



Becoming a School of Sanctuary

Learn / Action / Share



OLLSCOIL NA GAI MMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY



Places of Sanctuary Ireland

Foreword

In 2007, a collective of over 70 community organisations helped Sheffield to achieve its aim to become the first “City of Sanctuary” in the UK. The Sanctuary movement then grew quickly in popularity in the UK and it became clear that it could be incorporated into lots of different “streams” of society, e.g. universities, schools, libraries, youth and sports clubs, as well as towns and cities.

In Ireland, the schools stream came first to Northern Ireland, where the first award to a school was granted in 2017. Passionate volunteers and visionaries started sowing the seeds of the sanctuary movement in the Republic of Ireland around the same time, with the first school in Ireland awarded in 2020.

The vision of the sanctuary movement is simple – that anyone who is in need of sanctuary for any reason will find safety and welcome wherever they go. For the vision to become a reality, practical steps of implementation are needed to guide, equip and motivate groups. These practical steps are summarised as three key principles, which are adopted by all streams – LEARN, ACTION and SHARE.

These principles interconnect very simply: to help someone who is in need, we must learn to understand their life and their needs, then we can take appropriate action to help; finally, we share our learning and our action so that others can learn and act also.

“The vision of the sanctuary movement is simple – that anyone who is in need of sanctuary for any reason will find safety and welcome wherever they go”



Links to resources and tools that we recommend are provided here by clickable AND scannable QR codes. This facilitates the document to be used in hard copy form if required. Where a link is provided without a QR code, these items can be found on the Schools of Sanctuary Ireland website.





Learn

LEARN is a vital building block for schools and underpins the aim that is shared by all schools- to equip students with lifelong knowledge, awareness and skills to be empathetic and empowered global citizens of the future.

The LEARN principle is in line with governmental strategies and plans. One example is the Department of Education’s “Intercultural Education Strategy” which aims to ensure that “all students experience an education that respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society and is conducted in a spirit of partnership” (Education Act, 1998).

1. Facts and Realities

Learning why and how people flee or migrate from their homeland is a vital component of the Sanctuary journey; equally so, learning how marginalisation and exclusion impacts on lives and opportunities, e.g. of the Irish Traveller community.

Themes of inequality, racism, prejudice and colonialism all intersect with education around human rights and more recently, climate change. Learning about the diverse spectrum of global histories, cultures, traditions and perspectives, particularly those of ethnic minority and indigenous peoples, can help students to be more globally curious and see the above themes from a different perspective. This kind of comprehensive learning, where students see how social and global issues intersect and interact, will equip young people to understand how they can effect changes in their communities and in the world.

In relation specifically to people who flee their homeland, students, as is age appropriate, should acquire a basic understanding of the terminology of the “international protection

system”, e.g. definition of a refugee, definition of an asylum seeker etc. (see [Definitions](#)) It is also important that students and staff get a sense of the challenges and barriers of the international protection process and refugee experiences in Ireland and Europe.

We recommend

Resources

2. Welcoming Newcomer Families

The best practice of a School of Sanctuary is welcoming with empathy and tangibly-including vulnerable newcomer students. All students and staff need the intercultural skill of communicating sensitively with and supporting vulnerable students, both inside and outside the classroom.

Please bear in mind that the education of many asylum-seeking and refugee students may have been severely disrupted by their complex life experience, as can be the case with Irish Traveller and Roma students. Aside from the use of *language appropriate* educational assessment tools, forming a relationship with parents is important in order to ascertain the educational experience of the child or young person. It will also inform how best to support and be aware of the changing needs or circumstances of the student’s home life.

Students coming from a different country, sometimes a war-torn country, or those from an ethnic minority or marginalised community, face a multitude of challenges and barriers and often display symptoms of trauma and distress. How can students learn about these challenges in a sensitive way and how to help and support these students overcome them?

We recommend

Resources

3. Racism and Anti-Racism

The government of Ireland’s National Action Plan Against Racism (2023-2027) was launched in January 2023. It’s a really important document that proposes actions to help make Ireland a place where the impacts of racism are acknowledged and actively addressed. Of the five main objectives in the plan that will be implemented by various government departments, Objective Two (*Being Equal-Addressing Ethnic Inequalities*) specifically refers to Education:

Action 2.4: Introduce measures to address ethnic differentials in education and achieve equality of enrolment, retention, attendance, progression and outcomes for groups experiencing racism.

Action 2.5: Take steps to strengthen inclusion and anti-racism at all levels of the education system, including through addressing any bias embedded in the curriculum, and to support approaches that are fully intersectional and intercultural.



Does your school have an anti-racism policy? Do your staff and students know how to report a racist incident?



Schools could also consider anti-racism training for staff and board of management. SoSI will regularly provide opportunities for students to engage with learning about anti-racism.

We recommend

Training

Resource

4. Global and Irish Migration

Humans have always moved around our planet to find better opportunities to survive and thrive. In Ireland, we are uniquely positioned to understand what it is to be forced to migrate for survival and in search of better opportunities. More than borders and permissions, migration is a much deeper and richer topic, one that helps students acquire a global understanding of the world. It is good for students to understand the nature and benefits of migration and, where appropriate, the history and impacts of colonialism also. Exploring Ireland’s place in the world and the history of that place will enrich students’ engagement with the topic of migration.

We recommend

Video

5. The Power of Stories

Curate space for people to share their stories in a safe and supported way. Visits by a Sanctuary Ambassador can be arranged by request with SoSI and are a very powerful way for your students to understand the lived experience of people seeking sanctuary. SoSI regularly provides online opportunities for students to hear these stories.

Inviting past pupils from your school who may have overcome marginalisation to speak to current students is also a really powerful way to build empathy. If current students wish to share details of their experience of racism or marginalisation, ensure they are safe and supported in doing so. Check with the student that their family would be happy for them to share their story.

Choose books from our specially curated [Book List](#) for students to read at home or in class.

For younger primary classes, see our [YouTube channel](#) for story-telling videos. We also have “SoSI recommends” playlists on our YouTube channel which are primary and post-primary specific.



Action

ACTION is the way in which the school makes its commitment to welcome and inclusion visible and tangible. It is where the theory and idea of sanctuary comes to life and where students can get directly involved.

This Sanctuary Principle (and, indeed, the whole SoS framework) may align well with a diversity/inclusion- focused SSE, your Wellbeing Promotion Review or DEIS Action Planning. One criteria of the SoSI Charter is that it is a whole-school community endeavour, which is also a requirement of the SSE and the Wellbeing Framework. There are many inclusion and integration actions that your school may already be doing which can count as part of your Sanctuary journey.

1. Language: (it's not just for language teachers!)

Multilingualism contributes to the development of inclusive societies that allow multiple cultures, worldviews and knowledge systems to coexist and learn from each other. The facilitation of students and families for whom English is not their first language is a huge challenge for schools but it also presents an opportunity to broaden the intercultural learning of *all* students.

Language is the most important aspect of integration for anyone who moves to a new country. For children and young people, EAL research evidence has revealed that it is vital for linguistic development that the use of their first language is encouraged and celebrated in school.

We recommend

Resource 



1a: In School Buildings


Whether or not your school currently has a linguistically diverse student body, there is a great value in visibly representing lots of other world languages (not just European) in the school building wherever possible- multilingual signs, posters, language mats etc. Also, using the universal language of pictures/emojis instead of text is a “leveller” for all students, including those with learning difficulties.

- multilingual and pictorial signs
- Pictorial maps of the school building
- simple, logical and clear language of instruction in the classroom
- Display of home languages represented by your student body

We recommend

Resource 



Tool 



1b: Peer to peer Communications:

A language buddy system is a hugely effective and common way to support EAL students. Giving a tour of the school, introducing them to other students, answering basic questions, being on hand at break times etc. can all be tasked to a buddy.

Teachers should prepare all students for new arrivals and provide some guidelines for how to make them feel welcome. Please be aware that if a new student seems reluctant to talk or interact much for an extended period, that can be as a result of trauma as opposed to a language barrier. Move at the student's pace and help their peers to do the same.

1c: School Communications

Offering translations of application forms in various languages is the good practice of a School of Sanctuary. Schools' welcome booklets


should be primarily pictorial and designed with the EAL student and family in mind. If language is used minimally in the welcome booklets, it will be easier for schools to provide them in the different home languages of students. All staff members and guest staff members, including caretakers and receptionists, should be encouraged to support students and families whose first language is not English, e.g. by speaking slowly and using simple clear language.

Speech translation apps (Google translate etc) can facilitate conversation and meetings with students and parents as required. However, having students interpret for their parents in school meetings is never good practice and should be avoided.

1d: Language Resources

The live translation feature of Microsoft Powerpoint is a bit of a gamechanger for EAL supports in schools. Students just need access to a mobile device with which they can access the teacher's Powerpoint presentation and they can then view the text of the presentation in their home language.

We recommend

Tool 



Access to books in their home language is also vitally important for students for EAL students. (as well as EAL-specific educational materials) Some schools seek donations of appropriate books from their community or avail of funding to buy them. Access to a variety of hard copy bilingual dictionaries, good online dictionaries/ apps or picture dictionaries are important assets.

2. Place and Space

For children and young people with trauma or behavioural complexities, it is really vital that we provide them with calm corners or safe spaces where they can retreat (with support if necessary) in order to engage in self-regulation activities and take time out. Feeling overwhelmed by their new surroundings and situation makes

significant social and cognitive demands of children and young people. Lunchtime clubs, break-time spaces and other chill-out spaces offer security and safety to vulnerable students. Students may require prayer spaces for periods of particular religious observance.

Ethnic minority students who use public transport to travel to school can be unfortunately vulnerable to racism or harassment. It's important to check in with these students that they are ok when travelling to and from school and to support them to deal with any incidences that might occur. This support might be part of the buddy system too and students could be trained in how to safely react to a racist incident.

3. Extra Curricular/After-School Supports

Marginalised or vulnerable students will often opt out of opportunities that they think are not “for” them, that they cannot afford or that they, or their parents, do not fully understand. Research has long proven that participation in activities in community and society is a vital element of integration for everyone, especially young people and even moreso, marginalised or vulnerable young people. School staff are typically the most trusted people in the lives of vulnerable children and young people. They are therefore often best placed to encourage and explain to students what extra-curricular or after-school activities are available to them.

Ask for input from staff members, parents or connected service providers, e.g. youth services, about events or activities in the community. Especially during long school holidays, vulnerable students need routine, connection and things to do. Free or affordable summer camps are a great support to students and families and they help EAL students to maintain their English language learning.

Fellow students can also play a big role in welcoming their vulnerable peers into after-school or school holiday activities. The buddy system can come into play here also- ask students to contribute their ideas for how this could work!

4. Celebrations, Events and Campaigns

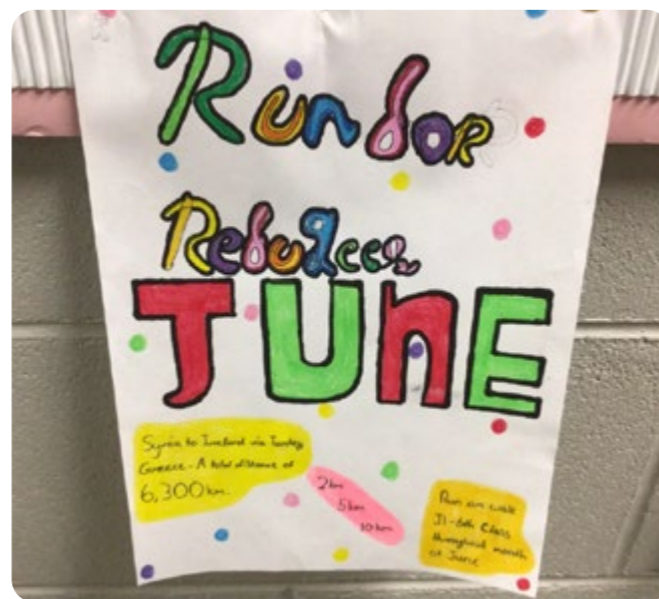
We love to see how schools celebrate diversity, equality and sanctuary throughout the school year. Intercultural/International Days are always a favourite but just make sure the Sanctuary message is central to proceedings! Ensure that students have a deeper sense of what is being celebrated and why.

Where possible, make space for your students to celebrate or mark other festivals/days that are important to their families, e.g. Eid, Europe Day, Diwali, Africa Day and many more. Use days such as these as occasions for students to learn more about other people's challenges, cultures and traditions.

SoSI will regularly provide opportunities for schools to attend and contribute to events or webinars or to get involved in campaigns of learning or action. Member and Champion schools are asked to attend/participate in SoSI events/campaigns and to share information about these events with neighbour or linked schools.

Suggested Days for the School Calendar:

September 21st	International Day of Peace
November 16th	International Day for Tolerance
December 10th	Human Rights Day
February 20th	World Day for Social Justice
March 21st	International Day for the Elimination of Racism
April 8th	International Traveller and Roma Day
May 16th	International Day of Living Together in Peace
June 20th	World Refugee Day



SHARE is the way in which the school makes its Sanctuary commitment visible to the wider community and the national Sanctuary network. It is how your school shares in the wider vision that those who seek sanctuary here find a culture of welcome and inclusion wherever they go. When you become a Member or, even more importantly, a Champion school, you become a beacon for other schools and community organisations and institutions to follow. We ask schools to take the following steps, many of which are vital criteria of the Schools of Sanctuary Charter:

- 1 Ensure that the SoS charter and pledge are placed in a prominent position of visibility in your school. When your schools receives its Champion plaque and certificate, these should be similarly displayed.
- 2 Your commitment to being a School of Sanctuary should be clearly mentioned on the school website and a short paragraph explaining what this means. Open days, graduation ceremonies and other school events are ideal opportunities to speak about the Sanctuary commitment and ethos. Champion Schools tell us that this is something prospective parents are often interested to know more about and it's particularly something that would assure a migrant parent about the suitability of your school for their child.
- 3 School news, be it via social media or newsletter, should encompass and celebrate your stories of inclusion, diversity and welcome. For a lot of parents and wider community, this is how they learn about the school's identity and values. Keep local and national press up to date with your school's achievements and activities in your Sanctuary journey!
- 4 Attendance and support for SoSI events is an expectation of Member and Champion schools, including in-person events in your locality
- 5 Offering advice or inspiration to other schools on the Sanctuary journey and ethos is a key part of sharing. Sharing your good practice with other schools, on national or regional level, helps others on their journey. Any joint visits or collaborations with other schools are welcome.
- 6 Your school's Sanctuary initiatives will be of interest to local councils and communities, including your nearest University of Sanctuary. So make sure you keep these kinds of organisations informed about Sanctuary-related events and campaigns in your school (tag them on social media) as there may be supports or projects in the wider community that the school can collaborate with and benefit from.





“One child
one teacher
one book
one pen can
change the world”

Malala Yousafzai

(Pakistani education activist, youngest ever Nobel Prize laureate)

Additional School Actions

The policies and practices of the school should be cross-referenced with the Schools of Sanctuary Ireland Charter, which asks that every member of the school community, including board of management, understands the school's undertaking to become an awarded School of Sanctuary

<p>Does your school have a specific anti-racism policy and procedures in place to cope with behaviours and language that conflict with the ethos of inclusivity? Is this policy available on the website and is it clearly communicated to students and parents?</p>	<p>Are there systems in place to find out about any religious dietary requirements students may have? Can your school waive meal fees for students who cannot afford them?</p>	<p>Are student councils/ committees inclusive and representative? A school policy to ensure this is a great way to educate children and young people about inclusive participation/affirmative action.</p>
<p>Is diversity represented in posters, visual cues and books displayed in the school?</p>	<p>Ensure students names are pronounced properly and spelled accurately by all staff.</p>	<p>Does the school's admission policy expressly welcome students of diverse backgrounds? Is the policy written in accessible language?</p>
<p>Are ethnic minority parents represented on school committees etc? If not, there may be barriers that limit their participation. The school will benefit from hearing the perspective of these parents. Facilitating the participation of these parents could be planned by the school.</p>		<p>Is physical education and sport in the school truly accessible to all? Are there potential barriers to participation for any students? Could a student survey about such potential barriers uncover issues that were not known?</p>
<p>How are students who have specific needs for religious observance facilitated and supported during the school day?</p>	<p>Is access to in-school extra-curricular activities, e.g. after-school activities, school tours, equal and inclusive? Have potential barriers to participation (language, neurodiversity, finance, equipment, transport, trust) been identified and, where possible, catered for?</p>	<p>Are there opportunities for parents and the community to donate uniforms, schoolbooks, stationery, sportswear and equipment, musical instruments etc for families in need?</p>



Schools of
Sanctuary

<https://schools-ireland.cityofsanctuary.org>



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