

SPIRITAN EDUCATION TRUST

PROPOSED ETHOS VISITATION OF SCHOOLS

Spiritan Education Trust CLG (SET) is committed to continuing and developing the Catholic education tradition of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritans) in Ireland, as Patron of its schools. One way by which it proposes to fulfil this role is through an ethos visit to each School.

1. What is a School Ethos Visit?

The Ethos Visit acts as a resource to support all who are committed to the promotion of the characteristic spirit of the school. It provides an opportunity for each school to reflect on its mission as a Spiritan school. The visit also enables the school patron to play its appropriate part in the important life-giving and supportive process for understanding, supporting and taking ownership of Spiritan mission in the community of schools for which it is patron.

The Visit fulfils this role by affirming what is already in place, appreciating the individual appropriation of each school of its Spiritan origin and traditions and facilitating the development of new ways of giving expression to this legacy. Its purpose is to capture the Spiritan ethos as lived and articulated in the particularity of each school community. It does not seek uniformity. Each school has its own location, history, crest, traditions and particular areas of high achievement. Each school is a unique living reality of teaching and learning in which Christian Discipleship is nurtured. In the midst of much change it is important to have in place what is needed to ensure the continuation of the Spiritan ethos as individualised in each school.

2. What are the indicators of a living Spiritan ethos?

We already have a rich variety of indicators from the Annual School Reports of 2012-2013.

One school speaks of the Spiritan ethos as expressed in its code of discipline and the resulting caring environment. Other reports emphasise prayer and highlight the importance of a good chaplaincy team.

Some schools list the activities and events that point to the Spiritan ethos in operation: retreats, pilgrimages to Lourdes, an exchange programme with a Spiritan School in Germany, mission immersion experiences. Seminars on depression and cancer awareness are provided in one school. While one school holds a "Development Education Week", another provides a "Healthy Eating Week". One school has a "Soul Project" and speaks of faith initiatives involving a large number of Staff.

School organisation also gives expression to a Spiritan ethos with a student mentoring scheme growing out of the Faith Friends programme in one school. The working of the Student Council and Green School Committee promotes the Spiritan ethos in a number of schools.

3. How is the Spiritan ethos expressed?

Each School has its own Mission Statement and policy documents. The School Website Newsletters, School Annual and other publications chronicle the life of the school and ought to reflect its characteristic spirit. Extracurricular school Events – liturgies, sporting events, inter-school competitions - act as a barometer of school values in action.

Perhaps the following identity of the school as a community of schools with a common Patron could be used on School websites and in policy documents:

_____ (name of school/college) was founded by the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (C.S.Sp.) in _____. We offer a Catholic education in the Spiritan tradition. As part of a Community of Spiritan Schools in Ireland and sharing in a Spiritan mission worldwide, this community of learning and teaching is managed by a School Board of Management. The Spiritan Education Trust (SET) ensures that all aspects of education and school life in _____ (name of school/college) are offered in accordance with the Spiritan missionary tradition and ethos in which the school was founded.

4. What is the Characteristic Spirit of a “Spiritan School”?

For some years now a set of values have been identified as the Spiritan Core Values that find expression in all that happens in our schools. There are Seven Core Values. Perhaps School Documents could be expressed in line with these common Spiritan values.

Openness to the Spirit

We are guided by the Holy Spirit in our relationships, choices, behaviours and decisions.

A Sense of Community

Working together as a community of schools, we value diversity as a gift from God and the foundation for building communities each and every day.

Solidarity with the Poor

We live in an unequal world where resources are unevenly distributed. From our privileged position we are called to recognise our role in working together to create a just world.

Commitment to Service

Following the examples of Jesus, the gifts and talents that we are blessed with are freely offered in the service of each other and in all the communities to which we belong.

Global Vision

This value reflects the missionary outlook of the Congregation. Spiritan education works for the empowerment of peoples and their liberation from injustice and poverty.

High Educational Standards

The realisation of each person's human and spiritual potential to strive for excellence in all areas of life.

Personal Development

The moral, spiritual, intellectual, physical, social and cultural development of each student is at the heart of the Spiritan vision of Education.

The Ethos Visit initiates a discussion around the Seven Core values asking how they serve to promote that which is best in the Spiritan Tradition in each particular school.

5. A Community of Schools with a shared Mission

There is something common to each Spiritan School distinguishing them from other schools. They have a common origin and inspiration and are part of the international mission of the Spiritans. The Spiritan Education Trust (SET) is charged by the Spiritans to direct and supervise their educational mission in a collaborative, open and transparent way. It does this through meaningful communication with school management and the fostering of co-operation among all stakeholders. Its own mission statement says that the SET “encourages education policies, programmes and practices which nurture and develop the abilities, talents and interests of each person in ways that promote and champion active citizenship and solidarity with people who are marginalised.”

The Ethos Visit is an occasion to foster communion within a school, between schools and with their patron body, the SET. A common ownership can then be seen by all and given expression in each School's documents, organisation, activities and events permeating the whole life of the school. It is in a spirit of partnership, openness and accountability that the ethos visitation of schools can achieve this purpose.

The Ethos Visit can be part of a process that recognises the uniqueness of each school while promoting the unity of all Spiritan schools according to agreed values and one patron continuing the Spiritan education heritage. It can promote a dialogue around the core values and seek to develop animation material and resources for the promotion of the Spiritan ethos and the shared identity of schools.

6. Through the lens of Resilience – in times of ‘Shock’

During times of Crisis Ethos is tested - Resiliency is more than just contingency plans and something to be practiced at an executive leadership level. It is a way of being, a mindset, a skill set, and a dedicated process that allows an organization to embrace uncertainty and endure and recover from setbacks or shocks. Our ethos should foster a culture that not only prioritizes but also practices flexibility, continued learning, and self-care across all levels and structures. In times of a crisis or rapid change, “burnout can emerge because of something different – what experts call ‘decision fatigue’...In other words, the Covid-19 pandemic or the abuse scandals within the network force us to rapidly grapple with difficult decisions in an unsettlingly new context.”

As part of the evaluation of our schools, credence and time should be given to highlight and evaluate the effectiveness of our Spiritan ethos during times of crisis.

E.g.:

- From the experience of the last while which of the ‘characteristic/core values’ have been tested – How are they manifesting themselves in our school at this time?
- How are they practically coming into play – which need supported/strengthen/re-focused? Give concrete examples of strengths and gaps
- How is this experienced in our school environment practically?
- Is there an ‘initiative’ – that as a network we can work together on/support each other on/re focus on – & how?

7. Structuring the Ethos Visit

The Ethos visits to our schools place in the context of an Independent External School Evaluation and was structured in this way:

- The Education Trust CEO advises a school that an Ethos Visit is due explaining its purpose and introducing the visiting team
- An initial visit by the team to agree a programme for the visit (an Ethos Questionnaire is presented for completion by the school and returned before the ethos visit)
- The ethos visit includes meetings with the Management (Principal and Deputy Principal); Chaplain; Teachers and others (as arranged by Principal)
- Visit to a First Communion and Confirmation Class;
- Concluding meeting with Principal;
- Draft Report inviting feedback
- Feedback received
- Final Report issued.

The key focus of the visit is, “What is needed for the Spiritan Identity to be maintained and developed in our school?”