

Recognised, Accepted, Celebrated? Exploring Students' Experiences of the Inclusion of their
Religion or Belief System in a Catholic Post-Primary School in Ireland

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation is a presentation of my original research work.

Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly.

This work has not been submitted previously at this or any other educational institution. The work was done under the guidance of Dr. Aiveen Mullally at the Marino Institute of Education, Dublin. I agree that the Library may lend or copy this dissertation upon request.

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Claire Woods", written in dark ink on a light-colored background. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

Claire Woods

Abstract

Ireland has undergone rapid social change in the past two decades. Multiculturalism and the decline of the influence of the Catholic Church have resulted in Catholic post-primary schools striving to cater for the needs of their student populations given their increasingly diverse religious faiths and secular world views. Facilitating diversity and inclusion have become burning issues in what were formerly homogeneous faith school communities. Much has been written about the inclusive nature of Catholic schools, not least by the Catholic Church itself, whose documents and statements are consistent in emphasising the message that their schools welcome all, with a special significance placed on the Catholic perspective. The aim of this quantitative case study is to explore student experiences of inclusion of their religion or belief system in a Catholic secondary school in Ireland. The urban, mixed school has 740 students. A quantitative research design and post-positivist paradigm were employed for the study. The chosen research method was a questionnaire completed by 115 students. The main findings show most students feel their faith or belief system is recognised and celebrated in the school. Students reported that they felt their faith was included and respected to varying degrees. The vast majority of respondents valued and wanted more inter-belief dialogue, whereas a few questioned the need for it. There was strong recognition of the school's confessional identity. A sense of apathy emerged regarding religion and belief in general among approximately one fifth of participants. A small number of participants, primarily those belonging to religious minorities, communicated their experiences of religious prejudice and stereotyping. The thesis concludes by offering some recommendations for stakeholders to promote the inclusion of other faiths and belief systems in Catholic schools and suggestions for further research.

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'If there is one word that we should never tire of repeating, it is this: dialogue. We are called to promote a culture of dialogue by every possible means and thus to rebuild the fabric of society. The culture of dialogue entails a true apprenticeship and a discipline that enables us to view others as valid dialogue partners, to respect the foreigner, the immigrant and people from different cultures as worthy of being listened to. Today we urgently need to engage all the members of society in building, 'a culture which privileges dialogue as a form of encounter' and in creating, 'a means for building consensus and agreement while seeking the goal of a just, responsive and inclusive society'. Peace will be lasting in the measure that we arm our children with the weapons of dialogue, that we teach them to fight the good fight of encounter and negotiation. In this way, we will bequeath to them a culture capable of devising strategies of life, not death, and of inclusion, not exclusion' (par. 14).

Pope Francis (2016)

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List of Acronyms

BERA	British Educational Research Association
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CSO	Central Statistics Office
CSP	Catholic Schools Partnership
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
JMB	Joint Managerial Board
RE	Religious Education
PE	Physical Education
ERSI	The Economic and Social Research Institute
MERC	Marino Ethics in Research Committee
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
REDCo	Religion in Education: A Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies of European Countries?
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education
SDPI	School Development Planning Initiative
TA	Thematic Analysis
TY	Transition Year

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past twenty years Ireland has undergone huge social and cultural change. Irish society is secularising and the number of people identifying with a religion other than Christianity is also growing. The Catholic identity of post-primary schools is under pressure given the steadily declining religious profile of its students (Inglis 2017, O'Hanlon, 2017). Nevertheless, they are mandated and obligated as Catholic schools, to further the faith formation and spiritual development of their students, provide a faith community characterised by care and love and cater for their holistic development (Vatican Council II, 1965, Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013). The challenge of fulfilling the mission of Catholic schools in a diversifying contemporary world, while remaining rooted in their ethos and vision (Kieran, 2008), has moved to centre stage in Church reflections. Church publications and many theologians such as Pollefeyt & Bouwens (2014) envisage the Catholic school of today as one, 'that embraces diversity in its search for a renewed and contemporary Catholic profile' seeking to, 'make the Catholic faith recognisable, believable and meaningful for young people today' (p. 355). Inter-belief dialogue, centred around respect and openness, has a key role to play. Pollefeyt & Bouwens argue that, 'the encounter and conversation between different views is being moderated by clear preferential option for the Catholic faith. Out of its own inherent strength and depth Christianity's voice is allowed to resonate amid a multiplicity of voices' (p. 175).

1.1 Case Study School Context

The school selected for this case study is a large mixed Catholic second level school in an urban setting. The ethos envisages the school as an identifiably Catholic faith community with a strong emphasis on care, growth and service. There is a special devotion to Mary and members of the community are encouraged to draw inspiration from her life of service. These

qualities are wholly in-keeping with inclusive Catholic school ideals. Relationships are at the heart of the work of teachers. Church documents state that, ‘The school must be a community whose values are communicated through the interpersonal and sincere relationships of its members and through both individual and corporative adherence to the outlook on life that permeates the school’ (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, p. 3). The lived example of community members is the primary means of communicating the ethos, ‘a school is not only a place where one is given a choice of intellectual values, but a place where one has presented an array of values which are actively lived’ (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, p. 32). This ethos in action is a powerful example to students, regardless of their belief system.

In the wider context, Ireland’s historical, political and cultural make-up creates a unique and complicated relationship with religion. While 78.3% of people in Ireland identify as Roman Catholic a significant number of these are ‘cultural Catholics’ who, although they may participate in the Sacraments, have disengaged with the Church and its teachings (Inglis, 2017). When one takes into consideration an increasingly diverse population and the growing number of people identifying with no religious belief, one comes to see Catholic schools as Ireland’s melting pot where learning to live together has become a priority.

Approximately 50% of Irish secondary schools are under the patronage of the Catholic Church (Griffin, 2019). Depending on location and individual circumstances, parents may face a lack of choice in terms of the ethos of their child’s school. The secularisation of Ireland’s population has created complexities in the education system as Catholic schools strive to serve their growing cohort of religiously diverse and secular pupils. Despite the best efforts and good will of schools, Mullally (2019) argues, ‘There can be some apprehension... about how best to honour the spiritual formation of all pupils, including those of different faiths’ (p. 7). It becomes clear that, ‘Before we can comfortably host students of

other faiths and their needs, it seems necessary that we address our own identity as Catholic schools and how we approach the responsibilities we have towards the faith development of Catholic students' (Mullally, 2019, p. 7).

1.2 The Importance of Student Voice

In this study, student experience will be the basis for the creation of new knowledge and insight. Fielding (2012) describes the different forms of interaction between young people and adults in schools, including the model whereby, 'Students as active respondents in which staff invite student dialogue and discussion to deepen learning/professional decisions...' (p. 56). Passively gathering the students' views without further thought and reflection from the various stakeholders in the school is of limited value, 'The key thing here is that personal knowledge of the range of students and rich narratives which articulate a holistic, vibrant knowledge of the diversity of young people provides the trigger for the discussion or agenda item for staff' (2012, p. 56). This case study's findings have implications for School Self-Evaluation and the School Improvement Plan, potentially seeing student input being put to use for the betterment of the whole school community.

In the case study, this ever-evolving situation is viewed through the lens of student experience. Considering students are the main group for consideration when assessing how inclusive a school is, it is striking how rarely their views have been sought out in the existing research, 'The ultimate target and supposed beneficiary' of inclusive practice is, 'very rarely consulted about their views, opinions and perceptions' (Álvarez et al, 2011, p. 148). Whereas in the influential quantitative study on religion and education REDCo (2009), 'pupils themselves are in fact the most important informants' (Bertram-Troost, 2011, p. 278), this is not the norm. One of the main aims of this study is to support and prioritise student voice and in so doing encourage religious inclusion in the school community. Young people need to be invited to join in this conversation and their views taken into consideration for policy

development. Mitra (2004) states that the benefits of doing so are myriad, including, ‘a marked consistency in the growth of agency, belonging and competence; three assets that are central to youth development’ (p. 651). Empowering students may even, ‘serve as a catalyst for change in schools’ (p. 652).

1.3 Aims of the Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the over-arching question; ‘What are students’ experiences of the inclusion of their religious faith or belief system within an Irish Catholic secondary school?’ The following sub-questions emerged from the research question:

- Do students feel that their faith or belief system is recognised and celebrated in school?
- Do students perceive the school as a welcoming ‘safe place’ where all beliefs are respected?
- Are students comfortable sharing their knowledge and practice of their faith or belief with classmates and teachers?
- Do students think it’s important to learn about other faiths and belief systems?
- What challenges do students face in school because of their religion or belief system?
- How do students experience the school’s Catholic ethos?

The theoretical underpinning for the research is informed by Boeve’s (2017) concept of the Catholic Dialogue School and the JMB Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Different Beliefs in Catholic Secondary Schools (Mullally, 2019).

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

This chapter outlined the context of the case study, its rationale and aims. Chapter 2 consists of the literature review, critically analysing Church documents, the Catholic Dialogue School model and drawing on national and international research in this field. In Chapter 3, the research design is described, along with the procedures, ethical considerations, data analysis

and limitations. The data collected is presented and analysed in Chapter 4. The last chapter deals with recommendations and concludes this thesis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This section examines the extensive existing literature in this field. Initially, the Irish Catholic school context, religious inclusion, legislation and a modern model of the Catholic school will be explored. Upon closer examination of the topic, relevant themes such as Religious Education and Religious Instruction and the value of student voice emerge. Challenges to inclusion such as parental concerns and curricular issues are then explored. The insights gained from the examination of the existing literature in the field sets the scene for this research study and informs its methodology

2.1 The Changing Irish Context

In the past two decades, Irish society has become increasingly secular. The 2016 census records show that almost 10% of the Irish population now state that they have no religion, a rise of 74% from 2011 (CSO, 2012, 2016). Atheism is now the fastest growing belief system in Ireland. This is partly due to the sharp decline of the institution of the Catholic Church in Ireland. Old sins cast long shadows and the child abuse scandal has left a legacy of horror and distrust (O'Hanlon, 2017). Compounding the Church's, 'wounded credibility' (p. 10) are issues surrounding the inclusion of women and the LGBT+ community which has led to a deep-seated malaise towards the institution in a post-Catholic Ireland. Ganiel (2016) defines post-Catholic Ireland as a, 'shift in consciousness in which the Catholic Church as an institution is no longer held in high esteem by most of the population and can no longer expect to exert a monopoly influence in social and political life' (p. 4).

The Church's fall from grace and subsequent loss of power have left a spiritual vacuum only to be replaced by indifference and individualism, 'People increasingly see and understand themselves as discrete, free, independent individuals who are not bound by the family, community and religion into which they were born' (Inglis, 2017, p. 21). O'Hanlon

(2017) describes how, ‘the process of secularisation... resulted in the emergence of a purely ‘immanent frame’ of reference and ‘exclusive humanism’, a ‘disenchanted universe’ without reference to the transcendent’, leaving the Church facing the, ‘challenge to reawaken the need for salvation and the good news of the gospels within a culture which expresses no such need’ (p. 14).

Nevertheless, approximately 78% of Irish people regard themselves as Catholic and 90% of Irish children participate in the Sacraments in primary school (Inglis, 2017). Inglis argues that a significant number of these are nominal Catholics, who are culturally Catholic but have disengaged with the Church. Liturgy and the sacraments are significant because of the collective understanding of the meaning behind them, yet the essence of them has become detached from their practice. With the dawn of this vicarious type of religious non-practice, youth faith development has been outsourced to priests and teachers through whom God is channelled (Inglis, 2017). Priests are drafted in when religion and meaning are needed. Gallagher (2013) explains that this is contrary to God’s invitational relationship with his followers, where all are universally called to be close with him. The Catholic faith is a way of life, as opposed to an occasional Mass service, as illustrated when Catholics are dismissed from Mass with the instruction of, ‘Go now to love and serve the Lord.’ These are growing issues in a country where the sanctity and value of liturgy, the Sacraments and Catholic education itself are becoming increasingly degraded.

Despite the scale and extent of secularisation and the rise in nominal Catholicism, places in Catholic post-primary schools are much sought after with parents valuing faith-based schools’ for their academic attainment, discipline and holistic care (McKinney, 2006). Schools are tasked with preserving their characteristic spirit amid a secularised, disenchanted and diverse school population. The challenge facing contemporary Catholic schools’,

is not how to safeguard a circle of the faithful... so that the Catholic identity of our schools can be saved. Instead, our continuous calling is to become the servants of young people who are entrusted to our care in a way that testifies of the authentic Christian inspiration. (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p. 318)

Honouring plurality should not be confused with embracing relativism or secularisation.

Byrne (2013) distinguishes, 'between pluralism, understood as recognising and honouring pluralism (while seeking to eschew relativism, the proposition that all these are to be equally valued) and secularism which argues for excluding religion and its plurality from culture, civil conversation and public life' (p. 207).

The insular mindset and easy power of the Catholic Church of old has been usurped by the culture of today, 'which values freedom... and views the exercise of authority and power in a much less deferential way, demanding participation and dialogue as part of how governance is exercised' (O'Hanlon, 2017, p. 16). Gallagher (2003) asserts that this shift could potentially lead to the growth and development of the Church and the education it provides, 'this calls for a different quality of lived faith within the community of the church and this fresh religious culture could be a source of radiation outwards' (p. 145). O'Hanlon (2017) cites the urgent need for Church renewal and reform based on, 'a deeper conversion to Jesus Christ, missionary in its approach to the great issues facing humanity and our world, respectful of both personal conscience and magisterium, and entailing a synodal form of church' (p. 19). Gallagher (2003) contends that the renewed Church would be countercultural engaging in authentic self-critique and offering a critique and resistance to the prevailing culture. This viewpoint has gained traction with other theologians as, 'a genuinely religious response to cultural complexity would want to deepen the wavelength of our human conversation about the dangers and potentials of the moment we are living' (O'Hanlon, 2017, p. 148).

Whereas the secularisation and individualisation of society may seem to indicate that religion has lost some of its significance, it is in fact needed now more than ever,

If there has been a rapid loss of cultural roots in religion especially in the younger generation this constitutes not only a faith crisis of concern for the church, but an anthropological crisis of concern to anyone who realises how the loss of such anchors can leave people existentially stranded and adrift. (Gallagher, 2003, p. 148)

The protective factor of faith belief and potential benefits of religious affiliation are well documented. Byrne (2013) states how they can provide grounding in community life skills, leadership capacity, emotional competencies and moral beliefs. Other benefits include the facilitation of, 'cross-generational ties for young people as well as helping them develop dense networks of adults who pay attention to their lives' (p. 208). Furthermore, 'Its invitation to participation and expression of care and commitment, holds within itself the possibility of encouraging positive learning for life towards defining engagement with deepest meaning, with all life, with love and with community (p. 208).

For Catholic education in particular, the critical question emerges of how Catholic schools can fulfil their mission and serve all their students, 'in an era when time honoured traditions fragment, people individualise, and school populations pluralise'? (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014, p. 47).

2.2 The Catholic School as an Inclusive Community

The Church has produced a wealth of literature depicting a clear vision of inclusive education for all,

All men... have an inalienable right to an education that is in keeping with their ultimate goal, their ability, their sex, and the culture and tradition of their country, and

also in harmony with their fraternal association with other peoples in the fostering of true unity and peace on earth. (Vatican Council II, 1965, p. 1-2)

Catholic education focuses on, ‘the promotion of the physical, moral, intellectual, emotional, spiritual and religious welfare of the human person’ (Kieran, 2008, p. 6). These schools strive to bring to life the inclusive community at the heart of Catholicism where all pupils are equally valued and welcome, ‘it is a school for all... although clearly and decidedly configured in the perspective of the Catholic faith, is not reserved to Catholics only, but is open to all those who appreciate and share its educational project’ (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, par. 15-16). A key feature of the inclusive Catholic school is how the faith formation of all students is fostered in a culture of ‘mutual learning’ characterised by ‘encounter’, not ‘clash’, openness, not, ‘closure’ and, ‘dialogue’, not ‘monologue’ (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013, par. 45). Underpinned by Jesus’ message of invitational love and, ‘in the certainty that the Spirit is at work in every person, the Catholic school offers itself to all... promoting the spiritual and moral qualities and the social and cultural values which characterise different civilisations’ (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, p. 47).

There are precursors to the transformative power and thriving community which will be encapsulated in the Dialogue School model,

Catholic Education aims to help each student to develop his or her full potential as a human being... enabling them to be people who are fully alive... Catholic schools seek to transform not only the individual human lives of our pupils, but also, through them, the society which they will help to build. (Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 2008)

The positive steps undertaken by the Church in striving, 'to ensure that Catholic schools are truly open to all' (Pope Francis, 2015) deserve recognition and affirmation. The Catholic Schools Partnership acknowledges inclusion as one its schools' greatest strengths which has led to the enrichment of the educational experience of all students (2015). Successive Popes have emphasised the value of religious inclusion with Pope Benedict XVI urging Catholics, 'not be afraid to enter into a profound and ongoing dialogue, for the good of our civilization' and Pope Francis' ministry giving, 'renewed energy to Catholic schools in fostering dialogue between all people of goodwill' (CSP, 2015, p. 14).

The key Vatican Council II text 'Nostra Aetate' (1965) highlights the Church's benevolent attitude towards the teaching of other faiths and recognises that the human search for meaning is universal,

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. (par. 2)

The creation of interfaith bonds is encouraged, 'through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with love and in witness to the Christian faith, they promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as socio-cultural values' (1965, par. 2).

Kieran (2008) argues that in embracing the religious or non-religious 'other' Catholic schools need to be mindful of their own rich theological and spiritual legacy, 'The Catholic school must be anchored in its Catholic mission to care for and develop the whole human person while simultaneously proclaiming and nurturing the Christian faith' (p. 10). As 'Redemptoris Missio' (1990) states, 'Her mission does not restrict freedom but rather promotes it. The Church proposes; she imposes nothing. She respects individuals and

cultures, and she honors the sanctuary of conscience' (John Paul II, par. 39). Another important Church document, 'The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School' reinforces this position, 'A Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation based on the values to be found in a Christian education; this is its right and its duty (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988, par. 6) Again the distinction is made that, 'To proclaim or to offer is not to impose...' (1988, par. 6). Parents and students alike can rest assured that Catholic schools, inspired by Gospel values, take special care to respect religious freedom and do not attempt to convert students of different beliefs to Catholicism (Vatican II, 1965).

Nevertheless, there is a characteristic spirit which permeates every aspect of the Catholic school. McLaughlin (1999) describes it as a, 'distinctive institutional framework including its distinctive ethos and a distinctive curriculum' (p. 77). The Irish Catholic Bishops document 'Vision 08' reiterates how faith is not confined to the RE classroom but is at the heart of the Catholic school's work, identity and values (Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, 2008). Therefore, it is important that schools make parents aware that their child will encounter the Catholic ethos and values on a daily basis as a natural part of school life (Mullally, 2019).

2.3 What constitutes a Catholic school?

The importance of Catholic schools' identity and aim cannot be overstated, 'Catholic schools are at the heart of the Church's mission in the service of society. The promotion of the human person is the goal of the Catholic school' (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, p. 3). In contemporary Ireland, Catholic schools seek to nurture the faith of all their students and educators,

must have the greatest respect for those students who are not Catholic. They should be open at all times to authentic dialogue, convinced that in these circumstances the best

testimony that they can give of their own faith is a warm and sincere appreciation for anyone who is honestly seeking God according to his or her conscience.

(Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982, par. 42)

Nonetheless, precedence is always given to the Catholic faith of the school. Prayer and the practice of the Sacraments are hugely important, alongside the observance of the liturgical calendar, engagement in ritual, display of religious symbols and ethos promotion (Mullally, 2019).

Strong pastoral care and positive relationships characterise the Catholic school in which students experience a loving and welcoming faith community. The liturgical calendar underpins the school calendar and Catholic celebrations and feast days should be marked appropriately. All students are welcome to attend and even play an active role, where appropriate, in these liturgical celebrations through music and artwork, ‘a Catholic school, in a spirit of inclusivity, could incorporate an ‘inter-religious’ element to these celebrations, where appropriate, without compromising its core values’ (CSP, 2015, p. 27). Fostering a culture of prayer by means such as a daily morning prayer, a prayer room or sacred space in the school and the provision of retreats for students are other central aspects of a school’s Catholic identity. Charitable activities are a regular occurrence and religious themes form part of assemblies. Catholic schools ought to be visibly so through the display of symbols and iconography (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977).

Norman (2003) states that the use of strong Catholic language in the mission statement and other school documents helps to make this identity known. A school Ethos Team can prove vital in promoting the ethos which permeates the school. Ethos is sometimes seen as an elusive concept, yet a clear definition is necessary for its discussion. Norman (2003) defines ethos as, ‘the relationships, atmosphere, use of symbols, rituals and practices,

vision and goals’ (p. 57). McCann (2003) highlights the significance of how the stakeholders interact with the ethos; ‘it is cherished by staff, responded to by pupils and valued by parents’ (p. 160). Whereas Prendergast & Monahan (2006) summarise it as, ‘what you remember, or perhaps better what you are after you forget everything you learnt in school’ (p. 121). Kieran (2008) emphasises how all staff have an integral role to play in committing to uphold the ethos, ‘In the same way that it is crucial for Catholic schools to acknowledge and respect other faith traditions and non-religious worldviews, it is important that everyone respect and agree to uphold the Catholic ethos of the school’ (p. 10). The induction of new staff, ongoing CPD and provision of retreats for staff facilitate the, ‘process for understanding, supporting and taking ownership of the characteristic spirit in a Catholic school’ (CSP, 2015, p. 42). Active promotion of the Catholic ethos includes the acknowledgement and celebration of the presence of other faith traditions in the school. As seminal Church documents stress, in order to be authentic, a Catholic school must be inclusive (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, 2013).

2.4 Religious Inclusion

Inclusion has been defined as, ‘advocating for and meeting the needs of every member of society, and that in doing so it values diversity, difference, equity and social justice’ (Schuelka et al, 2019, p. 310). In the educational context,

Inclusion represents a proactive stance. It challenges educational settings to make adaptations and adjustments to cater for the needs of diverse learners. The purpose of inclusion is to provide all learners with equality of educational opportunity and this right is guaranteed through equality legislation. (Glazzard, 2014, p. 40)

In terms of religious inclusion, this involves respecting and doing whatever is reasonable to accommodate the beliefs and practices of all members of the school community.

Irish research has determined certain factors conducive to successful religious inclusion; effective communication, awareness of rights and responsibilities, good relationships, openness to dialogue and compromise and flexibility (DES, 2014). To this end, policy development has a role to play. The introduction of an Equality and Diversity Policy and a Religious Education and Faith Inclusion Policy have been recommended by the Department of Education (2014) to articulate the school's rights and responsibilities in these areas, thus copper fastening the good practice of accommodating the diverse student population while respecting the school's characteristic spirit. The existence of such policies could pre-empt any possible issues for prospective students and their parents, providing, 'the opportunity to explain the school's ethos, background, approach to accommodating different faiths etc. This discussion would also allow time to discuss with prospective parents their concerns and issues in relation to these matters' (DES, 2014, p. 22).

Clear and open communication from day one builds trust and avoids misunderstandings. For optimal communication, one must be mindful of using appropriate language and, 'the role [it] can play in widening or bridging such differences' (Twiner et al, 2009, p. 474). Whereas there is no need to shy away from the use of strong Catholic language while discussing ethos in policy documents, the warm welcome offered to all in the faith inclusion policy should be just as explicit. In the conversation about religious inclusion, words have power, 'These discussions emerge from the position that our use of language itself shapes human realities' (Twiner et al, 2009, p. 474). In order for Catholic schools to be truly inclusive, language is an important consideration. While there are recognised features of good practice, 'there is no one size that fits all... concerning the inclusion of pupils in schools, as sufficient flexibility must be allowed for schools working in different contexts' (DES, 2014, p. 5).

2.5 Legislation and Catholic Schools

Both the rights of denominational schools to uphold their ethos and the rights of children and their parents to receive an education which respects their beliefs are provided for in various pieces of national and international legislation. Schools are a holding space for faith. Indeed, under the Education Act (1998), schools are mandated to cater for the spiritual and moral development of its pupil and boards of management are legislated to uphold the characteristic spirit of the school (Government of Ireland, par. 15). The Constitution of Ireland (1937) Article 42.1 recognizes parents as, ‘the primary and natural educator of the child’ who is chiefly responsible, ‘for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children’. The European Convention on Human Rights (1950) provides that the State must respect the rights of parents to have their children educated, ‘in conformity with their own religions and philosophical convictions’ (Council of Europe, Art. 2).

Article 44.2.4 of the Irish Constitution (1937) has become increasingly relevant in recent years as the population has diversified and Irish schools encompass a multiplicity of beliefs. This Article asserts the right of a child to withdraw from religious instruction in a school. There is often confusion about what constitutes religious instruction and religious education. In simple terms, religious instruction is education into a religion, whereas religious education is learning about religion (Devine, 2011). The vast majority of second level schools in Ireland provide Religious Education which follows a broad inclusive curriculum and does not necessarily involve faith formation. Nevertheless, some parents decide to withdraw their children from RE and are generally accommodated in doing so. In terms of case law, in 1998 Justice Barrington found that, ‘A child who attends a school run by a religious denomination different from his own may have a constitutional right not to attend religious instruction at that school’ (Campaign to Separate Church and State Ltd v. Minister for Education, 1998, Art. 44.2.4). However, the Constitution ‘distinguishes between religious ‘education’ and

religious ‘instruction’ (1998, Art. 44.2.4). Given that most Irish schools provide Religious Education as opposed to Religious Instruction, this case would not indicate a legal entitlement for parents to withdraw their children from RE. Regardless of the legalities, most schools will accommodate opt outs. However, ‘It is important that the school insists that this is not a ‘free class’ to do homework’ (Mullally, 2019, p. 17). Students may study a sacred text or related reading in their own faith or a secular text of ethical or philosophical value. Patrons are legally supported in preserving the ethos regardless of the religious landscape of the school, ‘A religious denomination is not obliged to change the general atmosphere of its school to accommodate a child of a different religious persuasion who wishes to attend that school’ (1998, Art. 44.2.4). A balance must be struck in promoting the spiritual beliefs of the faith school while simultaneously respecting the right to religious freedom of all students.

2.6 The Catholic Dialogue School

Boeve’s seminal texts, ‘present a new way of profiling Catholic education as a project of identity formation in a context of difference and plurality’ (2017, p. 56). The concept of the Catholic dialogue school emerges, in which, ‘rather than choosing between either catholic identity, or openness to otherness, the dialogue with the other stirs the (re)discovery of one’s own identity, and opens up the room to introduce once again the Christian voice within the conversation’ (2019, p. 37). As opposed to being polar opposites, ‘Identity and difference go hand in hand’ (2019, p. 40). Encountering and engaging with difference is in fact conducive to identity formation,

the presence of the (non-)religious other can contribute to this project of identity formation. People with different world views might challenge our views and urge us to account for them, both for ourselves as well as to others. We can learn a lot about who we are when confronted with who we are not. (2019, p. 40-41)

While all are, ‘invited and welcomed, whatever religion or philosophical view they adhere to’, they must, ‘engage in the pedagogical project of the catholic dialogue school’ (2019, p. 38). It is imperative that this is not only an assignment for the Christians at school, but also - and in the same way - engages those of different faiths to support this project. The latter are challenged, when engaging in dialogue, ‘to find sufficient resources within their own traditions and convictions, to contribute to the mutual learning process of the dialogue at school’ (2019, p. 48). This requires, ‘an attitude of availability and vulnerability, of openness to something more, to something other; an attitude of letting oneself be touched by the other, asking oneself questions about one’s own ideas and actions, etc.’ (2019, p. 47). While the Catholic dialogue school is a compelling model, its realisation is by no means easy as, ‘it should offer all present at school a very particular lens through which to look at what it is to live (together) in the current context, and it should do so in a both contemporary and challenging way’ (2019, p. 45). Its mission is all the more relevant and pressing, ‘in a time in which the Christian narrative and practices are no longer self-evident’ (2019, p. 45).

In the ‘Declaration of commitment to catholic education’ (2019) produced by Catholic Education Flanders, a clear and eloquent vision for the Catholic dialogue school is put forward, ‘Proceeding from the tradition to which the school belongs and in dialogue with its environment, the catholic dialogue school intends to be a training ground for living (together) in a world that is characterized by diversity and difference’ (p. 2). In this vibrant community, ‘critically-creatively learning to get along with what is familiar and what is different, with what unites and what distinguishes, enables people to contribute to an open, meaningful, tolerant and enduring society, where everyone has a place’ (p. 2).

In the post-Christian, post-secular world, ‘the catholic dialogue school invites everybody to go into dialogue with each other in search of the full meaning of being human’ (2019, p. 2). This does not lead to the blurring of the school’s confessional identity,

‘Instructed by its own mission, the school itself, in words and praxis, brings the Christian voice into this conversation in a contemporary and challenging way’ (2019, p. 2). It is essential to create space for and welcome all faiths and beliefs into the conversation. This dialogical approach requires the necessary attitudes and skills to engage with outside beliefs and world views, consequently fostering the ability, ‘to question, listen, reflect, reason, explain, speculate and explore ideas; to analyse problems, form hypotheses and develop solutions; to discuss argue, examine evidence, defend, probe, and assess arguments’ (Alexander, 2006, p. 5). Church documents affirm this concept and describe schools as, ‘privileged places for intercultural dialogue’ (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013, par. 4).

This approach requires a whole-hearted acceptance of difference, openness to discussion and deep respect for both faith and reason, ‘It ‘maximises pupils’ input, with the teacher acting as prompter, chair, interviewer and questioner, as well as providing information’ (Jackson, 2014, p. 123). Bertram-Troost’s (2011) research supports this view, ‘pupils of the school with the highest degree of religious diversity are also the pupils who are very tolerant and to attach importance to dialogue’ (p. 273). Whereas Álvarez et al (2011) observed that, ‘Students believed that learning about different religions helped them to learn about their own religion’ (p. 150). Ipgrave (2004) found it has impressive benefits ranging from raising pupils’ self-esteem, providing opportunities for developing critical thinking skills, enabling all learners to express themselves, and to creating a climate of moral seriousness. Dialogue, therefore, has the potential to, ‘contribute significantly to the formation of rational and mature citizens of democratic society’ (CSP, 2015, p. 20). In the modern age of religious apathy, it is heartening to learn that, ‘direct experience of religious plurality motivated children to explore religious issues. Moreover, it was notable that children

did not move towards a relativist stance, thinking that all religions were equally true (or false)’ (Jackson, 2014, p. 42).

However, the Catholic Schools Partnership cautions against the inclination to cultural relativism, ‘which suggests that all cultures and traditions are essentially the same and often seeks to quarantine related practices within a purely private sphere of life’ (2015, p. 20). Although, ‘the relativistic model is founded on the value of tolerance, it limits itself to accepting the other person, excluding the possibility of dialogue and recognition of each other in mutual transformation’ (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013, p. 20-21). Authentic inter-faith and multiple world view dialogue builds relationships with individuals and communities. In fact, it is the opposite of relativism, ‘It seeks common ethical values- the foundations of justice and peace. The aim of this dialogue is not to abandon one’s own faith and practices but to rediscover them in a deeper way through encounter with the other’ (CSP, 2015, p. 21).

2.7 Religious Education: A Pedagogy of Dialogue & Fostering Faith Development for All

As previously stated, religious education should not be mistaken for catechesis. Kieran (2008) reiterates that RE in a Catholic school involves acquiring knowledge and understanding of the beliefs and practices of world faiths, although the focus is on Catholicism. There is a well-established rationale for this broad curriculum, ‘The birth of the great religions and their visions of humanity and the world must be studied... in the context of a sociological, cultural and historical analysis which gives pupils a better understanding of the concept of religious faith’ (2008, p. 3). All students stand to benefit from RE, irrespective of their personal beliefs or world view, ‘Spirituality and a sense of the sacred have accompanied the human adventure since the dawn of time... It is easier for us to open up to others, to talk to them when we understand them. (Kieran, 2008, p. 3) However, Jackson

(2014) cautions that gaining a surface understanding of other faiths is not the learning intention. Teaching students about the basics about the history and main tenets of world religions will not suffice, 'It is also necessary to attempt to understand the meaning of religious language as used by religious believers, including expressions of their beliefs, values and emotions (p. 21).

Kieran (2008) raises the pertinent question about how Catholic schools in the current climate can simultaneously fulfil their functions as centres for evangelization, catechesis and Religious Education. Of vital importance is how secure the school is in its own Catholic identity. Kieran states that, ideally, a school should be, 'confident and securely rooted in the Catholic faith so that they are able to engage in respectful, generous and open dialogue with members of other faiths' (p. 10). Ethos is a lived example as opposed to an abstract concept taught in RE, 'Religious Education is just one manifestation of the ethos and mission of a Catholic school' (p. 11). Equally, restricting inter-faith dialogue to RE is counterproductive. Cross-curricular links should be established across subject areas, 'Rather than administering a once-off injection on inter-religious education during RE class it is more effective and important to teach all topics in a manner that celebrates and respects diversity' (p. 11).

Some evidence suggests the marginalisation of students belonging to the minority faith or world view (Kieran, 2008). Lodge (2004) contends that, 'those whose beliefs are different are rendered invisible and subordinate' (p. 32) in Irish Catholic schools. The onus is on the school to work towards becoming more inclusive, 'There is an intimate inter-dependence between different religious traditions so that when one religion is diminished all religions are diminished' (Kieran, 2008, p. 12).

Álvarez et al (2011) found that students, 'are not used to sharing their personal religious experiences with their classmates and do not seem comfortable with that kind of

approach' (p. 155). This comes as no great surprise as, even with the best of intentions of teachers, students of the non-dominant faith in the school may be put in the unfortunate position of having to talk for all 1.8 billion of the world's Muslims, 'Children in our schools live between cultures and cannot be asked to represent all other members of their cultural group' (Hegarty & Titley, 2013, p. 6). In situations where other faith traditions are discussed in no great depth, there is a danger of tokenism creeping in and, 'When working on issues of identity all this multistoried complexity needs to be honoured' (Hegarty & Titley, 2013, p. 6).

2.8 The Benefit of Engaging with Student Voice

There is a growing body of research indicating the value of engaging with student voice. Mitra (2004) asserts that much can be learnt from students and it is only by linking in with young people to discuss issues and possible solutions that their, 'unique knowledge and perspectives about their schools that adults cannot fully replicate' (p. 652-3) come to the fore. Mitra's research has shown how this process, 'helped to re-engage alienated students by providing them with a stronger sense of ownership in their schools' (p. 653). While it may not always be possible to fully accommodate all students' requests, they greatly appreciated being given a platform,

Students highly valued having their voices heard and 'honored.' Student voice opportunities helped young people to gain a stronger sense of their own abilities, and built student awareness that they can make changes in their schools, not only for themselves but also for others. (p. 653)

Utilizing student voice helps to counteract the inherent complexities of research in the field of religious diversity. Bertram-Troost (2011) points out that,

when measuring non-cognitive school outcomes, it is important to realise that the variance accounted for by school is normally between 10% and 15%. It is realistic to

imagine that the overall effect of school on how young pupils learn to live in a diverse society is even smaller. (p. 278)

Nonetheless, all progress in the area of religious inclusion, no matter how small and hard-won, is precious. Bertram-Troost (2011) describes the further difficulty in measuring specific outcomes, 'Especially as it is very difficult objectively to separate the influence of the school from other factors of influence it is instructive to learn from the pupils themselves what they think about the impact of religious diversity in school' (p. 280). It comes as no great surprise that the most useful and relevant information comes from those at the coalface of religious inclusion, and indeed marginalisation, in schools; the students. Amplifying their voices allows the researcher to get closer to the truth of the matter. As Jackson (2014) asserts, 'Young people are experts in their own lives, their lived experiences and agency should be valued and respected' (p. 82).

2.9 Facilitating Religious Diversity in the Classroom

Ipgrave (2004) recommends establishing simple yet effective rules of engagement to facilitate inclusive discussion about religion. Ground rules established through student-teacher collaboration and based on democratic principles should be embedded in school life, such as the using of appropriate language, one voice at a time, having respect for different beliefs, supporting views with reasons, giving everyone the opportunity to express their opinion and challenging ideas, not the people who hold them (Ipgrave, 2004). The teacher, as facilitator of the discussion, must take on board these principles themselves and be prepared for a student to be more informed than her on a topic. This, 'make(s) room for the pupils' own experiences and perspectives on those traditions, even when they challenge the teacher's own' (2004, p. 116). Jackson argues that once the rules of engagement are in place, 'in a safe classroom space, students are able to express their views and positions openly, even if these differ from those of the teacher or peers' (2014, p. 48). Jackson (2014) concedes that there

will always be an element of risk in any situation, although this can be managed through good practice, ‘Providing opportunities for student dialogue and exchange inevitably holds some element of risk, which can be minimised through suitable preparation and training’ (p. 56). Similarly, Byrne (2014) describes how effective Religious Education, ‘creates a safe space to test one’s own identity and reflect with others in a respectful manner on the search for meaning and values’ where, ‘the emphasis is on becoming a critical questioner and reflective searcher’ (par. 9). Students acquire, ‘the ability to express the big questions in words, story, art, song, ritual and prayer... developing their knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes... encouraging them to become actors in the world, particularly in support of those in most need’ (2014, par. 12). Young people are empowered to become more informed, empathetic and proactive citizens over the course of the RE programme.

2.10 Challenges to Inclusion in Catholic Schools

There are various, sometimes unexpected barriers to religious inclusion in Catholic secondary schools. The following section will address some of these challenges.

2.10.1 Addressing Parental Concerns

The parents of students of different beliefs may have concerns regarding their children receiving a Catholic education and issues may arise around admissions, curricula and faith formation. It is best for the school to pre-empt the concerns of parents of prospective students with different faiths and beliefs (Mullally, 2019). In school communications of all forms, including Admissions Policy, website and Open Night presentation, there should be a clear declaration of the school’s Catholic identity. Furthermore, ‘Applicant parents should understand that the characteristic spirit or ethos underpinning the school permeates the whole school day and not just during religious education classes’ (CSP, 2015, p. 23). It has been found that, ‘Many of the issues around inclusion and diversity [are] best addressed at a pre-enrolment meeting’ (CSP, 2015, p. 23) which provides parents with assuring clarity.

Curriculum content may be problematic, for example if a parent wishes for their child to abstain from music or dance and this clashes with the teacher's personal stance. The teacher may find themselves, 'torn between their belief in the inclusion of the child in the full curriculum and respecting the wishes of individual parents.' In such cases, 'Dialogue between parents and teachers is the only way forward' (Hegarty & Titley, 2013, p. 8). As always, anticipating the occurrence of these issues is the ideal as teachers can consider the 'implications for classroom planning, for example, whether physical contact between children might be deemed inappropriate in Drama or PE [or] whether producing representations of the human body or religious symbols may be inappropriate in Visual Arts' (Tormey, 2005, p. 35).

2.10.2 Uniform Policy

A further area for discussion is the school Uniform Policy. Religious apparel and symbols such as Christian crosses, male Sikh turbans and beards, Jewish yarmulkes and Muslim headscarves, 'are visible and public manifestation[s] of religious difference' (Kieran, 2008, p. 1) which must be permitted in school. Students may find the religious crests on uniforms objectionable and in such situations open dialogue is required.

Enright (2011) describes the case of Shekinah Egan which illustrates some of the issues encountered by young people and their families in Irish schools. In 2008, Shekinah's principal contacted the Department of Education seeking guidance on the wearing of the hijab in schools. The Department abdicated responsibility for the matter by telling the principal to come up with a solution in-house. The government's silence initiated 'a process by which second generation citizens could be made to answer for their difference... and to negotiate the conditions of their acceptance within the education system' (Enright, 2011, p. 475). This family of a minority faith tradition were effectively frozen out of normal social and political discourse, 'Its advocates are invisibilized and confined to minor deliberations at

the margins of the public sphere’ (p. 476). While, ‘Shekinah herself insisted on her Irishness and on the compatibility of her dress with her Irish identity’ (p. 483), the political elite of the time were unable to reconcile the two and grant this Muslim practice recognition. Ireland’s cultural memory is exposed as ironically short, ‘it’s not so long since Irish women wear headscarves to church’ (p. 470).

2.10.3 Dietary Requirements

Another relevant but often-overlooked consideration is food. However, ‘for those following a religious diet, ensuring they do so correctly can be an essential aspect of their identity and way of life’ (Twiner et al, 2009, p. 476). Presently, schools are offering a halal option where they provide school lunches and there is sufficient demand, whereas others are leaving religious minority group members to bring in their own lunch (Smyth & Darmody, 2010). There is widespread ignorance regarding the complexities of religious diets, for example Muslims may not consume any food which has come into contact with haram or forbidden food,

This lack of dialogue about what is provided and what is required is presumably one factor in a double-edged perception that there is a low demand for such a diet in school meals and a feeling that such diets are not catered for. (Twiner et al, 2009, p. 476)

Unlike other issues which would benefit from a national policy, ‘The variations we encountered reflecting local diversity suggest in turn that any blanket national policy is unlikely to be acceptable to all’ (Twiner et al, 2009, p. 485). A more nuanced approach is warranted here given the regional variation in practice.

2.10.4 Opting out of Religion Education

The system for opting out of RE is an imperfect one in many schools, given ‘the lack of accessible and transparent policies and procedures dealing with opt-outs’ (Mawhinney et al, 2010, p. 60). In 2010 an influential study led by Mawhinney was carried out in Queens University, Belfast on the opinions of students regarding their right to opt out of religious education. The report found that, ‘The majority of parents reported that schools did not inform them of this right’ and, ‘Many respondents acknowledged that they knew little of the RE curriculum taught in their children’s schools’ (p. 62). In situations where little to no effort is made to acknowledge the minority beliefs of learners, pupils face marginalization. The right to opt out should not be conflated with a genuine respect for religious difference, ‘The existence of this right... did not necessarily lead them to feel that their religion or beliefs were acknowledged and respected in the school’ (2010, p. 4). Opting out functions, ‘not so much [as] a protection mechanism for minority belief individuals but an ‘exclusion clause’ (2010, p. 6). Mawhinney argues that pupils come to the painful conclusion that their belief system is not valued, ‘The lack of attention given to their beliefs in the RE curriculum caused them to feel that these beliefs were not valued or respected by the school, nor indeed more widely by the education system’ (2010, p. 55). The vast majority of Mawhinney’s study participants, ‘expressed a desire for an approach to RE that is more broadly-based rather than narrowly focused on Christianity, non-doctrinal, non-confessional, open and inclusive in tone and style and committed to the development of critical thought’ (2010, p. 62-63).

In the Republic of Ireland context, the JMB Guidelines emphasise the importance of communication in allaying parental concerns regarding the content of RE classes and ensuring that any decision to opt out is an informed and considered one, ‘It is worth discussing with parents... that the syllabi have changed in their approach and they focus on dialogue and learning from one another’s beliefs’ (Mullally, 2019, p. 16).

2.10.5 A Lack of Representation

Parker-Jenkins and Masterson (2013) critically examine how representative Irish schools are, ‘...whose culture is being transmitted and where is there scope for having a balanced offering, which includes the history and religion of others, and which celebrates the achievement of diverse cultures?’ (p.11). Kieran (2008) asserts that within the manifestly Catholic community, students of all faiths and world views must feel seen and heard, ‘The religious other is not invisible in a Catholic school precisely because it is a Catholic, inclusive school’ (p. 10). Merely tolerating the presence of the (non)religious other will not suffice, ‘A passive or silent tolerance of children from other faiths which never engages in consultative and supportive discussion with the child, their parents or guardians cannot be counted as inclusive’ (Kieran, 2008, p. 10).

These changes to past practice in schools do not sit easy with some parties. There is a somewhat understandable fear of diluting the ethos and losing sight of the Catholic mission. Studying the literature on this subject shows these fears to be unfounded, the opposite can in fact be true. More to the point, it is only through the re-imagining of Catholic schools in light of a more modern model, that they can carve out a future for themselves, ‘Paradoxically a tradition stays alive not by staying the same, but by growing and developing with each new generation’ (Heylin, 2007).

2.11 Conclusion

As seen in the course of the literature review, this is multifaceted and complex field. While legislation and government and school policies promoting inclusion are welcome and necessary, generic solutions will not prove effective for schools across all areas.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design for this study and why a quantitative design was chosen. It goes on to explain the justification for the case study format. The ethical considerations and controls are also discussed along with the approach to data analysis. The chapter concludes by considering the reliability and validity of the study as well as its limitations.

3.1 Research Paradigm

It is important to recognise the various influences on a research design and how they impact the study. There are a number of world views to which a researcher may subscribe and how they design, execute and analyse their research is affected by their philosophical leanings. Positivism is concerned with identifying the laws that govern society in much the same way as the natural world is governed by the laws of science. Positivist researchers use these observable laws to explain and predict human behaviour. Maykut and Morehouse (2002) write, 'Positivism has come to mean objective inquiry based on measurable variables and provable propositions... It is the insistence on explanation, prediction and proof that are the hallmarks of positivism' (p. 4). Quantitative methods are often employed by positivists to distance themselves from the study and increase research validity and reliability. Interpretivists are acutely aware of their inherent biases as researchers and therefore draw heavily on the theories and perspectives of their participants to describe social phenomena. As such, interpretivist research usually incorporates qualitative data. Critical theory researchers believe the purpose of research is to affect change by using its subversive power to challenge the status quo. Pragmatists seek to discover practical, innovative solutions to the problems explored within their research (Creswell, 2014).

A post-positivist research paradigm has been chosen for this study. The study aims to uncover the existing reality of students' experiences of religious inclusion in school through the objective collection and interpretation of quantitative data. However, the researcher accepts, 'that we cannot observe the world we are part of as totally objective and disinterested outsiders' (Muijs, 2004, p. 5) and our experience shapes our interpretation of reality. Muijs (2004) states that, 'Rather than focusing on certainty and absolute truth..., the post-positivist will try and represent reality as best she can' (p. 5). According to Creswell, post-positivist, 'research seeks to develop relevant, true statements, ones that can serve to explain the situation of concern or that describe the causal relationships of interest' (2014, p. 37).

3.2 Research Context

The case study is set in a large, urban mixed post-primary school with a diverse student body. Efforts are ongoing to both promote and preserve the strong Catholic ethos whilst also ensuring that those who do not identify with the Catholic faith feel that their beliefs are welcome and celebrated. This research aims to discover just how successful these efforts are.

3.3 Research Design

Creswell (2014) states, 'Quantitative research is about explaining phenomena by collecting quantitative data which are analysed using mathematically based methods' (p. 11). Whereas, 'a qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting' (p. 15). Although researchers are sometimes pigeonholed into 'quant' or 'qual' categories, this is a false dichotomy with most recognising that both approaches have their advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, researchers select the methodology which will collect data that best answer their research question(s);

Many researchers take a pragmatic approach to research and use quantitative methods when they are looking for breadth, want to test a hypothesis or want to study something quantitative. If they are looking for depth and meaning, they will prefer to use qualitative methods'. (Muijs, 2004, p. 10)

Mixed methods, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, are often used in research to allow for the triangulation of data, 'Mixed methods research provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research' (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2006, p. 12).

A quantitative methodology was chosen as the best tool for discovering and recording knowledge in this particular case study which sought to, 'explain phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods (in particular statistics)' (Aliaga & Gunderson 2002, p. 14). A descriptive study design in the form of a self-administered questionnaire was used. Survey research allows for large scale, anonymous responses to be collected in a time and cost-efficient manner. The questionnaire was created using Google Forms, a free app available to Google Mail users. It was designed through the theoretical lens of the Catholic Dialogue School and informed by the JMB Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Different Beliefs in Catholic Secondary Schools (Mullally, 2019). Many relevant questions around the themes arising from the literature review were put together into three distinct sections. A combination of closed and open-ended questions was employed to elicit strong empirical data as well as more nuanced opinions. The Likert Scale was also widely used, proving to be, 'particularly effective because the ratings can be manipulated using measures of central tendency to reveal a general attitude or belief about a topic' (Flick, 2011, p. 18). The questions were worded in simple, clear and neutral language for clarity and objectivity. While overly long surveys are not generally recommended (Muijs ,

2004), the survey contained 33 questions as this was to be the only research instrument used and as such had to generate sufficient data.

Two students aged 14 and 17 were recruited to do a pilot questionnaire. A potential danger of questionnaires is the fact that, 'Their questions can be misunderstood and there is no way to clarify a question or response, so there is only one chance to get it right' (Flick, 2011, p. 15-16). The trialling of the pilot study with students at both the junior and senior ends of the school sought to protect against this risk. The older student reported having no difficulties completing the pilot study, whereas the younger student understood all the questions but felt unsure of how some of the questions applied to them. Given this student belongs to the dominant faith in the school, it was to be expected that certain questions, such as those around religious dress and diet, would seem separate to their experience. The Likert Scale questions allowed for a 'don't know'/'not sure' option, 'provid[ing] some freedom of response for certain questions that a participant may not have had experience with' (Flick, 2011, p. 19). The survey questions were deemed to be age appropriate and accessible for the sample of students aged twelve to nineteen.

3.4 Research Methodology

A case study methodology was chosen for this research. Case studies focus on a particular area, organisation or group of individuals and allow for the in-depth description, analysis and discussion of their subject generating rich data about participants' lived experiences within the research context (Creswell, 2014). Yin (1984) describes the case study as, 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (p. 23). Yin (1984) and Freebody (2003) classify case studies as descriptive, exploratory and explanatory. Descriptive case studies set out to describe the phenomena as they occur within the data may take a narrative form. Exploratory case studies

aim to explore any phenomenon in the data which are of interest to the researcher.

Explanatory case studies seek to explain the phenomena in the data through the close examination of it. A researcher may form and test a theory on the basis of the data (Yin, 1984). A descriptive case study was considered the most appropriate for this research. A single, rather than multiple-case design was chosen in order to focus on depth of understanding within a particular school context. A descriptive case study format was deemed to be the best option for fulfilling the research purpose and exploring the research questions.

A questionnaire was the quantitative tool used to gather data about the students' experiences of religious inclusion in their school. While a quantitative instrument may not at first appear to be a natural choice for gauging their individual experiences of inclusion, it was possible to tailor the questionnaire to serve this purpose, 'We do this by designing research instruments aimed specifically at converting phenomena that don't naturally exist in quantitative form into quantitative data, which we can analyze statistically' (Sukamolson, 2007, p. 3).

Questionnaires are a flexible, efficient means of gathering a large amount of information from a large sample in a timely fashion (Denscombe, 2014, Sukamolson, 2007). Additional advantages include their low cost (Sukamolson, 2007) and the ability, 'to collect precise data from a large sample of people who can remain anonymous' (Flick, 2011, p. 15-16). By including comment boxes with some questions, the questionnaire allowed for the collection of both factual data and opinions (Greig, Taylor & MacKay, 2007). A further advantage of questionnaires is the reduction of the potential influence a researcher may (inadvertently) exert in a face-to-face interview (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). However, Denscombe (2014) argues that questionnaires may lack sufficient detail and depth. In contrast, Sukamolson (2007) contends that, 'a well-designed quantitative study will allow us not just to look at what happens, but to provide an explanation of why it happens as well. The

key lies in your research design and what variables you can collect' (p. 17). With this in mind, comment boxes for elaboration were included with key questions in the survey.

Additionally, Robson (2011) maintains that participants often respond out of, 'politeness, boredom [or] a desire to be seen in a good light' (p. 239). In order to counteract this potential pitfall, a colleague was enlisted to process the consent forms to ensure the total anonymity of participants.

3.5 Sample Selection

Sampling, 'taking a small group of people from a larger population to represent that population' (Flick, 2011, p. 8) is a key consideration in quantitative research. There are different types of sampling such as convenience, purposeful, stratified and random.

According to Cohen et al (2007), a convenience sample uses a sample of people or materials that were convenient and most available to the researcher. There is, therefore, no guarantee about how representative the sample will be. Purposeful sampling occurs when people or materials that meet particular criteria are selected. A stratified sample is a combination of a purposeful sample and a random sample, used when the researcher targets particular variables in their study when selecting from a random population. A random sample is, 'based on a formula so that any member of a given population has an equal chance of being selected for the sample' (Flick, 2011, p. 8). Given that the researcher only had access to their own students, a convenience sample consisting of their 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th Year class groups was chosen.

3.6 Reliability and Validity

Reliability, 'refers to the extent to which test scores are free of measurement error' (Muijs, 2004, p. 71). In other words, if the study was replicated with the same sample, would the data produced be consistent? Another integral aspect of research design is the validity of the study; are we accurately measuring what we set out to? (Muijs, 2004). Measures have been

taken to meet the depth and breadth required for content validity within the instrumental constraints of the research by having a large amount of both open and closed questions. In terms of construct validity, the questions were cross-checked for fairness by the research supervisor and a pilot study was carried out. As each participant received the same questionnaire, they all had equal opportunity to respond (Cohen et al, 2007).

Silverman (2005) argues for the comparatively higher reliability and validity of quantitative over qualitative research. Conversely, online questionnaires have been criticised, ‘because they are anonymous, there can be problems with reliability and validity if the person taking the survey doesn’t take it seriously and doesn’t answer honestly’ (Flick, 2011, p. 15-16).

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Various ethical issues were considered in carrying out the case study. The utmost care must be given to ethical issues as any lapse completely undermines the integrity of the study. Indeed, as Mauthner et al (2012) declare, if our research is not ethically robust, ‘Not only will our peers doubt the value of our work, we will be letting others down who we made a pact with- our participants who ‘gifted’ their words to us, and the readers of our findings’ (p. 181). The most pressing ethical issue of this research project was the fact that the participants were students as special attention is needed when minors are involved,

There are specific issues arising from children’s and young people’s legal status, their knowledge and experience of the world, their differing levels of cognition and their relative lack of independence and autonomy, all of which require particular attention in order to ensure appropriate and ethical research practice. (DCYA, 2012, p. 1)

The British Educational Research Association (BERA) Guidelines for Educational Research (2018) provided the ethical framework for this research. As the participants were minors and,

furthermore, students of the researcher, it was of paramount importance to uphold the researcher's ethical responsibilities to them. Cohen asserts that, 'children... cannot be regarded as being on equal terms with the researcher and it is important to keep this in mind at all stages in the research process, including the point where informed consent is sought' (2007, p. 53).

In order to avoid the ethical implications of working with my own students, I had intended to recruit participants from classes I do not teach. However, given the school closures as a result of the COVID-19 global pandemic, I was limited in terms of the class groups I had access to and using my own students as the sample was the only viable option. This heightened the inherent power imbalance between teacher and student (Morrow & Richards, 1996). Students must not participate due to a desire to please nor fear of negative repercussions if they refuse. To mitigate these risks, I asked a colleague to act as an intermediary and take receipt of the parental consent/student consent forms and send out the questionnaire link to the participants. I sent out the initial information and paperwork to my students explicitly stating that I would not know whether or not they went on to take part in the study as the questionnaire would be anonymous. The use of a third party helped to safeguard against any inducements, pressure or coercion on potential participants (MacLean & Poole, 2010). Nevertheless, 'As a guiding principle... while it is desirable to lessen the power differential between children and adult researchers, the difference will remain and its elimination may be ethically inadvisable' (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 53-54).

For student consent and parental consent to be valid, it must be informed (Shaw et al, 2011). The purpose and aims of the study were clearly explained in the plain language statement to ensure transparency. The invitational nature of the study and participants' right to withdraw from it at any stage prior to its publication was communicated to them in the consent form, 'Subjects should have the option to refuse to take part and know this, and the

right to terminate their involvement at any time and know this also' (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 76). It was not envisaged that any harm could potentially arise from students' participation in the research. The digital data pertaining to this study is being safely stored in a password protected file on a secure laptop before its deletion on the 1st of September 2020 when thesis results are finalised.

The research proposal received the ethical clearance of MERC (Marino Ethics in Research Committee). Additionally, permission to conduct the research in the school was needed from the Principal and Board of Management. A written submission (Appendix A) was made to and passed by the Board. Subsequently, approval was sought and received from MERC (Appendix B) and the principal for the change in the research design due to the pandemic and lockdown measures.

While the study has been anonymised, the case study school is potentially identifiable given I am carrying out the research in my own school. This poses a potential conflict of interests. While it is my duty as a researcher to give an accurate representation of whatever data I unearth, negative findings could be damaging to the school's reputation, 'Possible controversial findings need to be anticipated and, where they ensue, handled with great sensitivity' (Cohen et al, 2007, p. 76). Celebrating the positives, identifying good practice and offering only constructive criticism by way of recommendations will serve to mitigate this risk. However, it is necessary that this approach stops short at whitewashing the findings, 'In quantitative research, the data analysis should reflect the statistical tests and not be underreported' (Creswell, 2014, p. 138).

The utmost care has been given to these ethical issues to maintain the soundness of the study. As Creswell (2014) emphasises, 'Researchers need to protect their research participants; develop a trust with them; promote the integrity of research; guard against

misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their organizations or institutions; and cope with new, challenging problems’ (p. 132).

3.8 Research Positionality

Educational researchers bring with them their own experiences and biases. I identify as a settled, heterosexual, white, Catholic ciswoman and as such recognise the inherent privilege of my position in the dominant culture of Ireland (Tracy, 2000). This is an important consideration to bear in mind because, as much as one strives for objectivity, all aspects of the research process are subtly influenced by positionality. As Denzin (1989) asserts, the interpretation of data, ‘begins and ends with the biography and self of the researcher’ (p. 12).

I teach Religious Education in the case study school and endeavour to make my classroom a welcoming and inclusive space for all. Therefore, I am cognizant of my potential bias in relation to the research subject matter. However, the use of quantitative information will help to alleviate some element of research bias. Attention was also given to reflexivity, especially in the interpretation of the qualitative aspects. Researchers make active choices and how they see and read the data is influenced by their views, experiences and values. Reflecting on the assumptions which underpin their data is an ongoing task. Thematic Analysis was employed knowingly and reflexively in the knowledge that themes don’t passively emerge, rather they are actively generated by the researcher (Braun et al, 2006).

3.9 Research Procedures

From the outset, this study was intended to be mixed methods, consisting of a student questionnaire followed by student focus group interviews. Following discussions with my research supervisor, the research proposal was sent to MERC in November 2019. Once ethical clearance was granted, a written submission was made to the school’s Board of Management in January 2020. Permission to conduct research within the school was granted.

Following the school closure due to COVID-19, it became clear that the qualitative research in the form of focus groups contained in the proposal was no longer feasible and a letter regarding the change to the proposed research methodology was submitted to MERC and to the Principal. On the 14th of May the information about the study was distributed online to students (Appendix C & D). Students and their parents or guardians signed a piece of paper and submitted a photograph of the document via email. During the week of the 18th of May, the link to the electronic questionnaire (Appendix F) was sent out to individuals who had returned completed consent forms (Appendix E). For ethical integrity, a colleague was enlisted to take receipt of the digital consent forms and to forward consenting participants the survey link. The questionnaire remained open for 10 days and yielded 115 responses. Six of the researcher's 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th Year classes were surveyed. Due to the exceptional circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher's 6th Year and TY groups were no longer engaged in online learning when the questionnaire was circulated and were therefore unavailable for participation in the study. The school has a total enrolment of 740 students meaning the sample consisted of 15% of its students. This is a good figure as Creswell argues that, 'even a small return rate may not be biased and may be acceptable in research' (2014, p. 390).

3.10 Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analysed statistically. Thematic Analysis was used to explore the qualitative material garnered from the open questions (see Appendix G for TA sample).

During the data analysis process, the researcher identified emergent themes relating the case study school which also correspond with the Catholic Dialogue School model as described in the Literature Review which informed the questionnaire. These three themes are:

A) Recognition of different beliefs and the inclusion of all

B) Dialogue which fosters respect, learning and faith development

C) Strong Catholic identity of the school community

The quantitative research tool allowed for the statistical analysis of data. Google Forms has a high level of functionality for data compilation and analysis. Initially, the raw data harvested by the questionnaire was manipulated into aggregate data to produce collective results and support arguments about students' experience of the inclusion of different religions and beliefs. Subsequently, some inferential data was garnered whereby the researcher drew inferences and showed relationships between variables. Finally, 'the researcher then revisits the literature and makes a comparison between the results with the existing findings in the literature. In this model, the quantitative researcher uses the literature deductively as a framework for the research questions or hypotheses' (Creswell, 2014, p. 62).

Braun et al's (2006) Thematic Analysis approach was used for interpreting the qualitative data of the open questions in the survey. This six-step process has, 'recently been recognised as a method in its own right' (Joffe, 2011, p. 210). Braun et al describe it as, 'a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data in (rich) detail. However, frequently it goes further than this and interprets various aspects of the research topic' (p. 79). This data analysis technique offered a flexible way of capturing students' experiences of inclusion of their beliefs and an interpretation grounded in the reality of their lives. Initially, the data was read critically and reflectively. Over time, codes were generated and then developed into themes. Upon further reflection, these themes were refined and then defined. In the final stage of this approach to analysis, compelling examples were selected for each theme and they were related to the literature. The presence of both quantitative and qualitative elements in the questionnaire allowed for a more relevant and richer story to be crafted from the data.

3.11 Limitations

Given that it is an individual case study, this research is limited to one secondary school context. Whereas the findings of quantitative research are usually generalizable, the case study deals specifically with this school's unique context and therefore its findings may not hold when scaled up.

The original research design consisted of an initial questionnaire followed by two student focus groups to further probe the issues raised in the first stage. This mixed method research would have allowed for the triangulation of data and may have gathered richer data than the questionnaire alone. However, due to the restrictions imposed by COVID-19, only questionnaires were possible. Questionnaires have been criticised for lacking depth and merely providing a surface level snapshot of the issue at hand. As Sukamolson (2007) states, 'When we want to explore a problem or concept in depth, quantitative methods are too shallow. To get really under the skin of a phenomenon, we need to go for qualitative techniques' (p. 10).

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter set out the research paradigm of this study, its design and methodology. Important issues such as reliability, validity and ethics in research have been discussed. The research procedures and analysis process have been presented. The approach to the quantitative data analysis was simplified by Google Forms which generates statistics for the different responses to each answer allowing the numbers to speak for themselves. The data were then analysed in the context of the literature. Thematic Analysis was used to interpret the data created from the open questions. This section concluded with an account of the case study's limitations.

Chapter 4: Presentation and Analysis of Findings

This chapter presents and interprets the main findings that emerged from the data collected through the questionnaires for this research project. As outlined in Chapter 3, questionnaires were sent out to 279 students in one Catholic school and a total of 115 responses were collected. In particular, this chapter will highlight those data which best answer the research question, ‘What are the student experiences of the inclusion of their religious faith or belief system within an Irish Catholic secondary school?’

Six themes were generated during the data analysis process. A combination of statistical data and qualitative material (open questions) garnered from the questionnaire will be used to show relationships and contradictions between the data set and the literature review material. The six themes and four sub-themes are:

Theme 1 - Recognition of different beliefs and the inclusion of all

Sub-theme - Perceptions of an inclusion continuum

Sub-theme - Perceptions of school as a safe place

Sub-theme - Challenges to the inclusion of students of different beliefs in a Catholic school context

Theme 2 - The role of dialogue in fostering respect, learning & faith development

Sub-theme - Attitudes towards inter-belief dialogue

Theme 3 - Recognition of the Catholic identity of the school

Theme 4 - Apathy towards religion and belief

Sub-theme - Atheism: Lack of recognition of the ‘nones’

Theme 5 - Perceived expectations of religious conformity

Sub-theme - Students' respect for the school's faith tradition

Theme 6 - Experiences of religious prejudice and stereotyping

Each of the six themes which emerged are explored individually in the sections of this chapter. Student voices will be represented by the labels S1 - S115.

4.1 Demographic of Research Participants

Initially, demographic information about participants, such as their gender, age and religion or belief, was gathered.

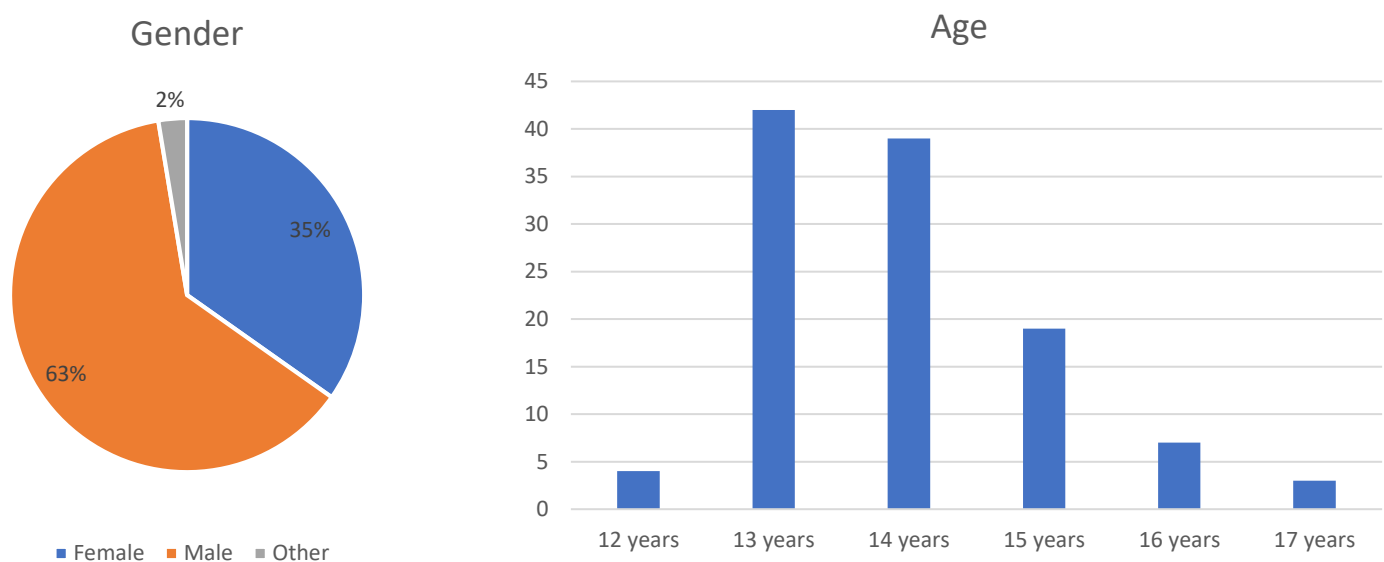


Figure 1 Participants' genders and ages

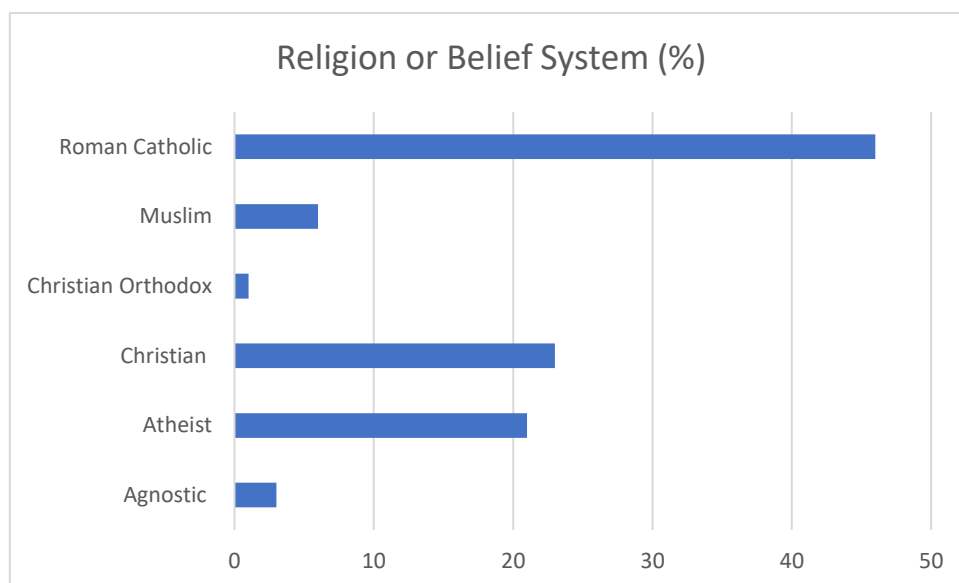


Figure 2 Participants' religions or belief systems

Figures 1 and 2 show the age, gender and religion or belief system of the students who responded to the survey. 63% of participants identified as male and 35% gave their gender as female. In the overall school enrolment, 61% of students are listed as male and 39% as female. The data set's gender breakdown is broadly representative of that of the school as a whole.

The school is shown to be a largely homogenous environment with the majority identifying themselves as Irish Catholics. 69% gave their nationality as Irish with that figure rising to 89% when those holding joint Irish nationality were included. 46% stated they were Roman Catholics, 23% were Christian, 21% were Atheists, 3% were Agnostic and 1% were Orthodox Christian. 6% identified as Muslim. The numbers identifying as Christian as opposed to Roman Catholic appear somewhat high but may be partly down to students selecting 'Christian' first from the alphabetical list. It is noticeable how students use Catholic and Christian interchangeably throughout the questionnaire. According to school records, eight different Christian faith denominations are represented in the school population.

6. How strongly are you attached to your religion or belief system?

115 responses

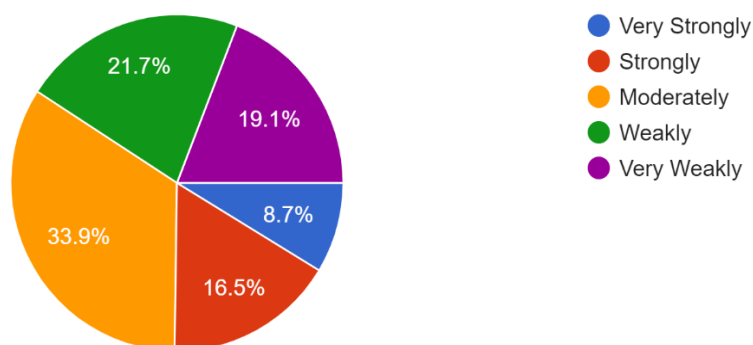


Figure 3 Participants' attachments to their religion or belief system

How often do you attend religious services?

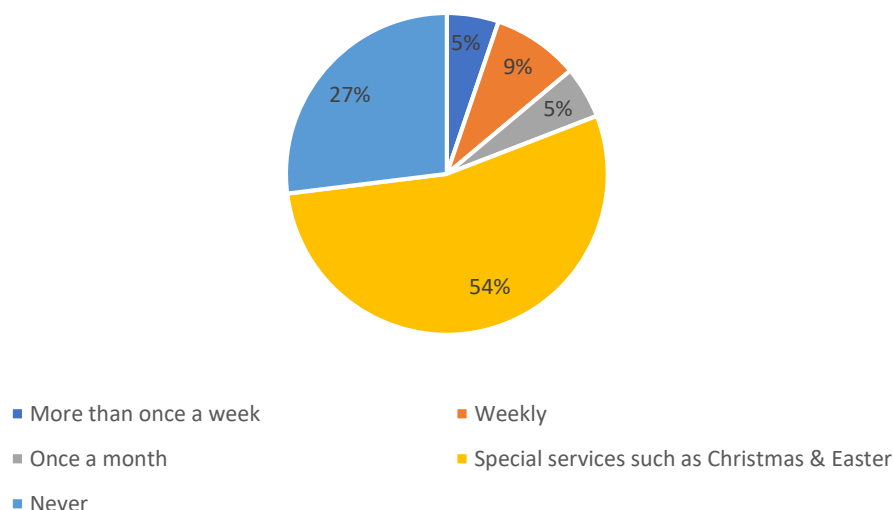


Figure 4 The frequency of participants' attendance at religious services

Students' individual commitment to their faith or belief system varied considerably as illustrated in Figure 3 above. 41% identified weakly or very weakly with their faith in a reflection of the secularisation of modern Ireland (Gallagher, 2003, O'Hanlon, 2017). In contrast, a total of 19% could be classified as regular attendees at a place of worship, stating that they attend a religious service more than once a week, weekly or monthly as seen in Figure 4.

4.2 Theme 1 - Recognition of different beliefs and the inclusion of all

Question 1 of Section B asked students if their religion or belief was recognised and accepted in the school with 62% answering in the affirmative, 13% stating, ‘no’ and 25% feeling unsure.

1. i) Do you feel your religious faith or belief is recognised and celebrated in the school?

115 responses

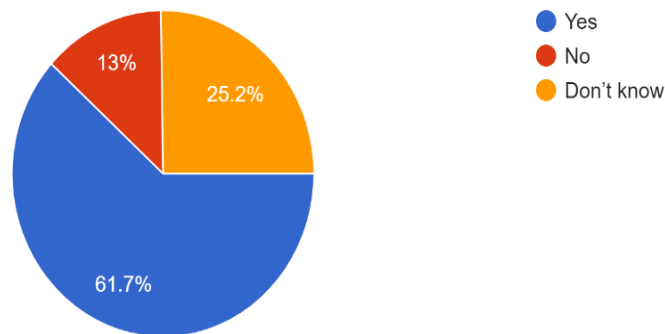


Figure 5 Participants' views on faith and belief recognition and celebration

Some students commented affirmatively, with S36 stating, ‘I think the school is focused on the Catholic religion but welcomes other religions and recognises them. We learn about the other main religions so I feel like they are all acknowledged,’ and S84 saying, ‘I feel like the teachers are very supportive of it, and I have never felt excluded for not believing.’ Views reiterated by S59, ‘I think the school is focused on the Christian religion but welcomes and recognises other religions.’ This is consistent with the message of official Catholic Church documents and statements, which emphasise the inclusive nature of the Catholic school (CSP, 2015; Vatican Council II, 1965) which, ‘offers itself to all’ (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977, par. 85). However, some students who did not identify as Christian had different points of view, as illustrated by S22, ‘I would say no because the school is predominantly Christian’ and S113, ‘It's hard to know because Atheism isn't really something you can teach about or celebrate’.

4.2.1 Sub-theme: Perceptions of an inclusion continuum

A few students took issue with the use of the verb, 'celebrate'; 'It's not typically a way of thinking that is, 'celebrated'. I wouldn't go that far.' These responses raise a valid point; there is a whole continuum from passive tolerance of religious diversity to the active celebration of it. As Kieran (2008) asserts that a passive or silent tolerance of difference does not constitute inclusion. Boeve (2017) explains that, 'The Church does not view difference in beliefs as a threat to its identity nor does it limit its attitude to tolerance, which at bottom is disguised intolerance. Rather, the church views other religious faiths with respect and admiration and enters into dialogue with them in order to be enriched by them' (p. 97). The Catholic Dialogue School advocates the recognition and celebration of other faiths, enabling all parties to embark on a 'project of identity formation in a context of difference and plurality' (Boeve, 2017, p. 55).

In this research, not one student of a religion other than Christian stated that their faith was recognised and celebrated. Nevertheless, some of these students expressed their satisfaction with the level of acceptance they experience in school, S11 and S28 stated respectively, 'I don't necessarily feel that my beliefs are celebrated, but I am allowed to have them in peace', 'There are no barriers between religions which is good enough for me.'

Unsurprisingly, Christian students were far more likely to feel their religion was accepted and celebrated in school with many citing prayer, events in the liturgical calendar, RE classes, Ethos Day, Catholic Schools' Week and the *Seinn* choral festival, as reported by S60, 'All the time. It's a Catholic school so my faith is definitely celebrated' and S35, 'I feel the school shows a strong love for the Christian faith.'

In contrast, a small minority of Catholic students felt not enough emphasis was placed on the recognition and celebration of the Catholic faith, S73 stated, 'I don't think so because

of the amount of other things the school is doing.’ This was supported by S83, ‘I’d like to see more done. Christmas and Easter are celebrated other than that no comment.’

4.2.2 Sub-theme: Perceptions of school as a safe place

There was a general consensus that different religions and belief systems were accepted and respected in the school. 74% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, ‘School is a safe place where my religion or belief is respected.’

School is a safe place where my religion or belief is respected.

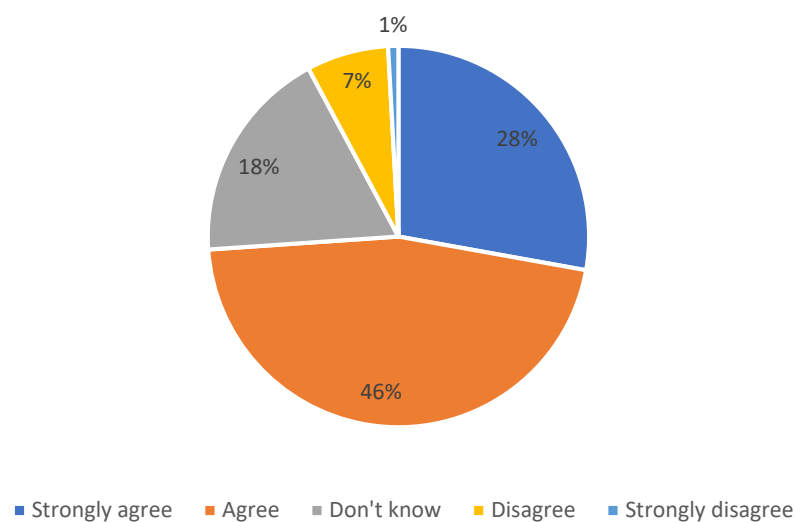


Figure 6 Participants' perceptions of having their faith respected in school

Many commented positively on the inclusive community of the Catholic school, such as S35, ‘Yes, while the school is mainly Catholic it is an open place and I feel it does respect other religions.’ S8, ‘We don’t have all the same beliefs and the school respects them all. No one is left behind’ and S37, ‘Nobody really cares if you’re not as religious as them or have different beliefs, it’s more you as a person that people judge’.

The school's prayer room is a welcoming and inviting space for all faiths and beliefs.

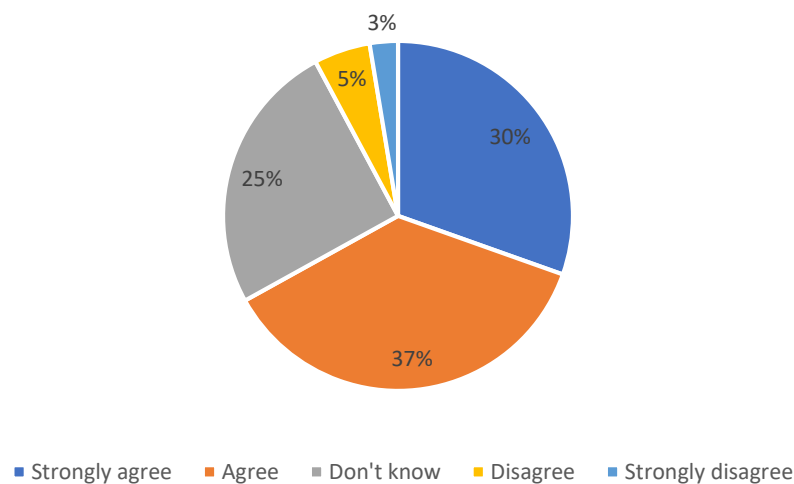


Figure 7 Participants' views on the school's sacred space

I feel comfortable praying or reflecting in the school's prayer room.

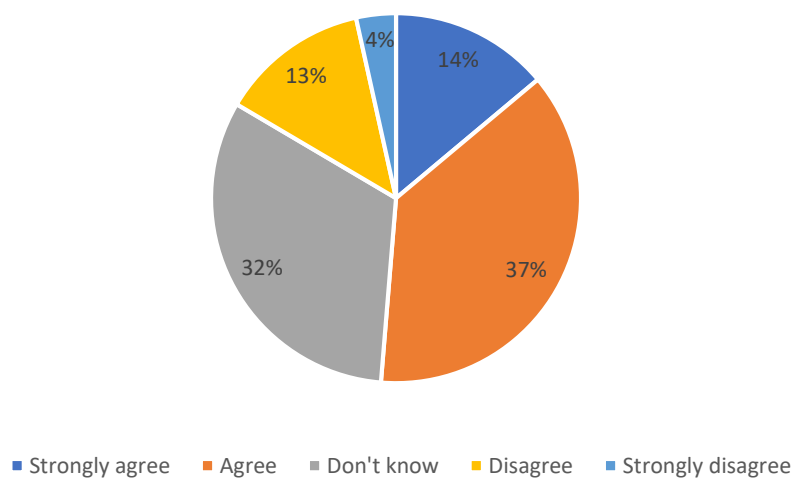


Figure 8 Participants' experiences of using the school's sacred space

In terms of the school's sacred space, 67% felt welcome in the prayer room, 8% did not and 25% were uncertain. Interestingly, the respondents belonging to a faith other than Christianity were split down the middle on this question indicating that such matters are personal and experience varies among individuals of the same creed. Despite its main

purpose being the facilitation of prayer and reflection, only 51% of all participants felt comfortable doing so in the prayer room, 32% were unsure and 17% did not.

The teachers are interested in and respect my beliefs.

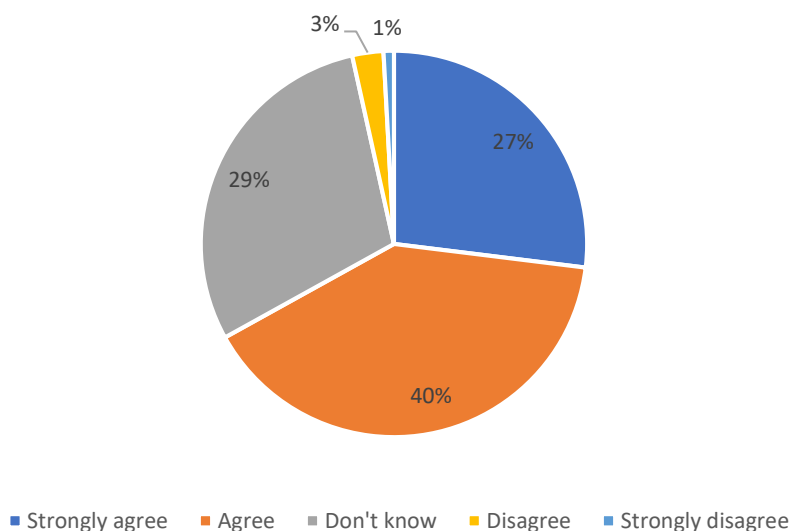


Figure 9 Participants' perceptions of how teachers view their beliefs

I am invited and welcome to attend religious celebrations (e.g. the Christmas Service) in my school.

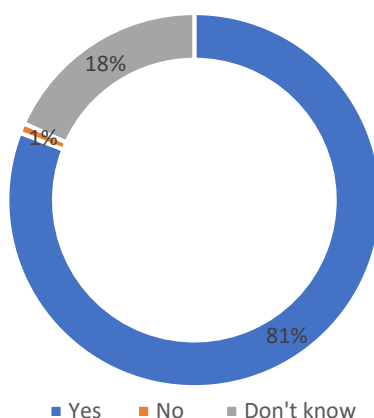


Figure 10 Participants' perceptions of feeling welcome at liturgical services

Most respondents (67%) felt that, 'The teachers are interested in and respect my beliefs,' with 3% disagreeing and 30% being unsure. A large majority of 81% agreed with the statement, 'I am invited and welcome to attend religious celebrations (e.g. the Christmas Service) in my school.' Only 1% disagreed, with the remaining 15% choosing, 'don't know'.

Numerous students commented warmly about the welcoming nature of school services, including S58, 'I feel welcome to come to the Masses and yet not obliged as I'm not Catholic' and S8, 'The carol service is open to everyone I have taken part before and have sang in the choir at many other events and I'm atheist'. Reiterating this view were S26, 'I feel as though religious services are welcoming of all faiths and religions. Although emphasis is placed on religion, the aim of the celebration is to strengthen school spirit regardless of religious beliefs' and S28, 'Everyone gets to join in on the fun'. A small number of participants reporting feeling pressurised into attending Mass, this is dealt with later under the umbrella theme of Perceived expectations of religious conformity.

4.2.3 Sub-theme: Challenges to the inclusion of students of different beliefs in a Catholic school context

This theme highlights the range of individual experiences of the inclusion of religion and belief along a continuum from tolerance to acceptance to celebration. Possible challenges to inclusion tested for in the questionnaire include the wearing of religious symbols, religious diets and curricular issues.

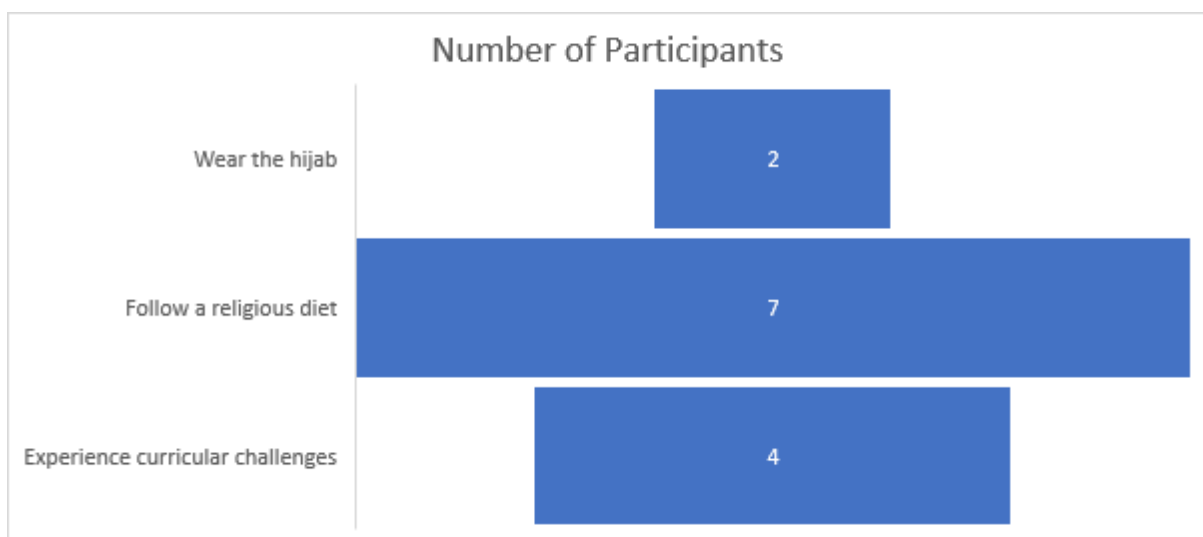


Figure 11 Number of participants who follow religious dress codes/diets and/or experience curricular challenges

Two students who wear hijabs both agreed that they had the freedom to wear it but one added that, ‘Sometimes it’s not respected, rude comments.’ This issue is further discussed in theme 6 - Experiences of religious prejudice and stereotyping.

Of the seven students following a religious diet, 43% stated there are sufficient food options for them in the canteen. This is supported by Twiner (2009) who stated that canteens may present issues due to the inability to be certain that no cross contamination has occurred between foodstuffs. In terms of practicality and peace of mind, Mullally (2019) suggests, ‘The most sensible way around this seems to be to invite students to bring in their own cutlery or food from home’ (p. 19). Nevertheless, given the mixed response, it is an area which warrants further investigation.

With regards to curriculum content, 4% stated that certain subject matter was problematic for them and their parents or guardians due to their religious beliefs. Students listed Social, Personal and Health Education, Civic, Social and Political Education, Physical Education and, in particular, Relationships and Sexuality Education as the problematic subjects (Keaton 2006; Hamzeh & Oliver 2012; Selim 2014). One respondent identified as an atheist and had no personal issue with the content, ‘They’re not problematic for me but to my parents, as they are strict Catholics. Sex ed is never mentioned at home and my mam is very uncomfortable with me going to any sex ed classes in future.’ Selim (2014) cites important differences between the teachings of Islam and the RSE programme of Irish secondary schools. Islam does not allow for sex outside of marriage, a conviction also held by other religious groups. A similar, ‘clash of values’ (p. 10) between religious faith and curricular content may also occur in PE and Music classes. Mullally (2019) advocates a proactive approach for managing these issues and the discussion of potentially problematic subjects such as RSE, PE and Music with parents prior to their child’s enrolment. Hegarty and Titley (2013) and Tormey (2005) acknowledge conflict may arise from the teacher’s dual duty in

covering the curriculum and respecting parents' wishes. The school and parents should engage in an open discussion about the practicalities of their choices, the complexity of timetabling and their child's needs in order to arrive at a solution that is acceptable for all.

4.3 Theme 2 - The role of dialogue in fostering respect, learning & faith development

Some of questions in Section 2 explored whether students thought there were opportunities for inter-belief dialogue and learning in school and gauged their opinions in this regard.

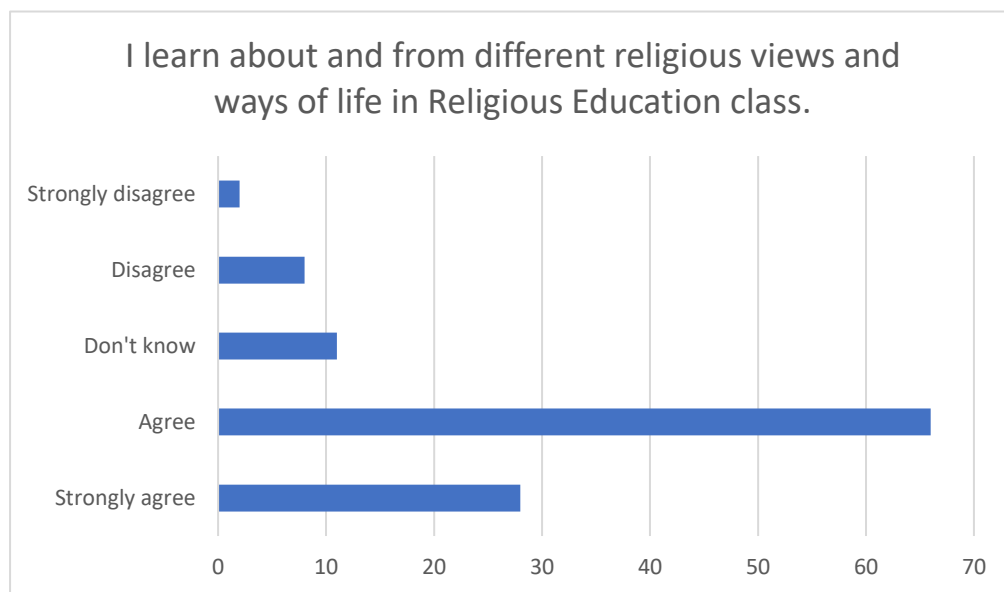


Figure 12 Students' experiences of learning about and from difference in RE class

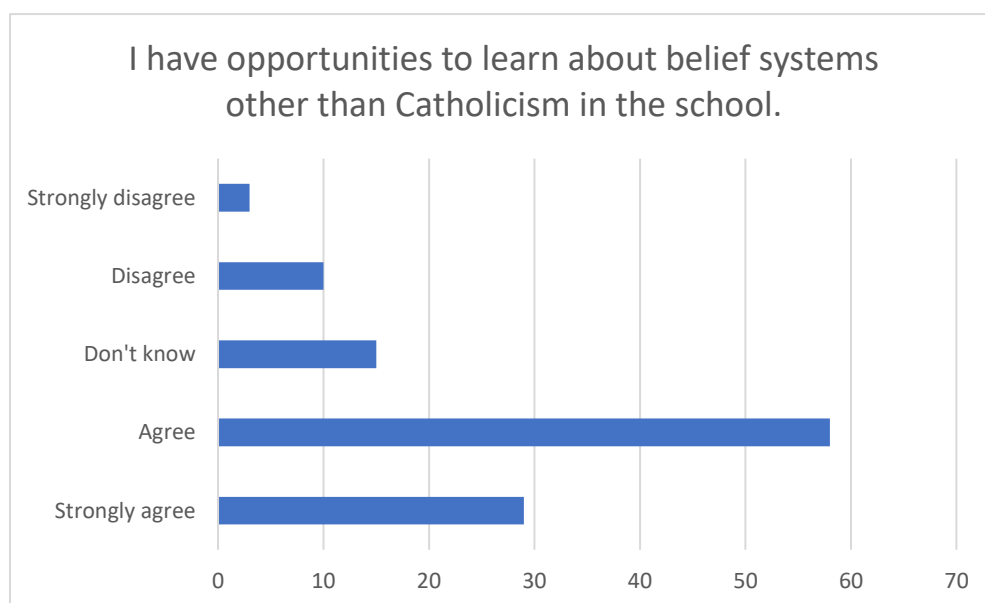


Figure 13 Participants' experiences of learning about faiths other than Catholicism

Many responses to questions which measured dialogue reaffirmed good practice in the school in this area. 82% agreed that they ‘learn about and from different religious views and ways of life in RE class’ and 76% of students said that they ‘have opportunities to learn about belief systems other than Catholicism in the school’. Byrne (2013) explains how Religious Education, ‘is intended to foster a specific orientation which recognises the plurality of religious expression and understandings and which critically engages with religion as highly relevant to society and to individuals’ (p. 73), thereby enabling, ‘children to adapt to their environment and to live their lives with meaning and with purpose in contemporary society’ (p. 166). Learning about, from and within a plurality of beliefs benefits all students, ‘The contribution which religious education makes to developing acceptance, understanding, respect and mutuality, attitudes which define inclusiveness in practice, is predicated on an understanding of religious education as both informative and formative’ (Dillon, 2013, p. 73).



Figure 14 Participants’ perceptions about dialogue in RE class

64% stated that, ‘there is room for discussion and dialogue from other faith or philosophical perspectives in Religious Education class’. In a similar vein, 64% agreed that they are

encouraged to develop their own personal faith or belief, whether or not that is Catholic.

Students' expressed positive attitudes in this regard, as seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Selection of Comments from Students Regarding Different Beliefs

'I really enjoy learning about different cultures and beliefs. I would love to see more variety everywhere' (S18).
'In my class we have all different beliefs which normalizes different religions. Other students are comfortable to share some things about their religion with us to educate us' (S22).
'You get an insight into other people's lives when you know their beliefs. It's interesting to talk about the laws and history of different religions' (S76).

The Irish Episcopal Conference (2010) describes how the Catholic school, 'promotes the formation of young people in the construction of the world based on dialogue in the search for community on the mutual acceptance of differences rather than on their opposition' (p. 101). Byrne (2013) states how effective religious education, as evidenced by many questionnaire respondents, 'helps the young person develop and come to a mature view of what is essential in life' (p. 208). Thus, 'it contributes to building up the fabric of society preparing young people to play their part respectfully in the dialogue that is humanity' (p. 208).

4.3.1 Sub-theme: Attitudes towards inter-belief dialogue

The majority of students were strongly in favour of an increased emphasis on learning about and from other religions and belief systems, as well as Catholicism, a view expressed by S12,

'There isn't only one faith in the world. We can't be ignorant about other faiths. We need to

be able to understand other people's views and lives'. This correlates with the findings from the REDCo Project (2009) which found that students are well aware of and experience religious diversity, and a majority are interested in learning more about different religions in school. Many participants in this study expressed sophisticated views on the necessity and benefit of doing so as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Selection of Comments from Students Regarding Inter-belief Dialogue

'I think this is extremely important, discrimination is still a major problem. I believe the first step to ending discrimination is understanding each other. To do this we need to learn more about their faith and how they were raised' (S28).
'People should know about other faiths so that they can see the different ways of how people live and what they believe in. It makes us more open minded' (S37).
'I think it's important to learn about other beliefs so we can understand more about each other's lives' (S39).
'I believe it's important because not knowing about different religions and beliefs is what leads to people being isolated over their beliefs. When you know what people belief in you won't be so quick to judge them or be unintentionally disrespectful' (S112).

There was widespread agreement (89%) that it is important to learn about different religions and beliefs in a Catholic school, as articulated by S82, 'Yes, everyone should be taught about all religions from an early age because it helps when meeting new people, you know how to be as respectful as possible towards them' and S12, 'It's important to be inclusive even if it is a Catholic school. We preach about being welcoming so we need to practice that more'. One participant suggested one way how this might be achieved;

I am a Christian, but I am part of different denomination and in our Church we have something called a Family Fun Day where anyone (no matter the religion) is invited to just have fun and eat and get along. It's held at the start of Summer, it's great day. (S16)

Student voices were not unanimously united in the call for more inter-faith dialogue and education, as communicated by S100, 'I think some people would be uncomfortable learning about other religions or not find it interesting' and S46,

I don't really care, I don't mind if someone talks about religion but I honestly wish I had the choice not to sit in a religion class. I understand that people have their own beliefs but it doesn't affect my day to day life so no I don't really want to learn more about other religions.

Half of participants say that a variety of religious celebrations (e.g. Eid, Diwali), not just Catholic festivals, are acknowledged in the school. In order to gauge the opinions of members of minority beliefs regarding this matter, they were asked, 'If you have a different faith or belief to the Catholic faith, would you like important times in your religion (e.g. Ramadan, Passover) to be acknowledged in school?'

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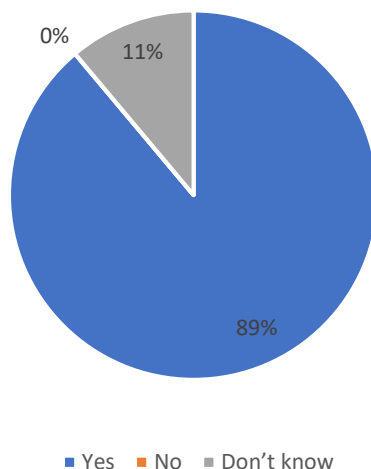


Figure 15 Participants' of different beliefs wishes regarding recognition of their religion in school

89% answered in the affirmative. One participant explained, 'If I am doing Ramadan I would like people to acknowledge that I am most likely hungry and not to eat in my face or talk about foods' (S88). Whereas another student did not share this view and associated their faith with home life, 'I don't really care if my religion (Islam) is being mentioned in school. I pray, etc. outside school' (S62).

The difference between the private and public spheres is an important one to bear in mind as if there is to be an increase in dialogue, as the majority advocated, there needs to be the accompanying openness and vulnerability to facilitate this. Byrne (2013) explains that,

Non exam state certified religious education programme seeks to identify understandings of God, engagement with religious traditions and in particular the Christian tradition... its purpose is not fulfilled by a comfortable abstract study of religions and beliefs separate from the real-life experience and search for meaning of the young person. (p. 210-211)

In the same way that, ‘all are to be respected’, equally, ‘all are to be called to speak from their emerging self-understanding and beliefs’ (p. 211). 60% of those surveyed said they, ‘feel comfortable sharing my knowledge and practice of my own faith or belief with classmates and the teacher’. 67% of religious minorities within the school felt comfortable doing so, whereas the researchers Álvarez et al (2011) found that students often felt uncomfortable sharing their religious experiences with their teachers and classmates. A high level of trust is required to facilitate this type of dialogue. In order to achieve this, Ipgrave (2004) advocates the foundation of ground rules around respect and openness. Jackson (2014) supports this assertion, recommending that student inter-belief dialogue be scaffolded through the establishment of the classroom as a safe place.

4.4 Theme 3 - Recognition of the Catholic identity of the school

The questions in Section 3 of the questionnaire focused on the school’s confessional identity and students’ experience of it.

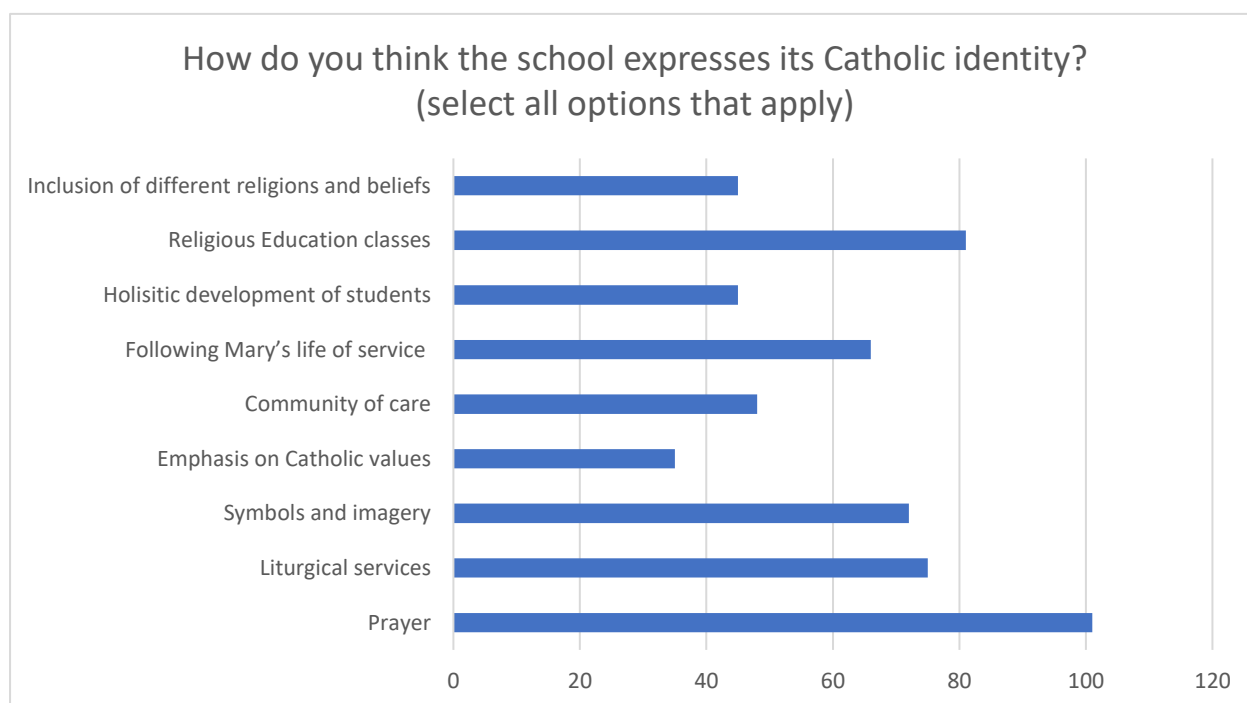


Figure 16 Participants’ interpretations of how the school communicates its faith identity

A large number of respondents reported that the Catholic identity of the school was strong, with one participant stating, 'It is the main focus of my school' (S72). Examples of the prominent role the Catholic ethos plays included prayer, the nurturing of the holistic development of students, the school community characterised by love and care, and liturgical services.

The dialogue school's Catholic core is an integral part of its identity (Boeve, 2017, Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010) and this was supported by the data in which 65% agreed and only 6% actively disagreed with the statement that, 'The Catholic ethos of the school is visible, valued, known and significant for all of us.' Correspondingly, 65% believed that the prayers used in school were for everyone, not just the Catholics and 66% think that the school chaplain is for everyone as opposed to just the Catholics. The majority of students experience the school's Catholic ethos, however a sizeable chunk of approximately 35% are not. This is dealt with in the following theme - Feelings of apathy regarding religions and belief systems.

These broadly positive results indicate that the school is, 'rooted, not fixed in its faith tradition' (Kieran, 2008, p. 10), a key element needed for the Catholic dialogue school to thrive. If the Catholic faith is strongly recognised and celebrated through, for example, prayer, observance of liturgical calendar, symbols and ethos promotion, there is scope then for the inclusion of other beliefs without compromising the school's characteristic spirit (Vatican Council II, 1965; Mullally, 2019; Kieran, 2008). Greene & O'Keefe (2001) contend that, 'depending on one's theological perspective, diverse Catholic schools represent a wonderful opportunity for dialogue or be serious dilution of religious character' (p. 176). The deciding factor in this dichotomy is how well the faith tradition and its characteristic spirit is preserved and promoted in the school.

4.5 Theme 4 - ‘Meh’: Apathy towards religion and belief

A sense of apathy towards religion was apparent in the survey responses. The mean ‘not sure’/‘don’t know’ response for the 17 questions applicable was 24%. While it is doubtless that some respondents did not fully understand all questions, the relatively high figure indicates an unwillingness or inability to engage with the big questions around faith and belief. Similarly, in the optional open text questions, a significant number of participants communicated their indifference, such as S67, ‘I don’t really care, never thought about it’ and S105, ‘Meh not too big into the whole thing’. With 21% of respondents stating that they have no belief system, it stands to reason that religious matters may not be an area of great interest to them, as illustrated by S98, ‘I would still feel welcome at it even if I had a different religion but religion isn’t an important thing in my life’ and S4, ‘Dunno I don’t really focus on religion as I don’t have any faith.’

Their expressions of disinterest in the religious world ranged from the matter of fact, ‘Nobody really cares about religion,’ (S46) to the flippant, ‘Don’t care it’s doesn’t really matter haha’ (S91). This reflects modern Ireland’s complicated and waning relationship with the Catholic Church (Gallagher, 2003; O’Hanlon, 2017; Ganiel, 2016). The rise of cultural Catholicism has seen growing numbers of nominal Catholics who engage in CEO (Christmas, Easter and Other Occasions) practice. One respondent identifies with and vocalizes this stance, ‘This is a Catholic school, I don’t believe in a god, however, Catholicism is an important aspect of Irish culture. When a school becomes atheist or starts to change the school for such reasons I think it’s wrong’ S28. Conversely, another atheist student expressed the view that religion should be a private matter, unrelated to a school’s primary activities of teaching and learning, ‘I don’t really like people trying to focus on their religion or faith, but it doesn’t really bother me I just believe that education should be focused more on learning’ S4.



Figure 17 Word cloud of the common words/phrases students used to express indifference

4.5.1 Sub-theme: Atheism: Lack of recognition of the 'nones'

One participant described feeling as if their atheism devalued them, 'I feel like my school does not like children who don't have any belief system or don't care about religion enough' (S33). This was echoed by another student, 'People are very judgemental so I wouldn't feel comfortable about saying what I am because people would usually just give out to me for not believing in God' (S46). These students may experience more difficulty in finding their spiritual niche compared to members of organised religions, as one respondent put it, 'There aren't really any atheist traditions' (S11). With a fifth of the sample identifying as atheists and many respondents expressing ambivalent attitudes towards religion in general, the question of how to engage these students in religious and spiritual school life arises.

4.6 Theme 5 - Perceived expectations of religious conformity

In contrast with the inherently invitational message at the core of Catholic education (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997; CSP, 2015; Vatican Council II, 1965), a small number of participants (9%) reported feeling varying degrees of pressure to adhere to the norms of attending Mass services and accepting Catholic teachings. S22 stated, 'We are made

go to Mass and get brought down year group by year group but you get to miss class'. S12 experienced teachers' disapproval for asking questions, 'The school is a Catholic school, I feel disappointment or questioning coming from teachers when some questions are asked. It's not always respected and you can be made feel or look stupid for questioning'. Lodge (2004) warns of this possibility, stating that students of the non-dominant faith may be 'rendered invisible and subordinate' (p. 32). This is grievous indeed, not just for the individual groups involved, but for all parties as Catholic schools are, by definition, inclusive schools (Irish Catholic Bishops Conference, 2008).

Certain students paint a picture of a religious monologue school where the vast majority identify as Catholic, 'Pretty much everyone has the same religion' (S60) and other beliefs are not shown the same respect, 'Teachers are also very religious, but I believe they don't pay enough respect to ALL religions' (S15). The Catholic Church is clear on the invitational nature of faith formation offered in their schools, which provide a holistic education, 'clearly and decidedly configured in the perspective of the Catholic faith' (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, par. 16) to all students. The Congregation for Catholic Education (1997) contends that while it is the school's right and duty to provide faith formation and promote, but never 'impose' Gospel values, 'the latter suggests a moral violence which is strictly forbidden both by the Gospel by Church law. (par. 6). There is no attempt to proselytise students who are not Catholic. While students may withdraw from religious education with their parents' permission, it is impossible to offer students a 'value-free education' as the Catholic ethos permeates all aspects of everyday school life (Vatican Council II, 1965; Mullally, 2019).

In terms of attending religious services, students who do not wish to attend have the option to remain in the school's General Purpose area. In practice, however, they are often shepherded along to church by teachers in the interests of expediency and ease of

supervision. Various respondents reported their experiences of discomfort. A student identifying as a nominal Catholic agreed that they were invited to and welcome in church ‘but it seems daunting and unnecessary’ (S71). A student with no belief system stated that, ‘Every student is heavily encouraged to attend mass’, whereas one Muslim student cited, ‘being forced to attend Mass’ (S48) as a challenge they faced due to their religious identity.

4.6.1 Sub-theme: Students’ respect for the school’s faith tradition

In contrast, a few atheist students communicated that they had no objection to passive participation in Catholic rituals and did so to show their respect to the school’s faith tradition, such as S92, ‘I don’t belief in God but I honestly don’t mind going to Mass. If I didn't it would be disrespectful’ and S82, ‘I think it would be easy to say I’m not recognised here considering some teachers make you stand for a prayer at the start of the class but it's a Catholic school in a Catholic country and they don't actually force you to pray. I think that standing with everyone else is a respect thing more than anything else’. These students’ opinions resonate with Mullally’s (2019) ideas for how all students can benefit from prayer time, where everyone is,

encouraged to show reverence during the prayer, promoting respect for the prayer experience. They do not have to participate in the prayer but could be encouraged to use the time to pray quietly in their own way. This is an opportunity to recognise and honour the spirituality of all the students (p. 11)

4.7 Theme 6 - Experiences of religious prejudice and stereotyping

In the course of the survey, a small number of students disclosed that they had personally experienced or witnessed religious prejudice and stereotyping. Muslims were disproportionately represented in the numbers of students who reported encountering religious prejudice (57% of Muslims V 1% of Christians). S62 stated, ‘I get obnoxious questions and remarks about my religion’. Similarly S24 said, ‘My religion is not mentioned

very often outside of slurs and insults'. A common thread of this Islamophobia was the deliberate conflating of violent extremism with the peaceful religion of Islam, as related by S104, 'Islamophobia and making fun of Muslims due to terrorism of people who claim to be Muslims' and S60, 'Islamophobia and people saying things about being terrorists and talk about the way we look'. There were some powerful examples of the type of religious slurs Muslim students were subject to given by S60, 'I get bullied e.g. saying I'm going to blow up' and S24, 'It hurts to be referred to as a suicide bomber'. This is the antithesis of inclusion and has no place in the Catholic dialogue school.

Increased dialogue and education were suggested as a part of the solution to this serious issue by one participant, 'It is important to learn about other religions so that maybe students getting bullied for their religion would be less common because it's not a mystery to anyone. Like because I follow Islam I shouldn't be thought of as a terrorist just because I'm Muslim' (S33).

Among the wider school population, one Catholic student reported being on the receiving end of religious prejudice, 'Some peers are claiming to be atheist because it's 'cool'. I have no issue with atheism or anyone that believes in it but I feel that I have received criticism from them for my faith' S64. Others flagged how religious difference or practice may make someone a target for abuse, S26 stated, 'Many people may insult others for having differing religious beliefs or even for practicing a religion'. Correspondingly, S84 said, 'I feel like in school if you mention your religion to classmates then they might discriminate but the teachers and the school itself is supportive'.

While the above examples are present in the school, they are not directly perpetuated by it. However, one student noted a lack of representation for the LGBT+ community and attributed that to the school's ethos, 'I am non-binary and LGBT+ representation is limited due to our school being religious' (S20). This is an area in need of development with students

being affected by known issues such as the uniform code and gendered toilets. This year, a small group of students have formed an LGBT+ support group with the assistance of a teacher. It is hoped that their existence and campaigning will be a catalyst for change. The inclusive nature of the Catholic Dialogue School means all students are equally welcome, regardless of gender or orientation. Pope Francis has shown himself to be very progressive in this regard, regularly meeting with members and advocates of the LGBT+ community and famously stating, ‘Who am I to judge?’ (Donadio, 2013) when asked his opinion of a gay priest.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter comprised a presentation and analysis the questionnaire data. Six distinct themes and their sub-themes were generated during the data analysis process. A thematic discussion and the development of these key ideas followed thereafter. The multiplicity of lens’ through which inclusion is viewed resulted in the co-existence of commonalities in students’ experiences and preferences, and significant contradictions and differences of opinion. This reinforced how a, ‘one-size-fits-all’ method for the inclusion of religions and belief systems proves ineffective.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

‘It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognise, accept and celebrate these differences’ (Lorde, 1986, p. 7).

This final chapter revisits the research question and summarises this study’s response to it. Recommendations for the consideration of school stakeholders will follow. The chapter will conclude with suggestions for future research in this area.

This case study has produced valuable new insights into students’ experiences of the inclusion of their religion or belief in the school in question, which may have a more general application. The findings will be shared with relevant parties such as the school Trustees, the Senior Management Team and the Ethos Committee.

This study set out to address the research question, ‘What are students’ experiences of inclusion of their religion or belief system in a Catholic secondary school in Ireland?’ The literature review examined Church documents on Catholic schooling, Government publications and Irish and international research relating to the topic including material on student voice, religious inclusion, religious education and the dialogue school model.

A questionnaire was formulated based on the literature review content. While the survey was primarily a quantitative tool, approximately a third of questions had text boxes to give voice to the students. With great care to the ethical considerations, it was disseminated online to 279 students, 115 of whom anonymously completed it. This was a response rate of 41% and represented 16% of the entire student population. The findings were broadly positive with the majority stating that their beliefs were recognised and celebrated (62%) and there was open dialogue between different beliefs in the school (63%). Most students agreed that while they were encouraged in their faith development whether or not that faith was Catholic (64%), the school has its Catholic identity at its core (65%). These are heartening

results which affirm the efforts of all those in the school who work tirelessly to promote its inclusive Catholic ethos.

Three other themes were also generated during the data analysis; feelings of apathy regarding religions and belief systems, perceived expectations of religious conformity and experiences of religious prejudice. These provide food for thought for school stakeholders and recommendations for how they might be dealt with follow below.

5.1 Recommendations

1. There is a need for further development and facilitation of dialogue between students of different faiths and beliefs. 89% of participants thought that it is important to learn about different religions and beliefs in a Catholic school and several commented how they would like to see more discussion and peer learning in school and in RE class.

Training and CPD. In the school, Religious Education is a non-exam subject and is sometimes viewed as a ‘timetable filler’. Some RE teachers are not qualified to teach the subject. These teachers in particular may lack the prerequisite knowledge about different faiths and feel ill-equipped for facilitating lively inter-faith discussions (Parker-Jenkins & Masterson, 2013). In school, ongoing CPD and in-service opportunities should be provided for RE teachers to build their confidence and develop their skillset in managing these conversations in an open and inclusive classroom which serves as a ‘safe space’ for all students (REDCo, 2009). Events such as a carousel where colleagues share methodologies and resources, a TeachMeet event or a session with an outside facilitator, perhaps sourced by the Trustees, could be useful. It would also be worthwhile to identify links with and invite in guest speakers from different faith backgrounds. These actions are indicated by Vision ‘08, ‘Catholic schools commit resources and time to Religious Education as a priority’ (Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference, 2008, p. 4).

Moreover, this would be beneficial for all teaching staff as responsibility for the inclusion of different religions and beliefs is not the preserve of the Religion Department. One of the REDCo (2009) project findings is also applicable here; to, ‘prepare educators in different subjects to treat religious topics relevant to their subject, ensuring the inclusion of students regardless of their religious or nonreligious background’ and, ‘develop innovative approaches to learning about religions and worldviews in different subjects including RE, history, literature and science’ (p. 4). This is a more organic and universal way to foster inclusion by purposefully highlighting marginalized groups during annual school events and when the opportunity arises during day to day classes. Jackson (2014) and Devine (2011) have recommended this approach as a means to embed inclusion all year round as opposed to limiting it to a week-long event which can be seen as exoticizing difference. Devine (2011) warns of danger of, ‘ad hoc attention to diversity in the absence of direct instruction about tolerance of difference’ due to the, ‘tendency to ‘museumize’ and essentialise minority cultures... rendering them exotic and other’ (p. 140-141). In the same vein, one-dimensional depictions of faith groups should be avoided as these feed into stereotyping and do not do justice to religions and secular world views in their complexity and internal diversity (Jackson, 1997, 2014).

The school has applied to partake in the Yellow Flag diversity and inclusion initiative for the coming school year. This is its second year applying as last year’s application was unsuccessful given high demand and limited capacity, showing the nationwide need and demand for such an initiative. As Ipgrave (2004) noted, the RE classroom is not the sole domain of religious inclusion, instead a school-wide approach is required. The Yellow Flag programme allows for the whole staff training in the area of inclusion which would be hugely beneficial. Nowadays, teacher training courses do touch on this topic but more experienced staff may have completed their training with little to no mention of it (Faas & Fianda, 2019).

Third level institutions which train teachers ought to review their current provision for diversity training and, if lacking, 'include the development of skills to organise and moderate in-class debates on controversial religious issues and conflicting world views' (REDCo, 2009, p. 4). Development is needed at both second and third level as, 'No changes can be made without education professionals and the required competence on their part' (REDCo, 2009, p. 4), otherwise, 'Teachers may feel overwhelmed and lacking in the skills and competence to cope with the change' (Devine, 2011, p. 159).

Representation of Minority Faiths and Beliefs. The data showed that on the whole, most students felt that Catholic festivals were suitably celebrated. The same could not be said of different faith traditions. The majority (89%) of the participants who affiliated with faiths other than Christian stated that they would like to see major festivals in their religion acknowledged in school. Ideas to achieve this include a display of relevant symbols and items in the General Purpose area, the canteen doing a special lunch and a message in the morning announcements via the intercom.

The researcher suggests an annual assessment to be carried out by members of the Religion Department and Ethos Committee to ascertain the religious demographic of the year's cohort. Based on these figures, it would be decided which religion's main festivals it would be appropriate to mark. Presently, it seems unlikely that any religion other than Islam would warrant such attention. The school would need to be mindful of the sensitivities around marking religious festivals about which teachers may have very little knowledge. The previous recommendation regarding CPD and in-service training would be important for the success of this initiative.

Amplifying Student Voice. While this study gives a strong indication of students' preference for this at least in principle, student voice needs to be engaged on a continuous basis. To this

end, the researcher intends to create an Inclusion Officer position as a new executive role on the Student Council. They would be tasked with ensuring all the events the Student Council are involved with are as inclusive and representative of the student body as possible. They would be designated as a link person available for all members of minority groups to liaise with. The Inclusion Officer would have a key role in the planning for and running of Diversity Week which is discussed below.

The researcher advocates the continuation and development of the Student Council initiative, 'Diversity Week'. This celebration of diversity was first held in April 2019 but this year's event was cancelled due to the school closure. The inaugural event was a success and received positive student feedback. However, there are areas for development such as ensuring more marginalised groups are explicitly recognised during Diversity Week. The focus was primarily on nationality, race and religion. The scope could be extended to include gender equality and the LGBT+ community in order to be reflective of the entire student body. Nevertheless, shining a light on and opening up a meaningful discussion about all these valuable topics in the space of a week is unachievable. A lasting schoolwide commitment to the awareness and promotion of these issues is required. The Yellow Flag programme would be a positive start in this regard.

Growing our Faith Community. Galvanising student voice is an important step in promoting dialogue. In the same way, the school needs to actively invite parents from a range of different faiths and backgrounds to become more involved in school life and facilitate minority representation on the Board of Management and Parents Council (Devine, 2011). Outreach activities such as an open day, cultural fair or coffee morning perhaps run as part of Diversity Week would provide an opportunity to mingle and act as the first step to getting involved. Seeking this partnership with, students', 'primary and principal educators' (Catholic Church, 2017, p. 3) would give the parental voice a platform and facilitate parents

in taking more ownership of their child's faith formation (CSP, 2015). Groome (1996) maintains that, 'In a Catholic school parents must have a role in the management of that school', to contribute their, 'opinion on the direction of the school and its policies' (p. 7). Taking on board diverse and perhaps divisive views results in a more cohesive and inclusive school, 'The highest form of love is the love that allows for intimacy without the annihilation of difference' (Parker, 1998, p. 22). This contribution is always invitational, never expected, with parents free to decide how much of themselves they give to the enrichment of the school community. While this may not prove an easy task as some parents may lack the opportunity or inclination to get involved, 'The environment of a Catholic school needs to reflect community, not simply as an ideal taught but as a value realized' (Groome, 1996, p. 115). Improved, regular communication between all parties will nurture the ethos and lead to more cohesive, trusting relationships that can, 'withstand an honest level of challenge' (Corey, 2000, p. 86).

2. Measures should be taken to (re-)engage the sizeable number (circa 35%) of students who have 'checked out' from the religious and spiritual life of the school. Approximately one fifth of the students surveyed self-reported as atheist and others identified with a religion but felt only a weak connection to it.

To preserve its relevance, and to avoid the potential negative impacts of having a high proportion of the student body being alienated from the school ethos, the school should actively seek to make changes now in a controlled way, consistent with its Catholic heritage, rather than having more sweeping change forced upon it by student, parent or teacher discontent in the future, 'For everything to remain the same, everything must change' (Lampedusa, 1958, p. 40). Hogan and Whyte (2003) argue that it is only with the dawn of a more secular society that challenges to state support for denominational education are becoming apparent. Pollefeyt & Bouwens (2014) reiterate this danger, 'Schools do not only

secularise because the students have lost the faith and somehow became disengaged and nihilistic, but because Catholic schools have gradually become unable to relate to them in a genuine and meaningful way' (p. 273). In their vision for modern Catholic education, 'starting from its Catholic individuality and through dialogue with different life views, it wants to be a guide for the philosophical and religious growth of all students, as such Catholic school identity and solidarity with otherness are not only perfectly combinable but they both come to full flourishing when combined' (p. 63).

Bridging the Catholic - Atheist divide. While an aim of Catholic education is to develop each student's individual faith, where this is not possible they can equally grow into religiously literate, open-minded and questioning citizens. There is no reason why atheists cannot engage with much of the school's Religious Education curriculum which interrogates challenging questions about the meaning and purpose of life, beliefs about God, the self and the nature of reality, moral and ethical dilemmas, put simply what it means to be human (Tormey, 2006). Some atheist students may have arrived at that position not because of any deep reflection on the topic, but because they have had little exposure to religious thought or practice at home or in school (Cox et al, 2019).

It should be made explicit to students that critical discussion from different faith, world view and philosophical perspectives is welcome in the classroom. This does not mean that Catholicism is constantly challenged at school level, besieged by the arguments of both other faiths and atheism. They come into dialogue, not conflict, with each other (Boeve, 2017; Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010). The aim is to build on our common values as opposed to taking entrenched, polarised positions, 'How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I dialogue if I am closed to, and even offended by, the contribution of others?' (Freire, 1972, p. 106). Explicit instruction of the skills associated with dialogue, such as active listening and a critical openness to novelty, is

necessary. Establishing the classroom as a safe place, reminding students of the importance of respect and humility and exposing them to multiple perspectives will further dialogue's aims of, 'understanding, enlargement of view, complicating one's thinking [and] an openness to change' (Tormey, 2006, p. 84). Often during adolescence young people undertake a journey of self-discovery. Religion can facilitate the search for meaning by signposting this rite of passage with dialogue, critical thinking and introspection (Byrne, 2013).

It should be made clear to students that the Catholics students do not have a monopoly on the school's religious ethos. As the ethos is the characteristic essence of the school, students must be enabled to find personal meaning and a sense of belonging in it. Many of the school ethos' key values (four of its six central tenets) are applicable for those who do not identify with Catholicism, such as; the promotion of the best spiritual, intellectual and physical self, living a life of service and commitment, the nurturing of community while respecting roles and responsibilities and the promotion of excellence with a personal, familial style. Whereas they are intended to be viewed through the lens of the Catholic faith, there is still meaning and value to be found where that is not the case. Regardless of a student's personal religious and spiritual landscape, the core values serve as an aspirational template for life in school and beyond. Our school community is a faith based one yet by the very nature of Catholicism it must be also an inclusive one (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2013). Furthermore, a strong grounding in the school's Catholic identity is an essential sign of readiness for dialogue; if the ethos, 'is not permeating the life of the school through the lived experience of the staff and students—i.e. it is not fully or even partially embodied—how can the school as so configured truly act as a site of intercultural dialogue?' (Franchi, 2016, p. 5) This means making the school's ethos accessible, on some level, to all.

The pressure, perceived or otherwise, to attend school Mass services must be addressed. There is perhaps some apprehension that if the choice was made explicit to

students, a large number would choose to stay in the General Purpose area and enjoy some free time resulting in supervision issues and a low Mass attendance. However, the current system of bringing virtually everyone along is not fit for purpose and is creating stress, discomfort and resentment for certain students. Furthermore, a small number of participants felt under duress to assimilate to the school's dominant faith and experienced disappointment and ridicule when they expressed their non-belief. A review and development of a school wide diversity and inclusion policy which deals with these specific issues, and other relevant issues, would be beneficial. Mullally's JMB Guidelines (2019), much cited in this piece, could provide the basis for such a policy.

Reaffirmation of the school's Catholic identity. One questionnaire respondent stated that atheism was generally perceived as being 'cool' and openly saying that you are Catholic can lead to judgement. The same could be argued for all school stakeholders. The anti-Catholic zeitgeist of modern Ireland has made some people feel uncomfortable expressing their Catholic identity; no longer a, 'badge of honour... more often than not an embarrassment to be reluctantly admitted' (Twomey, 2003, p. 17). A continued commitment to the faith tradition and ethos from the top down is needed to unapologetically communicate its significance at the heart of school life. In addition to the positive practice already underway in the school, a highly effective means of making ethos explicit is to allocate time to its discussion at every staff and school gathering. A ten-minute allocation at every staff meeting would ensure that the ethos and values, which underpin all the school does, are never far from everyone's minds. Consistent communication of the school's faith identity, purpose and principles is vital at parents' events such as Open Night and TY Information Night. It is an effective way of sharing ownership of the values until all parties become explicitly aware of them as part of themselves.

3. Action needs to be taken to tackle the religious prejudice this study uncovered evidence of.

The school runs an annual Anti-Bullying Week and students receive instruction in this area in SPHE class. There is an Anti-Bullying Policy which is well implemented. Further interventions to tackle this issue could include the implementation of an anti-bullying programme, such as the Finnish evidence-based KiVa programme. KiVa is based on decades of research in this field and consists of prevention, intervention and monitoring in the form of universal (whole school) and indicated (individual) measures (Kärnä, 2011). There is an organisation in the local area which offers free training in the programme. While there is strong evidence to its effectiveness, researchers in this field caution it is a pernicious problem with approximately 16% of post-primary students in Ireland suffering bullying (O'Moore et al, 1997). The effective implementation of a specific anti-bullying programme would be beneficial for students undergoing all forms of bullying, not just those involved in the religiously-motivated incidents which came to light during this study. Additionally, good Religious Education has an integral role in eradicating religious prejudice and intolerance.

Implementation of the previous two recommendations would also serve to alleviate this problem. From increased dialogue and the inclusion of those alienated from religion, would come more understanding and acceptance of each other. A two-pronged approach of effective bullying interventions and equipping students with the skills to live together would be the best solution to this issue.

While these recommendations are somewhat policy heavy, with the endorsement of various policies and initiatives, concrete definitive action is needed to have an impact. Robust policies and action plans act as, 'a resource and a support for schools in dealing with difficult situations' and, 'serve as a reference point for pupils, parents and teachers. It promotes harmony by clarifying procedures, expectations and roles' (SDPI, 1999, p. 16).

5.2 Proposed areas for further research

This study focused specifically on religious diversity and inclusion within the case study school. It would be beneficial to gauge student experiences in regard to the inclusion of other characteristics such as race and ethnicity and gender and sexuality. For example, institutional racism is a serious problem in Irish society (Devine, 2011) and a study in this area would be timely and have the potential to drive positive change.

Likewise, a lack of representation for LGBT+ members of the school community was highlighted by a research participant. The inclusion of members of this group also warrants further investigation. As Devine (2011) cautions, the silence of passive tolerance can have profound effects,

Often what is not spoken about, addressed or confronted (discourses of silence) is as significant in its impact as what is said and discussed... powerful carrying with it the potential to empower or disempowered by virtue of the modes of meaning making that inform what goes on in the classroom. (p. 86)

Another worthwhile area for further inquiry would be to implement the recommendations of this study and then to replicate it in 2 to 3 years' time. A sufficient amount of time would have to elapse to allow for new policies, practices and initiatives to embed. It would be interesting to see what, if any, impact these interventions would have while also generating more useful data for future reference.

5.3 Final thoughts

This is the first time students have been formally consulted regarding their experiences and views of the school's inclusion of their religions and belief systems. The past two decades have seen a dramatic shift in the make-up of the case study school population. Valuable insights have also been gained into their perception of the school's Catholic ethos. Aspects of good practise have been highlighted, as well as areas for development. It is evident that good

progress has been made in the inclusion of students of different beliefs and this study commends that work. Focusing our energies in the key areas identified in the recommendations would further that good work and honour our students' voices by acting on what they've told us about their lived experiences. Enacting the above recommendations would serve and benefit all members of our school community, 'A rising tide raises all boats' (JFK, 1963, p. 336).

Schools are complex environments with huge demands and expectations placed upon them to deal with social issues which often stem from elsewhere. Strong Catholic leadership is needed to make inclusion a priority among the many worthwhile areas for school development and improvement. School stakeholders must reflect critically on and engage in robust debate about the assumptions, policy and practice in school. Measures such as providing adequate resourcing of religious education teaching, investing resources in continuous CPD for diversity training, policy development and offering opportunities to a wider audience to engage in the conversation about religion and belief would go some way in reimagining the ethos as a means to include everyone.

The inclusion of all faiths and belief systems presents challenges and opportunities for Catholic faith schools. The Dialogue School model offers an ideal vision for facilitating the recognition, inclusion and celebration of all beliefs while safeguarding Catholicism as the cornerstone of the school community. Building this inclusive school community increases our appreciation of diversity, promotes shared values and dismantles prejudice and discrimination (Boeve, 2017; Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2010; Devine, 2011). This is undoubtedly a challenging and long-term task, yet an infinitely worthwhile one in making all members of the school community feel equally seen, heard and valued;

When those who have the power to name and to socially construct reality choose not to see you or hear you...when someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing (Rich, 1986, p. 199).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter to Board of Management

Claire Woods,

Address: XXX

Phone: XXX

E-mail: XXX

Board of Management,

XXX

XXX

XXX.

27th January 2020

Dear Chairperson of the Board,

I am in second year of The Master of Arts in Christian Leadership in Education course in Marino Institute of Education, which is kindly sponsored by the school.

I am currently researching for my thesis on the topic of religious inclusion. I would like to seek the Board's permission to conduct student questionnaires and a student focus group regarding their experiences of religious inclusion. My data collection methods have received ethical clearance from the Marino Ethics in Research Committee and I can assure you my work will be carried out with the utmost rigour. All data regarding the school will be anonymised in my thesis. However, my findings could well prove insightful and serve to guide the work of our Ethos Team and, on a wider level, contribute to the Trustees' body of research.

I would be happy to answer any queries and supply further details of my research in correspondence ahead of the next Board meeting.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best wishes,

Claire Woods

Appendix B: Letter to MERC

30th of March 2020

Dear Denis & Members of the Marino Ethics in Research Committee,

In light of the global pandemic of coronavirus and resulting school closures I have had to revise my research methodology for my thesis. I had planned to carry out a questionnaire and subsequent focus groups with students of my school. The focus groups are no longer feasible. However, the questionnaire was to be completed online and may be done by students at home. Written parental consent and student assent can be returned electronically.

In order to avoid the ethical implications of working with my own students, I intended to approach classes that were not my own. However, outside of the school environment I am now limited in terms of the class groups I have access to and my only viable option is to use my own students as the sample.

I am acutely aware of the position of power I hold as their teacher and how this impacts on my role as a researcher. I will therefore undertake adequate procedures to mitigate this dual role. A colleague has agreed to take receipt of the consent/assent forms and send out the questionnaire link to the participants. I will send out the initial information and paperwork to my students but explicitly state that I will not know whether or not they go on to take part in the study as the questionnaire will be anonymous. This will help to safeguard against any inducements, pressure or coercion on potential participants.

Ideally, I would survey students I have less contact with, but in these unprecedented times this change of tack is a necessary one which will be executed ethically.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Woods

Appendix C: Email to Students

Dear Student,

I am a student in Marino Institute of Education carrying out Masters research on ‘Students’ experience of religious inclusion in a Catholic secondary school in Ireland’.

I want to know what you think about religious inclusion (how different religious beliefs or world views are recognised and celebrated) in our school.

I would appreciate 5 minutes of your time to complete my questionnaire. If you would like to participate, please read the plain language statement attached and sign the consent form with a parent or guardian.

It is completely anonymous. Simply click this link to bring you to the questionnaire:

Thank you for your participation,

Ms. Woods

Appendix D: Plain Language Statement

Research Title: Student experiences of religious inclusion in a Catholic post primary school in Ireland.

Introduction to the Research Study

I am currently studying for a Master's degree in Leadership in Christian Education in Marino Institute of Education. As part of my studies, I am conducting a small-scale research study investigating what student experiences of religious inclusion are in our school community.

As a Catholic School, we have a strong ethos within which we welcome those of all religious beliefs and world views. A key part of our ethos is to promote the best spiritual self. Our school is more diverse than ever and it is important that students of all faiths and world views feel recognised, included and celebrated.

It is hoped the results of this research will raise more awareness of the good practice within the school and will highlight the areas for improvement in terms of religious inclusion.

Results may also help to inform school policy in this area.

What will participants have to do?

- Your participation in this study would mean taking part in an anonymous questionnaire that will take 10 minutes to complete online. You will be asked questions about what you have experienced in relation to religious inclusion.
- Prior to the questionnaire, you will need to electronically return a consent form signed by you and a parent or guardian.

What steps will be taken to ensure confidentiality?

- You will not be identified as the online questionnaires will be anonymous.
- The school will not be identified in the study.
- Consent forms will be securely stored in a locked office until they are shredded in September 2020.

Is involvement in the study voluntary? What if I change my mind later on?

- Involvement in this research study is completely voluntary. There will be no reward or penalty for participation or non-participation.
- In fact, I will never even know if you take part or not as Mr. X will be dealing with the consent forms in total confidentiality.
- Even if you agree to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time before Friday the 27th of May by emailing Mr. X and advising him of same.

If you have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact: The MERC (Marino Ethics and Research Committee) Administrator: Mai Ralph, mai.ralph@mie.ie

Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form for Students and their Parents or Guardians

I. Purpose of the Research:

This small scale research study will explore what student experiences of religious inclusion are in our school community.

As a Catholic school, we have a strong ethos meaning we welcome those of all religious beliefs and world views. A key part of our ethos is to promote the best spiritual self. Our school is more diverse than ever and it is important that students of all faiths and world views feel recognised, included and celebrated.

The study aims to collect student experiences to paint a picture of how inclusive the school is in terms of religion and spirituality.

It is hoped the results of this research will help to raise more awareness of the good practice within the school and also of the areas for improvement in this area. Results may also help to inform school policy.

II. Requirements of Participation in Research Study

My participation in this study will involve taking an anonymous 10-minute online survey.

III. Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and I can withdraw at any time.

I have read and understand the information in this form. The researcher has answered my questions and concerns and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I give my consent to take part in this research project.

IV. Arrangements to protect confidentiality of data, including when raw data will be destroyed, noting that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

All data recorded will be deleted in September 2020 after the study finishes. All online surveys will be anonymous. Arrangements to protect the confidentiality of data and anonymity of participants have been explained to me, including when raw data will be destroyed. I am aware that the confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations, in accordance with the guidelines of Marino Institute of Education.

V. Participant – Please complete the following.

(Circle Yes or No for each question)

I have read or had read to me 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 understand that I can withdraw my consent at any stage during the research process by emailing XXX	Yes / No
--	----------

VI. Signature:

I, and a parent or guardian of mine, have read and understood the information in this form.

The researcher has answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I assent to take part in this research project and my parent or guardian named below consents for me to do so.

Student Signature:

Name in Block Capitals:

Parent or Guardian Signature:

Name in Block Capitals:

Date:

Appendix F: Student Questionnaire

Questionnaire on Inclusion of Different Religions & Beliefs in our School

This is a questionnaire about your experience regarding the inclusion of different religions and beliefs in our school.

The questions are divided into the following 4 sections:

- Section A: Background Information
- Section B: Personal Experience regarding Religious & Belief Inclusion
- Section C: Challenges for Diversity of Religious & Belief in School
- Section D: Our School's Catholic Ethos

- The questionnaire will take approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

- Use of the comment boxes to explain / elaborate on your answers is most welcome as it will provide more information for this study.

- Your responses will remain anonymous.

- Please answer as honestly and with as much detail as possible.

Thank you!

Section A: Background Information

1. What age are you? *

Choose ▼

2. What year are you in? *

Choose ▼

3. What is your gender? *

☐ Female

☐ Male

☐ Other

4. What is your nationality? (if you have joint nationality please select both) *

☐ Irish

☐ Polish

☐ British

☐ Lithuanian

☐ Romanian

☐ Latvian

☐ Nigerian

☐ Ghanaian

☐ South African

☐ Spanish

☐ German

☐ French

☐ Italian

☐ Other: _____

5. What religion or belief do you identify with? *

- ☐ Atheist
- ☐ Buddhist
- ☐ Christian
- ☐ Hindu
- ☐ Humanist
- ☐ Jehovah's Witness
- ☐ Jewish
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ No Belief System
- ☐ Orthodox Christian
- ☐ Roman Catholic
- ☐ Other: _____

6. How strongly are you attached to your religion or belief system? *

Choose ▼

7. How often do you attend religious services? *

- ☐ More than once a week
- ☐ Weekly
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Special services such as Christmas and Easter
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Other: _____

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Section B: Personal Experience regarding the Inclusion of different Religions & Beliefs

1. i) Do you feel your religious faith or belief is recognised and celebrated in the school? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

1. ii) Please comment on your above answer.

Your answer _____

2. The teachers are interested in and respect my beliefs. *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

3. The school's prayer room is a welcoming and inviting space for all faiths and beliefs. *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

4. I feel comfortable praying or reflecting in the school's prayer room. *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

5. i) I am invited and welcome to attend religious celebrations (e.g. the Christmas Service) in my school. *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

5. ii) Please comment on your above answer.

Your answer

6. i) School is a safe place where my religion or belief is respected. *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

6. ii) Please comment on your above answer.

Your answer

7. We are encouraged to develop our own personal faith or belief, whether or not that is Catholic. *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

8. I have opportunities to learn about belief systems other than Catholicism in the school. *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

9. We acknowledge a variety of religious celebrations (e.g. Eid, Diwali), not just Catholic festivals. *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

10. i) If you have a different faith or belief to the Catholic faith, would you like important times in your religion (e.g. Ramadan, Passover) to be acknowledged in school? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

10. ii) Please comment on your above answer.

Your answer _____

11. There is room for discussion and dialogue from other faith or philosophical perspectives in Religious Education class. *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

12. I learn about and from different religious views and ways of life in Religious Education class. *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

13. I feel comfortable sharing my knowledge and practice of my own faith or belief with classmates and the teacher. *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Don't know
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

14. Do you think it is important to learn about different religions and beliefs in a Catholic school? Please comment on your answer. *

Your answer

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Section C: Challenges for Diversity of Religious & Belief in School

1. Do you think students should be taught about different religions and beliefs in a Catholic school? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

2. Do you think Christian moral values should be taught in school? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

3. i) Do you follow a religious dress code? (e.g. turban, hijab) *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

3. ii) If you answered yes, please comment on your above answer.

Your answer _____

4. i) If you answered yes to q. 3, do you have the freedom to wear the religious garments or symbols of your faith in school?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

4. ii) Please comment on your above answer.

Your answer _____

5. i) Do you follow a religious diet? *

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5. ii) If you answered yes, does the canteen offer sufficient options to cater for your religious diet?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Don't know

6. i) Certain school subjects or lesson content (e.g. P.E. or Relationships and Sexuality Education) are problematic for me and / or my parents / guardians due to our religious beliefs. *

☐ Yes

☐ No

6. ii) If you answered yes, please state which subjects are problematic for your religion or belief and why.

Your answer

7. Please comment on any challenges you experience in school due to your religion or belief.

Your answer

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Section D: Our School's Catholic Ethos

1. How do you think the school expresses its Catholic identity? (select all options that apply) *

- ☐ Prayer
- ☐ Liturgical services (e.g. School Mass)
- ☐ Catholic symbols and imagery
- ☐ Emphasis on Catholic values
- ☐ Community of care
- ☐ Following Mary's life of service (e.g. charity work)
- ☐ Emphasis on the whole person growth of students (e.g. faith, academic, social development)
- ☐ Religious Education classes
- ☐ Inclusion of different religions and beliefs
- ☐ Other: _____

2. The Catholic ethos of _____ is visible, valued, known and significant for all of us. *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

3. Do you think the prayers used in the school (e.g. morning prayer, prayers in religion class, school services) are open to everyone or just Catholics? *

- ☒ Yes, they are open to everyone
- ☐ Yes, but only to a degree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ No, not really
- ☐ No, not at all

4. Do you think our school chaplain (the priest who visits the school regularly) is for everyone or just the Catholics? *

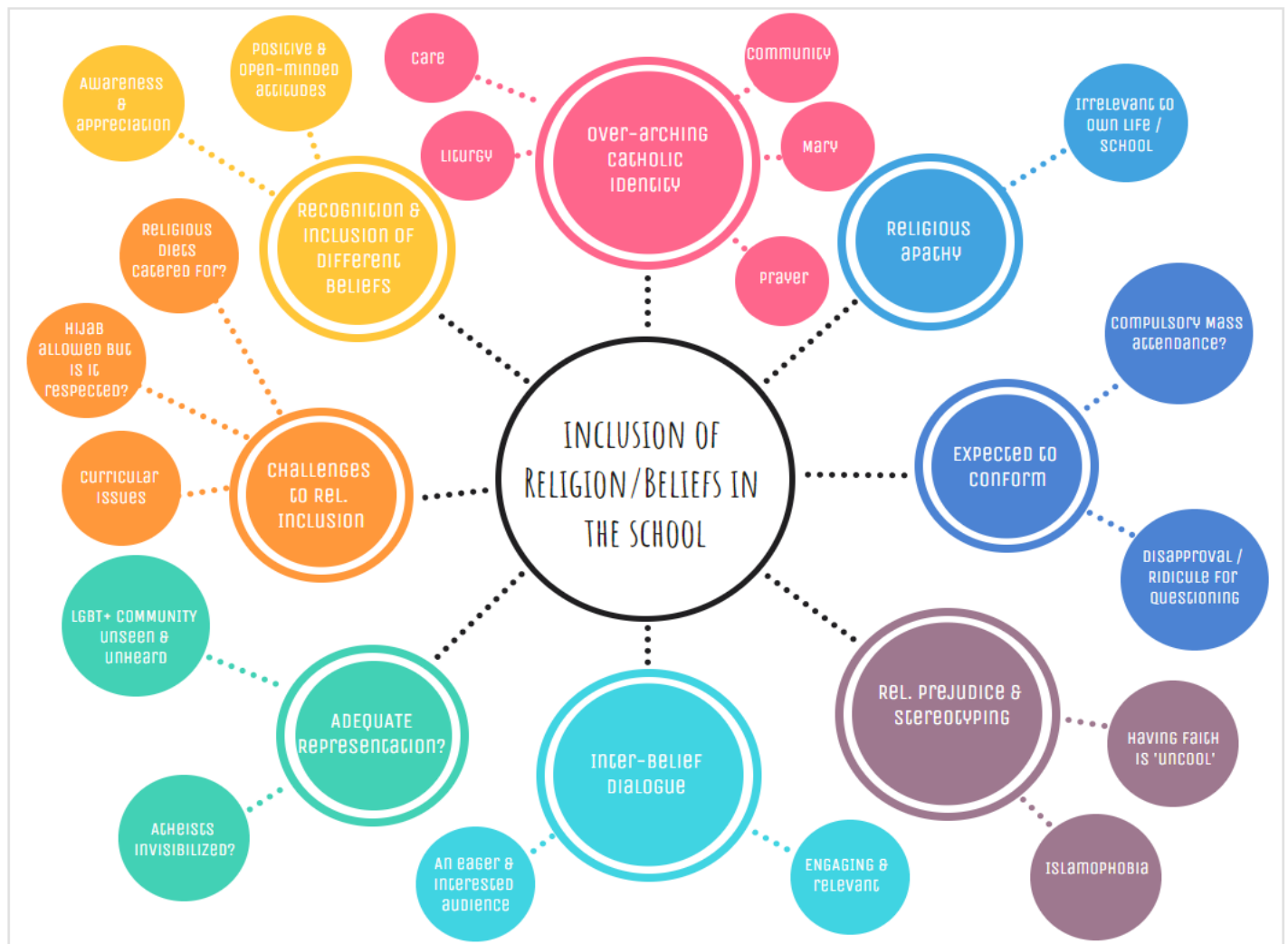
- ☐ Yes, he is a chaplain for everyone
- ☐ Yes, but only to a degree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ No, not really
- ☐ No, not at all

5. While the focus is on the school's Catholic tradition, there is an openness to and respect for all beliefs and world views. *

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

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Appendix G: Samples of the Coding Process



	1. What age are you?	2. What year are you in?	3. What is your gender?	4. What is your nationality? (if you have joint nationality please select bi)	5. What religion or belief do you identify with?	6. How strongly are you attached to your religion or belief system?
1	17	5th	Female	Irish	Roman Catholic	Moderately
2	14	2nd	Male	Irish	Roman Catholic	Moderately
3	13	2nd	Female	German	Christian	Strongly
4	14	2nd	Male	Ukrainian	Orthodox Christian	Weakly
5	17	5th	Male	Irish	Agnostic	Moderately
6	16	5th	Female	Polish	Atheist	Weakly
7	16	5th	Female	Polish	Atheist	Weakly
8	17	5th	Male	Irish/British	Atheist	Moderately
9	13	1st	Male	Irish/Polish	Christian	Strongly
10	14	2nd	Male	Irish	Roman Catholic	Moderately
11	12	1st	Male	Irish	Agnostic	Moderately
12	15	3rd	Female	Irish/Italian	Roman Catholic	Weakly
13	14	3rd	Male	Lithuanian	Christian	Very Weakly
14	15	3rd	Female	Irish	Roman Catholic	Very Weakly
15	16	3rd	Male	Irish	Roman Catholic	Weakly
16	14	3rd	Male	Nigerian/German	Christian	Strongly
17	13	1st	Male	Irish	Muslim	Very Strongly
18	13	2nd	Male	Irish	Christian	Strongly
19	15	3rd	Male	German	Christian	Moderately
20	14	2nd	Other	Irish	Roman Catholic	Moderately
21	14	2nd	Male	Irish	No Belief System	Strongly
22	16	5th	Female	Nigerian	Christian	Strongly
23	14	3rd	Female	Irish	Christian	Weakly
24	13	1st	Other	Irish/Ghanaian	Muslim	Very Strongly
25	15	3rd	Male	Irish	Roman Catholic	Very Weakly
26	16	5th	Male	Irish	Roman Catholic	Moderately
27	13	1st	Female	Irish/Polish	Christian	Weakly
28	13	1st	Male	Irish	Atheist	Very Strongly
29	13	1st	Male	Irish	Christian	Strongly
30	13	1st	Male	Irish	Christian	Moderately
31	13	1st	Female	Irish	Roman Catholic	Very Strongly
32	14	2nd	Male	Lithuanian	Atheist	Moderately
33	13	1st	Female	Irish	No Belief System	Very Weakly
34	15	2nd	Male	Irish	Atheist	Very Weakly
35	15	3rd	Male	Irish	Christian	Weakly
36	13	1st	Male	Irish	Christian	Moderately
37	14	1st	Female	Irish	Christian	Weakly
38	13	1st	Male	Irish	Muslim	Very Strongly
39	14	2nd	Male	Irish	Christian	Weakly
40						