

A Chara,

A sincere welcome back to this new school year, which is now well under way. Although Covid 19 is still with us and we need to remain vigilant, nonetheless, it is heartening to see that we are returning to a school year in which all that we missed so much about school life over the past two years is finally possible again. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the unwavering commitment and dedication demonstrated by boards of management, principals, and staff in our schools during the past two years, in managing the serious challenges which presented themselves and prioritising the needs of the children. Thank you for all you have done, and continue to do, for your pupils and their families. You are making a difference in many more ways than you know.

From my conversations with principals, I am aware that many of you spent considerable time during the summer holidays working on recruitment and other school-related projects. Staff wellbeing is a very topical issue at present. There may be an assumption that it falls to the Principal to ensure that staff feel supported and appreciated. However, it is not a one-way street. The Principal is also part of the team and needs support and encouragement. A conversation early in the year around how staff can support each other may be beneficial. Remember, an empty sack will not stand up, so, be kind to yourself, take time to switch off and re-charge.

Over the course of the coming school year, I propose to issue a number of newsletters to our schools. I am conscious that schools also receive regular updates from CPSMA, so, in an effort not to double up, I will concentrate on the areas of governance which tend to give rise to queries here in the office. I hope you will find the information useful. As always, I welcome any suggestions or feedback you may wish to offer.

On behalf of the four Patrons, Archbishop Kieran, Bishops Brendan, Fintan, and Ray, I wish God's blessing on you, and all in your school community, for a joyous and fruitful year ahead.

Warm regards,



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Recruitment

In recent months, over 600 new staff members have been appointed in primary schools served by St. Senan's office. The majority of schools managed their own recruitment processes exceptionally well and contacted us solely for Patron approval of adverts/appointments, or for necessary clarification on certain procedural points.



A reminder that schools are required to be familiar with the provisions of Circulars 0044/2019 and 0051/2019, and should, in the first instance, consult these documents for information before seeking advice from our office. The procedures outlined in these documents are quite specific and in order to protect the integrity of the recruitment process, schools are obliged to be aware of and adhere rigidly to these procedural requirements.

St. Senan's Education Office rolled out training in recruitment procedures for principals, chairpersons, and independent assessors in four separate venues during April and May this year. Turnout was quite good and feedback from attendees indicated that the sessions were very helpful. Further training sessions will be offered to schools in the spring term of the 2022/2023 school year. Chairpersons and principals, particularly newly appointed principals, are strongly encouraged to attend this training.

I would like to thank Linda Fleming most sincerely for her stellar work in guiding and assisting schools through the recruitment process in ways far too numerous to mention here. I would also like to acknowledge the professionalism and dedication of those on our panel of independent assessors, who acted on the Patron's behalf on interview selection boards throughout the summer months.

New Staff in St. Senan's Office

We are delighted to welcome two new staff members to our office. Mr. Patrick Gorey joined the team over the summer and will be offering administrative assistance to the Limerick Diocesan Office and ourselves. Many of you will already have spoken with Patrick in the past few weeks when contacting us by phone.

The newly appointed Assistant Director of St. Senan's Office is Mr. Kevin Kelly. Kevin brings a wealth of experience to the position, currently serving as Principal of a Catholic primary school in a significantly disadvantaged area in Birmingham. Kevin will take up his position here in late October and we very much look forward to working with him.

Principal Release Days

Arrangements for the provision of principal release days for the current school year are set out in Circular 0026/2022. It has been brought to my attention that some principals have been working from home on their designated release days. This practice should be discontinued, as the relevant circular specifically states the following: *"The Principal should be present in the school during the periods of release time unless absent on official school business approved by the Board of Management."*

Staff Contracts

Schools wishing to issue contracts to newly appointed staff members should download the relevant contract templates from the CPSMA website. Schools should also contact CPSMA directly with any queries they may have regarding the content of these contracts.



St. Senan's Education Office Website

Our website can be accessed at www.stsenansed.ie. The new website was launched in March of this year and contains a range of relevant information and resources. We hope to develop the website over time, to further supplement the advice and support service already provided by phone/email. You do not need a password to access the resources on our website.

Board of Management Annual Policy Review

Boards of Management should carry out a review of the following policies on an annual basis.

- Child Safeguarding Statement
- Anti-Bullying Policy.

Notification that these reviews are complete must be sent by email to Linda at linda.fleming@limerickdiocese.org and published on the school's website/social media channel. The relevant review checklists and notification documents are available to download from the Department of Education website.

Admissions Policy/Annual Admissions Notice

Where a board of management makes amendments to a school's Admissions Policy, the revised policy should be emailed to Linda at linda.fleming@limerickdiocese.org for Patron approval.

All schools must also publish their annual Admissions Notice on the school's website/social media forum. This notice must be published a minimum of one week prior to the commencement of the admissions process. The Admissions Application Form should also be published. It is not permitted to start the admissions process until 1 October at the earliest, in the year preceding the school year for which applications are invited. Schools must specify in their Annual Admissions Notice the date by which they will make a decision on applications received and this must be conveyed in writing within the specified period set out on their Admissions Notice. **Please note that schools must adhere to the agreed enrolment figures published in their Annual Admissions Notice.**

Familiarity with Essential School Policies

It is imperative that members of school staff are familiar with the provisions of core school policies. Ensuring that there is clarity for all may help to prevent unnecessary conflict at a later stage, among staff members, or, between staff and parents. It is also important for staff to appreciate that should an issue arise, acting in accordance with school policy offers protection. To this end, I recommend that time be allocated at staff meetings throughout the year, to work through the following policies, ensuring that staff members understand their roles, rights, and obligations. This is particularly important in the case of new staff members, or those returning to work after long-term absences.

- Code of Behaviour
- Anti-Bullying Policy
- Supervision Policy
- Child Safeguarding Statement
- Parental Complaints Procedure
- Grievance Procedures
- Data protection Policy



Catholic Ethos

Catholic primary schools must strive at all times to uphold the ethos of the school. At a minimum, schools should ensure that the Grow in Love programme be delivered to all classes for the allocated 30 minutes per day. Along with daily prayer and the celebration of the sacraments, there are many other opportunities throughout the liturgical year to maintain and promote the Catholic ethos. Schools may like to explore some of these options at a staff meeting. The following question may be useful as a starting point: “How does someone who walks through the door of our school know that ours is a Catholic School?”

The following resource, albeit an American publication, is particularly user friendly: ***“School Year, Church Year: Customs and Decorations for the Classroom.”*** By Peter Mazar. (ISBN: 1568542402, available to purchase on Amazon) Another useful resource, which is due for launch this autumn, is, ***“Saints and Seekers,”*** published by Veritas and edited by David Bracken. David works with us here in the Limerick Diocesan Office, as secretary to the Diocesan Property Sub-Committee. Should you need any further advice/suggestions in relation to promoting the Catholic ethos of your school, please feel free to contact our Diocesan Advisors for Religious Education at veronica.behan@limerickdiocese.org

Change of Membership on the Board of Management

Where a member of the Board of Management resigns mid-term and another member is elected in his or her place, this change should be notified to St. Senan’s Office. Please email any changes to Gwen at gwen.osullivan@limerickdiocese.org It is also important to ensure that the change of membership is also notified to the Charities Regulator, and that the new member signs the relevant declaration (Form 2), at, or before, his or her first attendance at a meeting of the Board. Please see Section 7.5 of the Governance Manual for further details.

Office Closure

St. Senan's Education will remain closed from Monday 31st October - Friday 4th November (inclusive) for office re-structuring. Please note that advice/support by phone or email will not be available during this time.



Use of School Premises by Outside Operators

Where the Board of Management of a school wishes to permit outside operators to use the school premises, the school must apply to St. Senan's Education Office for Patron approval in advance of entering into any agreement with the proposed operator. Once all necessary requirements are in place, a licence agreement between the parties will issue from our office. Where classroom accommodation is used to accommodate the outside operator, schools should notify their insurer, so that this arrangement can be noted on the school's insurance policy.

Ministerial approval must be obtained in order for an outside operator to use school accommodation during the school day. At present, the Department is tending not to grant this approval, as there is continued uncertainty around what degree of additional accommodation may be needed for Ukrainian pupils.

Schools in which there is an existing arrangement with an outside operator, for which Patron approval was not sought, should contact our office with a view to regularising the arrangement.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of activities for which licence agreements are required:

- pre-school facilities
- before and after-school arrangements
- activities such as, speech & drama/music lessons/sports
- evening classes/weekend activities etc.

Should you need advice on the above, please contact Gwen at the following email address:

gwen.osullivan@limerickdiocese.org

Recognised Certificate to Teach Religious Education

All teachers employed in Catholic primary schools in Ireland are required to hold a recognised certificate to teach Religious Education. This has been a requirement of the Irish Episcopal Conference since 2011. When posting adverts for teaching posts, schools should include the following line in the advert: "All applicants must hold a recognised qualification to teach Religious Education." For clarity, the Catechetics Council currently recognises the following providers of the programme in Religious Education/Religious Studies:

DCU Institute of Education (St Patrick's Campus)

- Certificate in Religious Studies (CRS) in conjunction with Catholic Religious Education in the B.Ed.
- Certificate in Religious Studies in conjunction with Catholic Religious Education in the PMEP
- Certificate in Religious Studies (part-time)
- Catholic Certificate in Religious Studies Supplementary (in fulfilment of the requirements for those in possession of a CCRS from the Bishops of England and Wales)

Froebel College/St Patrick's College, Maynooth

- Certificate in Catholic Religious Education and Theological Studies as part of B.Ed.
- Post-Graduate Certificate in Catholic Religious Education and Theological Studies as part of PME Hibernia College
- Certificate as part of PME Marino Institute of Education
- The Certificate Course as part of the B.Ed.
- The Certificate Course as part of the PME

Mary Immaculate College

- Certificate in Religious Education in conjunction with the B.Ed.
- Qualification to teach Catholic Religious Education as part of the Professional Masters in Education (PME)
- Certificate in Religious Education (Graduate Programme)

St Angela's College, Sligo

- Certificate in Primary School Religious Education (part-time)

St. Mary's University, Belfast

- Certificate as part of B.Ed. Primary 13
- Certificate as part of PGCE (Postgraduate qualification)

For further details regarding certificates issued in other jurisdictions, please consult the following Veritas publication, which is available online: ***"Recognition of Qualifications to Teach Catholic Religious Education in Catholic Primary Schools on the Island of Ireland."***

Suggested Reflection/Prayer to Start the New School Year

The following prayer is appropriate for use at a school Mass or assembly. If you have already held your start of year Mass, you could amend the prayer for use at another celebration.

We give you praise, O God, for everything that is new and beautiful, for everything which holds promise and brings us joy. Bless us as we start this new school year with our friends and teachers. Help us to make the most of every chance we have to start afresh. May we show love to one another and to all.

May the new beginning of this school year remind us that you give us chances to start over, again and again. Help us to forgive others as we receive your forgiveness. Help us to learn and to work together. Help us to listen when we should, to know the best words when we speak, and to know when it is better not to speak.

We thank you for our friends. Help us to be good friends this year. Help us to be patient with ourselves and with others.

Bless our school and keep us safe. Be with us as we travel each day. Help us to be aware of your love shown to us in the people around us.

Bless all those who care for us in our school and at home. Help us to show our care for them and to say sorry when we need to.

May (our saint) protect us and help us to live as well as we can, giving thanks and glory to God as (he/she) did.

Amen.

**St. Senan's Education Office, St. Munchin's
Corbally, Limerick**
**T: 061 347777 / E: sseo@limerickdiocese.org /
www.stsenansed.ie**

