irish Constitution.

Religious education in faith-based schools is inseparable from the characteristic spirit of the school. The Education Act specifically requires the Minister to have regard for the characteristic spirit of the school in exercising his or her functions with regard to the

¹ See https://www2016.net/asset/files/James_Conway_2016.pdf (accessed on 14 March 2016).

curriculum (section 30(2)(b)). Further, the Minister must allow reasonable instruction time in the school day for subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school (section 30(2)(d)). Thus NCCA proposals in areas impinging on religious education and the characteristic spirit of the school are of a different nature to other NCCA proposals. This is already acknowledged in the area of Relationships and Sexuality Education as part of the NCCA SPHE curriculum where it is explicitly acknowledged that the curriculum must be interpreted in the context of the characteristic spirit of the school.

The determination of the ethos or characteristic spirit of a school is not the function of the NCCA or the Minister. Curriculum proposals in sensitive areas should take account of the fact that as faith-based schools, we are committed to a particular understanding of the human person. We believe that further consultation should take place between the NCCA and patrons of faith-based schools on how the concerns behind the NCCA proposals might be addressed through the patrons' programmes and by a set of guidelines for all schools.

We have chosen the route of compiling a written submission in line with other faith-based stakeholders in primary education because the survey questions are framed in a manner that leads to response bias. The socially correct answer to every question (apart from those requesting a choice from a list of options) is "yes." We wish to register discordant and uneasy with this approach. It is a cause of concern that the NCCA's intention is likely to be the use of these positive survey results as a political argument in favour of introducing the CRB and Ethics course. The survey is thus not a genuine and impartial search for knowledge; it appears instead to function merely as part of a political strategy. This manner of presentation is a wasted opportunity to what could have been a genuine search and survey of stakeholders. It does a disservice to the task undertaken by the NCCA and, in the minds of some, casts the NCCA in a poor light.



Home

Contributor

Seán Ó Loingsigh



Clonmuck,
Askeaton,
Co. Limerick,
19th March 2016.

NCCA,
15 Fitzwilliam Square,
Dublin 2.

Dear Sir/Madam,

I wish to express my strong opposition to the proposal to introduce a new programme to primary schools, namely, the ERBE programme.

1. While you maintain that faith-based programmes can exist side by side with the ERBE programme it should be obvious that this will not happen. Like the chicken's egg when it hatches ERBE will push out any other faith-based programme because there will simply not be sufficient time to include all of them in a school curriculum that is already overstretched.
2. The survey on values on your website is a strike-screen. How could anyone possibly disagree with the questions asked? But to imply that these values pertain only to the ERBE programme is manifestly false when faith-based programmes (certainly the Catholic programme at any rate) promote these same human values and tolerance of difference. But the Catholic programme upholds other hugely important values also.
3. Religious education is not just a matter of knowledge. Of course it is knowledge but it also has many other dimensions that engage the whole human being and lead to personal commitment to God and to everyone and everything he has created.
4. In short, the ERBE programme seems to be nothing less than a naked instrument to undermine faith and force Ireland into an all-consuming secular mentality.

Yours faithfully,

John J. Loughlin



Home

Contributor

Secular Schools Ireland Ltd

SECULAR SCHOOLS IRELAND LTD (SSI)
SUBMISSION TO NCCA
On Proposed: “Ethics & Religious Beliefs” Curriculum for Primary School Children

March 31st 2016

ETHICS:

What is Secular Schools Ireland’s Ltd. (SSI) position on the teaching of ethics, as things stand?

As SSI has set out in its document on “characteristic spirit” (ethos), available at www.secularschoolsireland.com, we will not teach religion during the school day but will instead teach **ethics** and **life skills**. One of the great advantages of this is that everybody will be able to take all the same classes together – there will be no divisions or differences among the children; everyone welcomed and everyone treated the same.

For parental reference, we include a link on our *website to a* New South Wales model for the teaching of ethics to primary school children, which has been hugely popular and successful, the provision of which was made available widely, due to parental demand.

<http://www.primaryethics.com.au/K-6curriculum.html> even though it *won’t* be their curriculum we’ll be using, since we’re not Australia based.

In terms of Life Skills, we perceive the teaching of **emotional intelligence** skills (Social Emotional Literacy) as hugely important – emotional intelligence being the ability to manage feelings and express them appropriately and effectively, thus enabling people to work together. There is an enormous amount of research which indicates that these are hugely valuable skills in life (and later on, in one’s career). We are very supportive of both the “**Stay Safe**” and the “**Walk Tall**” programmes for primary school children, in this respect, also. We are open to any other curricula which provide the children with life skills, Social Emotional Literacy or experiences that would be of benefit to them. We also believe Barnardos’ “Roots of Empathy” programme to be an excellent one, in this regard, for example.

THE PROPOSED “ETHICS” ASPECT OF THE PROGRAMME:

SSI are hugely supportive of the teaching of ethics and will be providing ethics classes to their students, whether or not, ethics is made a standard part of the national curriculum, as set out above. We believe that it is critical to supply students with a set of tools, not a set of rules, such that they can successfully navigate the world around them and their experience of the world around them. Ethics, critical thinking, reasoning and the ability to weigh and measure evidence, perception and memory accurately are hugely valuable life skills and strongly impact a person’s perception of themselves, the world around them and their place within that world: To that end, perhaps it would be worth including an aspect of media literacy around things like body image, in the course [what is real, what is airbrushed, what is advertising, what is news, what is paid content disguised as news, how do advertising “clicks” work, why having a sensational headline pays financially etc.] as well as issues of “how to be safe online” and how to navigate issues of privacy in respect of social media, for older students.

The ethics programme should represent an opportunity for students to explore how to think, how to problem solve, how to weigh and assess information coming at them from all sources, including digital and social media.

THE “ABOUT BELIEFS” ASPECT OF THE PROGRAMME: RELIGIOUS ASPECT:

Ireland is unique in its school structure and the principle of “*subsidiarity*” applies to how the State interacts with children and parents in respect of primary school education. The structure Ireland has, whereby the State “*provides for*” education as opposed to “*provides*” education, a system of “*recognition*” with respect to patron bodies and one in which parents are recognised by the State “*as the primary and natural educator of the child*” and whereby the State guarantees to have “*due regard to the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation*” coupled with the Family rights and freedom of Religion rights enumerated in Bunreacht na hÉireann has numerous legal implications, one of which is the right of parents to exempt their child from instruction with regard to such areas. To this end, the ethics portion of the course should be divorced from the religious aspect of the course. The religious aspect should be a clear block that parents can exempt their child from, if it is to proceed at all.

Failure to structure this aspect of the curriculum in such a way that the parent can opt their child out of it, is at risk of unconstitutionality. This is doubly true in the context of denominational patronage, because there are two aspects from which parents (and children) have specific constitutional protections – one is the content of the programme “the religious and moral formation” aspect of the programme, and the second is the prism/worldview/ethos/characteristic spirit through which the programme is delivered. Denominational patrons will not only be entitled to deliver the religious portion of the programme through the prism of their own faith, they’ll be obliged to deliver the religious portion of the programme through the prism of their faith/characteristic ethos; The same is true for non-denominational patrons. The consequence of this is that parents from a minority faith or who are of no faith or for whom some aspect of the curriculum contravenes “their lawful preference” and/or their “conscience” are entitled to opt their child out of that particular section of the curriculum, but it will only be possible to do that, if it is a distinct and identifiable section of the curriculum.

Will the religious aspect of the programme be a separate and distinct aspect, from the ethics aspect, such that parents who wish to opt their children out of the religious aspect be able to do so, easily?

Patron Bodies:

What of the role and the rights of school patron bodies, who have offered to parents a secular option, re: education, and, if this programme goes ahead, as proposed, will be forced into teaching “about religions”? How does that fit with the Education Act 1998, Bunreacht na hÉireann and the extensive rights of parents, in this regards? Is this aspect of the curriculum at risk of being unconstitutional? Perhaps.

This is particularly relevant to Secular Schools Ireland (SSI) since we are currently involved in a court case against the Department of Education and Skills, in which we obtained the

largest number of parents signing up their children, for a secular school which did not teach religion in any form during the school day. The signatures pre-date this proposed curriculum. **We specifically constructed our proposed curriculum in such a way that no-one would have to opt their child out of it and the corresponding gnarly issue of supervision in respect of those children opted out, wouldn't occur.** It was written into our “characteristic spirit” document, at the time, as submitted to the DES, and as set out on our website.

Parents:

How are the following constitutionally protected rights vindicated both in the content of the proposed programme and in the delivery of the proposed programme?

When Secular Schools Ireland (SSI) canvassed parents to sign up their children, for the school which is the subject matter of the ongoing court case, we found that a wide variety of parents wanted a secular primary school education for their children for a wide variety of reasons. In the catchment area where the school was due to be opened, there was a catholic boys' primary school and a catholic girls' primary school and no other options.

We found that parents wanted the type of education we are offering for a wide variety of reasons:

Here are examples of some of the reasons:

They were a member of a minority faith and were devoutly religious but did not want a Catholic education for their children.

They were practising Catholics but were from a country where faith is something that was passed on at home and through their church and they didn't want religion taught in school to their children: They believed in (and wanted) separation of church and State in the matter of education, and thus wish to opt for a secular primary school education for their children, given the option offered by Secular Schools Ireland Ltd (SSI).

They were not religious and didn't want their children taught religion.

They wanted co-education for their children – boys and girls educated together

Conflicts:

Will the following people be able to opt their children out of the programme?

FOR EXAMPLE: 1

What of the rights of a parent who sends their child to a secular primary school and who wishes to exempt their child from the religion portion of this proposed course because they have opted for a secular education for their child on the basis that they are not religious and don't want this taught, in this manner, at this age, to their child? How will their constitutionally guaranteed rights be vindicated under this proposed programme?

FOR EXAMPLE: 2

What of the rights of a parent who sends their child to a secular primary school and who wishes to exempt their child from the religion portion of this proposed course because they

have opted for a secular education for their child on the basis that they are devoutly religious and the representation of their faith and other faiths, as part of this proposed programme, is contrary to “their conscience” and “lawful preference” “in the matter of religious and moral formation of their child” and consequently they don’t want this taught, in this manner, at this age, to their child? How will their constitutionally guaranteed rights be vindicated under this proposed programme?

FOR EXAMPLE: 3

What of the rights of devoutly religious parents who send their children to a denominational school precisely because they wish their children to receive a denominational education including “faith formation” as part of that denominational education?

Parents who send their children to a denominational school are Constitutionally entitled to expect, and to enforce ***against the school***, that their children will be in receipt of the denominational education, of their parents’ choosing, in accordance with the schools’ ethos.

They are entitled to expect:

That the child will be in receipt of “faith formation” in the prescribed faith.

That their child will receive the denominational education that the school purports to offer.

That the child will not be taught things by their school which contradict/undermine the faith into which they are being inducted by their parents, through the mechanism, of the use of a “recognised” school, within the meaning of the Education Act 1998. (Ethos/Characteristic spirit)

In other words, this makes the delivery of an “about beliefs” section to the course, in a denominational school nigh-on impossible.

FOR EXAMPLE: 4

Then, there is the issue of “***the manner of delivery***” of the programme:

What of the rights of a parent, who is ***not*** religious who is sending their child to a denominational (religious) school, perhaps in a village or town where there is no choice of school/school patron available, whose child under this proposed programme is not only going to be subject to a programme “about beliefs” but who will be subject to that programme being delivered through the prism of the “characteristic spirit” (ethos) of the denominational patron body, as is their right (and arguably obligation) under the provisions of Bunreacht na hÉireann and the Education Act 1998. How will their constitutionally guaranteed rights be vindicated under this proposed programme?



Home

Contributor

Sharon Delaney

Dear NCCA,

I am the mum to two non Catholic children and a non Catholic stepson. My two youngest attend the local national catholic school as there is no other option available to us within a 20 mile radius. As our rural school is not over prescribed we did not require baptism for attendance . Our religious preference is supported by way of allowing our children to read a book while in the classroom (or attend another class) we are required to supervise or remove our children when there is masses blessing etc involving the whole school as there are no teachers available for supervision. We have worked with our school and generally this works ok for us as we have managed not to have both parents at work during school hours. Mine and my family's children have always insisted on showing respect for anyone's faith. But when 4 and 5 year olds come home from school singing god and jesus is real. And are convinced if they and their families don't believe bad things will happen it tells me something is seriously wrong with the way morality and respect is taught. In addition I received this email pleading for my to petition you to maintain this status quo of brainwashed children . Well I am writing to you, and with every respectful bone in my body I implore you to follow the recent eu court ruling and allow children to choose faith at an age of informed consent supported by the family not the education system

Regards

Sharon Delaney



Home

Contributor

Simon Lewis

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the proposed new ERB curriculum. My submission is in my context as the editor of Anseo.net and it isn't very long and I'm sorry to say that it simply points out a fundamental flaw. I think the ERB curriculum will be excellent and probably quite similar to Educate Together's Learn Together Curriculum or hopefully a more inclusive Goodness Me Goodness You one.

The problem for the NCCA is that 98% of schools will be entitled to adapt it to compliment the ethos of their particular school. One only has to look at the RSE curriculum and how the Bishops manipulated it to conform to Catholic teaching. Therefore, if you are in a Catholic school, you cannot teach the full RSE curriculum.

Effectively, denominational schools will simply edit the ERB curriculum to suit their ethos, as is their entitlement.

For the ERB curriculum to work, this obstacle has to be hurdled and I have absolutely no idea how you're going to do it. However, without it being hurdled, there is little point in the ERB curriculum because it will fail to address the very problem it is trying to face.

Regards

Simon Lewis
Anseo.net



Home

Contributor

Sinéad McMahon

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Sinead McMahon
Position (if applicable)	
Organisation (if applicable)	Primary school teacher with a Masters in Religious Education, not currently teaching
Address	10 Celtic Park Road Whitehall Dublin 9
Telephone	0857168659
Email	mcmsinead@gmail.com
Date	30 th March 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal Yes Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish. English

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

Aims

At first glance, the proposed aims of ERB and Ethics would seem to fill a gap in the overall primary school curriculum in Ireland, given that they acknowledge and give form to the more abstract, spiritual, ineffable aspects of children's development. Indeed, they are reflective of the aims of many of the various patrons of education and school trusts, but are, naturally, presented from a secular perspective that endeavours to leave aside the lens of faith and step away from the bias of any particular system of belief or non-belief. Though the system for ERB and Ethics put forward by the state may be more secular or neutral in tone, one would hope that collaboration with its partners in education would support appropriate forms of integration that are reflective of and sensitive to the diversity of ethos, approaches and curricula, both hidden and formal in Ireland's education system.

Children's Learning

The proposals have huge potential in contributing to children's learning, not least in developing a good understanding and appreciation of diversity and the potential for finding common ground while acknowledging our differences. Indeed, the whole area of Religion, Beliefs and Ethics can elicit the strongest of feelings in people and can be an emotional minefield of potential conflict. It is, therefore, vital that our children are given the tools to engage respectfully and openly with each other in a way that many of us in this society seem unable, or perhaps, unwilling to do.

Proposed Features

The proposed features of this framework or curriculum are vital for the full and harmonious development of our children and can, I would suggest, support our children's learning in other areas of the curriculum.

Other Aspects

One element of a holistic approach to education in this area that does not seem to be mentioned is the need to develop the capacity or interior stillness and contemplation. Some would call this mindfulness, while others would see mindfulness a part of the process that enables a deeper, more holistic sense of awareness of the self, the wider world and the ineffable. Traditions from all over the world have engaged with this. Given that this program is from the Irish state, can we not introduce our children to traditions used in Ireland, both of Celtic and of European, North African and the Mediterranean origin, while not neglecting those from further afield, some of which have taken root in Ireland such as Buddhism? It may also allow children from diverse backgrounds to gather, united in a common search for stillness, peace and ultimate truth while focussing on the core of their own traditions and beliefs.

One very important aspect of these proposals that seems to be absent from the consultation paper is the potential for collaboration with faith communities and denominational programs. As noted earlier, the state cannot promote one faith over another and must present curricula in an

objective manner that leaves personal bias the lens of faith aside. Given that we are approaching this from a pluralist perspective that allows for unity in diversity and diversity in unity, it is surprising that both the consultation paper and the report on the patrons programs suggest that no element of the denominational programs can contribute to the development of this piece of work. Acknowledgement of the work of various groups, whether denominational or not, coupled with an openness to the potential to learn from them and use of appropriate forms of collaboration and integration will surely allow for genuine diversity and inclusion. Finding the right language to present this very nuanced argument is difficult, but a pragmatic approach that acknowledges the diversity in the classroom, values contributions from various groups, including those of faith, and balances the needs of the atheist or agnostic child with those of others is vital.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

Children, Parents, Teachers, School Communities

Done well, these proposals should greatly enrich children's experience of Religious Education, enabling them to gain a deeper, more critical understanding of religiosity and belief and a more responsible, balanced approach to ethics that will help them take ownership of the faith that has been handed down to them. It should also enrich their diverse faith journeys, allowing them to grow in their different traditions and belief systems while encountering and learning from other worldviews, enabling them to discern what is good in their own traditions and in the world around them. Hopefully, all parents will feel more at ease with the Irish education system, knowing that their beliefs, world-views and hopes for their children have been taken into account. Given enough supports and access to appropriate resources, it should also be of great benefit to school communities. If, however, there is no real collaboration with denominational patrons that allows for appropriate integration with programs opt-out provisions they may already have in place that allow for diversity in the classroom, it could become a burden rather than a blessing, one which seems to diminish or dilute the many positive elements of their unique identities.

The Role of Teachers.

In delivering this specific program, the teacher role is that of facilitator and guide. Perhaps there is also space for them to be companions with their students on this journey – the one in charge, clearly, and the leader – but someone who is also searching and growing. Their identity as someone of faith or of none may influence their own thinking, it may even be something the children are aware of, it may be clear in how they act and in the language they use, but as they teach and work with the children, their perspective and bias needs to be acknowledged so that their teaching is not unduly influenced. For a teacher of faith in a denominational school, this is also true, and it is noted in Sofia Caveletti's *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*, based on Maria Montessori's work in this area that their own, personal story should not be made known.¹ For these teachers, when teaching children of their own traditions, they may, perhaps, become catechists, depending on how both the denominational program and that of the state complement each other.

Time Allocation and Curriculum Overload

The issue of time allocation in this area is complex, with some elements, particularly those that require deeper exploration possibly taking more time than others. This is an area that covers many areas of human experience, given that it grows out of our engagement with ourselves, each other, and the wider world. Religious traditions reflect beliefs, and literature, art, dance and rituals are expressions of these. Ethics can both reflect and be formed by our beliefs in how we should act and engage with each other, yet is distinct from them at the same time. Human beings from different backgrounds and worldviews can come together and agree on the basics of human behaviour that are considered good. Curriculum overload could be dependant, in part, on how time allocation for this subject, as well as others is managed. If we are to avoid curriculum overload, a recognition of how this integrates into many aspects of our lives and learning is vital, as well as a willingness to allow for the appropriate use of denominational programs, particularly where they share common goals with the state curriculum and have well-thought out provisions for those who choose to opt out of the patron's program. Would a Catholic school making use of

1 (Sofia Cavalletti, Patricia M. Coulter *The Religious Potential of the Child: Experiencing Scripture and Liturgy* LiturgyTrainingPublications, 1992)

the Trocaire Box and the teaching materials that come with it be allowed to use it to cover Development Education and Ethics, given that it is an initiative run by the Bishops' charity? When the SPHE program was introduced, there was a certain amount of overlap with religious education programs. There were no allowances made for any form of integration, however, despite the possibility of subtly changing ones language to move from the lens of faith when needed, and the fact that sometimes, all the children in the classroom were of the same denomination. Genuine openness and flexibility on all sides, integration, and clear objectives should help avoid curriculum overload and ease the pressure on time-management.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

Great emphasis is placed on diversity, and on the idea that it is possible to learn from religion without necessarily submitting to any particular faith, system of belief or way of living. However, in emphasising the need for the state to present a curriculum or framework from outside any particular system of belief or non-belief, the N.C.C.A. seems to have arbitrarily dismissed denominational programmes and has missed certain similarities between these and other programs. On pages 45 and 46 of the consultation paper, only two programs, namely Educate Together and the Community National Schools programs are seen as having anything to offer in terms of developing a framework or curriculum for the state. The variety of teaching methods within these programs are mentioned, while there is a suggestion that all the denominational programs are quite limited in their aims, methods and approaches. One finds a similar attitude on page 51 of the Overview of the Patron's Programs where it would seem that only the methodologies of multi denominational programs have anything to offer.

Diversity in the classroom is acknowledged in other programs, and teachers are reminded to adapt their language and approaches to suit the needs of all children present. Given that the introduction to the *The Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*² acknowledges the possibility of diverse backgrounds in the classroom and the need for teachers to enable all children to grow according to their own world-view, a commitment to and an exploration of diversity seems evident here, as it may be in other programs. The Catholic Church's *Grow in Love*³ series does allow for the possibility that there may be non-Catholic children in the classroom, with suggestions for teachers on how to engage them, one example being on page 14 of the Teacher's Manual where there is a suggestion that teachers may wish to invite any non-Christian children in the class to talk about the places they go to pray to God.

In exploring pluralist language and approaches in the *Follow Me* program and *The Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*, the report does the latter a disservice in suggesting that, as it only refers to religious traditions in its general aims and outcomes, one could infer 'that the curriculum may not facilitate the exploration of belief systems other than those of a religious nature'(p25). This is a curriculum written in a format that reflects the language, practices and belief system of a particular large, (almost) 2,000 year-old institution whose evolutionary process is gradual, occasionally spurred on by the actions and words of passionate people acting as progressive agents of change, where meaning can be nuanced and multi-layered with words such as 'Religion' and 'religious traditions' sometimes referring to more than one would expect. Creating documents that merge renewed or recently evolved ways of thinking and contemporary language and teaching methodologies with tradition is a complex process where even the smallest of words and the simplest of changes can have complications.

There also seems to be some criticism of its approach to introducing children to other belief systems. Leaving the nuances of language and the role of traditions, religious or otherwise, in people's lives aside, delaying a deeper engagement with other systems of belief and non-belief allows for children's development and engagement with the wider world. Where one or two children at the more junior end of the school may seriously contemplate these differences, contemplating and critically examining these issues at a deeper level would be more likely to have more relevance for the majority of children at the senior end of the

2 *Irish Episcopal Conference Catholic Preschool and Primary School Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* Veritas Publications (30 May 2015)

3 http://www.veritasbooksonline.com/media/wysiwyg/Junior_Infants_sampler-web.pdf

school. This is quite possibly why the *Grow in Love* series' initial primary focus is on the Christian story, and, following on from that, the story of Judaism and Islam, all of which share the same roots, gradually broadening its scope as the children grow and interact more and more with the wider world. As this program draws on child-centred methods grounded in human experience and acknowledges the possibility of diversity in the classroom, a form of teaching and learning that reflects this encounter with different belief systems is possible.

What is very surprising was the implication that the Catholic School's Curriculum and denominational programmes are limited in their features and approaches. The similarities between the Socratic approach of the John Scottus School in Dublin and Bernard Lonergan's Method⁴ in theology which influences Catholic Religious Education are not noted. This approach to learning and religious education requires a critical engagement with one's faith and an awareness of personal bias and the role of perspective and human experience in learning, decision making and the development of understanding. It is dependant on a very specific form of questioning where one evaluates responses to experience, engages in a discerning critique of prior understanding and the input of others in order to come to new, possibly deeper understandings of the self, of others, of the world, of belief and the nature of things and, dare I say it, of God. While the language used to describe this method may make one think this is a process beyond the scope of a child in primary school, it is, in reality, a simple process but one that must be done while following specific guidelines. Though Bernard Lonergan was a Catholic Theologian, his work draws on the ideas of Thomas Aquinas and through him, the Greek philosopher Aristotle, much as the John Scottus School⁵ (<http://www.johnscottus.ie/about-us/>) is influenced by John Scottus Eriugena whose Christian teaching drew on Platonic thought and, it would seem, had an impact on the work of Thomas Aquinas.

Both the Catholic curriculum and program, and *Follow Me*⁶ series, which draws from the *Alive-O*⁷ series, are strongly influenced by the child and person centred approaches of Sofia Caveletti's Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, which began with the work of Maria Montessori, and Thomas Groome's Shared Praxis⁸ which requires a holistic engagement with one's lived experience involving critical reflection and responding out of love to choose to do good in the world.

Clearly, state curricula and programs cannot be presented through the lens of any particular faith. However, a lot can be learned from these catechist's approaches and attitudes while ensuring a more secular, pluralist system that that may allow for some appropriate, sensitive integration of denominational programs where they are in use. This is, of course, but one example of the potential of denominational programs and curricula to contribute, in a neutral way, to the proposed curriculum. In the context of a Catholic, or possibly Christian school, where Jesus' Way and the faith of Christians who believe in a loving, living God inspires the life of the school, it may also act as a form of either Catechesis for Christian children or faith formation for children of different faiths or none as they learn alongside each other, aware of the things that divide them and unite them. A quick glance at the John Scottus school's website would also encourage one to think that children of different backgrounds could also be formed in their own faiths through engagement with a program that is not necessarily designed as a form of specific faith formation.

- 4 Topley, Raymond, *Questioning for Faith Commitment in Communicating Faith* ,
Sullivan, John ed, The Catholic University Press, Washington DC 2011
- 5 <http://www.johnscottus.ie/about-us/>
- 6 <http://www.followme-series.org/resources/index.php>
- 7 <http://education.dublindiocese.ie/2012/02/21/alive-o-programme/>
- 8 Groome, Thomas H *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious
Education and Pastoral Ministry: The Way of Shared Praxis* Wipf and Stock 1998

We expect our children to be enabled to learn from each other's religions and systems of belief and non-belief without losing their own faith or being confused, can society and the state do likewise without promoting one faith over another? Clearly, one has to remove the lens of faith and create documents and state curricula that are secular in tone, but in an inclusive, pluralist society, is it really necessary to preclude any possible insights from denominational programs and communities on the grounds that they are presented from a faith perspective? Indeed, this seeming dismissal of denominational approaches could be a cause of apprehension and disquiet, particularly where great work has been done to ensure the promotion of sensitive, effective forms of inclusion and dialogue that do not dilute the teachings and unique identity of particular denominations and to encourage and enable the use of holistic, child-centred and critically reflective teaching methods.

In 1831 when the National Schools were established, agreement could not be found between the various groups on how best to go forward. The Kildare Place Society, Nano Nagle, Edmund Rice and Catherine McCauley all developed different approaches to education, to the rhythms and patterns of the school day and to religious education. The Catholic church feared proselytisation, and objected to publications from certain groups as there was a feeling they were anti-catholic.⁹

¹⁰

Dialogue proved difficult, but some form of agreement was finally reached. The conversation today, particularly in the area of Religious Education and the role of patrons seems rather similar, with new groups being as wary as the Catholic church was all those years ago. The question is, will we see history repeat itself, or will we learn from the mistakes of the past? Can we avoid becoming defensive and entrenched? Are we willing to listen to and learn from each other, to leave bias and prejudice aside, re-evaluating our opinions and positions and come to new understandings, developing a new appreciation of the needs, contributions and efforts of others so that school ethos and teaching is enriched rather than diluted. Will we enable our children to grow in understanding and in faith, valuing diversity while acknowledging that which unites us all, whether we be people of a specific faith or of none? In this age of inclusion, openness, pluralism and dialogue, can the successors of Maria Edgeworth, the Kildare Place Society, Edmund Rice, Nano Nagle and Catherine McCauley, as well as newcomers to the table finally reach agreement and work with the state to create a form of education that is sensitive to the needs of all and enhances rather than diminishes the diverse identities of Ireland's schools.

9 <http://www.csorp.nationalarchives.ie/context/1818.html>

10

http://www.ricorso.net/rx/library/criticism/classic/Anglo_I/Loebers_RM/Guide_Intro.htm





Home

Contributor

Sonia Murray

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in
Education about
RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Date	30th March 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

I am glad to read that the ERB and Ethics proposed programme is in no sense intended to replace the patron's programme or faith formation education in denominational schools. Although the proposed rationale, vision and aims are from a philosophical perspective, they echo those already permeating the ethos of the denominational school and the faith perspective. The Character Education and the Connection to the Wider World are clearly outlined in the Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland. They are contained within the strands: Christian Morality, Christian Faith, Word of God and Liturgy and Prayer. ~~These already provide a comprehensive R.E. that honours religious difference whilst respecting authentic pluralism.~~

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

The proposal to introduce other religious traditions from 1st/2nd class is very unsuitable, confusing and distracting as this is the stage at which pupils in Catholic Schools begin to recognise active membership in their own parish/faith community and prepare to receive Sacraments. It appears very disconnected from the reality of Primary School Curriculum content to expect pupils to begin acquiring skills at this stage in their development to 'actively participate in and contribute to "inter-belief dialogue" when many are only beginning to gain knowledge and some understanding of their own faith

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

The current Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum serves as an appropriate and considered response to the challenges within and concerns about the ERB and Ethics required for children in Catholic Primary Schools embedded in today's Pluralist society.

It is necessary to address the time constraints and the current curriculum overload. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to propose that this suggested ERB and Ethics(Citizenship) curriculum be integrated into the current SESE and indeed SPHE Curricula. This may facilitate the 'non-faith' lens of this proposed curriculum and remain mindful of those children who 'opt out' of the existing RE programme in denominational schools.



Home

Contributor

SPHE Network

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Organisation (if applicable)	SPHE Network
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Date	31 st March 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to: info@ncca.ie

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

Please note: The SPHE Network is responding specifically to the proposals around Ethics Education.

In reading the consultation document, the similarities between the aims of SPHE and the proposed curriculum in Ethics Education are striking and give rise to the immediate query as to why a curriculum on Ethics Education is necessary. We refer the reader to p.14 of ERBE document and p.9 of the SPHE curriculum (NCCA 1999) to exemplify our point. The themes proposed for the Ethics Education curriculum are almost identical to the extant themes in SPHE. We respectfully query whether sufficient comparative analysis was undertaken with the SPHE curriculum in advance of publication of the consultation paper. While connections between ERBE and Aistear are clearly outlined, such connections are not specifically made with the Strands and Strand Units of the SPHE curriculum – why is this?

The five key features of the ERBE curriculum can effectively be applied to the SPHE curriculum and to many other aspects of the curriculum, so we query the extent of innovation here.

The key issue of concern here relates to implementation rather than aims or content. Research in relation to the implementation of SPHE at both primary and post-primary level indicates that issues around implementation remain problematic (see for example, NCCA 2008; DES 2009; Roe 2010; NicGabhainn 2010; INTO 2015). In order for any resource to be implemented effectively, there needs to be a status and value accorded to the curricular area in which it sits, in this instance, SPHE. The research of NicGabhainn et al., (2010) state that issues of perceived importance, worth and relative value cannot be divorced from issues around implementation. We consider that SPHE is a marginalised curricular area with inadequate time accorded to it at both primary and post-primary level. This is in spite of the fact that of the six main priorities identified in a previous NCCA consultation, a number of the skills, values and attitudes highlighted by the 960 respondents are specifically associated with strands and strand units in SPHE:

These focused on developing children's life-skills; communication skills; well-being; literacy and numeracy skills; motivation and engagement; and their sense of identity and belonging.

(Fitzpatrick et al. 2014)

At primary level, 30 minutes of discrete time is allocated to the area along with a recommendation that teachers integrate SPHE into other curricular areas as appropriate. At post-primary level the average amount of time given to SPHE is currently one class per week up to Junior Cert. We argue that the skills promoted in SPHE are part of a suite of critical core skills needed to negotiate the complexities of current society. The promotion of such skills (decision-making, communication, critical reflection and analysis) are replicated in the proposed Ethics Education curriculum. Hence we conclude that Ethics Education already exists in the SPHE curriculum and to introduce it as a separate element of the curriculum would serve to confuse teachers, extend concerns about curriculum overload, and compromise implementation of both areas. There is an opportunity here to highlight the value of the SPHE curriculum and promote its implementation in the context of Ethics Education.

This may be a timely opportunity to revise the SPHE curriculum. There may be some merit in the proposal to have an umbrella area of “Wellbeing” which incorporates SPHE and Ethics Education – however the content would need to be merged from both areas as overlap is a huge issue at the moment for schools.

Thus we conclude that the introduction of a specific Ethics Education curriculum will not serve to enhance the child’s learning, and may be counterproductive if teachers see that curriculum overlap has not been addressed.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

The SPHE curriculum specifically outlines the concept of shared responsibility as a key feature, highlighting in particular the role of parents. In addition there is an entire Strand allocated to community and citizenship. The role of the teacher as leader, facilitator and guide of the process, and the focus on the children taking ownership of their own learning, permeates the entire SPHE curriculum. Therefore, we believe that the principles of Ethics Education in relation to the role of parents, teachers and the extended community are clearly visible in the SPHE curriculum.

In relation to time allocation and curriculum overload, our recommendations are as follows:

- Inclusion of ERB as part of the patron's programme
- Revision of SPHE curriculum to include a specific focus on Ethics Education
- Renewed emphasis on the need for commitment to implementing the SPHE curriculum as a discrete curricular area as well as being integrated throughout the entire curriculum
- Creation and circulation of effective planning models for implementation of SPHE
- Reflection and focus on school ethos and how this contributes to ERBE.

In summary, we view the introduction of a new curriculum on Ethics Education to be unnecessary. It may serve to achieve an adverse effect, particularly if seen as *yet another curricular area*. We believe that a review and revision of the SPHE curriculum to include specific reference to Ethics Education would be a far more efficient use of limited time and resources. This would serve to focus teachers on the important role and contribution of SPHE and thus enhance implementation and visibility. Energy put in to this would honour previous NCCA consultations and would reassure teachers that this is a worthwhile and important curriculum area which caters for children's social, personal, health and ethical educational needs.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

The SPHE Network is mainly focusing on Ethics Education in this submission as this is where our expertise lies. We have outlined our views clearly in the previous sections. We do believe that in a modern pluralist society the introduction of ERB is a welcome development and is long overdue.

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Contributor

Spiritan Education Trust Board



National Council for Curriculum and Assessment,
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22nd March 2016.

Spiritan Education Trust response to the NCCA consultation on Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics (ERBE)

The Spiritan Education Trust is the patron of Three Junior Schools, St Michael's Junior School, Ballsbridge, St. Mary's Junior School, Rathfriland, and Willow Park Junior School, Blackrock. It is also the patron of Six Second Level schools and is co patron of Holy Family Community School, Rathfriland. The trust board was set up in 1999 and was charged by the Spiritan Congregation to direct and supervise its educational mission.

The following is a quote from the Mission Statement of the Spiritan Education Trust: "... encourages education policies, programmes and practices which nurture and develop the abilities, talents and interests of each person in ways that promote and challenge active citizenship and solidarity with people who are marginalised".

This quote describes the overall approach to education encouraged in our network of schools and sets the context for our response to the consultation on Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics.

In making responses to the NCCA consultation, the Spiritan Education Trust welcomes the engagement with NCCA on Education in relation to Religion, Beliefs and Ethics. The Spiritan Education Trust also recognises that there is a changing context in relation to Religion and Beliefs in Ireland. However, within this consultative engagement there seems to be little or no recognition for the positive practices that currently operate within faith schools in the areas of religious education, the expression of belief and the development of good ethics.

Within our Spiritan school network, we welcome students (and families) of all faiths (and none) and from all cultures. At the core of our Spiritan schools, are well developed programmes of personal care. These programmes are child-centred and are delivered as part of a holistic approach to education where religious belief is not compartmentalised but is fully acknowledged as part of a lived reality for these parents and their children.

Spiritan Education is based on seven core values that ground the education experience for each student attending Spiritan schools. These seven values: Openness to the Spirit, A Sense of Community, Option For the Poor, Commitment to Service, Global Vision, High Educational Standards and Personal and Faith Development, are supportive of and complementary to the DES' stated aim of education; the following quote, from the Independent Report carried out on the 3 Junior Schools clearly shows that as a Catholic School, students of all faiths and none are welcomed

DECA House, Kinnage Moor, Kinnage, Dublin 12, Ireland. Tel: +353 1 4997 620

Head Office: Congregation of the Holy Spirit, Provincial House, Rathfriland, Leixlip, Dublin. Reg No. 11144. Reg Number No. 1124.
Diocese: From Canon C. O'Connell, Fr. Billy Carey O'Connell, Fr. Andrew Dwyer, Mr. Sean Connolly, Tuamcoole, Wex. Parish: Congregation of the Holy Spirit,
10, An Binn, Wx. MacDonagh St. Ros. Parish: James F. O'Connell, Wex. Parish: St. Mary's, Ros. Parish: St. Mary's, Ros.

and respected. "... Junior School is characterised by a welcoming, affirming, and inclusive spirit which is at the heart of the Spiritan ethos." "the students' faith development is being nurtured in the classroom through positive and respectful interaction between teachers and students. The teachers also show sensitivity to the individual contexts from which the children come."

The 1999 curriculum (DEC, 1999) emphasises the concept of helping children to achieve personal fulfilment and individual well-being. The three general aims of primary education are: to enable the child to live a full life as a child and to realise his or her potential as a unique individual; to enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and to contribute to the good of society; to prepare the child for further education and lifelong learning. (p. 7)

Within this consultation paper on Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in Primary Schools, there are differences within the rationale for ERB and Ethics and an educational programme based on a faith foundation, like that experienced in a Spiritan school.

1. Within the domain of these seven Spiritan core values, the integrated model of Personal and Faith development seems to be at odds with the NCCA consultation paper. Religious Education is part of Faith development.
2. The feedback from families (families of various Faiths) attending our schools (not included within the language of the NCCA consultation).
3. The Spiritan School Ethos is informed by the Spiritan Missionary Congregation which is committed to inter-religious dialogue. Spiritan school management undertake to engage with parents' is relative to the holistic education of their child including their family faith.
4. Spiritan Schools currently make provision for inter-religious and inter-cultural awareness in terms of their policies, ethos, and leadership within the programme of religious education and across other curricular areas.
5. Similarly, Spiritan schools currently make provision for ethics that serve the 'common good'. Within our Spiritan schools network, we have introduced Development Education as a new curricular initiative. Development Education engages the schools in terms of community, student leadership, expression of religious beliefs etc. A quote from one of our Junior Schools states "Students are both well informed of development needs in disadvantaged countries and respond generously and freely to different needs in various mission situations that are presented to them." One of the policies of the Spiritan Education Trust is that all the schools in our network include Development Education as part of the curriculum. Some of our schools are well on their way to receiving certification for the projects they have developed.
6. Religious education in Spiritan schools is inseparable from the characteristic spirit of the school. The Education Act specifically requires the Minister to have regard for the characteristic spirit of the school in exercising his or her functions with regard to curriculum [section 30(2)(b)]. Further, the Minister must allow reasonable instruction time in the school day for subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school [section 30(2)(d)]. Thus the NCCA proposals in areas impinging on religious education and the characteristic spirit of the school are of a different nature than other NCCA proposals.
7. The NCCA suggests four possible approaches:
ERB and Ethics as part of the patron's programme
ERB and Ethics integrated across curricular areas
ERB and Ethics as a discrete curriculum

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The Spiritan Congregation of the Irish Isles, The Sacred Heart, Malabar Street, Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. Reg No. 402044. Reg No. 11224
Ministry: Peter Casey CDB, Carmichael St. Billa Clara (Vice), 14, Seaside Drive, Mal. The Curate: Seamus, Mal. Vincent Curran, St. Paul Street,
10, St. James St. Mary Frances, Mal. Bob Hynes, 10, St. Catherine's Road, Mal. John O'Rourke, 10, Seaside Drive, Mal. Liam Flanagan,

ERB and Ethics as having both discrete and integrated components

In keeping with the Spiritan commitment to Openness and Dialogue, ERB and Ethics integrated across curriculum areas with the perspective of a living faith community is the preferred approach we would suggest.

1. Given the accepted reality of existing curriculum overload and serious time constraints it appears impossible to propose a discrete curriculum. In addition, it was argued that if such a discrete curriculum was developed on the philosophical basis suggested in the current proposals then this would conflict with the existing faith-based religious education programme and the characteristic spirit in Catholic schools. ERB and Ethics integrated across curriculum areas would arguably raise even more serious questions for the expression of the characteristic spirit of the school. The determination of the ethos or characteristic spirit of a school is not the function of the NCCA or the Minister. Curriculum proposals in sensitive areas should take account of the fact that faith-based schools are committed to a particular understanding of the human person.

The Spiritan Education Trust supports the view that the NCCA ought to organise further consultations with the parent bodies and the other stakeholders of faith-based schools with a view to addressing the concerns they have about the proposals in the Education about Religious and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics programme.

It appears to us that the ERB and Ethics curriculum proposal is predicated on a misconception that faith based schools offer a narrow anthropology excluding other religious world views and dialogue with the secular.

We hope that this response clarifies the Spiritan approach to Education and explains our stance in relation to the NCCA consultation on Education about Religious and Beliefs and Ethics (ERB).

Signed:



Peter Conboy CSsP, Chairperson of the Spiritan Education Trust Board
on behalf of the Spiritan Education Trust and the Boards of Management of
St. Michael's Junior School, Balbrinny, St. Mary's Junior School, Rathfriland and Willow
Park Junior School, Blackrock. March 2016



Home

Contributor

St Anne's Special School

Sisters of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary



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Roscrea
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Principal: Mr. James McMahon

Secretary: Mrs Breda Kennedy

29th March 2016

Submission from the Board of Management of St. Anne's Special School, in response to the Consultation paper on ERBE

To whom it may concern:

At the meeting of the Board of Management of St. Anne's school held on 3rd January 2016, the consultation paper on Education about Religion and Ethics was thoroughly discussed. It was strongly felt that such a component of the curriculum was, at least unnecessary, and at most confusing and conflicting with parts of the current Religious Education programme and general ethos of our school.

To suggest that the teaching of ERBE would begin with 4/5 year olds seemed totally unreasonable where such children are being initiated into the Faith of their parents' choice, and would be utterly confused by the introduction of other beliefs at this stage.

In our school, the ethical framework is provided by the spirit and ethos of the school which reflects the social teaching of the Catholic Church which, in turn, is based on the teaching of Jesus Christ. As such the school promotes the values of respect, love, compassion, peace, justice, mercy, forgiveness, integrity including engaging with people of all faiths and none. This is reflected in all the school policies and school leadership.

Inter-religion literacy is one of the five key skills in the new Catholic Pre-school and Primary Religious Education Curriculum. All of this is reflected in the 'Grow in Love' series which is currently being introduced into our school.

It is therefore felt that ERBE as a separate subject is totally unnecessary and will just add to the problem of an overloaded curriculum.

I understand that our Principal. Jim McMahon has already sent in a submission from the teaching staff of the school and he has explained the difficulties and problems that introduction of ERBE in the school would cause.

I trust that you will take our views into consideration when deciding on the future curriculum of our schools.

Yours sincerely

Sister Margaret Dobbin
Chairperson of the Board of Managers.



Home

Contributor

St Conleth & Mary's Primary School



St Conleth & Mary's
Primary School
Dublin Road
Newbridge
Co. Kildare
29th March 2016

The Secretary,
National Council for Curriculum & Assessment
35 Fitzwilliam Square
Dublin 2
D02 X1E6

**Re: Consultation Paper on Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB)
and Ethics**

Dear Sir,

St. Conleth's and Mary's Primary School is a co-educational senior primary school catering for pupils from second to sixth class. The school patron is Bishop Denis Nulty, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, and the school operates under a Catholic Ethos.

The Board of Management met twice in recent weeks to consider in details the consultation paper on ERB and Ethics.

Having considered the matter in detail, the Board of Management unanimously concluded that the primary school curriculum on Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) together with the Catholic Pre-School and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (Irish Episcopal Conference 2013) more than adequately meet the aspirations of the discussion document on ERB and Ethics.

The Board also expressed serious concern about the availability of time and resources, if either, or both subjects were to be treated separately from the current curriculum.

We hope that you will take these views into account in formulating your further policies.

Yours faithfully,

Andrew Cody
Chairman
Board of Management



St Conleth & Mary's
Primary School
Dublin Road
Newbridge
Co. Kildare
29th March 2016

The Secretary,
National Council for Curriculum & Assessment
35 Fitzwilliam Square
Dublin 2
D02 KH36

Re: Consultation Paper on Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB)
and Ethics

Dear Sir,

St. Conleth's and Mary's Primary School is a co-educational senior primary school catering for pupils from second to sixth class. The school patron is Bishop Denis Nulty, Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin, and the school operates under a Catholic Ethos.

The Board of Management met twice in recent weeks to consider in detail the consultation paper on ERB and Ethics.

Having considered the matter in detail, the Board of Management unanimously concluded that the primary school curriculum on Social Personal Health Education (SPHE) together with the Catholic Pre-School and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (Irish Episcopal Conference 2015) more than adequately meet the aspirations of the discussion document on ERB and Ethics.

The Board also expressed serious concern about the availability of time and resources, if either, or both subjects were to be treated separately from the current curriculum.

We hope that you will take these views into account in formulating your further policies.

Yours faithfully,

Andrew Cody
Chairman
Board of Management



Home

Contributor

St John's NS, Kenmare

As a catholic school Saint John's N.S Kenmare, first and foremost would like to emphasise the fact that it is a school of faith that creates a nurturing co-educational environment based on Catholic values. We welcome students from all nationalities. All our students are encouraged to develop to their full potential and gifts: academic, social, creative, spiritual, moral and cultural. In response to the NCCA proposal of a new programme on ERB and Ethics, the Board of Management of Saint John's N.S would like to outline some integral points :

- We feel that Catholic Schools are already places where children learn about other religious traditions particularly those of the children of other faiths in our schools. In Saint John's N.S, children learn about the feasts and festivities of other faiths throughout the school year. Education of these takes place explicitly through lessons and informally as they occur throughout the year, thus we feel that the proposal of a new programme does not reflect this education that already takes place.
- Catholic schools strive to achieve best practice when it comes to inclusion. The actual percentage of children within Catholic primary schools who are physically 'opting out' of the traditional 'religion class' is very low. In Saint John's N.S, the rights of non-Christian children to opt out are respected. The figures are very low in our school, with 8-10% of children opting out only.
- We feel that in catholic schools the area of Relationships and Sexuality Education as part of the NCCA SPHE curriculum already acknowledges characteristic spirit of the school. Catholic schools currently make provision for ethics in terms of school policies, school ethos, school leadership, religious education and across other curricular areas.
- On consultation with teachers in the school, it was unanimously felt that the existing curriculum is already overloaded and the

school day already embodies serious time constraints thus it appears implausible to propose a discrete curriculum.

- The proposals are arguably inspired more by an adult, intellectual critique of religions than the childhood experience of living in a world informed by religious and other beliefs.
- Our school is currently adopting the new Grow in Love religious programme, and inter-religious literacy is one of the five key skills that the programme equips children with. This programme will be implemented throughout the school as it becomes available.
- As a school, which already adheres to the changing demographic of society we are open to further and continued dialogue on the ERB and ethics in order to inform future school programmes.



Home

Contributor

St Mary's Convent Primary School



10th March, 2016

Dear Sir/Madam,

In response to the consultation document on the proposed introduction of a curriculum subject called "Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics" (ERBE), St. Mary's Convent Primary School staff wish to echo the sentiments of the CPSMA regarding the proposed curriculum, as follows:

1. We currently make provision for inter-religious and inter-cultural learning and awareness in terms of their policies, ethos, leadership, the programme in religious education and across other curricular areas.
2. Our School currently makes provision for ethics education i.e. education in values, or moral education, in our daily interactions and in the formal and informal instruction.
3. Parents, families and children with religious convictions have a right to continue to give expression to these in faith-based schools. As a staff we feel we have a right to continue to teach in the Catholic tradition, in a Convent Primary School.
4. Religious education in faith-based schools is inseparable from the characteristic spirit of our School. The Education Act specifically requires the Minister to have regard for the characteristic spirit of the school in exercising his or her functions with regard to curriculum (section 30(2)(b)). For over one hundred years St. Mary's has been a faith based school and the characteristic spirit of our school permeates all aspects of the school and defines our mission.
5. Parents of children, and the children themselves, who are 'opted out' of denominational Religious Education have the right to do so in our school and are catered for in this regard. We enrol pupils from a wide variety of faiths, who make the choice to attend our school.
6. The Managerial Body (the CPSMA) do not recommend the introduction of the curriculum in any of the ways suggested by the NCCA and therefore until there is agreement between the CPSMA, the Patrons and the NCCA, we in St. Mary's Convent Primary School would strongly resist any changes to the Religious curriculum.

Regards,

Pauline O'Dwyer, Principal

Eithne Doherty, Chairperson of the Ethos Committee



Home

Contributor

St Michael's NS (Parents x13),

Newtown



St. Michael's N.S.
Newtown
Borris
Carlow

The Secretary

NCCA

Dublin

Roll No.17462]

Dear Secretary,

As parents of children in the above school we write to express our opposition to the introduction of two new subjects to an already over loaded curriculum. These two subjects, Education about Religion and Beliefs and Ethics, are unnecessary in our school because they are already covered in the Religion programme. They are taught about other religions and the Christian Morality.

We are worried that they may take away from the time for the present subjects in school especially maths and English. They seem to be trying to replace our Catholic beliefs and ethos which are so much part of our school. We are very happy with our school as it is excellent.

Pupils of other faiths are welcome to our school and their views are accommodated and respected.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and to praise our school.

Best wishes

Sharon Foley



St. Michael's N.S.
Newtown
Borris
Carlow

The Secretary
NCCA
Dublin

Roll No.17462j

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment and to praise our school.

Best wishes

Rita Fenton 



St. Michael's N.S.
Newtown
Borris
Carlow

The Secretary
NCCA
Dublin

Roll No.17462)

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment and to praise our school.

Best wishes

Kathleen Butler



St. Michael's N.S.
Newtown
Borris
Carlow

The Secretary

NCCA

Dublin

(Ref No.17462)

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment and to praise our school.

Best wishes

Paul + Sylvia Folan



St. Michael's N.S.
Newtown
Borris
Carlow

The Secretary

NCCA

Dublin

Roll No.17462j

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment and to praise our school.

Best wishes

Shirley O'Brien



St. Michael's N.S.
Newtown
Borris
Carlow

The Secretary

NCCA

Dublin

Roll No.17462]

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment and to praise our school.

Best wishes

Aine Greenan



St. Michael's N.S.
Newtown
Borris
Carlow

The Secretary

NCCA

Dublin

Roll No.17462]

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment and to praise our school.

Best wishes

Mary Murphy



St. Michael's N.S.
Newtown
Borris
Carlow

The Secretary

NCCA

Dublin

Roll No.17462]

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment and to praise our school.

Best wishes

Margaret + Andrew Hannon



St. Michael's N.S.
Newtown
Borris
Carlow

The Secretary

NCCA

Dublin

Roll No.17462]

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment and to praise our school.

Best wishes





St. Michael's N.S.
Newtown
Borris
Carlow

The Secretary

NCCA

Dublin

Ref No.17462

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment and to praise our school.

Best wishes

Noreen & John Ryan



St. Michael's N.S.
Newtown
Borris
Carlow

The Secretary

NCCA

Dublin

Ref No.17463j

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment and to praise our school.

Best wishes





St. Michael's N.S.
Newtown
Borris
Carlow

The Secretary

NCCA

Dublin

Roll No.17462]

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Pupils of other faiths are welcome to our school and their views are accommodated and respected.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and to praise our school.

Best wishes

We don't know enough about this at the moment
to make an informed decision.

MARIEE HOG *Mariee Hog*



St. Michael's N.S.
Newtown
Borris
Carlow

The Secretary
NCCA
Dublin

Ref No.17462

Dear Secretary,

As parents of children in the above school we write to express our opposition to the introduction of two new subjects to an already over loaded curriculum. These two subjects, Education about Religion and Beliefs and Ethics, are unnecessary in our school because they are already covered in the Religion programme. They are taught about other religions and the Christian Morality.

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment and to praise our school.

Best wishes

James & Laura Kiely



Home

Contributor

**St Michael's NS (Board of Managment),
Newtown**

ST. MICHAEL'S NATIONAL SCHOOL

NEWTOWN
BORRIS
CO. CARLOW.

059 8724488

Roll No. 17462J

The Secretary

NCCA

Dublin

Dear Secretary,



On behalf of the above Board of Management of the above School I wish to respond to your invitation to comment on the proposed subjects for Primary Schools in "Education in Religions and Beliefs" and "Ethics". While the proposed subjects seem worthwhile at first glance but when we dig deeper they seem to overlap with similar subjects now taught in our Catholic Schools. On our R.E. Curriculum and Programmes there are lessons devoted to "Other Religions and Faith" as well as many lessons on Morality, so we see the new subjects as superfluous. We also see that our school policies, ethos, leadership and other curricular areas amply include "Ethics"

We have a problem how these two subjects will fit into the present school curriculum. What subjects will be replaced or time lessoned? As a Catholic school we cannot allow Religious Education hours to be curtailed. The time is necessary to foster and preserve our Catholic/Christian ethos and vision.

We are an inclusive school and accommodate all so we do not feel it necessary to have the new programmes.

Finally as the Board of Management of a Catholic School under the Patronage of the Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin we have to preserve and foster our Catholic vision and ethos. We do not think that the two new subjects will add to our ethos. In fact they could well diminish the characteristics of an excellent Catholic School.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Pierce Murphy'.

Pierce Murphy, Chairperson on behalf of the Board.



Home

Contributor

**St Michael's NS (Principal),
Newtown**

ST. MICHAEL'S NATIONAL SCHOOL

NEWTOWN
BORRIS
CO. CARLOW.

050 9724498

Roll No. 17462J

The Secretary

NCCA

Dublin

15-3-16

Dear Secretary,

On behalf of the teaching staff and school community of the above School I wish to respond to your invitation to comment on the proposed subjects for Primary Schools in "Education in Religions and Beliefs" and "Ethics". While the proposed subjects seem worthwhile at first glance but when we dig deeper they seem to overlap with similar subjects now taught in our Catholic Schools. On our R.E. Curriculum and Programmes there are lessons devoted to "Other Religions and Faith" as well as many lessons on Morality, so we see the new subjects as superfluous. We also see that our school policies, ethos, leadership and other curricular areas amply include "Ethics"

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We are an inclusive school and accommodate all so we do not feel it necessary to have the new programmes.

Finally as the teaching Principal of a Catholic School under the Patronage of the Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin we have to preserve and foster our Catholic vision and ethos. We do not think that the two new subjects will add to our ethos. In fact they could well diminish the characteristics of an excellent Catholic School.

Yours faithfully,



Máire-Tírean Uí Riada,

Principalside



Home

Contributor

St Mochuo's Rathcoffey

St. Machus's School

Rathcasslagh, Donadea, Navan,

Co. Kildare

Tel/Fax 045 868721

E-mail: rathcasslagh.school@quintec.ie



29th March 2016

Info@quintec.ie

Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics Consultation,

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment,

35 Fitzwilliam Square,

Dublin 2.

Re: Consultation on Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics

Dear Sir/Madam,

We refer to your consultation on Education about Religions and Beliefs and Ethics.

We wish to respond to the consultation as attached.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Dolan,

Chairperson - Board of Management

ERB & ETHICS CONSULTATION BY NCCA
RESPONSE FROM ST MOCHUO'S RATHCOFFEY NATIONAL SCHOOL

We refer to your consultation on Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics and wish to respond as follows.

We have serious reservations about the new proposals in the consultation paper. Rathcoffey National School is a Catholic School and teaches the Catholic faith to the children in the school who are predominantly from Catholic families. The school also allows for children who are not of Catholic faith.

Provision is made within our school for inter-religious and inter-cultural learning and awareness and ethics. There are many studies where it is proven that the Catholic Education system out-performs those of others. These important values have underpinned the long tradition of Catholic education in this country and worldwide.

The new proposals do not sufficiently take into consideration parents, families and children with religious beliefs who have a right to give expression to those in faith-based schools. The NCCA proposals may well undermine this right.

Religious education in faith-based schools is inseparable from the characteristic spirit of the school. The Education Act requires that due regard be given to the characteristic spirit of the school in exercising functions with regard to curriculum. Further, reasonable instruction time must be allowed in the school day for subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school. What the NCCA proposes may seriously and negatively impact on the characteristic spirit of Catholic schools.

In the 2011 census, 84% of the population of Ireland was Catholic. Families for generations have sent their children to Catholic schools. Families have a right to determine what religious beliefs they hold. The vast majority of parents in Ireland wish to have the choice of sending their children to Catholic schools.

Children at that age are too young to be encouraged under the new proposals to figure out which faith they think looks best to them. They have been brought up in the faith of their families and sent by their families to Catholic schools.

The new proposals talk about enabling children "to contribute positively to their communities", our Catholic school is based in a small community and the children do contribute to their community in a very positive way. There are almost 3,000 catholic primary schools in Ireland and these schools are at the heart of our local communities.

We have concerns as outlined above, that the new proposals may fundamentally undermine the characteristic spirit / ethos of our school.



Home

Contributor

St Oliver Plunkett NS, Ballina

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Eileen Blakeney
Position (if applicable)	Chairperson, Board of Management
Organisation (if applicable)	St. Oliver Plunkett N.S.
Address	Creggs Road, Ballina, Co. Mayo
Telephone	096 22842
Email	quayns@eircom.net
Date	30/03/16

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children’s learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

As the Consultation Paper indicates, learning about ethics is important for all persons, and developing modes of ethical behaviour is of central importance to human development. Given that the teaching of ethics deals with the formation in and the promotion of a personal commitment to the dignity and freedom of all human beings, the importance of human rights and responsibilities, the place of justice within society, and the service of the common good; it is difficult for anyone involved in education to argue against the value of its inclusion within the curriculum. Likewise for Education about Religions and Beliefs – there is no doubt that a strong case can be made for facilitating the exploration by children of religions, beliefs and worldviews of people in our classrooms, schools and communities.

However, it is our view that the Consultation Paper fails to take account of the fact that the subject matter set out for the ‘new’ curricular area are in fact already being dealt with both within the formal curriculum through a number of curricular areas, as well as being implicit in the ethos of each primary school in Ireland. In the sections that follow, we will exemplify these points further.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

The Consultation Paper presents four possible approaches to the curriculum development for ERB & Ethics, namely:

- 1) ERB & Ethics as part of the Patron's Programme
- 2) ERB & Ethics integrated across the curriculum areas
- 3) ERB & Ethics as a discrete curriculum
- 4) ERB & Ethics as having both discrete and integrated components.

With regard to each of the above approaches, we make the following points:

- In our view, Proposal 1 does not give sufficient recognition to the fact that these aspects are already inherent in the faith-based religious education programme already taught within Catholic schools. Indeed, the Catholic understanding of Religious Education is committed to inter-religious dialogue. Notably, Inter-religious literacy is one of the 5 key skills in the new Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum.
- Proposal 2 appears as the most manageable, and indeed, we suggest that the themes indicated in the Consultation Paper are in fact already in existence across several curricular areas within

the existing primary curriculum. As mentioned above, it is dealt with in Religious Education in faith-based schools. However, it should be pointed out that other subjects within the existing curriculum already deal with many of the themes put forward for inclusion in an ERB and Ethics curriculum. To briefly deal with some of these:

(i) The Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum document (Government of Ireland, 1999) refers to how SPHE has 'a moral and spiritual dimension' (p. 2), It notes that 'SPHE plays an important role in developing an understanding of the democratic way of life and individual and group rights and responsibilities. It provides opportunities for children to learn about, and actively participate in, the various communities to which they belong and to develop a sense of a shared commitment' (p. 3). Strand 3 of the SPHE curriculum focuses on '*Myself and the wider world*' and within this strand, 'children are given opportunities to learn about their own culture and traditions and are encouraged to respect the rights and contributions of culturally diverse people and groups' (p. 6).

(ii) Elsewhere, the curriculum document for Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE) (Government of Ireland, 1999), states that SESE 'seeks to generate an appreciation of cultural and historical inheritance and cultivates an atmosphere of equality and opportunity where gender, cultural diversity, minorities and special needs are respected and valued. Prejudice and discrimination are challenged while respect and mutual understanding are promoted' (p. 4). Mutual respect and understanding as well as ethics are emphasized in the Aims of SESE as follows:

'to enable the child to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes so as to develop an informed and critical understanding of social, environmental and scientific issues'

'to enable the child to play responsible roles as an individual, a family member and a member of local, regional, national, European and global communities' and

'to cultivate humane and responsible attitudes and an appreciation of the world in accordance with beliefs and values' (p. 5).

- In light of the existing situation where curriculum overload is widely reported as a key concern for teachers at primary level, it is our view that proposal 3 which suggests developing ERB and Ethics as a discrete subject on the curriculum would exacerbate the problem of an already overcrowded curriculum.
- As proposal 4 puts forward a case for both a discrete and integrated curriculum, we reiterate our points in relation to proposal 2 + 3.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

There are a few additional points which we would like to make with regard to the Consultation Paper.

Firstly, that in any discussion around 'ethics' in a school setting, due regard must be given to fact that the ethical framework is provided for by the characteristic spirit of the school. In the case of a Catholic school, the ethical framework reflects the social teaching of the Church and promotes the values of respect, love, compassion, peace, justice, mercy, forgiveness, integrity, inclusion, and engages with people of all beliefs. In the case of our school, this is exemplified in the following statement ratified by the Board of Management of St. Oliver Plunkett N.S. on 7/11/2007 which set out our 'Ethos':

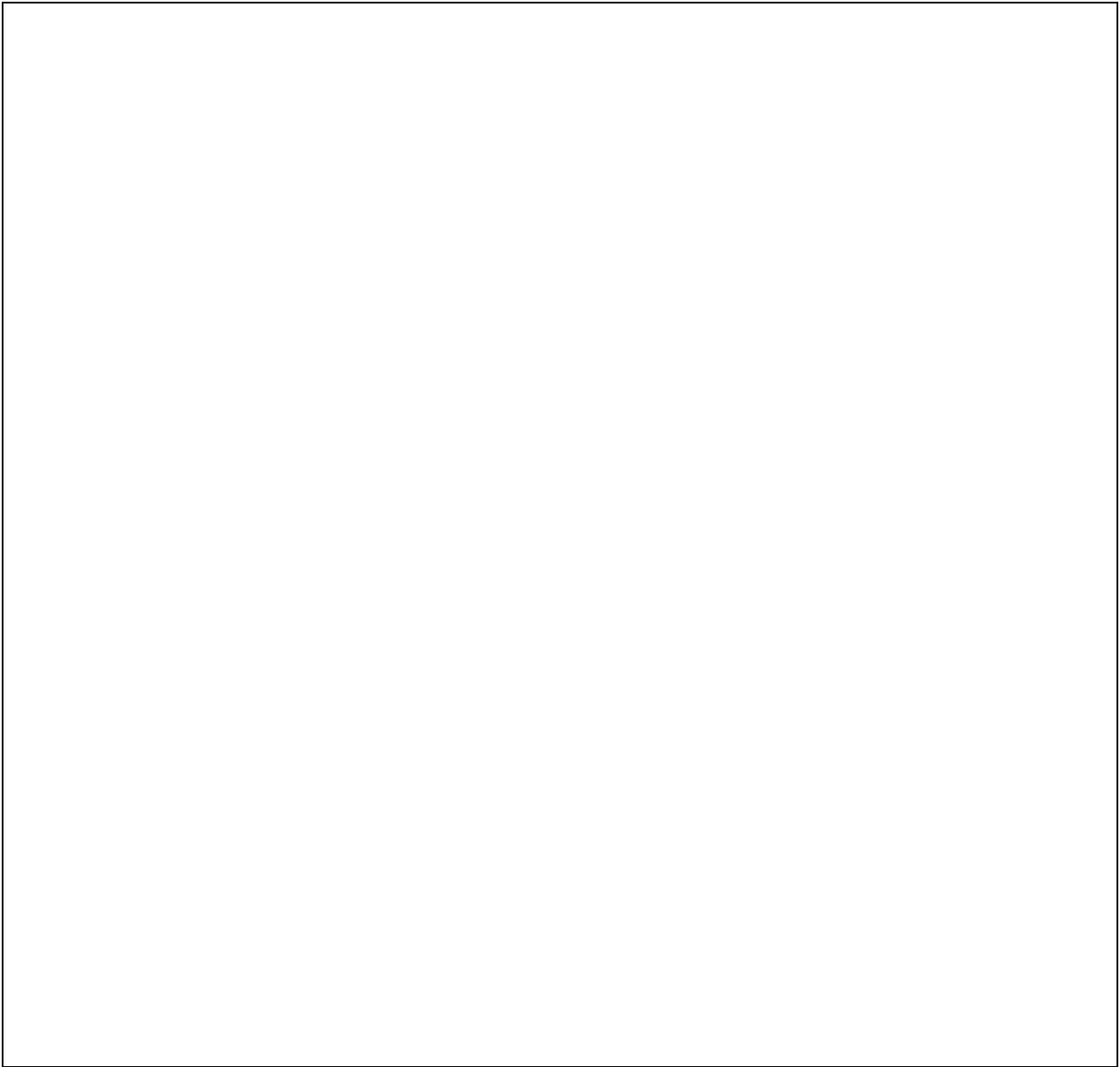
St. Oliver Plunkett National School is a co-educational Catholic primary school under the patronage of the Bishop of Killala. The school models and promotes a philosophy of life inspired by belief in God and in the life of Jesus Christ. While St. Oliver Plunkett N.S. is a Catholic school with a Christian ethos, it has due recognition for pupils of other faiths or of no faith. Our Christian school ethos finds expression through the core values of our school and is exemplified by our actions, attitudes and practices.

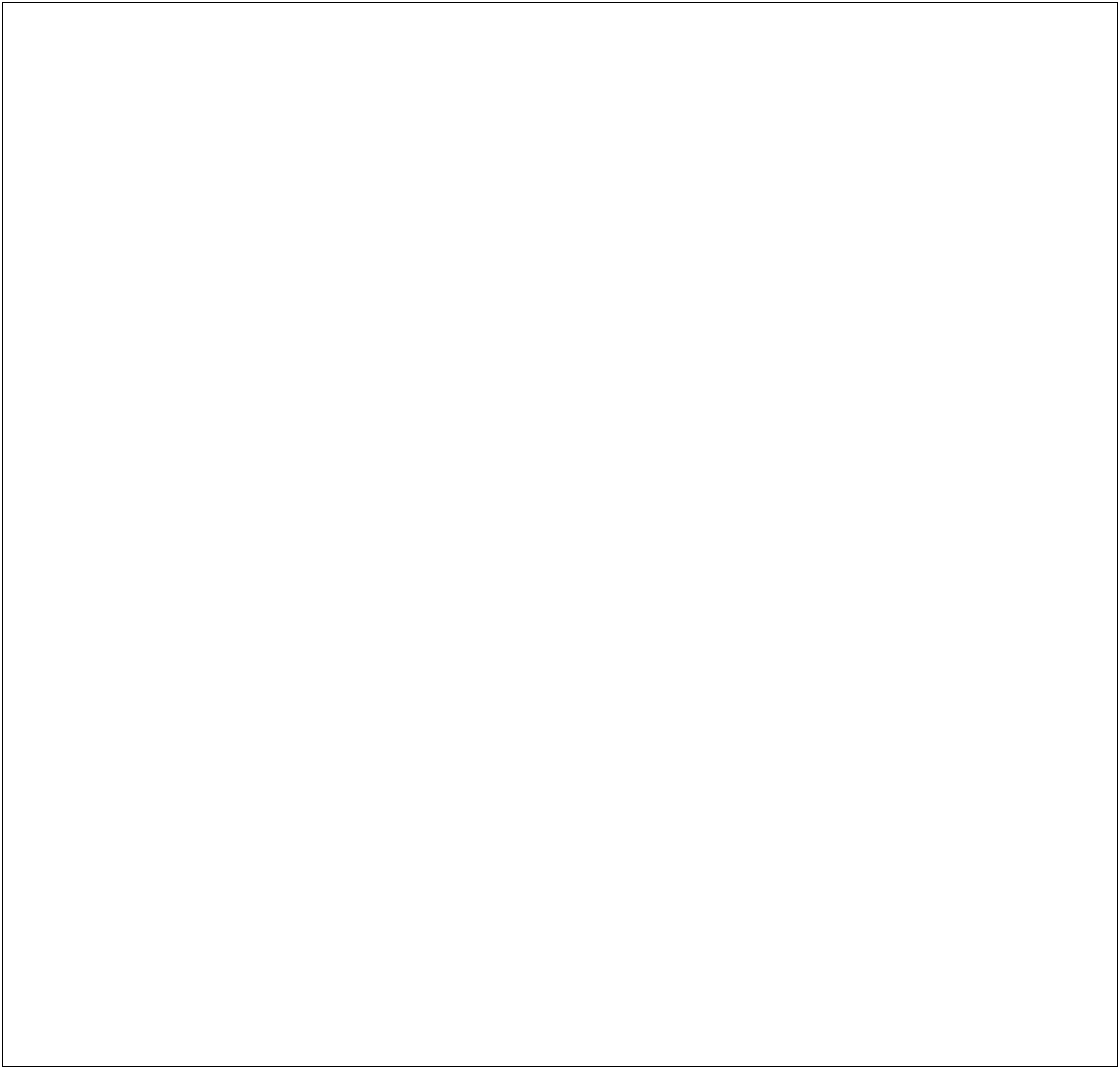
- *Staff in the school strive to create a caring, relaxed and happy atmosphere where teachers and pupils have a mutual respect for each other*
- *We want all partners in education, children, teachers, parents and management to work tirelessly for the good of the child*
- *We encourage all children to be self-motivated, ambitious and to reach their potential while in this school. Motto – 'if it's worth doing, it's worth doing well'*
- *We see our school not only as a place where knowledge is imparted and skills developed, but as a place where the emotional, social, physical and spiritual development of pupils is of paramount importance*
- *We hope to provide opportunities where pupils will discover their talent and that by nurturing them, they will come to fruition*

In summary, the NCCA Consultation Paper *Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School* as well as offering some very laudable new directions for a stronger emphasis on ethics for primary school children, also raises issues of concern regarding duplication of existing curricular areas, and in particular curriculum overload.

The Board of Management of St. Oliver Plunkett N.S. Ballina welcome the opportunity for debate and dialogue that the consultation process presents. In that spirit, we offer the following suggestions:

- That further examination of the existing curriculum is undertaken in relation to the content on ethics already contained within SPHE and SESE, with a view to undertaking a revision of these curricular areas to include a more explicit reference to ethics and responsibility.
- With regard to Education about Religions and Beliefs, that further consultation take place between the NCCA and patrons of faith-based schools to explore how the concerns behind the NCCA proposals might be addressed through the patrons' programmes, with a view to the development of an agreed set of guidelines for schools.







Home

Contributor

St Peter's NS



Board of Management

Scoil Náisiúnta Naomh Peadar, Mainistir Eimhín, Co. Chláir Dara

St. Peter's National School, Monasterevin, Co. Kildare

045 525037 peadar.naola@eircom.net www.stpetersmonasterevin.ie

Roll Náisiúnta na n-Óg



To whom it may concern,

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the proposed introduction of the new ERSE Curriculum. St. Peter's NS is a Catholic school under the patronage of the Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin. As such we strive to enable our pupils to grow through the experience of their religious identity, in which Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. This is done in a culture of respect and acceptance for those of other faiths, whom we welcome into our school. Our children are taught to respect and learn from other religious traditions. We seek to teach children to serve the common good and be the best of citizens because of their commitment to their Catholic faith. This is central, not only to the new Religious Education Curriculum devised by the Irish Episcopal Conference, but also to the culture of our school in which ethics and morality are fundamental to our ethos, policy development, leadership and the delivery of the school curriculum.

We believe that parents who wish their children to have a faith based education have a right to this. In a faith based school such as St. Peter's religious education cannot be compartmentalised, but must be fully acknowledged as part of the everyday life of the school. The Education Act specifically requires the Minister to have regard for the characteristic spirit of the school in exercising his or her functions with regard to curricular implementation, something that is already recognised in the area of RSE, where it is explicitly acknowledged that the curriculum must be interpreted in the context of the characteristic spirit of the school.

Finally, the fact that the curriculum as it stands is already widely acknowledged to be overloaded in terms of content and time available surely makes it implausible to propose the implementation of a new discrete subject, the objectives of which are already covered in a religious curriculum commensurate with the Catholic ethos of our school.

We trust you will seriously consider the concerns raised in this letter and take into account the manner in which respect for and acceptance of all cultures and religious beliefs is cultivated daily in faith based schools throughout Ireland.

Kind regards,

Keith Higgins

Chairperson, Board of Management





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Contributor
St Vincent's GNS

Submission to Consultation Paper: ‘*Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School*’ (NCCA, November 2015.)

Submitted by The Board of Management of St Vincent’s GNS, North William Street, Dublin 1. March 2016.

Under the Trusteeship of the Daughters of Charity of St Vincent de Paul and with the Archbishop of Dublin as Patron of the School, the members of the Board of Management of St Vincent’s GNS, North William Street, Dublin 1 are aware of the ‘growing cultural and religious pluralism in our society.’¹

The Catholic Church is constantly aware of ‘this challenging and complex context’ and states that this ‘context prompts new questions and calls for new answers to old ones.’²

The members of the Board of Management are also aware of the numerous and ‘important developments in Catholic education in recent times.’³ Most recent and important to this submission are

- *Catholic Schools Partnership* (2010)
- *Share the Good News: National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland* (2010)
- *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious education Curriculum for Ireland* (2015)
- Lane. D. *Catholic Education in the Light of Vatican II and Laudato Si’* (Veritas, 2015).⁴

Members of the Board of Management welcome dialogue around any new initiatives and programmes for the common good that are in keeping with the Catholic ethos of the school. The School and its staff have embraced many changes through the years with the introduction of new initiatives and programmes delivered by the Department of Education and Science including, ‘a concern for the ongoing professional development of their staffs and the training and formation of their board members.’⁵

At this time in the context of the history of our Catholic school and its Catholic ethos, the Board examined the Consultation Paper on *Education in Religion and Beliefs and Ethics* through a ‘faith lens’⁶. Presently, the Board governs the school on an ethos and Religious Education perspective, under the guidance and from the current direction offered by the Patron, the Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (CPSMA), The Education Secretariat in the Dublin Diocesan Office and Catholic Schools Partnership. Members of the Board of Management welcomed the Consultation Paper and were heartened to see

¹ A Pastoral Letter from the Catholic Bishops’ Conference, Vision 08: A Vision for Catholic Education in Ireland, May 2008, p. 2 *from here on will be referred to as* Vision 08

² Vision 08, p.2

³ Dermot Lane, *Catholic Education in the Light of Vatican II and Laudato Si’* (Veritas 2015) p.11

⁴ Ibid p. 11

⁵ Vision 08, p.7

⁶ *Education about Religion and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics in the Primary School: Consultation Paper* (NCCA, November 2015) p.29 *from here on will be referred to as* Consultation Paper: ERB and Ethics

that already much of this content was being taught in St Vincent's GNS through the various subjects in the Primary School Curriculum.

One of the key features of the Catholic Church is that it is constantly adapting to the signs of the times. In his recent publication, Dermot Lane proposes that the overall vision of Vatican 11 should inform our understanding of Catholic education in the twenty-first century.⁷ He outlines some of the 'significant structural shifts' which emerged at the Vatican Council and he names those that are 'directly related to Catholic education.'⁸ He describes the Church that is encountered at Vatican 11 as one, 'reaching out in dialogue to other churches, a Church extending the hand of friendship to other religions, a Church committed to a process of teaching and learning in a new relationship of mutuality with the modern world.'⁹

Vision for a Curriculum in ERB and Ethics

The proposed vision for a Curriculum in ERB and Ethics is for a 'pluralist and values based education... to support children... to live in and contribute positively to a diverse world.'¹⁰ The ERB and Ethics curriculum will contribute to the development of the child in five key areas: *personal understanding, mutual understanding, character education, connection to the wider world and spiritual awareness.*

The vision articulated in the ERB and Ethics curriculum 'seeks to develop individual critical thought and values, seeks to develop personal responsibility while also looking for the common good.'¹¹

The Catholic primary school already has articulated a vision for Catholic education which encompasses all of the above. It states, 'Catholic schools seek to reflect a distinctive vision of life and a corresponding philosophy of education. This is based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ.'¹²

Children are open to confusion if alternate views are presented.

Education about Religions and Beliefs

'It [ERB] focuses an informed awareness of the main theist, non theist and secular beliefs.'¹³ Because it is an objective and pluralist approach it doesn't recognise the transcendent nature of God, who is the *raison d'être* of a Catholic school. In addition, ERB does not nurture the belief or practice of any one religion.

An 'informed awareness'¹⁴ of their religion would not be sufficient for children. A young child must develop his/her faith identity at an early stage. A sense of belonging develops from a young age. There is a possibility of confusion for the children if an ERB and Ethics curriculum is introduced with a patron's programme.

⁷ Ibid. p.18

⁸ Ibid. p.18

⁹ D. Lane, *Catholic Education in the Light of Vatican 11 and Laudato Si'* (Veritas 2015) p. 20

¹⁰ Consultation Paper: ERB and Ethics p. 9

¹¹ Ibid p.11

¹² Vision 08, p. 2

¹³ Consultation Paper: ERB and Ethics p. 6

¹⁴ Ibid p. 6

Role of Patron as acknowledged in the Consultation Paper

The Consultation Paper states that, ‘Each school patron has a right to develop a programme that supports and contributes to the ethos of the school.’¹⁵ An ERB and Ethics curriculum is based on a different philosophy which will not be in line with the philosophy of Religious Education in the Catholic school.

‘Catholic schools are distinguished by faith in the transcendent mystery of God as the source of all that exists and as the meaning of human existence.’¹⁶

Catholic primary schools operate under the Schedule for a Catholic Primary School, agreed with the Minister for Education. The Schedule for a Catholic Primary School mandates the school to model and promote ‘a philosophy of life, inspired by belief in God and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.’¹⁷

Through the formulation of policies such as Schools Admission Policy, Anti Bullying Policy, Child Protection Policy, based on the Principles of Catholic Social Teaching, children are engaged in promoting communication and dialogue.¹⁸ These Principles ‘include the formation and the promotion of a personal commitment to the dignity and freedom of all human beings, the importance of rights and responsibilities, the place of justice within society and the service of the common good.’¹⁹

Parents

The Consultation Paper explains how the vision of the ERB and Ethics curriculum will contribute to the life of parents. It states ‘it will recognise the parent as the primary educator of the child.’²⁰

Parents have exercised their choice in choosing a Catholic school for their child/children, knowing that the ethos permeates the whole school day. In so doing they are also aware of the philosophy of the Catholic school, its specific ethos and the fact that their children will grow in faith using the Catholic Religious Education programme.

Parents choose a Catholic school for their child because they know that ‘young people are able to develop the full range of their abilities and talents in a balanced, integrated and generous way.’²¹

The *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* recognises the important role of parents as the primary educators stating, ‘In the home they can introduce young people to the reality of faith through prayer, moral formation, everyday expression of love and reconciliation, good example and simple sharing of the faith journey.’²²

Parents’ choice must always be respected in regard to the school they choose for their child/children.

¹⁵ Ibid p. 7

¹⁶ Vision 08, p.3

¹⁷ Agreed Schedule for a Catholic Primary School in the Republic of Ireland. Available from www.cpsma.ie/publications from here on Schedule for Catholic Primary School

¹⁸ Compendium of Catholic Social Doctrine

¹⁹ Consultation Paper: ERB and Ethics p.6

²⁰ Ibid p. 10

²¹ Vision 08, p. 3

²² *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (2015) p. 13

Role of Community

The Consultation Paper acknowledges that an Ethics education contributes to ‘fostering dialogue and community life in a pluralist society.’

Catholic education emphasises the importance of the parish school and the School as a Community Partnership. ‘The great strength of the Catholic primary system in Ireland has been its rootedness in parish communities, where the school commands the support and loyalty of the families involved.’²³

Inclusion and Other Religious Traditions

The Consultation Paper addresses the contribution of an ERB and Ethics curriculum in terms of children being engaged in and promoting communication and dialogue between different cultural, religious and non religious backgrounds; they will learn how to contest prejudice and the worst effects of stereotyping.’²⁴

The *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* recognises the importance of developing ‘ecumenical and inter-religious awareness and respect for the cultures and religions of others.’ It emphasises that ‘inter-religious learning establishes the basis for appropriate relationships with religious others.’²⁵ Due time is given to the study of other faiths in the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland*.²⁶

Inter-Religious Literacy

The Consultation Paper aims to propose a curriculum with an aim ‘to foster a respect for, understanding of and empathy with members of different religions, beliefs and worldviews.’²⁷

‘Catholic education values tolerance and inclusiveness. In an increasingly multicultural society, it is open to generous dialogue with Christians of other traditions and those of other faiths and none, while remaining true to its own distinctive ethos.’²⁸

Work in other curricular areas such as, SESE, SPHE, Religious Education and other subjects, enhances their ability to ‘engage with the tensions of a pluralist society.’²⁹

Developing skills of inter-religious literacy is one of the five key skills of the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum*.³⁰ These ‘skills of inter-religious literacy enable children to be able to speak the public language of religion... to understand the need for dialogue... to develop powers of sensitivity towards people of other religions and beliefs... to explore beliefs and practices... to enter into dialogue... to foster awareness of... the dignity of the human person.’³¹

These skills have been introduced in the new Religious Education programme *Grow in Love*, introduced to primary schools in 2015. These skills will be further developed as the programme is introduced throughout the primary school.

²³ Ibid p.7

²⁴ Consultation Paper: ERB and Ethics, p.10

²⁵ *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015)*, p. 28

²⁶ Ibid p. 29

²⁷ Consultation Paper: ERB and Ethics p. 6

²⁸ Vision 08, p.8

²⁹ Consultation Paper: ERB and Ethics p. 21

³⁰ *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015)*, p. 36

³¹ Ibid p.37

Inter-Cultural Perspective

The Consultation Paper in explaining the term Education about Religion and Beliefs states that children ‘will learn about the major forms of religion, belief traditions and worldviews that have been embraced around the world’... thus helping children to ‘develop a respect for understanding of and empathy with people of diverse religions, beliefs and worldviews.’

The Education Act (1998), states that ‘all students should experience an education that ‘respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages, and traditions in Irish society.’³²

The Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland reflects the principle of The Education Act (1998) and promises to ‘provide positive images of religious and ethnic groups, gender and disability.’³³

Ethics Education

The Consultation Paper states that ‘the teaching of ethics includes the formation and the promotion of a personal commitment to the dignity and freedom of all human beings, the importance of human rights and responsibilities, the place of justice within society, and the service of the common good.’ These are acknowledged as ‘essential to education for citizenship and the proper functioning of democracy.’³⁴

The Consultation Paper also states that an ERB and Ethics Curriculum will ‘help children learn to make choices and decisions in a way that considers the effect on others...’³⁵

Catholic education seeks ‘to form pupils who will...strive to give authentic leadership in society.’³⁶ They will do this through the Christian quality of their lives, the unselfish use of their gifts for the common good and their commitment to work for a more just, cohesive, and caring human society.’³⁷

The Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland includes ‘Development education’ which ‘includes two key perspectives: the justice perspective and the global perspective.’³⁸

Catholic Ethos

Faith creates a Catholic school. The Catholic school ‘sees diversity as offering opportunities for deeper understanding among persons holding diverse convictions.’³⁹

In addition, Catholic education values tolerance and inclusiveness. In an increasingly multicultural society it is open to generous dialogue with Christians of other traditions and those of other faiths and none, while remaining true to its own distinctive ethos.’⁴⁰

³² *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015)* p.21

³³ *Ibid* p.21

³⁴ Consultation Paper: ERB and Ethics p. 6

³⁵ *Ibid* p.6

³⁶ Vision 08, p. 3

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 3

³⁸ *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015)* p.21

³⁹ Vision 08, p.8

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.8

The Catholic ethos prioritises ‘the justice perspective’⁴¹ as does the ERB and Ethics curriculum which ‘promotes the place of justice in society.’⁴²

The *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* recognises ‘that Religious Education enables children to develop positive Christian morals virtues and values.’⁴³ These echo the values of those mentioned in the proposed ERB and Ethics curriculum, ‘justice, integrity, critical thought, moral responsibility, confidence...’⁴⁴

The *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* states ‘that teaching about different religions and beliefs is carried out in a fair and balanced manner in Catholic schools.’⁴⁵

From a Child’s Perspective...

The Consultation Paper on ERB and Ethics states that its curriculum ‘will value the child as a curious, capable, confident and caring individual.’⁴⁶

The Catholic school places the child at the centre of all that takes place within. The desire is for the child to grow to its full potential and the school is there as a service to the children it educates. The Catholic school endeavours to ‘help students grow in confidence and self esteem and to develop in their humanity.’⁴⁷

The Education Act (1988) requires a school to ‘promote the moral, spiritual, social and spiritual, social and personal development... having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school.’⁴⁸

The Schedule for the Roman Catholic Primary School encompasses this vision for the child in its aim to promote ‘the full and harmonious development of the person of the pupil: intellectual, cultural, moral and spiritual.’⁴⁹

Conclusion

While members of the Board of Management are open to the key messages for the provision of Education about Religion and Beliefs and those of an Ethics Education, it is felt that the patron’s programme for the faith based school is ‘conceived through a faith lens,’ and ‘a national curriculum in ERB and Ethics may be based on a more pluralist epistemology which explores different faiths and beliefs without promoting one faith perspective above another.’⁵⁰ Therefore the ERB and Ethics curriculum does not concur with the vision for Catholic Education, as the ERB and Ethics curriculum claims that ‘patron’s programmes tend to draw on a realist epistemology.’⁵¹

⁴¹ *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015)* p. 21

⁴² Consultation Paper: ERB and Ethics p. 6

⁴³ *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015)*, p.22

⁴⁴ *Ibid* p. 22

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 21

⁴⁶ Consultation Paper: ERB and Ethics p.19

⁴⁷ Vision 08, p.4

⁴⁸ The Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998)

⁴⁹ Schedule for a Catholic Primary School

⁵⁰ Consultation Paper: ERB and Ethics p. 29

⁵¹ *Ibid* p. 29

- The introduction of a discrete ERB and Ethics curriculum will add to the existing problem of curriculum overload, which in turn would impede the quality of children's learning.
- Introduced as a discrete curricular area, mandated by the NCCA and therefore subject to inspection by the inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science, the ERB and Ethics curriculum will unbalance the status of the Patron's programme in a faith based school.
- The stated aims of the ERB and the Ethics curriculum are similar to those of an RE curriculum but without the faith aspect.



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Contributor

Teresa McQuillan

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Date	28th March 2016

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

As a grandmother I have probably limited enough access to how primary schools now work. However, what I do know is that Religious Education in Catholic Primary Schools is a vital expression of what it means to be a Catholic School. My grandchildren all go to Catholic schools and it's lovely to see how these schools have helped them learn about their faith. They are a vital support to my children in this regard. It's also wonderful to see how those schools have also helped them to become the caring, thoughtful, kind, socially inclusive and aware young people they are turning out to be.

In my view any Religious Education, whether it's called ERB and Ethics or RE or inter-religious education or anything else, in a Catholic school only makes sense if it is an expression of the Catholic faith. That doesn't mean it excludes others or that it's a kind of indoctrination. It just means Religious Education in a Catholic school is trying to teach and share something Catholics believe to be true. That expression of the Catholic faith obviously includes openness to learning about other religions and obviously includes learning about what it means to be a good person. However, religious education in a Catholic school also means a lot more. It means learning about Jesus, learning about what Jesus teaches, it means learning about the sacraments, it means learning about what it is to be a member of a Church community. And for people of faith, for parents of faith who chose a Catholic school for their children, it means even more than that; it means providing time and space for children to grow in their relationship with God and their relationship with others out of an understanding of that relationship with God.

Religious Education isn't some vague theoretical exercise; it's a vital way of helping children learn how they are loved by the God who created them and because of this love how they are called to love others. I think Catholic religious education has done a great service to this country and is something that should be proudly celebrated and protected!

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

I would like to think that my local Catholic schools are very welcoming places. That is what I hear from neighbours and friends, and that is what I witness in my parish as the Coordinator of the parish's sacramental preparation programme. Whenever I meet any of the teachers I'm always struck by the energy, the care, the diversity, the excitement and the warm sense of welcome and belonging I receive from them. I hope if I am feeling all of that as a someone meeting the teachers/principals, that the children and parents in the school are feeling it ten times as much!

I also know that the schools in my parish are very diverse in terms of their population. This has become really obvious over the last ten years or so. I would absolutely hate to think that any child would feel left out or isolated. We must ensure that this isn't the case. And surely if we all work together in creative ways that respect all the various different perspectives and traditions – including faith traditions – we can come up with solutions to the problems identified by for example the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism that you quote in your Consultation documents.

However, in seeking to ensure children of other faiths and cultural backgrounds are made welcome we can't allow a situation to arise where Catholic children and Catholic parents are made to feel less welcome; where they have to park their beliefs at the door of their Catholic

school.

The solution to the question of parental choice isn't to take the rights of Catholic parents to a Catholic education for their children away in favour of the rights of other parents. My concern from reading the Consultation documents is that that is what ultimately might happen. In our desire to include everyone we could end up with a very inadequate form of religious education and ethics education that are not really about any kind of faith at all. It would be a bit like teaching children biology or science without them even touching a real life tree or without inviting them to love nature from being out in the natural world! We don't want religious 'technicians', we want people so committed and alive in their own faith that they can't but reach out in love to the whole world and in particular to those who are different from them.

Catholic parents and children have rights too that can't simply be cast aside in an effort (well-meaning as it clearly is) to include others. As stated above, denominational religious education will, as you rightly say in your consultation paper, always be through a 'faith lens'; it couldn't be anything else and be true to what it is about. You can't then have another religious education experience for children, in an attempt to be inclusive, that actually contradicts that faith. That would actually end up excluding more people and would create huge confusion for everyone concerned.

So what's the solution for those children who may be feeling excluded? I think as a grandparent who recognizes very much that our country has changed a lot in the last two decades, I'd like to see four things happen; firstly that the beliefs of children of other faiths and no faiths are properly provided for within the school timetable. Children who opt out of faith based RE shouldn't just be left to languish at the back of the classroom; they should be properly catered for. NCCA needs, in my view to take their needs seriously in this regard but in a way that doesn't take away the rights of parents and children who want rich faith based education. Secondly, I also think that these children should continue to be welcome in the very many ways they are already being made to feel welcome; when their opinions and experiences are warmly welcomed and celebrated, when the festivals and feast days of their faiths are celebrated, when their parents are informed of the school's faith practices in a way that includes and welcomes. Thirdly, I think the Catholic church needs to look very seriously at how much time is spent on sacramental preparation. I know the teachers in the schools in my parish love being involved in First Communion and Confirmation and the schools guard their involvement really jealously but I think parishes need to be of much more assistance to schools. Parents should be choosing the sacraments for their children (as they are asked to do in our parish) rather than it being just a kind of cultural rite of passage. Parishes need to do more, and schools need to be doing less. This would probably help children who aren't involved in sacramental preparation feel less excluded in at least two years of their time in primary school. Finally, obviously parents who don't want Catholic education for their children need to be provided with alternatives. The whole process of providing more choice for parents needs to be speeded up. That's probably the ultimate piece of the puzzle that needs to be looked at.

As a grandparent, I don't obviously have much to add to conversations around things like time allocation. Just to say though that the time given over to RE in faith schools needs to be understood as sacred ground; as a sacred time of encounter for children with a living faith. So that time needs to be maintained and protected. In addition, what happens in the rest of the time table can't then contradict what happens in that very important time given over to RE. It would be very hard for children and teachers if that was to happen. It would also be hard to see how you could continue to call Catholic schools Catholic. Likewise I'm sure for Church of Ireland, Methodist, Muslim, and Jewish schools. In my opinion, Religious Education in faith schools always has to be through a 'faith lens' for it to make sense.



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Contributor

Terry Leddy, Sr Anna Smith



Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

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Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAC-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 3.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie



3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

We make our submissions to the N.C.C.A. as Retired Teaching Principals (Primary) and currently as Diocesan Advisors in the Diocese of Kilmore. We visit annually 84 Primary schools in the Diocese ranging in size from small two/three/four teacher rural schools to large town schools up to twenty-four teachers in size. On reading the Consultation Paper it appears to us that the N.C.C.A. assumes that its proposed curriculum is necessary to foster inclusivity in schools. This overlooks the very great extent to which faith-based schools already achieve this aim. We would find that our Catholic schools are very inclusive places.

The landscape in Ireland has changed greatly in the last number of years with so many people of different ethnic and religious backgrounds coming into our country. A huge number of children from different faiths and none have been welcomed into our Catholic schools by Boards of Management, Principals, Teachers and all school staff. Much of this happened without any prior preparation, guidelines or discussions. Can we give an example from our school visitation.

(2)

NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnaí Eanáir agus Meán-Oibríoch
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment



primary
developments
táinig siad chun saol na ndéanaí

Example: St. Clare's National School in Cavan town - a Deis Band 1 school with children from 24 different nationalities. We were lucky enough to be visiting this school during their multicultural week. All the various nationalities displayed their traditions, flags, tastes, music, religious practices, etc. We experienced inclusivity at its best - in a Catholic school. On another occasion we were visiting a large town school during Ramadan. Huge respect was shown to all the Muslim children by the class teachers and the children by keeping food and drink in the background.

We would also contend that Catholic Schools currently make provision for inter-religious and inter-cultural learning. A commitment to inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue is clearly outlined in the recently launched Pre-school and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland and in the Veitias Programme 'Grow in Love'. Again we have experienced this in our work.

Example: A rural six teacher school. School population mainly Catholic but with many Muslim children throughout the classes.



NCCA

An Chomhairle Náisiúnaí Ealaíona agus Meaisíní
National Council for Curriculum and Assessment



primar
developments
Tús na hÉireann

At Religious Education time the Catholic children work in their 'Grow in Love' and 'Alive O'. The Muslim children work with their bibles or complete work on religious content provided by their parents, where appropriate. Periodically these Muslim children report to their class-mates on what they have been studying. Everybody is included which helps generate a very positive atmosphere.

In a similar way a strong case can be made that Catholic schools currently make provision for Ethics education. Again, this commitment to ethics education is clearly outlined in the Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland and in the Veritas Programme.

It is our firm belief that many of the aims of the ERB and Ethics Programme are already being well catered for in the R.E. Programme in Catholic Schools.

Signed:

Tommy Kelly, D.A. Kilmore Diocese

Dr. Anna Smith D.A. Kilmore Diocese



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Contributor

The Humanist Association

SUBMISSION TO NCCA EDUCATION IN RELIGION & BELIEFS & ETHICS

FROM THE HUMANIST ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND

AIMS & VISION

Humanism is for people who base their understanding of existence on the evidence of the natural world and its evolution; people whose values are not based on religion or belief in a god or gods, but are found in people themselves. Humanism is for people who value reason, allied to our capacity for love and compassion, with a strong ethical perspective.

Our aims and vision are very much the same as stated in the NCCA's Consultation document ERBE. We also seek to develop self-awareness, confidence and understanding of what each group contributes to society. We too rejoice in human diversity and seek to balance individual rights with social responsibility. This is why we regard our schools as forums where children can be free to become their best selves and learn how to be decent and responsible citizens. Where our approach might differ is that we would always encourage a healthy questioning attitude. One of the cornerstones of humanism is the power of uncertainty since we need to be ready to adjust our thinking if new circumstances arise.

This is why we call ourselves 'humanists' since we have faith in the basic decency of people. We understand that the most important factor in all our actions is the common humanity which we share with every person on this planet. And we would emphasize that the values which we all hold so dear – such as compassion, justice, honesty, truthfulness, charity, reason etc., are human values first and foremost. These values existed before any of the major religions had started, and they will always exist because they are the essence of our humanity.

EDUCATION

Humanism is an outlook on life; a philosophy. We place **this** life and humanity at the centre of our philosophy since we do not believe there is an afterlife and nor do we believe in supernatural beings. Just as religions are an attempt to explain the world, so humanism – or the non-religious perspective – is equally a way of understanding the universe and our place in it, through examining what we see in nature and the world around us. "Man is the measure of all things" wrote Protagoras who was born in 484B.C. There are written texts going back to 500 years BC, in which Greek philosophers questioned the idea of gods and sought to examine the material world in a 'scientific' manner. Early formulations of what we now understand as 'the Big Bang theory' and the theory of evolution, were written down at that time. It is important to us to demonstrate how an alternative questioning attitude has persisted in the human psyche although history has often stifled this impulse.

The development of science from the 17th century expanded peoples' thinking on the origins of the earth. It was really only in the latter part of the 19th century that groups such as the Rationalists and the Freethinkers were able to be established with any confidence. The word secularism began to be used from 1851 and we would lightly touch on this history in a way suitable for a Primary school.

HUMANIST ETHICS

Again, our approach to ethics resembles that of the attitude in the NCCA Consultation document ERBE so that an integrated approach is feasible. We would be keen to emphasise this, since in the past, non-religious people have been described as 'selfish nihilists' who believe in nothing and consequently can do just as they like! We would stress that it is not necessary to believe in a god to be good. We believe that morality comes from understanding human nature and human experience: that we are **all** part of the human family and our actions have consequences for those around us. We believe that an individual conscience is an integral part of our human selves and that our understanding of right and wrong develops over time as we grow older and also as we study the experience of human history. We also believe that as we grow older, so we must take increasing responsibility for our own actions.

Humanists have to work out moral paths for themselves, but always guided by our conscience, parents, teachers, our laws, personal integrity, etc. We do not lay down any dogmas in which people **must** believe. We only have one guideline: "Do not do to others what you would not like for yourself". This is taken from the *Analects of Confucius*, c.500 B.C. It was a well-known maxim in the Ancient World, long before any of the major religions existed, and therefore it has been an honourable pillar of human values for well over 2,500 years, and possibly for considerably longer since there were also strong non-theistic traditions in ancient China and India. Basically we think that people find more happiness and fulfilment when behaving well towards our fellow man.

Faiths often imply that the non-religious are lacking in a spiritual life. For humanists, to limit the word 'spiritual' to religious experience is to seriously devalue spirituality. For us, spirituality is just that – the life of the human spirit. So love, friendship, nature, the arts, are all a vital part of the spiritual life and this belongs to everyone and is a natural and human experience. We give meaning to our life by the respect with which we invest it and our spirituality is part of life's journey for everyone.

If we had to sum up a humanist ethical code, some of the headings would be: think for yourself; respect truth and reason; be sceptical yet open-minded; respect human values; be loving and kind; help the vulnerable; value nature and the environment; respect life.

POSSIBLE THEMES TO EXPLORE IN ERB & ETHICS

Again, the curriculum themes selected in the NCCA Consultation document for Ethics work equally well for humanists, but the ERB section themes would need some careful editing.

For instance, the theme of *"worship, pilgrimage and sacred places"* would not ordinarily be part of our vocabulary. However, apart from the *'worship'* which we would not be part of, *"pilgrimage and sacred places"* can be valued too as part of life's journey and the inspiration of nature. For the non-religious, the magnificence of nature is indeed 'awe inspiring' so much so that we think no divine sanction is needed for us to truly appreciate nature in all its forms. In this way, with a sensitive approach, we could use much the same content, being mindful that 'curriculum overload' and time constraints are a factor in this new curriculum.

rites of passage ceremonies & seasonal celebrations

CEREMONIES:

People have always marked the main events of our lives; birth, marriage and death. It would seem to be part of our psyche - a human need going back far into history. Before the churches and a designated priestly person took over these ceremonies, a respected member of the tribe might have acted at these times.

Humanists would not use a church so a description of our secular ceremonies is something that children are always interested to hear about, be it a naming ceremony to welcome a new baby into the family and the wider community; or a wedding where the couple compose their own vows to each other. Since 2013, the Humanist Association has been able to legally marry people using their own legal marriage solemnisers, but for births and deaths, no legal officiant is required. The Association can either provide one or they will help those involved to do the ceremony themselves. Secular music, poetry and prose are all part of the ceremonies which follow a recognisable format, familiar to all, and family members and friends can be part of the ceremony depending on what is suitable for the participants. Humanist ceremonies are dignified and individual and have become a very important public face for the secular members of our society.

Humanist funerals are very much part of who we are. Since we believe this life is all we have, we accept death as part of the natural continuing cycle of birth, living and death. We stress that our memory will live on in the hearts and minds of those who have known us and that life itself continues on. So humanist ceremonies give people the opportunity to express their feelings and ideals in their own words.

SEASONAL CELEBRATIONS

Again, children are always interested in whether we celebrate the great seasonal feasts of Christmas, Easter, Hallow'een. Of course we do and we explain that these feasts which nowadays are thought of as religious feasts, were originally celebrations marking the natural passing of the seasons of the year. We would speak of the historical significance of these seasonal rituals which many children are already aware of nowadays, and we would say that

these times are part and parcel of our lives in which humanists readily participate - but without any religious connotations. Therefore Christmas for us would be a mid-Winter festival and a time for family and friends. Easter is to welcome the Spring. Hallow'een would hark back to pagan times when spirits would have been very much part of human lives. Seasonal festivities are part of our cultural heritage, developed over thousands of years from the interaction of humanity with nature.

We do not have any ceremony equivalent to a first Holy Communion or Confirmation. We celebrate birthdays and one can mark when a child goes from primary to secondary school by a family outing or a gift but this would be entirely a matter for the individual family and there is no 'tradition'. In Norway which has a very large humanist population, there is a Civil Confirmation ceremony held all over the country for young people who have reached voting age. They and their parents are invited to the Town Hall where the civic dignitaries preside, the band plays and refreshments are served; and the whole is preceded by a course in civic responsibilities. The children here might like to debate if this would be a good idea in Ireland.

SUMMARY

Most non-religious people feel no need for any systematic ideology or organisation. The State should be secular in order to support ALL its citizens fairly. However during the past two centuries an international humanist movement has developed to express secular ideas. Humanism is committed to free inquiry and the open mind within a pluralist society. Freedom of thought is a cornerstone of our outlook.

Many people today, particularly in the West, think along humanist lines without necessarily giving themselves a label. This is as it should be, but humanist associations exist to defend and support the secular life when needed. According to the latest Census Returns in 2011, the non-religious were the largest group in Ireland after Catholics, being 35,300 more than all the Protestant groupings together. It will be interesting to see what the 2016 Census will show. Similarly our recent 1916 Commemoration had inclusivity as its theme and Ireland is demonstrating that in education with the *Educate Together* sector.

So humanism is a very positive philosophy of life. We gain inspiration from other peoples' lives, from different cultures and from our rich natural world. We value the great ideals of cooperation that we humans have created, like the United Nations, the World Health Organisation, the International Court of Human Justice, the Geneva Convention on War, the Declaration of Human Rights, UNICEF etc. All these organisations were established on human values which are the foundation of us all, whether religious or non-religious.

Because of the overwhelming influence of religion, in the past secular people often appeared negative since we would usually be confined to denying a belief in a god and an afterlife. But for the past 50 years we have emphasised what we **do** believe in – our positive belief in humanity and the essential decency of human beings, with a firm ethical commitment to those values as outlined earlier. A more tolerant and open atmosphere has enabled us to develop our philosophy with confidence and coherence.



Home

Contributor

Tomás Ó hÓistín, John Phelan, Timothy
Kelly

COVER LETTER

DAVID E. HEISTIN

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BOM ST. CULLEN'S

27/3/16

RE - EDUCATION ABOUT RELIGIOUS BELIEFS & ETHICS

The following submission outlines the comment and concerns of the above named group of friends, all of whom are parents and all of whom are currently serving on Boards of Management

Kind Regards

David E Heistin

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

SEE COVER LETTER FOR DETAILS

Name(s)	TOMÁS O'HEIRIN	DIAR PADLAN	THEODORE WELLY
Position (if applicable)			
Organisation (if applicable)			
Address			
Telephone			
Email			
Date	27 / 3 / 16		

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Personal

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to erbc@ncca.ie

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERS and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERS and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERS and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

THE OVERALL AIMS ARE VERY MUCH IN keeping with what is currently the position held by our respective schools. As one of the last pieces in the curriculum to add the aim (as contained) should prove highly beneficial to both children & teachers.

STRENGTH TO A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF CONCEPT IN RELATION TO JUDICIAL ETHICAL BELIEFS MUST BE RECOGNISED 'BY RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS' (JUL - JUD) "LEARNING, TEACHING" (3rd - 6th) (see notes?)

WHILE MY PERSONAL VIEW OF COURTESY, DUTY WOULD BE HELD AS THE AIM FOR AN ETHICAL CURRICULUM

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERS and Ethics.

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

CHILDREN & PARENTS WITH JUDICIAL BELIEFS (NON-CREATION IN) SHOULD FIND THIS CONTRIBUTION VERY HELPFUL FOR OURS.

THE GENERAL WELL-BEING OF COMMUNITY WILL BE IMPROVED - WITH ALL WHO ARE CONFIDENT TO PARTICIPATE

CONTRIBUTION - THE ROLE OF TEACHERS WILL BE INVOLVED - LESS 2-OBSERVING APPROACH - MORE EMPLOYED TO JUDICIAL BELIEFS

WHILE CHILDREN OF OUR SCHOOLS COULD HAVE FURTHER SUPPORT ABOUT BELIEFS - IN A POSITIVE WAY

THE PARTICIPATION FOR SACRAMENTS IN 3rd & 6th CLASS (see notes)

IN PARTICULAR MAY NEED MORE COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IF SUCH KEY FACTORS ARE TO BECOME SIGNIFICANT. (AS THEY SHOULD)

1. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (REB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

* Collectively we feel REB & ETHICS is to be
BROADLY welcome. Much of what is taught at
PRESENT is INCORPORATED WITHIN THEIR CURRICULUM,
SUCH A CURRICULUM WILL RESOLVE THAT THESE
CRITICAL ASPECTS, ARE ATTENDED TO IN AN
OBJECTIVE MANNER. THEY WILL CONTRIBUTE
TO CONTINUITY IN GOOD CHARACTER BUILDING
WITH HIGH & SOUND SOCIAL OUTCOMES
BOTH SHORT TERM & LONG TERM.
OUR OWN CITIZENSHIP CURRIC (FINCH/BOWERS)
WILL BE VALUED & RESPECTED WHILE
ENRICHING, RESPECTING OTHER CURRIC/BELIEFS
THE WORKS RELATED TO THE ALLOCATION WITH
THE ALLOCATED SOMEWHAT THROUGH INTEGRATION
ESPECIALLY IN THE REAT OF GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY
AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES. WE DO NOT DENY
THAT PREPARATION FOR THE SIGNIFICANT OF
FULTONHILL & BETHUNGLATION & CONFIDENCE AND
TIME-CONVENING - PERHAPS ANY COMMUNITY COULD
BECOME INVOLVED TO A DEGREE BECAUSE IN
THIS AREA WITHIN CITIZENSHIP, SCHOOLS,
WE FEEL THE NEED & TAKING RESPONSIBILITY' COULD
FORM A SOURCE (FREE-STANDING) IN THEM.
OUR CITIZENSHIP CURRIC (SIBS) WILL TAKE STRENGTH FROM
THE CURRENT REB PROPOSALS TO DATE AND WE WOULD
YOU WELL WITH YOUR CONSULTATION PROCESS.

Changes
to our
curriculum

NCCA

An Education Agency for the New Zealand Curriculum
National Centre for Curriculum and Assessment



primary
developments



Home

Contributor

Tony Kealy

15 FEB 2016

12th February 2016

To whom it may concern

I am a father of two National School going children, one in second class and one in fourth class. It is a Catholic School and I am very happy with the education they are receiving under that ethos. In the school, there are lots of different nationalities with lots of different religions, and none. Every child is fully respected and valued equally, as it should be. I do not agree with tampering with the system and request that the Education about religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics part of the curriculum be abolished or incorporated into other areas of teaching. I wholeheartedly request that the teaching of Religion is left as it is at the moment. Please confirm that you have received this.

Yours Sincerely Tony Kealy

Grangeeth,
SIANE, Co. Wick



Home

Contributor

Trócaire

Consultation on the proposals for a curriculum in

Education about RELIGIONS & BELIEFS & ETHICS

Respondent's details

Name	Lydia McCarthy
Position (if applicable)	Education Officer, Trócaire
Organisation (if applicable)	<p>Trócaire</p> <p>Trócaire is the official overseas development agency of the Catholic Church in Ireland.</p> <p>Trócaire envisages a just and peaceful world where people's dignity is ensured and rights are respected; where basic needs are met and resources are shared equitably; where people have control over their own lives and those in power act for the common good.</p> <p>We're working in countries across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. Overseas we deliver our support through local partner organisations, helping communities and families to free themselves from the oppression of poverty. We support communities in the developing world in their efforts to improve their lives, meet their basic needs and ensure their human dignity. This support is offered regardless of race, gender, religion or politics.</p> <p>In Ireland, Trócaire raises awareness about the causes of poverty and encourages Irish people to campaign for global change and an end to poverty as a matter of justice. Through our development education programme we work with schools supporting educators, and encouraging young people, to explore global justice issues and become active global citizens.</p>
Address	Maynooth, Co Kildare

Telephone	01 505 3200
Email	lydia.mccarthy@trocaire.org
Date	30/02/16

Is this response a personal view or is it made on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

Written submissions may be in English or Irish.

Written submissions will be published online at the end of the consultation process.

The proposals, as set out in the Consultation Paper for a new curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, should form the basis of written submissions to the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).

The Consultation Paper can be found [here](#).

Please send your submissions to:

FAO-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 35 Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2.

Or email submissions to info@ncca.ie.

Three areas for consideration are listed below.

1. The proposals contained in the Consultation Paper for a curriculum in ERB and Ethics.

Consider:

- The proposed aims of ERB and Ethics in relation to the overall curriculum
- The potential contribution ERB and Ethics may have to children's learning
- The proposed features for the curriculum
- Other aspects you would like to see included.

As stated in the information provided by the NCCA 'ERB helps children to know about and to understand cultural heritage of some of the major forms of religion, belief traditions and worldviews in today's society'. It is for this reason that Trócaire does not see a place for self-awareness and personal beliefs (as outlined in aim 1) within the aims. We believe that this is an area that belongs in patron programmes. This curriculum should strive to provide knowledge about various religions. Trócaire is suggesting the following aims:

Aim 1

Develop a knowledge and understanding of a wide range of world religions and world views.

Aim 2

Have knowledge and understanding of how religious and non-religious world views have contributed to the culture in which we live, and continue to have an impact on individuals and relationships between their communities.

Aims 1 and 2 encapsulate the need for children to begin their exploration about world religions from outside their world and look in, to remain more objective.

Aim 3

Identify and explore global justice issues, recognising injustice and inequality in order to develop empathy and embrace human diversity.

Aim 4

Understand the relationship between rights and responsibilities from a global, local and personal perspective.

Again Trócaire believes that the child should begin with the wider world and work in. Aims 3 and 4 encourage children to explore injustice and inequality, human rights and diversity at a global level, to inform their understanding and behaviours with their peers.

Key skills Trócaire would like to see included are:

- Investigation
- Questioning
- Enquiry
- Articulation
- The formation, presentation and defense of view points
- Philosophy for children should be encouraged as a means of promoting democratic thinking among children.

Trócaire thinks that these aims and skills would foster an ability in children to critically examine religions different to that of their own, issues of inequality and injustice, and be able to understand the capacity for themselves as global citizens and wider society to respond to matters of injustice and inequality.

Human rights, as a global moral framework, should be considered as an overarching influence in the formation of a curriculum for ethics, and indeed for education about religions and beliefs. The Toledo Principles of 2007 clearly outline the importance of human rights in this respect. The state has a responsibility, regardless of its relationship with religious structures, to educate about and present religions in a neutral and objective fashion, and in doing so to respect the freedom of the individual to choose his or her own beliefs.

In the case of ethics, it makes sense to invoke an already existing, global framework for moral behavior such as the human rights system, which outlines a universal set of behaviours which are widely accepted as being virtuous and principled. Rights, in the case of education, are often listed alongside responsibilities. While it is important that such a curriculum does lead to action rather than solely thought and reflection, it is pertinent that this action or responsibility be looked at from a collective and societal perspective, and not as equal to rights. While it is important that children feel empowered to act and promote ethical standard and behaviours, they must also be informed as to the various societal and global forces at play, and how these can be challenged.

2. The potential contribution of a curriculum in ERB and Ethics

Consider:

- Contribution to the experience of children and parents
- Contribution to school communities
- Contribution to the role of teachers
- Suggestions to address issues of time allocation and curriculum overload.

Trócaire would like the curriculum to support teachers in exploring various identities, beliefs and backgrounds of the diverse group of children in their class. This curriculum has the potential to make classrooms more inclusive for every child. It also has the potential to provide a space for teachers to look at the world outside their classroom. This curriculum should foster a positive learning environment in classrooms, where students get used to, from a young age, questioning things, in order to understand better, and therefore be more accepting of, difference.

Such a curriculum should serve to enhance children's knowledge of world religions and also their thoughts around morality and positive behaviours. It is important that children be objectively informed about religions other than their own, but also that children of minority beliefs in a classroom do not become "spokespeople" for their religions or seen as tokenistic. Such a curriculum must have equal capacity in all schools – this may be a challenge where some schools have a large number of children from a diverse range of backgrounds, whereas others may be monocultural or reflect only one religion. In order to avoid disadvantage, measures should be put in place to ensure that all children may be exposed to and learn about different religions to an equal standard of objectivity and information, regardless of school context. Such a curriculum should be introduced in the junior end of primary education and continue throughout primary education in a spiral fashion. Research has shown that children of this age and stage are capable of engaging with global issues and issues of inequality and fairness. Thus, it is more logical to introduce such a subject before certain prejudices and stereotypes may have taken hold. It should also be designed in a way that ensures a smooth transition to Junior Cycle Philosophy at Post Primary.

Teachers will likely need significant support in implementing a curricular area such as this. Clarity will be imperative when it comes to distinguishing between this and the patron's programme, and how teachers should deal with confusion around this. Moreover, teachers are likely to encounter difficult and uncomfortable questions, particularly where a faith is taught in a school, around the connection between these subjects and other religions and the faith formation programme in their schools, from both children and parents. Similarly, a teacher may face challenges where his or her own faith conflicts with that being taught as part of this curricular area. Supports should be

in place to help teachers to look at these beliefs and religions from an objective, specifically information-giving point of view, rather than the promotion of a variety of moral standpoints. Furthermore, teachers are likely to identify potential duplication with other existing subjects. Meaningful Continuous Professional Development (CPD), particularly in the area of ethics will be necessary in order to separate aspects of this subject from similar aspects of other subjects. An example is the proposed theme of climate change. This will potentially already be explored in Geography/ Science/ History. Perhaps a change of name to Climate justice would be more appropriate so that teachers and children can distinguish between the causes, effects and implications of such an issue, and how they may be dealt with in each subject with ethics looking at moral solutions and actions to be considered.

3. Reflecting on the proposals for a curriculum in Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics, please elaborate on your views and opinions.

In addition to that aforementioned, Trócaire would like to add the following suggestions and elaborations:

- Regardless of whether or not ERB and Ethics become one or two stand-alone subjects, or are integrated across the curriculum, it is our view that the skills and methodologies used and developed through the implementation of these subject be present across the curriculum, both implicit and explicit, so as to inform and influence the ethical formation of the school in general, and so as to form an integral part of the child's personal and social development. The focus on active teaching and learning pedagogies laid out in the proposal are welcomed, creating opportunities for children to create their own meanings and opinions.
- A previously mentioned, since there is a risk of curriculum overload, it is important that teachers do not feel that the content of these subjects duplicates that already delivered through other subjects. Subjects such as SPHE and SESE must be carefully analysed so as not to double up on content, particularly in areas such as human environments, environmental awareness and care, myself and myself and the wider world.
- Since issues of a controversial, sensitive nature may be touched upon in the teaching about other religions and indeed ethics, language must be of primary consideration. Appropriate and correct terms should be used when describing aspects of diversity and difference, in order to avoid stereotyping and negative connotations.
- The SPHE curriculum, which would perhaps be seen as the closest to ERB/ Ethics in terms of content, is based on the premise that learning starts with the individual and continues to the wider world. A suggestion for this curriculum would be that the emphasis begins with the global and returns to the personal. This enables the child to look at global, international and interpersonal issues, and relate them back to his or her own experiences as decisions.
- A focus on action is missing form the proposal. Similar to that of an 'Action Project' at second level CSPE, we would like to see children raising awareness and taking action on an issue they explored through this curriculum.



Home

Contributor

Una Mallowney

I support retention of a Catholic ethos in publicly-funded schools. I understand this to mean a way of life which is loving, forgiving, non-aggressive, compassionate, generous, honest, just, helpful, modest, frugal, mindful, optimistic and responsible. These values can be found in many religions. Our Christian heritage in Europe ties these values to the teachings and example of Jesus, and the roadmap is already there for us all to follow.

The specific techniques of the Catholic faith, such as First Communion and Confirmation can be taught separately, and in my parish have been primarily the responsibility of Catholic parents, not teachers, for many years now.

A half-hour a day is not too much to communicate the essentials of christian living to our children. But it is even more important that the ethos permeating the school and the values taught to the children includes the elements listed above.

(Signed) Una Mallowney, mother and grandmother



Home

Contributor

Una Purcell

Reflection on ERB

The proposed aims of the ERBE programme echoes the aims of religious education but with a completely secular tone. Many of the proposed outcomes of this programme have been achieved through religious education for generations. The uniqueness of the individual, good relationships, spiritual awareness, recognition of injustice, personal integrity, search for truth and meaning are at the core of religious education. Respect for the individual, openness to all, inclusivity are essential components of Religious Education as is the building of community where all can live in peace and harmony.

The ERB programme as outlined in the document is like an alternative religion, "composed" by the state and thrust upon the schools making extra work for our very hardworking primary teachers. Rather than being objective and pluralistic it undermines religious freedom.

In denominational schools, where Religion will be taught, it seems that this programme will also have to be provided. Surely it could be very confusing for young children in these schools. It would also seem like an impossibility for children to be able to view all beliefs through secular or atheistic eyes. It is difficult to see how a completely secularist approach to faith could be made compatible with the vision of the patrons in denominational schools. The addition of this programme in denominational schools will put added pressure on already overloaded timetables. It would be totally unacceptable that it would encroach on the time allocated to Religious Education.

The proposed knowledge about religions does not include belief or practice. Learning about religion without lived experience or practice or commitment does not help young people in their search for meaning in life or ground them in the reality of life.

The ERBE programme could deprive our young people of the riches of faith in God. This country has a rich Christian tradition which has enhanced the lives of people throughout the ages. It would be sad if our Christian heritage was undercut by a programme that may have more to do with politics than religion. It is vital that we hold on to what is good in our Primary Schools and treasure the place of a lived faith in these communities. The experience of ritual, liturgy, prayer enhances the lives of children and is important for their development but does not have any place in the ERB programme. Involving children in ritual, liturgy and prayer develops many other skills and offers many opportunities for cross curricular links with music, drama, literacy, numeracy, history and geography. Children also get experience of group work, presentation skills, and grow in self-confidence and awareness.

Every child has a right to a religious education programme. While the ERBE programme may meet the needs of non-denominational schools, it is no substitute for religious education. Invoking the name of God, those who fought in 1916 gave their lives that we might have freedom. It is my hope that we use this freedom well, that we are not the generation that are instrumental in denying God at the heart of our world and robbing our future generations of the awareness that they are always loved by God.

I have no doubt that the new Religious Education Programme "Grow in Love" will enrich the lives of our children in our Catholic Schools and it is vital that this programme continue in our Catholic Schools. The new ERB programme should be optional if Boards of Management decide to adapt it according to their schools' needs.



Home

Contributor

Whitegate NS Midleton



Cover Page for Written Submissions

To: FAD-ERB and Ethics Consultation,
National Council of Curriculum and Assessment,
11, Fitzwilliam Square,
Dublin 2

Respondent Details:

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Address: Whitegate NS,
Whitegate, Midleton, Co. Cork P25 1062
Telephone: 0214661622 0876281949
Email: whitegate@eircom.net
Date: 28/3/16

This submission is made:

- on my own behalf (Personal)
- as Principal / Teacher in school
- as Parent/Guardian
- on behalf of Board of Management

Please send submissions to: FAD-ERB and Ethics Consultation, National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 11, Fitzwilliam Square, Dublin 2

Submission begins on following page.

Scoil Cholmáin/ Whitegate NS
Uimhir Rolla 11992i

*Whitegate,
Milltown,
Co. Cork,
P25 A062*

*V. Rev Canon. Denis Kelleher, P.P., Chairperson
Kay Foley, Principal
Fón 0214661622/ Faxe 0214662711
Riombhpost whitgatems@eircom.net
Idirlíon www.scoilcholmain.ie*

Monday, 28th March, 2016

Re: Response to the Consultation on ERB and Ethics

A Chara,

The following is the submission of the BOM in response to the consultation on ERB and Ethics.

Our school, Whitegate NS 11992i is a catholic co educational primary school. Our school is a four teacher school with a Teaching Principal.

Catholic Education is at the heart of our school. We view our children as history makers in their own right, creating their own story and we work to provide an appropriate education. We are guided by the motif of the Resurrection, offering a second chance, a new beginning at all junctures. The word Catholic, *Latin: kate*, etymologically implies inclusion. We strive to respect and accommodate the diversity inherent in all our students, staff and in our whole school community.

In terms of the proposed new curriculum of ERB and Ethics we make the following observations.

The linkage of ERB and Ethics with the four themes of *Aistear*, Identity and Belonging, Exploring and Thinking, Communicating and Well Being, the areas of the Primary Curriculum, SPHE and SESE (History and Geography) and with Religious Education are already established and do not require another discrete curricular area contributing to curricular overload, fatigue and apathy.

As a Catholic school we are already committed to inter-religious dialogue and our society reflects this need. This matter is addressed on Enrolment to our school and discussed openly then and on an ongoing basis with our parents/ carer cohort of other faiths and none and with our parents/ carers of Catholic faith in terms of faith formation activities, sacramental preparation and participation and parish based activities. The dynamic in Irish Society of movement from a predominately Catholic religious perspective to a more pluralist dimension has led to a productive discussion on these issues and has emphasized the need for recognition of denominational education defined by its own individual ethos and characteristic spirit.

We make provision for inter cultural and inter religious awareness through our current SESE, SPHE, Arts, Language and Religious programmes at all levels.

Every effort is undertaken to enrich and develop our children's understanding of the world in which they find themselves and to establish the life skills to benefit their lifelong learning. We perceive the proposed ERB and Ethics Curriculum to have more in common with intercultural and interreligious matters than our understanding of an all encompassing religious education in the context of a Catholic school.

Ethics underpins several of our school policies in terms of Anti Bullying, Dignity at Work, reference to the Teachers' Code of Conduct, SNA and SEN Provision, Use of agreed Disciplinary Procedures and the School Code of Conduct and indeed the day to day workings of the school.

Those seeking a Catholic education who attend our school have every right to witness their faith through daily prayer, an active acknowledgement of the religious calendar, of sacramental preparation and an appreciation of God's Creation. We make provision for those who do not wish to participate in a spirit of mutual respect and dignity.

The faith formation aspect of Catholic schools involves the school community at its widest point of influence. Grandparents and extended family participate in the sacramental highpoints and also in the celebration of Catholic Schools' Week as well as at Advent, Christmas and Easter. School community masses are inclusive of many who would otherwise have no link with their local school or sometimes with younger generations. Our school celebrates a Pet Week in and around 4th October to highlight the story of Francis of Assisi as well as the role of responsible pet ownership. Each school interprets its ethos in terms of its own particular story.

We as a Board of Management do not accept the requirement for a distinct ERB and Ethics Curriculum. The efforts made by all schools to acknowledge and engage in meaningful dialogue with the diversity inherent in contemporary Irish society have prompted this proposed curricular inclusion and accommodated these acknowledged needs through curricular innovation and a renewed and creative perspective on the meaning of an inclusive education.

We appreciate your consideration of our submission.

Le déca-métri.



Kay Foley, Secretary to the BOM of Whitegate NS 119921

Principal



Home

Contributor

Aidan Hart

Dear Sir/Madam,

you might find my article on Religious Education in Catholic Schools and the role of multi-faith Religious Education pertinent to your enquiry, to which I am happy to contribute.

I am a retired inspector of the N. Ireland Department of Education and Training and its first inspector of Religious Education.

The article is hosted on the Association of Catholics in Ireland website. The link is;

<http://www.acireland.ie/faith-formation-the-role-of-home-parish-and-school/>

kind regards,

Aidan Hart

