

**Welcome, Wisdom & Witness**

# **Living our Le Chéile Charter**



October 2019

## Introduction:

As Le Chéile has just celebrated its 10th anniversary, this booklet is designed to continue and encourage reflection on how ethos is lived out in our schools. It reflects the educational and philosophical vision and mission outlined in the Le Chéile Charter (p. 1-8). It is divided in two parts:

**Part 1: Understanding the Charter** draws together an understanding of a Le Chéile school, the expectations for our students, unpacking what is ethos and why we embrace the importance of dialogue in our mission.

**Part 2: The Charter in action: practical suggestions** takes a journey through some of the spaces where ethos is found. It offers challenging questions a school might ask about the lived out ethos in their school today. It offers some processes in exploring and reflecting on the questions. Finally, it offers some practical suggestions to assist in the day to day application of the Charter.



## Part 1: Understanding the Charter

The purpose of a Catholic voluntary secondary school under the patronage of the Le Chéile Schools Trust, is to provide an education that ***acknowledges and affirms the dignity and uniqueness of every human being as a child of God.***

“The glory of God is humanity fully alive” (St Irenaeus, p.5 of Charter)

It embraces the physical, mental, emotional, social, moral and spiritual growth of each student. It seeks to build a learning community that welcomes and witnesses through the lens of the Le Chéile Charter. The school draws its identity from the richness of its religious and cultural heritage and the charism of its founder(s). It is committed to ***creating a space of inclusivity, equity and openness***, where people can live with and be taught by one another, however diverse people might be. It does not discriminate on religious grounds and is open to a diversity of students. It offers the educational space which ***promotes excellence*** so that students can respond responsibly to their own lives, the lives of others and the earth, which is our home.

## A Le Chéile school:

1. Focuses on three key words; **WELCOME, WISDOM AND WITNESS**, as the essence of a Le Chéile spirituality.
2. Takes seriously living, praying and celebrating as a Catholic community in a multicultural and pluralistic society.
3. Acknowledges, values and encourages the multiplicity of voices, visions and practices and sees them as an opportunity to enrich the dialogue between people and understands that the Christian message underpins this dialogue.
4. Seeks to explore its Catholic identity in the midst of present-day plurality.

## Students in a Le Chéile School:

- Aim to develop critical appreciation of the world they live in.
- Are given opportunities to develop a strong sense of their own personal worth.
- Recognise themselves as moral persons who reflect on key issues which heighten their awareness of their responsibility to themselves, society and the earth we all call home.
- Experience the importance of the world of mystery through exposure to art, poetry, music and nature.
- Gain awareness of the contribution they can make in life through use of their personal talents and career choice.
- Recognise that we are exposed to the reality of God each day. This Presence is heightened in the sacramental life of the Church and in other meaningful liturgical rituals that allow all of us to see God at work in our lives.
- Reflect on the meaning and mystery of life and understand the significance of religion in their own lives and the lives of others.
- Invited to develop their faith and live the values and attitudes of Jesus Christ in a pluralistic society. ([Charter, p. 8](#))



## Ethos

### **The word ‘ethos’ may be defined as the disposition or character of an organisation or school.**

It is the flow of energy that connects all elements of a school together and when we talk about having a Catholic ethos, this means that a school is committed to creating a space that is invitational to understanding and living in a world where the divine permeates all aspects of life ([Welcome](#)). The school promotes an ethos that views our world through the lens of a Christian understanding of life and God ([Wisdom](#)). This ethos fosters an education that is transformative and humanizing but also invites students to explore a deeper meaning and faith about life and God. A pathway is opened for students to theology—the search for God at the heart of life. This is a space where student choice and voice is fostered and encouraged ([Witness](#)).



## Together in Dialogue

The Catholic school is engaged in dialogue on a vertical and horizontal level. It is in conversation with God; he speaks, we listen, we speak and God listens. This is a process of revealing who we are to each other and is an on-going journey throughout our lives of understanding and knowledge making about the mystery of ourselves and God.

## Together in our Stories

The diversity and richness of the stories of the fifteen congregations are shared amongst the community of Le Chéile. They offer a common, cohesive vision of what education means through the Le Chéile Charter. The Charter was born from dialogue about the importance of Catholic education and its hopes and aspirations for the future. The charism from the founder(s) offer a way of helping the school community respond to the message of the Gospel. Each school retains its charism, traditions and heritage but is enriched by the connectivity and narratives of the other congregations as we journey together with one mission, vision and spirituality. ([Information on all congregations is offered in the Charter, p. 9-24](#))

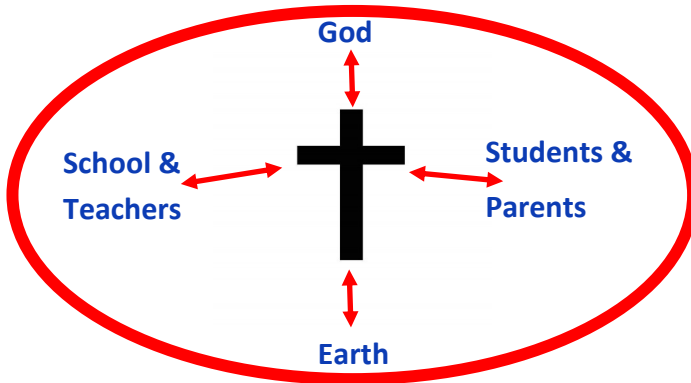
We invite you here to reflect the unique story of your founder through the lens of our Le Cheile Schools Trust shared purpose of Welcome, Wisdom, Witness:

Our Founder and Welcome

Our Founder and Wisdom

Our Founder and Witness

There is also dialogue between the many people engaged in education in the school: teachers, students, leaders, parents etc. The cross symbolises the human and divine dialogue which happens at the very heart of life – within the school and the classroom. Within our Catholic tradition, the cross has always symbolised the meeting of the human and divine.



### *Purpose of the Catholic School*

A Le Chéile school is a dialogue school which embraces the multi-cultural and religious traditions of its members. While its baseline comes from the Catholic tradition, it appreciates and respects the values of other religions and philosophies and enters into dialogue with them.

**Catholic identity and solidarity with others go hand in hand, offering a service to the world which encourages, diversity, plurality and difference.**

With the help of inclusive and welcoming rituals, the school community celebrates the high and low moments in the life of the school. Religious Education is offered as a core and central subject within the curriculum. Engagement in Religious Education is through invitation and recognises the religious freedom of all students and parents and thereby avoids coercion or indoctrination. Where possible, the school reaches out to the parish and gives witness to its characteristic spirit and ethos.



## Part Two: The Charter in action: practical suggestions

### Where is Ethos to be found?

Ethos is to be found in **the purposes for education** that a school desires and how these purposes play out in the day to day encounters in the classroom and the corridors. The purposes for a Le Chéile school centre on a vision of the human person as holistic, unique

and an active agent in their own learning and education. This understanding challenges the school to reflect on who the student becomes, what they need to know, understand and do, where and when this should take place and how it should happen. The purpose of a Le Chéile school is to offer Education as a space where the encounter with others in the classroom has a transformative effect on the student.

Ethos can be found in the type of **curriculum** that is chosen by a school and how that curriculum is inclusive of all students' needs, aspirations and abilities. The curriculum in a Le Chéile schools **offers hope and possibility** for students and teachers. It emerges in the expansion of knowledge, understanding, skills, values and dispositions to **the holistic needs of the students** – beyond the limitation of examination results alone.

The curriculum in a Le Chéile school is relevant to the needs of the students of the 21st Century. It acknowledges that we live in a global, technological and pluralistic world and that everything in life is consistently evolving and caught up in a dynamic process of change. The possibility of preparing students for the future has become practically impossible and therefore the curriculum of a Le Chéile school draws on the wisdom of the past and opens itself to the present, so that we can enable the survival of the student for the future. **Past, present and future are interwoven** together to enable the flourishing of all students.



## Curriculum & Ethos

1. Does the curriculum at both senior and junior cycle, in a Le Chéile school, encourage the growth and flourishing of all students in the 21st century?
2. As well as promoting assessment-based learning, do the subjects, short courses, Wellbeing, Level 2 Learning Programmes and Other Areas of Learning, offer students the potential to become unique and special individuals reflecting our belief they are children of God?

To help you reflect on these questions, the following prompts might be of assistance:

1. **Learning Outcomes & Intentions**—towards which goals are they learning?
2. **Content**—what are they learning? Is it relevant?
3. **Learning activities**—how are they learning?
4. **Teacher role**—how is the teacher scaffolding their learning?
5. **Pupils role**— are they actively engaging?
6. **Materials & resources**—with what are they learning
7. **Grouping**—with whom are they learning?
8. **Location**—where are they learning?
9. **Time**—when are they learning?
10. **Assessment**—is there dual assessment of learning, both formative and summative? Does our reporting help and encourage a student to take responsibility for their learning?

These questions about learning, are questions about ethos. Ethos is experienced in the choices made by the school and the teacher in their **teaching, learning and assessment methodology** which opens the potential and flourishing of all students as children of God. It is captured in the **roles and relationships** of the students and teachers as they build a learning environment in which each thrives in dignity, equity, democracy and inclusion. It is witnessed in the **Gospel values** that are important in the school. Values such as inclusivity; truth; spirituality; forgiveness; concern and service find their foundation in the life, death and resurrection of Christ and the ongoing mission of the Church.





# Gospel Values

# In Our School



Jesus made friends with rich and poor, saints and sinners, outsiders and insiders.	<b>Luke 10:25-37, Luke 14:12-14, Banquet Mark 2:15-17, Call of Levi</b>
Application Areas: Admissions, contact situations, pastoral care programmes, day to day interaction.	Think about: How and where is this happening in our school?

Seeing connections between secular knowledge and spiritual knowledge.	<b>Mark 4:1-20, 26-32, Seed Parables Matt 16:1-3 Signs of the Times Matt 5:13-16 Salt and Light</b>
Application Areas: Promoting inter-disciplinary approaches and seeing the connections between all areas of learning.	Think about: Do we truly celebrate and pursue the search for truth across all curricular areas?

Promoting awareness of the spiritual dimension of life. May your hidden self grow strong.	<b>Luke 11:1-13, The Transcendent Romans 12:9-18 Col 3:12-15 Eph 3:14-19 Being rooted</b>
Application Areas: Prayer! Spirituality and a faith-friendly atmosphere. Liturgical seasons.	Think about: How does our school welcome and encourage the celebration of faith?

The school community strives to model the example of love and pardon given by Jesus	<b>Matt 5:43-48 Loving enemies Luke 15:11-32 Prodigal Son forgiveness and judging Gal 5:18-26</b>
Application Areas: Relationships in the school community.	Think about: How do we promote forgiveness as a faith value among students & staff?

Jesus saw leadership in terms of service to others. It was not a burden on others, but of helping them.	<b>Mark 10:35-45, James and John Matt 23:3-4 helping with burdens Matt 11:30</b>
Application Areas: Leadership roles in the school. At student, staff, board and parental levels.	Think about: Do I recognise the ways in which I am called to lead? How do I exercise leadership?

Always looking out for those who are experiencing particular problems or difficulties	<b>Luke 1:33-10 Lost Sheep, Lost Coin Matt 23:31-46 You did it to me Mark 2:1-6 Friends Mark 7:24-37 Help</b>
Application Areas: Relationships in school life and between all groupings and individuals, informing policy at every level.	Think about: How is a culture of care shown in our school?

A teacher points the way - leads by example. Strives for authenticity. Teaches with an authority based on sense of self.	<b>Mark 1:21-22, 23-34 Jesus the teacher Matt 21:28-32 Parables Peter 4:11-13 Cliffs Matt 23:14-30 Talents</b>
Application Areas: Approaches to teaching and the relationships in the classroom.	Think about: What is your understanding of the teacher's authority? How do I reflect on my role as a teacher?

Where your treasure is, your heart is also. Building on foundations.	<b>Luke 12:20-32 Trust John 6:1-11 Respect Matt 7:24-29 Assumption 1Cor 5:2 Milk and solid food</b>
Application Areas: Approaches to learning and openness to the possibilities. Students taking responsibility. Involving parents.	Think about: Is there an atmosphere that is conducive to learning? Where does it come from?

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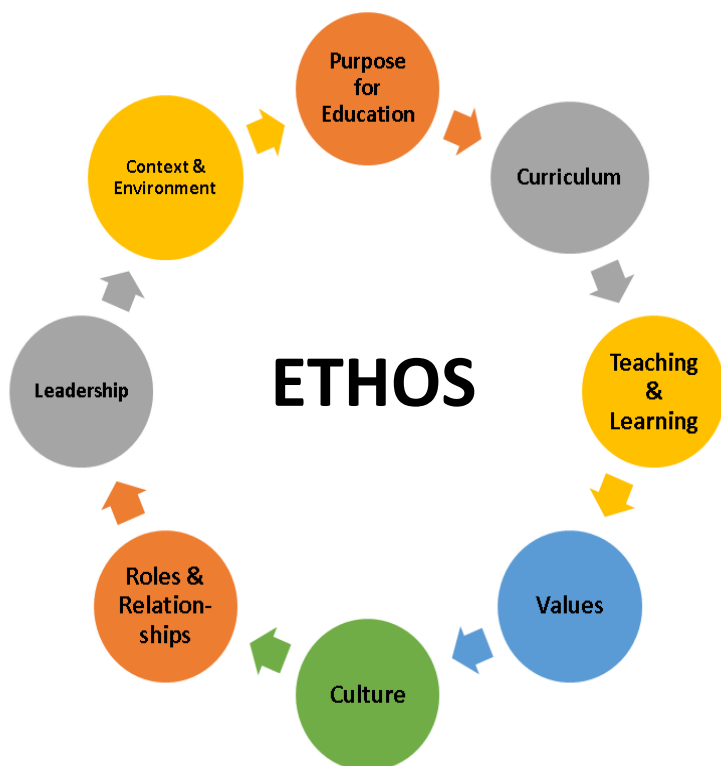


## Culture & Ethos

The **culture** of the school includes many traditions, habits, rituals, mindsets and assumptions and a particular ethos emerges through the openness this culture has **to change, newness and transformation**.

How **leadership** is understood and how it works through **enabling and empowering others**, creates a type of ethos that **affirms and acknowledges the diversity and unique contributions of all people** engaged in the educational encounter.

Finally, ethos emerges through the **context and environment** of the school – its buildings, playing fields, car park, its signage, its connection to the local community and to the world. Our disposition to the environment of the school, **builds an understanding about the care, love and preciousness of our world**, a world we live within and are invited to make a better place.



*The multiplicity of elements of ethos*

## Reflective Questions on Catholic Ethos:

1. Does our school embrace the understanding of the human being as a unique child of God? Where do you see that lived out in your school?
2. Is there sufficient balance in the curriculum to ensure the holistic development of all students? Does it meet the needs of all students in twenty-first century Ireland?
3. Does the curriculum give the student and teachers spaces to encounter awe, wonder and mystery?
4. How does teaching, learning and assessment in your school enable and empower the student to strive to expand their knowledge, skills, understanding, values and dispositions? Are all your students' flourishing in the classrooms in your school? Is your curriculum relevant to the needs of the students ?
5. Are the lived values of your school rooted in the Gospel values? Are these lived values found in your Code of Behaviour and Admissions Policies, in how you communicate with parents and how your students find a voice within the school and classroom?
6. Does the culture of your school value all who work therein, or are some valued more than others? Is the culture open to change and flexibility – responding to the needs of the students in a pluralistic, technological and global world? Is there a respect for the Catholic culture and traditions that underpin the life of the school?
7. Is there a sharing of power, control and voice amongst all who work in the school? How do the roles and relationships enable the flourishing of each and every person in the school?



8. What model of leadership is functioning within the school? Is there leadership encouraged for all?

9. Is the school building and environment loved and cherished by all in the school? Is it connected to the natural world? Is there respect and understanding for the importance of the space we inhabit for learning and education? Is there a tacit knowledge of the context in which the school is located and which influences the many processes and practices working within the school?



**Each of these reflections are asking ethos questions and request us to be honest in our search for answers. They are opening questions for dialogue about the lived ethos of a Le Chéile school.**

**In the light of our understanding of our Ethos, Why?, Where? and How? might we do things differently?**

**How could we improve?**

## Processes that might help answer these questions:

1. Over the past number of years, **School Self-Evaluation** has been concerned with literacy and numeracy and recently it has shifted its focus to the “Looking at our Schools 2016” for guidance. Perhaps what is missing from each of these approaches is a process that gathers data and understanding of how ethos is working in the school. Using the same process, ethos may be added to the SSE plan so that a critical lens might be placed on how it is working and flourishing.
2. Many of these questions underpin the workings of many **teams and committees** already in operation in the school. For example, schools now have some teams working on teaching and learning, the Junior Cycle curriculum etc. The main emphasis of curriculum is a holistic, student-centred focus and this aligns with the ethos of understanding each student as unique and special, and a child of God. The process this team might like to engage with is to explore and inquire how the educational experience in the classroom engages with this important principle. How student centred is our school? How student centred is our classrooms? Where do we see this in action?
3. The **Board of Management** in their role of reviewing policies, might like to engage in the process of viewing each policy from the perspective of ethos. What might be helpful is asking what kind of disposition does the policy reveal and is this disposition aligning with our ethos? For example, if we are reviewing the Code of Behaviour, does the Code begin with positive behaviour? Is the language positive or negative? Is the Code about discipline alone and filled with what cannot be done within the school? Is it about sanctions or rewards?
4. Choosing the three main components of our spirituality: welcome, wisdom and witness as part of the **Assemblies** that are carried out during the year with the students, will highlight some of the deeper values and ideas contained at the centre of the ethos.
5. These questions can be used at **staff meetings, parent meetings, student council meetings, with the senior management team**. They can be part of the **interview questions** for teaching positions or AP1 and AP2 positions.

The process is about reflection, dialogue and engagement with the living ethos that flows through our schools. Questions challenge us to see things differently.

## Guidelines

Le Chéile offer the following guidelines to help each school live out the Le Chéile ethos. We acknowledge that each school has their own unique context and charism. These guidelines are a non-prescriptive assistance to help the school engage in a dialogue around the importance of these challenges and opportunities.

### 1. **Admissions Policy Review**

Each school to carry out a review of its **Admissions Policy** to ensure that the school is inclusive of enrolling a diversity of students. Where a school is oversubscribed, refusal should be based on the oversubscription criteria applied to all students equally. Does your Admissions Policy include the Le Chéile Characteristic Statement, reflective of the ethos and founding heritage. (See Appendix 1)

### 2. **Religious Education**

The school responds to the holistic development of all students and that includes the spiritual dimension. In response to this educational philosophy, the school offers:

- a. 3 periods a week for the core subject of Religious Education or 200 hours over three years.
- b. It seeks where possible to employ specialist and qualified teachers of Religious Education.
- c. It develops inclusive programmes of Religious Education that include students of the Catholic faith, other religions and none. The NCCA new specification on Religious Education offers an inclusive and reflective space for all students to enquire, explore, reflect and act.
- d. The involvement of students in prayer and worship should be well thought out and inclusive in nature.

### 3. **Request to be excused from Religious Education**

- a. It is recommended that the school's distinctive Catholic ethos and characteristic spirit is made clear to all parents at a meeting before the student commences their time in the school. This might be delivered by the RE team who can offer an overview of the RE programme for parents, the importance of the spiritual development of the student and the civic duty in understanding a diversity of faiths and none.

B. Each request to be excused is taken on a case by case basis, with an invitation to a conversation between the parents, student and senior management. This meeting should allow the parent the freedom to table their concerns and the school to respond.

c. If the request to be excused is granted, then the student may remain in the RE class but will work on their spiritual development through the reading of a sacred text or some other inspirational spiritual literature. Other alternative arrangements may be made by the school.

#### 4. Clothing

a. The school uniform has been decided through consultation with all the stakeholders in the school. The crest of the school is part of the school's distinct Catholic identity and therefore should be respected and worn by all students.

b. At the same time, religious clothing such as the hijab or turban may be worn by students of the Muslim and Sikh faith as a sign of their distinct religious identity. This might be a colour aligning with the uniform. It is only when an item of clothing becomes a method of exclusion that it should not be worn e.g. the covering of the full face by the wearing of the niqab.

c. Awareness and understanding about the religious ritual importance of painted hands (Hindu), facial hair (Sikh) etc. is encouraged and sensitivity should be acknowledged in the code of behaviour.

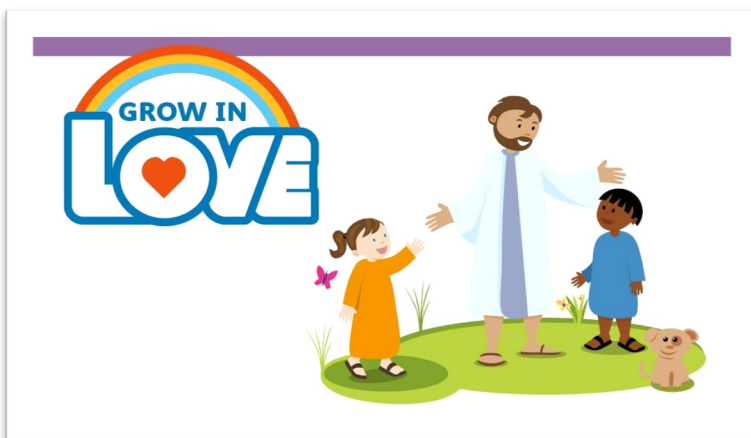
#### 5. The Language of our identity—signs and symbols

The use of signs and symbols that capture the Catholic faith and tradition are very important in the life of the school. These should be relevant for the community that inhabit the school and whilst many religions do not engage in this type of language, a Catholic school shares in this dialogue as part of their ethos.



## Primary School Guidelines

1. **Grow in Love** is the new Religious Education series for Catholic primary schools in Ireland. It introduces a new curriculum for Religious Education, and replaces the *Alive-O* series. Each *Grow in Love* programme is divided into a number of themes, which will allow teachers to take a thematic, cross-curricular approach to the teaching of Religious Education.
2. Each primary school will engage with parents before their child comes into the school. This engagement will explain the Catholic ethos of the school and what this might mean for their child.
3. The approach of the school is one of openness to dialogue with parents about RE and participation in the sacramental life of the Church. Primary schools will continue to be respectful of parents wishes around the engagement of their child with the sacraments.
4. As with post-primary schools, if a student does not wish to participate in RE, a student will remain within the class during Religious Education. The teacher will offer the child alternative learning materials. Other alternative arrangements may be made by the school.





**Conclusion:** The education of the students in a Le Chéile school does not just happen by itself. It is built daily by the love, care, hard work, sacrifice, prayer and actions of the whole school community in togetherness. Our ethos emerges throughout every aspect of our school community—our purposes, processes and practices. The spirituality of Welcome, Wisdom and Witness flows through the deep traditions and heritage that together we respect and celebrate. This is our story, as we live out our mission as a Le Chéile Catholic school and embrace the wonders of our world and of our century.

## Together, We are Called

To act with justice, We are called.

To love with tenderness, We are called.

To serve each other, We are called.

To walk humbly with our God. We are called.

1. We are people of love, our hearts welcoming all.

With hands open to share, for this we are called.

Just as Christ has loved, so we must too, be Christ's love to all.

2. We are called to live out, the wisdom we have received.

The faith handed to us, a light for all to see,

Let us take our place within the world, together we will shine.

3. Let us journey as one, in faith, hope and love.

As we witness in joy, the love of the One who has shown the way,

The truth and life. In Him we are one.



## Appendix 1:

### Admissions

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