Reap task 1 – Overall notes on what is being looked for & helpful quotes

The quotes are interspersed in sections where they seem most handy. The main source is the BCE’s Religious Education Curriculum of 2013 (REC). This is conceptually based on Gabriel Moran’s distinction between classroom RE and the religious life of the school. The final authority or guidelines for how Catholic schools are to ensure that they are Catholic comes from the Congregation for Catholic Education. This body was set up by the Vatican after Vatican II and it has produced a series of documents and letters offering advice to bishops and Catholic schools on how schools maintain their Catholic identity and mission in a rapidly changing world. The main source for the REC is the 1988 CCE document, The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School. (The convention is to refer to this document by paragraph number).

Intro All Catholic (RC) schools have a mission which amounts to use of knowledge in the world to make a better world. (eg Villa seeking to form young men of Gospel values who will add to the common good.) Such a mission requires rigorous engagement of the mind and a warm generosity of heart and character. Quotes: Mission statement of BCE. Our mission statement. “The Catholic school finds its true justification in the mission of the church.” (CCE, 1988, 34)

The big insight that lies behind the RE Curriculum of 2013 (REC) is that it is based on a helpful distinction between knowing about religion and the kind of formation of character which might propel a young person to change the world. Gabriel Moran puts it very well when he says that we should be clear about what we are focusing on when undertaking two distinct but complementary tasks in RC schools. Moran sees the danger of not making this distinction when he urges that “we distinguish in order to unite in a more careful and intelligent way.” (2007. P256). Compare: “There is a close connection, and at the same time a clear distinction, between religious instruction [RE] and catechesis, or the passing on of the Gospel message [religious life of the school].” (CCE, 1988, 68)

- Classroom RE gives students knowledge of, literacy in and understanding of Religion/s and how they work. Eg students from RC schools can talk about the RC social justice principles on in a fluent way because they have systematically learnt about them through the Curriculum, can link them to sacred texts, to particular branches of the Church (SVDP) etc. The place for RE is the classroom and we cannot presume that the students have faith.
- The Religious life of the school beyond the classroom helps to shape students in a certain way, ie in RC schools there is a sacramental climate, with prayers, rituals, masses etc all of which instil a certain way of being religious (ie within the RC tradition). Parents have a right to expect that the Catholic school will assist them in the faith formation of their children, and this process takes a lifetime, reaching far beyond the classroom.

BCE take Moran’s model of the distinct yet complementary dimensions of “religion” in an RC school. This is the model of the 2 overlapping circles. Without commitment to these two circles, RC schools would not be worth their salt. (cf CCE, 1988, 69)
The task asks you to explain the overall importance of the model, with all teachers in an RC school contributing to the religious life and a special group undertaking the crucial task of teaching specialist RE through decent training and PD.

With respect to the classroom RE, you are asked to focus in particular on how your journey assists in creating rigour in RE as a subject and, ultimately, a very high standard of religious literacy in students. You are given checklists of things to mention, like the importance of ongoing PD – eg to be skilful interpreters of Biblical texts, the importance of rigour in assessment (“line of sight” in design of tasks), the importance of critical questioning (Inquiry method), the importance of an overarching curriculum with exit standards for each year level. Perhaps most interesting and important – and an area where we are strong – is to understand the start point of our students, many of whom don’t go to Mass regularly; so we don’t use “presumptive” language but neither do we water religion down into SOSE. The watchword here is that RE is a specialist subject which requires committed teachers. It would be easy to teach it as Sociology or Humanities, but the combination of high quality support through the REC and PD, along with the motivation of the individual teacher creates a platform achieves from which students literate in Religion can leave RC schools able to challenge rather than consume the prevailing culture. Moran urges that we must teach RE “with all the breadth and depth of intellectual excitement one is capable of.” (p256).

Meanwhile the CCE state that “The religion teacher is the key, the vital component, if the educational goals of the school are to be achieved;” (1988, 96) such teachers “must have a thorough cultural, professional and pedagogical training, and they must be capable of genuine dialogue.”

With respect to the Religious life of the school, there is a whole raft of concrete examples that can be briefly pointed to: little and big liturgies, from rituals of prayer through to class masses to community liturgies; learning about Augustine and Thomas sacramentally, eg through signs and icons; rich array of social justice learning opportunities, eg from Mission day to refugee workers/ students to Ministry groups etc; articulation of key values, eg Gateway values; sacred spaces and icons etc. Moran points out that clear focus on the separateness of the religious life of the school enables us to be religious “with all the particularity of the verbal and non-verbal symbols that place us on the way.” (p256). He also asserts, correctly, that “schools cannot avoid socialising children into some way of life.” (p258): we write on the gatepost that we are an RC school and commit to pushing, sometimes, against the secular tide. He also notes the importance of giving school-leavers “sustaining rituals at life’s crucial moments.” (258) – there may be times much later in life when a prayer is needed.

The task also then asks that you consider the all-important overlap between these 2 dimensions: really they feed each other. As Augustine would put it, faith and reason are twin props in the search for truth. The very best teachers of RE model an active faith and this lends authenticity to what they say in the RE classroom, eg they welcome the difficult questions and respond in an authentic way, eg how can God allow children to suffer? How can the RC church be the “body of Christ” when so many priests have been found guilty of abuse? Moran rightly sees that we can’t simply understand Religion objectively and must
“have some feel for it.” (p257). Moran also sees that for all the knowledge in the world that won’t in and of itself propel a young person to change the world: RC schools have a particular (revolutionary) approach to empowering young people for change: “From worship and contemplative prayer flow the energies for protest in the name of justice. The experience of prayer and the overflow into moral engagement within today’s world is what forms the person as Christian.” (p258)