

# Teachers' perspectives

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# Background

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<b>School name</b>	<b>School Profile</b>
School 1	Educate Together school
School 2	Girls' Catholic school
School 3	Church of Ireland co-ed school
School 4	Rural Catholic co-ed school
School 5	Boys' Catholic school

Number of individuals interviewed (5 principals and 9 RME teachers)

# Nature of Religious and Moral Education

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- Formal school-based religious instruction – 3 main areas
  - RME classes
  - Preparation for religious rites
  - Other faith-based activities at school



# RE Classes – Programmes used

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- **Catholic schools – Alive-O programme**
- **Church of Ireland – Follow Me series**
- **Educate Together – Learn Together programme**

# Alive-O programme

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A broad programme, offering various topics to choose from

- *I basically follow Alive O and there is a lot in it ... but they do say that you know to pick and chose from the week what you would be able to get done (girls' Catholic school, Teacher 2)*

Some teachers critical

*... the Alive O book, I find it very time consuming and.*

*WHY IS THAT?*

*It would have a piece every day and I just really can't, just judging by the, I would have different maybe things on my agenda, I'd have things higher up on my list of priorities than religion, unfortunately, I do try and discuss the higher elements with them and we do probably do that once a week but I wouldn't have the time to go through the day by day activities, especially as they demand your art time and they demand, you know music and I find them very hard to interweave into my teaching (boys' Catholic school, Teacher)*

Children are seen as responding well to the programme (songs, discussions)

# Church of Ireland – Follow Me series

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Broad programme, covering various topics, but stronger emphasis on the Bible

*They're very similar topics to what's in the Alive-O and very broad sort of things, ... each week there'd be some readings from the bible like about what they're talking about, like this week now we're on is feelings so a little bit about when you're feeling happy and sad, who do you turn to talk to and there's references to psalms in the Bible and stories in the bible, stories of children who are happy, you know, that sort of thing (Col, co-ed school, Teacher 2).*

The broad similarities between programmes followed in Catholic and Protestant schools aim to provide the children with the same grounding:

*They kind of work together to create something that would be similar so that you're bringing forward a society where the children have all got the same grounding in schools even though there are I suppose liturgical differences as opposed to actual moral differences which there aren't (Col, co-ed school, Principal)*

# Educate Together – Learn Together programme

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Gives an overview of various world religions + covering moral and ethics issues, can be integrated with other subjects

Mixed views, some critical (structure & resources)

- *... it [the programme] is very much you are given a guideline and the teacher is asked right ok go off and do it. So it is very much up in the air from that point of view and very much down to the teacher, the individual teacher ... it can be challenging you know because Educate Together they don't really, they haven't given us any resources to work with it (ET school, 5th class Teacher)*

Children are seen as enjoying the discussion element

o *There's an awful lot of discussion and with the older kids they like the debating aspect of it and sharing their own experiences and views and you know they're happy to share their views and they have different views and it makes a good discussion anyway and gets them talking (ET school, 6th class Teacher).*



# Topics covered in RE class

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- Topics introduced in programmes, but free to add additional topics

*Ok the 4 main areas would be the belief systems ..., the environment would be another one, ... morality and spirituality and then it's the ethics strand as well, there should be 4 areas, yeah... ( **Learn Together**, ET School , 6th class Teacher).*

*A lot of this year what we were talking about was mainly you as an individual in relation to everything else, so it started of with me as me and then from that it went to me and my family, me and my school, so me and I suppose the wider world then and then it came and then it talked about myself in relation to words so that was kind of like just literacy and how we learn to read and write when we are young and we keep developing it all along and how, then it went into how the bible is our, we read it to find out how we should live and the lessons Jesus thought us so and if we have, if God hadn't given us words to start off with we wouldn't be able to read and that is (**Alive-O**, girls' Catholic School , Teacher 2).*

# Topics covered in RE class

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*[We cover] very broad sort of general themes, you know, it's not specific to the Church of Ireland. ... it's called Follow Me series.*

*They're very similar topics to what's in the Alive-O and very broad sort of things, there'd be, each week there'd be some readings from the bible like about what they're talking about, like this week now we're on is feelings so a little bit about when you're feeling happy and sad, who do you turn to talk to and there's references to psalms in the bible and stories in the bible, stories of children who are happy, you know, that sort of thing (**Follow Me series**, Teacher, Col co-ed School).*

# Class work and homework

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Various teaching approaches used, including: reading (text books, work books), debating, celebration of festivals, art, music, etc.

*Basically we start off with a discussion, maybe use the white board and maybe brainstorm ideas. Sometimes there might be a text to read or a book or story or something or sometimes it could be centred around a festival that's coming up and they might do an art activity based on like a Buddhist celebration. Yeah might get a little bit for homework maybe, to write a summery of what they've learned (ET School , 6th class Teacher)*

- Differences between schools in methods used
- Limited homework in RE

# Class work and homework

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More active teaching approaches (discussions, pair work, group work) work best with children

*WHAT SEEMS TO WORK BEST THEN, WHAT TEACHING APPROACH SEEMS TO WORK BEST?*

*That they all get a turn to speak, they like sharing their views, so giving them a turn to speak and putting your hands up and. (ET School, 6th class Teacher)*

*Sometimes it would be small groups and then they talk out to the wider group then after and then other times we would just kind of throw it out there and whoever wants to speak just speaks up and I suppose there is the video, we haven't watched any of the dvds now but I'm hoping to watch some of them, there is something on the sacraments in that so hopefully we will watch that then this week. (girls' Catholic School, Teacher 2)*



# Preparation for religious rites: Confirmation

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Provision inside (C) or outside school (ET, CoI)

- Time involved

*But from the standpoint of the staff, you know I remember being so frustrated in doing confirmation all down through the years, we always felt it was left to the schools to do, so I welcome priests doing something for a change (Principal, girls' Catholic school)*

*AND HOW MUCH TIME WOULD YOU SPEND ON SUCH PREPARATION WOULD YOU SAY.*

*I'd say every week it could be up to 2 hours. (Catholic co-ed school, Teacher)*

# Preparation for religious rites: Confirmation

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Diminished importance to children with regard to religious aspect

*SO HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU THINK THE SACRAMENTS ARE TO YOUR PUPILS?*

*I think they're very important anyway because it's all about belonging to a group, getting on as a class, being a communion class when they're in 3rd or 4th class or a confirmation class in 5th or 6th depends, so I think it is important, belonging to a group of the class and even the religious community. (Catholic co-ed School, Teacher)*

*Do you think that the actual making of the confirmation is important to them?*

*No it is a day, it is a day for getting dressed up, that is what I really feel ... I mean it is a day out, it is what will their dress be like, I mean it is not really, I don't think they really see the religious aspect of it. (girls' Catholic School, Teacher 1)*

# Preparation for religious rites: Confirmation

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## Importance to parents – mixed response

*HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU THINK IT IS TO THEIR PARENTS?*

*I suppose it's a big day for them as well, like their kids are grown up at that stage, you know once they make their confirmation they're into adolescence I suppose you know, the baby is gone out of them, so it's the last big step in primary school you know. (boys' Catholic School, Teacher)*

*I'd say mostly parents have just no interest. I'd say a lot of them from the time they made their communion they haven't been back in the church since. (Catholic co-ed School, Principal)*



# Other religious activities at school

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- Time for prayers (morning prayers, Grace before meals at lunchtime, before going home), visits to the Church, setting up nativity plays etc.
- However, the extent to which these activities take place varies by school

# Religion and diversity

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- All schools had some children from a different religious/belief background
- Diversity as an asset

*I would hate to see the school as a purely Church of Ireland school, I think that having all the other faiths here brings a great richness to the life of the school and a great understanding of difference and of similarities and so on; that I would hate to lose (Principal, CoI).*

- Limitations in accommodating minority faith parents' wishes, withdrawal

*I ask the parents if they don't want him to do religion, I say well you're going to have to look after him, come in and mind him which is probably a bit unfair but I don't have the personnel here to look after somebody (Principal, Catholic co-ed)*

# Religion and role of school and family

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Family have an important role to play in imparting moral/values education and religious education to the children

- The importance of greater parental involvement

*I think parents shelve their responsibilities and say: 'well, right, the teacher will do that'. And we are left trying to do everything and that is not right, you know. (Teacher, girls' Catholic School).*

School's role is supplementary, yet particularly important for some children

*And I mean that's, an awful lot of that, you know a lot of kids and I know the backgrounds that they come from, the only sort of structure that they have would be in a school setting. ... we do have some sort of influence and you like to think that they go out at the end of it, you know, well I mean knowing right from wrong, you know have some sort of inclination to do right from wrong and I mean I know from the formal end of it, teaching prayers and things like that, an awful lot of that is left to the school, I'd say, you know what I mean, if it wasn't it wouldn't be done at all (Principal, boys' Catholic School).*

# Religion and role of family and Church

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## Greater involvement of churches (preparation for sacraments)

- *The onus is on the teachers to prepare [children] for their rites of passage and things like that but it's probably not fair, I think the school is going with the church, the faith, the church should take more of a, put more of an input into that preparing the children rather than the teachers maybe having to prepare them for all this. I think the religious aspect is fine but the preparation and the time that goes into preparing for sacraments should be more church and parent involved maybe. (ET School, 6<sup>th</sup> class Teacher)*

# Teacher education and RE

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- Satisfaction with the training – mixed views
  - Helpful in explaining and clarifying issues**
  - Dissatisfied with training**

*You could see that religion was kind of this subject that even the college of education didn't know how to handle, that is the sense that I got now.*

*IN WHAT WAY DO YOU THINK?*

*They didn't really know how to teach it.*

*...*

*Yeah they didn't know what they were doing, they couldn't decide themselves and I don't know was this the education, was this the college or was this because the Church hadn't decided how to teach it. (ET School, 5th class Teacher)*

# Conclusions

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- Several approaches used in teaching RME (RE classes, rite of passage preparation, other activities)
- Mixed views on programmes used
- Variety of teaching approaches
- Importance of Confirmation
- Religious diversity in schools
- Role of family, school and Church in religious and moral education
- Mixed views on satisfaction with teacher education re: teaching RME