

**Diocese of Killaloe.**  
**Post-Primary Catechetics.**  
**Diocesan Advisor for Religious Education.**  
**Annual Report 2024 -2025.**

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## **1. The Role of the Diocesan Advisor**

The Role of the Diocesan Advisor is detailed in the Irish Bishops' Conference publication of 2013 'The Role of the Diocesan Advisor for Post-Primary Religious Education'.

It covers the following main areas:

**School Visits:** Regular visits to build trust with the Religious Education Team, offer resources, and meet with school leaders.

**Engaging with Schools and Partners:** Liaising with Religious Education Teachers, Principals, Chaplains, and keeping the local Bishop informed.

**Organising In-services:** Annual and local in-services for Religious Education Teachers, including retreats and prayer days.

**Developing Links:** Promoting interaction between home, school, and parish.

**Evaluation of RE:** Ensuring adequate timetabling and resourcing of Religious Education classes and retreats.

**Resource Gathering:** Informing schools about the best available resources for Religious Education Syllabi/Subject Specifications and Faith Formation.

**National Association of Post-Primary Diocesan Advisors (NAPPDA):** Supporting professional development and policy implementation for Religious Education.

The Code of Canon Law is clear that bishops have a responsibility in relation to Religious Education which is not just confined to Catholic schools.

Regarding the visitation of timetabled Religious Education classes, no classes were visited by the Diocesan Advisor in the 2024-2025 school year. Where oratories, prayer rooms, sacred spaces and chaplains' offices were in existence the Diocesan Advisor visited or viewed these when invited to do so. These facilities were evident from a very good to excellent extent in all the schools visited to date. Of the 21 Post-Primary Schools in the Diocese of Killaloe 16 have been visited to date. Of these 16, the Diocesan Advisor met with the School Principal in 13 of these schools, with the Deputy-Principal in 2 of these schools and in 1 school neither of the senior management team were available at the time of visitation.

In line with good practice the Diocesan Advisor is a registered teacher whose Garda Vetting is current and has attended child safeguarding training with the Diocese of Killaloe.

## **2. Context.**

In order to appreciate the context in schools and society in which the Diocesan Advisor works I think it important for the purposes of understanding what is happening in schools regarding Religious Education to give some background and information regarding recent research findings that illustrate the importance of the work of the Diocesan Advisor.

The Diocesan Advisor is operating in an environment within schools whereby the personal religious faith and practice of teachers, and indeed, other stakeholders, is diminishing.

In Ireland, the Diocesan Advisor is a person appointed by the local bishop(s) to act in the name of the Catholic Church in relation to the support of Catholic faith in schools within the diocese. The study 'Identity, Ambiguity, and Professionalism: Dilemmas for the Diocesan Advisor in the Republic of Ireland ' by PJ Sexton and Catherine McCormack, states that there is also a requirement to "evaluate Religious Education". The 2013 handbook referenced earlier states that the evaluation should recognise the strengths of a school's religious education programme and view any shortcomings in the context of a willingness to assist the school's authorities (p11). There is no requirement to inspect any aspect of the school's Catholicity, however. The Diocesan Advisor may also be involved in the recruitment and selection of Religious Education Teachers and School Chaplains.

The GRACE report states that the role of Diocesan Advisors be reassessed with a view to their being more proactive in ensuring that the Catholic ethos of schools is being upheld, that Religious Education and the statutory allocation of time is provided, and that faith formation is provided for all. Diocesan Advisors are also tasked with exercising a training and support role (IEC 2010, p.198).

In the Post-Primary Schools involved in the GRACE Research Non-examination Senior Cycle Religious Education (SCRE) is reported as 'directionless, lacking standards, support and oversight'. 79 per cent of those who teach RE in Catholic secondary schools

hold a degree or equivalent in RE. Qualitative evidence emerged of a lack of standards, lack of support, and lack of oversight of SCRE. Participants identified focus on the quality and oversight of RE as a priority for patrons and trusts.

There has in recent years been a focus on the development of ethos in the different school sectors and defining the identity of schools as Catholic, Multi-denominational etc. In this context the various patrons' programmes whether religious or secular in nature and content take on a new significance.

### **3. Outline of School Visits.**

As the Diocesan Advisor has only been in the role for 12 months it was deemed appropriate to conduct school visits in a listening and supportive spirit. The agreement of the Directors of Schools in Limerick and Clare ETB and Tipperary ETB was sought to visit the ETB Schools before commencing visits and all 21 Post-Primary School Principals were written to in order to seek their co-operation with a school visit prior to commencing them. In each visit the concerns of the School Management and the School Chaplains and Teachers of Religious Education were listened to and feedback on the support of the Diocese and possible future interaction was asked for. Ideas regarding good practice and the sharing of resources took place. Meetings were mostly held with the whole Religious Education Team and School Chaplain with the Principal also present and, in some cases, where it was appropriate to do so, meetings with the School Chaplain and Principal were held immediately after meeting the Team. In 1 case a School Ethos Co-ordinator (ETB Sector) attended the meeting and in another a telephone follow-up call took place with a School Ethos Co-ordinator (Catholic School Sector). The provision for Religious Education was outlined in all schools and areas for further development of the subject were discussed. In several cases the importance of relationships with the wider school community were discussed and how they impacted the day-to-day reality of Religious Education in the classroom setting. Resources, recruitment and subject specific areas of concern were highlighted also. School Ethos and current issues in Religious Education were discussed. The impact of other subject areas on the provision of Religious Education arose repeatedly on all the visits. The acquisition of appropriate

resources for Religious Education, professional development opportunities for School Chaplains and Religious Education Teachers as well as self-care were recurring issues.

The increasing diversity of the student population in the secondary schools and how to accommodate them and give them due respect while promoting school ethos was also discussed throughout the school visits.

#### **4. Strengths Noted.**

The commitment of school management to Religious Education was strong and evident in all the schools the Diocesan Advisor visited. Likewise, the commitment of Religious Education Teachers to the teaching of Religious Education and the values it promotes was strong. Where the school had a Chaplain in situ the quality of services provided by the Chaplain were excellent. There were also some good connections to chaplaincy services in association with the local parish in some of the schools visited. In schools that follow the Catholic Ethos there were noticeable signs that these schools were striving to embrace the identity of a Catholic School. In all the schools visited there was an identifiable commitment to ethos. In some schools an Ethos Co-ordinator was appointed to promote ethos. In schools where Religious Education was being taught as an exam subject the diligence of the teachers involved is commendable. In all the schools visited the promotion of Religious Education within the school was at the core of the teachers' commitment to their subject. There were some very good examples of the provision of retreats. Likewise, there were several examples of schools' involvement in initiatives such as the JP2 Awards, Faith Friends, Trips to Places of Pilgrimage and Religious Significance e.g. Knock, Taizé, Social Justice Projects, Inter-Generational Projects, Mission Awareness, St. Vincent de Paul fundraising, World Youth Day Participation, etc.

Teachers worked collaboratively in many instances either in curriculum delivery or through extra-curricular activities, liturgies, parish projects and in addressing the needs of their students. In all the schools visited there was a noticeable commitment to the needs and care of students. There was a discernible characteristic of building positive relationships with students evident in all the

schools visited. There was an acute awareness of local needs and how these impact on the work of teachers in the Religious Education classroom and by School Chaplains.

Where time allowed teachers used prayer, meditation, retreats, liturgies, etc. to complement their work with the students and address the faith formation aspect of their work where appropriate. The diligence of teachers in covering classroom or curricular material was evident and is highly commendable. The use of facilities such as prayer rooms, outdoor stations of the cross, memorial gardens and benches etc. was noticeable and are essential to the work of religious education and faith formation and the promotion of school ethos. There were several examples of print rich environments in the schools across the diocese and particularly the use of sacred or contemplative spaces to enhance the school environment and the promotion of religious education in the school. Schools were complimentary of the support they received from their School Trust where this applied. There was a noticeably strong desire, in all the schools visited, to raise the subject profile of Religious Education.

## **5. Areas of Concern.**

Some of the most notable areas of concern were the impact that Senior Cycle SPHE/RSE will have on the timetabling of Senior Cycle Religious Education and in all schools the cost-of-living crisis is having a noticeable effect on the cost of providing retreats and transport. Principals and teachers described the timetabling pressure at Senior Cycle in many instances. The availability and recruitment of qualified staff and school chaplains is also an urgent and ongoing concern. In some schools the addition of the ETB patron's programme IMBVE would have to be considered in association with the provision of Religious Education at Junior Cycle Level. For schools providing JCRE teachers commented on what they described as the vague and challenging language of the exam, the challenging nature of it for weaker students and the length of the course. Despite these concerns some schools were open to the provision of LCRE but again the availability of the resources to provide for it were uncertain.

The pressure that other areas of the curriculum were placing on the timetabling, resourcing and support for Religious Education and Chaplaincy services was also having a noticeable impact on facilities such as prayer rooms, oratories, sacred spaces, retreat provision, text and resource provision etc. Teachers reported their anxiety around being able to keep and improve on current facilities, resources, retreat provision etc. In schools with no Chaplain the pressure on school management and teachers to meet the needs of students and provide retreats, student support, etc. was noticeably greater and very challenging. The impact of local social issues in the community are having a noticeable effect on the work of teachers of religious education in all schools as is the increasing diverse nature of the school population. Issues such as homelessness, substance abuse, poverty, etc. were highlighted.

Concern was also expressed about the needs of newly qualified teachers of Religious Education. In conjunction with this the whole area of Non-exam Senior Cycle Religious Education in terms of Resources, Textbooks and Methodology needs urgent attention. Teachers also have concerns about LCRE Coursework and the digital submission of it. They report that current resources for Section B + C of the LCRE Syllabus are outdated and in need of modernisation. They are also concerned about meeting the required level of content to cover in Senior Cycle Religious Education, whether exam or non-exam. Supervision for Chaplains has declined following the recent Covid pandemic and needs to become a regular feature of the supports that School Chaplains need to be able to fulfil their remit. Teachers would welcome more support for Professional Development opportunities and meeting the expense of them.

Teachers were anxious to maintain the Catholic Ethos of schools where this is the ethos while coping with the diversity of the school population and to remain respectful of other worldviews at the same time.

In one school being designated a DEIS School would contribute enormously to their work given their socio-economic setting and have a great impact on the work of the Chaplain and school services, but it was not forthcoming.



## **6. Visit Outcomes.**

Where it was appropriate and in keeping with his remit the Diocesan Advisor reported all concerns to the diocesan authorities. He also asked the executive of the NAPPDA to report the concerns in relation to SPHE Provision and Religious Education at Senior Cycle to the relevant authorities e.g. Trusts, Bishops' Conference etc. The cost of retreats and transport was researched but unfortunately the Diocese does not have the administrative structures or resources to centralise the provision of or costs of these services. It was however recommended to the Diocese for parishes to support the resourcing of retreats etc. where finances allow either on a once off or continuous bases. The issue of the timetabling of Religious Education was discussed with school management and reported to the Diocesan authorities. The Diocesan Advisor will continue to provide resources for Religious Education and will endeavour to concentrate more on Senior Cycle RE and current world issues as these were brought to his attention. It is intended by the diocese to provide an additional day for Senior Cycle CPD. Where it was appropriate to do so the Diocesan Advisor asked schools to maintain and build on their Retreat Provision gradually. Retreat provision undoubtedly suffered due to the Covid pandemic.

## **7. Challenges for The Diocese to Consider.**

### **A. Timetabling and Curricular Provision for Religious Education.**

Given the concerns being expressed by school management, teachers and chaplains about the curricular provision and timetabling of Religious Education and the pressure this is facing from many other areas, particularly from Senior Cycle SPHE, in the coming school year, the Diocese should consider engaging in further discussions with the relevant authorities be that Dept. Of Education, Trust Bodies, Bishops Conference, ETBs etc. about protecting the provision of religious education. In fact, it is a serious and genuine concern that increasingly class periods will be taken from Religious Education and will be cut to a bare minimum where it means that agreements with the relevant bodies that are in existence will not be maintained and the provision of Religious Education could become

increasingly non-existent. For instance, under the provisions of Circular 7/79 and the Model Agreements of Designated Community Colleges and the Deeds of Trust of Community Schools the ETB has responsibility to provide 'religious instruction' in Vocational Schools, Community Colleges and Community Schools and therefore schools should have the resources to provide for Religious Education at both Junior and Senior Cycle. Likewise, the provision of chaplaincy services is provided for in the 'Contracts for Chaplains' as agreed by the ETBI and the Irish Bishops' Conference. In the case of comprehensive and community schools, the duties for chaplains are outlined by contracts drawn up by the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools.

**B. Availability and Recruitment of Qualified Staff and Chaplains.**

The Diocese should consider entering discussions with the education partners concerning this issue. It is particularly difficult to recruit chaplains and so the training and recruitment of chaplains should be discussed with third level providers of chaplaincy courses to see how the Diocese might aid the recruitment of students and personnel into chaplaincy studies. Likewise, the encouragement of students to undertake studies in theology, religious studies and religious education should be promoted by the Diocese, Schools, Chaplains, Teachers of R.E. and local parishes.

**C. Faith Formation.**

Where it is appropriate to do so, schools should consider developing a policy on faith formation in addition to policies and curricular plans on religious education and chaplaincy. The Diocese could explore how best to assist schools with this.

**D. Facilities and Resources.**

The Diocese should consider engaging with the relevant authorities to ensure that all schools have a prayer room/oratory/reflection room, sacred space and the resources needed, including textbooks, reference books, sacred texts, ICT, Audio-visual etc. to support the teaching and learning of religious education.

In addition, all schools should be encouraged to hold retreats and/or other relevant learning experiences to enhance the provision of religious education and maintain a good profile for the subject in each school setting.

**E. Ensuring Catholic Ethos is being upheld.**

The Diocese should discuss with the schools in the Diocese how best to support them in fulfilling their remit under school ethos. While directly concerned about schools that follow the Catholic Ethos the needs of students from the Roman Catholic Tradition in non-Catholic schools need to be considered also. As School Trusts are also primarily concerned with ethos and school governance any duplication of roles needs to be discussed.

**F. Training and Support Role of the Diocesan Advisor.**

The Diocese should explore how the Diocesan Advisor can develop this training and support role through further and future initiatives. Currently, the Diocesan Advisor provides monthly resources to all 21 schools in the Diocese, organises an annual CPD Day and visits schools. He will continue to do so and engage with the schools to identify needs and respond to them appropriately and as resources allow.

**G. Non-exam Senior Cycle RE.**

It is intended to hold a CPD Day devoted to this in the 2025-26 school year.

**H. Quality and oversight of RE.**

As classroom visits have not taken place it is difficult to comment on the quality of the provision of religious education. Therefore, this report only comments on the evidence of this that could be ascertained from the time spent talking to school management, teachers and chaplains during school visits.

**I. Professional Development Opportunities.**

The Diocese should consider how it can support teachers and chaplains in their pursuance of professional development opportunities, whether that is further and post-graduate studies or in the case of school chaplains, supervision.

#### **J. Local Parish Support.**

Throughout the school visits, school management, teachers and chaplains were grateful for and consistently acknowledged the support of the local parish clergy and communities. The diocese should encourage clergy, therefore, to visit the schools throughout the school year particularly those schools that do not have the services of a chaplain in situ. Also, parishes might consider assisting in the provision of liturgies, retreats, pilgrimages and outings etc. These can be done on a local and cost-effective bases. Whilst acknowledging the declining age profile and availability of clergy and their increased workload, it is an opportune time to provide positive faith experiences to young people today and to develop constructive relationships between schools and parishes.

#### **K. DEIS Status.**

The Diocese might consider if it is appropriate for it to support a school's application for DEIS Status and how it might do so?

### **8. National Association of Post-Primary Diocesan Advisors. (NAPPDA).**

NAPPDA stands for the National Association of Post Primary Diocesan Advisers.

Its role includes:

Professional Development: Supporting the ongoing professional development of religious education (RE) teachers.

Policy Implementation: Assisting in the implementation of policies related to religious education.

Resource Sharing: Facilitating the sharing of resources and best practices among RE teachers.

Networking: Promoting collaboration and networking among diocesan advisers and RE teachers.

The Diocesan Advisor is a member of this association and has attended its meetings and represented the Diocese of Killaloe on this body since his appointment in April 2024.

## **9. Youth Ministry.**

While the role of the Diocesan Advisor is primarily concerned with the 21 post-primary schools in the diocese he has, with the assistance of others, compiled a Youth Survey which will be launched at the Annual CPD Day for Chaplains and Religious Education Teachers on September 25<sup>th</sup> next. There will be an information session and forum for those involved in Youth Ministry in the Diocese on September 24<sup>th</sup> to discuss advancing initiatives in the Diocese in association with Alpha Ireland.

## **10. School Visits Schedule 2025.**

- January 14th 2 p.m.  
St. Joseph's Secondary School, Spanish Point, Co. Clare.
- January 20th 9.40 a.m. St. Flannan's College Ennis, Co. Clare.  
12.30 p.m. St. Joseph's Secondary School, Tulla, Co. Clare.
- January 27th 1.40 p.m. Borrisokane Community College, Co. Tipperary.
- January 28th 11.55 a.m.  
St. Caimin's Community School, Shannon, Co. Clare.
- February 5th 12.30 p.m. Nenagh College, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary.  
2.00 p.m. Roscrea Community College, Roscrea, Co. Tipperary.
- February 6th 10.15 a.m. Coláiste Mhuire, Ennis, Co. Clare.
- February 13th 11 a.m. Cistercian College Roscrea.
- February 24th 11 a.m.  
St. Mary's Secondary School, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary.
- February 25th St. John Bosco Community College, Kildysart, Co. Clare.
- March 6th 11.10 a.m. Kilrush Community School, Kilrush, Co. Clare.
- March 20th 11.20 a.m. to 1.20 p.m.  
St. Brendan's Community School, Birr, Co. Offaly.
- March 24th 12.20 p.m.  
St. Joseph's C.B.S. Secondary School, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary.
- May 7<sup>th</sup> 12.30 p.m. to 1.30 p.m.  
St. Patrick's Comprehensive School, Shannon, Co. Clare.
- May 13<sup>th</sup> 12.30 p.m. to 1.30 p.m. Rice College, Ennis, Co. Clare.

- **Schools To Be Visited September 2025.**
- Ennis Community College. Ennis, Co. Clare.
- St. Michael's Community College, Kilmihil, Co. Clare.
- St. Joseph's Community College, Kilkee, Co. Clare.
- St. Anne's Community College, Killaloe , Co. Clare.
- Scariff Community College, Scariff, Co. Clare.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

Brendan O' Brien.

Diocesan Advisor Religious Education Post-Primary.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

+Fintan Monahan.

Bishop of Killaloe.