

Patron of Newtown School Waterford and Newtown Junior School.

(Appointed by Munster Quarterly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (MQM))

An introduction to, and an overview of, Newtown, Quakers and Educational Ethos

Newtown School was founded in 1798 by the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and remains under the ownership of Quakers in Munster collectively known as Munster Quarterly Meeting (MQM). Whilst founded as a school for Quaker children, it has been a multi-denominational school for some time. As a multi-denominational school, people of all religions and of no religion are welcome.

The school prospectus, and other brochures, outline the academic and extra curricular activities of the School. This document addresses topics of Quaker and Quaker values in education within a multi-denominational context. It has been prepared by Patron, which represents the Quaker interest in the School:

- The Religious Society of Friends in Ireland today, and its origins
- Waterford Quakers
- Quaker Ethos
- Thoughts on Quaker values in education
- An article on expectations of education in a Quaker school
- Newtown School and Newtown Junior School today



“Pro tanto quid retribuamus?”

The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Ireland

The Religious Society of Friends has about 250,000 members world-wide, of which 1,487 are in Ireland (687 in Ulster, 540 in Leinster and 260 in Munster)*. From earliest days Friends were also known as Quakers because it was suggested, rather derisively, that they quaked in the presence of God - and the name has stuck.

The Society started in England as a movement of 'seekers' who were disillusioned with the traditions, ritual and power politics of the church of that time. They tried to lead a renewal of Christianity to see how they could live out the Christian message more simply. George Fox (1624-1691) founder of the Religious Society of Friends, believed that God spoke to people directly, and his preaching and organisational ability led to the formation of the 'Friends of the Truth' in 1652, which later became the Religious Society of Friends. In common with other sections of the Christian Church, many Friends were involved in the evangelical movement in the 19th Century, and to this day the Society of Friends in Ireland embraces a wide diversity of expression of our faith.

Central to the life of Friends is our 'Meeting for Worship', which is open to anyone who wishes to attend. This is normally held in a simple room at a Quaker Meeting House on Sunday, though it may be held at any time in any place. Those that are gathered worship and pray together in quiet dependence on God, seeking his will and guidance. The life, example and teachings of Christ are of great importance to us. We believe that everyone present is equally likely to be chosen by the Spirit to share a message, and usually a number speak, pray or read a suitable passage during the Meeting. Everyone present, including Children, has responsibility for receiving insight, interpreting it, and passing it on to the Meeting if led by the Spirit to do so.

Since every member has responsibility, Friends feel there is no need for clergy. We believe God and man have direct relationship and mutual correspondence at all times. As we believe all of life to be sacramental we do not feel the need for the Sacrament of the Eucharist. We believe in spiritual baptism, yielding to the power of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, and thus water baptism seems to us unnecessary. Because a written creed can limit the interpretation of God, we do not have one. Of course, we do not claim that ours is the only true path to God, but simply that it is the right one for us.

The lack of clergy places the responsibility for both the worship and the administrative business, including the running of schools, on each and every individual Friend. This is done through a series of 'Monthly Meetings' in a particular area; 'Quarterly Meetings' in a province and 'Yearly Meeting' nationally. There are also numerous committees to carry out the business of Friends. All such meetings follow the pattern of being an extension to worship and as such endeavour to find the will of God in any particular situation. This leads to what is called the 'feeling' of the meeting being reached, where everyone present feels comfortable with a decision. There is no voting or majority decision, which Friends feel can lead to division and lack of unity.

We are convinced there is 'that of God' or 'the light of Christ' in everyone, and we seek to reach it. We place great store by honesty and integrity and we encourage simplicity. Women and men have been on an equal footing among Friends from the beginning. Friends have always believed that all war is inconsistent with the spirit and teaching of Christ. We try to avoid conflict in our daily lives, and to work for reconciliation, equality and the relief of suffering.

*figures for year ended 31st December 2016

Waterford Quakers

Quakers first settled in Waterford around 1655, in the parish of St. John, and worked in small trades and milling. Initially they held Meeting for Worship in their homes.

In 1694 a Meeting House was opened in Bowling Green Lane, on the site of the present Christian Brothers' School in Manor Street. By 1703 a new Meeting House had been built in Bowling Alley. The third location for the Meeting House was in O'Connell Street (now the location of the Garter Lane Arts Centre). This opened in 1791 and served until 1972, when the Meeting moved to its present location at Newtown, adjacent to the grounds of Newtown School.

Other important dates in the life of Waterford Friends were 1798, when Newtown School opened, and 1824 when Newtown Burial Ground was first used. Previous burial grounds had been in St John's Lane and Parliament Street, near to the early Meeting Houses.

Early years

The first endeavours of Quakers to settle in Waterford met with opposition from city authorities. They struggled to maintain their religious identity as they lived out their strongly held Christian beliefs in truth, honesty, equality and religious tolerance. The resistance to Quakers putting their religion into practice deepened their conviction, especially regarding their testimonies relating to oaths, tithes and peace. Between 1650 and 1750 there were nearly 1,000 Quakers imprisoned in Ireland because of these convictions.

18th and 19th Century – Business and Education

Waterford Quakers developed their small community during this period and became successful in trade and industry, especially when released from religious intolerance in the following years. Family businesses flourished. These included glass manufacturing (Penrose and Gatchell), iron manufacturing and engineering (Jacob), brewing (Cherry, Strangman, Goff and Davis), grocers (Hill and Chapman), biscuit making (Jacob), shipbuilding (White, Malcomson and Jacob) and cotton spinning and weaving (Malcolmson).

Waterford Quakers became involved in the City through relief work (Tuskar Lodging House, Munster Dining Rooms and Famine relief), city affairs and business life. They were involved with the establishment of the Waterford Chamber of Commerce and the development of the railways and the first Waterford bridge. The contribution made to the city by Waterford Quakers was marked by Waterford Corporation in 1998 when a specially illustrated scroll was presented at a civic reception held during the Bicentenary celebrations of Newtown School.

The Establishment of Quaker Schools in Waterford

Newtown School was opened in 1798 in order that "the children of Friends may have the advantage of a religious education and be in some degree preserved from the dangerous consequences of being brought up in a less guarded manner..."

Children who were not members of the Society of Friends were first permitted to enter in 1874. The School now called Newtown Junior School opened in the early twentieth century.

Today both Schools draw pupils from all religious denominations, and from none, and appreciate the contribution of all to our community.

QUAKER ETHOS

ETHOS: The characteristic spirit and beliefs of a community.

Under the 1998 Education Act and the Articles of Management, Patron is responsible for Ethos in Newtown School Waterford and Newtown Junior School.

Quakers do not have a set dogma or creed, rather we have a set of Queries we ask ourselves regularly as a way of reminding ourselves of the things that are important. Quaker beliefs centre on the following key areas which form the Ethos of our Society and which we strive to encourage and achieve in our everyday lives and in our schools.

- Quakers believe that the Will of God is best discerned through corporate worship and corporate decision making. For Quakers, God's authority comes from the spiritual leading of God through our ordinary members, rather than through an individual who is 'head' of our church. One of the Queries asks: 'Do you gather together at meetings for worship in expectant waiting on God, prepared to share experiences and insights? Are these meetings occasions when by the help of the Holy Spirit you are enabled unitedly to worship God? Are you open to the promptings of the Spirit, and sensitive to one another's needs, whether your response be in silent worship or through the spoken word?'
- Quakers believe that there is 'that of God' or 'the Light of Christ' in every person which can be reached (though sometimes not without difficulty!). George Fox, put it thus: '...be obedient to the Lord God and go through the World and be valiant for truth upon earth ... be patterns, examples ... that your life may preach among all sorts of people, and to them; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in every one.'
- Quakers believe in simplicity. Quaker Meeting Houses are quite plain and are not consecrated; Christ said 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst'. Quakers try to live their lives simply and encourage a sustainable way of life.
- Quakers believe in honest and integrity. Our 'Query' reads: 'Are you honest in your daily work and in all your personal relationships? Do you maintain integrity in your dealings with government authorities and other outward concerns?'
- Quakers believe in equality of men and women in all things. Women have taken a full part in the affairs of our Society for over 340 years.
- Quakers believe that all war is inconsistent with the spirit and teaching of Christ. We seek to live at peace with all people and to work towards reconciliation between individuals, groups and nations. On a personal level we ask ourselves 'Do you cherish an understanding and forgiving spirit? Do you avoid unkind gossip and the spreading of rumour? Do you avoid damaging the reputation of others? Do you cultivate an appreciation of each individual's worth?'
- Quakers believe that alcohol, tobacco, drugs and gambling ultimately contribute to social and moral suffering, and have traditionally abstained from their consumption or promotion.

Quaker Values in Education

A working group of Quakers in the UK, 'Education – our spiritual concerns group', listed the following as Quaker values in education. The purpose of the list is to provide material for discussion. The concepts are not unique to Quakers and provide food for thought in a multi-denominational context.

Quakers believe that there is “that of God” in every person

- This means that those of us involved in education approach every learner hopefully, believing that each individual's educational needs should be recognised and equal value given to them.
- It means that we believe in “immense potential” and that the purpose of education is to help individuals to believe in the potential in themselves.
- It means that we believe that learning is a lifelong experience and is a part of living rather than a preparation for it.
- It means that we respect each individual and value the contribution that each has to make to the learning process.
- It means that we treat individuals as equals, whatever their gender, race, culture, class, ability, sexual orientation or circumstances. It means that we actively reject, and work to eliminate, discrimination of any sort.
- It means that we believe that learning happens most creatively when relationships are based on mutual respect and trust.
- It means that we wish to adopt methods of discipline based on trust and mutual support, seeking to promote the positive.
- It means that we encourage individual responsibility for the group and the group's responsibility for each individual.
- It means that we seek to avoid hierarchies of power and to encourage a participating community.
- It means that we want to empower learners to challenge injustice and to develop the imagination to find alternatives, to build compassionately a community which is inclusive of those who may be disadvantaged or rejected.
- It means that we encourage questioning and exploration, honesty and openness.
- It means that we seek to nurture and value spiritual growth and to open windows into new worlds of creativity and imagination.
- It means that we seek creative ways to go forward, particularly in situations that involve or might lead to conflict.
- It means that we stress achievements and successes, bearing in mind that excessive use of competition can be destructive.
- It means that teachers recognise that they are learners too and need to strive to be good listeners.
- It means that we try to live out our vocation adventurously.
- It means that we value simplicity, pursuing the things which bring true fulfilment and seeking to find and communicate a right relationship with the material world.
- It means that we try to keep before ourselves and others the ideal of unqualified and unlimited love.

The Expectation of Education in a Quaker School

In 1988 J. Philip Wragge wrote an article on Quaker education that provides a useful back-drop.

From the earliest days, Friends emphasised the importance of education. George Fox set up schools as early as 1668 and one of the first calls on Monthly Meetings was 'to help parents in the education of their children'. For more than 200 years, Quaker schools offered a 'guarded' education for a 'peculiar' people which meant a maximum of Quaker influence and a minimum of worldly influence: but from the second half of the 19th century the life of Friends gradually became merged with that of the country as a whole, and with this, Quaker schools in many ways have become similar to those in the developing national system of education.

If then, Quaker schools are now similar in many ways to other schools, is there anything distinctively Quaker about them any more? While the Society of Friends has no unanimous philosophy of education, certain emphases can be seen. On the whole the schools are friendly places of easy relationships between teachers and taught, and between older and younger pupils, where there is space for pupils to take increasing responsibility for their own lives in an ordered, stable, trusting community, where pupils are judged against their own progress and not against others, and are not burdened with public assessments emphasising failure. The schools take examinations seriously yet, for them, the passing of examinations is not the major purpose of education: concern for individual development, recognition of the variety of personality, of the diversity of contribution to the total life of the school community is equally important. This means an emphasis on extra-curricular activities and a social consciousness concerned with a just, non-violent peaceable order of society that flows over into the community. However, it must be admitted that there are many other schools which share many, if not all, of the same approaches and attitudes.

Nevertheless, Friends' schools have an outlook and ethos which is recognisably Quaker. This is not discovered in forms, ritual or doctrine, but is rather expressed in the whole of life's relationships and springs from Quaker fundamentals. Two are particularly relevant.

The first is the *Inward Light*, or *belief of that of God in everyone*. This means that a child is not first a pupil, primarily someone to be taught, but a person in his or her own right: it means membership of a community where there are differences of function, but equality of status, of a caring, mutually respecting, compassionate community where members are loved in order to learn to live. This is, of course, an ideal, for teachers may sometimes be too ready to retaliate and afraid of forgiveness. All this has implications for the structure of a school and the way it is organised and run.

The second fundamental is an emphasis on *truth*. From the beginning, Friends saw truth as one – God's truth. This included inward and spiritual truth revealed directly through Christ, and also the outward and natural truth of God's world revealed through observation and experiment. It was only much later they came to recognise the validity of truth expressed through music, art and literature: these were gradually recognised as different, but complementary, aspects of truth. 'Doing the truth' is also important, known in the experienced relationships of the whole of life. This is the truth that sets people free from shams and pretence into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, into life as a joyful, meaningful, purposive adventure.

Underlying all this is the Quaker experience of the universal sense of presence of God, discerned particularly through silent waiting and listening which may lead to worship and obedience. Silence initially commits nobody to anything, but with an open and receptive attitude it may help pupils to discern this Presence and respond to it, to awaken and keep open the channels of spiritual communication and

discovery. It is, of course, helpful when schools are linked to a strong, sympathetic local Meeting for Worship. The schools do not wish to impose or indoctrinate: they cannot determine the faith of their pupils, but in an open and undogmatic way they can enlighten and enlarge understanding and sympathetically explore religious attitudes and experiences and help pupils to find what is true for themselves.

Are these the things that are fundamental to Quaker education – what our schools are about? These ideals are increasingly difficult to achieve in a society that is concerned with material possessions, with 'getting on' and therefore with a high level of examination results. The schools are still essentially boarding schools which include among their pupils some from overseas and some who are in boarding need; so the ideal of the school as a family is central, although teenagers, who are now freer and more independent than formerly, sometimes find the constraints of boarding school restricting. All this kind of issue raises questions about parental expectations – why they send their children to Quaker schools and what they hope the schools will help their children to become and achieve.

It is sometimes asked how Quaker can the schools be when only a small proportion of staff and pupils are Friends. Here, Quaker principles embedded in the whole way of life of the schools, the traditions established over the years, the present example of Quaker staff, are central. Teachers who find themselves out of sympathy with all this usually do not stay. One may also ask how far anything of Quakerism 'rubs off' on to pupils although this is often better understood and appreciated when school days are over.

In the end, Quaker education is not only concerned with examination results, but with experiences that are not measurable, the discovery of true self, happy spontaneous personal relationships and an openness to the spiritual element of existence.

Newtown School and Newtown Junior School Today

Newtown School and Newtown Junior School are owned by Munster Quarterly Meeting, represented by a Patron Committee.

Newtown School

Under the Articles of Management approved 28th February 2016 Patron appoints the Board of Management which manages the School on behalf of Patron and is accountable to Patron and the Minister for Education and Skills. The Education Act, 1998 provides that it shall be the duty of the Board to "manage the school on behalf of the patron and for the benefit of the students and their parents and to provide or cause to be provided an appropriate education for each student at the school for which that board has responsibility". The Act also provides that a "board shall perform the functions conferred on it and on a school by this Act". The Principal is responsible for the day to day management of the School including guidance and direction of the Teachers and Staff and is accountable to the Board for that management.

Newtown Junior School

Newton Junior School separated from Newtown School Waterford and entered into the Free Education State System in September of 2007. It is owned by Munster Quarterly Meeting and under the patronage of the Religious Society of Friends via the Patron of Newtown School Waterford and Newtown Junior School.

NJS fully and successfully embraced its new status as a National School. It is run by its patron appointed Board of Management, and on a day to day basis by the Principal and her management team. Each of its members of staff have taken time to learn of, and immerse themselves in, Quaker values and approaches in order to successfully create a meaningful and appropriate educational model built around core Quaker beliefs.

Aims of the Schools

As well as encouraging each pupil to reach his or her academic potential, the Schools aim to promote a sense of caring for others and to extend that approach to a commitment to the local community and the outside world. Within this caring community the Schools seek to provide an education for life, aimed at preparing pupils for the environment they will meet in their future lives and careers. The Schools are committed to a mixed ability intake and to fostering adaptability, self motivation, confidence and a sense of responsibility amongst all pupils.

The Schools aim to communicate a set of values that reflects a balance between the spiritual and material aspects of life. All members of the School Community are of value and worthy of respect and the Schools try to convey this, hoping that all both realise this and behave accordingly.

The Visible Quaker Aspects of Quaker Schools

One aspect of school life that is particularly Quaker is the use of silence. The school day begins with a gathering of all pupils, called 'Collect', during which there is a period of silent worship to allow reflection and prayer. At mid-day meals a period of silence is observed. All business meetings – Board of Management, sub-committee and staff meetings - begin and end with silence also.

President Mary McAleese, on the occasion of her visit to Newtown in November 1998 when we were celebrating our Bicentenary, experienced this silence at the start of the school gathering and afterwards, in her speech to the school, she said:

“I was thinking as we were having those few minutes of silence, the words that came into my head, a line from the poem by T.S. Eliot ‘And in the stillness, dancing’, and I thought how lovely to be in a place where people, particularly young people, are comfortable with silence, since it seems to me that our world is a very busy and noisy world, even to the point, I think, that we are a little nervous around silence. It is lovely to be in the company of young people who actually use silence and who know that in silence you can find all sorts of things that help you cope with the day’s work or to reflect or simply just to be still. Many of us would never think you would find dancing in the silence, but those of you who know silence will know that you find all sorts of extraordinary things in it.”

It is our hope that during your time as a member of the School Community you will have an opportunity to experience all the aspects of our Quaker schools that go together to make it an adventure in living for all participants.

On behalf of Patron

Edward Clibborn, Convenor