

**ARCHBISHOP'S HOUSE**  
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Dear Chairperson and Principal,

I extend to you my greetings and good wishes as I begin my ministry as Archbishop and as Patron of your school. I do so conscious of the very difficult circumstances under which school communities are functioning. I know that Covid-19 brought sickness and, sadly, death to school communities, while greatly disrupting their mission of education and care for our children.

I am aware of the great efforts which Principals and school staff made to continue to provide education and support for children and their families when public health guidelines required them to close their doors. Your innovation and dedication have been greatly appreciated. I know that Boards of Management grappled and continue to grapple with difficult questions in meeting their responsibilities for the safety and well-being of pupils and staff.

Now that a pathway has been announced for schools to return to normal activities, I know that reopening is being approached with the professionalism and care which has marked the work of our schools to date.

I would like to mention one issue which is of great concern to many parents, and indeed to schools, namely the arrangements for celebration of the sacraments of First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion and Confirmation. The impact of Covid-19 last year greatly disrupted arrangements for these important moments in the life of our communities and families. With the cooperation of schools, alternative arrangements were made, often at very short notice, to enable celebrations to take place safely and reverently, though sadly circumstances made it impossible to provide for all children. This initiated, sooner than anyone could have planned, a realignment of roles between schools, parishes and families in preparation for the celebration of the sacraments.

The Irish Bishops, in "Guidelines for Preparing and Celebrating the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Holy Communion", have stated that preparation for celebration of the sacraments is a partnership between home, school and parish. Schools play an indispensable role in religious education, particularly in their Catholic ethos, which is affirmed and expressed through school life, school assemblies, prayer moments during the day, celebration of liturgical seasons and feast days, as well as in relationships based on respect for the dignity of each member of the school community.

Schools have the responsibility to deliver the Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015) through the approved *Grow in Love* programme, that helps our children to grow in faith and the knowledge and love of God. In this way, schools prepare children to celebrate the sacraments, and support families and their parishes in the completion of Christian initiation of children.

Parishes have the responsibility to prepare the liturgical celebration of the sacraments and to support parents in nurturing the faith of their children within the context of the community of faith which invites them to celebrate the sacraments.

During 2020 we had positive experiences of celebration, with parish registration of families and parish preparation of the ceremonies, complementing the work of the school. This year we plan to build on this experience through registration of families directly with the parish and by providing preparatory resources for families at parish level, complementing the programmes delivered in school.


There is understandable anxiety about the timing of the celebration of the sacraments this year. I assured parents that there is no deadline and that we should focus on supporting children so that they are prepared to celebrate the sacraments whenever, and in whatever format, this proves possible. As happened last year, the celebration of the sacraments in parishes can extend beyond the end of the school year through arrangements made with parents who have registered with the parish.

As soon as liturgical celebrations can be safely resumed, we will prioritise the celebration of sacraments for children where this could not happen last year, then children who are due to celebrate Confirmation this year, followed by First Reconciliation and First Holy Communion.

As schools reopen, teachers will continue to teach Religious Education programmes. Meanwhile, with the cooperation of schools, families will register the names of children they wish to receive the sacraments with the parish. Then parishes will engage in preparation with families so that they will be ready for celebration of the sacraments whenever we may safely gather to do so.

I am confident that our schools will continue to reflect their Catholic ethos in the spirit of service which has been so evident during this crisis. I assure you of my deep appreciation of the commitment of Principals, school staff and members of Boards of Management to our children and their families, not least in the important work of preparation for the sacraments.

With my prayerful good wishes and kind regards,



✠ Dermot Farrell  
Archbishop of Dublin