**Council for Catholic Maintained Schools**

**Policy: The requirement for teachers in Catholic Maintained Primary and Nursery Schools to hold a recognised Teachers’ Certificate in Religious Education**

**Context**

1. Since the 1930s when Protestant Church based schools transferred to the state all schools have had a discretion to appoint principals on the basis of their faith. This position was confirmed by legislation in 1976. As a consequence all faith based schools have been able, at least in theory, to recruit and select staff on the grounds of Religious belief. In legislative terms, this is currently provided for through what has commonly known as the teachers’ exemption to Fair Employment and Treatment Order 1998.
2. The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools has never considered the requirement nor sought to use this ‘exemption’ in order to favour one section of the community over another in the appointment of teachers. Indeed, Council has been freely quoted in the recent past as viewing the very notion of religious discrimination of any type, including in the employment of its teachers, as fundamentally abhorrent.
3. The CCMS has always chosen instead to rely on a teacher’s professional competence and a recognised Teacher’s Certificate in Religious Education, which is available as a programme of study to all potential teachers, as a measure of that teacher’s suitability to work in a Catholic maintained primary or nursery school.
4. The requirement to hold the Certificate has been in existence for many years and its origins can be traced back to the early establishment of Catholic schools. It has always been regarded as a genuine professional occupational requirement in Catholic schools which seek to educate children within the framework of a distinctive philosophy and associated set of values. However, it is important to stress at the outset that a teacher need not be a practising Catholic to have accessed, studied or acquired the Certificate, or to teach in a Catholic maintained school.

**The Nature and Purpose of Catholic Education**

1. In addition to taking into account a child’s, spiritual, moral and religious need, Catholic education specifically enables the child to develop spiritual and moral values and to come to a knowledge of God. This is infused in the daily working practices of the school and specifically through the taught religious education element of the curriculum.
2. In Catholic Schools, the Religious Education Progamme is taught in a manner that complements other curricular areas such as History, Geography, Science, Visual/Art, Music, Drama, Literature and PHE. It also seeks to acquaint pupils with the inclusive, ecumenical and interreligious perspectives of the Second Vatican Council.
3. In this way the Religious Education Programme in Catholic schools plays a pivotal role in the integration of all learning in the primary school curriculum by promoting the holistic development of pupils; ethically; spiritually; religiously.
4. Catholic education seeks to promote knowledge and understanding of the Catholic faith tradition while it simultaneously acknowledges, welcomes and accommodates pupils of other faiths and other traditions. The Catholic school is committed to the promotion of equality, respect and inclusivity as well as serving, in particular, the needs of those on the margins of society. It also recognises that faith is always a free act and cannot be imposed. In addition it respects the right of every child to religious freedom and choice, which has its foundation in the dignity of the human person. The Catholic school particularly acknowledges that parents are the primary educators and therefore seeks to respect their wishes.
5. Under the Northern Ireland Curriculum, the content of the curriculum for Religious Education remains the responsibility of the different Church authorities or patron bodies. In Catholic schools Religious Education integrates the many branches of learning within the NI Curriculum into a multi-coloured mosaic. Religious Education and ethical formation contributes to the integrated learning that is encouraged across the curriculum for Primary school children. It embraces diversity as a Christian and educational value; it fosters respect for differences in culture and religion on the basis of the dignity of every human being, and it explicitly promotes a spirit of fairness, a concern for all who are in need, and the value of forgiveness in relationships.

**The Nature and Content of the Teachers’ Certificate in Religious Education**

1. It is with all of the above in mind, that the Teachers’ Certificate in Religious Education is regarded by the CCMS and the Trustees of Catholic Schools as an essential measure of a teacher’s commitment to the underlying ethos of specifically Catholic schools and of their professional suitability to work in a Catholic maintained primary or nursery school and in some circumstances for some post primary schools.
2. Currently, the Certificate programmes are validated and ‘Recognised’ by the Episcopal Conference. All must offer pre-service and qualified teachers foundational knowledge and skills for communicating the Catholic faith to children in Primary schools. These programmes enable schools and their teachers to address the many spiritual and religious opportunities and challenges facing pupils in contemporary Ireland.
3. *There are currently two routes to the acquisition of a Recognised Teacher’s Certificate in Religious Education:*

**As an Undergraduate**

For a teacher with an initial teacher education degree to be recognised to teach in a Catholic school they should have 120 contact hours\* in the area of Religious Education, to include an exploration of Catechesis and Catholic Religious Education, (hours of Religious or Theological subjects, in the B.Ed. or other degree), and of Religious or Theological Studies (taken in an additional Certificate). The prescribed areas for study include:

**As a Postgraduate**

For postgraduate students to be recognised to teach in Catholic schools in Ireland they should have 50 contact hours\* at a postgraduate level in the area of Religious Education, to include exploration of Catechesis and Catholic Religious Education and Religious or Theological Studies (hours of Religious or Theological subjects, in the Graduate Diploma or other degree). Areas to be studied should include:

**Recognised Providers**

1. Courses that lead to the acquisition of the Teachers’ Certificate in Religious Education are available through a wide variety of approved providers and importantly the Certificate itself is open for all to obtain irrespective of their religious backgrounds or beliefs.
2. The Catechetics Council currently recognises the following providers of this programme in Religious Education in Northern Ireland.
3. To ensure that the highest academic standards prevail, all Certificate programmes are reviewed by suitably qualified external examiners, appointed in accordance with the academic procedures in each of the respective Colleges. In the case of new or reaccredited programmes, an independent assessor, nominated by the Catechetical Council, should be consulted and may advise on changes to ensure conformity with the requirements of this document. The external assessor reports to the Catechetics Council on completion of the consultation.
4. Other Institutions wishing to apply for recognition of their programmes, are required to send details of their programmes (course outlines, learning outcomes, contact hours, and bibliographies etc) to the Council for Catechetics of the Irish Episcopal Conference.
5. It is envisaged that this Certificate should eventually be located on Level 7 of the NQAI framework, Special Purpose Certificate Award (24-30 Credits) recognising the professional, developmental and occupationally related nature of the Certificate.

**CCMS Policy**

1. In April 2013, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools endorsed a major change in policy which will allow any potentially redundant teacher from any sector to be redeployed into a Catholic maintained primary or nursery school without first having obtained a Teachers’ Certificate in Religious Education (Appendix 1). That redeployment opportunity will however remain subject to a commitment that the teacher will source and obtain the Certificate within a reasonable period of time, which the CCMS has proposed, would be three years.
2. Potential redeployed teachers will be given an opportunity to discuss and understand the faith based nature of the Catholic Education system so that they can be satisfied that they would be content to work in the sector. They will be offered an opportunity to demonstrate a commitment to which will in essence be measured by the teacher signing up to an undertaking that they will gain the Teachers’ Certificate in Religious Education within three years from the date of redeployment.
3. This requirement would be reflected in their contracts of employment. Failure to have secured the Certificate within a reasonable period of time, without good cause that would have prevented it, will lead to the termination of their contracts of employment.
4. This policy change is a positive and engaging step which recognises that there should be no situation in which valued teachers, from other sectors or indeed from our Catholic Post Primary Schools would face compulsory redundancy as a consequence of not having pre-obtained the Teachers’ Certificate in Religious Education. It also seeks to build on the collaborative approaches to redundancy management and teacher redeployment that have been developed between the various employers and the Trade Unions over recent years. That is an issue which will become increasingly important as all school sectors progress towards a more cohesive approach to Area Based Planning in the coming months and years.
5. At this moment in time, there is no relaxation on the requirement for any other teachers seeking their first or any teaching post in a Catholic maintained primary or nursery school to hold the Teachers’ Certificate in Religious Education by the time of taking up post.
6. However, alongside the already agreed policy change, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, as part of its own Equality Scheme, will, over coming weeks, be conducting an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) of the requirement, this recent policy change, and a range of other potential mitigations to ensure that the final policy requirement will not be regarded as an impediment to gaining employment in a Catholic school. It may well be the case that the outcomes of that review will lead to other policy changes, for example an extension of the variation agreed recently in respect to any teachers seeking employment in a Catholic maintained primary or nursery school.



**CCMS Circular 2013 / 06**

**12 April 2013**

**To: Chairs of Boards of Governors and**

 **Principals of Catholic Maintained Schools**

**Re: Teachers’ certificate in religious education**

Dear Principal

You will have noticed from today’s press coverage that the members of the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, yesterday agreed a formal amendment to its current policy that all teachers seeking appointment to a Catholic maintained primary school must hold, by date of appointment, a Teachers Certificate in Religious Education. That amendment now enables all teachers facing redundancy irrespective of their perceived religious backgrounds or the sectors in which they currently work, to be considered for immediate redeployment into a Catholic maintained school, subject to a demonstrable commitment to the faith based nature of the Catholic Education System. If judged suitable for redeployment, those teachers will be required to obtain the Certificate within a reasonable period of time, which the Council has judged to be three years.

This is a significant development for the Catholic Maintained Sector and one which seeks to build on the collaborative approaches to redundancy management and teacher redeployment that have been developed between the various employers and the Trade Unions over recent years. This is an issue which will become increasingly important as we progress towards a more cohesive approach to Area Based Planning.

The Council for Catholic Maintained Schools views this development as a positive and engaging step which recognises that there should be no situation in which valued teachers, from other sectors or indeed from our Catholic Post Primary Schools would face compulsory redundancy as a consequence of not having pre-obtained the Teachers’ Certificate in Religious Education.

Alongside this policy change, Council has initiated a dialogue with the Senior Trustees of Catholic Schools and with St Mary’s University College with a view to reviewing and validating the range of courses currently approved for this purpose and with a view to developing new and equitable pathways to acquiring a meaningful certificate which Council regards as being a necessary professional qualification for those committed to teaching in a Catholic Maintained Primary or Nursery School.

Finally, over the coming weeks, the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, as part of its own Equality Scheme, will be conducting an Equality Impact Assessment of the requirement, this recent policy change, and, a range of other potential mitigations to ensure that the final policy requirement will not be regarded as an impediment to gaining employment in a Catholic school.

Essentially, Council regards this latest change as a positive policy development which reflects the already diverse nature of the staff and pupil composition of our schools. It is a change that reflects the positive steps being made towards a shared society and it prepares Catholic schools for a future in which there will be a single Employing Authority for all teachers.

**Yours sincerely**

**Eugene O’Neill**

**Head of Human Resources, Finance and Governance**