Loreto College

Religious Education

Policy Statement

Introduction

An important aim of Loreto College is to bring students to an awareness of God's love, care and compassion, so that they will find meaning in their lives, hope for the future and give service to others. We are committed to providing high quality Religious Education and collective worship in line with the requirements of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986 and the Religious Education Core Syllabus. Religious Education is at the heart of the curriculum and central to the Loreto school community.

In *choosing* a Loreto education for your son / daughter, we assume support for the continuation of the promotion of our Catholic ethos and the rich heritage passed on to us from our founder Mary Ward and the legacy of the Loreto Sisters. Your choice to send your child to a Catholic school remains one to be proud of and confident in. Although the history, tradition and ethos of the school is Catholic, Loreto College, Coleraine welcomes students of all traditions who are willing to support and contribute to this tradition. In this diversity, there is richness and sharing that is mutually beneficial.

Aims of Religious Education

The aims of Religious Education reflect the sentiments of Loreto school in general -

"Whatever the necessary changes in educational structures and methods, there are certain emphases which the Loreto tradition seeks to value and retain".

- To create an environment where the spiritual dimension in the education of pupils is emphasised in conjunction with their intellectual, social, emotional and physical development.
- To provide an environment in which students may experience and develop the Catholic Faith.
- To assist the school in promoting understanding of and respect for the faiths, traditions and cultures of others.
- To provide pupils with the opportunity of reflecting on the Christian vocation and morality that should accompany the pursuit of excellence in all areas of school life.
- To provide students with opportunities to develop initiative, independence and critical thinking within the perspective of faith.
- To provide opportunities for students to experience enjoyment and a sense of achievement in Religious Education classes.

- To foster a sense of self-esteem as children of God.

- To lead pupils to an understanding of the Christian values that should govern their work, leisure and general lifestyle.

- To promote the Christian virtues of altruism, charity, honesty, truthfulness and justice, with a real care for the underprivileged locally and globally.

- To encourage students to live out their Catholic faith through participation in their school and parish communities.

- To support the school in their creation of a caring and disciplined environment, which provides for the pastoral care of all students, in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

- To provide a counter to the values of the secular society.

- To provide opportunities for pupils to step aside from their normal school activities to reflect on the values of the Gospel.

- To encourage parents to be supportive and active in the religious education of their children.

"Love truth; seek knowledge for the end it brings you to, which is God" (Mary War

Legislative Background

The Department of Education Circular 2026/09 outlines that schools must provide parents the following details at the point of admission to the College:

- An outline of RE topics for each year group.
- A schedule of planned collective worship activities.
- Information on invited external contributors, clergy or guest speakers.
- A neutral explanation of parental rights of withdrawal.
- The DE Standard Withdrawal Form (provide on request from the school office).
- Contact details for the Principal or designated member of staff.

Taught Curriculum - RE Topics

Religious Education is allocated the following number of lessons for specific year groups:

Year Group	***Lesson Allocation***
Years 8	***4 x 35 mins per week***
Year 9 and 10	***3 x 35 mins per week***
Years 11 &12 (GCSE Religious Education or OCN Level 2 Religious Education)	***4 ½ x 35 mins per week (9 x 35 mins per fortnight)***
Years 13 AS and Year 14 A2	***4 x 35 mins per week (8 x 35 mins per fortnight)***
Year 13 General Religion	***2 lessons over the two week timetable***
Year 14 General Religion	***2 lessons over the two week timetable***

The RE curriculum follows the DE Religious Education Core Syllabus. Key stage 3 students follow the Fully Alive Irish Catechetical Programme as published by Veritas, and a variety of other resources, depending on the agreed departmental schemes of work which are annually reviewed. Areas studied are as follows:

Year 8 - 'Fully Alive 1'	Year 9 - 'Fully Alive 2'	Year 10 - 'Fully Alive 3'
New Beginnings	Creation and the Environment	Values
An Introduction to the Mass	Ability and Disability: Miracles	Islam
Welcome to Loreto!	Advent	Advent and Christmas
The Bible	The Story of Moses	The development of Christianity: St. Paul
Advent and Christmas	Mary Ward Week	Mary Ward Week
The Land of Palestine at the time of Jesus	Catholic Schools Week	Catholic Schools Week
Mary Ward Week	Lent	The development of Christianity in Ireland : St. Patrick
Catholic Schools Week	A study of Judaism	Lent
Lent	Holy Week	Jesus and his relationships with others: Scripture, Prejudice and Discrimination.
The Life and Ministry of Jesus	Resurrection	Justice and Human Rights
Holy Week	Conflict in the Christian Churches: Orthodox and Martin Luther	An Introduction to Mark's Gospel
The Resurrection	Ecumenism: Christian Denominations	
The Parables of Jesus		

- Staff may cover additional material in line with the school ethos, liturgical events and celebrations throughout the year.

Key Stage 4

All students in KS4 study Religion at Loreto.

The majority of our students study **GCSE** in RE.

Units of study follow the CCEA syllabus:
-Year 11: Paper 5 Christianity through a study of the Gospel of Mark (50%)
-Year 12: Paper 6 An Introduction to Christian Ethics (50%)

There is no coursework or controlled assessment in this course; it is 100% exam.

In studying Religion to GCSE level, the students are provided with the opportunity to build on their communication and literacy skills – oral and written - through analysis, evaluation, selecting appropriate detail, research, debating, essay writing. Furthermore, the students are encouraged to explore moral dilemmas and refer to the Gospel message and Church teaching to help decision-making.

The **OCN NI Level 2 Award in Religious Studies** is designed for learners who wish to develop knowledge and understanding in religious studies in order to make sense of religious choices people make in today's society. It is intended that learners will develop empathy, respect and awareness of moral issues and other religious beliefs and cultural diversity. This course is assessed by continuous assessment. Students' complete units of work, through building a portfolio. This qualification may be used as an alternative pathway to achievement for a small number of pupils where appropriate.

Key Stage 5

Religious Studies is offered as an optional A Level. We study CCEA AS/A2 Religious Studies:

-Unit 1: AS2 an Introduction to the Acts of the Apostles
- A2 Themes in selected letters to St. Paul.
-Unit 2:
AS 7 Foundations of Ethics with Special Reference to Issues in Medical Ethics.
A2 Global Ethics

Enrichment Program – KS5

All students in Years 13 and 14 are timetabled for General Religion / Enrichment. Year 13 are currently timetabled in a modular system, where they will meet with five teachers, and learn about the following: Charity; Positive thinking strategies; Morality; Prayer and Creation.

The Year 14 program is based on a series of speakers who are invited into the school to explain their work. Themes covered range from Stress Relief through Yoga and Reflexology, Alcoholics Anonymous; ACET; Simon Community; St. Vincent de Paul; Concern; Habitat for Humanity and Trocaire.

Not only does the provision of General Religion, give the students a much needed break from examination demands, but it also opens options to them, regarding the potential they might have to be a part of the many

outreach programs available to them. It also conveys the Christian responsibility to be aware of moral dilemmas and systems of social injustice and act on these. With this in mind, many of our students partake in the Pope John Paul 11 Award in Year 13 and Year 14. Here they are encouraged to take an active role in their parish and in participating in groups to promote social justice.

Loreto Core Values and Liturgical Celebrations / Collective Worship

In the wider school community, the Loreto Core values - Justice, Peace, Joy, Sincerity and Freedom permeate the many whole school services throughout the year. Mass is celebrated to mark the opening and closing of the school year for Years 12 and 14, as examinations approach. The latter is a thanksgiving mass for school leavers. There is also a closing end of year Mass arranged for Years 8 – 11. Mass is also celebrated weekly in the school Chapel, during Advent and Lent. The opportunity for reflection via retreats is provided for each year group. Christmas and Easter Liturgies are celebrated for the whole school as major events in the Liturgical calendar. Christian Unity week is always marked through assemblies annually. There is also opportunity to reflect on the origins of the school, in celebrating 'Mary Ward' Week and 'Catholic Schools Week.'

We continue to keep strong links with the Loreto Sisters who visit the College regularly and are grateful to Fr Farren, and other clergy from local parishes, who are invited in to celebrate liturgical services within our school community.

The themes of equality, justice and peace are frequent themes in whole school services consistent with the school's aims, the Loreto philosophy of education and the Kolkata Guidelines. These themes are further reinforced through the pupils' involvement in fund raising for our designated charities, including the Loreto Missions and our link schools in Darjeeling, India, and Sudan. The Religious Education department helps to support these efforts, in the promotion fundraising, and through raising awareness of issues of injustice.

Parental Right of Withdrawal

The Department of Education Circular 2026/09 confirms that parents have an *"unqualified right to withdraw their child from RE and/or collective worship, wholly or partially, without the need to explain or justify their reasons."*

- Parents may withdraw their child from all RE teaching,
- Only certain RE topics (e.g., miracles, morality, sacraments, prayer), all collective worship
- Or specific elements of worship such as prayers, hymns, liturgical observance, assemblies, or contributions by visiting speakers.
- Parents do not have to justify their decision and will not be asked for meetings to discuss their decision.
- Parents may request an optional meeting if they wish to discuss the scope or implications of withdrawal.
- Loreto College acknowledges that some parents may prefer withdrawal from only certain RE units or specific worship elements. The withdrawal form allows parents to state precisely which topics, rituals, or settings they wish to opt out of. Staff will follow these instructions sensitively, ensuring clarity and consistency.

Procedure for requesting Withdrawal

Parents may request withdrawal at any time during the year using the DE Standard Form, available from the school office. All requests will:

- Receive acknowledgment via email or paper note.
- Be recorded confidentially without any approval step.
- Be confirmed within five school days, including the start date and alternative arrangements.
- Parents may request a meeting only if they wish to discuss the scope of partial withdrawal.

Alternative Arrangements

Alternative arrangements will not resemble rewards or incentives to withdraw - e.g. one to one tuition in other subjects. Guidelines state alternative arrangements, for those students not studying Religion, must be "meaningful, age-appropriate and supervised" and be designed to avoid "isolating or stigmatizing pupils". Students no longer studying Religion will be supervised during that time. They should bring other resources from home to complete and keep focused. Activities may include:

- Independent reading or study.
- Quiet supervised activities.
- Age-appropriate tasks

Record Keeping

A secure register will record:

- The pupil's name.
- Whether the withdrawal is full or partial.
- Start date of arrangements.
- Details of alternative arrangements provided. This register will be reviewed regularly to ensure accuracy. Parents do not need to renew the request annually; the arrangement will remain until written notice is received to change or end the withdrawal.

Communicating Information - Whole school gatherings

Loreto College will ensure collective worship is not used as the primary or exclusive means of delivering announcements, awards, or school-wide information. At least one non-religious whole-school gathering will take place each term, and key messages will also be shared electronically or during class registration, ensuring all children have equal access to school communication.

Staff Responsibilities / Training

All staff, including substitute teachers, will be informed of the policy. Teachers responsible for the delivery of Religious Education and collective worship will receive guidance on how to implement partial withdrawals and how to supervise transitions sensitively. Staff will be trained to maintain confidentiality and avoid drawing attention to pupils who are withdrawn. Parents with questions may contact Mrs McCarry (Vice Principal) or Mr Gallagher (Principal) by phoning the school office at 02870343611.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Compliance

The school will regularly review practices to ensure compliance with the DE Circular 2026/09. The Department of Education intends to legislate for inspection of both RE and withdrawal arrangements. Loreto College will maintain evidence of compliance, including annual communication with parents, documentation of requests, and staff training records.