

Nurturing Community:

A School Culture Approach



AN INNOVATIVE PROGRAMME SUPPORTING SCHOOLS TO REFLECT, PROCESS AND STRENGTHEN THEIR SCHOOL CULTURE IN A TIME OF CHANGE



For the past 5 years the University of Notre Dame has partnered with schools across Ireland to focus on, strengthen and sustain their school culture, including since 2017, 9 CEIST schools. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 we were all set to welcome a new cohort of schools into the process. But times and priorities have changed in the past few months.

Taking account of the new reality facing school leaders we have revised our programme offering in a way we believe will serve as a resource to school communities as they return to school in the autumn.

COVID-19 RESPONSE

School communities have been challenged in a unique way by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our teachers have had to adapt to a 'new normal' in terms of providing support to students. The support of colleagues, something so valuable in a crisis, has been limited by imposed distance, online interactions only, and personal and family priorities.

As we emerge from the crisis, and our school communities gather again, how will we process the impact of the past months? How will our schools re-set expectations and priorities, informed by how our beliefs and values have been reshaped by the crisis?

We believe that our process, with a focus on School Culture and tailored to the unique experiences of schools during this crisis, will support you and your colleagues in tackling some of these profound questions.

The process is designed to be engaging, support-focused, and flexible within the context of a crowded yet uncertain academic calendar in 2020/21.

FLEXIBLE APPROACH

Planning for next year is challenging in the current context as school leaders are unsure whether full classrooms will be able to return in September, if teachers be allowed to gather in staffrooms, or will some element of remote learning be required to continue?

To take account of this high-level of uncertainty the support programme we are outlining here will take account of this in the following ways:

1. This initiative will not require participating schools to assign resources to planning or delivering sessions. You will be fully supported through facilitation by Notre Dame and CEIST staff.
2. Assuming social distancing will be required into the next school year all inputs will be delivered live via an online platform and, if you wish, form part of your normal schedule of staff meetings or Croke Park hours.
3. If social distancing restrictions are lifted during the school year we will shift delivery of the sessions to in-person facilitation if you prefer.

OUTCOMES

Participation in this initiative will provide you and your staff with a space to process your collective experiences of the COVID-19 crisis from an educational perspective, and allow you to develop a shared language and priorities in relation to strengthening and sustaining your school community into the future.

SELECTION CRITERIA

1. Principal is committed to focusing on school culture in the context of being a Catholic school.
2. A faculty and staff who the Principal believes, in the main, are open to such a process.
3. Support and buy-in of the Board of Management.

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STEPS IN THE PROCESS

1. Our School, Our Stories
2. Mapping Our School Culture
3. Catholic Schools: A Dual Mission
4. Exploring Root Beliefs
5. Deciding Core Values
6. Communicating our School Culture

TIMELINE

Early October:

Whole staff introductory session reflecting on the experience, as a school community, of the past months.

Early December:

Staff explore the importance as a Catholic school of fostering a positive and intentional school culture, conscious of key learning's from the COVID-19 crisis.

Late January:

Staff examine the dual mission our your school, and what it means to be a Consciously Catholic School.

Late February:

Staff are facilitated to identify a shared set of Root Beliefs that will illuminate your school culture.

Early April:

Whole staff input to decide a set of Core Values that highlight your priorities as a school community.

Early May:

Staff explore how your School Culture can be strengthened, sustained and protected into the future.

Process completed and achievement celebrated by all participating schools!!!

This process is aligned with a number of the domains under the *Looking at Our Schools, A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools* including; Leading Learning & Teaching, Managing the Organisation, and Leading School Development.

Each session will be approximately 40 minutes long. Sessions are designed to be interactive and engaging, utilising mixed-media and group discussion.

The dates outlined above are indicative and a final timeline will be decided in consultation with individual school leaders.

FUNDING

The cost of this programme is free to schools and funded through a partnership between the University of Notre Dame and CEIST.

PLANNING FOR UNCERTAINTY!

The one thing we know for sure right now is that we have no clear picture of how the next academic year will unfold.

With this in mind, we will adapt and adjust the format of this programme as circumstances allow, with the goal of providing the highest level of support to you and your staff as is possible.

If COVID-19 restrictions disappear during the 2020/21 school year we will, in consultation with school leaders, seek to enhance and enrich the programme offering in ways that make sense to individual school communities.