

**Investigating the Perceptions of Primary School Communities
in the Republic of Ireland Regarding Their Catholic Identity**

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of EdD is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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List of Abbreviations

CSP	Catholic Schools Partnership
CNS	Community National School
CCE	Congregation for Catholic Education
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills (previously known as the Department of Education (1921–1997) and Department of Education and Science (1997–2010))
ERB	Education about Religions and Beliefs
ETB	Education and Training Board
EVS	European Values Survey
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
RE	Religious Education
SICI	Standing International Conference of Central and General Inspectorates of Education
UN CERD	United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
USA	United States of America
VEC	Vocational Educational Committees
WSE	Whole School Evaluation

Investigating the Perceptions of Primary School Communities in the Republic of Ireland Regarding Their Catholic Identity

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Abstract

At primary level, there is a predominance of Catholic schools; approximately 89.9% in the school year 2015/2016 (DES, 2016). At one time, this reflected the religiosity of Irish society. Now, with approximately 16% of the population describing themselves as being from a faith tradition other than Catholic (CSO, 2011), there is a rightful demand for more diversity in the provision of primary education. This call has also led to a questioning – from both within the Catholic school system and from outside – about the nature of Irish Catholic primary schools.

The aim of this research is to develop a typology or characterisation of the religious identity of Irish Catholic primary schools. This objective is built on the presupposition that the Catholic character of these schools spans a spectrum rather than being a single definable entity. In order to develop such a system of classification, data were gathered from eight Catholic school communities in one Diocese in the Republic of Ireland. These data were analysed with reference to the five models of Catholic school identity developed by Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) as part of the ‘Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project’. These models build on work previously undertaken by Professor Lieven Boeve regarding the identity of Catholic universities in post-Christian Europe. The dissertation concludes by proposing a model for the religious identity of Catholic primary schools in the Republic of Ireland, and by considering the implications of this work for the patrons of these schools.

Introduction

The Irish primary school system is unique in the world by virtue of the fact that the state does not provide but rather provides *for* education at this level. It does this by funding a system of schools that are owned and managed by individuals or groups known as “patrons”. In the academic year 2015/2016, there were 3,124 mainstream primary schools in the Republic of Ireland (Department of Education and Skills, 2016). 2,808 of these (89.9%) were under the patronage of the Catholic Church, through the local bishop or a religious order. At one time, the predominance of Catholic schools reflected the religiosity of Irish society. Now, with approximately 16% of the population describing themselves as being from a faith tradition other than Catholic (Central Statistics Office, 2011), there is a rightful demand for more diversity in the provision of primary education. This demand has led to a questioning – both within the Catholic school system and from outside of it – about the nature of Irish Catholic primary schools¹. Much of this dialogue has focused on the rights of children, parents and families who are not Catholic and do not wish to be educated within the Catholic tradition (United Nations Human Rights Council 2009; Irish Human Rights Commission, 2010). This dissertation concentrates instead on Catholic primary schools themselves, and aims to investigate the effect that the majoritarian system of primary education has had on their religious identity. The aim of this research is therefore twofold:

- To ascertain the perceptions of primary school communities in the Republic of Ireland regarding their Catholic identity
- To develop a typology or characterisation of the religious identity of these schools.

It is further hoped that the study will reveal ways in which Catholic patrons can support primary school communities in understanding and strengthening their religious character.

In order to develop such a system of classification, the perceptions of representatives from eight Catholic school communities regarding their religious identity were elicited. Using qualitative methods of data collection and a bounded case study approach, the researcher produced a model of the religious identity of the schools that took part in this study. While this study is too small to

¹ See, for example, Kieran (2005), Martin (2008), Whiteside (2015)

be generalisable to the population of primary schools, it is arguable that the results are indicative and likely to exist in other dioceses in the Republic of Ireland.

A summary of the chapters in this dissertation is as follows:

Chapter 1 will outline the history of the Irish education system at primary level. It will show that this structure evolved over time in a way that was never envisaged at its conception, leading to the largely denominational system that is in place today. It will also outline the recent developments that have attempted to establish more non-faith-based schools in the Republic of Ireland.

Chapter 2 will explore the terms “characteristic spirit”, “ethos” and “identity” – three terms used somewhat interchangeably when referring to the religious culture of denominational schools. It will show that there are two levels at which ethos exists in schools: an intended level given by a founder or patron, and an operative level through which that vision is put into effect in the daily running of the school. Empirical research on the religious identity of Catholic schools in Ireland, England and North America will also be examined in this chapter. In particular, the work of Boeve (2006) and of Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) will be discussed. These authors have compiled a typology of the religious identity of Catholic educational organisations that will be used as a starting point for the researcher’s model based on the Irish context.

Chapter 3 will outline the research paradigm, methodology and approach underpinning the study. It will also describe the sampling and recruitment procedures used to select the schools that took part in the research, and the data collection methods employed. Ethical considerations will also be outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 4 will detail the triangulated findings from the data collected. It will show that the religious identity of the schools involved in the research is very mixed, with schools exhibiting varying levels of commitment to their Catholic identity. The findings will demonstrate that, in general, schools have a *laissez-faire* approach to ethos, with little or no support from parents, families and parishes in this regard.

Chapter 5 will discuss the data collected in light of existing empirical studies and literature in the field of Catholic school identity, focusing in particular on Pollefeyt and Bouwens' (2010) typology of the religious identity of Catholic educational organisations. It will use this model as a starting point from which to propose a model that illustrates the religious identity of Catholic primary schools in the Republic of Ireland.

Chapter 6 will consider the implications of the findings of this study for Catholic primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. It will also suggest ways in which Catholic patrons can work to strengthen the religious identity of their primary schools.

The rationale for this paper arises from the researcher's own experience of working with Catholic primary schools on the island of Ireland in the area of religious education (RE). From this vantage point, it became clear that there was a correlation between the religious identity of the school and the quality of RE taught there: the stronger the Catholic ethos, the more likely it was that RE would be taught to a high standard. The implication of this learning was the realisation that, in order to improve the quality of RE in Catholic schools, there was no point in focusing only on classroom teaching: the religious identity of the school as an entity also had to be considered.

The scope of this paper is limited by its extent. It is also limited by the timescale of the programme for which it was undertaken, and by the relatively small size of the sample of schools included in it. The various means through which the trustworthiness of the study can nevertheless be judged are detailed as part of Chapter 3.

1. The Evolution of State-Sponsored Denominational Education in Ireland

The desired outcome of this study is the development of a typology of the religious identity of Catholic primary schools in the Republic of Ireland today. As a first step, the historical evolution of state-sponsored denominational education at primary level will be explored in this chapter. This is important in establishing the context within which contemporary Catholic primary schools developed. The chapter is not intended to be a complete history of the Irish education system. Rather, the aim is to set out why denominational schools – and particularly Catholic schools – are the main providers of education at primary level today.

Coolahan (1981, p.141) describes the Irish education system as “unusual, interesting and complex”. It is, in fact, a system that is unique in the world by virtue of the fact that there are almost no schools at primary level that are directly state-run. Rather, according to the Irish Constitution (1937, 42.2) the state provides “*for* free primary education” (as opposed to providing education directly) by funding a system of schools that are owned and managed by individuals or groups known as “patrons”. The state, through the Department of Education and Skills (DES), exercises a role in overseeing these schools by determining educational policy, including curricula.

The Irish education system evolved over time, rather than being designed in its current form. Ireland’s colonial history, the homogeneous religious affiliations of the population and economics, amongst other factors, have all impacted its development. The result is that, today, Ireland faces what Coolahan (1981, p.141) identified 35 years ago as “daunting challenges” in providing the range of primary schools appropriate to the needs of society. In the intervening time, these needs have only become more acute. In the last census, approximately 16% of the population described themselves as being from a faith tradition other than Catholic (Central Statistics Office, 2011) while, at the same time, approximately 89.65% of primary schools were under Catholic patronage (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather, 2012).

In this chapter, an explanation of how the system of Irish national schools evolved will be given. This is essential if the current situation is to be fully understood. At this point, it is worth noting

the difference in terminology: all national schools are primary schools, in that they provide elementary education for children. Not all primary schools are national schools, however, as there are a number of private, fee-paying primary schools that are not supported by the national system. These terms are often used interchangeably, however. This study will not include primary schools outside the national school system.

Chapter 1 is divided into five sections:

- 1.1 Primary education before 1831
- 1.2 The state-sponsored system after 1831
- 1.3 Educational provision at primary level 1921-1971
- 1.4 New models of patronage emerge
- 1.5 Educational provision at primary level today

1.1 Primary education before 1831

The seminal publication *Irish Education: History and Structure* (Coolahan, 1981) notes that Ireland had a long tradition of education, with formal schooling (such as monastic and bardic schools) evident for centuries. After the Tudor conquest of Ireland in the sixteenth century, the aim of English policy for the country was to promote schooling as a means of spreading the English language and the Protestant faith. With the enactment of the Penal Laws in the late seventeenth century, this policy went a step further by actually forbidding Catholics to teach Catholic children, to set up a school, or to send children abroad to be educated (Coolahan, 1981). The response of Irish Catholics was to develop an ad-hoc system of schooling known as “hedge schools”, where children would learn covertly from a poet or a local educated person, such as a former clerical student. Not unsurprisingly, government authorities distrusted these schools, fearing their potential for subversion in one form or another (Coolahan, 1981).

A series of Relief Acts at the end of the eighteenth century partially dismantled the Penal Laws. This allowed lay Catholics and individual priests, as well as a small number of religious orders (such as the Ursuline, Presentation and Loreto Sisters, the Christian Brothers and the Sisters of Mercy) to begin setting up schools for Catholic children. By 1824, an official commission calculated that there were about 11,000 schools in Ireland, staffed by 12,000 teachers and

catering for upwards of 500,000 students (Coolahan, 1981). The majority of these schools (about 9,000) were hedge schools, and they catered for almost 400,000 children. Only 40% of children attended school, however (Coolahan, 1981).

Recognising that a more educated general population would be desirable, state commissions were set up to advise on education in Ireland. Akenson (2012) notes that the commissions of 1791, 1806-1812 and 1824-1827 were particularly important, and comments that the earliest of these outlined the plan that was eventually adopted as the national education system in 1831. This system was outlined in a letter written by the Chief Secretary for Ireland, E.G. Stanley, to the Duke of Leinster, and is therefore often referred to as the “Stanley Letter”.

1.2 The state-sponsored system after 1831

The Stanley Letter outlined a system of national schools with local patronage/management that would be overseen by a state board. A key cornerstone of the plan was that schools would be open to children of all religious denominations, and that they would have combined secular but separate religious instruction. The national school system was therefore envisaged as a multi-denominational or mixed system that would unite children of different traditions. In an effort to make this vision a reality, the state adopted a principle of not supporting denominational schools financially. This position was at odds with the viewpoint of the three mainline Christian Churches – Roman Catholic, Church of Ireland and Presbyterian Church – who wanted the state to support denominational schooling. Each therefore put pressure on the government to allow aid to be given to schools under the management of individual churches (Akenson, 2012). By 1840, their efforts proved successful, and a decision was made to grant state aid to denominational schools, provided that the rules to which they adhered were approved by the state board. These concessions clearly represented a departure from the original multi-denominational plan (Coolahan, 1981).

Prior to this concession, the Church of Ireland set up its own school system – the Church Education Society – in opposition to the national system. The schools that belonged to this system first opened in 1839, and were open to children of all faiths. Only children belonging to the Church of Ireland needed to attend religious instruction, however. It was only when financial

difficulties made the running of a separate school system unviable that the Church of Ireland schools joined the national school system.

The Presbyterian Church was also opposed to the multi-denominational system outlined in the Stanley Letter. Akenson (2012, p.162) suggests that this is because the Presbyterian Church disagreed with the distinction between secular and religious instruction.

In contrast, the Catholic Church initially supported the national school system, as it was recognised by most as a considerable advance from what had gone before. Aid was therefore sought by Catholic clergy for a large number of schools that were attended in the main by Catholic children. The arrival of Dr Paul Cullen as Archbishop of Armagh changed this, however; in 1849, he began to lead a strong attack against the national school system. The Synod of Thurles (1850), presided over by Dr Cullen, issued several decrees warning about the dangers of the national school system and stating clearly that “the separate education of Catholic youth is, in every way, to be preferred to it” (Akenson 2012, p.255). The Catholic Church continued their opposition to the mixed education system and opposed any plan to extend it to secondary and higher education.

The three mainline Christian Churches remained unified in their opposition to the national school system as it had been envisaged and, in practice, each enrolled almost exclusively children of its own religious persuasion. This leads Hyland (1989, p.92) to the conclusion that, by the beginning of the twentieth century, the system was one that was “*de jure* undenominational, but *de facto* denominational in 97% of cases”. What happened in practice, therefore, was that children attended schools established by clergy and religious or their own denomination – Catholic children enrolled in Catholic schools, children who belonged to the Church of Ireland in Church of Ireland schools, and Presbyterian children enrolled in Presbyterian schools. People’s allegiance to their respective churches ensured that the multi-denominational system envisaged would not realise. In fact, the Catholic hierarchy (1900, cited in Coolahan 1981, p.37) contended that the national system of education was “as denominational almost as we could desire”. The Irish primary education system therefore evolved in fundamentally different ways to systems in other parts of the United Kingdom. In England and Scotland, for example, parallel systems were

in place, where denominational schools existed side by side with schools controlled by the local authority. This development was also mirrored in other Western European countries (Hyland, 1989). In Ireland, however, provision was never made for a separate system of primary schools controlled by the local authority. One important reason for this was because in 1870 the Powis Commission had found that voluntary denominational efforts had adequately met the demand for elementary education in this country, and so no other (i.e. state) provision was required (Hyland, 1989).

1.3 Educational provision at primary level 1921-1971

When the Irish Free State was established in 1921, it was curriculum reform rather than systemic restructuring that received government attention. The *de facto* denominational status of the school system was therefore allowed to continue. Successive ministers for education adopted the view that the state had a subsidiary role, aiding agencies such as the churches in the provision of educational facilities (Coolahan, 1981). The Irish Constitution was enacted in 1937 and Article 42 confirmed the state's role in this regard:

The State shall provide *for* free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiatives ... with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation [emphasis added].

The caveat noted here regarding the rights of parents reflects the “conscience clause” that had been in operation since the 1830s. This clause was verified in the *Rules and Programme for National Schools* (1917, p.3) where it was stated that “No child shall receive, or be present at, any religious instruction of which his parents or guardians disapprove”.

In 1954, the Council of Education, which had been set up three years earlier, issued its report on the function and curriculum of primary schools. In this report, attention was drawn to what the authors regarded as an anomaly in the control and management of national schools. The report pointed out that the theoretical object of the national school system (i.e. as a multi-denominational system) was at variance with realities of the denominational nature of primary schools, and that “consequently ... it needs restatement” (Department of Education 1954, p.93). It was therefore suggested that “the fullness of denominational education may be legally

sanctioned in those schools which are attended exclusively by children of the same religious faith” (Department of Education 1954, p.93). When the *Rules for National Schools* were revised in 1965, this recommendation was applied, and so the preface to the *Rules for National Schools* (1965, p.8) asserts, “... the State provides for free primary education for children and gives explicit recognition to the denominational character of these schools”.²

Hyland (1989) views this step as an error in the reading of the Council’s (1953) report, as she contends that no cognisance was taken of the fact that not all national schools were attended exclusively by children of the same denomination. The author states (Hyland 1989, p.96):

It is one thing to recognise that denominational schools are an acceptable element in the system and to guarantee that all schools will receive equal treatment – it is quite a different thing to say that all schools are denominational and to enshrine such a statement in the official rules for national schools.

The publication of the new curriculum for national schools in 1971 added a further complication to the situation by encouraging the integration of subjects, both religious and secular. In the introduction to Part 1 of the *Teachers' Handbook*, for example, it was stated that the curriculum should be seen “more as an integral whole rather than as a logical structure containing conveniently differentiated parts” (Department of Education 1971, p.19). The handbook continues: “The integration of the curriculum may be seen in the religious and civic spirit which animates all its parts” (Department of Education 1971, p.19). As Williams (2005) notes, this guideline reflected the *Rules for National Schools* (1965).

Taken together, the *Rules for National Schools* of 1965 and the provisions of the 1971 curriculum impacted hugely on the official status of national schools at primary level. The state now formally recognised the denominational character of the national school system and expected schools to offer a curriculum where religious and secular instruction would be integrated. The religious character of national schools in the Republic of Ireland – whether Catholic or Protestant – was therefore confirmed. There was no alternative to a faith-based primary education.

² See Williams (2005) for further treatment of this subject.

Hyland (1989) asserts that by allowing these two changes in the national school system, the state ignored the rights of those citizens who regarded denominational education as being in violation of their conscience and lawful preference. While the conscience clause laid down in the 1917 *Rules and Programmes for National Schools* remained in 1965, no guidance was given as to how it could be operated practically in the school day, given the integrated nature of the curriculum. It has therefore been said that it was “extremely difficult, if not impossible”, for children not to be exposed to religious values to which their parents might object (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather 2012, p.15).

Kiberd (1996, p.573) summarises the primary education landscape of the 1970s well when he states that the Catholic ethos of primary schools in the Republic of Ireland, “which had pervaded schools for two centuries, had never been clearly defined, largely because it was assumed to be unproblematic and all-pervasive. What was to take its place was not at all obvious”.

1.4 New models of patronage emerge

It was within this context that two new models of primary schools emerged in the Irish primary school system: the multi-denominational model and the Gaelscoileanna model. Their establishment reflected the strong pressure to have schools that were not tied to the Churches and that that reflected worldview preferences of parents. The motivation of those supporting the Gaelscoil model was also particularly cultural and linguistic. The policy framework for recognition of new schools was available, and at that time, was conditional on (a) having the minimum required number of children who intended to enrol in the school and (b) having a patron who was willing to manage the school. In the case of both the multi-denominational model and the Gaelscoileanna model, no suitable patron existed, so parents and other interested educationalists went about forming a patron body themselves.

1.4.1 Multi-denominational schooling

When it opened in 1978, the Dalkey School Project National School was the first school founded by parents who “wished to have their children educated in a multi-denominational school” (Dalkey School Project National School, 2016). By 1984, two other multi-denominational schools had been founded and a coordinating umbrella body, Educate Together, was established.

In the school year 2015-2016, there were 77 Educate Together national schools in Ireland (Educate Together, 2016).

Despite the growth in popularity of multi-denominational education, the meaning of the term remains ambiguous even today. For example, Educate Together (2016) defines multi-denominational patronage as an “equality-based” model, with “all children having equal rights of access to the school, and children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds being equally respected”. In addition, schools under the patronage of Educate Together do not provide denominational religious education (RE) during the school day, but do provide education about religions and beliefs (ERB). They also facilitate parents who wish to avail of denominational RE outside school hours (Educate Together, 2016). Not all multi-denominational schools operate in this way, however, with the Community National School (CNS) model being the most obvious.

The CNS is a second type of multi-denominational model in the primary school sector. Introduced by the Minister for Education and Skills, Mary Hanafin, in 2007, it was originally announced as inter-denominational in character. The aim of CNS was therefore “to provide for religious education and faith formation during the school day for each of the main faith groups represented” (DES, 2007). The intention was that CNSs would be under the patronage of the local Education and Training Boards (ETBs), formally known as the Vocational Educational Committees (VECs).

Since 2008, however, CNSs have redefined themselves as “state-operated multi-denominational, co-educational primary school[s]” (Scoil Aoife CNS, 2016). Further, CNSs remain under the interim patronage of the Minister for Education, and so are one of only two examples of the state *providing* rather than *providing for* education at primary level. The other such schools are Model Schools, which were established as teacher-training institutions in the 1830s, before the foundation of teacher-training colleges. Nine of these schools remain. In the school year 2015-2016, there were 11 CNSs in Ireland (Scoil Aoife CNS, 2016).

CNSs differ to schools under the patronage of Educate Together in that rather than providing a programme of ERB, two and a half hours per week is spent on a “common multi-belief

programme” called *Goodness Me, Goodness You* (Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB, 2016). As part of this programme, children from all religious traditions and none are taught together using stories, songs and poems from a variety of belief traditions. The intention is that children interpret and adopt these materials differently according to their own religious tradition or worldview. Further, for either three or four weeks during the year, children are grouped according to their own religious tradition or worldview and are taught faith-specific material. This faith formation takes place during, rather than after, school hours, as is the case in Educate Together schools.

It is therefore clear that the multi-denominational model of primary education provides an alternative for parents who do not wish for their children to attend a faith-based school. The two forms of multi-denominational schools are quite different, however, with schools under the patronage of Educate Together prohibiting faith formation during schools hours, while CNSs incorporate faith formation according to each child’s own religious tradition during the school day. A third form of multi-denominational education, through the medium of the Irish language, is also available, and is described in Section 1.4.2.

1.4.2 Gaelscoileanna

A second new model of patronage that flourished during the 1970s was the Gaelscoil model. The first Gaelscoil was founded in 1917 by parents living outside of the Gaeltacht areas who wanted their children to be educated through the medium of the Irish language. By 1973, twelve Gaelscoileanna had been established and Gaelscoileanna Teoranta, a national coordinating body for schools teaching through the medium of Irish, was founded. A decade later, the number of Gaelscoileanna had risen to 30, and more than doubled again to 74 by 1993 (Gaelscoileanna Teoranta, 2016). It was in this year that An Forás Patrúnachta, a patron body for schools providing education through the medium of the Irish language, was established. In the school year 2015-2016, there were 144 Gaelscoileanna in the Republic of Ireland and 63 of these were under the patronage of An Forás Patrúnachta (An Forás Patrúnachta, 2016). This patron focuses on the development of the provision of Irish-medium education “with a choice of religious ethos”: Catholic, multi-denominational and inter-denominational (An Forás Patrúnachta, 2016).

Gaelscoileanna with a Catholic ethos teach RE programmes sanctioned by the local bishop, and children are prepared for the sacraments during school hours. In the school year 2015/2016, 35 schools under the patronage of An Forás Patrúnachta espoused a Catholic ethos. In addition, the 81 Gaelscoileanna that are not under the patronage of An Forás Patrúnachta are also under the patronage of the Catholic Church. This brings the total number of Gaelscoileanna with a Catholic ethos to 116.

Gaelscoileanna that have an inter-denominational ethos function with a shared Catholic and Protestant ethos. In these schools, both Catholic and Protestant programmes of RE are followed, and children are prepared for the sacraments pertaining to them. In the school year 2015/2016, 15 schools under the patronage of An Forás Patrúnachta were operating with an inter-denominational ethos.

In Gaelscoileanna that have a multi-denominational ethos, "... no particular (denominational) religion is taught within the official school timetable as set out by the Department of Education and Skills" (An Forás Patrúnachta, 2016). Thirteen of these schools were in operation in the school year 2015/2016. For two and a half hours each week, a common core curriculum called *Croí na Scoile* is implemented in these schools. Like schools under the patronage of Education Together, Gaelscoileanna with a multi-denominational ethos facilitate parents who wish to avail of denominational RE outside school hours, although it must be taught through the medium of the Irish language.

In summary, patron bodies such as Educate Together and An Forás Patrúnachta have certainly brought more diversity to the provision of primary education in Ireland since the 1970s. Such schools still form a very small percentage of the overall number of national schools, however. This will be discussed further in Section 1.5.

1.5 Educational provision at primary level today

In the school year 2015-2016, there were 3,124 mainstream primary schools in Ireland. Approximately 21% of these schools (10.56% located in urban areas and 10.12% located in rural areas) were designated as disadvantaged under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools

(DEIS) scheme. The DEIS scheme focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities, from pre-school through second-level education (DES, 2015). The breakdown of primary schools by patron body for the school year 2010-2011 is given in Table 1 (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather 2012, p.29).

Patron Body	Number of Schools	Percentage of Total
Catholic	2,841	89.65
Church of Ireland	174	5.49
Presbyterian	17	0.54
Methodist	1	0.03
Jewish	1	0.03
Islamic	2	0.06
Quaker	1	0.03
John Scottus Educational Trust Ltd ³	1	0.03
Lifeways Ireland Ltd ⁴	2	0.06
An Forás Patrúnachta	57	1.80
Educate Together	44	0.44
Vocational Education Committee ⁵	5	0.16
Minister for Education and Skills ⁶	9	0.29
Total	3,169	100%

Table 1: Catholic primary schools in Ireland by patron body

³ John Scottus School is a multi-denominational school. For two and a half hours per week, all children study philosophy and “students are free to incorporate these views into their own emerging world view as they think best” (John Scottus School, 2011).

⁴ Lifeways Ireland Ltd is the recognised patron body for Steiner National Schools in the Republic of Ireland. The religious ethos of Steiner schools is described as follows: “Steiner Waldorf schools ... tend to be spiritually oriented and are based out of a generally Christian perspective. The historic festivals of Christianity, and of other major religions as well, are observed in the classrooms and in school assemblies. Classes in religious doctrine are not part of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum, and children of all religious backgrounds attend Steiner Waldorf schools. Spiritual guidance is aimed at awakening the child's natural reverence for the wonder and beauty of life” (Irish Steiner Kindergarten Association, 2016).

⁵ The Vocation Education Committees (VECs) are now known as the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). The ETBs are the patron designate of CNSs, although the Minister for Education is the current, interim patron of these schools (see Section 1.4.1).

⁶ The minister is the patron of all Model Schools (see Section 1.4.1).

The emergence of multi-denominational schools in the 1970s is evidence of the desire on the part of some parents for a non-faith-based primary education for their children. The right to such an education was discussed at a national level on several occasions, such as at the National Education Convention, which took place in 1993, and by the Constitution Review Group in 1996. Little was done to address the issue of lack of diversity of patronage within the primary system, however. In 2005, and again in 2011, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UN CERD), noted the dominance of denominational primary schools in Ireland, and recommended the state "... promote the establishment of non-denominational and multi-denominational schools" (UN CERD, 2011). Similar observations have been made by other international bodies, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2009), as well as from national bodies such as the Irish Human Rights Commission (Irish Human Rights Commission, 2010).

The demand for a non-faith-based primary education increased sharply from the late 1990s onwards as economic migration brought people from many and varied faith traditions to live in Ireland. A decline in the number of people indicating a formal religious affiliation and regular religious practice has led to an increase in this demand (Central Statistics Office, 2011). The obvious need for alternative models of patronage was noted by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference as far back as 2007. In its policy statement, *Catholic Primary Schools: A Policy for Provision into the Future* (2007, p.6), the Bishops stated:

The Catholic Church accepts that there should be choice and diversity within a national education system ... In new centres of population it is incumbent upon the State to plan for the provision of school sites and to ensure, in consultation with the various patron bodies, that there is a plurality of school provision reflecting the wishes of the parents in the area.

In August 2010, the Department of Education and Skills (DES) published data on 47 selected areas where they believed divesting of Catholic primary schools was warranted based on lack of alternative provision for parents who so wish. The following year, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn, established a Forum on Pluralism and Patronage in the Primary Sector. An advisory group to the forum examined the issue of patronage in the Irish primary school system, and its report was published in 2012. Among the recommendations given in the report was that

patrons would provide the DES with options for divesting an existing school in areas where there is an absence of diversity of patronage, and where there is parental demand for alternative school patronage. The DES would then decide on the patronage of the divested school. Recommendations were also made for communities served by one “Stand Alone” school (defined as schools that serve a local community where it is not possible to provide a second school; schools outside of an urban area, where the nearest school is more than 3km away), where transfer of patronage is not an option. These recommendations sought to ensure that such schools would be as inclusive as possible and accommodate pupils of various beliefs (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather, 2012).

A year after the publication of the report of the advisory group to the Forum of Pluralism and Patronage, the DES surveyed parents in 43 areas to establish demand for alternative patronage in particular areas, and it was found that there was sufficient demand for alternative provision in 28 of the areas surveyed (Department of Education and Skills, 2013b). Some criticism of these surveys exists, however. For example, the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference (2013) notes that in those areas where an opinion in favour of change was expressed, this amounted in each case to between 2.2% and 8% of parents with children in school. The bishops therefore cautioned that, given this “... limited request for change”, attention must be given “... to the large majority who have expressed no such interest”. The bishops also note that while the survey reflects accurately the views of those who participated, a large majority of parents did not take part in the surveys.

Since 2013, however, no denominational schools have been transferred, closed or amalgamated to facilitate the divestment process. A number of multi-denominational schools have opened, however, two of which are in accommodation previously used as Catholic schools. In relation to the second recommendation of the forum’s advisory group regarding the inclusion of all children in denominational schools, the DES published *Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector: Progress to Date and Future Directions* in 2014. In addition, before his resignation as Minister for Education and Skills in 2014, Ruairí Quinn made unscripted suggestions about how time allocated to RE could be used to improve pupils’ literacy and numeracy. Quinn was succeeded as Minister for Education and Skills by Jan O’Sullivan. During

her two year term, Minister O’Sullivan removed Rule 68 from the *Rules for National Schools*. This rule stated:

Of all parts of a school curriculum, Religious Instruction is by far the most important, as its subject matter, God’s honour and service, includes the proper use of all man’s faculties, and affords the most powerful inducements to their proper use. Religious Instruction is, therefore, a fundamental part of the school course, and a religious spirit should inform and vivify the whole work of the school.

Interestingly, many key stakeholders, including Atheist Ireland, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and the Catholic Schools’ Partnership, were in agreement that removing rule 68 did not affect the religious ethos of Catholic schools or the nature of the integrated curriculum, each noting that the Education Act (1998) had enshrined this right. Williams (2016) therefore concludes that the removal of rule 68 was a “symbolic statement”.

Minister O’Sullivan was succeeded as Minister for Education and Skills by Richard Bruton in May 2016. Within one month of his appointment, Mr Bruton announced the Government’s plan to “increase the number of multi-denominational schools to 400 within the next 15 years through a combination of new schools and an accelerated process of divestment” (O’Brien, 2016). The Minister has indicated that his preference of multi-denominational school is the CNS.

For its part, the Catholic Church published a guideline document, *Catholic Primary Schools in a Changing Ireland: Sharing Good Practice on Inclusion of All Pupils*, in 2015. In this document, the reader is reminded that Catholic schools have responded positively to demographic changes in Ireland, and that many of them have led the way in integrating migrants into local communities. The diverse and inclusive characteristic of Catholic schools is also confirmed by a 2012 study from the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) which found that 80% of parents with the top incomes send their children to non-Catholic schools, while children in Catholic schools come from just 20% of the top income families. The report also found a significantly higher number of children with learning difficulties and disabilities in Catholic schools than in other school types. With regard to traveller education the ESRI report (2012) states: “Most multi-denominational schools did not have any traveller pupils. Catholic schools

were more likely to have greater numbers of traveller pupils compared to minority faith schools.” It is therefore true to say that, while the Catholic school system does dominate primary education in Ireland, Catholic schools have clearly indicated that they are open to and welcoming of all children in their local communities.

This chapter has outlined the historical development of the national education system at primary level. Although originally intended to be a multi-denominational system, it quickly became confessional, and has remained so despite an increasingly religiously diverse population. It has been acknowledged by all partners that more diversity is required within the system, although progress to achieve this has, to date, been slow. For the purpose of this dissertation, the impact that the evolution of the primary school system has had on the religious identity of Catholic primary schools is to be considered. In a situation where so many national schools are under Catholic patronage, the question is to determine whether Irish Catholic primary schools are actually distinguishable as Catholic. These and other questions will be discussed in Chapter 2.

2. Literature Review

Building on the outline of the historical context of the development of Irish Catholic primary schools given in Chapter 1, this chapter will examine the literature relevant to the religious identity of these schools. It begins, in Section 2.1, by reviewing various authors' analysis of the overlapping terms "ethos" and "characteristic spirit", and will comment on their relationship to the concept of "identity", a term more prevalent in literature originating from the United States of America (USA) and Australia. From there, the chapter will consider the only means through which Irish Catholic primary schools can assess their own characteristic spirit: a self-evaluation process developed by the Catholic Schools Partnership (CSP).

Section 2.2 will go on to discuss relevant literature in the field of "Catholic School Identity". Most of this research comes from outside of the Republic of Ireland, although three studies completed under the auspices of the CSP, the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (2012) are also discussed. These studies will inform both the methodological and theoretical basis of the researcher's own study.

The final section of this literature review (2.3) will examine the work of Lieven Boeve. His theory about the identity of Catholic universities in post-Christian European societies has been taken up by others, including Didier Pollefeyt and Jan Bouwens (2010), who attempt to frame the religious aspects of the identity of Catholic educational organisations based on Boeve's (2006) categorisations. This has led to the conceptualisation of five models of religious identity, as exemplified by these institutions – a theory that has already been applied in several other contexts. These models will serve as a theoretical lens through which the researcher can compare her own findings.

2.1 "Ethos", "characteristic spirit" and "identity": an appraisal of the literature

The concept of "ethos" is notoriously difficult to define. Lambkin (2000, p.191), for example, describes the concept as both "elusive" and "abstract". McLaughlin (2005) gives two reasons why this is so, focusing on ethos in educational settings. First, he states, it is because the term "ethos" is used as a synonym for terms such as "ambience", "atmosphere" and "culture". It

therefore avoids specific definition for the purposes of analysis and discussion. Second, because ethos is manifested in a wide range of aspects of the life and work of the classroom and the school, McLaughlin (2005) contends that it is more difficult to be precise about its effects. For example, Canavan and Monaghan (2000) specify 21 aspects of school life that determine ethos, including symbols/icons/emblems, rituals and ceremonies, communication systems and relationships with parents. For this reason, some authors resist using the term ethos.

The term “characteristic spirit” was the term chosen in place of “ethos” in the Education Act (1998). In the Act, a school’s characteristic spirit is defined as being determined by the “... cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school ...” (Government of Ireland 1998, 15(2)(b)). In practice, the words “ethos” and “characteristic spirit” are used interchangeably in educational parlance in Ireland and, for the purposes of this paper, they are understood to have the same meaning.

The definition of “characteristic spirit” offered by the Education Act (1998) indicates that there are two dimensions of ethos – the values and traditions that are characteristic of the *objectives* of the school and the values and traditions that are characteristic of the *conduct* of the school. Skelly (2012) describes these two dimensions as that which is prescribed and that which is operative. Here, the author is clearly influenced by the work of Donnelly (2000, p.135), who defines these two categories as “positivist” or “anti-positivist”. A positivist definition, Donnelly (2000, p.136) contends, views ethos as a “... *formal* expression of the authorities’ aims and objectives for an organisation”. An anti-positivist approach, on the other hand, views ethos as something more informal, “... emerging from social interaction and process” (Donnelly 2000, p.136).

Norman’s (2003, pp.2-3) definition of ethos is clearly in line with an anti-positivist (operative) interpretation of the term, as he describes ethos as “... the atmosphere that emerges from the interaction of a number of aspects of school life, including teaching and learning, management and leadership, the use of images and symbols, rituals and practices, as well as goals and expectations”. The White Paper, *Charting Our Education Future*, also clearly places its

understanding of school ethos within the anti-positivist paradigm by stating that, "... the ethos of a school is an organic element, arising, first and foremost, from the actual practices which are carried on in that school on a daily, weekly and yearly basis" (Department of Education and Science 1995, p.11).

Donnelly (2000) maintains that the positivist (or prescribed) perspective of ethos is also significant, however, as it makes clear both the aims and objectives that the school authorities hold, and the ideals to which the founders of the school aspire. Her research, however, ultimately found that the intended ethos set out by school authorities was, at times, both far removed from reality and even undermined by the conduct of members of the school community. This point is echoed by McLaughlin (2005, p.312) who comments that, "The potential tension between an 'intended' ethos and an 'experienced' ethos is ... an inescapable part of ethos in an educational context." Donnelly (2000, p.150) thus deduces that ethos is "... a *negotiated* process whereby individuals come to some agreement about what should and should not be prioritised". In the Irish context, where patrons do not exercise the same leverage over ethos as similar authorities in other jurisdictions, this negotiated process needs to be led by the principal and teachers in the school community. If they do not do so, the patron's ability to do leverage control is limited.

A further concept that must be mentioned at this point is that of "identity", or more specifically, "Catholic school identity". This term is used widely in literature on Catholic schools originating from the USA and Australia in particular, and so it is important to set out its relationship to the terms "ethos" and "characteristic spirit", more commonly used in Ireland and the United Kingdom. For the purposes of this study, the term "Catholic school identity" will refer to the demonstrable indicators or expressions of a school's ethos or characteristic spirit. It therefore relates closely to the operative or post-positivist dimension of ethos as outlined above.

Having clarified the definitions of the terms "characteristic spirit", "ethos" and "identity" in general terms, attention must now turn to how these phenomena are evident in Catholic primary schools in Ireland.

2.1.1 The “intended” ethos of Catholic primary schools in Ireland

The legal definition of the ethos of the Irish Catholic primary school is set down in a document known as the “Schedule”. The Schedule is given as an appendix to the Deed of Variation, which is an agreement between the Minister for Education and the patron bodies regarding the management of schools. The wording of the Schedule is as follows (Catholic Primary School Management Association 2012, p.23):

A Roman Catholic school (which is established in connection with the Minister) aims at promoting the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the person of the pupil: intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual, including a living relationship with God and with other people. The school models and promotes a philosophy of life inspired by belief in God and in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Catholic school provides religious education for the pupils in accordance with the doctrines, practices and tradition of the Roman Catholic Church and promotes the formation of the pupils in the Catholic Faith.

Since 2002, all Catholic primary schools have been required to display the Schedule in a “prominent place” in the school (Catholic Primary School Management Association 2012, p.23). It must also be included in all school policies and is the basis upon which Catholic primary schools devise their ethos/vision/mission statements. In this way, it is hoped that the “given” (intended) interpretation of Catholic school ethos is put into practice in the day-to-day running of the school.

The wording of the Schedule matches well the descriptions of the Catholic school given in Church documents, and as articulated by authors in the field of Catholic education. There is, however, no universally accepted definition of a Catholic school. Miller (2006, p.66), for example, sets out what he describes as five “non-negotiable” traits of Catholic schools: that they are inspired by a supernatural vision, focused on Christ, permeated by a Catholic worldview, sustained by the martyrology of teaching and imbued by a spirit of prayer. Almost a decade earlier, the Congregation for Catholic Education (CCE) outlined six alternative characteristics of a school “... which would present itself as Catholic” (CCE 1997, par. 4):

the Catholic school as a place of integral education of the human person through a clear educational project of which Christ is the foundation; its ecclesial and cultural identity; its mission of

education as a work of love; its service to society; the traits which should characterize the educating community.

More recently, Nuzzi and Holter (2009, p.1) offer what they term as ten “Constitutive Elements of Catholic Identity for Catholic Schools” focusing on its sacramental, ecclesiological, canonical, catechetical, evangelical, incarnational, Trinitarian, Paschal, educational and Christian nature. In the Irish context, Lane (2006) outlines seven distinctive characteristics of the contemporary Irish Catholic primary school: its social teaching and prayer life, its ecumenical nature and focus on the good News of Jesus, its sacramental preparation and links with the parish and its desire to have made known that “God is love” (1 John 4:8).

Previous to that, also in the Irish context, Kieran (2005) identified seven defining principles of post-Conciliar Catholic teaching on education: respect for the universal right to religious freedom, respect for the academic integrity of the educational community, its Christocentric nature, an emphasis on an anthropology based on the dignity and multi-dimensionality of all human beings, and a critical and creative engagement with contemporary culture. Most recently, Harmon and Mahon (2012) propose five qualities of Catholic schools that distinguish them from other schools in the Irish primary education system: that they are desired by parents and by the community, that they are rooted in the person of Jesus, and that they are evangelical, sacramental and catechetical.

Despite this lack of agreement on a definition of the Catholic school, common core elements do emerge, and these common core elements are evident in the aforementioned Schedule: (i) provision for the holistic development of the child, including his/her spiritual development; (ii) a Christocentric focus; and (iii) the delivery of Catholic RE that is both informative and formative. This last point is underlined by Vatican documents such as *Catechesi Tradendae* (John Paul II, 1979) and more recently by circular letters from the Congregation for Catholic Education (2009).

The question for this study is the extent to which these characteristics are and can be exhibited by Irish Catholic primary schools, given the context in which these schools operate. As noted in Chapter 1, the way in which Irish Catholic primary schools developed meant that national schools were *de facto* denominational, rather than being designed as a separate system into

which those who wanted a Catholic education could opt. The Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin (2008), acknowledged this fact when he stated:

I have on more than one occasion expressed my opinion that the fostering of plurality of educational patronage is something desirable and welcome in Ireland today, North and South, and could bring benefit to all, also in allowing the specifically Catholic school to be more distinctively Catholic. The Catholic school can only bring its real contribution to society when it is allowed to be fully a Catholic school...

2.1.2 The “operative” ethos of Catholic primary schools in Ireland

Evaluating how the Schedule of a Catholic school is put into effect (i.e. its operative dimension) is somewhat of an anomaly in the Irish context. The Whole School Evaluation (WSE), carried out by the DES, does not comment on a school’s religious identity. The basis for this decision is that, as the school’s characteristic spirit is derived from the patron, it is the patron who should assess that aspect of the school, not the state. The same is true for the curricular area of RE. Until very recently, patrons of Catholic primary schools had no formal way of evaluating or supporting schools in expressing their Catholic identity. This changed in 2010, when the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference and the Conference of Religious of Ireland established the CSP. The CSP describes itself as “... an umbrella group providing strategic thinking on major issues facing Catholic Schools” (CSP, 2016). It has a Council of twenty-one members representative of the various stakeholders in Catholic schools. This Council is charged with implementing a strategy that will achieve the aims of the CSP. One of the first initiatives of the group was to publish, *A Process for Understanding, Supporting and Taking Ownership of the Characteristic Spirit in a Catholic School* (CSP 2012b). Unlike the WSE, it is not a formal evaluation process, but rather can be understood as a tool to help schools to articulate and strengthen their Catholic character.

The CSP process begins by outlining five characteristics of Catholic primary schools. They are:

- A. We are called to be followers of Christ
- B. We have a Catholic understanding of education
- C. The school is a Christian community
- D. The school is an agent of personal growth and social transformation
- E. Religious education is an integral part of the life of the school

These five characteristics resonate well with the common core elements of the definition of Catholic schools, as discussed above: (i) the provision for the holistic development of the child, including his/her spiritual development (characteristic B, C, D); (ii) a Christocentric focus (characteristic A); and (iii) the delivery of Catholic RE that is both informative and formative (characteristic E).

The CSP then goes on to offer eight ways in which a school might demonstrate each of these characteristics. These suggestions are called “indicators”. Key stakeholders in the school community are asked to rate on a four-point scale whether or not each of the indicators are a part of the school’s lived experience. In this way, the CSP process facilitates the “negotiated process” described by Donnelly (2000, p.150) by bridging the gap between a school’s aspirational ethos and experienced ethos, or between its ethos and its identity. In a survey carried out on behalf of the CSP in 2011, it was found that there was “clearly a struggle” to articulate what a Catholic school is and how it could be distinguished from other primary school models (Meagher 2011, p.12). The CSP process aims to address this struggle. The key characteristics and indicators offered by the CSP are given as an appendix to this document (Appendix A). At the end of the process, schools are asked to choose five of these indicators on which to improve.

The CSP (2012b, p.6) stresses that the process it outlines is not undertaken by “outside experts”, but is led by the school itself. According to Stockman (2008), this definition places the CSP evaluation procedure firmly within a self-evaluation framework. McNamara and O’Hara (2008, p.178) comment that self-evaluation is “... now a mainstream concept and most education systems throughout Europe are to a greater or lesser extent scrambling to find ways of integrating it into the everyday lives of schools”. A self-, rather than external, evaluation process is also undoubtedly more appealing to teachers and principals, who describe external inspection processes as having a colonising effect on their time and energy (Jeffrey and Woods, 1998; Perryman, 2007; Irish National Teachers’ Organisation, 2009).

MacBeath (1999) advocates in favour of school self-evaluation by suggesting that progress is much more likely to be achieved through a school’s own identification of its strengths and weaknesses rather than through externally mandated change. Blok, Slegers and Karsten (2008)

argue, however, that the utility of school self-evaluation has not been researched thoroughly enough, and point historical evidence, as recounted by Clift, Nuttall and McCormack (1987), who describe the first experiences of schools in England with self-evaluation. They conclude that self-evaluation processes did not contribute to improvements in the schools in any way. More recently, Schildkamp, Visscher and Luyten (2009, p.17) determine that the implementation of a self-evaluation instrument for Dutch primary schools had “no effect on pupil achievement”, although some indirect effects were noted.

Nevo (2002) suggests that one way to improve the validity of school self-evaluation is to connect self-evaluation with external evaluation procedures. The Standing International Conference of Central and General Inspectorates of Education (SICI) concurs, stating that without any external perspective, self-evaluation can result in “... self-delusion, introspection and superficial change” (SICI 2003, p.22). Building on the work of Nevo (2002), Van Petegem (2009) argues that external evaluation can play both a stimulating and legitimising role when carried out in tandem with school self-evaluation. The work of Christie, Ross and Klein (2004) is also relevant here in so far as these authors advise that external evaluation can confirm the validity and reliability of self-evaluation. There are several examples of good practice when it comes to this model of school evaluation. Most relevant in terms of this study is the example of the Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth, England (2007, p.1), which employs a framework to “... assist schools in the process of reviewing the Catholic education which they provide, evaluating its content and planning for its future development”. The process of implementing this framework includes both an element of self-assessment and a “validation visit” by the bishop’s representative(s) to confirm the strengths of the school and to assist the school in highlighting areas for development (Catholic Diocese of Portsmouth 2007, p.1). This process takes place every three years, and the ensuing report is sent to the bishop and governors (board of management) of the school. Other similar instruments have been developed by the English Dioceses of Birmingham, Nottingham, Brentwood and Leeds.

In summary, this analysis has determined that the terms “ethos” and “characteristic spirit” are interchangeable, and that they have two dimensions: one that is given by the patron (intended) and one that is active in the school (operative). The term “identity” is related to the latter

interpretation of this definition. The challenge for schools is to ensure that these two dimensions of ethos are as aligned as possible. Many studies on the religious identity of Catholic schools have been carried out in both Irish and international contexts. These are discussed in Section 2.2.

2.2 Empirical research on Catholic school identity

Empirical research on the topic of “Catholic school identity” is prevalent in the United Kingdom and North America in particular. In each of these education systems, Catholic schools form the minority of school types.⁷ There has also been a limited amount of research carried out in the Irish context. Studies in each of these jurisdictions are considered below.

2.2.1 England

The study that correlates closest to this piece of research was published by Walbank in 2012. The questions underpinning this study were: “... how [do] head teachers perceive the Catholic nature of their establishments and how [do] they articulate their vision of Catholic education for contemporary society?” (Walbank 2012, p.169). Nineteen primary schools in one English diocese took part in the research, making it a small, bounded case study. Participants’ responses were considered through the lens of Arthur’s (1995) three models of Catholic education: holistic, dualistic and pluralistic.

Walbank (2012, p.173) describes Arthur’s (1995) holistic school as one that is “deeply imbued by the Catholic faith”, and that has a “significant presence of Catholic teachers and pupils”. While elements of this model were reflected in the research findings, it was rejected “in practice if not in principle” by all participants in the study, because no school admitted only Catholic children (Walbank 2012, p.174). Arthur’s (1995) second model – dualistic – separates the secular and religious aims of the school. Walbank (2012) found that some elements of this model could be found in practices across all schools in the study, and linked this to the presence of non-Catholic teachers and students. The author summarises the dilemma well in stating: “The real challenge for schools in these circumstances is how to balance fidelity to the Catholic faith and encounter those of other faiths without falling into religious relativism” (Walbank 2012, p.177).

⁷ 10% of schools in England and Wales are Catholic schools (Catholic Education Service, 2016); 6.7% of schools in the USA are Catholic schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016); and 13% of schools in Canada are Catholic schools (Canadian Catholic School Trustees’ Association, 2016).

The third of Arthur's (1995) models of Catholic school, the pluralistic model, reflects an admissions policy that welcomes children of all faiths and none, and suggests that this approach fundamentally weakens the Catholic nature of the school. Walbank's (2012) research indicates that this may not be so, however, as it describes two schools in the study as serving children of all faiths and none while retaining a distinctly Catholic character. The use of interview data in dialogue with theoretical models of Catholic school identity is an approach that will be emulated in the reporting of findings in this study.

2.2.2 North America

A second study directly relevant to the aim of this research was undertaken by Convey (2012) in the USA. This study investigated the views of 3,389 Catholic elementary and secondary school administrators and teachers about their understanding of the term "Catholic identity". Data was collected through a three-part online survey completed by participants in 36 states. It was therefore a large enquiry with a wide geographical reach. The results of the study revealed that 91% of participants viewed their school's "strong faith community" as an important component of its Catholic identity (Convey 2012, p.195). Other components of Catholic school identity that received high ratings from participants were that the school day begins with a prayer (92%) and that school-wide liturgies occur periodically (89%). Another finding to note from this research is that the majority of participants did not consider the proportion of Catholic teachers or students in a school as essential elements of its religious identity, with just 39% and 15% of respondents, respectively, noting these as essential. This is an interesting finding when considered in light of Arthur's (1995) school model categorisations. It led the researcher to seek out literature specifically related to this issue.

Donlevy's (2007) study directly addresses the impact of non-Catholic students on Catholic teachers in four Catholic high schools in Western Canada. Focus group interviews with 22 teachers were used to collect the data for this investigation. The results reveal that the inclusion of non-Catholic students heightened teachers' uncertainty and ambiguity around the nature and purpose of Catholic schools. The author deduces that "... teacher participants arrived at their own conclusions depending on their position along the spectrum of views from fundamentalist to conservative to liberal" (Donlevy 2007, p.17). Experientially, however, it was found that

participants welcomed, appreciated, empathised with and sought to protect non-Catholic students in their classrooms. Each focus group also expressed the opinion that the presence of non-Catholic students demonstrated to society at large that Catholic schools are open and inclusive.

2.2.3 Ireland

There are three pieces of empirical research that are worthy of note in the Irish context. The first of these focused on issues relating to the attitudes of parents of children attending Catholic primary schools. Carried out by the Council for Research and Development of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference (2008), the enquiry solicited the views of 503 parents using quantitative survey methods in the form of a five-part questionnaire. Among the findings most relevant to this piece of research is the question that asked respondents to rate eleven reasons why they might choose a Catholic school for their child on a five-point scale ranging from "very important" to "very unimportant". The results showed that 58% of parents rated the Catholic identity factor as either "very important" or "important", while just 14% said that it was "unimportant", and 28% said that it was neither important nor unimportant.

A second piece of research in the Irish context was undertaken by Meagher (2011) on behalf of the CSP. This study opted for a qualitative rather than a quantitative methodology, and employed focus group discussions as a means of data collection. Nine focus groups were undertaken in total, with groups of principals and teachers, priests and pastoral workers, members of Boards of Managements, interview panel assessors, pastoral council members and pupils. Interestingly, the views of parents were omitted from this study.

Findings from this paper were given under seven headings. One of these, not touched upon by other studies, related to the role of the parish in the life of the Catholic primary school. Here it was noted that some teachers and principals were "aggrieved" that they were sometimes unsupported by home or parish in the task of RE (Meagher 2011, p.27). In some schools, teachers reported that the school chaplain did not visit the school, and that this left teachers feeling "undervalued, unappreciated and unsupported" (Meagher 2011, p.27). There was considerable variation in this experience, however, with some participants reporting excellent relationships with the local parish priest, and schools enjoying regular and purposeful visits by

him to the school. *Share the Good News: The National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland* (2010, p.144) clearly envisages this type of relationship between schools and their parish communities, stating that: “The Catholic primary school ... works closely with the local Catholic faith community ... The connection between school and parish is in this way acknowledged and reinforced day by day.”

A third piece of research carried out in the Irish context and worthy of consideration is the *INTO (Irish National Teachers’ Organisation) Survey on Teaching Religion in National Schools* (2012). Adopting a quantitative approach, this survey was completed by 363 teachers and mirrored a very similar survey done by the INTO in 2002. 90.6% of respondents to the 2012 survey taught in Catholic schools, reflective of the 89.65% of Catholic schools nationally at that time. Respondents were asked to estimate the frequency with which clergy/church representatives visited classes and, as with the Meagher (2011) study, responses varied widely, with 23% citing frequent visits to all classes, and 24% describing visits to all classes as occasional. Participants were also asked whether or not children should be prepared for the sacraments in school, the current practice in Catholic schools. 47% agreed that they should (a decrease of 20% since the 2002 survey), while 38% said that they should not (an increase of 8% since 2002). With regard to time allocation, participants were asked whether or not RE should be taught during school hours, and 59.5% thought that it should; again, almost a 20% drop since 2002. 70% of participants said that sacramental preparation took additional time beyond that which was allocated to RE, a huge increase of over 50% since 2002. In the only other question related to the content of RE, 71.9% of respondents thought that inter-religious education should be taught at primary level – a decrease of 14.2% since 2002.

In summary, although schools can self-evaluate their own religious identity using the CSP process described in Section 3.1.2, there has been no empirical research carried out in the Irish context to consider the religious identity of Catholic primary schools as a group. Studies such as those carried out by Walbank (2012) and Convey (2012) would undoubtedly be of service to those interested in the denominational nature of primary education in Ireland. The aim of this study is to carry out such research with the objective of developing a typology of the religious identity of Catholic primary schools in Ireland today. Following the example of Walbank (2012),

the findings of this study will be examined through the theoretical lens of the model developed by Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010). This will be discussed in Section 2.3.

2.3 The work of Boeve (2006) and Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010)

In 2006, Belgian theologian Lieven Boeve offered four models of the identity of Catholic universities in post-Christian European societies. That study was initially considered to be less relevant to this research because of both its context and its focus on tertiary education. Boeve's (2006) work has been extended by others, however, most notably his colleagues from the University of Leuven, Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010), and their work has proven very valuable in building a theoretical framework through which the religious identity of Catholic educational institutions can be explored. In this section, attention will be given both to the work of Boeve (2006) and Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010).

2.3.1 Boeve's reflections on the identity of Catholic universities in post-Christian European societies

Boeve (2006) uses the term "post-Christian" to describe his research setting – Flanders, Belgium – and also uses the term in reference to other European contexts that have secularised. The author later explains that the prefix "post-" doesn't only translate as "after", and defines the term "post-Christian" as being when the Christian faith "... is no longer the obvious, accepted background that grants meaning" (Boeve 2012, p.145). Despite the fact that 64% of the population of the Republic of Ireland self-declared as Christian in the 2011 Census, it is arguable that Christianity no longer provides the "obvious, accepted background that grants meaning" (Boeve 2012, p.145) for the vast majority of people, and so a designation as post-Christian could be accurate. Evidence of this decline in religiosity is apparent from data derived from the European Values Survey (EVS). Initiated in the late 1970s, this survey aimed to explore "the moral and social values underlying European social and political institutions" (EVS, 2015). Reviewing the EVS of 1981, Fogarty, Ryan and Lee (1984) noted an unparalleled level of belief, practice and prayer on the island of Ireland (North and South), distinguishing it from its European counterparts. Simultaneously, McAllister (1983, p.4) described Ireland as "one of the most religious societies in the world by whatever measure is used". Breen and Reynolds (2001) note that the 25 years following these comments were characterised by rapid and profound

economic changes in Irish society, particularly from the mid-1990s onwards. Mass unemployment changed to almost full employment, and emigration was replaced by inward migration, resulting in a dramatic increase in the standard of living of the vast majority of the population by the turn of the century (Kitchin and Bartley, 2007). Changes during this quarter-century were not limited to the realm of the economic, however. Demographic, social and religious changes were also evident, and the latter can be tracked reliably using longitudinal data from the EVSs of 1981, 1990, 1999 and 2008. Some of the most relevant of these findings are shown in Table 2.

	1981	1990	1999	2008	% Decrease 1981-2008
Belief in God	97.1%	97.6%	95.5%	91.8%	5.3%
Belief in heaven	89.3%	89.5%	85.3%	79.8%	9.5%
Belief in hell	60.5%	52.6%	53.3%	52.9%	7.6%
Belief in an afterlife	84.6%	83.3%	79.2%	74.2%	10.4%
Belief in sin	89.8%	86.6%	85.7%	78.0%	11.8%
Mass attendance (weekly)	82.4%	80.9%	56.9%	44.3%	38.1%

**Table 2: EVS results for the island of Ireland (North and South) –
1981, 1990, 1999 and 2008**

As Table 2 shows, the proportion of Irish people who believe in God decreased from 97% in 1981 and 1990 to 95.5% in 1999, and to 91.8% in 2008. Belief in core Christian doctrine (God, heaven, hell, afterlife and sin) also showed a decline. Changes in church attendance were much more pronounced, however, with weekly attendance approximately halving in the period between 1981 and 2008. This data leads Breen and Reynolds (2011, p.5) to the conclusion that while the overall picture seems to be one of a pronounced church-oriented decline, there is a “relatively persistent religious sentiment”. The authors make use of Davie’s (1994) description of “believing without belonging” and Inglis’ (2007) description of “cultural Catholicism” to describe this trend and to make sense of the results. This leads Breen and Reynolds (2011, p.9) to the conclusion that, even in 2008, Ireland still remained “outstandingly religious” when

compared to much of Europe. Murray (2008, p.10) concurs with this view, and comments further that it is therefore “hardly surprising” that the education system reflects this religiosity. Breen and Reynolds (2011) also note that the proportion of people who believe *and* belong (i.e. who practice regularly and accept all core Christian beliefs) seems to distinguish the Irish case from its European neighbours. This is backed up by two other findings from the 2008 EVS. One of those is the answer to the question, “How often do you pray to God outside religious services?” The proportion of Irish people who answered once a week or more to this question was 67%, almost 32% higher than the average of the countries that took part in the study. Similarly, when asked, “How important is God in your life?”, 4.7% of Irish respondents answered ‘not at all’, while the European average was almost triple that, at 13.6%.

The important question is whether this relative religiosity represents something unusual about Ireland in particular, or whether Irish society is simply in a process of “catching up” to the rest of Europe. More recent studies seem to indicate a continuation of the decline in Mass attendance. For example, an *Irish Times*/Ipsos MRBI survey in 2012 put weekly Mass attendance at 34%, and an Association of Catholic Priests/Amárach study the following year found a similar Mass attendance rate of 35% (*Irish Examiner*, 2013). A 10% decline in attendance since the EVS of 2008 was also noted in *The Sunday Times*’ Behaviour and Attitudes poll, which put weekly Mass attendance at 34% (*Irish Examiner*, 2013). Therefore, while it is possible to argue about defining Ireland’s status as “post-Christian”, there is no doubt that the overall religious identity of the country is, at least, “less Christian” than it once was. The next ESV study is planned for 2017, and this should provide an interesting perspective in relation to this.

Boeve (2006) suggests that post-Christian societies are characterised by both detraditionalisation and pluralisation. The author’s use of the term “detraditionalisation” in preference to the more popular notion of “secularisation” is an important distinction to note, as it points to the fact that changes are occurring across culture, not just in the religious domain. This, coupled with the second notion of pluralism, points to the fact that the dominant Christian culture is being replaced by a range of religions and life philosophies, of which atheism is one. Reflecting on Boeve’s (2006) analysis, Sharkey (2010, p.9), comments that the “paradigm has shifted from

identity formation within the context of commitment to a particular religious tradition to individuals putting beliefs together themselves from disparate sources”.

Boeve’s (2006) four models of the identity of Catholic universities arose out of his suggestion that there were four possible strategies for responding to the growing secularisation of such institutions: (i) abandon all claims to Catholic identity; (ii) reassert a distinctively confessional identity; (iii) promote the university as a place where Christian values, and humanitarianism in particular, are promoted; and (iv) search for a reinterpreted Catholic identity by means of an ongoing dialogue with the contemporary pluralistic context. Of these four possibilities, it is the final one that Boeve (2006, p.254) considers to be “the most fruitful”. This option argues that the Catholic university retains its specific religious identity while recognising, and responding to, the increasing pluralisation and detraditionalisation evident among its staff and student population. In this way, the Catholic university provides an opportunity for genuine dialogue between Catholics and non-Catholics. Boeve (2006, p.258) concludes that such a model would prepare students to live in a multi-faith society: “... plurality and difference are [therefore] no longer a threat to one’s own identity but rather an enrichment thereof.”

2.3.2 The work of Didier Pollefeyt and Jan Bouwens

In partnership with the Catholic Education Commission of Victoria, Australia, Didier Pollefeyt and Jan Bouwens from the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, worked on a study that is now known as the “Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project”. Building on Boeve’s (2006) work, the initial aim of the project was to develop an empirical methodology to frame the religious aspects of the identity of Catholic educational organisations. In developing such a methodology, Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) eventually presented five models of the religious identity of a Catholic educational organisation:

1. A confessionally based organisation
2. An organisation focused on values education from a Christian perspective
3. An organisation dedicated to institutional reconfessionalisation
4. An organisation dedicated to institutional secularisation
5. An organisation seeking recontextualisation (or identity formation in a plural context)

Material related to the “Enhancing School Identity Project” (2009) makes it clear that these models are theoretical typologies and do not necessarily exist in pure form. Rather, the models highlight tendencies that are present to greater or lesser degrees in contemporary educational institutions. In practice, elements of all five models may be found in a particular school, with perhaps one or more paradigm dominating. In their theoretical model, however, Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) do suggest a hypothetical timeline, with the more confessionally based organisations prevailing during the 1950s, and the other models being introduced more recently. The authors conceptualise these school types, and the development thereof, in Figure 1. A further description of each is given below.

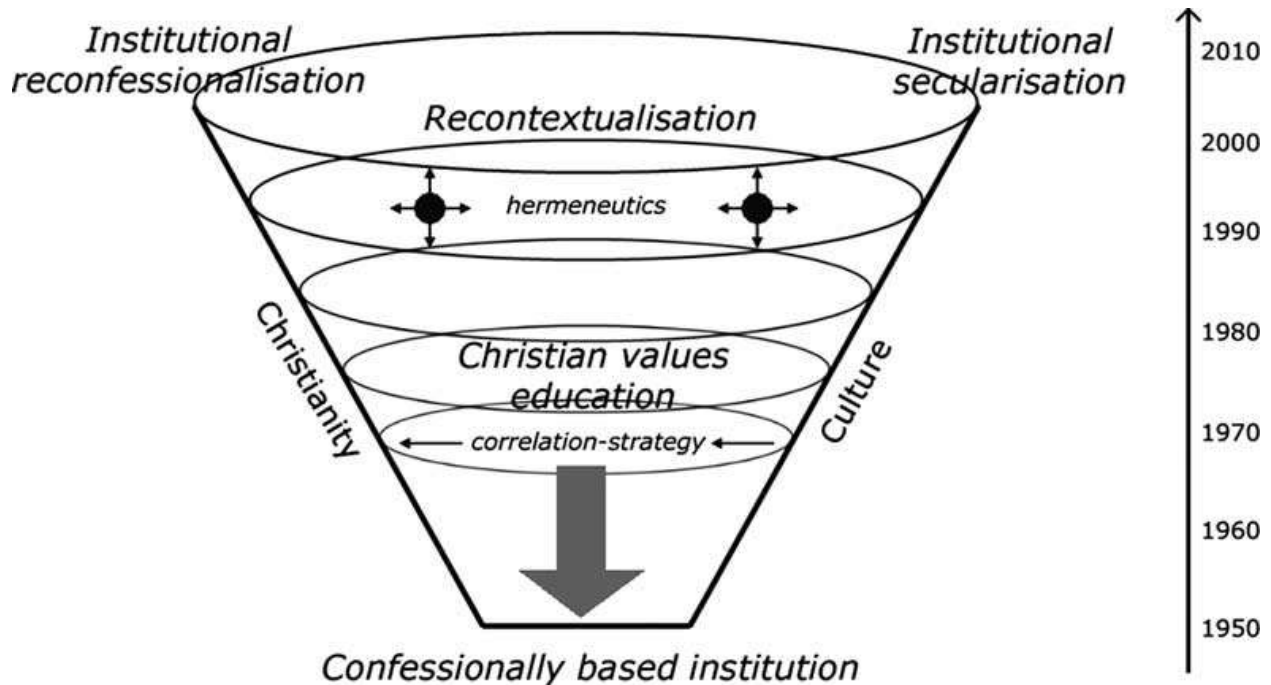


Figure 1: Pollefeyt and Bouwens' (2010) model of the religious identity of a Catholic educational organisation

2.3.2.1 A confessionally based organisation

This model was not originally included by Boeve (2006) in his analysis of Catholic universities in post-Christian European societies. Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010, p.200) included it in their model because they hypothesise that there could still be what they describe as “traditional confessional” schools in operation. In this school model, practices such as the celebration of class or school Masses, and the recitation of formal prayers throughout the day are maintained without question or reflection on the prevailing culture.

Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) perceive such a model to be undesirable because they assume that a school operating out of this religious ideology must not be reflecting in any real way on its own religious identity, or on the religious identity of members of the school community. They therefore comment: “An ‘old style’ confessional school identity is simply continued out of habit, from the desire to remain recognisably ‘Catholic’, as an expression of a passive, awaiting attitude, or also just to not have to deal with it” (Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2010, p.200). Some authors, including O’Shea (2014) have difficulty with this characterisation, and see it as caricaturing those Catholic schools that are attempting to maintain a specific Catholic identity in the traditional sense. The confessionally-based model of Catholic education is, according to O’Shea (2014, p.369) incorrectly portrayed by Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) as “dogmatic and anti-intellectual”. O’Shea (2014, p.342) instead proposes that confessionally-based Catholic schools have “long history of effectiveness in training successive generations in their religious duties”.

2.3.2.2 An organisation focused on values education from a Christian perspective

The second model proposed by Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) is labelled as “Christian values education” in Figure 1. The authors describe this type of school as emerging when the gap between the Catholic faith and culture begins to widen. Figure 1 therefore displays the term “correlation strategy” as a descriptor of the process that is ongoing in this theoretical school model. The aim is to find a compromise between faith and culture “... with which anyone can reconcile” (Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2010, p.200). Sharkey (2010, p.12) refers to this model by using the verb “harmonise”.

This type of school specifically uses “ethics” as a mediator between culture and the Catholic faith (Pollefeyt and Bouwens, 2010). Christian values and norms, which are universally recognisable and commonly shared by the general population, are therefore prized: helpfulness, altruism, kindness, friendship, solidarity, etc. Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010, p.200) maintain that this type of school is assured of a “broad basis” as it appeals to both “believers and ‘not-any-more’ Catholics” as well as “post-Christians, other-believers and other-minded people”. Williams (2005, p.108) confirms this, stating: “Generosity, concern for others and consideration of their interests, willingness to share and to cooperate, courage and steadfastness are among the values which inform a religious ethos and which would be perfectly acceptable to believer and non-believer alike.” Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010, p.200) maintain, however, that the implicit aim in this school type is still somewhat evangelical, as it is hoped that, through an appreciation for shared values, the school will “... bring back into the church as many ‘astray’ and ‘anonymous’ Catholics as possible”.

Just as with the confessionally based organisation, Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) reserve some critique for this type of school model. First, it presupposes that all school members are at least “addressable” with regard to the Catholic message, which may not be the case (Pollefeyt and Bouwens 2010, p.201). Second, the authors foresee the possibility that faith and culture will continue to move further and further away from each other. This will make it increasingly difficult for schools to be the mediator between the two. A further risk then emerges, which the Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010, p.201) name as “horizontalisation”. Where this occurs, those elements of the Catholic faith that are easily correlated remain present, while those that are not are abandoned. The authors therefore conclude that, “In practice, this approach usually results in a post-Christian school environment in which it is good to sojourn but where little explicitly Catholic faith remains present” (Pollefeyt and Bouwens, 2010, p.201).

2.3.2.3 An organisation dedicated to institutional reconversion

To return to the diagram in Figure 1, the third school model suggested by Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) emerges when a school moves further away from the prevailing societal culture and closer to an explicitly confessional Catholic identity. Boeve (2006, p.201) calls this model “institutional reconversion”. Such a school model would overtly and publicly assert its

Catholic identity. It would be taken for granted that a substantial part of the school population is practising Catholicism, or least should be, and so practices such as corporate prayer and sacramental celebrations are purposefully preserved as pillars of school life.

In his analysis, Boeve (2006) points to some examples of successful “reconfessionalised” third-level institutes, such as the Institut Catholique in Paris. Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2009) concur, stating that such a school model is a “legitimate option in the middle of plurality”. The authors also warn, however, that there is a possibility that those students who are formed in a school model such as this could grow up to be maladjusted and even alienated from the secularised and pluralist culture of the “real world” in which they live.

2.3.2.4 An organisation dedicated to institutional secularisation

The theoretical antithesis of the institutional reconfessionalisation model is what Boeve (2006, p.247) identifies as “institutional secularisation”. In this model, secular culture is embraced within the school, and so it moves further and further away from its Catholic identity. Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2009) describe this move in stark terms when they state that this school type “goes along with the culture that surrounds it: in our modern culture Christianity is slowly disappearing, and so the same happens in the school”.

The authors are clear that the process of institutional secularisation is rarely a “... conscious and guided decision”, but more likely “... an implicit process” that begins with the school adopting the Christian values education model (Pollefeyt and Bouwens, 2010, p.202). There comes a point, however, at which the tension between Christianity and culture becomes insurmountable, and so a decision is made at an organisational and institutional level to adopt a secularisation process, and the school’s Catholic identity is renounced. Boeve (2006) gives the example of the French-speaking Belgian Christian Democrats changing their name to “Centre Démocratique Humaniste” (“Humanist Democratic Centre”) to illustrate the process of institutional secularisation. In this Irish context, the Catholic Scouts of Ireland (now Scouting Ireland) could be described as an organisation that has undergone similar institutional secularisation.

The population of an institutionally secularised school is typically characterised by a diversity of religious outlooks and philosophies of life (Pollefeyt and Bouwens, 2009). Compulsory courses in Catholic RE are replaced with broad, comparative RE classes. In some cases, specifically Catholic RE classes will be offered, but only as an elective. This, it believes, is indicative of its neutral-pluralistic post-Catholic identity, in which the dialogue between different philosophical viewpoints is actively encouraged. In other cases, the post-Catholic school could opt for what it deems to be a “neutral” stance by suggesting that one’s religion or life philosophy is a private matter that doesn’t belong in the public sphere, and so denominational RE is not permitted at all. Boeve (2006, p.248) insists that, in such cases, “Neutrality ... is far from neutral.”

2.3.2.5 An organisation seeking recontextualisation (or identity formation in a plural context)

The philosophy underpinning this school type is that the cultural context is changing, and thus the Christian faith should evolve (or “recontextualise”) along with it. In this way, faith remains “recognisable, believable and meaningful” in the school environment (Pollefeyt and Bouwens, 2009).

In this theoretical model, Catholicism is just one option among a multiplicity of philosophical and religious positions evident in the school. Unlike the “values education in a Christian perspective” model, however, which seeks the lowest common denominator to unify all members of the school community, this institution is “propelled by dissimilarity” (Pollefeyt and Bouwens, 2010, p.202). Young people are therefore taught to consider how other religions and life stances relate to their own religious identity. Institutionally, the Catholic faith is treated as the “preferential”, rather than the exclusive, perspective (Pollefeyt and Bouwens, 2009). It is not the intention that all students attending the institution become Catholic, but rather that every student is challenged and enriched by the Catholic narrative, regardless of their religious identity or life stance. In this way, the Catholic faith and the prevailing culture are brought into full and meaningful dialogue.

The use of the word “hermeneutics” in Pollefeyt and Bouwens’ (2010, p.200) diagram (Figure 1) describes well the process undertaken in the recontextualised school environment. Here, the

Catholic faith is not understood as a static, universal and unchanging truth. Rather, it is accepted that there is a need for interpretation (hermeneutics) in order for students to understand the tradition in the context of their own culture and experience. The Enhancing Catholic School Identity Project advocates the use of recontextualising strategies so that the school's Catholic identity is reframed as a new expression within the diverse cultural context of its students.

The recontextualisation model, as proposed by Pollefeyt and Bouwens' (2010), is not without its critics. For example, O'Shea (2014, p.366) concludes that, because the Catholic faith is treated as the preferential, rather than the exclusive, perspective in such a model, children would be invited to adopt "... an eclectic mix of whatever it is that appeals from all possible sources, including those that are not apparently compatible with what has been traditionally understood as Christian belief." While accepting that there is a need to adapt the presentation of the Christian message to contemporary culture O'Shea (2014, p.367) insists that any recontextualising must be based on core Christian beliefs, and that these cannot be diluted. The author stresses that Catholic schools students and should not be asked "to surrender the Catholic claim expressed by Christ that 'No one comes to the Father except through me' (John 14:6)." (O'Shea 2014, p.364).

To summarise, this chapter began with an appraisal of the words "ethos", "identity" and "characteristic spirit". From there it considered the ethos or characteristic spirit of Catholic primary schools. It soon became clear that there are two levels at which ethos exists in Catholic primary schools: an intended and an operative level. The intended level is more straightforward: it is the characteristic spirit of the school given to it by its founder or its patron. The operative level is the way in which this vision is put into effect in the daily running of the school. It is this second aspect of ethos that is of interest in this study. It may also be referred to as the school's Catholic identity. Empirical research in this field was explored from different contexts, including the England, North America and Ireland.

The works of Boeve (2006) and Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) were then discussed. The models of the identity of Catholic educational organisations developed by Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) will prove to be a relevant theoretical framework for this study, the aim of which is to develop a typology of the religious identity of Irish Catholic primary schools. This empirical research could

lead to an extension, adaptation or disregarding of these models in the Irish context. These research findings are outlined in Chapter 3.

3. Methodology

Chapter 3 outlines the research paradigm, methodology and approach underpinning this study, the purpose of which is to develop a typology of the religious identity of Catholic primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. It describes the selection criteria applied to the participating schools, and also states how these schools were recruited. The data collection methods employed in the study are then detailed. These were chosen in line with the research paradigm and methodology. The means through which the data was analysed is also summarised in this chapter. The chapter concludes by outlining the ethical considerations observed when undertaking the study, and the degree to which this study can be considered trustworthy, following the criteria set down by Lincoln and Guba (2005).

3.1 Assumptions and rationale for research design

The research design underpinning this study is summarised in Figure 2:

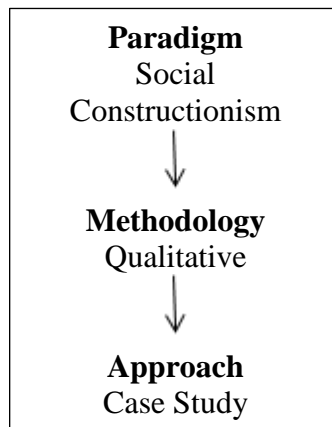


Figure 2: Research design

Each element of this figure will now be discussed: the research paradigm (Section 3.2), the research methodology (Section 3.3) and the research approach (Section 3.4).

3.2 Research paradigm

The term paradigm was coined by Thomas Kuhn (1962) as a means to describe an approach to research. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p.157) define a research paradigm as "... a basic set of beliefs that guide action". Burke Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004, p.24) add to this definition by explaining that these beliefs "... include, but are not limited to, ontological beliefs, epistemological beliefs, axiological beliefs, aesthetic beliefs, and methodological beliefs". Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggest that each of these elements are interlinked: ontological assumptions give rise to epistemological assumptions, epistemological assumptions influence methodological considerations and these, in turn, impact on instrumentation and data collection. It is clear, therefore, that both ontological and epistemological assumptions must be considered before any research project can begin.

3.2.1 Ontological assumptions

Ontology is the study of being, and is concerned with questions about what kinds of entities actually exist. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) ask, for example, whether social phenomena are external to individuals – imposing themselves on their consciousness from without – or if they are the product of individual consciousness. The question is therefore whether particular realities are of an objective nature, or if they are the products of individual consciousness. These questions spring directly from what philosophy terms the nominalist–realist debate. The realist view holds that knowledge exists separately to individuals. There is therefore only one universal truth, and that truth is discovered rather than created. On the other hand, the nominalist view contends that there is no independently accessible thing. Rather, the truth about what exists is socially negotiated. The assumption underpinning this research study lies closer to the nominalist perspective, as it contends that while the religious ethos of a Catholic school certainly exists, in that it is given as an aspiration by its founders, its identity is only evident when it is expressed by those who are part of it. A school's religious identity therefore cannot be studied objectively, but only subjectively in consultation with those who give life to its expression. This ontological perspective guides the researcher's epistemological assumptions.

3.2.2 Epistemological assumptions

Epistemological assumptions concern knowledge – its nature and forms, how it can be acquired, and how it can be communicated to others. Crotty (1998) describes it as a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know. So, if ontological assumptions question the existence of a particular phenomenon, epistemological assumptions question how we can learn about that phenomenon.

Crotty (1998) identifies three possible epistemological stances: objectivism, constructionism and subjectivism. An objectivist (also known as a positivist) stance views knowledge as hard, objective and tangible (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). Meaning, and therefore meaningful reality, exists as such apart from any consciousness. If this study were to espouse an objectivist epistemological stance, it would presume that the Catholic identity of primary schools can be observed as an objective truth.

A second epistemological assumption, constructionism, opposes this view by asserting that there is no objective truth. Rather, truth, or meaning, comes into existence only when humans engage with particular realities. Constructionism therefore contends that “human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as we construct or make it” (Schwandt 2000, p.197). If this is the case, it is clear that different people may construct meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon.

The third epistemological stance identified by Crotty (1998) is subjectivism. Also identified as anti-positivist because of the contrasts between it and objectivism, subjectivism sees knowledge as personal, subjective and unique (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). The difference between it and constructionism is that while the latter depends on the interplay between the subject and the object, through which truth or meaning emerges, subjectivism sees meaning imposed on the object by the subject without any reference to reality. A subjective epistemology therefore asserts that all knowledge is purely a matter of perspective.

Having given due attention to both ontological and epistemological considerations, the researcher considered that this study fits best into a constructionist research paradigm. This paradigm is discussed in greater detail in Section 3.2.3.

3.2.3 Constructionist research paradigm

Crotty (1998, p.45) describes constructionism as the view that all knowledge is “contingent upon human practices and is constructed in and out of interactions between human beings and their world”. The researcher is therefore rejecting as naïve the realist ontology and objectivist epistemology that would hold that a phenomenon such as a school’s religious identity exists independently, outside of those who are part of the school community, and that it can somehow be assessed in a direct and unmediated manner. Rather, the researcher sees that the subject (the school community) and the object (Catholic identity) are interlinked. This conforms to Crotty’s (1998, p.45) explanation of the relationship between the subject and the object in the constructionist approach:

Because of the essential relationship that human experience bears to its object, no object can be adequately described in isolation from the conscious being experiencing it, nor can any experience be adequately described in isolation from its object ... Subject and object, distinguishable as they are, are always united.

This approach also conforms to the researcher’s operative understanding of religious identity offered in Chapter 2. If the focus was on what McLaughlin (2005, p.312) describes as the “intended” or “aspirational” ethos of the school, then a more positivist research paradigm may perhaps be appropriate. Given, however, that the focus of this research is on the “... *negotiated* process” through which ethos is established in the school community, a constructionist paradigm is more fitting (Donnelly 2000, p.150).

Crotty (1998, p.45) also contends that within the constructionist paradigm, all knowledge is developed and transmitted “with an essentially social context”. This point is, in fact, what distinguishes constructionism from constructivism. The former emphasises a social dimension of meaning-making, whereas the latter focuses on individual meaning-making. The former is therefore often referred to as social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). The

researcher favours this paradigm over a constructivist paradigm because it places a significance on the role of culture in shaping individuals' meaning.

The main criticisms levelled against social constructionism can be summarised by its perceived conceptualisation of realism and relativism (Andrews, 2012). Social constructionism can therefore be accused of being anti-realist in denying that knowledge is a direct perception of reality (Craib, 1997). Crotty (1998) refutes this argument, stating that to say that meaningful reality is socially constructed is not to say that it is not real. The author draws on the work of Fish (1996) to make this point. Using an example from baseball, Fish (1996) explains that while “balls” and “strikes” are certainly social constructs, they are also real. Solanki (2013) gives money as an example of an article that is both real and a social construct. Crotty (1998) therefore suggests that “idealism” would be more appropriately set opposite realism than social constructionism.

3.3 Research methodology

Following Hycner's (1999, p.156) assertion that “... the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa)”, a qualitative research methodology was chosen to match the study's constructionist approach. Creswell (2003) highlights some of the characteristics of a qualitative methodology as follows:

- The researcher is involved in the actual experience of the participants
- The research uses methods of data collection that are interactive and humanistic
- Research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured, and is fundamentally interpretive
- The researcher systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study

Qualitative research methodologies include interviews, observations, and the analysis of documentary and audiovisual materials. The qualitative data collection methods employed in this study will be outlined in Section 3.6.

Critics of qualitative research methodologies assert that it is too subjective, difficult to replicate and lacks transparency. To ensure a rigorous approach to the research, Lincoln and Guba's (2005) criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research was considered during all stages of the data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting. These procedures through which these criteria were put into effect will be summarised in Section 3.8.

3.4 Research approach

A case study approach to the research was immediately considered by the researcher because, although the CSP process has been available for use in all primary schools since September 2012, its implementation has not been universal. In fact, only a handful of dioceses have mandated its use to date. This pattern of implementation lends itself to a bounded case study approach. The diocese in question was chosen because it is more geographically and demographically diverse than the other two possibilities. It is also the diocese that is closest to the researcher's home and workplace, making data collection less complicated than if she had to travel between 100km and 200km to visit each school site.

Stake (1995, p.xi) describes the case study as "... the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances". The author goes on to identify three models of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. This piece of research best fits Stake's (1995) description of an instrumental case study, as the primary source of interest is not the case study diocese itself, but the phenomenon being investigated in that diocese. Stake (1995, p.237) explains:

In what we may call an instrumental case study, a particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory. The case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else.

The case study approach is not without difficulties, and critiques abound in the literature, chiefly with regard to the difficulty of making generalisations from small samples (Tellis, 1997). No claim to generalisability will be made in this study as the case is recognised from the outset as a small, non-representative sample. That limitation acknowledged, every effort will be made to

enhance the transferability of this study to different contexts. These efforts are outlined in detail in Sections 3.5 and 3.8.

3.5 Participants

Having decided to adopt a case study approach to the research, attention turned to the potential participants and how they might be selected and recruited. There are 171 primary schools under the patronage of the bishop in the case study diocese, and it was decided to collect data from eight of these schools. Eight schools was considered to be data saturation point, given that four members of each school community were to be interviewed, and given the limited scale of this research project within one diocese.

3.5.1 Sampling methods

Probability sampling methods were chosen for the research on the basis that this would enhance the transferability of the research to other case study dioceses. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) describe six types of probability samples: simple random samples, systematic samples, stratified samples, cluster samples, stage samples, and multi-phase samples. Given the diversity of school types present in the case study diocese, a stratified sampling approach was decided upon. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.111) state that stratified sampling involves “... dividing the population into homogenous groups, each group containing subjects with similar characteristics”. This, the authors maintain, is a “useful blend of randomisation and categorisation” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007 p.111). From the researcher’s point of view, implementing stratified sampling strategies offered an opportunity to see if the views of participants varied according to the type of school community to which they belong.

In order to employ stratified sampling methods to the schools in the case study diocese, the following profile of Irish primary schools was consulted (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather 2012, p.30):

Student Population	Fewer than 50	50-99	100-199	200-299	300-499	500 or other	Total
No. of Schools	618	836	816	492	301	93	3,165

Table 3: A profile of Irish primary schools (2010/2011)

Table 3 provides the following useful information:

- 19.52% of Irish primary schools have a student population of fewer than 50
- 26.10% of such schools have a student population of between 50 and 99

It was therefore decided that two of the eight schools that would take part in the research (25%) should have a student population of fewer than 50, and two (25%) should have a student population of between 50 and 99. It was considered likely, given their small size, that some of these schools would be Stand Alone schools. Stand Alone schools are described as schools outside of an urban area, where the nearest school is approximately 3km away (Coolahan, Hussey and Kilfeather 2012). These authors report that approximately 1,700 schools in Ireland (53.71%) are Stand Alone schools. It was decided, therefore, that the four schools in the study with a student population of fewer than 99 should be Stand Alone schools.

A further consideration, when sampling strata were being established, was the impact that a school's socio-economic and socio-cultural status can have on its identity. It was therefore decided to include both schools designated as disadvantaged and Irish-language medium schools in the study. As approximately 10.5% of urban Irish primary schools are designated as disadvantaged, it was deemed appropriate that one of the eight schools that would take part in the study (12.5%) would have this designation. Similarly, approximately 11% of primary schools are Irish-language medium schools, and so it was decided that one of the eight schools to take part in the study (12.5%) would fall into this category.

For the remaining two participants in the case study, it was decided to recruit from the pool of urban Catholic primary schools in the diocese. It was also decided that both of these schools should have an alternative provision of patronage available in their local area. This would ensure

that the parents who were interviewed as part of the study would have had a choice to send their child to a school other than a Catholic school.

In summary, Table 4 outlines the profile of the schools that the researcher wished to recruit to take part in the study.

School Type	Location
Gaelscoil	Unspecified
Population fewer than 50	Stand Alone
Population fewer than 50	Stand Alone
Population 50-99	Stand Alone
Population 50-99	Stand Alone
Non-DEIS	Urban, where alternative provision of patronage is available
Non-DEIS	Urban, where alternative provision of patronage is available
DEIS	Urban

Table 4: Profile of schools recruited for the study

In addition to these stratified sampling criteria, two other criteria for selection applied to each of the schools that took part in the study:

- That the school had completed the CSP process in 2014
- That the school appointed a facilitator to the CSP process who was not the principal. This ensured that four participants from each school would take part in the interviews.

It is acknowledged that one school type omitted from the research is Special Schools that operate under Catholic patronage. This is because of the small number of these schools in the Republic of Ireland (approximately 4%) (DES, 2013a). Having decided on the required number and profile of participants, recruitment began in spring 2014.

3.5.2 Recruitment procedures

Following approval by the DCU Research Ethics Committee (Appendix B), work began to recruit schools that would take part in the research. The following steps were undertaken to complete this task:

1. A diocesan representative wrote to the 131 schools in the diocese who had committed to undertaking the CSP process in 2014 to make them aware of this research study.
2. Each of these schools was contacted by email, and their school community invited to take part in the study (Appendix C). This invitation yielded two participating schools, both of which fulfilled different sampling criteria. The schools were coded “School 2” and “School 5” respectively, as schools were to be assigned random codes numbered 1-8.
3. The selection criteria set out in Section 3.5.1 were applied to the remaining 129 schools. Twenty-one were disqualified on the basis that they had appointed the principal as the facilitator for the CSP process. The criteria outlined in Table 4 were applied to the remaining 108 schools, and this reduced the pool of candidates by exactly half, as outlined in Table 5:

School Type	Possible Number of Schools
Gaelscoil	5
Stand Alone, population fewer than 50	6
Stand Alone, population 50-99	24
Urban, non-DEIS, where alternative provision of patronage is available	16
DEIS, Urban	3
Total	54

Table 5: Profile of potential participants

4. A second, more targeted invitation was issued to each of these 54 schools (Appendix D). This was delivered by the researcher via a personalised email to the CSP facilitator, and was followed up one week later with a phone call to that person. The order in which these

phone calls were made was randomised based on the school's position on the list of schools that made up each category.

5. A total of 15 phone calls were made before the remaining six participants were secured. More detailed descriptions of the profile of each of these schools is given in Appendix E.
6. A mutually convenient time was arranged to visit each of the eight schools to conduct the interviews. In all cases, it was agreed that the interviews should take place in the school building during or after the school day. The plain language statements (Appendices F and G) and informed consent form (Appendix H) were forwarded to the CSP facilitators in all schools, and they were asked to distribute them to the other people who would be interviewed as part of the study. A chairperson from one school declined to take part in the research (School 3), and a parent from another school (School 5) was unable to attend on the scheduled day and did not wish to reschedule. Data was therefore collected from 30 interviews, rather than 32, as was anticipated.

3.6 Data collection

As outlined in Section 4.2, a qualitative research approach was taken in keeping with the study's constructionist paradigm. In keeping with the qualitative methodology outlined in Section 3.3, data for the study was collected via semi-structured interviews using a face-to-face format and aided by an interview schedule. This data was triangulated using documentary evidence and observations from each of the participating schools, and using the researcher's own field notes. Each of these data collection methods are outlined in Sections 3.6.1, 3.6.2 and 3.6.3 below.

3.6.1 Research interviews

Kvale (1996, p 174) describes a research interview as "a conversation, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to the interpretation of the meaning of a described phenomena [*sic*]". Schostak (2006, p. 54) concurs, stating that an interview is an extendable conversation between partners, which aims to uncover in-depth information about a certain topic or subject, and through which a phenomenon could be interpreted in terms of the meanings interviewees bring to it.

A number of texts differentiate between structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Burns and Grove, 2005; Pooit-O'Hara and Tatano Beck, 2006). A structured interview was immediately discounted for this study because the closed questions that it employs would not allow the researcher to investigate participants' perceptions of their school's religious identity in sufficient depth. An unstructured interview was similarly unappealing because of the possibility of digression and because it would make comparisons between participants more difficult. A semi-structured interview was therefore decided upon. Ribbins (2007) describes such interviews as guided conversations.

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews with four representatives from the school community:

1. The CSP process facilitator (in all cases, this was a teacher in the school)
2. The principal
3. The chairperson of the board of management
4. A representative from the parents' association

The interview schedules were piloted in advance with the same four school representatives from a school not within the pilot diocese. Some minor changes were made to the schedules, primarily to make them both more precise and more linguistically comprehensible. Headings were also added so that the researcher could better guide the participants through each section of the interview. These schedules are included as appendices to this document (Appendices I-K).

A semi-longitudinal aspect was introduced to the research by following up on two questions with the CSP process facilitator approximately one year after the initial interview. The purpose of the second interview was to ascertain whether or not each school worked on the aspects for improvement selected as part of the CSP process, and what support the diocese provided to the school community to enable them to do so. A second set of interview questions is therefore included as part of the interview schedule for the CSP process facilitator (Appendix I).

While advocating for the use of the qualitative research interview, Hermanowicz (2002, p.498) also cautions that "while interviewing is among the most central, revealing and enjoyable

methods that one can use in research, it is deceptively difficult”. Interviews have also been criticised as being time consuming with regard to both data collection and analysis because they need to be transcribed and coded (Robson, 2002). Hammersley and Gomm (2008, p.100) add further to these caveats by stating that:

What people say in an interview will indeed be shaped, to some degree, by the questions they are asked; the conventions about what can be spoken about; ... by what they think the interviewer wants; by what they believe he/she would approve or disapprove of.

This observation leads some researchers, such as Walford (2007, p. 147), to argue that “interviews alone are an insufficient form of data to study social life”. It is for this reason that the researcher decided to combine qualitative research interviews with other methods of data collection, as detailed below.

3.6.2 Documentary evidence/observations of the physical setting

Arising from an examination of the CSP process, and from the researcher’s own literature review, five tangible indicators of a school’s Catholic identity were selected, and the researcher observed/analysed these in tandem with data from the interviews conducted in each school. These five indicators were:

1. That the school mission statement makes reference to its Catholic identity
2. That Christian symbols are visible in the school
3. That there is a sacred space suitably situated, well-maintained and current within a public area in the school
4. That the school crest makes reference to its Catholic identity
5. That the school website makes reference to its Catholic identity

Indicators 1-3 are based on elements named as part of the CSP process (Indicators A1, A7 and E4) (Appendix A). Indicators 4 and 5 are based on relevant research studies in the area of school identity. For example, Lambkin (2000, p.190) explores the school badge (crest) as a “concrete rather than abstract” way to explore about the “elusive” concept of ethos. Furthermore, Gambescia and Paolucci (2011) focus on the nature and extent of Catholic identity communicated through official websites of Catholic colleges and universities in the USA. An

obvious criticism of this study is that a college's fidelity to its Catholic identity cannot be judged only by visiting its website. When considered in tandem with the other indicators named above, however, the researcher considered it to be a valid item for inclusion.

Indicators 2, 3 and 4 were observed by the researcher while she was in school buildings conducting the interviews. This type of observation is classified by Morrison (1993) as an observation on the physical setting. The researcher therefore sought to observe incontestable facts, a form of observation much less subjective than other observational data. These data were collected by taking photographs, with the permission of the school principal.

Data pertaining to Indicator 1 was collected from the school principal during the school visit. Data pertaining to Indicator 5 was collected after the school visit, by visiting the school website and taking screenshots of the relevant data.

3.6.3 Field notes

Thorpe and Holt (2007) describe field notes as contemporaneous notes of observations or conversations taken during the conduct of qualitative research. Schwandt's (1997, p.115) adds to this a note that field notes are written "for an audience of one", and so are free-flowing and spontaneous in manner.

Bryman and Bell (2003) identify three classifications of field notes: mental notes, jotted notes taken at the time of observation or discussion, and full field notes written up as promptly and as fully as possible. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) state that field notes can be written at a descriptive or a reflective level. At the level of reflection, Bogdan and Biklen (2008, p.122) suggest that field notes may include:

- reflections on the descriptions and analyses that have been done
- reflections on the methods used in the observations and data collection and analyses
- ethical issues, tensions, problems and dilemmas
- the reactions of the observer to what has been observed and recorded – attitude, emotion, analysis, etc.
- points of clarification that have been and/or need to be made

- possible lines of further inquiry.

In this study, field notes were recorded on a reflective level after each interview and at the end of each school visit. Undertaking the field notes immediately meant that they were not compromised by the memory of the researcher. The field notes were dictated into a voice recorder and were later transcribed by the researcher. They were analysed together with the data collected from the interviews and from the documentary research and observations of the physical setting. These data analysis procedures are outlined in Section 3.7.

The use of field notes as a data source is open to criticism. These criticisms often echo the general critique of qualitative research methods outlined in Section 3.3, as they are described as “subjective, biased, impressionistic, idiosyncratic and lacking in the precise quantifiable measures that are the hallmark of survey research and experimentation” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2007, p.407). The researcher accepts absolutely that the field notes collected as part of this research are biased. They are her own personal impressions following the interviews and the school visits. On their own, they would be an inadequate method of data collection. Together with the interviews (as the primary source of research) and the documentary research and observations, however, they are believed to be a valuable source of data.

3.6.4 Triangulation

Flick (2006) describes triangulation as the observation of the research issue from at least two different points. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007, p.141) emphasise the importance of this practice, arguing that exclusive reliance on one method “may bias or distort the researcher’s picture of the particular slice of reality being investigated”. There are a number of ways in which triangulation can be implemented in a research project: methods triangulation, triangulation of sources, analyst triangulation and theory/perspective triangulation (Patton, 1999). The same author later cautioned that it is a common misconception that the goal of triangulation is to arrive at consistency across data sources or approaches. In fact, Patton (2002) argues that such inconsistencies may be likely, given the relative strengths of different approaches.

Inconsistencies therefore do not weaken the evidence, but are an opportunity to uncover deeper meaning in the data (Patton, 2002).

Erzberger and Kelle (2003, p.461) seem to concur by stating that empirical research results obtained with different methods are "... like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that provide a full image of a certain object if put together in the correct way". Hammersley (2008, p.28) further notes that to use triangulation to produce complementary data is not incompatible with the goal of validation: "while the purpose for which additional data was collected was not necessarily validation, what results is a correction of the initial interpretation that is analogous to what may occur in triangulation for checking validity".

In this study, the researcher's aim is to create a bricolage of each school's religious identity using data from semi-structured interviews with various members of the school community, from her own field notes taken at the end of each interview and school visit, and from various other pieces of documentary evidence and observations of the physical setting. It is hoped that these three pieces of data will build on each other, challenging as well as validating each other, to create a more complete profile of the school than would otherwise be the case.

3.7 Data analysis

In this section, an overview of the data analysis procedures employed in the study are outlined.

3.7.1 Research interviews and field notes

It is important that the data analysis procedures employed in a study match the research paradigm and methodology. As a constructionist paradigm and qualitative research methodology were employed in this study, an inductive form of content analysis was used to consider the data generated from the interviews and the researcher's field notes. In this form of analysis, preconceived categories are avoided, and instead categories and names for categories are allowed to flow from the data. Johnson (2004, p.167) argues that inductive forms of content analysis are more appropriate where the phenomena in question have "subjective capabilities". As the research interviews were built on the perceptions of participants, there is a high degree of subjectivity evident.

Tesch's (1990) steps for developing an organising system for qualitative data were adhered to in the data analysis of the interviews. These steps are outlined in Appendix L. In addition to following these steps, the researcher also remained aware of Glaser's (2008) constant comparison approach to data analysis, in which the emerging relationships and categories are continually refined, and emerging theories or patterns tested as new data are compared with old. The categories, subcategories and codes gleaned from each of the key phrases in Tesch's (1990) data analysis procedure are recorded in Appendix M.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) contend that the advantage of the inductive approach to content analysis is that direct information is gained from study participants without imposing preconceived categories or theoretical perspectives. The same authors concede, however, that a serious challenge to this form of data analysis is to ensure that findings accurately represent the data. Procedures for verification of the findings were therefore put in place, and are outlined in Section 3.8.

3.7.2 Document analysis

Two documents were analysed in order to triangulate the data gleaned from the interview data and the researcher's own field notes: the school mission statement and the school website. In Section 3.7.1, the researcher argued that an inductive, rather than deductive, form of content analysis was best suited to qualitative research. That assertion holds true. In this part of the research, however, a deductive form of content analysis was used as it was decided that this approach was best suited to analysing the documents gathered. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) describe deductive content analysis as being a more structured process than the inductive approach, as it uses existing theory or prior research to identify key concepts or variables as initial coding categories. The initial coding categories identified for both documents analysed as part of this study are outlined below.

3.7.2.1 Mission statement

The themes sought in the school's mission statement are taken from the legal definition of the ethos of the Catholic primary school given in its Schedule. Based on this description, it was decided to look for the following themes in the analysis of schools' mission statements:

1. Reference to "Catholic"
2. Reference to "Jesus"
3. Reference to "RE"
4. Reference to spiritual development/relationship with God
5. Reference to the development of Christian values in the school

3.7.2.2 School website

Following the methodology employed by Gambescia and Paolucci (2011, p.9), the researcher searched for a number of "markers" of Catholic identity on the website of each of the participating schools. The markers particular to this study are based on both Gambescia and Paolucci's (2011) work and on the Schedule of the Catholic primary school. They are:

1. The word "Catholic" is used on the website's homepage (Gambescia and Paolucci, 2011)
2. A statement is made about the religious order or diocese with which the school is affiliated (Gambescia and Paolucci, 2011)
3. The fact that the school is a place of Catholic worship, and that devotions and sacramental celebrations are noted (Gambescia and Paolucci, 2011)
4. Catholic symbols (photographs or images) are featured on the website (Gambescia and Paolucci, 2011)
5. Some statement with regard to religious education is made (Catholic Primary School Schedule)

3.7.3 Observations of the physical setting

Observations were made about two aspects of the physical setting of the school: the presence or absence of Christian symbols, and the presence or absence of a sacred space. The quality of these, where they did exist, was also assessed in response to the following questions:

- Is the sacred space well maintained and kept current (i.e. by changing with the liturgical year)?
- Are the Christian symbols historic (i.e. unchanged since the founding of the school) or contemporary and relevant?

In addition, observations were made about the school crest. Specifically, the researcher wanted to ascertain whether or not the school crest makes reference to its Catholic identity through the use of a religious symbol. While none of these observations taken in isolation are indicative of a school's religious identity, together with the analysis of the interviews conducted in the school, they do build a picture of the school's Catholicity.

3.8 Ethical considerations

At the planning stages of this research study, an application was submitted to the school patron seeking permission for the research to be conducted in his diocese (Appendix M). This permission was granted in January 2014 (Appendix N). An application was then made to the DCU Ethics Committee. The study was deemed to be a low risk social research project, and permission to conduct the research was granted in March 2014 (Appendix B).

3.8.1 Ethical considerations in data collection

Ethical considerations in data collection primarily concerned the recruitment of participants to take part in the study. The researcher needed to consider the fact that she spoke initially only to the CSP process facilitator, who consented for the school to take part in the research pending the approval of the other members of the school community who were also to be interviewed. In order to ensure that all participants understood both the nature and purpose of the research and their rights as participants, the researcher requested that the plain language statements and informed consent forms be forwarded to each of the participants in advance of the scheduled interviews. The researcher's contact information was given on these documents, and participants were invited to contact the researcher with any questions they had. In addition, these documents were discussed with participants before each interview.

3.8.2 Ethical considerations in data reporting

Every effort was made to protect the anonymity of the participants and of their school communities. These means were explained to participants as part of the plain language statement and informed consent forms. They were:

- Neither the name of the school nor individual participants were disclosed in the research findings. Once their participation in the study was confirmed, each school was assigned a code (a number 1-8), and the school was only referred to by that number.
- The audio recording and transcript of the interviews were available only to the researcher. This and all other data pertaining to the school was kept in a secure location, to which only the researcher had access.

It was made known to participants that the research would disclose the name of the diocese in which this research took place. In this way, the anonymity of participants would be limited. It was later decided that it would serve no benefit to disclose the name of the diocese in which the research took place, so participants' anonymity was therefore enhanced further.

3.9 Trustworthiness of the study

To ensure a rigorous approach to the research, Lincoln and Guba's (2005) criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research were considered during all stages of the data collection, analysis, interpretation and reporting. As has already been stated, critics of qualitative research methodologies are often reluctant to accept the trustworthiness of such studies. Among the various frameworks for ensuring rigour in this form of work, Lincoln and Guba's (2005) are among the most prevalent. These authors describe five criteria used to assess the degree to which a qualitative study will be considered trustworthy: credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and validity. Lincoln and Guba (2005) describe a series of techniques that can be used to achieve the criteria that they outline. The strategies employed to enhance the trustworthiness of this study are detailed below.

3.9.1 Researcher reflexivity

Roller (2016) describes one of the challenges of qualitative research as the potential distortion of research outcomes due to unintended influences from the researcher's own self. Although not an 'insider' in terms of her positioning within the schools who took part in the research, the

researcher does have a passion for and professional background in the topic under discussion, and was aware of the potential of this to affect the research outcomes. In order to minimise the impact of such bias, particular strategies were built into the research design with the specific intent of minimising bias, and of enhancing the researcher's own reflexivity. Firstly, as discussed in section 3.6.4, data from the interviews were triangulated using observational data and documentary analysis. Insights from the observational data and documentary analysis were more objective than data from the interviews, thus making it less likely that the researcher's bias would impact the reporting of that data. Secondly, the researcher was able to confess bias, where it did exist, in the field notes taken after each of the interviews and school visits. Having revealed the bias, she could then be aware of it in the analysing and reporting phases.

Bias was also alleviated somewhat through the initial piloting of the interview schedule in one school outside of the case study diocese. Some minor changes were made to the schedules after this piloting, primarily to make them both more precise and more linguistically comprehensible. In addition, however, the piloting gave the researcher an opportunity to become aware of the tone in which she asked questions, and to be conscious not to give any leading follow-up questions or prompts.

Two further procedures through which Lincoln and Guba's (2005) criteria were put into effect will be summarised below: peer debriefing (Lincoln and Guba, 2005) and the return of transcripts to participants (McNiff, 1988).

3.9.2 Peer debriefing

Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.308) describe peer debriefing as "... a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind". The authors go on to explicate three advantages of such a debriefing. The most important of these, for the purposes of ensuring credibility, is that it gives the researcher an opportunity to have his/her bias probed, meanings explored, and the basis for interpretations clarified. Mindful of the advice offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the researcher chose a former colleague (a peer), who is currently undertaking a PhD in Education, as the person with whom the debriefing sessions

would be conducted. His “devil’s advocate” role was invaluable in interpreting where bias was possible or assumptions were being made (Lincoln and Guba 1985, p.309).

3.9.3 Return of transcripts

McNiff (1988) suggests that to return transcripts to participants increases the validity of the findings of a study, because participants are able to confirm that they meant what they said. It also gives participants the option to withdraw statements with which they are not comfortable. The researcher was aware of Kvale’s (1996) caution about potential problems with returning transcripts, however. This author warns that some participants may experience shock when reading their own interview, as oral language when transcribed verbatim can appear incoherent or confused. In order to ensure validity, however, participants’ transcripts were returned to them by email within one week of the interview.

To summarise, this chapter has outlined the data collection and analysis methods employed as part of this study. These methods are consistent with the social constructionist research paradigm and qualitative research methodology underpinning this study, and consider as fully as possible procedures to ensure trustworthiness and research reflexivity. Chapter 4 will now outline the findings of the research.

4. Findings

Chapter 3 detailed the research methods through which data for this study were collected. They are as follows:

- Thirty research interviews from eight schools
- Sixteen pieces of documentary evidence (two from each school)
- Observations of the physical setting in each of the schools taking part in the research
- Field notes following each school visit.

Chapter 4 now describes the findings gleaned from this data. Research interviews and field notes were analysed using the inductive form of content analysis described in Section 3.7.1. These data were then triangulated with data derived from each school's mission statement and the school website, and from observations of the school's physical setting. The desired outcome of this data analysis is the development of a typology of the religious identity of the Catholic primary schools in this study. This chapter describes the cumulative findings from each of the data sources named above under ten thematic headings, seven of which were deemed "major" and three of which were deemed "minor". These themes are listed in Table 6.

Major Themes	
1	Participation in the CSP process
2	Sacramental preparation and the home–school–parish partnership
3	Parish support
4	Religious practices of parents and families
5	RE
6	Detraditionalisation
7	Religious identity of schools
Minor Themes	
8	Religious identity and belief systems of teachers
9	Parental choice of Catholic education

Table 6. Data themes

Each of these themes will be discussed in Sections 4.1 to 4.9 below. Schools will be coded using the code “S” followed by the number 1-8. Representatives of the parents’ association will be referred to as “parent”, the chairperson of the board of management as “chairperson” and the CSP process facilitator as “teacher”.

4.1 Participation in the Catholic School Partnership (CSP) process

The findings in this theme have been subdivided into three sections:

- 4.1.1 Perceptions and outcomes of the CSP process
- 4.1.2 Diocesan support for the CSP process
- 4.1.3 Continuing work on the CSP process

4.1.1 Perceptions and outcomes of the CSP process

All thirty participants were asked: “How did you find participating in the CSP process this year?” Some were then asked the follow-up question: “Is the characteristic spirit of the school something you had given much thought to before now?” Participants were generally positive about undertaking the process, with two specifically praising its collaborative nature and two others stating that they found it to be an affirming process. No participant stated that their school had difficulties with it. When asked about the outcomes of the process, responses were divided into two categories. The first category details the participants’ general perceptions about participating in the process, while the second demonstrates the very practical, tangible outcomes for the school, having undertaken the process. The findings in the first of the category are given in Figure 3.

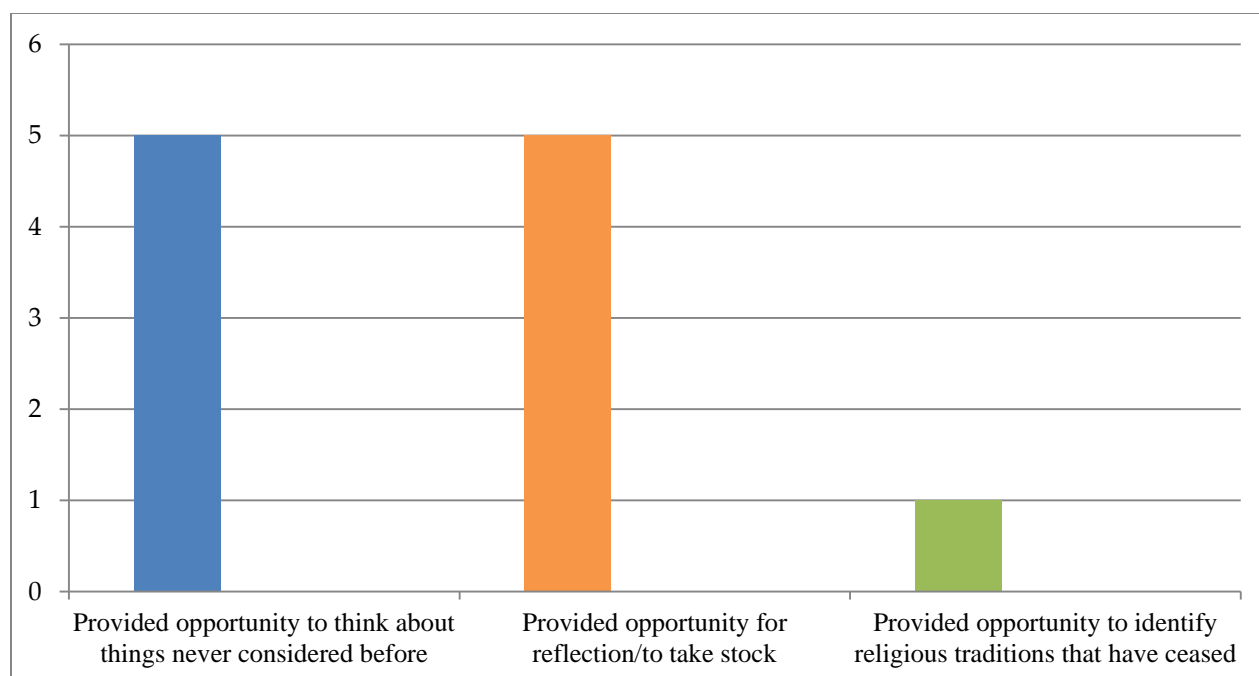


Figure 3: General outcomes of the CSP process

In addition, nine participants in six schools also detailed what have been categorised as the practical outcomes of undertaking the CSP process. These outcomes are given in Table 7.

Outcome	Number of Participants Who Gave This Response
Formulation of a religious education policy	4
Establishment of a sacred space in the school	4
Purchase and use of Bibles for RE	3
Introduction of school Masses	2
Composition of school prayer	1
Composition of mission statement for the school	1
Composition of ethos statement for the school	1
Introduction of prayer at the beginning of board of management meetings	1
Encouraging teachers to teach RE	1

Table 7: Practical outcomes of the CSP process

Two field notes directly referenced the practical outcomes of the CSP process. The following note was recorded after one visit: “I suppose the danger is that they’ll ‘do’ all of these indicators in the CSP process ... but I wonder how much of that is actually taking root.” A similar observation was made after the visit to S3: “I don’t think the CSP process will have made much of a difference to this school. They’ve done it, like, and it will probably mean that they’ll do a couple of things like buy Bibles or make an RE policy or whatever but really that will make very little difference.”

4.1.2 Diocesan support for the CSP process

Both principals and teachers were asked two additional questions related to the CSP process. One of these questions was: “If you could ask the school patron for one thing in terms of supporting your school’s Catholic identity, what would it be?” The field notes taken after the visit to S8 recorded a difficulty observed in all schools in articulating the ways in which the diocese could fulfil this role: “... they [teachers and principals] really couldn’t come up with ways that the diocese could support them in being a Catholic school. They have practical suggestions but nothing radical; just not very imaginative, given that they could have said anything at all.” Principals’ and teachers’ responses to this question are given in Table 8.

Response	Number of Participants Who Gave This Response
Visitation by the diocesan adviser to provide support	6
Cluster school communities for liturgical celebrations/retreats	3
Visitation by the bishop	3
Support in relation to the spiritual development of teachers	2
Provision of in-service	1
Representation and lobbying for schools to the DES	1
Provision of financial support for RE resources	1

Table 8: Diocesan support requested by principals and teachers

Six of the sixteen participants (37.5%) said that they would welcome visits by the diocesan adviser to provide support for staff both in RE and in enhancing those areas noted for improvement during the CSP process. For example, the principal in S4 commented, “I think it would be wonderful to have somebody who’s used to doing it coming in and teasing it out with people ... I think it would be very useful.” Three participants suggested that the diocese might cluster school communities for liturgical celebrations or retreats. For example, the teacher in S3 remarked that she thought it would be good for schools in the diocese to gather for a Mass. She described how this would work: “... if you had a thing ... where there were songs that each school had to learn and we all came together, and you know, [*name given*] National School will bring up a gift ... [it could be] a big celebration of our Catholic schools in [*diocese named*].”

Three participants stated that they would welcome a visit by the bishop to the school. The teacher in S6 commented, “I think the bishop could come to the school. They [the children] would love that”. Another two participants commented that they would welcome diocesan support in terms of supporting the spiritual development of teachers. This is one of the indicators of Catholic school identity referred to in the CSP process document. The principal in S7 said that she would welcome this kind of support because it would be outside of her professional competence to take on this role. She commented “I don’t feel qualified to do that, you know?” Individual responses from participants indicated that they would appreciate diocesan support in the form of in-service opportunities, financial support, and representation on behalf of schools to the Department of Education and Skills.

4.1.3 Continuing work on the CSP process

Participants from each of the schools that took part in the study said that they would work on the five indicators they had identified for improvement as part of the CSP process in the following academic year. This ongoing engagement is what is envisaged in the literature related to the process. Participants in three of the schools said that they would welcome diocesan support in achieving the indicators they had decided to work on. Approximately one year after the initial interviews, a follow-up interview was conducted with the teacher in each school. The purpose of the second interview was to ascertain whether or not their school had worked on the aspects for improvement selected as part of the CSP process, and what support the diocese provided to the

school community to enable them to do so. The findings from the follow-up interview are given in Table 9.

School	Number of Indicators Worked on
S1	1 out of 5
S2	2 out of 5
S3	2 out of 5
S4	0 out of 5
S5	0 out of 5
S6	2 out of 5
S7	1 out of 5
S8	3 out of 5

Table 9: Number of CSP process indicators worked on in the year immediately following its initial implementation

Both S4 and S5 did not work on any indicators in the year since the initial school visit. The teacher from S5 chose not to participate in the second interview for this reason. The teacher in S4 was on a temporary contract and had left the school soon after the first interview was completed, so the principal in that school was asked to comment on the indicators that had been worked on in the intervening year. Again she chose not to be interviewed formally, again on the basis that there was nothing to report. The other teachers reported that their schools had worked on one (two schools), two (three schools) or three indicators (one school) in the year between the first and second interview. None had any received any diocesan support in doing this, although a meeting was held by the diocese in order to review how the process went.

It is clear that the implementation of the CSP process did have some impact on schools, and work was done in six schools to strengthen their religious identity based on the indicators they had identified for improvement as part of the process. No school managed to make significant

progress on their aims, however, and no additional support was made available by the diocese to encourage or enable them to do so.

4.2 Sacramental preparation and the home-school-parish partnership

The point at which the home-school-parish partnership is most obvious is around sacramental preparation and celebration. All thirty participants were asked: “Do you think that teachers should prepare children for the sacraments? Why/why not?” Twenty-two research participants gave their responses, and these are shown in Figure 4:

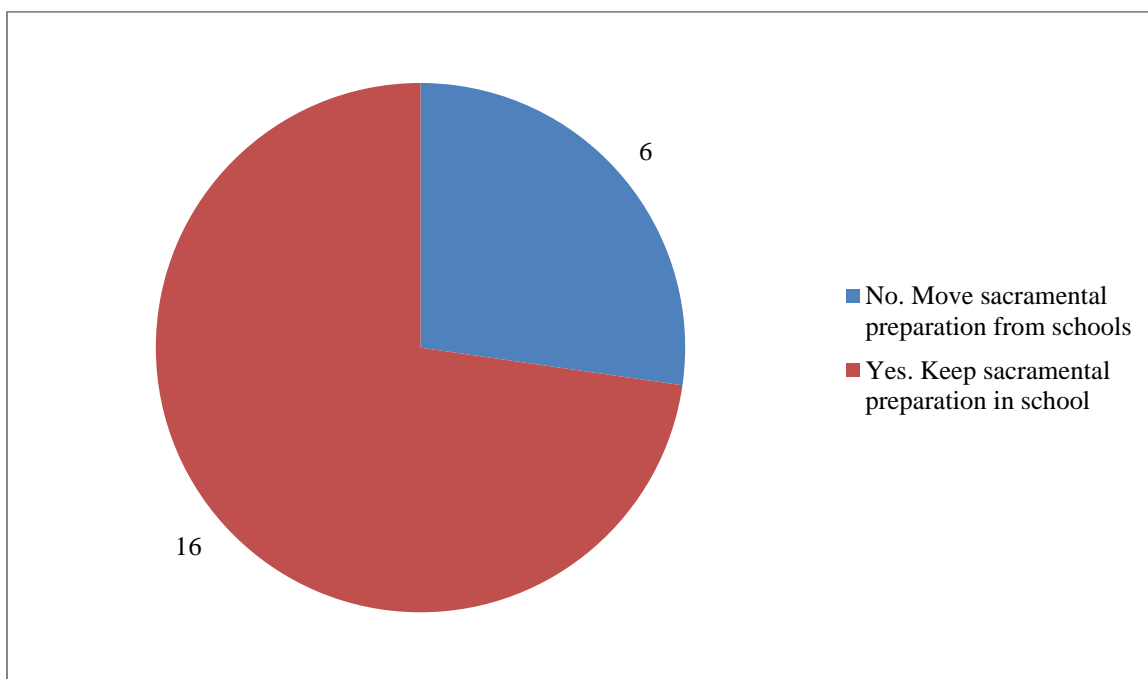


Figure 4: Correct place for sacramental preparation and celebration

There was little consensus among the six participants regarding their reasons for thinking that sacramental preparation should be moved out of schools and into a parish context. Two participants said it was because preparation for the sacraments does not belong in schools, as it is not schools' responsibility. One of the same participants also commented that having sacramental preparation in schools puts pressure on children who are not Catholic. This point was echoed by a principal (S4) who shared her view that sacramental preparation should be

taken out of schools in the hope that only those who are really committed would put themselves forward. She shared what she thought might happen were this to take place: “Ok, disaster and chaos for a while ... but, would you end up with something firmer and stronger?” The principal in S3 agreed, stating that he felt sacramental preparation and celebration should come out of schools because some parents aren’t genuinely interested in faith. This principal commented: “It kind of annoys me, you know, that such a big deal is made over these things [the sacraments] and yet most of them don’t even go to Mass.” This point will be discussed further in Section 5.4.

Interestingly, only one of those who said that the sacraments should be moved out of the school context was a parent, and none of the chairpersons shared this view. In contrast, of the sixteen participants who said that sacramental preparation should stay in schools, seven (44%) were either parents or chairpersons. Further, there was remarkable consensus among parents on this issue, with five of the seven parents who answered the question giving the same response (that sacramental preparation should stay in schools) for the same reason – because they believe that it wouldn’t be done otherwise. One parent (S1) commented:

I think the when the teacher’s doing it, it’s being done, and my fear is that it wouldn’t be done if teachers weren’t doing it ... There would be a percentage of parents who would be, straight down, who would absolutely do it. Then there would be parents who would half kind of, do it, and then there’d be parents who wouldn’t do it, for all kinds of reasons.

Other reasons cited by participants as to why sacramental preparation should stay in school are given in Table 10.

Reason Given	Number of Participants Who Gave This Response
It is part of being a Catholic school	2
Teachers and schools know what they are doing	2
The parish doesn't know the children	1
Tradition	1
Sacramental celebrations are exciting days for the school	1
Children will listen to teachers more than to parents	1

Table 10: Reasons why participants felt sacramental preparation should stay in schools

The participant who articulated most clearly her rationale as to why the sacraments should stay in schools was the teacher from S8. Speaking about how parish-based sacramental preparation and celebration works in other contexts, she stated:

... if you ... sign up to be a member of that parish, you're known as a member of that parish, you form a community within that parish, the kids all go to Sunday School together, then they move into their First Communion programme, and when you work that way, then I have no issue with it ... Then you're creating the community and that Catholic family for them as they go through. However, our parish hasn't done that. And you can't suddenly decide, at First Communion ... now we're going to take it out of the only family that they know, which is their class group, and make it something else ...

In terms of the home-school-parish partnership generally, eight respondents representing six schools said that they felt the Catholic school was “propping up” the faith, and that, of the three pillars of home, school and parish, the school was the one bearing the most weight. The chairperson from S2 stated, for example: “I suppose the schools, em ... They [the institutional Church] are using that platform to keep the Catholic religion going.” The chairperson from S5 agreed, stating, “I think the school is carrying more than the parents”. Further observations about this topic, and about parish and diocesan support for the schools that took part in the study, are discussed in Section 4.3.

Overall, there was a strong sense in the schools that took part in the study that it was the schools themselves that are the chief driving force behind RE and faith formation, rather than the parents and the parish. In some cases this was true to the extent that the schools felt that they alone were supporting this aspect of the children’s development. This becomes acutely apparent at times of sacramental preparation and celebration. Despite this, however, the majority of participants felt that sacramental preparation and celebration should stay in schools. The majority of these participants were chairpersons and parents, and their rationale was that as long as it was the responsibility of the school to prepare the children, all partners could be assured that it was actually being done.

4.3 Parish support

When discussing the topic of sacramental preparation and the home–school–parish partnership, participants also gave their thoughts about the parish supports available to them. The perceptions of participants were judged and parish supports were placed on a scale ranging from poor to very good. The number of schools deemed to fall under each of these categories is given in Figure 5.

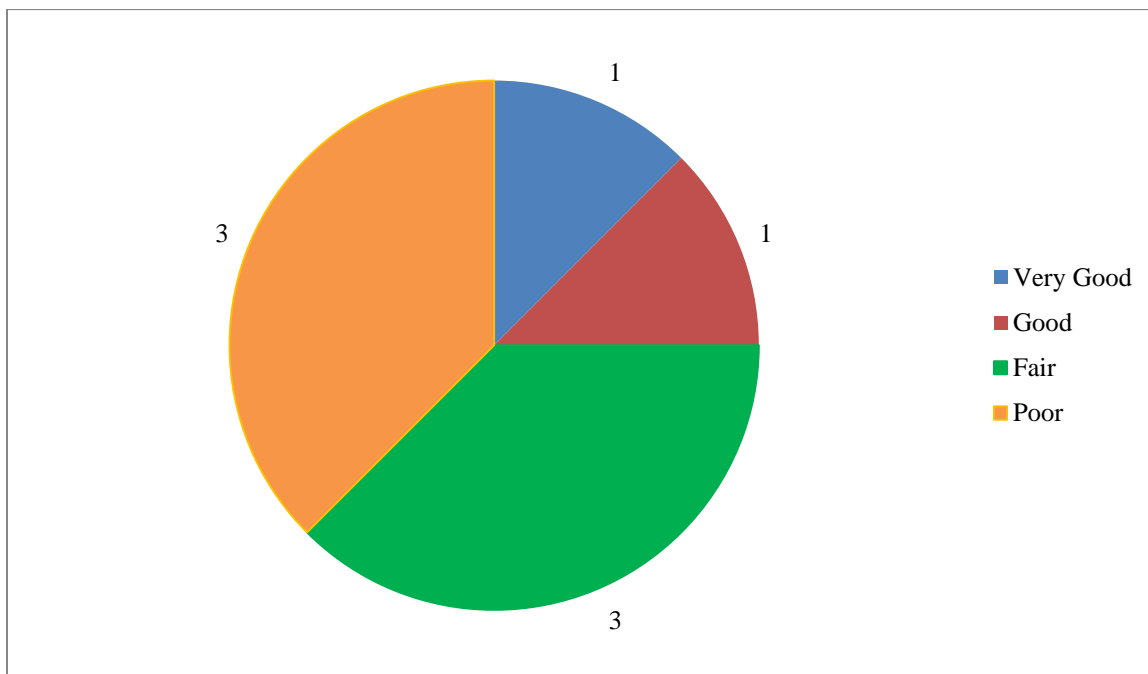


Figure 5: Evaluation of parish support for schools based on participants’ perceptions

Schools 1, 3 and 6 were deemed to have poor parish support, based on the responses given by the interviewees. In all of these schools, participants shared that the local priest did not visit the school. For example, the teacher in S1 commented, “I would like to see the priest come in a little bit more, maybe. I don’t think he even really knows what’s going on with religion in the school. Like, I know he’s busy, but we haven’t seen him yet this year.” The principal in S6 had a similar experience: “We don’t see anyone from the parish ... We’d like the priests to come and visit us ... I know he’s up to his eyes and ears and all the rest of it, em ... [*pauses*]. We don’t see anybody now, not at all. And that’s not a criticism, that’s a fact.” In both of these schools, however, parish-based programmes of sacramental preparation were in place, so it seems that the parishes are at least trying to support the schools in this way, but it does not appear that this support was felt by the teachers. In S3, the local priest did not visit the school and no such programme was in place. Teachers were therefore receiving no support from the parish at all in terms of RE or sacramental preparation. The priest, who is the chairperson of the board of management, declined the invitation to take part in this research, so it was not possible to question him about this.

Three other schools were deemed to have “fair” support from their parishes: Schools 4, 7 and 8. In these schools, participants told how the local priests visited the schools irregularly, and that visits were chiefly concentrated around the time of sacramental celebration.

One school was deemed to have good parish support: S5. The chairperson from this school commented: “The parish ... [*pauses*] it tries [*laughs*]. That’s all I could say. I mean, there’s so few people ...” The chairperson went on to talk about one person from the parish who does visit the school, however:

There’s one woman who is Trojan when it comes to ... She loves taking care of the young kids when it comes to getting involved with serving at Mass and getting a choir started ... She’s very big into the kids, but she’s the only one that I could say really tries to pull them in.

The principal from S5 could have been talking about the same person, or perhaps a second person, when she said, “The lady who works in the parish comes out to the servers here and we also have one of them – the woman who trains the readers – she comes out to train the Fifth and

Sixth Class as Ministers of the Word.” The principal also mentioned that the priest called into the school “a lot” but commented that “it’s more for a chat, you know, it’s more on an informal basis”. She then confirmed that she would describe the support from the parish as good.

The only school deemed to have very good parish support was S2. Participants in this school spoke about regular visits to the school by the local priest and the parish sister. The parent from this school commented on the impact of these visits on her own children when she stated, “... every time Sr [name given] would be here, both of them would say, ‘Oh, Sr [name given] was in, Mammy.’ You know, they enjoy seeing her.” The principal and teacher also spoke about the visits from this parish sister, and from the local priest, and on the impact that has on the children. The principal commented about how the experience of the priest visiting the school now had changed from the experience of when she was a child in that school herself:

Like, do you know the way Fr [name given] comes in now, and he’s lovely, like ... I remember the priest coming in, you know, and you’d be like, “Hello Father”, but you wouldn’t move, you’d be scared stiff, like ... he’s more open and friendly, like ... The children feel that they can tell him things ... whereas, you know, you wouldn’t have when you were in primary school ... Head down, you know [laughs]?

The principal also emphasised how the presence of the parish priest in the school made children’s RE and faith experiences all the more positive: “He’d know all the children’s names ... So you see faith would mean an awful lot.”

There is a discernible pattern here in terms of the link between participants’ perceptions of the parish support available to them and type of school community that they are part of. While three of the four Stand Alone schools were deemed to have good or very good parish support, all four of the urban schools were deemed to have fair or poor parish support. The field notes for S2 echo this point:

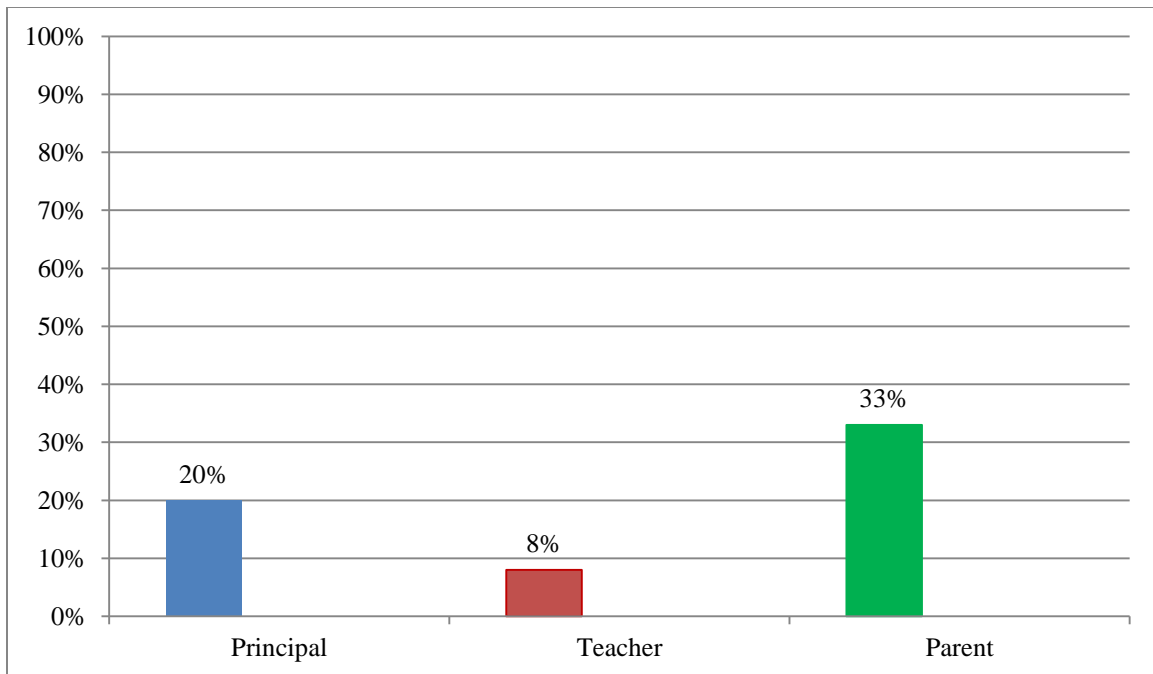
There’s very obviously a very tight and tangible home–school–parish link ... Like you can actually see how it works – it’s not a theory or an aspiration. The priest is spoken of really highly, and the Sister seems to be great for coming in and keeping the kids involved in parish activities. I’ve no doubt that the small numbers

helps that kind of relationship. You just couldn't have that in the bigger schools.

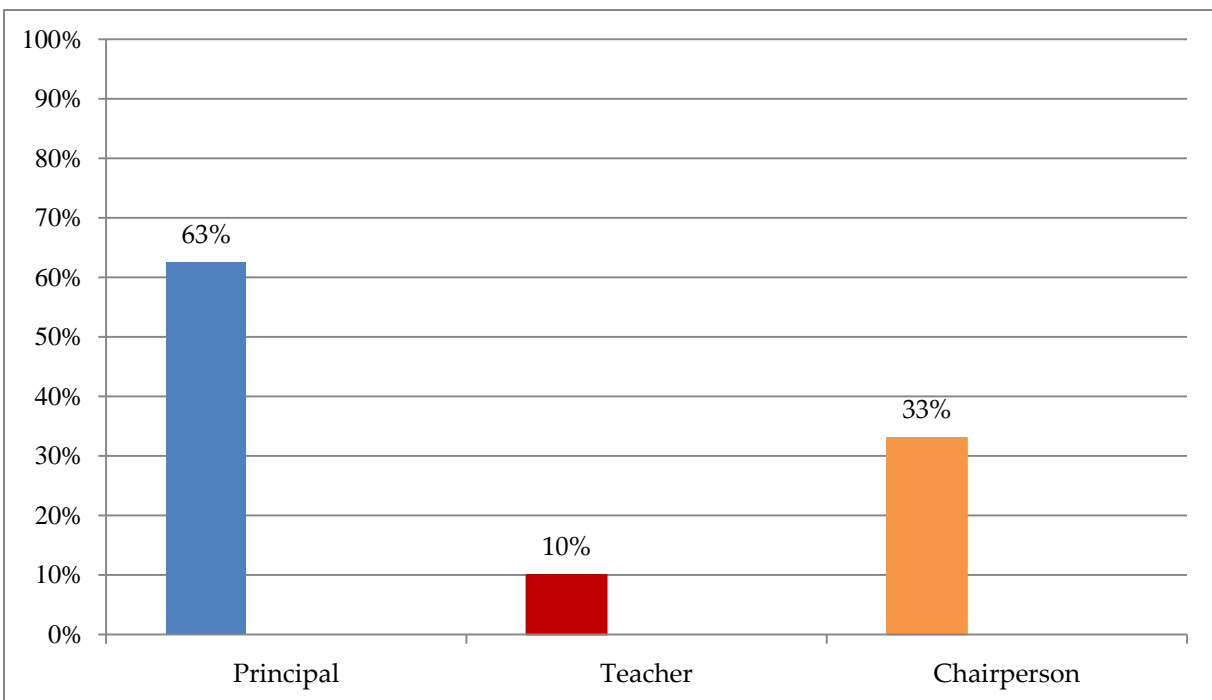
In summary, it seems that parish support for the RE carried out in schools is mixed, and generally weak, with six of the eight schools that took part in the study deemed to have fair or poor support from their parishes.

4.4 Religious practices of parents and families

Each of the interview schedules featured the following question related to the religious practices of parents and families: “Do you think that most of the Catholic children [in the school] and their families are practising their faith?” All but four participants perceived “practising their faith” to mean Mass attendance only. In a follow-up question, participants were sometimes asked their perception of the number of families who would attend Mass regularly. The purpose of this question was not to gauge the number of families that actually attended Mass, but rather to assess the interviewees’ perceptions on this issue. While the general consensus was that Mass attendance was low, there was a discernible difference in the perceptions between interviewees in individual schools. This is perhaps most clear in the cases of Schools 1 and 5, as participants in both of these schools expressed their answers in percentage terms:



**Figure 6: Perceptions of participants in S1
regarding the religious practices of parents and families**



**Figure 7: Perceptions of participants in S5
regarding the religious practices of parents and families**

From these figures, it is evident that there was a 25% differential between the perceptions of the teacher and parents in S1. This increases to an average of 52.5% between the perceptions of the principal and the teacher in S5, as that principal stated her opinion that “between half and three-quarters” of children and their families attended Mass regularly. The average of 62.5% was taken for the purposes of Figure 7, above.

Seven participants expressed their view that while regular Mass attendance was low, faith beliefs were evident in the lives of many parents and families. For example, the chairperson in S2 commented that “when exams are coming up, they’re praying left, right and centre”. The teacher in S3 named the religious practice of visiting the graves of family members who had died as being of particular importance to the families in that school. Two participants from S6 thought that prayer was a feature of many families in their school. The teacher in that school stated: “I’d say a lot of them don’t go to Mass ... A lot of them, I’d say, would say prayers at home. Maybe 40% in a class, I’d say.” The parent in this school confirmed this, commenting that “They might not go to Mass [but] maybe they’d say their prayers at home.”

The participants who were most optimistic about the faith practices of parents and children were from S7. The principal in that school commented, “I’d say more people now are practising ... than were five or six years ago ... I mean, if you go to Mass here now there are a lot of young couples with small children at Mass which, I think you wouldn’t have seen seven or eight years ago as much.” The chairperson agreed with this sentiment, stating, “You know the papers always say, ‘The churches are empty’. Not around here, they’re not ... I go to Mass on Sundays ... and there are lots of young families ... certainly it’s not full of old people.” The teacher and parent in this school disagreed, however, with the former estimating regular Mass attendance at about 25% while the latter stated her perception that, “There wouldn’t be a huge amount of families, of young families [at Mass].”

Representatives from S8 were most pessimistic about the faith practices of parents and children. In this school, the principal commented, “You ... have less children going to Mass, you know, definitely”, while the teacher stated that the “majority of kids” are not exposed to faith or faith

practices in the home. The parent from the school agreed: “I would say that probably there wouldn’t be a whole lot of it [faith practices in the home].”

In summary, the rate of religious practice among parents and families could be considered to be low, when the common, standard measure of Mass attendance is applied but higher when other practices, such as prayer, are included.

4.5 RE

The findings in this theme have been subdivided into three sections:

- 4.5.1 Time allocated to RE
- 4.5.2 RE content
- 4.5.3 Inter-religious education

4.5.1 Time allocated to RE

Both the principal and the teacher in each school were asked about their perception of how much RE teachers teach per week. 75% of respondents (twelve of sixteen) didn’t think that teachers teach the required 2.5 hours of RE per week. When asked why they believe this is the case, respondents gave a range of responses, which are outlined in Figure 8.

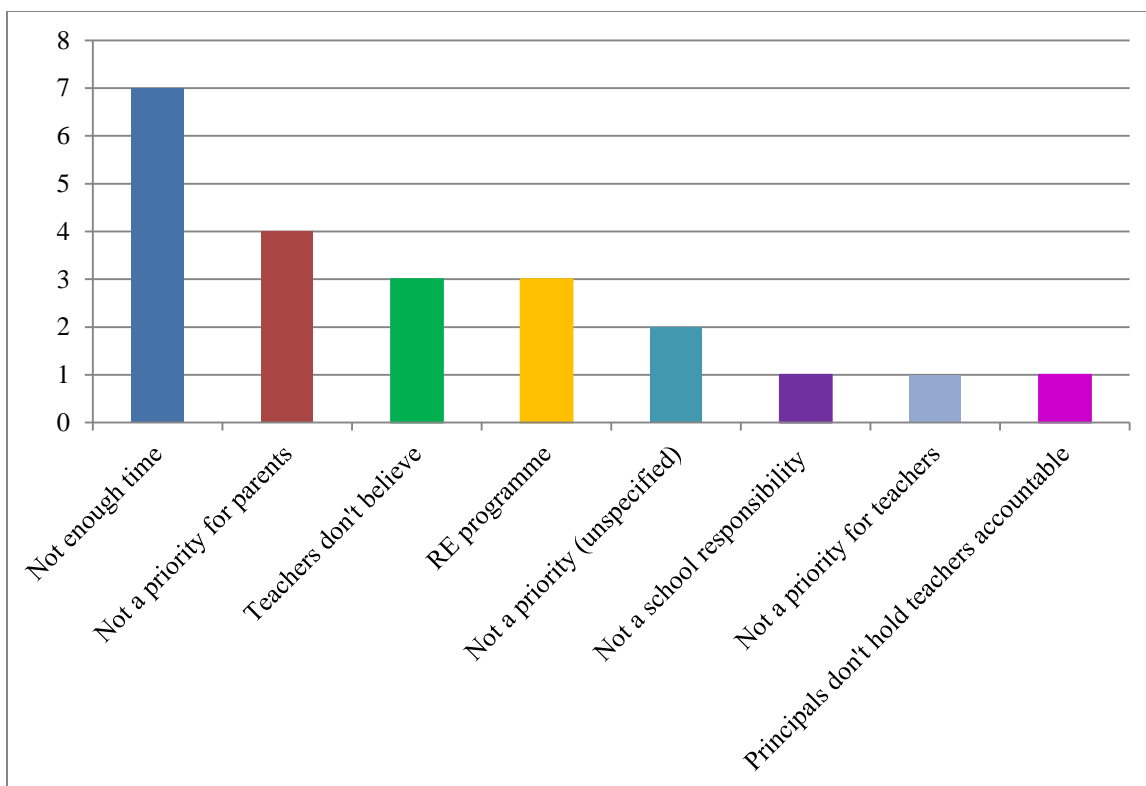


Figure 8: Reasons why teachers don't teach RE for 2.5 hours per week

The most common response given by participants as to why they thought teachers did not teach the required amount of RE was curriculum overload – that there was not enough time to fit in 2.5 hours of RE per week. For example, the principal in S1 commented, “... the curriculum is too full. Do they teach two hours of PE a week? No. Do they teach two hours of Arts-related activities? No.” The teacher in S5 agreed, stating, “... they have twenty-five hours and thirty-five hours of content to fit into it. You’ve got square pegs in round holes ...”

The second most commonly cited reason why teachers didn't teach the required amount of RE was because it is not a priority for parents. The principal in S3 was sure that this was the case:

... parents, are expecting, maybe, results in other subjects and they're just considered more important ... I suppose there's not a lot of pressure from parents to come in about religion ... whereas if they're not doing well in maths or English or Irish, they're going to ask some questions, like. So I think, there's no pressure from parents about religion and you feel under pressure to cover the

other – the rest of the curriculum – so I think in practice that’s why a lot of teachers don’t do it.

In addition to the four participants who said that RE was not a priority for parents, two other participants said that RE wasn’t a priority generally, but did not specify whether this was in terms of priorities for the teacher, parents or others, and one said that it was not a priority for teachers specifically. As indicated in the comment from the principal in S3 above, it is possible to conclude that the priorities of teachers and the priorities of parents are interlinked. That is, those subjects that are not priorities for parents are subsequently reflected in the priorities of teachers.

The next two most commonly cited reasons why teachers did not teach RE for 2.5 hours per week were each mentioned by three participants. One of these reasons was because of the RE series that has been mandated for use in all Catholic schools. There was a general feeling of dissatisfaction amongst teachers with regard to this series. For example, the teacher in S8, who was strongest on this issue, commented:

Alive-O [the RE series] is a disaster [*laughs*]! I’m just going to put it out there. It’s horrendous from the point of view of, like, I originally qualified from Mater Dei [Catholic college of education] so I have four years’ Theology background, you know? And it’s dense and deep and I’m trying to take something out of it to work with a class...

Three teachers stated that they do not teach the required amount of RE because they do not believe what they are teaching. For example, the teacher in S4 stated:

... in a lot of cases, their personal beliefs and faith don’t allow them – don’t encourage them – to do so. You know, in certain cases, they’re not very devout themselves and whatever. They’re not into it and they feel that their rights are being infringed upon because faith is such a personal thing.

The religious identity/belief system of teachers will be discussed further in Section 4.8.

Three participants stated that they/the teachers in their school do teach RE for 2.5 hours per week. Two of these participants were in the same school (S2). Two other participants stated that they only teach RE for 30 minutes per week. Both of these participants were also in the same

school (S3). The principal in S6 summed up what seemed to have been a commonly held view when he said, “If you don’t get your 2.5 hours done but you’ve talked to the children and you’ve listened to them, I think that’s as much 2.5 hours as anything else.” This point may be linked to teachers’ emphasis on Christian values education, rather than Catholic RE specifically, a topic that is explored in Section 4.7.3.

4.5.2 RE content

The type of RE that participants revealed they were teaching was of interest. For example, the principal in S2 said that she based it on the liturgical (Church) year, including saints’ days, while the principal in S5 shared that she had “... done a lot of mindfulness this year”. The teacher in S3 stated that the emphasis in what RE she did was on God, commenting, “... you don’t need to be as strict on the Church”. This emphasis on a relationship with God and on living out faith may be practised by other teachers, as a similar theme was picked up by a parent in S6 who commented that “If you go back through their Second Class religion books, it’s all about making new friends ... I’ve often seen them doing, ‘A job I done for Mam’, so that’s kindness, straight away, ‘Making a new friend’ ... so that’s friendliness.” This kind of approach perhaps confirms the impression of the chairperson in S7 who stated his perception that RE in contemporary Irish Catholic schools is “nicer, cosier and more PC” than when he was in school. This point was echoed by the chairperson in S4 who commented, “Jesus gives us an explicit message ... But it’s watered down out of all proportion”. This point will be discussed again in Section 4.7.2.

4.5.3 Inter-religious education

All teachers and principals were asked about whether or not they thought teachers would like to include some inter-religious education as part of their delivery of RE. Just one principal (S2) said that she would not: “I wouldn’t like to be trying to teach more faiths. I like what I’m familiar with, you know?” One of the teachers (S5) said that wouldn’t mind including elements of inter-religious education in her teaching, but believed that this should not take the place of denominational RE: “It’s no harm for them to have information ... but during religion time, no.”

The remaining fourteen teachers were very positive about the teaching of inter-religious education, which is not currently part of the RE series that is used in Catholic schools. The

principal in S1 commented, for example: “I think that’s important in today’s world. It is hugely important to learn about other faiths and no faiths and to have respect for people who have other faiths and no faith.”

In summary, the findings of this study with regard to RE reveal a strong perception that most teachers do not teach RE for the required amount of time each week. The reasons for this were varied, and are likely multi-faceted. What RE is being taught by teachers seemed to focus more on education in Christian values than on Catholic doctrine, Scripture, liturgy or morality. The majority (87.5%) of participants expressed a view that they would welcome inter-religious education as part of the RE curriculum to be taught in schools.

4.6 Detraditionalisation

Both principals and teachers were asked to comment on the religious practices that are part of school life now, and the religious traditions that they recall from their own school days. It was felt that parents and chairpersons would have limited knowledge about the first of these questions, but they were asked to comment on the second. These findings are detailed in this section under three headings:

- 4.6.1 Religious practices in schools today
- 4.6.2 Religious traditions recalled
- 4.6.3 Secularisation

4.6.1 Religious practices in schools today

The most common religious practice reported by participants was the saying of formal prayers during the school day. This was mentioned by an interviewee in every school as being a part of daily school life. Although the rationale behind this practice was not part of the interview schedule, three participants offered this information, and their answers varied. First, the principal in S3 commented:

When we open the doors, [we] line up and say a prayer. A lot of it has more to do with discipline, just to get them to ... stop talking ... It is possibly more to do with a discipline thing than to do with a religious thing, you know, but we do it anyway ... it’s a token ...

It's a nod of the head to say, "We're a Catholic school". It's that and a discipline thing.

The teacher in S4 seemed to espouse the same view, that the reason for religious practices such as formal prayer in his school may not be entirely faith-based either: "It [religious traditions] is still happening ... It's routine over the years, it's tradition." The participant then continued, "... it's becoming more and more empty ... You just get on with it ... it's a requirement of your profession and job". In contrast, the teacher in S7 gave her rationale for starting the day with a prayer, and it had a strong religious motive: "I start out the day with a prayer to bless the work." The contrast between the rationale for the same faith practice among these participants was considered in the field notes taken after the interview with the teacher in S7:

She [teacher] is obviously a woman with a very strong faith as well. I mean the way she described why she prays – to bless the work that she's going to do that day – is about 100 miles away from the principal who said they say the *Morning Prayer* to get the kids to line up and as a 'token' to the Catholic ethos. So they both say the prayers, but for different reasons, so maybe it's the reason behind saying the prayer, not the saying of the prayer itself, that points to a religious identity.

Participants from six of the eight schools that took part in the study mentioned other religious practices that are evident in the school. These are listed in Table 11.

Religious Practice	Number of Participants Who Gave This Response
School Mass once a year	4
May Altar in the classroom/school	3
The liturgical (Church) year is celebrated in the school	3
Classes in which children are not preparing for the sacraments go to Mass during the school day	2
Classes in which children prepare for the sacraments go to Mass during the school day	1
Prayer is said over the intercom every day	1
The whole school attends Mass on holy days	1
Religious songs/hymns are sung as part of whole-school assemblies	1
Children celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation during the school day	1

Table 11: Religious practices currently evident in schools

4.6.2 Religious traditions recalled

Participants were asked to comment on their memories of religious traditions from their own school days. The rationale behind this question was to see if these practices had increased, decreased or otherwise changed.

Three of the four participants from one school (S2) reported that there are more religious practices in the school now than there were when they were at school. What is especially interesting about this is that one of these participants (the teacher) actually went to the school as a child, so her basis for comparison was very good. This teacher commented: “Well, now we go to the church for, like, Mass and stuff this year which we wouldn’t have done [when I was in school] ... I don’t really remember many Masses.” This participant went on to comment that a lot of religious practices that she remembers from school are still in place in the school today. This point is echoed by the parent participant who is also local to the area, but who didn’t attend

S2 herself. The principal from the school also agreed with these comments, stating that there are “definitely more faith practices now than there were in ... school growing up”.

Participants from every other school commented that there were more faith practices, either when they were in school themselves or even when they started teaching, than there are in their schools now. The chairperson from S8 gave his perception as to why this is the case: “It wasn’t Catholic ethos [back then]. It was Catholic full stop ... Catholic everything.” This comment points clearly to the participant’s perception that the Catholic faith was once the dominant paradigm from which all things operated.

Participants from four schools recalled the practice of the bishop calling to the school once a year, usually in preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation. Four participants also recalled a more authoritarian style of teaching and preaching when they were in school. Three of these participants said that this was especially true in relation to Mass attendance. For example, the principal in S4 commented: “Even as a child yourself, if you missed Mass on a Sunday, you’d be terrified.” The parent from S8 summarised her perception of the difference between then and now when she said, “I think it was fear ... And maybe there’s a little bit more honesty now ...” The other religious practices which were once a feature of school life, but which participants felt are no longer evident, are given in Table 12.

Religious Practice	Number of Participants Who Gave This Response
Angelus	2
Benedictions and devotions	2
More RE taught	2
Religious examiner called once a year	2
Children celebrated the Sacrament of Reconciliation during the school day	1
First Communion celebrated during the school day	1
Children knew their prayers coming to school	1

Table 12: Religious practices no longer evident in schools

Participants from three schools (S6, S7 and S8) were asked to comment on whether or not and how their school's religious identity had changed because of the number of non-Catholic children who attend the school. S6 and S7 have a non-Catholic population of approximately 30%, while S8 has a non-Catholic population of approximately 10%. In response, the principal in S7 stated:

A little maybe, yeah. Yeah. I suppose at assembly and that. Before you could say, "Everyone stand up and we'll bless ourselves". You have to be a little more conscious of it now, I think ... I suppose it is a challenge and what I feel is that the children may feel left out.

The other two principals didn't believe that their school's religious identity had been affected by the presence of non-Catholic children. For example, the principal in S6 stated, "... we do our prayers, at 12 o'clock ... I come over the intercom, I say, 'Today's saint is ...' and stuff like that ... There's no problem ..."

4.6.3 Secularisation

Two participants mentioned explicitly the topic of secularisation. The teacher in S6 commented: "Like, we don't have 8 December off and it's not about holidays or anything. It's just marking the time ... I think it's kind of chipping away." The chairperson in S4 stated his perception about

the place of faith in society in general: “The world we live in is not very conducive to practising, because the big thing is about being ‘free’ ... but freedom for what?”

Although these were the only two comments that directly point to the effect of secularisation on the religious identity of schools, other findings detailed in this chapter, such as the decline in the religious practices of parents and families, also point to this influence.

In summary, the majority of schools identified a decrease in the number of religious practices in schools today compared with when they were in school themselves. This is evidence of what Boeve (2006) identifies as “detraditionalisation”.

4.7 Religious identity of schools

The findings outlined in Sections 4.2 to 4.6 of this chapter are all related to the general theme of the religious identity of schools, which is discussed specifically in this section. This, the most extensive of the major themes outlined, relies on evidence from all three data collection methods: interview data, field notes and structured observations. The findings are detailed under five headings:

- 4.7.1 Documentary evidence/observations of the physical setting
- 4.7.2 Self-identification as Catholic
- 4.7.3 Importance of Christian values
- 4.7.4 Recontextualisation of schools
- 4.7.5 Reconfessionalisation of schools

4.7.1 Documentary evidence/observations of the physical setting

Data were collected from two pieces of documentary evidence (the school’s mission statement and website) and from observations of three items from the physical setting (the presence or absence of Christian symbols, the school crests, and the presence or absence of a suitably maintained sacred space). Each of these elements is discussed individually below.

4.7.1.1 Mission statement

A deductive form of content analysis was used to consider each school's mission statement. As discussed in Section 3.7.2.1, the following themes were sought:

- Reference to "Catholic"
- Reference to "Jesus"
- Reference to "RE"
- Reference to spiritual development/relationship with God
- Reference to the development of Christian values in the school

The total number of above references given in each school's mission statement was calculated, and the results of the findings are given in Table 13.

School Code	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Number of Themes Evident	0	3	3	2	2	4	2	1

Table 13: Results of analysis of schools' mission statements

S1 was the only school whose mission statement included no references to any of the characteristics deemed to demonstrate its Catholic identity. S6's mission statement had the greatest number, with four out of the five themes evident. The mean number of references to Catholic identity found in the schools' mission statements was 2.125.

4.7.1.2 School website

Again, a deductive form of content analysis was used to evaluate each school's website. As discussed in Section 3.7.2.2, the following "markers" of Catholic identity were sought:

- The word "Catholic" is used on the website's homepage
- A statement is made about the religious order or diocese with which the school is affiliated
- The fact that the school is a place of Catholic worship, devotions and sacramental celebrations is noted

- Catholic symbols (photographs or images) are featured on the website
- Some statement with regard to RE is made

The total number of above references given in each school's website was calculated, and the results of the findings are given in Table 14.

School Code	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Number of Markers Evident	3	0	N/A	2	0	2	0	2

Table 14: Results of analysis of schools' websites

Three of the websites made no reference at all to the school's Catholic identity (S2, S5 and S7). S3 doesn't have a website, so the mean number of characteristics evident on the websites belonging to other seven schools was 1.285. The highest number of references to the school's Catholic identity was evident in the website belonging to S1. Interestingly, this was the school whose mission statement contained no references to its Catholicity.

4.7.1.3 School crest

Observations were made about each's school crest and, specifically, whether or not the crest made reference to the school's Catholic identity through the use of religious symbols. The results of these findings are given in Table 15.

School Code	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Symbols Evident	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 15: Results of analysis of schools' crests

These results show that the crests belonging to four of the schools that took part in the study made reference to its Catholic identity. This was done through the use of religious symbols such as a cross (S2 and S7), crosier (S6) or depiction of Mary and of the Holy Spirit (S8).

4.7.1.4 Christian symbols

While visiting each school, the presence or absence of Christian symbols was noted. The quality of these and where they were present was also assessed in response to the following question: “Are the Christian symbols historic (i.e. unchanged since the founding of the school) or contemporary and relevant?” The results of these findings are given in Table 16. The code “H” denotes historic symbols and the code “C” denotes contemporary symbols.

School Code	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Presence of Symbols and Their Quality	No	Yes (H)	Yes (H and C)	No	Yes (H and C)	Yes (H)	No	Yes (H and C)

Table 16: Results of observations of Christian symbols in each school

It was noted that, in three schools (S1, S4 and S7), no Christian symbols, either historic or contemporary, were evident. Historic symbols were evident in two schools (S2 and S6), while both historic and contemporary symbols were evident in the remaining three schools (S3, S5 and S8).

4.7.1.5 Sacred spaces

Along with the presence of Christian symbols, observations during school visits also focused on the presence of sacred spaces. The quality of these and where they were present was also assessed in response to the following question: “Is the sacred space well maintained and kept current (i.e. by changing with the liturgical year)?” The results of these findings are given in Table 17.

School Code	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Presence of Sacred Space	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No

Table 17: Results of observations of sacred spaces in each school

Four of the eight schools did not have any sacred space evident within a public area of the school, although these may have been present in individual classrooms. Of the four schools that did have sacred spaces visible in public areas, these were all “suitably situated, well maintained and current”.

Data from the two pieces of documentary evidence (the school’s mission statement and website) and from observations of two items from the physical setting (the presence or absence of Christian symbols, the school crest, and the presence or absence of a suitably maintained sacred space) were collated for each school, and a tally made of how many of these five indicators were present in each school. The results of these findings are given in Table 18.

School Code	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Total Number of Indicators	2	4	3	2	3	5	2	4

Table 18: Total number of elements from documentary evidence/observations of the physical setting evident in each school

The only school in which all five of the desired elements were present was S6, although they were present to greater or lesser degrees depending on the indicator in question. Two schools each showed evidence of three (S3 and S5) or four (S2 and S8) of the desired elements, while three schools (S1, S4 and S7) showed evidence of two of the elements. As stated in Section 3.7.3, while none of these observations taken in isolation is indicative of a school’s religious identity, together with the analysis of the interviews conducted in the school, they build a picture of the school’s Catholicity. This will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.7.2 Self-identification as Catholic

One question on each participant’s interview schedule asked her or him to describe their school in three words. The aim of this question was to see if participants would immediately identify their school as a Catholic school. Only 22 participants answered this question directly. The results are given in Figure 9.

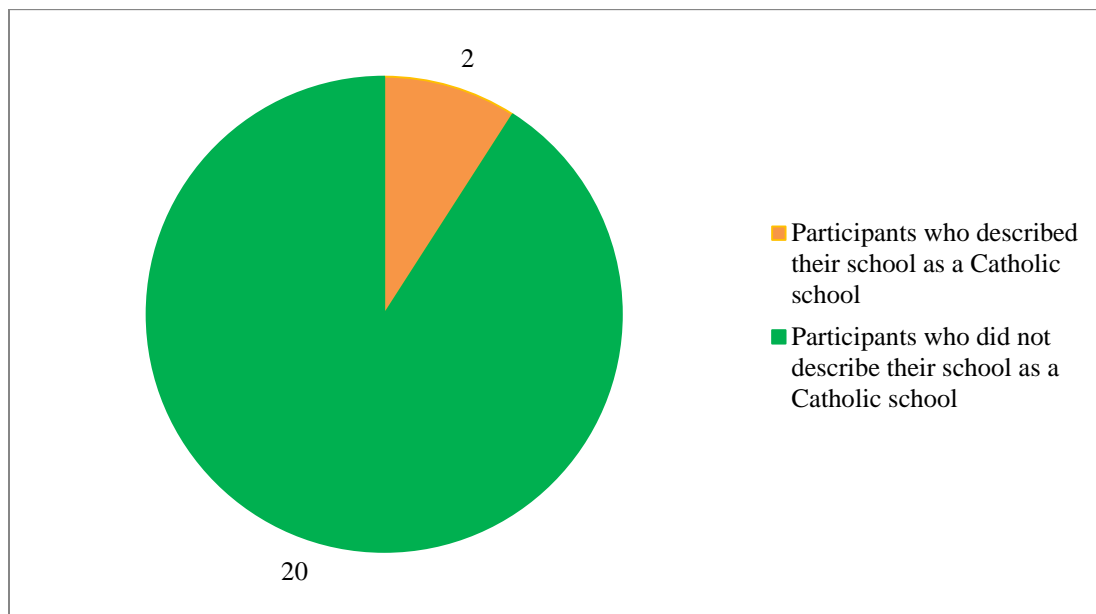


Figure 9: Number of participants who described their school as a Catholic school

The only two participants who described their school as a Catholic school were members of the same school community (S8). Both gave a similar reason for the inclusion of this characteristic in their description of the school: The principal stated: “I would because, you know, you get in ahead to sort of say, ‘It is a Catholic school’ and that while religious instruction is technically for a half an hour per day, religion permeates everything ... ‘*Dia dhuit, Dia’s Muire dhuit*’,⁸ you know?” The teacher in the same school commented “... because I think we wear our hearts on our sleeve about it, so if you are coming here, whether you are Catholic or not, we have an expectation that you recognise that it’s a Catholic school”. In both cases, then, the rationale given for the inclusion of the word “Catholic” in the description of the school was to preempt and

⁸ “*Dia duit*” is a greeting in the Irish language used to mean “hello”, but which literally translates as, “God be with you”. The response to this greeting is, “*Dia’s Muire duit*”, which literally translates as, “God and Mary be with you”.

avoid future conflict rather than to make any explicit statement about the religious identity of the school. Approximately 10% of the student population in S8 are from faith traditions other than Catholic and none, and there is an Educate Together school within a 3km radius. This latter point was noted as part of the field notes taken after the visit to this school: “The fact that there is an Educate Together school in the town is helping them to be more deliberate and focused on their identity but they seem to be using that to cover themselves more than anything else, so that they can say to parents who mightn’t like their children doing RE or whatever, ‘Well, we told you, it’s a Catholic school’...”

The twenty participants (91%) who did not state that their school was Catholic in their description of it gave various reasons for not doing so. First, some did not feel like the faith dimension of the school was something that strongly characterised it. For example, the parent in S3 stated, “The religion wouldn’t come into it when I’d be thinking about it.” Others tied those characteristics that they did mention to faith. For example, the parent in S2 commented that her description of the school as a welcoming, child-centred community was “absolutely” grounded in its religious identity. Conversely, the teacher in the same school said that the characteristics of her school that she named (being friendly, welcoming and open) were not necessarily linked with the school’s religious identity, stating, “I think they’re just part of being a good school”.

One possible reason why participants didn’t mention their school’s Catholic identity when asked to describe their school is because it is an aspect of the school that they take for granted and do not reflect on to a large extent. This was certainly the case for the teacher in S1. When asked why she didn’t mention the school’s Catholicity as part of her description, she commented:

I’m taking it for granted that it *is* [*emphasised*] a Catholic school.
Do you know what I mean? I’ve never worked in an Educate Together school, I’ve never ... I wouldn’t have grown up around Educate Together schools so I think I take it for granted that it’s a Catholic school.

Related to this point is the fact that four participants from three different schools (S2, S4 and S5) stated that faith is embedded in their school. For example, when asked if religious identity makes any difference to the life of the school, the teacher in S5 stated, “Yeah, I think it influences

everything ... I think it does. We bring it to bear on our everyday lives here. I don't think we probably even think about it, but it most certainly does, yeah."

Four participants from two schools said that their schools would not be much different if their ethos changed from its Catholic patronage. Three of these participants came from one school (S3). The principal in this school stated "To be honest, I actually don't think so. I don't think there's that much of a difference really." This principal had the experience of teaching in a school under the patronage of Educate Together previously, and so was able to compare his experience of teaching in both school models. The teacher in the same school had a similar viewpoint when asked if it would make a difference if the patronage of the school was to change to a multi-denominational model: "Em ... [*pauses*] No, I don't think so because we're not that strong. I don't think it would." The parent representative from the school gave a similar response when asked if he thought parents would object to such a change: "I don't think so ... Like, there'd be a bit of a murmur ... But after a while, I don't think they would ... I've a feeling they wouldn't."

4.7.3 Importance of values education

Representatives from seven of the eight schools that took part in the study spoke about the importance of emphasising Christian values education. For example, as reported in Section 4.5.2, the content of RE often focused on living out Christian values, rather than on teaching Catholic doctrine, Scripture, liturgy or morality. Six representatives from five schools commented on this in their interviews. The point was underlined by the principal in S3 who, when discussing the difference between schools under Catholic patronage and schools under the patronage of Educate Together, commented, "I mean, at the end of the day, the whole idea is the same, you're trying to teach them to be good, like ... You're still teaching values."

Parent representatives in four schools (S4, S6, S7 and S8) emphasised the importance of Christian values education to them. For example, the parent in S8 stated: "To me, that's religion, it's not about what is read from the Bible on a Sunday, it's about that kids learn to respect each other and love each other." Fourteen respondents mentioned the importance of cultivating the particular value of respect in their school community. For example, the principal in S7 commented:

You know, there's a lot more emphasis on respect, and not judging people and accepting everyone, and that is very Catholic as well as being very moral, you know, and I suppose, because of the level of our school [a junior school], a lot of it is moral education, and looking after yourself, other, the environment, family, you know?

The chairperson from S8 noted, however, that while Christian values like kindness and respect are very much part of being an effective Catholic school, this is only true if faith is the reason why these values are emphasised and if this is made explicit. He was not convinced that the link between Christian faith and values is actually articulated: "They say things like, 'That's what Jesus wants of us', but it's not because of Jesus ... It's just an added-on addendum." A similar observation was made in the field notes taken after the visit to S8: "... what exactly is making this a Catholic school? You could say values, they are all strong on values, but none of those are explicitly Catholic."

4.7.4 Recontextualisation of schools

Only one principal spoke in concrete terms about trying to provide opportunities for both children and staff to understand and reinterpret the Christian faith tradition in terms of their own culture and experience. This was the principal in S6, who said of his staff, "What I want is the idea of the spirit, and it comes down to, 'What would Jesus do if he was here?' and then we work from there." The same principal spoke about how he employed a similar strategy when talking to the children about how to treat one another, stating:

... I might say, 'This is what Jesus would do'. Like, it's not a civics lesson ... I am sure they do it in Educate Together too, so when we do it, what's the difference? And I know we do have a difference, and I want to frame that in an ethos where Jesus is important, and faith is important.

The principal in S6 was one of only two respondents to mention Jesus in this way. The other was the teacher from S7.

4.7.5 Reconfessionalisation of schools

Representatives from three schools (S2, S4 and S8) showed some evidence that they were attempting to reclaim, or at least be more explicit about, their school's religious identity. For

example, the chairperson from S4 stated: “I think it’s important that it be up there and up front of us ... you need something to say that we are Catholic. That’s important.” This point echoes the sentiments of the teacher and principal from S8, who said that they always described the school as Catholic but, as it turns out, this was primarily to avoid future conflict. In both of these cases, however, there was no evidence that the schools were actually making concrete efforts to reconsecrate, for example by placing more emphasis in recent times on RE, religious practices in the school, etc.

4.8 Religious identity/belief system of teachers

There were no questions on the interview schedules that directly addressed the theme of teachers’ own religious identity or belief system. This is primarily because this topic was not the focus of the study. Nonetheless, one-third of participants (ten out of thirty) mentioned this topic under the portion of the interview schedule entitled, ‘Religious Practices of School Community’. The comments of these ten participants were grouped and are shown in Figure 10.

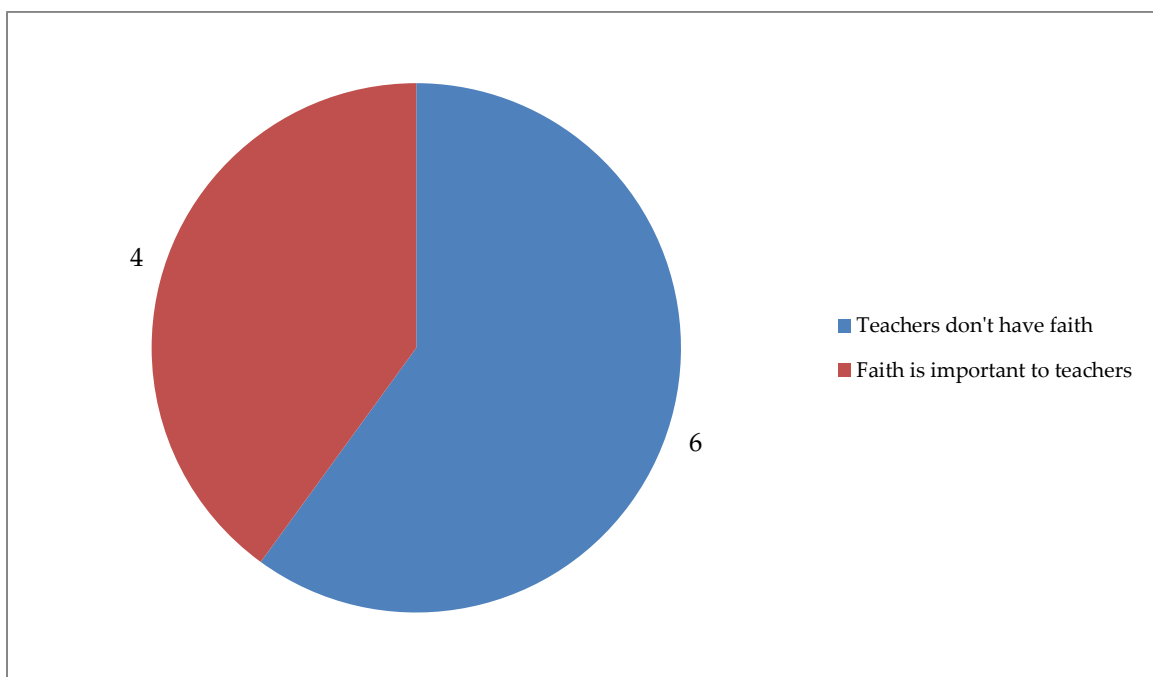


Figure 10: Participants’ perceptions about how important faith is to teachers

Six participants from three schools stated their perception that many teachers do not have faith themselves, whereas four participants from another three schools stated their perception that faith is important to many teachers. There were no similarities between the school types from which the participants who gave each answer came, indicating a difference among the perceptions of individual participants rather than similarity of response by school type.

Further divergent data emerged when four teachers offered comments on their own religious identity, as shown in Figure 11.

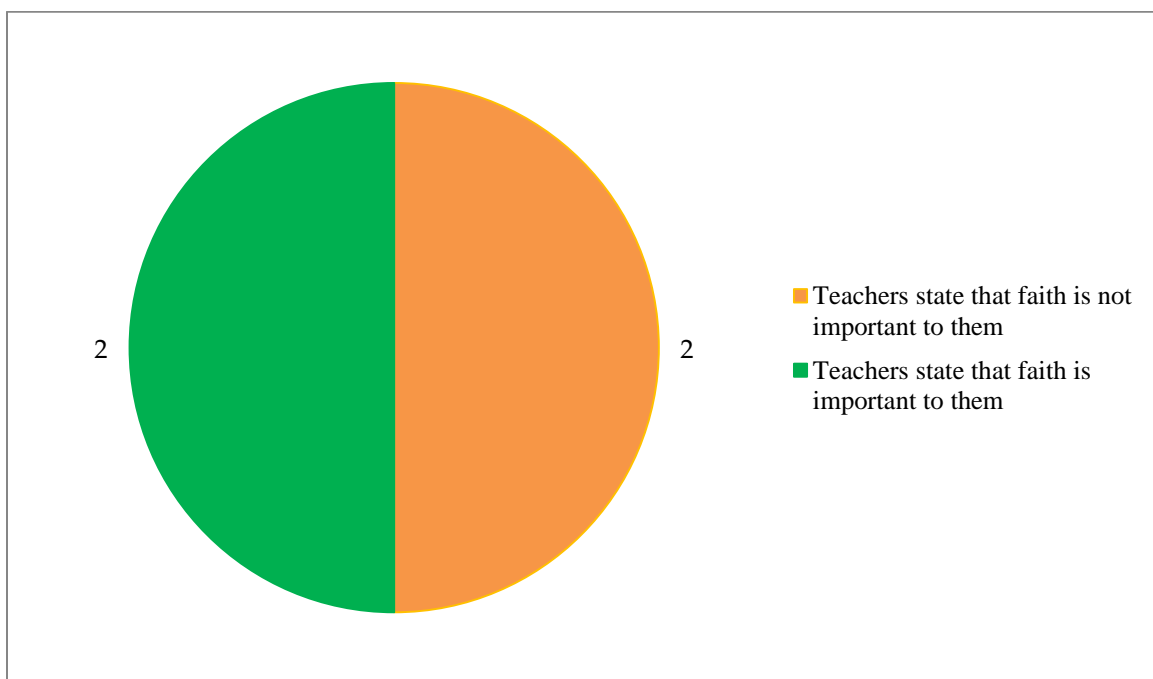


Figure 11: Participants' statements about how important faith is to them

As Figure 11 shows, two participants from two different schools said that faith was important to them, and two participants from two other schools said that faith was not important to them. Again it should be noted that these research findings were collected because participants volunteered the information, rather than being asked about it directly. It therefore does not represent the views of all participant teachers in the study.

It would seem logical, however, that the religious identity of teachers would have an impact on their desire to teach RE and their enthusiasm to uphold the Catholic ethos of the school. This point was mentioned in a field note made after the visit to S6: “The principal is definitely the driving force behind the Catholic ethos in this school, everyone agrees with that. They all name his own ‘little faith practices’ [such as naming the ‘Saint of the Day’ over the intercom] as being an important part of what the whole school is about.”

Three participants perceived that some teachers may not want to teach RE, and four perceived that some teachers have difficulty with the Catholic Church. In particular, these participants mentioned the Church’s handling of child sexual abuse, teachers’ own experiences of RE in school, and the Church’s teachings on sexual morality. It was also noted by two participants from S7 that younger teachers, in particular, may have a weaker religious identity than their more senior colleagues. For example, the teacher in this school commented:

We have a lot of very young teachers and I’m not sure that they would straight away ... see the immediate value of that [working to strengthen the school’s religious identity] ... I know this. I know this as a Mammy, and I know it as a colleague of younger people. I know this. I know this as an observer of the younger parents, you know?

Again, all data pertaining to this topic was collected based on the voluntary and unsolicited contributions of participants. It is not a major theme in the research, nor is it related to the main aim of the research. The data is noteworthy, however, and could perhaps form the basis for a further study.

4.9 Parental choice of Catholic education

Although no questions on the interview schedule asked participants about parents’ choice of a Catholic school for their children, all seven parent participants gave their views on this topic in the course of the interviews. Again, there was some divergence in the responses given. Two parents stated that religious ethos was not a deciding factor in choosing a school for their children. For example, the parent from S3 stated:

Well, it wasn’t a deciding factor, like, but there’s not a whole pile of choice around anyway. Well, there’s an Educate Together school inside in [*large town named*], but I wouldn’t have, for the

convenience ... It's convenience more than anything. Plus, I mean, if they'd be paling around [meaning "being friendly"] with anybody, they'd be from here, you know?

The chairperson from S5 echoed the sentiment about the choice of Catholic education not really being a choice when she commented, "Yeah, well, you know, out here, the only choices is the two Catholic schools ... And very few parents are going to start driving their kids unless they're very strong in their belief of, 'No, it's not going to be a Catholic school'."

Three participants stated that parents either took for granted the fact that the school to which they sent their child was a Catholic school, or didn't reflect on it. This was most clear in the case of the chairperson in S5 who, not being born in Ireland, didn't realise that most of the primary schools in the country under Catholic patronage. When she made this discovery, she shared: "As far as I knew it was a public school, I wasn't aware that it was actually, you know, 'Oh, it's a Catholic school' ... It was probably when the second one [child] was in [that I realised] *[laughs]*."

In contrast, three parents stated that the Catholic ethos of the school was an important factor for them when choosing a school. For two of these parents, there were schools under the patronage of multi-denominational bodies available within a 3km radius, so they made a deliberate choice to send their child to a Catholic school. The parent in S7 commented, "I wanted my children to go to Catholic school. They are Catholic, I bring them to Mass, I christened them, you know ... I would be a practising Catholic, so ..." Similarly, the parent from S8 stated, "I liked, well, the Catholic ethos thing. I always would have had that ... I would be a Mass-goer." As was demonstrated in Section 4.4, however, the findings from this research clearly show that the perception is that most parents are not practising faith with their family. The responses of both of these participants could therefore be seen as atypical.

In summary, the findings of the data collected in this study reveal participants' perceptions about many aspects of their school's religious identity. These will be discussed with reference to the historical context and literature review (outlined in Chapters 1 and 2) in the chapter that follows.

5. Discussion

Chapter 4 detailed the triangulated findings from the research interviews, documentary evidence, observations of the school settings and field notes taken following each school visit. Chapter 5 now discusses these data in light of the historical context within which the Irish primary education system evolved (Chapter 1) and existing research in the area of Catholic school identity (Chapter 2). The chapter is organised into four sections:

- 5.1 Factors relating to the historical context and evolution of primary education
- 5.2 Boeve's (2006) concepts of "detraditionalisation" and "pluralisation" in the Irish context
- 5.3 The application of Pollefeyt and Bouwens' (2010) model to the Irish primary education system
- 5.4 Discussion of the CSP process

5.1 Factors relating to the historical context and evolution of primary education

As explained in Chapter 2, the structure of the Irish primary education system is unique in the world by virtue of the fact that there are almost no state-run schools at this level. Factors such as Ireland's colonial history and the homogeneous religious affiliations of the population contributed to the development of the system in this manner and, despite the efforts of initiatives such as the Forum on Pluralism and Patronage (2012), there has been little substantial change to the system since the nineteenth century, when a decision was made to grant state aid to denominational schools. Three results from the study are discussed under this heading:

- 5.1.1 Parental choice of Catholic education
- 5.1.2 RE
- 5.1.3 Parish support

5.1.1 Parental choice of Catholic education

As reported in Chapter 4, no questions on the interview schedule asked parent participants about their choice of a Catholic school for their children, although all seven gave their views on this topic in the course of the interviews. Three parents (43%) said that the Catholic ethos of the

school was an important factor for them when choosing a school. For the other parents (57%), however, the religious identity of the school was not a factor that they considered when choosing a school, prioritising instead other factors.

Although a comparatively small sample of parents, these findings are interesting when considered in light of the findings from the Council for Research and Development of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference (2008). That study found that 58% of parents thought that a school's Catholic ethos was either very important or important, while 14% of parents thought that this factor was unimportant, and 28% said that it was neither important nor unimportant. From the results of this study, it is possible to conclude that many parents aren't deliberately opting for a Catholic education for their child. Rather, they seem content that their child goes to a particular school (often the local school), and that it happens to be a Catholic school. This *laissez-faire* approach to ethos has consequences for Catholic schools, perhaps particularly when it comes to the teaching of RE.

5.1.2 RE

This theme has been subdivided into two sections:

- 5.1.2.1 Time allocated to RE
- 5.1.2.2 RE content

5.1.2.1 Time allocated to RE

Much recent debate has focused on the time allocated to RE in the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999), with one INTO study (2012) revealing that 70% of teachers found that sacramental preparation took up time over and above the two and a half hours per week allocated to the subject. It is important to note, however, that sacramental preparation takes place in just two of the eight years of primary education. Participants in this study shared their perceptions that the time actually *spent* on RE (as opposed to the time allocated to it) in classes other than those in which sacramental preparation takes place is significantly lower than the time allocated by the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). For example, 75% of respondents (twelve of sixteen) did not think that teachers teach the required 2.5 hours of RE per week and two of the teachers interviewed said that they only teach RE for 30 minutes per week. It could be argued, then, that

while additional time is spent on RE in the immediate preparation for the celebration of the sacraments, it is possible that fewer – and perhaps significantly fewer – hours are spent teaching RE during the rest of the school year. This point is made in the CSP document, *Catholic Primary Schools in a Changing Ireland* (2015, p.28), which states:

Over the course of the school year, 2.5 hours are devoted to religious education each week. This average is also maintained during second class and sixth class. Schools should take care that this amount of time is not exceeded. The time allocated to religious education is sufficient to cover sacramental preparation. The issue of encroachment on the time for other curriculum areas need not be problematic when the overall year is taken into account.

A topic less well researched is *why* teachers feel the need to spend so much additional time in the immediate preparation for sacramental celebrations. It is possibly because the subject is taught so little in classes other than Second Class and Sixth Class, which places additional pressures on teachers in those classes. Or it may be as a result of the factors relating to the decline in religious practices of parents and families, causing schools to teach what would otherwise have been learned, perhaps incidentally, in the home. There is an absence of research in this area in the Irish context.

5.1.2.2 RE content

The Schedule of the Catholic primary school sets out clearly that such schools provide RE for pupils “in accordance with the doctrines, practices and tradition of the Roman Catholic Church” and that it should further promote “the formation of the pupils in the Catholic Faith” (Catholic Primary School Management Association 2012, p.23). Authors in this field universally agree that the delivery of Catholic RE that is both formative and informative is central to such schools (CCE, 1997; Kieran, 2005; Lane, 2006; Nuzzi and Holter, 2009; Harmon and Mahon, 2012). In fact, the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979, 69) goes as far as to state that RE is the basis upon which Catholic schools are established: “... the special character of the Catholic school, the underlying reason for it, the reason why Catholic parents should prefer it, is precisely the quality of the religious instruction integrated into the education of the pupils.” Consideration must be given to whether or not this is true in terms of the quality of RE offered by the schools in this study.

As outlined in Section 4.5.2, some schools in the study shared details about the RE content that they had been covering that year. This included topics such as mindfulness, and material that emphasises God rather than the Church. This focus on general Christian RE, rather than one focused on Catholic doctrine, Scripture, liturgy or morality was observed by the parent participant in S6, who commented that what RE she saw her child doing in school was about being kind and friendly. For some teachers who took part in the study, the quality of RE taught in schools was influenced by the RE series mandated for use in all Catholic schools, with three teachers expressing dissatisfaction with the material, and one in particular describing it as “horrendous” (teacher, S8). This teacher commented she was “trying to take something out of it to work with” and, in the course of her second interview, said, “... our teachers here just can’t stand *Alive-O*, and find it very difficult to pull anything from it ... I mean they’re doing bits and pieces ... [but] very much incidentally and, you know, makeshift really.” It is important to note that significant developments in the curricular area of RE have come into effect in recent years, and these are not reflected in the interview data. For example, the first ever RE curriculum, the *Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* was published in 2015, and shortly after it, a new RE series for Catholic schools, *Grow in Love*. Early reaction to these developments have been very positive.⁹ The teachers who took part in the interviews had not yet implemented either the curriculum or the *Grow in Love* series in their schools, however.

Many teachers also spoke about the decline in religious practices of parents and families, and this too could be impacting on the quality of the RE content they are teaching. In addition, some spoke about the shift in the religious identity/belief systems of teachers, which may influence the quality and quantity of RE that they would teach. Whatever the reason, the evidence from this small sample is that both the time the teachers allocate to RE and the quality of the RE they teach is lower than the standard intended by the school patrons, and that is evident in the schools’ Schedule. This evidence seems to point to a gap between the intended ethos of the schools and their current practice, albeit that the focus of this study was in one diocese, and not meant to directly represent the entire county.

⁹ See Daly (2015), Hayes (2016) and Ryan (2016), for example

5.1.3 Parish support

Although the Catholic Church initially supported the national school system, from 1850 onwards it withdrew this support and joined the other mainline Christian Churches in calling for state funding for denominational schools at primary level (see Section 1.2). The Churches' argument rested on the belief that the state should provide for citizens of particular religious traditions to send their children to a school in line with their religious beliefs. Primary schools, therefore, came to be seen very much as an extension of their local churches, and were attended in the main by children from that parish community. In addition, schools were generally visited once a year by the bishop and the diocesan religious examiner, and more frequently by the local clergy.

Participants in this study gave their views about the parish supports that were available to them, and these were judged and placed on a scale ranging from poor to very good. Overall, parish support for the RE carried out by the schools that took part in this study is mixed, and generally weak, with six of the eight schools that took part in the study deemed to have fair or poor support from their parishes. In each of the schools judged to have poor parish support, participants stated that the local priest did not visit the school. This was exemplified by one teacher who, in the course of her second interview in May 2015 said "... we haven't seen a priest once here and I have Second Class".

This finding seems to reveal a relationship between school and parish that is somewhat more strained than research by authors such as Meagher (2011) and the INTO (2013) indicate. Both of these studies reported mixed support from local clergy, whereas this research found support to be mixed but generally poor. The INTO survey, for example, showed that 24% of respondents described classroom visits by the clergy as occasional, while Meagher (2007, p.27) states that "some" teachers and principals were aggrieved by the lack of parish support for their work. The author goes on to describe the impact of this lack of support as resulting in teachers feeling "undervalued, unappreciated and unsupported" (Meagher 2011, p.27). Meagher (2011) explains that the relationship between the priest and the school was considered important as it sent out an essential message about the role of the school in the parish. For the majority of the schools involved in this study, however, it is clear that the link between the parish and the school is, at best, notional.

The issue of parish support for the Catholic primary schools in this study is therefore seen as a second example of how the “intended” ethos of schools does not match its “operative” ethos. *Share the Good News* (2010, p.144), the National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland, states that the Catholic primary school “works closely with the local Catholic faith community, and in particular with the priest and the local Faith Development Coordinator, who visit the school regularly in a supportive role”. In the case of at least six of the eight schools that took part in this study, this does not seem to be the case.

Evidence of the strained relationship between school and parish becomes particularly apparent at times of sacramental preparation and celebration. As discussed in Section 2.2.3, teachers who took part in a 2012 INTO study were asked whether or not children should be prepared for the sacraments in school. 47% agreed that they should, while 38% said that they should not. In this study, 56% of teachers said that sacramental preparation should stay in the school, and 31% said that it should not. While these findings may appear to be broadly similar, they change substantially when the opinions of chairpersons and parents are considered. When these are added, results show that 73% of participants maintain that sacramental preparation should stay in schools while 27% say that it should not. This study therefore shows that, proportionally, it is parents and chairpersons rather than teachers who want sacramental preparation to stay in schools. Five of the seven parents who expressed this opinion stated that they held it because keeping the sacraments in the schools was the only way to ensure that it would actually be done. The fact that such a proportion of parents lack confidence in either their parental peers or their parish leaders to adequately prepare children for the sacraments of initiation is interesting. It begs the question as to whether parents who present their children for these sacraments do so based in a faith commitment or simply because their child is in a particular class in a Catholic school. Given that there is no evidence to support the notion that Catholic parents are not withdrawing their children from participation in the sacraments, again this trend may be indicative of the *laissez-faire* approach to denominational education.

In summary, all three of these issues (parental choice of Catholic education, the nature and purpose of RE in Catholic primary schools, and parish support for these schools) appear to be

tied to the historical context and evolution of the primary education system. The intended ethos of Catholic schools in these three areas may be well defined in principle, but it is not matched in practice. It is likely that the incongruence between the intended and operative ethos of Catholic primary schools is at least somewhat tied to issues that Boeve (2006) names as “detraditionalisation” and “pluralisation”. These concepts are discussed in Section 5.2.

5.2 Boeve’s (2006) concepts of “detraditionalisation” and “pluralisation” in the Irish context

Boeve (2012, p.145) suggests that post-Christian societies are ones in which the Christian faith “... is no longer the obvious, accepted background that grants meaning”. These contexts, once heavily influenced by Christian teachings and traditions, are now characterised by both detraditionalisation and pluralisation. This section considers the implications of detraditionalisation and pluralisation on the religious identity of Catholic primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. It does so under four headings:

- 5.2.1 Religious practices of parents and families
- 5.2.2 Religious identity/belief system of teachers
- 5.2.3 Detraditionalisation within schools
- 5.2.4 Pluralisation

5.2.1 Religious practices of parents and families

Section 4.4 reported participants’ perceptions about the number of parents and families who are practising their faith. As stated, all but four participants interpreted “practising their faith” to mean Mass attendance alone, and the general consensus was that adherence to this religious practice was low. There were sometimes large variances between the perceptions of individuals in this regard, however, with a 25% differential between the perceptions of the teacher and parents in S1 and an average differential of 52.5% between the perceptions of the principal and the teacher in S5.

As discussed in Section 2.3.1, the EVS of 2008 showed that the proportion of Irish people who attended Mass weekly was 44.3%, and more recent studies have indicated that this figure may have declined even further, possibly by as much as 10%. The average results from this study are

broadly in line with the lower end of these findings, with some notable exceptions given by individual participants. What is also in line with the EVS data is the finding from this study that, despite low Mass attendance, some participants perceived that faith beliefs and adherence to religious practices other than weekly Mass attendance were evident in the lives many parents and families in their school communities. Private and family prayer, more casual Mass attendance and visits to the local graveyard were three such practices named by participants. This finding mirrors the results of the 2008 EVS as, despite the low Mass attendance reported, belief in core Christian doctrine (God, heaven, hell, afterlife and sin) averaged at 75.3%. In addition, 67% of people declared that they prayed once a week or more outside of religious services.

The findings of this study, mirrored by others such as the EVS, point up an obvious paradox in the nature and identity of Irish Catholics, although Irish Catholics are arguably not unique in this regard.¹⁰ While 84.2% of the Irish population self-declared as Catholic in the 2011 census, weekly Mass attendance at the same time was a little more than half of that, at 46% (RedC on behalf of the Iona Institute, 2011). While the reason for this phenomenon itself is outside the scope of this study, what must be considered here is the impact of this trend on the religious identity of Irish Catholic primary schools. It certainly appears to have left teachers in a position where they are trying to make up for a lack of faith practices in homes, particularly when it comes to sacramental preparation and celebration. This may lead to feelings of frustration on behalf of teachers. An example of this is the contribution made by the principal in S3: “It kind of annoys me, you know, that such a big deal is made over these things [the sacraments] and yet most of them don’t even go to Mass.” This view was also echoed by representatives from S1 (principal and teacher) S4 (principal and teacher) and S8 (parent). The lack of weekly Mass attendance may also impact teachers’ decisions when it comes to teaching RE. As reported in Section 4.5, the second most common reason given by teachers as to why they do not teach RE for the required 2.5 hours per week is because it is not a priority for parents. This may also affect the content of what is taught in RE, and may contribute to less emphasis being placed on Catholic doctrine, Scripture, liturgy or morality. Of course, teachers’ own religious identity and belief systems are also important when considering this point. This is examined further in Section 5.2.2.

¹⁰ See, for example, Dean (2010) for an analysis of the same issue in the context of the USA.

5.2.2 Religious identity/belief system of teachers

Section 4.8 reported this study's finding that six participants stated their perception that many teachers do not have faith themselves. In addition, three participants perceived that some teachers may not want to teach RE, and four perceived that some teachers have difficulty with the Catholic Church. Two interviewees indicated their perception that this may be more prevalent among younger teachers. It is important to note once again that all data pertaining to this topic were collected based on the voluntary and unsolicited contributions of participants, so these findings are not necessarily representative even of this small group of participants. Nonetheless, their possible implications are interesting to consider in light of the overall aim of this study: what are the consequences for the religious identity of Catholic primary schools to have teachers who (i) do not have faith themselves, (ii) do not want to teach RE and/or (iii) have difficulty with the Catholic Church? In Miller's (2006, p.72) discussion on the five essential "marks" of Catholic schools, the role of teachers in "witness[ing] to the Gospel" is noted: "If pupils are to experience the splendour of the Church, the Christian example of teachers and others responsible for their formation is crucial. The witness of adults in the school community is an integral component of a school's Catholic identity."

Again, this can be seen as an example of the potential disparity between the intended and operative ethos of Catholic primary schools. It does not seem accurate, in the Irish context, to describe all teachers in Catholic primary schools as "evangelisers" as Miller (2006, p.72) would. What also needs to be considered is whether or not such a designation would even be appropriate, given the lack of alternative education provision for both children *and* teachers provided by the Irish state. Miller (2006, p.72) recognises the difficulty in his own description, but holds to it, stating: "While their demands are high ... there is no getting away from the fact that if teachers fail to model fidelity to the truth and virtuous behaviour, then even the best of curricula cannot successfully propose Christian values and promote a Catholic ethos." In the Irish context, however, it may not be fair, realistic or suitable to place such a responsibility on teachers. It is important to consider that the data indicating lower levels of religious adherence from the EVS and other sources also apply proportionally to teachers. It therefore cannot be assumed that those who wish to teach in a primary school are willing or able to uphold a

description of their work such as the one described above. One possible result of a weaker religious identity among teachers is a decline in religious practices in Catholic schools.

5.2.3 Detraditionalisation within schools

As reported in Section 4.6, there was evidence of detraditionalisation in all but one of the schools that took part in the study (S2). Three of the four participants interviewed in this school reported that there are more religious practices in their school now than there were when these individuals were at school themselves. The demographic of this school may be a point to take into account when considering this finding. With a population of 29 students and two teachers, this school's relationship with the parish is the only one in the study deemed to be very good (see Section 4.3). It is worth noting again that all four of the urban schools that took part in the study (each of which has a population of over 400 students) were deemed to have fair or poor parish support. Also significant, however, is the fact that the only other school in the study that falls into the same demographic as S2 – S3 – was deemed to have poor parish support. It is therefore possible to conclude that while it is not inevitable that small, rural schools will exhibit more religious practices, it does seem that a smaller school population, which usually occurs in a rural area, contributes to the possibility of a stronger religious identity. This also reflects the tradition of there being a sense of ownership by rural communities of their local schools.

The other seven schools in the study all showed signs of detraditionalisation, with participants in each of these schools stating that there were more faith practices either when they were in school themselves or when they started teaching. This finding obviously mirrors the fact that there are less religious practices generally evident societally today than there were a generation ago, as discussed in Section 5.2. There was no overwhelming sense from participants that this detraditionalisation was to be lamented, however, with four participants recalling in a negative way a more authoritarian and fundamentalist Catholic Church compared with a Church that is now more “honest” (parent, S8). Only two participants seemed to indicate that they believed that the detraditionalising trend was regrettable: the teacher in S6 and the chairperson in S4. Both of these participants referred to these patterns as being evident in the contexts outside of the school community, however, with the chairperson in S4 commenting, “The world we live in is not very conducive to practising”.

Convey (2012) found that among the indicators of a strong Catholic identity in school communities were (i) that school-wide liturgies occur periodically (89%) and (ii) that the school day begins with a prayer (92%). Detraditionalisation within the schools in this study was evident in the falling number of schools that adhere to such practices. For example, only half of the schools that took part in this study celebrate school Masses once a year. Further, only one participant stated that religious songs/hymns are sung at school assemblies. Each of the eight schools noted that the saying of formal prayers was part of the school day, indicating a high compliance with this indicator of Catholic identity. As noted in Section 4.6.1, however, this practice is not necessarily based on a faith conviction, but rather on other reasons such as classroom management and discipline. The decline in such religious practices in Irish Catholic primary schools will inevitably have a detrimental impact on the school's religious identity.

5.2.4 Pluralisation

In three of the eight schools that took part in the study, more than 10% of the student population were from faith traditions and belief systems other than Catholic (S6, S7 and S8). All three of these schools were urban schools. Only one urban school in the study that had a non-Catholic enrolment of less than 10%, probably explained by the fact that it operates through the medium of the Irish language.

As discussed in Section 1.4, demand for non-faith-based primary education increased sharply from the late 1990s onwards due to both the inward migration of people from many and varied faith traditions, and a decline in the number of people indicating a formal religious affiliation (Central Statistics Office, 2011). What is interesting in this study is that even where alternative educational provision was available in all three urban schools (S6, S7 and S8), between 10% and 30% of parents still chose a Catholic school for their non-Catholic children.

As reported in Section 4.6.2, principals from S6, S7 and S8 were asked if their school's religious identity had changed because of the presence of these children in their school. Two principals (S6 and S8) felt that children from faith traditions other than Catholic had no effect on their school's religious identity, while the principal in S7 stated that the children had "a little" effect

on the school in this regard. Generally, however, this principal felt that the presence of non-Catholic children in the school was positive: “I think that’s a good thing, that they would know, ‘Well that boy doesn’t have to say prayers because he doesn’t worship our God, he worships a different God.’ I think that’s good for them to learn [that].”

These findings confirm the conclusions reached by Donlevy (2007), who found that participants welcomed and appreciated non-Catholic students in their schools. In fact, every participant in this study said that children from faith traditions other than Catholic should be welcomed into the Catholic school. The principal in S6 commented, for example, “A Catholic school is open to every denomination”. Donlevy (2007) found that participants in his study believed that the presence of non-Catholic students demonstrated to society at large that Catholic schools are open and inclusive. Arthur (1995) contends that a when non-Catholic children constitute a significant presence of the student population, the Catholic identity of the school will be fundamentally weakened. This designation may not apply to the schools in this study, however, as the non-Catholic population never went beyond 30%.

5.3 The application of Pollefeyt and Bouwens’ (2010) model to the Irish primary education system

Section 2.3 gave an overview of the work of Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) in developing an empirical methodology to frame the religious aspects of the identity of Catholic educational organisations. The result of this work was the presentation of five models of the religious identity of a Catholic educational organisation:

- A confessionally based organisation
- An organisation focused on values education from a Christian perspective
- An organisation dedicated to institutional reconfessionalisation
- An organisation dedicated to institutional secularisation
- An organisation seeking recontextualisation (or identity formation in a plural context)

Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) stress the fact that these models are theoretical typologies and do not necessarily exist in pure form. Rather, they highlight tendencies that are present to greater or

lesser degrees in contemporary educational institutions. Each of the models is examined below, and the evidence of same found in the primary research is outlined.

5.3.1 A confessionally based organisation

Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010, p.200) describe this type of school as “traditional confessional”. Here, practices such as the celebration of class or school Masses, and the recitation of formal prayers throughout the day are maintained without question or reflection on the prevailing culture. In this study, schools were deemed to have traits of a confessionally based organisation when they exhibited signs of engaging in traditional Catholic practices against the backdrop of countersigns of a more secular identity, or when aspects of their religious identity were clearly historic and not reflected upon. These criteria conform with Pollefeyt and Bouwens’ (2010, p.200) analysis that: “An ‘old style’ confessional school identity is simply continued out of habit, from the desire to remain recognisably ‘Catholic’, as an expression of a passive, awaiting attitude, or also just to not have to deal with it.” As stated in section 2.3.2.1, some authors, including O’Shea (2014) have difficulty with this characterisation, seeing it as caricaturing those Catholic schools that are attempting to maintain a specific Catholic identity in the traditional sense.

All eight schools that took part in the study showed evidence of practices that were deemed to be reflective of a confessionally based organisation. The number of these practices observed in each school is given in Table 19.

School Code	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Number of Practices Evident	2	5	1	2	2	4	2	2

Table 19: Practices evident of a confessionally based organisation by school

The most common feature of a confessionally based identity was the recitation of formal prayers throughout the school day which, as discussed in Section 4.6.1, was a feature common to all schools, but one which did not seem to be reflected on in general. This point was made most strongly by the teacher in S4: “Yeah, it’s still happening ... [but] it’s routine over years, it’s tradition ... it’s becoming more and more empty in my opinion ... You just get on with it.”

The school with the fewest indicators of a confessionally based organisation was S3, with the engagement in formal prayer being the only indicator of such an identity. The school with the strongest indication of a confessionally based organisation was S2. Participants from S2 spoke about faith being embedded in the school, and this was exhibited in the historical religious symbols evident in the environment, the school crest that reflected its religious identity, the teachers’ commitment to teaching religious education for 2.5 hours per week, and their practice of reciting formal prayers throughout the school day. Furthermore, as reported in Section 4.6.2, three of the four participants from S2 identified that there were more religious practices in the school now than there were when they were at school themselves – the only school that reported such a finding. S2 is also the only school that was deemed to have very good parish support.

In spite of this, however, participants from S2 identified a lack of formal faith practices amongst the families in their school, particularly in terms of Mass attendance. The principal in this school commented: “You know, when you’d be looking for someone to ... who’s going to Mass on Sunday anyway ... it’d be the same staunch three or four families, and we’d have about twenty families in the school.” This perception was confirmed by the chairperson of the board of management: “It’s very noticeable at First Communion and that when the church is packed, where there’s quite a number of kids that we won’t see again until Confirmation. That’s a fact really.” The fact that S2 engages in more faith practices than ever before against a backdrop such as this is strongly indicative of what Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010, p.10) describe as a confessionally based organisation that is continued out of some sense of obligation, lethargy or loyalty to tradition. While other schools also showed evidence of this type of school model, none did so to the same extent as S2.

5.3.2 An organisation focused on values education from a Christian perspective

The second type of school model identified by Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) – one that focuses on values education from a Christian perspective – emerges when a gap becomes evident between the religious culture upheld by the school and the prevailing culture in society in general. As discussed in Section 2.3.2.2, when this happens, “ethics” is employed as a mediator between culture and the Catholic faith, and Christian values and norms, which are universally recognisable, are prized: helpfulness, altruism, kindness, friendship, solidarity, etc. There was evidence of such a focus on values education from a Christian perspective from all but one of the schools that took part in this study. The one school for which there was no evidence of this was S5, and there was no apparent reason for this. The school with the strongest indication of Christian values education was S6. Indicative of this was a comment from the teacher in S6 regarding the emphasis that the school put on the children cultivating respect: “Everybody is kind and well-mannered to each other ... it’s just having respect.” This point was confirmed by the chairperson in the school. When asked if this was linked somehow with faith, the chairperson revealed that he did not think it was, stating: “They’re just things you want to do, and they’re things we promote in the school not just because they’ve to do with faith but because those are the kind of things we try to promote.”

This emphasis on Christian values appears to have influenced the RE taught in the school. As noted in Section 4.5.2, RE in S6 is very much based on Christian values, a point that was picked up on by the parent representative from this school: “If you go back through their Second Class religion books, it’s all about making new friends ... I’ve often seen them doing, ‘A job I done for Mam’, so that’s kindness, straight away, ‘Making a new friend’ ... so that’s friendliness.” This emphasis was also reflected in a comment by the teacher in S6, who reported to tell the children in her class: “... you don’t have to go to Mass and say your prayers, you know? Just be a Christian, treat people right”. The school’s emphasis on Christian values also seems to have influenced this teacher in terms of the amount of time dedicated to RE. She shared: “If you don’t get your two and a half hours [of RE] done but you’ve talked to the children and you’ve listened to them, I think that’s as much two and a half hours as anything else.”

Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) identify that one of the dangers of the Christian values education model is that those elements of the Catholic faith that are easily correlated remain present, while those which are not are abandoned. The authors therefore conclude that, “In practice ... little explicitly Catholic faith remains present” (Pollefeyt and Bouwens, 2010, p.201). This certainly seems that it could be true of S6. The only counter to that is the outlook and leadership of the principal. His faith practices are certainly explicitly Catholic, and include telling the children about a saint a day over the intercom, emphasising the learning of formal prayers, and beginning staff and board of management meetings with prayer. He also attempts to make faith real and contextual by asking the children, “What would Jesus do if he was here?” The principal is well-liked and admired in the school, with the teacher in S6 commenting, “I personally would do anything for him”. Nonetheless, there certainly appears to be a struggle to emulate the confessional Catholic practices championed by the principal, with reliance instead on Christian values education. Pollefeyt and Bouwens’ (2010) prediction about such schools eventually dropping that which is explicitly Catholic is therefore certainly a possibility, perhaps particularly when the leadership of the school changes.

5.3.3 An organisation dedicated to institutional reconversion

Of the five categories suggested by Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010), institutional reconversion was among the least evident in the eight schools that took part in this study. As discussed in Section 2.3.2.3, institutional reconversion emerges when a school moves away from the prevailing secular culture and closer to an explicitly confessional Catholic identity. The key features of such a school are that it overtly and publicly asserts its religious identity, that a substantial part of the school population practises the faith, and that religious rituals such as corporate prayer and sacramental celebrations are key, meaningful aspects of school life.

Although five of the eight schools that took part in the study had a 95% Catholic student population, no participant described the majority of their student population to be practising their faith. As reported in Section 5.2.1, this applies more so when the common, standard measurement of weekly Mass attendance is applied, and less so when other indicators of belief are taken into consideration. Neither could it be said that any of the schools in the study overtly

assert their religious identity. The only possible exception here is S8, where both the principal and teacher included the school's religious identity in their description of it. As explained in Section 4.7.2, however, it was found that this description was only included to pre-empt and avoid future conflict from parents who did not want their children participating in RE or other religious practices. Therefore, although representatives from this and two other schools (S2 and S4) did state that they were trying to be more explicit about their school's Catholic identity, there was no concrete evidence of any efforts to make this a reality. Indeed, it could be argued that the lack of ongoing engagement by any of the schools in this study with the CSP process (as discussed in Section 4.1.3) indicates contentment with the nature of schools' religious identity at present, and a desire for the *laissez-faire* approach to their religious identity to continue.

5.3.4 An organisation dedicated to institutional secularisation

Seven of the eight schools that took part in this study showed evidence of practices that were deemed to be reflective of institutional secularisation. The number of these practices observed in each school is given in Table 20.

School Code	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8
Number of Practices Evident	3	3	3	3	2	0	2	2

Table 20: Practices evident of an organisation dedicated to institutional secularisation by school

S1, S2, S3 and S4 each displayed higher than the average indications of institutional secularisation, but the indicators themselves varied from school to school. In S1, no religious symbols were present in the school building, and neither the mission statement nor school's crest referenced its Catholic identity. In both S2 and S4, no contemporary religious symbols or sacred spaces were visible in the schools, and the websites lacked reference to its religious identity. The indications of secularisation in S3 were different, however, and perhaps indicative of a stronger degree of secularisation in this school.

In S3, both the teacher and principal indicated that they teach RE for approximately 30 minutes per week, 20% of the time allocated to this subject. In addition, as reported in Section 4.5.2, the teacher in this school stated that the emphasis in what RE she did during this time was on a more general concept of God, commenting, "... you don't need to be as strict on the Church". Most convincing of this school's move towards a secularised institution, however, is the fact that all three representatives from this school reported that their school would not be much different if their ethos was not Catholic. The parent from this school further reported that he didn't think other parents would mind if the school's ethos changed from Catholic. The CSP provides some advice for schools that discover, though the implementation of its process, that they no longer wish to remain under Catholic patronage. It states, "... if the process highlighted serious issues with regard to the Catholic identity of the school then the chairperson liaises with representatives of the patron on the best way forward" (CSP 2012b, p.8). Given that there is no external oversight of the CSP process, however, and given that there was no ongoing diocesan support for its implementation, it is hard to see how a school would take up such an invitation itself. S3 shows no signs of doing so, content instead to continue with its *laissez-faire* approach to its religious identity. In the context of a diocese that is trying to strengthen the religious identity of its schools, this could be considered a worrying case for the patron of this school.

5.3.5 An organisation seeking recontextualisation (or identity formation in a plural context)

As with the reconfessionalising model described in Section 5.3.3, there was little evidence of what Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) describe as recontextualisation in any of the schools involved in this study. In a recontextualised school model, Catholicism is just one option among many philosophical and religious positions evident in the school. It is therefore treated as a preferential, rather than the exclusive, perspective. In addition, the Catholic faith is not understood as a static, universal and unchanging truth, but an effort is made for students to understand the tradition in the context of their own culture and experience. The primary evidence of recontextualisation in this study was the contemporary Christian symbols evident in S3, S5 and S8. In addition, as discussed in Section 5.3.2, the principal in S6 made sincere efforts to make faith real and contextual by asking the children, "What would Jesus do if he was here?" both pieces of evidence, however, only point to a minimal examples of recontextualisation.

In summary, the aspects of Pollefeyt and Bouwens' (2010) model that were most evident in the schools that took part in this study were those related to the confessionally based organisation, organisations focused on values education from a Christian perspective and organisations dedicated to institutional secularisation. It seemed that neither reconsecration nor recontextualisation were particularly evident in any of the school communities that took part in this study.

5.3.6 Proposed model of the religious identity of the schools that took part in this study

Given the evidence presented above, the following model could summarise the religious identity of the schools that took part in this research:

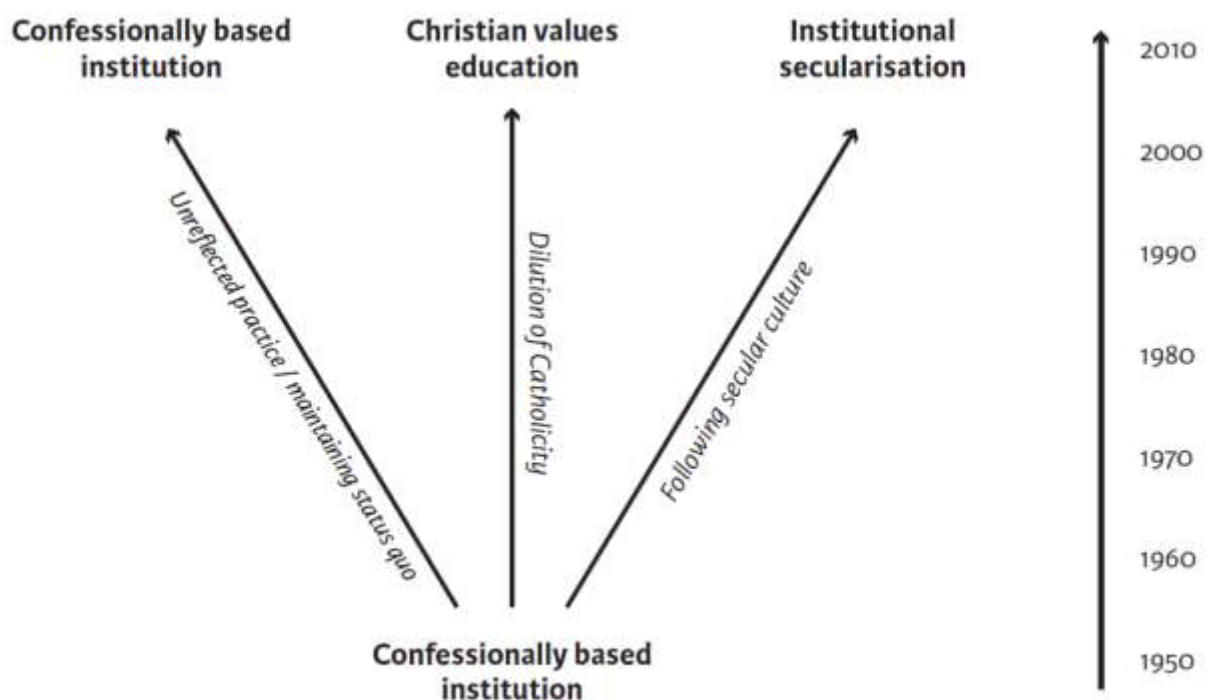


Figure 12: Model of the religious identity of the schools that took part in this study

As with Pollefeyt and Bouwens' (2010) model given in Figure 1, the school classifications identified above do not exist in pure form. Rather, they are characteristics evident to greater or

lesser extent in each of the schools that took part in the research. As the model indicates, it is probably true to say that all of the schools that took part in this study started off, at their founding, as confessionally based organisations, again to varying degrees. As the years progressed, some schools maintained this confessional basis, in spite of the secular changes evident in Irish culture. This is most true of S2. In all but one school, there was evidence that, over the years, Christian values education became increasingly evident. The school with the strongest indication of Christian values education was S6. Four schools showed above average evidence of institutional secularisation, the strongest of which was S3, where all three school representatives said that it would make no difference to the school if it changed from its Catholic ethos. In summary, then, the schools that took part in this study are showing evidence of a weakened Catholic identity, and, arguably, will continue to do so unless there is more support put in place by the school patron. *A Process for Understanding, Supporting and Taking Ownership of the Characteristic Spirit in a Catholic School* (CSP 2012b) developed by the CSP was intended to do this. It is discussed in Section 5.4.

5.4 Discussion of the CSP process

The CSP process, *A Process for Understanding, Supporting and Taking Ownership of the Characteristic Spirit in a Catholic School* (CSP 2012b), can be understood as a tool to help schools to articulate and strengthen their Catholic character. It was undertaken by all schools in this study during 2014. The findings outlined in Chapter 4 show that participants were largely positive about participating in the CSP process. The general outcomes of the schools participating in the initiative were that it gave them opportunities to think about things they had never considered before, to reflect/take stock, and to identify religious traditions that had ceased in the school. In addition to these general outcomes, participants shared nine specific outcomes of their schools having taken part in the process, such as the formulation of an RE policy and the establishment of a sacred space in the school (see Table 7).

There is a concern, however, that the instigation of a number of small, individual initiatives to respond to the promptings of the CSP process amounts to little more than token compliance. It was the intention of those who compiled the CSP process that rather than its being a one-off initiative, it would be an “ongoing method ... that is embedded in scheduled meetings of the

school ... a template to continue reflection over years to come” (CSP 2012b, p.8). One of the reasons why follow-up interviews were scheduled with the teachers in each school in this study was to assess what “continued reflection” had been undertaken in the year after the process was initially completed. As shown in Section 4.1.3, however, none of the schools worked on the process in this ongoing manner.

In Chapter 2, the arguments of authors such as MacBeath (1999) in favour of school self-evaluation were outlined. The views of opponents of self-evaluation such as Blok, Slegers and Karsten (2008) and Schildkamp, Visscher and Luyten (2009) were also considered. Reviewing the results of the CSP process for the schools in this study, it is clear that the schools encountered several of the drawbacks of self-evaluation outlined by these authors.

Authors such as Nevo (2002), Christie, Ross and Klein (2004) and Van Petegem (2009) suggest that one way to improve the validity of school self-evaluation is to connect it with external evaluation procedures. In this case, the most obvious source of such external support would be from the diocese. Participants in this study reported that they had no support from the diocese in terms of addressing the indicators of Catholicity that they had identified as needing improvement. In their initial interviews, six principals and teachers said that they would welcome such support in the form of visits by the diocesan adviser for RE. In the follow-up interviews, it was found that no schools received such support. If the diocese were to implement an external validation component to work in tandem with the self-evaluation that the schools did by way of the CSP process, it would not only conform to best practice in terms of school self-evaluation, but it would also be in line with the actions of dioceses in other jurisdictions who follow this model of affirming and accrediting the work done by schools in terms of ethos in Catholic schools (for example, in the Diocese of Portsmouth, England). Other possible sources of external support for the process, such as peer evaluation, could also be considered by the diocese.

There is no doubt that a process such as the one provided by the CSP has the potential to impact positively on the religious identity of Catholic primary schools. Based on the outcomes of this study, however, it is clear that if dioceses continue to leave schools to self-assess their religious identity without any external support, there will be little or no improvement, even where schools have identified specific areas for improvement.

In summary, it is clear that Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) categorisations of Catholic schools have relevance in the Irish context because, from the findings of this study, schools are showing evidence of institutional secularisation and, particularly, of Christian values education. Neither of these findings are particularly surprising given the historical evolution of the primary education system in Ireland, and given the current pluralising and detraditionalising trends. The findings present a difficulty, however, for patrons who rely heavily on primary schools for the education in faith of children and for preparation for the sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation. At the moment, the practice of the Catholic schools that took part in this study is at variance with their stated aims. Without intervention, the gap between the intended and operative ethos of these schools will continue to grow. Recommendations for how this disparity can be addressed are given in Chapter 6.

6. Summary, Implications and Conclusion

This chapter will present an overview of each of the preceding chapters, and will draw out the implications arising from the research findings.

6.1 Summary

This dissertation began by outlining the history and evolution of the Irish education system at primary level (Chapter 1). This system is unique in the world by virtue of the fact that more than 99.5% of the schools are run not by the state but by voluntary organisations known as patrons. The vast majority of these patrons are denominational, with the Catholic Church as the largest provider of primary education. Despite appeals for change in the system, and initiatives to do so such as the Forum on Pluralism and Patronage (2011), there remains today few alternatives to faith-based primary education in the Republic of Ireland. Many commentators and organisations point to the impact of this situation on the rights of families who have no alternative but to send their child to a Catholic school (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2009; Irish Human Rights Commission, 2010). Yet little attention has been given to the effect that the system has had on the religious identity of Catholic schools themselves. That is what this dissertation aims to investigate.

Chapter 2 began by exploring the terms “characteristic spirit”, “ethos” and “identity”. It concluded that there are two levels at which ethos exists in schools: an intended level and an operative level. The intended level reflects the characteristic spirit of the school provided by its founder or patron. The operative level is the way in which this vision is put into effect in the daily running of the school. This may also be referred to, in the context under consideration, as the school’s Catholic identity. Empirical research on the religious identity of Catholic schools in Ireland, England and North America was also examined in this chapter. It was found that there is sometimes a disparity between the intended and operative ethos evident in schools. In the Irish context, this may be especially true, as patrons do not exercise the same leverage over ethos as similar authorities in other jurisdictions. Rather, the responsibility for ethos is devolved to the local level, with any oversight by the diocese being advisory. If principals and teachers do not take ownership of ethos, therefore, little can be done about it. The work of Boeve (2006) and of

Pollefeyt and Bouwens (2010) were then discussed. In particular, the typology of the religious identity of Catholic educational organisations suggested by these authors was examined in detail. It provided a relevant theoretical framework for this study.

Chapter 3 outlined the research paradigm, methodology and approach underpinning the study. It also described the selection criteria and procedures adhered to in recruiting schools to participate. The data collection methods employed in the research were then described. The chapter concluded by outlining the ethical considerations that were noted, and the methods employed to ensure trustworthiness in the study.

Chapter 4 detailed the triangulated findings from all of the data collected. It found that the religious identity of the schools involved in the research was very mixed, with some schools showing a much higher level of commitment to their Catholic identity than others. Overall, it was found that participants had a *laissez-faire* approach to ethos: twenty participants did not state that their school was Catholic in their description of it, and four participants from two schools said that their schools would not be much different if their ethos changed from its Catholic patronage. Three of these participants came from one school (S3). Representatives from seven of the eight schools that took part in the study spoke about the importance of emphasising Christian values education. This seemed to be highlighted much more than a distinctively Catholic identity that would focus on Catholic doctrine, Scripture, liturgy and morality. Despite efforts to involve parents and families in sacramental preparation, the schools that took part in this study continued to play the most significant role in this area. Parish support was reported to be mixed, but generally poor, in this regard.

Chapter 5 discussed the data collected in light of the historical context within which the Irish primary education system evolved, and in light of existing research in the area of Catholic school identity. It used Pollefeyt and Bouwens' (2010) typology of the religious identity of Catholic educational organisations as the lens through which to explore the data. The aspects of this model that were most evident in the schools that took part in this study were those related to confessionally based organisations (most evident in S2), organisations focused on values education from a Christian perspective (most evident in S6) and organisations dedicated to

institutional secularisation (most evident in S3). It did not seem that either reconfessionalisation or recontextualisation was particularly evident in any of the school communities. Detraditionalisation, a term preferred by Boeve (2006) above the term secularisation, was a feature of seven of the eight participating schools.

6.2 Implications

Having ascertained the perceptions of these eight primary school communities regarding their Catholic identity, attention must next turn to the implications of the findings. Given the predominance of Catholic schools at primary level and the declining number of Catholics in the Republic of Ireland, some argue that the only solution is to reduce the number of Catholic schools at this level, perhaps by as much as 50% (Quinn, 2011). It is argued that this would allow Catholic schools to freely affirm their Catholic identity (Martin, 2012). This suggestion is arguably both idealistic and over-simplistic, certainly in the short to medium term. Furthermore, the most recent evidence available mirrors the findings of this research, in that the vast majority of parents seem happy with the status quo and to not want such radical structural change (Department of Education and Skills, 2013b). Based on the findings of this study, however, it could be argued that the status quo is what Van Nieuwenhove (2014) terms “Catholic lite” Catholic schools. Perhaps if Irish Catholic primary schools were to conform to their intended ethos, as laid down in the Schedule of a Catholic school and in Church documents, there might be a greater call for alternative educational provision.

The question for patrons of Irish Catholic primary schools is whether they are happy to allow the *laissez-faire* approach to ethos to continue, or if they want primary school communities to reconfessionalise – at least to some extent – and to espouse a more distinctive religious identity. If a decision is made towards the latter approach, the following steps could help to narrow the gap between the intended and operative ethos in Catholic primary schools:

- Six of the sixteen participants (37.5%) who took part in the study said that they would welcome visits by the diocesan adviser to provide support for staff both in religious education and in implementing the results of their self-evaluation by means of the process provided by the CSP. The remit of the diocesan adviser is currently limited to the curricular area of RE, and schools reported weak support for their work in this area. If

this role were to be expanded to include the area of ethos, the diocesan adviser could play a role in providing an external validation component, working in tandem with the self-evaluation that the schools do by way of the CSP process. This would make the CSP process much more robust in terms described by Nevo (2002), Christie, Ross and Klein (2004) and Van Petegem (2009) and would ensure its continuing implementation in schools. It would also give diocesan advisers a concrete role in schools. Models from the Catholic dioceses of Birmingham, Nottingham, Brentwood and Leeds, England, could all provide exemplars for such a model. Validation of this nature might also assist those school communities that have identified that their religious identity is not important to them, such as S3 in this study.

- It would seem worthwhile for Catholic patrons to provide continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers in terms of understanding and strengthening their school's religious identity. Meagher's (2011, p.12) finding that there is "clearly a struggle" to articulate what a Catholic school is and how it could be distinguished from other primary school models was reflected in this research. By providing CPD in the wider context of enhancing a distinctive school culture, patrons could be assured that the teachers in their schools were aware of their specific responsibilities as teachers in Catholic schools. Some authors question if these teachers should also undertake faith formation in the context of CPD (Coll, 2007). To do so compulsorily would seem difficult in the Irish context where teachers, as well as parents, have few alternatives to denominational education at primary level. To *offer* such CPD, however, would certainly be welcomed by some of the teachers who took part in this study.
- It may be particularly important to aim CPD in the area of ethos at existing and aspiring school principals. Coll's (2009, p.156) research supports this suggestion, as she found that "The witness of the head teacher ... was a power symbol of the Catholic nature of the school". By making it a requirement for newly appointed school principals to have some post-graduate qualification in Catholic education, or similar, patrons would at least be certain that the school leader has knowledge in this area. The role of the principal as the faith leader of a Catholic school is something that has been given very little attention

in the Irish context. It was outside of the scope of this study but did emerge as an issue. It is certainly a point worthy of consideration and an area for further research.

- At the same time, it is important to consider the needs of those teachers who are from a faith tradition other than Catholic, or no faith tradition at all, but who teach in Catholic schools. The current situation is that these teachers assume a role in faith formation and sacramental preparation. This too seems like an untenable situation. Given the declining levels of religiosity in the Republic of Ireland, the challenge of finding faith-filled teachers for Catholic schools is likely to increase. Creative solutions such as team teaching need to be explored, trialed and researched as a matter of priority. This is an area that has received little attention in the literature to date.
- At parish level, there is clearly a need for more engagement with school communities in the area of RE, particularly with regard to sacramental preparation. Despite the stated vision in *Share the Good News* (2010), parish support in 75% of the schools that took part in this study was considered to be “fair” or “poor”. Parish communities must find ways to support RE in schools, or they risk teachers inferring from their non-participation that this subject is not valued. Considering that many of the teachers who took part in this study already perceive that RE is not appreciated by parents and families, it is all the more important that they do not get a sense that parish communities share a similar view. The form of support most frequently mentioned by participants in this study was classroom visits. These need not be undertaken by priests of the parish. Rather, parishes could train and commission lay people to undertake this ministry. Such a move would send a clear message to school communities that parishes want to take an active and supportive role in the area of RE.
- At a school level, the results of this study indicate that more work needs to be done in making parents aware of the distinctive ethos of Catholic schools, and of the value of RE to the holistic development of their children. This is perhaps best addressed at the enrolment meeting for parents and families whose children are starting in Junior Infants. It should be continued on a whole-school basis, however, with regular reference to the

school's religious identity, for example through school newsletters, the honouring of holy days, and regular prayer assemblies for the whole school community. The introduction of the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (2015) and the *Grow in Love* series (2016) on which it is based, should help schools in this endeavor, as both firmly emphasise the role of parents and families in the RE of children. The impact of the *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum* (2015) and the *Grow in Love* series (2016) is an important area for future research.

Emphasising the religious identity of Catholic schools will inevitably cause difficulties for those parents and families who do not wish their children to attend such schools, but who have no alternative provision in their area. The current *laissez-faire* approach to religious ethos means that such difficulties do not arise. The consequence, however, as evidenced in this study, is that some school communities are Catholic in name but not in nature. From a faith perspective, one has to consider the consequences of allowing this situation to continue. By employing an approach that neutralises the explicitly religious character of schools, Catholicity is not only being diluted, is it, in fact, being disregarded. It is inevitable, then, that teachers begin to make comments such as “it’s becoming more and more empty” (teacher in S4) and “[daily prayer is] a token ... It’s a nod of the head to say, ‘We’re a Catholic school’” (principal in S3).

6.3 Conclusion

The model of the religious identity of the Catholic primary schools that took part in this study (Figure 12) indicates that the gap between the intended and operative ethos of these schools is significant and growing. Without intervention, it is arguable that these schools are on a single trajectory towards a further dilution of their religious identity. Given that they are, in many cases, the sole provider of RE and sacramental preparation for children, this has grave implications for patrons of Catholic schools. The process offered by the CSP affords primary schools an opportunity to assess their religious identity. Without concrete action to support schools in implementing their own recommendations, however, the process will not have any lasting impact.

APPENDIX A
THE KEY CHARACTERISTICS AND INDICATORS OF A CATHOLIC SCHOOL (CSP, 2012B)

A. We are called to be followers of Christ

1. The school has a mission statement clearly rooted in the mission of Christ.
2. All members of the school community are cherished and valued as Christ would welcome them.
3. At regular school assemblies there is ongoing reflection on the Christian way of life.
4. Members of staff are provided with opportunities to develop their understanding of Jesus Christ.
5. Children are introduced to and experience a variety of ways of praying including guided reflections, periods of silence and participation in liturgy.
6. The seasons of the Christian Year are highlighted by appropriate and relevant spiritual celebrations to which all in the school community are invited.
7. There are Christian symbols (such as the crucifix, art works) in each classroom and place of gathering in the school.
8. Copies of the Bible are available for use in senior classes and the Bible is always treated with respect in the school community.

B. We have a Catholic understanding of education

1. Education is written and spoken about by the principal and the teachers as something broad and holistic; as embracing the academic, physical, social and spiritual development of the child from a Christian perspective.
2. School policies seek high standards in all areas of school life. Excellence is an ideal to which we aspire while acknowledging that it must be understood, written and spoken about not as an absolute measure but as the best that each individual child is capable of attaining.
3. The school makes explicit mention – in its literature, statements and oral communications at key events – that the spiritual development of pupils is a central educational aim.
4. The school consciously attends to the moral development of the pupils in its policies and planning.
5. Pupils of other faiths and those of more humanist and secularist beliefs who are members of the school community are welcomed into the life of the school.
6. The Board of Management, principal and staff are aware of the importance of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue in Catholic education and attempt to give expression to these in the life of the school.
7. Values inspired by the Gospel are integral to decision making within and on behalf of the school.
8. The school works in close partnership with other Catholic primary schools in the same geographical area.

C. The school is a Christian community

1. Issues relating to the Catholic identity of the school appear frequently on the agenda for Board of Management meetings.
2. Meetings within the school (Board of Management, Staff, Parents' Association etc.) usually begin and/or end with prayerful reflection.

3. The contribution of parents to the life of the school is encouraged and welcome.
4. The school is active and visible in parish and local community events.
5. Catholic pupils are prepared for the sacraments through a partnership of home, school and parish.
6. The school is a safe and caring environment for its employees and supports are provided for individual members of staff to foster their deeper development.
7. The members of staff of the school are confident in articulating its Catholic ethos.
8. There is a real rather than a notional link between the school and the local Catholic parish community, which in turn supports the school.

D. The school is an agent of personal growth and social transformation

1. Our pupils, in a spirit of mutual respect and trust, can approach staff, share concerns and feel listened to.
2. All school planning and policy development is clearly linked to and inspired by the school's mission statement.
3. Visitors to our school experience an atmosphere that reflects the values of justice, forgiveness, integrity and respect for the needs and rights of pupils, parents and members of staff.
4. The school has a living link with a school in a developing country.
5. The school participates in and supports justice and peace initiatives such as Trócaire's Lenten campaign.
6. Our school is involved in programmes such as the 'Green Flag' programme, promoting an appreciation of and respect for the environment.
7. Pupils receive an age appropriate introduction to media studies as they learn to critique what they see on their TV and computer screens (e.g. how cartoons and advertisements work; the models of 'success' and 'happiness' being promoted).
8. Given that pupils inhabit a world of information technology, members of the school community are invited to reflect on the uses, influences and dangers of modern means of communication: Internet, Facebook, Twitter, mobile phones.

E. Religious education is an integral part of the life of the school

1. There is a policy statement in the school on religious education which includes faith formation, prayer, sacramental experiences and awareness of the stewardship of God's creation. This is stated as a developmental, year-by-year policy and integrated with relevant policy documents across other aspects of school life.
2. The religious education programme receives its allotted time for each year and the school follows the curriculum and textbooks approved by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference.
3. The principal or the RE Representative work with class groupings in planning the work for the year and this is clearly stated and communicated to parents, staff and the local parish as a basis for mutual understanding and a partnership approach.
4. There is a place of prayer/sacred space suitably situated and maintained within the school, which is open to all in the school community.
5. At the beginning and end of each school day and at other specified times during the day, there is time devoted to prayer.

6. There is a developmental and inter-disciplinary programme in the school on environmental and ecological education, which is inclusive of religious education.
7. In partnership with the parish and other bodies, opportunities are provided to staff and board members for adult spiritual support and growth.
8. The religious education and faith formation programmes of the school are being reviewed and renewed in light of the guidelines and vision of the National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland – *Share the Good News*.

APPENDIX B
APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH BY THE DCU RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University



Ms Elaine Mahon
School of Education Studies

3rd March 2014

REC Reference: DCUREC/2014/018

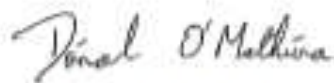
Proposal Title: Investigating the perceptions of primary school communities in the Republic of Ireland regarding their Catholic identity

Applicants: Ms Elaine Mahon, Dr Gerry McNamara

Dear Elaine,

This research proposal qualifies under our Notification Procedure, as a low risk social research project. Therefore, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal. Please note approval is subject to receipt of correspondence from each School confirming their agreement to participate in the study. Materials used to recruit participants should state that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Donal O'Mathuna'.

Dr. Donal O'Mathuna
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee



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APPENDIX C
FIRST EMAIL INVITATION TO TAKE PART IN STUDY
(ISSUED TO ALL SCHOOLS IN THE DIOCESE)

Dear (name),

My name is Elaine Mahon, and I am writing to you because you have been appointed as the facilitator for the Catholic Schools Partnership's *Process for Understanding, Supporting and Taking Ownership of the Characteristic Spirit in a Catholic School* in your school this year. I would like to invite your school to participate in a research study entitled, 'Investigating the perceptions of primary school communities in the Republic of Ireland regarding their Catholic identity'. This study is being conducted as part of a Professional Doctoral programme that I am undertaking in Dublin City University's School of Education Studies.

The purpose of the study is to investigate two questions: (i) What are the perceptions of primary school communities in the Republic of Ireland regarding their Catholic identity?; and (ii) In what ways can Catholic patrons can support primary school communities in understanding and strengthening their religious character?

Participation in the study involves interviews with four members of your school community: (i) you, as facilitator for the *Catholic Schools Partnership's* process; (ii) the school's principal; (iii) the chairperson of the Board of Management; and (iv) a representative of the parents' association. Each interview will last an average of forty minutes. In addition, you will be asked to take part in a follow-up interview one year after our initial conversation. Should your school agree to participate in the research, I will provide Plain Language Statements and Consent Forms to all of those involved in the study.

In order to protect the anonymity of interviewed, neither the name of the interviewees nor the name of your school will be disclosed in the research findings. All interviews will be audio recorded in order to accurately capture what is said. Afterwards, the conversation will be transcribed, and a copy of the transcription will be sent to the participants by email so that each can confirm that it accurately reflects what was said during the interview. The original recording and transcript will only be available to me, and all data will be kept in a secure location.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and participants will maintain the right to withdraw from it at any time. In the event that someone chooses to do so, all information that has been provided (including audio recordings) will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper.

I understand that you will have to discuss my invitation with other members of your school community, and sincerely appreciate you taking the time to do so. My email address is elaine.mahon25@mail.dcu.ie and my phone number is 087-6456810. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the study, and feel free to pass on my information to anyone else who would be involved in making this decision.

Kind Regards,
Elaine Mahon

APPENDIX D
SECOND EMAIL INVITATION TO TAKE PART IN STUDY
(ISSUED TO 54 SCHOOLS)

Dear (name),

You may remember that I wrote to you some time ago inviting your school to participate in a research study entitled, ‘Investigating the perceptions of primary school communities in the Republic of Ireland regarding their Catholic identity’. This study is being conducted as part of a Professional Doctoral programme that I am undertaking in Dublin City University’s School of Education Studies.

I am writing again because your school fulfills particular criteria that I would like to have represented as part of the study, and so I invite you once more to take part. This criterion is (*for example, ‘that yours is an urban Catholic school designated as disadvantaged’*).

Participation in the study involves interviews with four members of your school community: (i) you, as facilitator for the Catholic Schools Partnership’s process; (ii) the school’s principal; (iii) the chairperson of the Board of Management; and (iv) a representative of the parents’ association. Each interview will last an average of forty minutes. In addition, you will be asked to take part in a follow-up interview one year after our initial conversation. Should your school agree to participate in the research, I will provide Plain Language Statements and Consent Forms to all of those involved in the study.

In order to protect the anonymity of interviewed, neither the name of the interviewees nor the name of your school will be disclosed in the research findings. All interviews will be audio recorded in order to accurately capture what is said. Afterwards, the conversation will be transcribed, and a copy of the transcription will be sent to the participants by email so that each can confirm that it accurately reflects what was said during the interview. The original recording and transcript will only be available to me, and all data will be kept in a secure location.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and participants will maintain the right to withdraw from it at any time. In the event that someone chooses to do so, all information that has been provided (including audio recordings) will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper.

My email address is elaine.mahon25@mail.dcu.ie and my phone number is 087-6456810. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the study, and feel free to pass on my information to anyone else who would be involved in making this decision. I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind Regards,
Elaine Mahon

APPENDIX E

PROFILE OF PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

School 1 is a Gaelscoil located in an urban area with an enrolment of 510 students at the time the research was completed. There are two other Catholic primary schools within a 3km radius: one boys school and one girls school, both of which operate through the medium of English. The principal estimated that 0.5% of the student population was non-Catholic.

School 2 is a Stand Alone school with an enrolment of 29 students at the time the research was completed. All of the students were Catholic.

School 3 is a Stand Alone school with an enrolment of 49 students at the time the research was completed. The principal believed that two students were non-Catholic (4%).

School 4 is a Stand Alone school with an enrolment of 95 students at the time the research was completed. All of the students were Catholic.

School 5 is a Stand Alone school with an enrolment of 76 students at the time the research was completed. All of the students were Catholic.

School 6 is an urban, senior school with an enrolment of 421 students at the time the research was completed. There are seven other Catholic primary schools within a 3km radius, two of which are special schools and one of which is a Gaelscoil. There is also an Educate Together School within a 3km radius. The principal stated that 30% of the student population was non-Catholic.

School 7 is an urban, junior school with an enrolment of 419 students at the time the research was completed. There are two other Catholic primary schools within a 3km radius. There is also a Community National School and a Gaelscoil with an inter-denominational ethos within a 3km radius. The principal stated that 30% of the student population was non-Catholic.

School 8 is an urban senior school designated as disadvantaged under the DEIS scheme. It has an enrolment of 448 students. There are seven other Catholic primary schools within a 3km radius, two of which are special schools. There is also an Educate Together School within a 3km radius. The principal estimated that 10% of the student population was non-Catholic.

APPENDIX F
PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENTS FOR CSP PROCESS FACILITATOR

My name is Elaine Mahon and I am a doctoral student in the School of Education Studies at Dublin City University. I am inviting you to participate in a study entitled, 'Investigating the perceptions of primary school communities in the Republic of Ireland regarding their Catholic identity'. Other people in your school community have also been asked to participate in this research.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will participate in two interviews. The first interview will last approximately an hour, and the second interview will last approximately twenty minutes. The interviews will be approximately one year apart. Both interviews are designed to investigate the following questions: (i) What are the perceptions of primary school communities in the Republic of Ireland regarding their Catholic identity?; and (ii) In what ways can Catholic patrons can support primary school communities in understanding and strengthening their religious character?

In order to protect your anonymity, neither your name nor the name of your school will be disclosed in the research findings. Your interview will be audio recorded in order to accurately capture what is said. Afterwards, the conversation will be transcribed, and a copy of the transcription will be sent to you by email so that you can confirm that it accurately reflects what you said during the interview. The original recording and transcript will only be available to me, and all data will be kept in a secure location. You are welcome to a summary of the results of the study upon its completion.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from it at any time. In the event that you choose to do so, all information you provide (including audio recordings) will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper.

My email address is elaine.mahon25@mail.dcu.ie and my phone number is 087-6456810. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the study or your participation in it. If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Telephone: 01-7008000.

APPENDIX G
PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENTS FOR OTHER PARTICIPANTS

My name is Elaine Mahon and I am a doctoral student in the School of Education Studies at Dublin City University. I am inviting you to participate in a study entitled, 'Investigating the perceptions of primary school communities in the Republic of Ireland regarding their Catholic identity'. Other people in your school community have also been asked to participate in this research.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will participate in one interview, which will last approximately forty minutes. The interview is designed to investigate the following questions: (i) What are the perceptions of primary school communities in the Republic of Ireland regarding their Catholic identity?; and (ii) In what ways can Catholic patrons can support primary school communities in understanding and strengthening their religious character?

In order to protect your anonymity, neither your name nor the name of your school will be disclosed in the research findings. Your interview will be audio recorded in order to accurately capture what is said. Afterwards, the conversation will be transcribed, and a copy of the transcription will be sent to you by email so that you can confirm that it accurately reflects what you said during the interview. The original recording and transcript will only be available to me, and all data will be kept in a secure location. You are welcome to a summary of the results of the study upon its completion.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from it at any time. In the event that you choose to do so, all information you provide (including audio recordings) will be destroyed and omitted from the final paper.

My email address is elaine.mahon25@mail.dcu.ie and my phone number is 087-6456810. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions about the study or your participation in it. If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University. Dublin 9. Telephone: 01-7008000.

APPENDIX H
INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR ALL PARTICIPANTS

Title of Study: ‘Investigating the perceptions of primary school communities in the Republic of Ireland regarding their Catholic identity’

Research Aims:

1. To ascertain the perceptions of primary school communities in the Republic of Ireland regarding their Catholic identity
2. To propose ways in which Catholic patrons can support primary school communities in understanding and strengthening their religious character

University: Dublin City University, School of Education Studies

Researcher: Elaine Mahon (Student, Professional Doctoral Programme)

Please indicate that you understand what your participation in this study involves by reading the following statements carefully and circling Yes or No for each:

I have read the Plain Language Statement Yes / No

I understand the information provided Yes / No

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study Yes / No

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions Yes / No

I am aware that my interview will be audio recorded Yes / No

I understand that I may withdraw from the research study at any point Yes / No

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researcher, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project.

Participant Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX I
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR CSP PROCESS FACILITATOR

Schedule 1 (June 2014)

CSP Process

1. How did you find participating in the CSP process this year?
2. Is the characteristic spirit of the school something you had given much thought to before now?
3. What will happen with the areas that you have identified for improvement as part of the CSP process?
4. Do you think it would be beneficial for someone from the Diocese to give you support to work on the indicators that you have chosen to improve on next year?
5. If you could ask the school patron for one thing in terms of supporting your school's Catholic identity, what would it be?

School's Catholic Identity

6. Do you think being Catholic is a vital part of your school's identity? That is, if your school was no longer a Catholic school, would it make much of a difference? Why/Why not?
7. If you could describe your school in three words, what would they be? Are these adjectives explicitly Catholic?
8. Do you feel the school's Catholic identity has changed much since you first came here? If yes, how?

Religious Practices of School Community

9. What religious practices do you remember from when you were in school? Are these still a part of school life today?
10. Are religious practices like class/school Masses and formal prayers part of the normal life of the school? Do you think they should be? Do you think most teachers would agree?
11. Do you think most teachers teach Religious Education for two and a half hours a week? Why do you think this is so?
12. Do you think that teachers would rather if they didn't have to teach Catholic Religious Education? Why/why not? Would you rather teach about other religions *as well as* Christianity? Why/why not?
13. Do you think that teachers should prepare children for the sacraments? Why/why not?

14. Do you think that most of the Catholic children and their families are practicing their faith? If no, why do you think that is? If yes, what kinds of religious practices would you think they engage in?

Children from Faith Traditions other than Catholic

15. Are there any/many children attending this school from faith traditions other than Catholic? What is the practice in this school for those children who wish to opt out of religious education?
16. Do you think it's a good idea for children from different faith traditions and none to learn about the Catholic faith? Why/why not?
17. Do you think the presence of children from different faith traditions and none affects the faith of Catholic children? If so, in what way?

Any other comments?

18. Is there anything about your school's characteristic spirit that we haven't mentioned in this interview that you would like to tell me about?

Schedule 2 (June 2015)

1. Did the school manage to work on the indicators that you have identified for improvement last year? Could you tell me about that?
2. Did the Diocese provide any formal or informal support to you in working on these indicators? If yes, could you tell me about what support was given? If no, what support do you think would have been helpful?

APPENDIX J
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

CSP Process

1. How did you find participating in the CSP process this year?
2. Is the characteristic spirit of the school something you had given much thought to before now?
3. What will happen with the areas that you have identified for improvement as part of the CSP process?
4. Do you think it would be beneficial for someone from the Diocese to give you support to work on the indicators that you have chosen to improve on next year?
5. If you could ask the school patron for one thing in terms of supporting your school's Catholic identity, what would it be?

School's Catholic Identity

6. Do you think being Catholic is a vital part of your school's identity? That is, if your school was no longer a Catholic school, would it make much of a difference? Why/Why not?
7. If you could describe your school in three words, what would they be? Are these adjectives explicitly Catholic?
8. Do you feel the school's Catholic identity has changed much since you first came here? If yes, how?

Religious Practices of School Community

9. What religious practices do you remember from when you were in school? Are these still a part of school life today?
10. Are religious practices like class/school Masses and formal prayers part of the normal life of the school? Do you think they should be? Do you think most teachers would agree?
11. Do you think most teachers teach Religious Education for two and a half hours a week? Why do you think this is so?
12. Do you think that teachers would rather if they didn't have to teach Catholic Religious Education? Why/why not? Would you rather teach about other religions *as well as* Christianity? Why/why not?
13. Do you think that teachers should prepare children for the sacraments? Why/why not?

14. Do you think that most of the Catholic children and their families are practicing their faith? If no, why do you think that is? If yes, what kinds of religious practices would you think they engage in?

Children from Faith Traditions other than Catholic

15. Are there any/many children attending this school from faith traditions other than Catholic? What is the practice in this school for those children who wish to opt out of religious education?
16. Do you think it's a good idea for children from different faith traditions and none to learn about the Catholic faith? Why/why not?
17. Do you think the presence of children from different faith traditions and none affects the faith of Catholic children? If so, in what way?

Any other comments?

18. Is there anything about your school's characteristic spirit that we haven't mentioned in this interview that you would like to tell me about?

APPENDIX K
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR BOARD OF MANAGEMENT
CHAIRPERSON AND PARENT REPRESENTATIVE

CSP Process

1. How did you find participating in the CSP process this year?
2. Is the characteristic spirit of the school something you had given much thought to before now?

School's Catholic Identity

3. Do you think being Catholic is a vital part of your school's identity? That is, if your school was no longer a Catholic school, would it make much of a difference? Why/Why not?
4. If you could describe your school in three words, what would they be? Are these adjectives explicitly Catholic?
5. Do you feel the school's Catholic identity has changed much since your first child started school/since you first become involved with it? If yes, how?

Religious Practices of School Community

6. What religious practices do you remember from when you were in school? Are these still a part of school life today?
7. Do you think that teachers should prepare children for the sacraments outside of school time? Why/why not?
8. Do you think that most of the Catholic children and their families are practicing their faith? If no, why do you think that is? If yes, what kinds of religious practices would you think they engage in?

Children from Faith Traditions other than Catholic

9. Do you think children from faith traditions other than Catholic should be welcomed to attend this school? If so, what affect do you think these children have on the school community?

Any other comments?

10. Is there anything about your school's characteristic spirit that we haven't mentioned in this interview that you would like to tell me about?

APPENDIX L
SUMMARY OF TESCH'S (1990) STEPS FOR DEVELOPING
AN ORGANISING SYSTEM FOR QUALITATIVE DATA

Tesch's (1990) steps for developing an organising system for unstructured qualitative data will be adhered in the data analysis phase of the research. In summary, these steps are:

1. Read through 20%-25% of the data to get a sense of the whole. Jot down ideas about the data as they come to mind.
2. Choose one document to go through, paying attention to transitions from one topic to the next. Note the topics in the margin.
3. When step 2 has been completed for several interviews, make a list of all topics. Cluster together similar topics, and allocate each as 'major topics', 'unique topics' (that seem important but appear rarely) and 'left-overs'.
4. Abbreviate the topics as codes, and take the list back to the interviews analysed to date. Write the codes next to the corresponding segments of the text. See if new topics emerge. Work on new interviews to try out the preliminary coding system.
5. Refine the organising system by grouping similar codes together to create categories.
6. Make final decisions on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetise the codes. Begin the first complete coding session on the entire body of data available.
7. Assemble the data material belonging to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.
8. If necessary, recode the existing data.

APPENDIX M
CATEGORIES, SUBCATEGORIES AND CODES GLEAMED FROM EACH OF THE KEY PHRASES IN
TESCH’S (1990) DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Step 1: Ideas from first 25% of data

- School 1
 1. Outcomes of CSP Process
 2. Religious identity of teachers
 3. Importance of school in passing on faith
 4. Parental demand for Catholic schools
 5. Religious practices of parents and families
 6. Sacramental preparation and celebration
 7. Religious Education
 8. Children of other faiths
 9. ERB
 10. Relationship between faith and the Irish language
 11. Parish support for schools
 12. Religious practices in schools
 13. Religious traditions recalled
 14. Religious identity of the school
 15. Religious identity of parents
- School 2 (numbers 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13 above mentioned)
 16. Importance of Christian values
 17. Diocesan support
 18. Reconfessionalisation

Step 3: List of all topics; cluster together similar topics and allocate as ‘major topics’, ‘unique topics’ (that seem important but appear rarely) and ‘left-overs’

Major Topics	Unique Topics	Left-Overs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcomes of CSP process • Sacramental preparation and celebration • Parish support • Religious practices of parents and families • Religious Education • Religious practices in schools • Religious identity of schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diocesan support • Importance of school in passing on faith • Parental demand for Catholic schools • Religious identity of parents • Religious identity of teachers • Children of other faiths • ERB • Secularisation • Watering down faith • Reconfessionalisation • Christian Values education • School described as ‘Catholic’ or not • Recontextualisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship between faith and Irish language/culture • Teacher demand for Catholic schools • Outreach/service

Steps 4 and 5 (Abbreviate the topics and codes and refine the organising system by grouping similar codes together to make categories):

Major Themes	Unique Themes
1: Participation in CSP process Subcategories: Perceptions and outcomes of the CSP process (POCSP); Diocesan support for CSP process (DSCSP); Continuing work on the CSP process (CWCSP)	8: Religious identity/belief system of teachers (IDT)
2: Sacramental preparation and the home-school-parish partnership (SPHSP) Subcategory: Importance of school in passing on faith (IS)	9: Parental choice of Catholic education (PC)
3: Parish Support (PS)	
4: Religious practices of parents and families (RPP)	
5: Religious Education (RE) Subcategories: Children of other faiths (OF); ERB (ERB)	
6: Detraditionalisation (DT) Subcategories: Religious practices in schools (RPS); Secularisation (S); Watering down faith (WDF)	
7: Religious identity of schools (IDS) Subcategories: Reconfessionalisation (RECONF); Christian Values education (CVE); School described as 'Catholic' or not (SD); Recontextualisation (RECONT)	

Step 6 (Make final decisions on the abbreviations for each category and alphabetise the codes):

	Code	Category and subcategories
1	CVE	Christian Values Education
2	CWCSP	Continuing work on the CSP process
3	DSCSP	Diocesan support for the CSP process
4	DT	Detraditionalisation
5	ERB	Education about Religions and Beliefs
6	IDS	Religious identity of schools
7	IDT	Religious identity/belief systems of teachers
8	IS	Importance of schools in passing on faith
9	OF	Children of other faiths
10	POCSP	Participation in the CSP process
11	PC	Parental choice of Catholic education
12	PS	Parish support
13	RE	Religious Education

14	RECONF	Reconfessionalisation
15	RECONT	Recontextualisation
16	RPS	Religious practices in schools
17	S	Secularisation
18	SD	School described as 'Catholic'
19	SPHSP	Sacramental Preparation and the home-school-parish partnership
20	WDF	Watering down faith

Final Categories

Major Themes	
1	Participation in the CSP process
2	Sacramental preparation and the home-school-parish partnership
3	Parish support
4	Religious practices of parents and families
5	RE
6	Detraditionalisation
7	Religious identity of schools
Minor Themes (seem important but appear rarely)	
8	Religious identity and belief systems of teachers
9	Parental choice of Catholic education

APPENDIX N
APPLICATION TO SCHOOL PATRON SEEKING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

January 2nd, 2014

Dear Bishop,

I hope this letter finds you well, after a restful Christmas break. I am writing in relation to some doctoral research that I would like to undertake in your diocese regarding the religious identity of Catholic primary school communities, and the ways in which this identity can be strengthened and sustained.

This research would build upon a study that I completed last year in the Diocese of Elphin, where I assessed the experiences of six schools who had undertaken the Catholic Schools' Partnership's *Process for understanding, supporting and taking ownership of the characteristic spirit in a Catholic school*. This research has been presented to Bishop Jones, to the Council of the Catholic Schools' Partnership and to representatives from those Dioceses in which the divesting of primary schools is being considered. The response to my research was positive, and I have received encouragement to continue to explore how best to support a Catholic ethos in primary schools.

I am therefore requesting your permission to conduct research in eight Catholic primary schools in your diocese during the final term of this academic year. The research would take the form of one interview lasting an average of forty minutes with each of the following people: (i) the facilitator of the Catholic Schools' Partnership process; (ii) the school principal; (iii) the Chairperson of the Board of Management; and (iv) a representative of the Parents' Association. These four individuals would have met as part of the Catholic School's Partnership process, which I know you have invited schools to participate in this year. I intend to ask the process facilitator to meet with me again during the academic year 2015/2016, for a second, shorter interview.

The research aims that will form the basis for my interviews are as follows:

1. To ascertain the perceptions of primary school communities in the Republic of Ireland regarding their Catholic identity
2. To propose ways in which Catholic patrons can support primary school communities in understanding and strengthening their religious character

Participation in the study would be entirely voluntary and the names of the participating schools and individuals would not be disclosed in the research findings.

As a former primary school teacher myself, I am very sensitive to the demands school communities contend with on a day-to-day basis, and do not wish to add to the workload of those who are already contributing so much to Catholic schools. I hope that the research findings will be beneficial to both the schools and the Diocese as you plan how best to sustain and strengthen the ethos of Catholic schools. I am committed to keeping you updated on my progress, and of course on the findings of my research.

I would very much appreciate your blessing on this piece of research, and would be most grateful if you could communicate that to me in writing. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch. You are also welcome to contact Dr Justin Harkin, who was my contact person in the Diocese of Elpin, or Fr Michael Drumm, Chairperson of the Catholic Schools' Partnership, should you wish to discuss my work to date with someone other than myself.

I appreciate you taking the time to consider my request.

With every blessing on your ministry,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Elaine O'Shea". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid.

APPENDIX O
APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH BY THE SCHOOL PATRON

	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"><div style="flex: 1;">Diocese of</div><div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 150px; height: 20px; margin-left: 10px;"></div></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 500px; height: 20px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>
<p>Elaine Mahon, 12, The Avenue, Innwood, Enfield, County Meath.</p> <p style="text-align: right; margin-top: 20px;">07 January 2014</p> <p>Dear Elaine,</p> <p>Further to your letter this morning I am more than pleased to give you my permission and support to continue your doctoral research in eight Catholic primary schools here in [redacted]. I am delighted you have chosen our diocese to carry out your research and know that [redacted] Team will be delighted to facilitate that process.</p> <p>In time you might be so kind as to send me a copy of your initial study that you presented to Bishop Jones, as it may assist me in addressing issues in education as they arise.</p> <p>Kindest regards</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 20px; margin: 5px 0;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 20px; margin: 5px 0;"></div>	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 600px; height: 20px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	

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