

ETHOS STATEMENT

WE CARE, WE DEVELOP, WE BELIEVE
TOGETHER WE ACHIEVE



Salesians of Don Bosco
Ireland



The General Principles of Catholic Education

Salesian College, as a Catholic Voluntary Secondary School, strives to live the message of Jesus Christ in a particular time and place. This challenges us as a school community to be a witness to the Gospel and its values, to cherish each person as made in the image of God, to create solidarity and community, to help those in need and to welcome all especially the stranger.

As a school we are guided in our approach by the general principles of the Catholic education in the form of the twin qualities of inclusive respect and the common good. This notion of the common good "involves the Gospel sense of solidarity and identification with the other as expressed so profoundly in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10: 25-37)."¹ Catholic education is grounded in the values of openness, working for the common good, and a priority approach to those members of society in need of economic, family, social, academic, spiritual and faith support.²

Catholic schools are committed to the deepest respect for both faith and reason and as such they contribute in a significant way to the formation of rational and mature citizens for a democratic society. Catholic education aims to foster in students a sense of inner freedom, a capacity for good relationships and a deep awareness of their own giftedness. The Catholic school celebrates the talents and achievements of all, and their policies and practices are permeated by the spirit of Christ in such areas as discipline and punishment, bullying, racism and sexism, exclusions and expulsions, as well as respect for and support of the role of teachers.³

Catholic Schools seek to continue the mission of Christ and to provide a religious education that includes faith formation, prayer, sacramental experiences and a growing awareness of being stewards of God's creation. Christians, who are part of the school community are invited to constantly rediscover what it is to be a follower of Christ. In a culturally diverse society, as Ireland is today, the Catholic school welcomes all that is positive and new in this reality, asks all its members to practice an attitude of respect for difference, to seek always the good of the other and to be open to members of other faiths and none.



The Salesian Approach in Catholic Education



PROACTIVE: The Salesians have received from their founder, St John Bosco, a profoundly Catholic approach to education that he called *The Preventive System*. His approach is nothing if not proactive in its dedication to respond to the real needs of those he sought to help and educate. Don Bosco's first educative experiences were with young prisoners, young apprentices and young labourers who had been forced to migrate to the city of Turin during the industrial and political upheavals that characterized Italy during most of the 19th century. These young people shaped Don Bosco as an educator as he attempted to respond to their needs and abilities, a process of mutual interaction and learning that took place over many years. In this he is an example to teachers today who are also challenged to learn as they teach and take the range of abilities and needs of their students seriously.

CONTEXTUAL: Don Bosco understood that the lure of the city, coupled with an absence of understanding and support, could easily lead to situations where the natural kindness of young people and their desire for goodness were lost or damaged. Don Bosco's response was both practical and educative. Similar forces are at work today and our response also needs to be practical and educative. What Don Bosco developed at that time has been described by one of his biographers as a "home that welcomed, a parish that evangelized, a school that prepared them for life, and a playground where friends could meet and enjoy themselves." From this tradition has come the practice that every Salesian centre is to see itself as a school, a home, a church and a playground, seeking to bring these elements in the most practical and relevant means to the youth where the centre is situated. The Salesian ethos calls us to be shepherds of loving kindness. Jesus, as the good shepherd, calls us to imitate him in seeking the young, in particular, those who are lost and scattered, the poor and the wounded, the vulnerable and most in need. The Salesian School today is still challenged to live this ideal in a contemporary fashion.



THE PREVENTIVE SYSTEM:

At the heart of Don Bosco's Preventive System of Education lies the core process of what he termed Assistance, a concept and approach synonymous with educative accompaniment, which he preferred to the more repressive forms of vigilance and discipline characteristic of many educational approaches at the time. Educative accompaniment – assistance – implies a readiness to engage in an educative way with a variety of issues and areas in the lives of young people, not all of which have been foreseen. Educative accompaniment names the creation of an educative context in which educators mix willingly with and relate to the young. It names a relationship that pertains both within the classroom and outside it, in terms of a quality of presence that is always educative, person-centred, interested, and engaged with the young.

This qualitative presence unfolds through a process in which three foundational themes meet and interact within the educational environment. Don Bosco named these three themes as reason, religion, and loving kindness.

REASON

The first theme challenges the educator to find ways of being reasonable in all dealings with the young. This element has clear implications for the approach to discipline and codes of conduct within the School.

LOVING KINDNESS

The third theme challenges the educator to discover personal qualities expressive of a compassionate, gentle and kindly approach that is supportive of the young person's development in the fullest possible sense. In Don Bosco's vision, this third element has no room for repressive tendencies or power-based approaches. It is rooted in the gentle, optimistic spirituality of Don Bosco's patron, St Francis De Sales.

RELIGION

The second theme is religious and spiritual in nature and denotes the celebratory character of Salesian education and its approach to prayer and liturgy within the School. From this perspective the School is viewed as "a place of celebration". The view of the person operative in the Salesian School derives from a Christian philosophy. Each encounter with the young is to help the young person find self-belief and meaning. The quality of reasonableness that informs the School's approach to discipline finds its inspiration in the Christian call to a love that does justice and is pastoral in its outlook, that is, takes a holistic, well-rounded view of the young person and of the young person's education for life. This element has obvious implications for equality and fairness in the way the School is organized and run.

The Preventive System constantly challenges the Salesian School to find ways of relating within the educative community that are evidently reasonable, spiritually grounded and authentic, and compassionately understanding in a way that mirrors gentle kindness and regard. In the Christian and Salesian tradition, every person is seen as a child of God and is to be treated with respect and dignity. There is a depth to each person that deserves exploration, education and celebration and this can only happen when there is a proper and caring relationship between the young person and the adult accompanying him or her. In effect, the Preventive System has to do with the unfolding of a quality of presence on the part of educators among the young people in the School that is educative in the richest sense of the word. The teacher educates directly not just in the classroom, but also within the total ecology of the School: in conversations, in games, in the general organization of the School, among groups, in both formal and informal settings.

A healthy school culture based on the style of the Preventive System increases confidence and reciprocal trust, reduces alienation and mental health issues associated with it, prevents prejudices and misunderstandings, supports informal communication, and nurtures well-being and a sense of belonging.

All involved in the Salesian School community are called to reflect on the style and the quality of their communication. Essentially, it is about being available to understand and to make oneself understood. In this way the Salesian school seeks to model positive and mature models of relationship for the young person as they prepare for engagement in the wider world.

The Salesian School values the roles of all staff and supports in particular the teacher in the classroom. Teachers, because of their face to face contact with students, play a critical role in the School community, understanding the needs of the young people in their care, The teacher can become a voice for each young person in developing the educative curriculum of the School. Parents, working positively and closely with their child's teacher, form an integral and powerful element of the educative process.

The Salesian School is guided by civil legislation, the Salesian ethos, and the social teaching of the Church so as to enable them to offer a better educative and pastoral response in a pluralistic culture. The Church's social doctrine is a collection of principled reflections, whose purpose is to examine reality so as to determine the extent to which it is consistent with the teachings of the Gospel on human dignity and on the human vocation.

Every Salesian School is asked to form what is known as the Salesian Educative Pastoral Community (EPC). The EPC focuses on building a team approach to the work, recognizes that there is greater strength in unity. It seeks to create a structured approach which allows for a plan (SEPP) to be drawn up (Salesian Educative Pastoral Plan) and a group to ensure its implementation and review (EPC), so as to ensure that we are constantly responding to the ever-changing needs of young people in a meaningful and relevant way today.



PARTNERSHIP:

Envisaged as a partnership, the educative community encourages the experience of growing together and learning how to live with others. This takes place through dialogue within the School itself and with the wider local community, particularly parents and others concerned for the integral education of the young.

In contemporary Ireland this dialogue involves an encounter with an emerging multicultural society marked by the simultaneous presence of ethnic, cultural, political and religious differences, the fascination with the mass media, and the world of information technology. In this way the School becomes a place where it is possible not only to learn about but also to experience the possibilities and limitations of the prevailing social culture in terms of both personal freedom, and individual and collective life.

Don Bosco's approach to the School further requires that the educative community learn to reflect what he called "the family spirit". By this he meant that the School should be a welcoming place where young people feel safe and wanted. It means that young people should experience the School as a place where a relational style is practiced, and where responsibilities are shared, on the basis of "reason, religion, and loving kindness."

The School is not isolated from the realities of the society of which it is a part. The School will have to face social problems as and when they arise. Young people are faced with two worlds today, one in the school, the other outside. Good educators know how young people are moved by curiosity and excitement and that both School curriculum and policy must acknowledge the competition of other forces. This is part of being an educative community living in the real world.

The qualities of the Preventive System are the guiding principles in searching for authentically Salesian responses to new social problems as they are encountered. A system of education that is closed off within itself is not really educational. A School that tries to ignore the real world of young people or tries to be closed off from its sociocultural context is not Salesian. Genuine education certainly calls for forethought, prudence and even protection, but it must also be wisely open and able to educate in and with pluralism.



THE SALESIAN SCHOOL:

The Salesian School is open to everything that has to do with education, formation, growth, and human advancement. It is open to the places and settings where young people live. It wants to be involved in whatever will help their professional future. It is able to dialogue and enter conversations with other institutions and groups without losing its own identity and ability to make its own specific contribution to the quality of life of all concerned. In such ways the Salesian School becomes a centre of healthy life to which young people can easily relate and in which they can feel supported and understood; and it can help them give life to voluntary forms of ecclesial and social work.

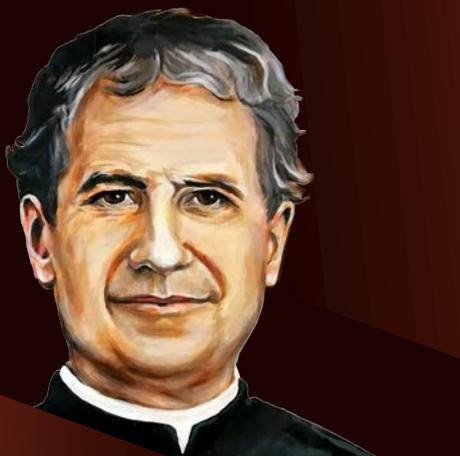
In the Salesian School we are particularly concerned that young people not fall prey to alienation or estrangement or become disaffected with the educational system itself. We desire to help them learn how to practice freedom with responsibility. Responsibility for the relationship lies first with the adult, but over time, there is to be an appropriate sharing of responsibility with the young person.

Don Bosco never believed in corporal punishment or repressive regimes of rules. Order was valued in his centres but it had a human and caring face. He understood that in the world of the young a certain amount of "disorder" must be allowed for and understood. Young people want to explore and try new things.

The implication for the Salesian School is the awareness that while programmes are important, so also are the things that happen outside programmes.

It is in this context that the deep meaning of educative accompaniment – Don Bosco's assistance – makes its vital contribution. This means, for Don Bosco, learning to "like what the youngsters like" in a spirit of caring, developing, believing and achieving.





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