



EARLSTON HIGH SCHOOL RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE POLICY

Introduction

In accordance with the Education Act (1980) and the advice contained in Circular 1/2005 it is the policy of the school to hold acts of Religious Observance.

Earlston High school is a non-denominational school.

Definition

Religious Observance is defined for schools in Scotland as:

“Community acts which aim to promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community and express and celebrate the shared values of the school community”ⁱ.

Purpose

Religious Observance will provide experiences which will be meaningful to all pupils and staff, aiding their spiritual development.

The school community will comprise staff, pupils and families from a variety of faith backgrounds and worldviews. This diversity will be valued and considered when planning acts of Religious Observance.

Aims

The aims of Religious Observance are defined as:

“To promote the spiritual development of all members of the school community;
To express and celebrate the shared values of the school community”ⁱⁱ.

Spiritual Development:

“includes being helped to recognise, reflect upon and develop a deeper understanding of the value and worth of each individual which comes from one’s dignity as a person.”ⁱⁱⁱ

A Curriculum for Excellence encourages each individual within a school community to develop as “a successful learner, confident individual, responsible citizen and effective contributor”.

To further these aims, the school will therefore plan:

- to allow pupils and staff to engage in shared activities reflecting and expressing their spiritual needs and aspirations
- to celebrate important occasions in the life of the school and the community

- to involve pupils and staff in experiences which stimulate, challenge and extend their capacities for spiritual response to the world in which they live.

Withdrawal

Under the terms of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, parents have the right to ask for their child to be withdrawn from Religious Observance. In the past the school has dealt with such requests with sensitivity and understanding and this approach will continue. The head teacher will offer to meet with any parent wishing to withdraw their child to ensure that they are clear about the school policy on Religious Observance.

In particular, parents should be reassured that the Religious Observance planned by the school adopts an open and respectful approach and does not seek to compromise the beliefs of any pupils or their families.

Where a child is withdrawn from Religious Observance, suitable arrangements will be made for the pupil to participate in a worthwhile alternative activity.

Frequency

The school follows the advice of Circular 1/2005. There will be a minimum of six Religious Observance opportunities per year for each pupil. In addition the school will maintain traditional celebrations central to the life of the school community.

Quality

The school intends to provide Religious Observance events of high quality which will further the aims of Religious Observance.

The Religious Observance Team

The school will appoint a group to supervise Religious Observance under the direction of the head teacher. This team will be drawn from a range of people - members of staff, pupils, chaplain and from a range of traditions in order to plan acts of religious observance.

Organisation

The head teacher, in consultation with the school's Religious Observance Team, will draw up a programme for Religious Observance.

It is appreciated that within the school programme pupils will assemble for a range of reasons. A clear distinction will be maintained between Religious Observance assemblies and assemblies for other purposes. Religious Observance assemblies or events will be devised which allow all members of the school community to participate with integrity.

Evaluation

Regular evaluation of the Religious Observance programme will take place under the direction of the head teacher or person nominated by the head teacher.

The School Chaplain

Headteachers are encouraged to appoint a chaplain. The chaplain is appointed in line with Scottish Borders Council policy.

The role of the chaplain will be fully discussed and regularly evaluated in discussion between staff and the chaplain(s).

The role of the chaplain includes:

- being a member of the Religious Observance Team
- being a resource for the RME curriculum
- providing pastoral care for staff and pupils (and if appropriate, their families)
- being available at community events in the life of the school
- having a key role at times of extreme difficulty
- within Learning Communities, providing a bridge and common resource across the Learning Community

Location

Consideration will be given to providing (a) high quality location (s) for Religious Observance events in the school which allow for full participation in the event.

Worship

The following extract from Circular 1/2005 will be considered when planning Religious Observance events:

“Where the school, whether denominational or non-denominational, is continuous with a faith community, that community’s faith in the “focus of worship”, may be assumed and worship may be considered to be appropriate as part of the formal activity of the school.

“ Where, as in most non-denominational schools, there is a diversity of beliefs and practices, the review group believes that the appropriate context for an organised act of worship is within the informal curriculum as part of the range of activities offered for example by religions, groups, chaplains and other religious leaders.”^{iv}

The school will consider positively requests by members of the school community for organised acts of worship within the informal curriculum of the school.

Diversity & Flexibility

The school will develop Religious Observance in a creative way which is most appropriate to this school community in line with Circular 1/2005.

Although assemblies have been the traditional way of delivering Religious Observance, other creative options will be considered.