

NATIONAL REPORT ON TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND QUALIFICATIONS IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AND CATHOLIC CHARACTER

INTRODUCTION

During the year mid 2013-mid 2014 Catholic Character reviewers asked schools about teacher professional development and qualifications in Religious Education and Catholic Character. Approximately a fifth of schools nationally were reviewed during this period.

SUMMARY

The development of a well qualified teaching force is central to the Bishops' vision for Catholic schools. While much good work is being done in professional development, significant numbers of teachers remain underqualified to teach Religious Education. Further, it seems that most Boards of Trustees and school leaders do not plan for the development of staff qualifications in this area, and do not strategically make funding available for study.

The report summarises the information that was gathered and provides recommendations to Proprietors, Boards of Trustees and school leadership on next steps.

WHAT WE FOUND OUT

Professional development

A significant amount of Religious Education and Catholic Character professional development is undertaken, particularly in primary schools, where much of the development is school-wide, compared with secondary schools where much of the professional development is restricted to teachers of Religious Education. Schools rely heavily on the opportunities offered by the diocesan Catholic Education Offices, and, in schools with Proprietor Trust Boards, the opportunities offered by those Boards.

Teachers overall were enthusiastic about their PD experiences, and in some cases could explain clearly what effect the PD has had in improving classroom learning. The work of RE advisors is particularly appreciated, and this is often tailored to the specific needs of the school.

Teachers anecdotally mentioned increased confidence in knowledge, teaching techniques, thinking and evaluating practice, stimulus to try new approaches, engagement and enjoyment, broader and deeper knowledge of the topic and of the theory and theology behind topics, better understanding of the RE programme, and the Catholic Faith, "deeper understanding of the overall vision of our particular school and the needs of our community", faith growth and deepening of understanding of the teacher's own values and beliefs. "rekindling who and what we are, nurturing/growing our faith, allows us to hear Christ's call and sense the Holy Spirit."

Changes in teaching and learning practices as a result of professional development

A wide range of changes were noted including: more variety of prayer types, increased confidence in delivery of lessons, shared language, use of SOLO in Religious Education, taking more notice of shared planning and assessment, delivery of strands refined, “meaningful assessment and planning for specific student need is beginning to appear”, “enhanced knowledge leads to improved teaching and learning”, “students now see teachers as learners”, use of the digital tools and reflective journals, specific planning based on student need, more coherent planning style for RE lessons, “quality feedback, peer and self-assessment, blended e-learning, drama, dance and visual art incorporated”, more focus on the affective domain, more story telling in RE, IT ideas and resources passed on to staff, digital resource more used, RE incorporated into other learning areas. None of these items were widely reported, however.

Responses from secondary schools included: “better able to guide students in relation to use of internet”, “I can better talk about my own experience of the Mass and its effect of my own life. I’ve made a unit resource on the Mass”, “greater focus for students when preparing for school Masses, analysis of NCEA results in RE, with the DRS setting targets for all levels and reviews against those targets, (increasing numbers of students attending Masses in and out of school can in part be attributed to this)”, “mentored two new RE teachers with more confidence”. The comments referred consistently to an individual teacher’s experience, and did not mention whether departmental practice changed.

These comments were heartening and encouraging as they reflected the enthusiasm of teachers for the Catholicity of our schools.

Teachers consistently considered professional development was worthwhile. However, there were a handful of comments that professional development made very little difference, and a number of reports provided no comment on any changes in teaching and learning practices as a result of professional development.

While both professional development and study towards qualifications can feed into certification, certification is not a itself a formal qualification – many respondents seem unaware of this difference.

Formal qualifications and work towards qualifications

In contrast to the amount of professional development undertaken, there is not yet a lot of uptake of papers or courses which lead to specific qualifications, despite this being a defined aim of the Bishops for the Catholic education system. Whole staff initiatives to undertake a paper such as TH101 – Introduction to Catholicism are proving very rewarding in some schools.

Certificates in Catechetical Studies, Diplomas in Religious Education and Religious Studies, Understanding Sexuality, Certificates in Leadership in a Catholic School , Masterates in Educational Leadership and in Religious Education were the qualifications most commonly mentioned, but only a very small proportion of teachers have completed or are undertaking study towards these qualifications. Those secondary schools where the whole Religious Education Department is well qualified in Theology and/or Religious Education find that Religious Education and Religious Studies Achievement Standards are effectively taught.

Funding allocated for professional development in Catholic Character and Religious Education

Most schools stated that funding for Religious Education and Catholic Character professional development is adequate or generous or that funding is always available. However, many schools had difficulty specifying how much was spent in this area; they could not estimate what was spent on Religious Education and Catholic Character combined as a proportion of the total professional development budget, nor could they distinguish between Religious Education and Catholic Character funding for PD. Estimates ranged from 2% to 33% of the total professional development budget. Very few schools appeared to allocate funding for papers leading to qualifications.

Access to any other sources of funding

Dioceses fund various courses at little or no cost to schools, some schools ask for a subject donation for Religious Education and it seems that some of this may go into professional development costs, a teacher in one school was funded through the Manaiaakalani Trust for release days to enable action research on changing pedagogy in Religious Education, another school accessed funding from a charitable trust and also received an anonymous donation, some secondary schools receive funding from their Proprietor Trust.

The example of funding for action research on changing pedagogy suggests that there may be more such possibilities available to schools.

References to PD in Religious Education and Catholic Character in Boards of Trustees' policies

Most schools have at least one point in Board policies or the annual plan that relates to professional development in this area. Some policies specify work towards accreditation. Typical policies state that opportunities will be provided for staff to take part in appropriate professional development, or that staff are required to meet the Bishops' minimum of 12 hours annually, or that professional development will support the school's special character. However, many schools have only very general policy in this area, and some schools do not have a professional development plan at all¹. It is not clear whether Boards ask school leadership to report in any detail in this area.

The barriers

Distance, cost and time constraints were frequently mentioned, particularly in relation to achieving the Proprietor's expectation of 12 hours of professional development a year. On the other hand, some very remote schools ensure they get to almost everything offered, despite the costs of transport and scarcity of relievers. The model of a whole staff completing a TCI paper, or Understanding Sexuality is an excellent one, but staff are fluid and within several years there can be

¹ Some examples of specific statements made in BOT and school management level policies

- The school provides opportunities for regular RE professional development and spiritual development for all staff.
- The school expects all teachers of RE to be working towards a suitable approved qualification in line with the NZBC requirements
- In-school PD is available at least once per term
- CEO courses are attended by all staff
- Teachers are encouraged to complete the Diploma of Religious Studies

significant changes to the proportion who have taken such courses. One respondent said, “The management of PD is a “loaves and fishes” exercise, conducted with particular skills by the DP.” Schools are to be congratulated on how much they achieve in a “loaves and fishes” environment.

WHERE TO FROM HERE? RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROPRIETORS, BOARDS OF TRUSTEES AND SCHOOL LEADERS

PROPRIETORS

Proprietors have a legal responsibility for the Catholic Character of schools and the effectiveness of teaching in Religious Education. They would do well to seek more precise information from schools, including information on their plans to raise the qualifications of staff.

Given that there is no standard way of reporting on spending on Catholic Character and Religious Education, Proprietors might consider developing a template for reporting in this area.

BOARDS OF TRUSTEES

Most schools’ Board policies have some mention of professional development to support Catholic Character and Religious Education. There is an opportunity for Boards to set more specific and challenging goals, and to plan and allocate funding to assist staff to undertake qualifications. If there is no clear path from policies to goals to funding and, finally, to reporting, Boards and Proprietors cannot be certain policies are driving significant progress.

We are at the beginning stages in ensuring that teachers have appropriate qualifications in Catholic Character and Religious Education, not simply certification and professional development. Boards need to work with school leadership to develop plans and strategies for this.

In particular, secondary school Boards of Trustees need to be aware that those schools that have appointed Boards of Trustees could ask questions about the impact of professional development in Catholic Character and Religious Education, so that they can report more specifically to their Proprietor.

Boards and school leadership need to be able to assure Proprietors that they are making funding available to ensure that staff can receive appropriate professional development in Catholic Character and Religious Education, and that staff are taking papers that will lead to qualifications in these areas.

SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Overall, schools are engaging in a wide range of professional development to support Catholic Character and Religious Education. All schools, both primary and secondary, can seek to improve even further and most school leaders can become more specific and strategic about enabling staff to undertake qualifications.

The majority of secondary schools need to put in place strategies to ensure that all Religious Education teachers gain qualifications in Theology and/or Religious Education.

Schools could develop tools for formal analysis of the effectiveness of their professional development in Catholic Character and Religious Education, and their long term monitoring of growth and progress in teacher skills and in students' learning and spiritual development.

The leadership and assessment contract, and other initiatives driven by the State have made a significant difference to the way teachers plan and deliver the curriculum, and to learning – schools need to ensure that best practice developed in some areas of the curriculum is also applied within Religious Education.

We are at the beginning stages in ensuring that teachers have appropriate qualifications in Catholic Character and Religious Education, not simply certification and professional development. Boards and school leadership need to develop plans and strategies for this.

Some schools face problems of distance in accessing papers leading to qualifications, and accessing professional development. Other remote schools, however, have overcome this problem. Discussion with the Catholic Institute or the diocesan Catholic education office might enable a creative solution to be found. The possibilities of distance learning are expanding rapidly and will be shaped by what schools articulate as their needs.

Schools could think laterally about access to funding, for instance funding for research, which can be applied to Catholic Character, and will lead to qualifications.

CONCLUSION

We congratulate and thank schools for their continuing work to support Catholic Character and Religious Education teaching in our schools. We hope this summary of what we found, and our suggestions for next steps, will be useful for schools, Boards of Trustees and Proprietors.

We thank schools and reviewers for their work in providing this information.

New Zealand Catholic Education Office

October 2014