

Guidelines for Catholic Early Childhood Services

INTRODUCTION

The Catholic Church recognises the important role that our Catholic Early Childhood Services play in fostering the holistic development of young children. The Church acknowledges parents as the first educators of their children and supports this with provision of Catholic Education from Early Childhood to Secondary levels. In Catholic Early Childhood Centres children are assisted in their spiritual development and membership of the Church as well as developing the skills needed for an easy and smooth transition to school.

Early Childhood Services in each Diocese share in the Mission of Catholic Education and therefore the Catholic Special Character of each Centre must be given due recognition. The holistic foundation principles of Te Whariki, the Early Childhood Curriculum, make it totally in tune with Catholic values and beliefs about the education of young children. The Catholic Character dimension should never be considered as an 'add on' or as something to be carried out at a specific time each day. It is the heart of the Service and it should infuse everything that the staff and children do throughout the day. The primary purpose of a Catholic Early Childhood Service (ECS) should be to provide an all-encompassing Catholic family atmosphere that supports the awakening and nurturing of faith in the young children bringing them to an awareness of God and Gospel values and their place in the world.

Catholic Early Childhood Services are expected to have strong links with local parishes and Catholic schools.

The guidelines for determining whether an ECS may describe itself as "Catholic" aim to ensure that the service has in place structures and processes which:

- Ensure the service has and maintains an authentic Catholic identity
- Support and uphold the integrity of the bishop
- Protect the bishop/diocese/parish from liability

LEGALITIES

1. The Catholic ECS must be licensed in accordance with the Education Act 1989 under the Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008.
2. The Catholic ECS must be incorporated as a legal entity which is separate in law from a Church structure such as a diocese, school or parish.
3. Establishing the ECS as an incorporated company is the preferred model although an incorporated Trust is also acceptable.
4. The diocesan bishop decides whether a particular ECS in his diocese may be designated as Catholic, and may impose conditions on the Service in order for it to receive that designation.
5. The legal entity is the owner of the Catholic ECS, and does not need to own the property or facilities the Catholic ECS uses.
6. If the legal entity does not own the property it occupies, it is to have a formal lease in place for property or facilities it uses, including Church property. Any such lease must be with the owner

of the land upon which the Catholic ECS facility stands. The Catholic ECS can lease non-integrated property on a school property with the consent of the property owner. Leasing integrated or non-integrated school property requires the involvement of the diocesan education property manager.

7. The licensee should preferably be the company or Trust, and must not be a priest, parish, school or diocese. Employees of the parish or diocese would not normally be the licensee.
8. The directors or trustees must be fit and proper persons as required by Regulation 8 of the Education Act 1989 under the Education (Early Childhood Services) Regulations 2008.

CATHOLICITY

9. The Catholic nature of the ECS must be clearly set out in its foundation documents eg charter, constitution, trust deed, lease agreement (especially for-profit services). The foundation documents must be approved by the diocesan bishop.
10. The foundation document must ensure that the governance body has sufficient members who can take a leadership role in ensuring the maintenance of the Catholic character.
11. The ECS must follow the Catholic Early Childhood Curriculum.
12. The ECS must have at least one teacher in a senior role (preferably the director or manager) who is a committed and practising Catholic with the ability to implement the Catholic curriculum. Ideally that person will be a committed and practising Catholic but this cannot be specified in advertisements. Advertisements for this type of position should specify the “ability to lead and support the Catholic character of the Service”. Each diocese will have a process for determining a preferred candidate’s acceptability to the diocesan bishop.
13. At least 50% of the teaching staff must be doing or have finished the Certificate in Catholic Early Childhood Teaching.
14. There must be regular scheduled professional development for all staff on the Catholic character of the Catholic ECS, with funds allocated in the annual budget for Catholic character and staff development.
15. Core aspects of the Catholic character must be in place:
 - Prayer and simple Catholic rituals are a normal part of the daily life of the Centre or service
 - Gospel values are reflected in the relationships between staff and between staff, children and parents.
 - The Liturgical seasons are marked in simple enjoyable ways.
 - Pastoral care of children is based on the recognition that each child is a unique individual loved unconditionally by God and created in the image and likeness of God.
16. The Catholic ECS should have a relationship with a person with the experience to act in a chaplaincy role, who can be a priest, religious or lay person approved by the bishop.
17. The Catholic ECS’s documentation provided to parents must
 - a) require signed assent to their children participating in the Catholic Early Childhood curriculum and in activities associated with the Catholic character of the Catholic ECS;
 - b) make clear that attendance at a Catholic ECS does not of itself provide an automatic preference certificate and right to attend a Catholic school.
18. The Catholic ECS must have an ongoing relationship with the local Catholic Education Office or equivalent, and cooperate fully in the monitoring of the Catholic character as required by the bishop.

19. The Catholic ECS must be willing to pay a per student levy to cover the costs of monitoring of the Catholic character, should the diocese require it.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY

20. The Catholic ECS must be able to demonstrate to the bishop or his advisers that the Service is financially viable.

21. A copy of the audited annual accounts is to be provided to the bishop via the Catholic Education Office or equivalent.

SAFETY

22. The Catholic ECS must be able to demonstrate that in addition to the health and safety requirements of the Ministry of Education for ECSs and the health and safety requirements for any workplace, the ECS has in place an effective screening and monitoring processes for staff and volunteers.