



Becoming a School of Sanctuary

A Quick Guide



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY



Places of Sanctuary Ireland

Schools of Sanctuary Ireland (SoSI) believes that schools are the future of a harmonious and integrated Ireland, as they embrace their role in equipping generations of school-goers to build an inclusive and equitable future for all global citizens.

As a School of Sanctuary, schools find further motivation and structure in which to engage deeply with this role and ensure their school is a safe, welcoming and inclusive environment for all students.

In adopting the three Sanctuary Principles, **LEARN/ACTION/SHARE**, a school further embeds and develops its intercultural practice, becoming an ever more inclusive and empathetic place, in which diversity and equality is celebrated.

The school pursues a commitment to equip students and staff to understand and respond to the challenges and needs of those who seek sanctuary in their communities, in Ireland and in the wider world.

Schools of Sanctuary Ireland is a stream of **Places of Sanctuary Ireland** CLG (**PoSI**) (RCN: 20107369). PoSI's board of directors oversees the governance of Schools of Sanctuary Ireland's work.

PoSI is the umbrella body in the island of Ireland for a network of groups and organisations that share the objective of promoting a culture of welcome and inclusion. PoSI provides a focus for coordination and development of the network, which includes schools, community groups, higher education institutions, churches, local councils, businesses and other organisations. The PoSI **mission** is to build a culture of welcome, hospitality and inclusiveness right across every sphere and sector of society, so that wherever people seeking sanctuary go they will feel safe, find people who welcome them and understand why they are here, and have opportunities to be included in all activities. The PoSI **vision** is that Ireland will be a welcoming place of safety for all and proud to offer sanctuary to people fleeing violence and persecution.



“We have a collective responsibility to ensure education plans take into account the needs of some of the most vulnerable children and youth in the world..... These children are the keys to a secure and sustainable future, and their education matters for us all.”

(António Guterres,
United Nations Secretary General)

“Being part of Schools of Sanctuary has helped me to integrate in Ireland. Education is definitely key to that and that’s why Schools of Sanctuary is here for us. It has helped me really to become more proactive, confident and just to be the person who I am today.”

(Student of a Champion School of Sanctuary)



Why become a School of Sanctuary?

Engaging with the School of Sanctuary message and ethos provides schools with a valuable structure for growth in their approach to inclusion and equality.

Schools forge links with a growing national Sanctuary family of schools throughout Ireland and also join in a network of the many third level institutions, libraries and other community organisations that embrace and sustain the Sanctuary movement.

The School of Sanctuary journey equips students of all ages to be a strong, confident voice for inclusion, diversity and equality in 21st century Ireland and to create a harmonious and bright future for the country.

All Students:

- Develop intercultural skills including awareness of other languages, religions, cultures
- Increased empathy and compassion
- Improved understanding of world geography, culture and politics
- Increased understanding of the value of advocacy and the importance of equality at all levels of life

Newcomer/Minority/Vulnerable Students:

- Increased feeling of inclusion/belonging
- Increased confidence to make friends, speak to others, share their stories
- Involved in decision making processes, feel engaged, valued

Parents from new or marginalised communities:

- Increased confidence for participation in school and better understanding of school in Ireland
- Increased sense of belonging within the school community
- Have opportunity to share their culture and skills

Schools:

- Increased levels of knowledge and awareness around what it is to be a refugee, to be in a new culture, the International Protection System
- Increased understanding of the important role of the school in providing welcome, being a safe space, supporting parents of newcomers
- Schools can show evidence of their commitment to inclusion & integration
- Schools find positive and effective ways of engaging in advocacy and lobbying on behalf of under-represented groups
- Schools will discover a fresh and deeper appreciation of the diversity of cultures and languages in their school community.

Sustained Impact:

By embedding Sanctuary into the core curriculum of the school, the concept becomes part of the school culture owned by the entire community rather than something owned by a small number of teachers. Schools identify the problems and solutions and formulate a way of fulfilling the three Sanctuary principles (Learn, Action, Share) within the context of their own unique school culture.

Becoming a School of Sanctuary

Becoming a School of Sanctuary is a self-directed culture and ethos that schools achieve over time based on the three Sanctuary Principles:

Learn, Action and Share.

The intention and reasons to become a School of Sanctuary should be shared by the whole school. The Sanctuary principles should then become a central focus of planning and decision-making in the school, as well as being embedded into as many activities and areas of the curriculum as possible.

Getting started

A school that formally commences its Sanctuary journey with SoSI is called a **MEMBER** school. By this point, the whole school will already understand the Sanctuary message and see what aspects already resonate with the school's culture, practice and community.

Member Schools should:

- form a small committee (or task a pre-existing school committee), inclusive of staff and students, who will progress and record the school's Sanctuary journey.
- discuss and plan how to embed the 3 Sanctuary Principles of Learn, Action and Share into school life.
- assess what is already happening and see how it can be built upon. What is not happening? What needs to improve/change for the school to embody the Sanctuary message?
- get lots of people to sign the [Pledge form](#) to ensure that the whole school community is involved. The signed pledge form and [SoSI Charter](#) should be displayed somewhere prominently in the school if possible and info about the SoS programme added to the school website.



Receiving recognition as a "Champion" School:

As the Member school progresses on its journey, a portfolio (digital format e.g. padlet, bookcreator etc) of evidence of learning and activities is developed. This should clearly demonstrate how the school is engaging with the three Sanctuary Principles of **Learn, Action and Share** and working to meet the criteria of the SoSI Charter.

Examples of Champion school portfolios can be viewed [HERE](#)

To achieve the **Champion** award, a SoSI monitoring team visits the school. This is a friendly visit, not a school inspection! To arrange for the visit, the digital portfolio is first sent to the SoSI team for initial review. Recognition as a Champion School of Sanctuary is granted following the monitoring visit and a report submission, if the monitoring team agrees that the school has met the SoSI Charter criteria. Thereafter, an official SoSI plaque and certificate is awarded to the school at a local or regional awards ceremony.





“Being a Champion School of Sanctuary means that we actively encourage inclusivity and diversity in our school and we share with parents, the wider community and other schools as much as possible. It means that our students feel welcome, safe and secure in our learning environments and are happy to share their culture and language here.”

(Teacher, Mount Sion CBS, Waterford)



Does a school have to pay to join the Schools of Sanctuary Ireland network and when can we join?

Becoming a Member is free of charge (*subject to change/funding limitations*) and you can join at any time.

How long does it take to become a School of Sanctuary?

Although you may have been doing Sanctuary-related activities long before now, we recommend that in order to fully embed the Sanctuary Principles, schools engage with the programme for at least a full calendar year before requesting the monitoring visit.

Is it only schools with significant ethnic diversity that can become a School of Sanctuary?

Certainly not! Every student stands to benefit from your school being a safe and welcoming environment for all. We believe that all students should be educated as to the nature of vulnerability and marginalisation and encouraged to be “sanctuary-giving” to all in their daily lives.

Is it a lot of extra work for teachers?

No. There are no reports or deadlines to meet and it is not a large-scale once-off project. Schools can incorporate the Sanctuary theme into the year plans and the portfolio can be built over time. There are also many creative ways that teachers and students can engage with the school’s Sanctuary journey in the classroom. (*Please see the suggested activities pack and the additional resources on our website*).

How do we record our Learn, Action, Share activities?

A portfolio of the school’s activities is created and developed by the school’s Sanctuary committee. You can view Champion school portfolios on our website.

Can students get involved in the planning of the school’s Sanctuary journey?

A Sanctuary committee should be formed and students should make up a large majority of this group. Students could be tasked with certain roles like being a photographer for events, organising events, making videos, designing posters, helping to build the school’s SoS portfolio and much more!

How are Member and Champion schools supported by SoSI?

They are listed on the SoSI website and Champion schools’ portfolios are displayed. We also amplify these schools’ activities and achievements on our social media channels. SoSI provides direct staff support, advice and learning resources as well as opportunities for collaborations, webinars, training and more. Links with other Sanctuary schools in the network, with local community groups focussed on diversity and inclusion, and with other Sanctuary initiatives e.g. libraries, universities are also facilitated.

What happens after a school becomes a Champion School of Sanctuary?

The school continues the good work by sharing their practices and expertise across and beyond their community. Champion schools are encouraged to redouble their commitment to welcome and inclusion and to keep their SoS portfolio updated to reflect their latest actions and achievements in this commitment. Champion school portfolios are included on the SoS website.

“It is great to be part of a network of schools, who all strive to support children in need of sanctuary. We exchange lots of ideas through this network, allowing us to continuously improve.”

(Teacher, Scoil Bhríde Shantalla, Galway)



“When I came to Ireland, I wanted my children to feel safe and settled in their new home and school. I was quite fearful, having no idea how they would be treated as foreigners in their class. However, I was extremely happy when the children returned home and with delight they told me how everyone in the school was so friendly, and I soon realised that, as a School of Sanctuary, the school has embraced these important values. They are growing up in a friendly supportive environment, which teaches them the importance of welcome and respect.”

(Ukrainian parent in Ireland)

“Being involved with Schools of Sanctuary is the most fulfilling thing I have undertaken in my career. It has opened my eyes to the beauty of celebrating diversity. The School of Sanctuary experience is joyful and heartwarming. I am so proud of all of my students who have taught me and each other so much.”

(Teacher, Mercy Secondary School, Kilbeggan)



Places of Sanctuary Ireland



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