

School Culture Initiative

AN INNOVATIVE ONE-YEAR PROCESS FOR REFLECTING ON, STRENGTHENING
AND SUSTAINING THE CATHOLIC CULTURE OF YOUR SCHOOL



BACKGROUND

Now in its fifth year, the School Culture Initiative has worked with primary and secondary schools across the country in four previous cohorts.

As the initiative has evolved it has become clear that strong partners are a key to its success. In 2018 Notre Dame partnered with Kildare & Leighlin at primary level to ensure the initiative was anchored in a strong local partnership.

The School Culture Initiative is an exciting undertaking between the University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education and KandLe. It aims to offer primary schools a rich and engaging one-year programme aimed at strengthening and sustaining their Catholic School Culture.

Using a framework developed and implemented with Catholic schools in the US, but tailored for an Irish context, Notre Dame faculty and KandLe staff will facilitate and support individual School Culture Teams (the Principal plus two other teachers) over a one-year period to introduce, explore and implement the school culture framework. The process is focused on schools exploring the issue of Catholic school identity from your own school context while being conscious of the rich tapestry of experiences different schools bring to the initiative.

A LEARNING COMMUNITY

A collaborative approach is employed, with the various School Culture Teams engaging as a single cohort for the delivery of induction, a School Culture Seminar and

on-going facilitation. Throughout the year the Culture Teams from the participating schools gather monthly, forming a supportive community from which all can draw advice and encouragement as they journey through the process.

"Being part of the 'Culture Formation Team' along with those from the other schools taking part has allowed for a natural network of teachers to develop a community with whom we can share ideas and gain support and advice from. The external support and facilitation has helped us to ask some of the hard questions that start important conversations in relation to our

Catholic school identity and ethos."

- Angela Mitchell, Primary Principal, Dublin

STEPS IN THE PROCESS

1. Induction for School Culture Team
2. Reflection on your Schools Context
3. Investigation and reflection on the Tenets of a Catholic School
4. Determining Root Beliefs
5. Deciding Core Values
6. Consideration of Actions and Behaviours
7. Communicating the Message (consistently, creatively and constantly)

SELECTION CRITERIA

1. Principal is committed to Catholic culture of their school.
2. A faculty and staff who the Principal believes are open to such a process.
3. Support and buy-in of the school's Board of Management.
4. The successful schools are clustered geographically to facilitate monthly meetings.

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THE SCHOOL CULTURE TEAM

Each school forms a School Culture team, consisting of the Principal and two other teachers. This team is responsible for leading and facilitating the process in their school. Due consideration should be given by the Principal when inviting teachers to join the School Culture team as the success of the initiative, to a significant degree, hinges on the commitment of these individuals.



TIMELINE AND EXPECTATIONS

The process is designed to be consistent rather than intensive!

June/ August:

Highlight to staff that the school is beginning this one-year process, and introduce the members of the School Culture team who will lead it.

September:

Induction Seminar (Sat. 12th – Sun. 13th). A residential for the School Culture Teams, focused on understanding and implementing the process.

Following the Induction you hold an introductory session for staff (30 mins.).

October:

Cohort meeting in one of the three schools (these meetings rotate between schools throughout the year).

Whole staff input on exploring Church teaching on what an intentional Catholic School is (40 mins.).

November:

Whole staff input focused on beginning the process of developing the school's Root Beliefs (40 mins.).

School Culture Seminar (Sat. 9th – Sun. 10th). Overnight attended by School Culture teams and an additional 3 teachers from each school. Focuses on formulating draft Root Beliefs and setting schools up to finalise the process in the second half of the year.

December:

Whole staff input focused on presenting, refining and finalising your schools Root Beliefs (35 mins.).

January:

Cohort meeting in one of the three schools.

Whole staff input on deciding your school's Core Values (40 mins.).

February:

Cohort meeting in one of the three schools.

Whole staff input on Considering Actions and Behaviours (40 mins.).

March:

Cohort meeting in one of the three schools.

Whole staff input on Communicating the Message (40 mins.).

April:

Cohort meeting in one of the three schools.

Present School Culture Plan to staff and Board of Management, for implementation in the coming academic year.

May:

Process Completed and Achievement Celebrated!!!

FUNDING

The cost of facilitation, programme materials, accommodation and meals are covered for participating schools.