

# LSP Policy on Religious Expression

## Title

Policy on Religious Expression

## Introductory Statement

This policy was formulated in Spring 2011 as a collaborative exercise between the Ethos Committee, the Board of Management and the Limerick School Project community. A community meeting provided the opportunity for open discussion which, together with research on existing policies and practices in other Educate Together schools, fed into the drafting of this policy. The Policy on Religious Expression complements the Policy on Equality, and should be read in conjunction with it. The understanding of multi-denominational education is based on Educate Together's guiding principles ([www.educatetogether.ie](http://www.educatetogether.ie)).

## Rationale

This policy document was drawn up to ensure:

- That there is equality in religious expression for all children in the school;
- That religious expression by children/a group of children, for example, through dress, does not result in the exclusion of other children/groups of children in the school;
- That religious expression takes place in a context of mutual respect, appropriate to a multi-denominational school;
- That the principles of justice and equality for all are promoted in the school.

## Relationship to Characteristic Ethos of the School

Limerick School Project (LSP) is a multi-denominational school which endeavours to enable every pupil to participate actively in all school activities regardless of physical ability, gender, race, religion or learning ability. We also commit to preparing each and every pupil for life by promoting value and respect for all. The school mission statement promotes the spirit of inclusiveness and the principles of equality. Educate Together, the patron body of LSP, defines 'multi-denominational' as encompassing 'religious, atheist, humanist or personal creed' ([www.educatetogether.ie](http://www.educatetogether.ie)).

As an Educate Together school, LSP 'depends on parents who are happy to allow their children to explore and be exposed to different religious views and who do not regard it as their religious duty to seek to persuade others of their beliefs' ([www.educatetogether.ie](http://www.educatetogether.ie)). Within this context, the school teaches a core religious curriculum that promotes equal respect for children of all faiths and of no faith. The school makes available the school premises to any religious groups represented in the school to carry out denominational religious instruction out of school hours. Members of the school community agree that this is entirely extraneous to education

within the school, and that religious/spiritual guidance is the responsibility of parents/guardians and religious organisations.

## **Aims**

In addition to the aims of the Equality Policy, by introducing this policy the school aims to:

- Prepare our pupils for life in a multicultural, multid denominational and increasingly secular society and with an understanding of the value of religious diversity and pride in their own religion, atheism, humanism or personal creed;
- Give clarity with regard to the wearing of religious garments by pupils in the school;
- Ensure that children are not obliged to disclose their religion, humanism, atheism or personal creed and should not feel pressured to do so.
- Ensure that any sharing of knowledge about religion is purely of an informative nature, is set within the context of the Ethical Curriculum, and is not in any way proselytising.

## **Organisational Areas**

### **Staff:**

- Where appropriate and with the agreement of the child, teaching staff will use the wearing of religious garments as a proactive opportunity for a class to learn more about a particular religion in the context of the Ethical Curriculum, in particular, the Belief System strand.
- Teaching staff will make appropriate arrangements around a situation where a large number of children participate in a religious ceremony and wish to wear their religious garments to school in a context of sharing information about that ceremony.

### **Parental Involvement:**

- Parents are invited to participate in the classroom, by sharing their religious beliefs in an informative and non-proselytising way within the context of the Ethical Curriculum in their child's classroom, as deemed appropriate by the class teacher.
- The class teacher will use home-school communications to alert parents to topics being covered in the Ethical Curriculum in a particular school year to ensure that all parents and children have this opportunity.

### **Dress:**

- Children are free to wear clothing that expresses their religious or other identity, within a context of mutual respect, and where appropriate for activities that are being carried out that day, having regard for standard health and safety requirements.
- Children do not have to disclose their intention to wear garments that express their religious or other identity in advance or seek permission to do so.

- Garments and icons should be worn in a manner which is respectful of the beliefs and faith of other children and would not cause offence or potential exclusion to others.

### **Photographs:**

- Arrangements for photographing children in ceremonial attire worn for religious occasions are a matter for parents to arrange outside school hours.

### **Induction of New Pupils:**

- New Parents to the school are given an information pack which contains many policies, school rules and procedures, including the Policy on Religious Expression.

### **Induction of new Teaching/Non teaching staff:**

- New staff - and where practicable/necessary temporary staff - will be made aware of the Policy on Religious Expression through the established induction programme.

### **Ethical Curriculum:**

- As part of our Ethical Curriculum the pupils get an opportunity to gain an understanding of various religions, looking at symbolism, light, leaders, places of worship in various religions. Children and their parents may share their knowledge with classmates, in an informative and non-proselytising manner, under the direction of the class teacher.

### **Breach of policy:**

- Any pupil or group of pupils may be regarded as acting in breach of this policy by the deliberate wearing of garments or emblems in a manner that is disrespectful of the beliefs and faith of other children and would cause offence or potential exclusion to others. Where a teacher feels there is a breach it should be reported to the Principal. The Principal and Chairperson of the BOM will meet with the parent(s) / guardian(s) of the pupil(s) involved to explain the school's policy. Any further repeat instances by those involved will be dealt with under the School Policy on Discipline.

## **Success Criteria**

The success of this policy will be measured by:

- All pupils being given the opportunity to express their religion, humanism, atheism or other personal creed;
- All pupils and parents understanding and taking responsibility for this expression to take place in a context of mutual respect;
- Teaching staff and parental satisfaction with the upholding of the multid denominational ethos and respect for religious expression being promoted in the school.

## **Roles and Responsibility**

- The teaching staff: in alerting parents and pupils to topics being covered in the Ethical Curriculum; ensuring that religious expression in the classroom is an

opportunity for teaching tolerance and understanding; and making appropriate arrangements around a situation where a large number of children participate in a religious ceremony and wish to wear their religious garments to school in a context of sharing information about that ceremony.

- Parents and community: in supporting the policy, and in proactively availing of opportunities for parental involvement as outlined above.
- Board of management: in supporting the policy and in providing resources, if required.
- Ethos Committee: in monitoring and reviewing the operation of this policy.
- By agreeing to be a part of the school community (either as a pupil, member of staff, parent/guardian, visitor etc.) all members implicitly agree to respect the school ethos, which includes the policy on religious expression.

### **Implementation and Review**

A draft for the policy was circulated to the LSP community and returned to the Board of Management with recommendations for amendments. This policy is currently in operation and will be reviewed in Spring 2013.

### **Links to other policies**

This policy is linked to the Equality Policy and should be read in conjunction with it.

### **Ratification and Communication**

This policy was ratified by the Board of Management at a meeting on May 9<sup>th</sup> 2011. It is circulated to the parent body through the PTA and Ethos Committees and to the pupil body through the School Council. Copies of the policy are available through the school office, and also on the school website.