



## Circular Letter 0062/2018

**To: THE MANAGEMENT AUTHORITIES OF  
COMMUNITY AND ETB POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

### **Clarification in respect of Section 5 of Circular 0013/2018 in relation to the NCCA Religious Education syllabus and religious instruction**

#### **1. Introduction**

The purpose of this circular is to make clear the different requirements for those students who are studying the NCCA Religious Education syllabus\* and those who elect to join Religious Instruction classes where the school they attend offers to provide Religious Instruction in accordance with the rites and practices of a particular religious denomination. [This circular should be read in conjunction with Circular 0013/2018.](#)

#### **2. Clarification of Section 5 of Circular 0013/2018**

Circular Letter 0013/2018 sets out a new approach to the arrangements for religious instruction and worship in certain post-primary schools. The key change identified in that circular was that those who did not want religious instruction in line with the requirements of any particular religion should be timetabled for tuition rather than address their withdrawal by providing supervised study or other activities.

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\*This refers to the NCCA Religious Education syllabuses for both Junior and Senior cycle. A new NCCA Junior Cycle Religious Education Specification will be introduced from September 2019 and will replace the current NCCA Religious Education Junior Certificate Syllabus.

In section 5 of that circular it was stated that the NCCA Religious Education curriculum at either Junior or Senior cycle level also serves the religious instruction requirements of the Catholic church and that where that is the case it is important that parents are made fully aware that the curriculum is not necessarily confined to learning about religions.

The NCCA-developed Religious Education Junior and Senior Cycle syllabuses, and the Religious Education specification for Junior Cycle, to be introduced in 2019, are intended for students of all faith backgrounds and none. The content prescribed in the syllabuses is intended to ensure that students are exposed to a broad range of religious traditions and to the non-religious interpretation of life. They do not provide religious instruction in any particular religious or faith tradition.

The Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference published guidelines for the faith formation and development of Catholic students which built on the content of the Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus 1999\* and the Leaving Certificate Religious Education Syllabus 2006\*\*. In addition, parental experience conveyed to the Department suggests that in some schools there has been a practice of delivering Catholic religious instruction within class periods where the NCCA Religious Education syllabus is timetabled.

The purpose of this circular is to eliminate any ambiguity about how Religious Education is delivered in schools and accordingly adjust the arrangements in the original circular where necessary.

### **3. Schools discretion in relation to Religious Education**

The Department does not require schools to include the NCCA-developed Religious Education syllabuses at Junior or Senior Cycle as mandatory subjects on their curriculum. Accordingly schools have discretion to determine if they provide the subject at all or if it is to be mandatory or optional in any particular class group or year.

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\*Guidelines for the faith formation and Development of Catholic Students: Junior Certificate Religious Education Syllabus (1999)

\*\*Catholic Bishop's Conference Framework document: Guidelines for the faith formation and Development of Catholic Students: Leaving Certificate Religious Education Syllabus R.E. & A Curriculum Framework for Senior Cycle (2006)

Religious Education, where it is offered by a school, must be delivered in the timetabled class periods without any religious instruction or worship of any religion

forming any part of class activity. This means that any practice or material that would introduce religious instruction or worship cannot be used in the future. Religious Education will be subject to inspection including its delivery according to this circular.

This clear separation of religious instruction from the NCCA Religious Education syllabus has the effect of ensuring that withdrawal does not arise for students studying the NCCA Religious Education syllabus where the school provides the subject as part of its normal range of subjects.

#### **4. Providing for religious instruction**

Where a school decides to offer religious instruction in line with the requirements of any particular individual religious denomination, it must not be associated with or integrated to any degree with the NCCA-developed Religion Education syllabus being provided in timetabled class periods. Such religious instruction must be provided as a discrete separate subject which will be external to the Department-approved NCCA Religious Education syllabus. Where the school is providing religious instruction having regard to the legal instruments created when the school was recognised, the school may provide the teaching resources from within the school's overall teacher allocation and the delivery must be in full class periods devoted exclusively to religious instruction.

Students should be provided with a place in any religious instruction class only where there has been a parental request for admission to the class. In accordance with Section 4 of Circular 0013/2018, parental/student choice must be established in relation to religious instruction at the outset of the school year and that choice replaces mandatory placement by the school in religious instruction classes and therefore eliminates any necessity for subsequent withdrawal from that class. On establishing parental choice at the outset of the school year, schools should also recognise the views of students on reaching the age of 18.

Following on the clarification in Section 2 above in respect of the Religious Education syllabuses which may form part of the normal range of subject choice that may be provided by a school, the approach outlined in Section 4 of Circular 0013/2018 of

parents seeking a withdrawal from the NCCA–developed Religious Education syllabus is no longer necessary.

## **5. GDPR requirements**

GDPR places an increased emphasis on transparency, accountability, and security standards for personal data. Schools should note that the clarification in section 2 about the content and delivery of the Department-approved NCCA Religious Education syllabus means that there should be no requirement for the school to seek information from parents or students about whether or not they are of any religion, and in section 4 of this circular it is a matter for a parent to come forward where a school is proposing to offer religious instruction rather than the school seeking information from parents about their religion.

## **6. Dissemination of Circular**

A copy of this circular should be provided to members of the board of management and the teaching staff of each school. This circular may be accessed on the Department of Education and Skills website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie). An Irish version of this circular is also available on the Department’s website. **7. Queries**

Queries in relation to this circular should be e-mailed to the Department at:

[schoolgovernance@education.gov.ie](mailto:schoolgovernance@education.gov.ie)

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5<sup>th</sup> October 2018