

Report by the Committee for Belief Systems

In late 2014, a committee was formed to evaluate the treatment of Belief Systems at Citywest ETNS. This committee was comprised of Massimo Fermo (Board nominee), Clara Geaney (Parent nominee) and Aoife Blood (Teacher nominee).

The committee worked to compose a survey that could be used to gauge parent opinion in relation to the matter at hand. This survey was circulated to all parents on 9 March 2015. In total, there were 58 responses to the Belief Systems survey. The committee feels that this reflects close to half the families within the school community (taking into account that there are some families with more than one child in the school, and that many families will have completed only one response).

The results of this survey are attached (See Appendix 1).

Comments on the Results of the Survey

1. The committee is pleased to note that an overwhelming majority; **90% of parents; enrolled their child at Citywest ETNS for its broad ethical education programme.**
2. Another positive outcome from the survey was that **82% of parents recognise that while their children are taught about world religions, they are never asked to observe any religious practices.**
3. What did become clear is that there is some **uncertainty with regard to parents' perceptions of the effective teaching of Belief Systems at Citywest ETNS (49% selected 'I don't know')**. As our pupils are all under age 8, and as Belief Systems is only one strand in the Learn Together curriculum (as Algebra is only one strand in Maths), the committee is satisfied that pupils may not necessarily be referring to their learning at home, and as such parents' uncertainty is unsurprising.
4. When asked **which festivals parents would like the school to celebrate/ showcase, a clear majority (65%) listed Christmas.** Also mentioned were a number of other festivals which can be seen on the Results of Belief Systems document. These responses will be taken into account upon developing a new timetable for the celebration/ showcasing of festivals within the academic year.
5. There is **no clear consensus as regards the use of a rolling calendar for the celebration/showcasing of festivals**, but what is clear is that parents feel strongly about the inclusion of Christmas every year (Out of fifteen comments, six mentioned Christmas specifically.)

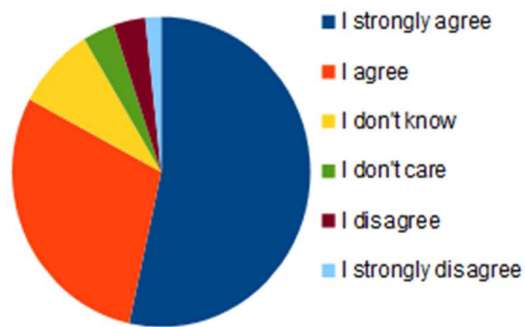
Recommendations

1. The committee recommends adhering to the Learn Together Curriculum with regard to the learning of Belief Systems. In this way, the children will be taught about Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Sikhism as well as the main non-theistic approaches of Atheism, Agnosticism and Humanism.
2. The committee recommends that while the children will be *taught* about festivals relating to the six major world religions (plus Atheism, Agnosticism and Humanism) within the context of the Learn Together curriculum, the **festivals that are celebrated/showcased within the school community will be only those that were listed by parents in the survey.**
 - **Particular priority should be given to Christmas** in light of its popularity among responses.
 - The teaching of Belief Systems would take place irrespective of the celebration/ showcasing of festivals taking place at any given time.
3. Any parents who would like a **particular festival to be added to the calendar would submit their request**, for consideration in the next review of the Learn Together plan. Parents who wish to support the learning of belief systems by coming in and speaking with the children about their own religion will be encouraged and supported in doing so.
4. The committee recommends a change to the current approach to the teaching of Belief Systems. Rather than focussing on a particular religion in isolation, we suggest a comparative approach to the religions. **Teachers would take a thematic approach** whereby a topic is chosen (for example food), and this topic is explored in the context of the main world religions.
5. The Committee has provided a proposed timetable of celebrations for the school to adopt (Appendix 2).
6. The Committee has provided a suggested list of themes for the school to use when teaching Belief Systems (Appendix 3).

Results of Survey

1. I chose to enrol my child at Citywest ETNS for its broad ethical education programme

I strongly agree	27	47%
I agree	25	43%
I don't know	2	3%
I don't care	1	2%
I disagree	3	5%
I strongly disagree	0	0%

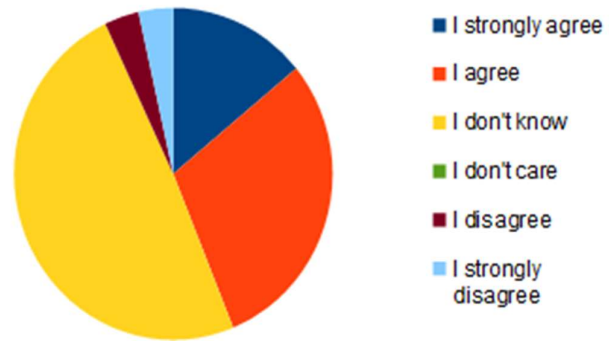


2. I understand that while my child will be taught about the main religions, he/she is never asked to observe any religious practices

I strongly agree	31	53%
I agree	17	29%
I don't know	5	9%
I don't care	2	3%
I disagree	2	3%
I strongly disagree	1	2%

3. Belief Systems are being taught effectively at Citywest ETNS

I strongly agree	8	14%
I agree	17	30%
I don't know	28	49%
I don't care	0	0%
I disagree	2	4%
I strongly disagree	2	4%



Comments:

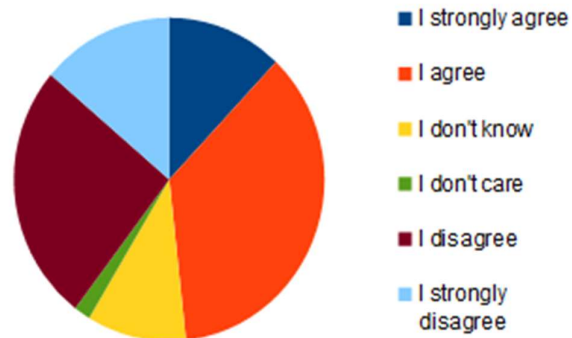
- It is too early to comment upon this as I am not sure
- I believe belief systems are something for home and not for school.
- I would prefer if no belief systems were taught just an awareness.
- What belief system? I did not notice that my child learned anything.
- I feel that the school is still forming its policy, but would prefer a more relaxed approach, including all belief systems, or at least those that wish to participate.

4. I would like the school to celebrate/ showcase the following festivals: (eg: Christmas, Diwali, Eid, etc.)

- All
- All festivals
- any, and as many as possible
- Christmas
- christmas
- Christmas
- Christmas
- Christmas
- Christmas, Easter
- Christmas, Easter, solstice
- Christmas, Halloween and any others I don't mind
- Christmas/Easter but other religions celebrations
- Christmas/Lent/Easter/Harvest
- Easter, Christmas
- Easter, not chocolate eggs, but painting real eggs.
- eid
- Eid
- I'm okay with all of them, as long as it doesn't affect education quality.
- I would very much like
- Imbolc, Bealtaine, Lughnasadh, Samhain
- No
- no
- no
- no
- None
- None.
- xmas, diwali
- yes

- Yes
- Yes
- yes
- Yes
- Yes
- yes
- yes
- Yes
- Yes
- Yes definitely
- Yule, Halloween, Easter (the non-Christian origin)

5. I support a system of celebrating/showcasing religious festivals in the school on a rolling timetable whereby one festival is recognised at a time, with the omission of others at that time (eg Hanukkah one year, Rohatsu the next and Christmas the following year).



I strongly agree	7	12%
I agree	21	36%
I don't know	6	10%
I don't care	1	2%
I disagree	15	26%
I strongly disagree	8	14%

Comments:

- All festive should be celebrated every year, as they are all different time in the year
- All the kids celebrate Christmas anyway so maybe Christmas and an additional festival would be good?
- Christmas is celebrated in Ireland by most so it would need to be celebrated every year
- Could they be combined and celebrated together?
- I believe we can celebrate all festivals each year.
- I can't see a need to leave any out any year. For example- Christmas is an annual cultural tradition for most families as well as and in my case instead of a religious event.
- I dont think that celebrating Christmas every 3 or 4 years is fair considering the amount of kids whom parents are Catholics, I believe we live in Catholic country and should respect its traditions, and culture, I believe this would mean celebrating Xmas only twice per time the kids will be in Primary School. I believe there should be some other solution, like Multicultural Concert, Fares, to make all kids, parents and belives recognised and satisfied, but as we live in Ireland we should folow Irish traditions.
- I would prefer different religious festivals to be celebrated in some way throughout the year. These are important dates in yearly calendar for the children of different religions. I'd prefer my child to learn more of different cultures/festivals.
- I would prefer the option in no. 4. above. Celebrating one festival year is too little.
- Ireland is a predominantly christian country and I believe the christian festivals/feasts should be celebrated each year with other religious festivals also.

- Midsummer festival, Eastern Europa
- there should be no religious festival in the school at all, I am concerned as we are a family that do not believe in any of the beleifs systems it may cause confusion in our child- like it was during xma period last year, these prcatices should take place outside the school
- While I accept that children should be taught an acceptance of various belief systems, I do not support celebrating or showcasing these in the school. I would prefer an entirely secular education for my child.
- While I agree with rotating the celebrations, Christmas for a lot of people is not a religious event but a cultural tradition in Ireland and should still be acknowledged in harmony with other celebrations
- Why we need to wait one year for each religion? There is no religion classes, so why not to let the kids have fun, and enjoy some of other culture tradition.

A Proposed Timetable of Celebrations
based on the responses to the survey

	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
Year 1	Lughnasa dh	Harvest	Diwali	Christmas		Imbolc	Easter	Easter	Bealtaine	Midsummer
Year 2		Samhain Halloween	Harvest	Yule				Bealtaine		Eid

List of Festivals mentioned in the responses to the survey

Festival	# of mentions	Date	Notes
Christmas	17	25/12/2015	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christmas
Midsummer	1	between June 21st and June 25th	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Midsummer
Easter	8	N/A	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter
Diwali	1	between mid-October and mid-November	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diwali
Eid (Eid al-Fitr)	2	end of Ramadan (June - July)	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eid_al-Fitr
Imbolc	1	February 1st	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imbolc
Bealtaine	1	April 30th / May 1st	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beltane
Lughnasadh	1	August 1st	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lughnasadh
Samhain Halloween	1	October, 31st	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samhain
Lent	1	Christian: 40 days before Easter	Christian Lent or Bhuddist Lent (Vassa)? http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vassa http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lent
Yule	1	Winter solstice	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yule
Harvest	1	various times at different places generally between late Aug and Nov	http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvest_festival

Suggested Themes
for a new thematic approach
to the teaching of Belief Systems

The Body

Learn different religious beliefs about the body and their significance for believers (circumcision, not cutting hair, bindi, burka for Muslim women).

Food

How each religion dictates what food should be eaten/avoided (halal meat, no beef for Hindus) and role of fasting (Ramadan). Religious significance of food at particular festivals (Easter and the end of Lent).

The Afterlife

What different religions say happen to us when we die (karma).

Work

What does religion say about what we should work at? How are we to balance/manage work and home life and days of rest (Sundays).

Laws

What things are forbidden by different religions (gambling, alcohol, contraception)? What remains in law today which is similar to that which was laid out in religious texts (The Ten Commandments)?

Animals

Which animals are significant to different religions? What animals appear in religious texts?

Children

What does each religion say about children? What is expected of children (rights/rituals which are relevant to children alone)? Differences between rearing boys and girls.

Unity/Equality

Look at role of religion in conflict/war. Learn about how different religions have great similarities and for the children to explore how we can live in harmony with one another.

Books/Texts

Learn about different religious texts (Bible, Quran, Torah); role of Holy Scriptures for believers; similarities in the stories; learn some of the stories within the texts; learn timescale, when texts were written - their historical background - and by whom.

God

Learn about who are the different God/Gods for each religion. Learn about different styles of leadership and importance of God to believers everyday lives (saying "grace" at meal times).

Houses of worship

Learn about the different building for each religion (church, mosque, synagogue). Learn about types of religious service (taking Holy Communion, facing Mecca); how often people worship (daily, Sundays).

Festivals/Holy Days

Learn about different festivals for each religion (Christmas, Ramadan, Yom Kippur, Lent) and similarities and differences between them. The role and importance of these days/events for believers.

Ceremonies

Learn about different ceremonies for each religion (marriage, communion, christening, funerals, Amrit) and again differences and similarities. Ceremonies guide people through their life – birth, marriage, death – and role of religion to bring people together and celebrate milestones in lives of believers.

Pilgrimage/Holy places

Learn about pilgrimage, where believers go and why. Learn about creation of Israel.

Religious Leaders

Learn about different types of religious leaders in communities (priests, the Pope, Rabbis, and Imam) and their role for believers. How religious leaders are involved in the community (for example, why are Irish hospitals named after Saints?).