

SEPTEMBER 2024

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER

"The mission of schools and teachers is to cultivate an appreciation for all that is truthful, virtuous, and aesthetically pleasing." – Pope Francis (October 2017)

Dear Principal/Chairperson,

I hope this finds you all well. A sincere welcome back to yet another busy school year. Although the summer weather wasn't quite as sunny as we had expected, I do hope that you managed to take a well-earned break from the intensity of school life, to recharge, in preparation for the new school year. A special welcome to our newly appointed principals and deputy principals. I pray that you will be guided by the Holy Spirit to lead your schools with kindness, courage, and sound judgement.

Our four patrons, Archbishop Kieran, Bishops Brendan, Ray, and Fintan, have asked that I extend their sincere thanks to you, to the members of the board of management, and to all school staff for the wonderful work you do in our schools. Our pupils benefit not only from an excellent standard of education, but also from the exceptional standard of care, kindness, and compassion extended to them on a daily basis by school staff. This is something of which you should be very proud indeed.

As you embark on this very busy first term, we have put together a brief newsletter which we hope will be of some assistance to you. On behalf of the staff of St. Senan's Education Office, I wish you all the very best for the new school year. We look forward to working with you all over the coming year.

Beir bua is beannacht,

Aislin Foley

Services offered by St. Senan's Education Office

As always, the staff of St. Senan's Education Office will be available to help and guide you throughout the coming school year. We are open from Monday to Friday offering support to chairpersons and principals by email and over the phone. Our phone line is open from 9:30am – 3:30pm daily. However, the quickest and most efficient way to lodge your query is to submit an email to us giving a brief outline of your query. If you are unsure as to where to direct your query, please submit an email to: sseo@ldo.ie Please include your mobile phone number at the end of your email in case we need to speak with you by phone for further clarity on your query.

A reminder, especially for newly appointed principals, that the purpose of our office is to offer advice and support to chairpersons and principals in relation to their respective roles in managing the school. It is not function of the Patron to advise other members of the school community.

Therefore, we would be most grateful if you would ensure that all teaching staff and special needs assistants employed in your school understand that their correct point of reference for advice or support is their union. Your co-operation on the above matter is very much appreciated.

Board of Management Training

A further three modules in training for boards of management will be delivered during the first term of the 2024/25 school year. These modules will be delivered online. Training for Chairpersons and Principals in the area of **Data Protection**, is scheduled to take place over Zoom on **Tuesday 24th September**. The link to access the training session will be sent to all schools and chairpersons in a separate email early next week. The Data Protection module will be delivered by Ms. Michelle O' Riordan. Michelle previously worked as a Director in St. Senan's Education Office and is now the Data protection Officer for the seven Munster Dioceses. The training session will include guidance on the retention of documents, CCTV, data access requests, and dealing with data breaches. I strongly encourage all chairpersons and principals to register with us and attend this training session.



Board of Management Meetings: Confidentiality & Conflict of Interest

A Board of Management must meet a minimum of five times per year, scheduling at least one meeting during each of the three school terms. To protect the integrity of board proceedings, the Chairperson should regularly remind board members of the need for absolute confidentiality in relation to all matters discussed at these meetings. As the new school year gets underway, now is an opportune time for schools, which have not yet done so, to arrange school-specific email addresses for all board members. This will assist in ensuring confidentiality in relation to board matters.

Similarly, all board members should be made aware that where a conflict of interest arises in relation to any matter before the board, the relevant member must recuse him/herself for the duration of the board's deliberations on the matter. Further information in this regard can be found on pages 31 & 41 of the Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2023-2027.

Board of Management: Change of Membership

Any member of the Board of Management wishing to resign his/her position, must submit the resignation, in writing, to the Chairperson. Where a chairperson wishes to resign from his/her role, this must also be communicated in writing to the Patron. Schools must notify our office of any change in board membership, giving the name and details of the newly appointed board member. In addition, the details recorded on the website of the Charities Regulator in respect of board membership must be amended accordingly.

Recruitment of Teaching Staff and Special Needs Assistants

Recruitment season was as busy as ever this summer. We hope that you felt the benefit of the training events which were delivered back in the springtime. Many thanks to all who attended these events. It was heartening to see such a large turnout and to receive such very positive feedback from participants.

For schools who are still in the process of recruiting teaching staff and special needs assistants, a reminder that all adverts must be approved by our office before they are uploaded onto one of the recruitment websites. Please double check your draft advert for errors prior to submitting it to us. Sample adverts may be accessed on the St. Senan's Education Office website at the following link:

<https://www.stsenansed.ie/recruitment/advertising/sample-adverts/>

In advance of making an offer of employment to the successful candidate, all appointments must be approved by our office. Template letters of offer and employment contracts are available to download from the “Members’ Documents” area of the CPSMA website. Unfortunately, our office cannot provide copies of these templates to schools.

NB: Please remember that the supplementary panels remain in operation until the first working day of November and all permanent teaching vacancies must be filled from these panels.

Recruitment of a School Secretary/School Caretaker

We have received several queries in relation to the recruitment process for the positions of school secretary, caretaker, and bus escort. Whilst these vacancies are not subject to any formal procedures, they must be advertised. Adverts can be placed locally, or, through one of the education websites. Sample advertisements for these positions can also be found at the following link: <https://www.stsenansed.ie/recruitment/advertising/sample-adverts/> Patron approval is not required at the end of the interview process for these positions. Again, template contracts are available to download from the CPSMA website.

School Insurance

At a recent meeting with the representatives from Allianz Insurance, it was reported to us that some schools may be underinsured at present. Please engage with your local representatives, Noel O’ Loughlin (Diocese of Killaloe), or Martin Mc Keogh (Archdiocese of Cashel & Emly; Dioceses of Limerick and Kerry) to discuss your current cover and premium.

It is important to note that all Catholic primary schools nationwide are insured with Allianz. It is not open to schools to arrange cover with alternative providers.

Schools which are now included in the Hot Meals Scheme should ensure that Allianz is notified of the arrangements which are in place for the delivery of the scheme and seek advice around insurance cover in this regard.

Schools proposing to embark on any type of legal action should consult with Allianz in advance of instigating any such action. Schools must also notify the Patron in advance. The duty to notify the Patron is a statutory duty, provided for in Section 15 (2) (c) of the Education Act under which schools are required to *“consult with and keep the patron informed of decisions and proposals of the board.”*

School Maintenance Manual

The Department of Education has published a new circular which offers maintenance guidance to schools. Circular 0054/2024 offers advice on developing a good maintenance regime for school buildings and external spaces. You can access the document at the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/maintenance-guidance-for-all-schools/>

Increase in Instances of Burglaries from Schools in August 2024

As we commence the new school year, I have received communication from the Crime Prevention Office of An Garda Síochána, advising that they have seen an increase in burglaries from schools throughout the country in recent days. They have requested that I pass on the following simple, but very useful, advice to our schools.

- Control Access to school /campus buildings and deter unauthorised entry
- Post warning signs – “No Cash Stored on the Premises” or “24hr CCTV in Operation”
- Store valuables in secure areas – photograph and record property (note any identifying marks)
- Improve natural surveillance (cut back overgrown trees and shrubs)
- Focus on indoor and outdoor lighting, illuminate burglars to eliminate burglary
- Use CCTV and alarm monitoring and keep your system maintained
- Last out of the building should set the alarm and lock all doors and windows
- Report any suspicious activity to your local Garda Station



Ethos

“The mission of schools and teachers is to develop an understanding of all that is true, good and beautiful.” Pope Francis (October 2017)

As our Boards approach their first Anniversary at the end of this calendar year, we hope that you have gained a sense of the importance of your role to the lives of our young people and the future of Catholic education in general.

During our training this past spring / summer we looked in detail at the role and responsibilities of Boards of Management and explored the Board’s duty to uphold the Catholic Ethos of each school and how the ethos checklist should be used to facilitate this very function.

We wish for you to take this opportunity to examine this document in advance of your first Board meeting of the academic year and ensure that the checklist and its application becomes a regular and significant feature on the agenda from this point onward.

The consistent message from our school leaders must be one of unity and celebration of our catholic identity, as a collective of over 500 Primary Schools across the four dioceses we have a vital and significant role to play.

Video Link: [CPSMA Living Our Ethos \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)



A PRAYER FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Father,

Thank you for all those men and women who have given their talents to educating our young people.

Through the challenges they encounter each day, lead them to an ever-deeper appreciation of the sacred duty to which you have called them.

We give thanks for the invaluable work of all those who contribute to the efficient running of our schools, support staff, kitchen staff, maintenance staff, governors and chaplains. We thank them for their hard work and dedication, and we pray that they may continue to work in support of our schools.

Thank you for all those who lead our Catholic schools.

May they be people of integrity so that they can be witnesses as well as teachers. We pray that the schools they lead will become places where our young people can experience your love in their lives.

Submission of 2022/23 School Accounts

All schools are obliged to submit a copy of their certified annual accounts to the Patron's office. Schools which have not yet submitted their accounts for the 2022/2023 school year are requested to do so immediately. Please submit your school accounts by email to: sseo@ldo.ie putting the school's name and roll number in the subject bar of your email.

If you need advice on school finances, budgeting etc., please contact the FSSU at: 01 9104020 or email primary@fssu.ie

Admissions Policies & Admissions Notices

In late 2022, all schools were required to amend their Admissions Policy in response to legislative developments relating to the establishment of special classes. Revised policies were approved by St. Senan's Education Office at that time. Any further proposed amendments to a school's Admissions Policy must be submitted to our office for approval prior to publication or circulation among the school community. Schools should ensure that the Admissions Policy published on their website is the most recent copy of their policy.

The earliest date on which schools may publish their Admissions Notice each year is 1st October. The contents of the new Admissions Notice should be discussed, agreed, and recorded in the minutes at a BOM meeting held in advance of publication. Schools must publish their Admissions Notice at least one week prior to accepting applications for places. Once published, schools are obliged to abide by the provisions of their Admissions Notice.

Schools which anticipate that their enrolment figure into the future is likely to necessitate the need to take in another stream of pupils (i.e. schools which propose to progress from Principal + 8) must seek approval from the Patron and Department of Education in advance of executing this change.

If a school wishes to consider the possibility of amalgamation, or a change of status to coeducation, the proposal should, in the first instance, be discussed at board of management level. It is important for schools to understand that these processes are complex and may take several years to come to fruition. Good communication and managing the expectations of all stakeholders in the school community are key factors in any negotiation of a proposed change for the school. Therefore, it is absolutely imperative that all board of management discussions remain confidential at the early stages. Once the board of management has agreed that it wishes to further explore one of the above options, its chairperson should contact St. Senan's Education Office. Any initial engagement with the Patron's office will be strictly exploratory in nature and the ultimate decision rests with the Archbishop or Bishop of the relevant Diocese.

Department of Education Circulars

Below please find links to the most recent relevant circulars issued by the Department of Education:

Circular 0011/2024: Staffing Arrangements; 2024/2025

<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/staffing-arrangements-in-primary-schools-for-the-2024/25-school-year/>

Circular 0020/2024: Gaeltacht Recognition Scheme

<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/-gaeltacht-school-recognition-scheme-continued-implementation-of-the-scheme-in-primary-schools/>

Circular 0025/2024: Report of Education Need for the Purpose of the Assessment of Need Disability Act 2005

<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/-report-of-education-need-for-the-purpose-of-the-assessment-of-need-disability-act-2005/>

Circular 0028/2024: Appointment of Administrative Deputy Principals & Staffing Schedule for Special Schools 2024/2025

<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/-appointment-of-administrative-deputy-principals-and-staffing-arrangements-in-special-schools-to-take-effect-from-the-2024/25-school-year/>

Circular: 0029/2024: Allocation of Assistant Principal Posts 2024/2025

<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/edaea-allocation-of-assistant-principal-posts-2024/25-primary/>

Circular 0039/2024: Grant Scheme for ICT Infrastructure

<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/0b493-grant-scheme-for-ict-infrastructure/>

Circular 0040/2024: Standardised Testing and Other Matters

<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/information-in-relation-to-standardised-testing-and-other-matters-academic-year-2023/24-and-subsequent-years/>

(Sections 3 to 12 provide updates on a number of curriculum and other matters which are relevant to primary schools and special schools.)

Circular 0042/2024: Say Yes to Languages: Primary Language Sampler Module

<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/Circular-0042/2024-say-yes-to-languages-primary-languages-sampler-module/>

Circular 0049/2024: Special Needs Assistant Allocation fr 2024/2025 School year.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/special-needs-assistant-allocation-2024/25/>



Circular 0050/2024: Home Tuition Scheme: 2025/2025 Special Education Component

<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/9c0f9-home-tuition-grant-scheme-20242025-special-education-component/>

Circular 0053/2024: Recruitment of Special Needs Assistants; Supplementary Assignment Arrangements for 2024/2025 School Year

<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/dc16e-recruitment-of-special-needs-assistants-snas-supplementary-assignment-arrangements-for-the-20242025-school-year/>

Circular 0058/2024: Parent's Leave Scheme for Teachers

<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/parents-leave-scheme-for-registered-teachers-employed-in-recognised-primary-and-post-primary-schools/>

Circular 0059/2024: Parent's Leave Scheme for Special Needs Assistants

<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/-parents-leave-scheme-for-special-needs-assistants-employed-in-recognised-primary-and-post-primary-schools/>

