The Ethos of the Church of Ireland Primary School: The Student Voice

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Abstract

Title: The Ethos of the Church of Ireland Primary School: The Student Voice
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This study aimed to investigate the explicit ethos of the Church of Ireland (Anglican) primary school in the Republic of Ireland, and to gain insight into ethos as a lived experience among the students.

The explicit ethos of the school was explored, as presented through the voices of the State, the Church of Ireland, and the school patrons. After considering the ethos of Anglican primary schools in England, a model of prescribed ethos for Church of Ireland primary schools was proposed. The model says the individual school has certainty about its Christian identity, it promotes inclusion, encourages parish-school links, values school assembly and religious education, and regards core Christian values as important to the school community.

The empirical research was conducted through pupil surveys in October 2019; it investigated the lived experience of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school as voiced by its students, and explored a number of factors that affected student attitudes. The research employed three key instruments: adapted *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* (Lankshear, 2017), *The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* (Francis, 1978a; 1978b), and the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010). Each research instrument was found to be reliable and valid in this new context.

It was concluded that students had positive attitudes towards the ethos of their schools, demonstrated positive levels of psychological wellbeing, and had positive attitudes toward Christianity; implying the Church of Ireland primary schools were working well in terms of student experiences of ethos and wellbeing, and were Christian in ethos.

The study demonstrated the potential for listening to the student voice in relation to school ethos, and their voice being included in articulated school ethos statements. It has also added a new study to the international field of research into Anglican primary school ethos.

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Introduction to the Research

This research study is positioned within the Church of Ireland (Anglican) primary school sector in the Republic of Ireland, which in this thesis will be identified as Ireland. Irish primary schools are predominantly state schools, educating children for eight years, from four or five years of age to twelve years of age, after which they progress to secondary school for five or six further years of formal education. Located in a complex and historic educational structure based on a system of school patronage, the Church of Ireland primary school sector, with 172 schools, occupies a small niche in educational provision, serving less than 3% of the enrolled school population. The core legislation for education in Ireland is in the 1998 Education Act, which includes the requirement that each primary school in Ireland publishes a statement of its ethos or characteristic spirit (Government of Ireland, 1998).

The overall aims of this research study are to investigate what is understood by the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school, and to consider the lived experience of ethos among the student population in these schools. It will be shown that there are explicit elements of Church of Ireland primary school ethos; these are prescribed by the State and by the Church of Ireland through its Board of Education and its school patrons. It will be proposed that the implicit or lived experiences of students are crucial to consider, in terms of the development and subsequent articulation of the ethos of the school.

The early chapters of this study will focus on the explicit elements of the ethos of a Church of Ireland primary school. This analysis will raise questions, themes, and a model of prescribed ethos to be explored through the subsequent empirical research. This is designed to capture the narrative of the lived experience of the school ethos, as voiced by the students. By analysing student attitudes toward the ethos of their schools, and exploring factors which impact on these attitudes, this study aims to draw conclusions about the overall ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school.

The empirical research is national in focus, with a broad geographical spread, and includes the voices of students in large and small schools. This is the first large-scale, student-focussed study to capture data from Church of Ireland primary schools, and it is located in a clear gap in the limited research on school ethos in Ireland. The data collection took place in 2019, as the Church of Ireland marked 150 years since its disestablishment; it was also five months before Covid-19 impacted on the education

system in Ireland, and it will therefore provide a snapshot of school life at a particular point in history, which may be of value to future researchers.

The findings of this research study may be of potential value to a number of different stakeholders in the user community. First, the students (both current and future) will recognise their voice as being of importance in dialogue about school ethos. Second, the research may be of benefit to the Church of Ireland and its school patrons, as they provide leadership and support to the schools under their patronage, particularly in reference to themes of identity and school ethos. Third, the research may be of benefit to school boards of management and teaching staff, as they will gain an overall picture of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school, coupled with a positive and practical attitude toward including the student voice in school dialogue about ethos.

The empirical nature of the research and the instruments that measured school ethos in the study will also be of value to the research community. The study introduces research from the Church of Ireland into the field of international research on Anglican primary school ethos. The reliability and validity of the established research instruments will therefore be assessed in a new context, and evidence-based findings will be added to this field of research.

The research study is structured in seven chapters. Each chapter will raise a research question or topic, and core findings and implications will be presented at the chapter end. A concluding chapter will provide a summary of the research and highlight key findings of value to the stakeholders and research academy. Chapters one, two, and three will locate the research in its historical and educational context, and investigate what is meant by school ethos, particularly in relation to the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school. Key themes and questions raised in these chapters will form the basis for the empirical research, data collection, and analysis, which will be presented in chapters four, five, six, and seven.

Structure of the Thesis

In chapter one, the research question is to investigate the context for the study. This investigation will be conducted through the lens of an overview of the key historic events and educational events and factors that have influenced the overall structure of the Irish education system, particularly where these pertained to the Church of Ireland primary school sector. The overview will be structured chronologically, drawing on primary sources, such as legislation and government publications, and secondary sources, including the work of commentators such as Coolahan (1981) and Parkes

(2011; 2019). Conclusions, focussed on the legacy of the development of the Irish education system, will be presented. These will be linked to implications for the current research, and for future stakeholders.

The research question raised in chapter two is to investigate the elements of the ethos of a primary school, with a particular focus on the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school. Ethos will be shown to be composed of explicit or prescribed elements and implicit or lived experience elements. The explicit ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school will be presented, as it is articulated by central church bodies and school patrons, and as it is seen in published school ethos statements. Through analysis of these sources, the key elements of the explicit ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school will be identified.

In chapter three, the primary research question is to investigate the core elements of the ethos of an Anglican primary school. As little literature exists pertaining to the Church of Ireland primary school and its ethos, school ethos will be investigated by exploring published literature relating to the ethos of Church of England (also Anglican) primary schools. The five elements of ethos under scrutiny will be: the school's identity as a Church of Ireland school, the diversity and inclusion provided for and experienced in the school community, the importance of parish-school links, regular experiences of religious-based practices including religious education and school assembly, and the promotion of core values grounded in Christianity. These themes will be explored in the context of the Church of England primary school, and then re-considered in the context of the Church of Ireland primary school. A suggested model of the prescribed ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school will be presented.

Chapter four acts as a bridge between the literature and the empirical research components of this study. The research question for the study will be introduced: What are the key elements of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school as articulated through student attitudes and lived experiences? Four embedded questions will be raised:

1. Who attends Church of Ireland primary schools and what ethos-related activities are found in these schools (religious education, school assembly, parish-school links)?
2. What is the student experience of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school?
3. Are Church of Ireland primary schools Christian in ethos?
4. Do students in Church of Ireland primary schools demonstrate good levels of wellbeing, and does school ethos have an impact on student wellbeing?

The methodology of the empirical research study will be presented. The logistical and organisational process from pilot project to final survey design will be described, including the ethical principles adhered to. The study cohort is composed of students from 4th class, 5th class, and 6th class in Church of Ireland primary schools in Ireland. The first embedded research question will be addressed at the end of chapter four: Who attends Church of Ireland primary schools and what ethos-related activities are found in these schools?

In chapter five, the research question is: What is the student experience of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school? This will be investigated by analysing data gathered from students' responses to statements about the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school, using an instrument adapted and extended from that employed by Lankshear in Church in Wales primary schools: *The Lankshear Student Voice Scales* (Lankshear, 2017; Lankshear et al., 2021*)*. Factors that can potentially affect the student experience of school ethos will be examined, and conclusions formed. Thus, the research question to be addressed in chapter five is whether there is an overall description of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school, articulated through the voice, attitudes, and experiences of its students?

In chapter six, the research question is: Are Church of Ireland primary schools Christian in ethos? This claim was made by the Board of Education of the Church of Ireland (2017). To investigate this question, data collected from administering the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* (Francis, 1978a; 1978b) will test the hypothesis that assessing student attitudes toward Christianity may provide an indicator of the Christian ethos of the school (Lankshear et al., 2018). Factors that affect student attitudes toward Christianity will be examined, and conclusions formed. Thus, the research question to be addressed in chapter six is whether the Church of Ireland primary school is, through the voice of its students, Christian in ethos?

In chapter seven, the research question is: Do students in Church of Ireland primary schools demonstrate good levels of wellbeing, and does school ethos have an impact on student wellbeing? The school is regarded by the Department of Education and Skills (2018a; 2019a) as playing a key role in supporting and enhancing the wellbeing of its students. By collecting and analysing data, employing the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010), hypothesised connections between wellbeing and school ethos will be explored. Thus, the research question to be

addressed in chapter seven is whether students experience positive levels of wellbeing in the Church of Ireland primary school, and how this may be affected by school ethos?

In the conclusion to this study, it is intended to summarise the key findings from the empirical research and to discuss the relevance and usefulness of the research to the user community, including stakeholders in schools and school patrons. The importance of the student voice in research, policy, and practice relating to all aspects of school life, including school ethos, will be highlighted. The potential benefit of the research to the academic community will also be discussed, primarily in terms of the effectiveness of the research instruments, and their possible use and development in future studies within the Anglican school context.

Chapter One

The Church of Ireland Primary School in the Context of the Irish Education System

The research focus of this study is to investigate the ethos and identity of Church of Ireland primary schools; these schools occupy a small and defined niche in the overall State provision of education. The aim of chapter one is to introduce the Church of Ireland primary school in its context. It is not intended to provide a complete history of Irish education; this chapter will highlight a number of key historic events and educational factors that affected the emergent structure of the primary school education system. The Irish primary school education system in 2022 exists in a complex interface between the State and the Churches, which it will be shown hold an historic role in the provision of education. In this overview it will be concluded that three key themes have featured consistently in the educational system narrative: family (as the primary educator of children), patronage and the Churches, and religious education or instruction (traditionally emphasised as a core component of primary school education).

The chapter will be structured chronologically, and will end with an overview of the primary school system in Ireland as it was in 2019, when the empirical data for this research study was gathered. First, the provision of education for children in Ireland prior to 1831 will be outlined. The un-denominational national school system, which was introduced in Ireland in 1831, will then be discussed. The responses of the Churches to the new system and the subsequent Royal Commission Report in 1870 will be examined, and it will be shown that the State-run un-denominational national education was in fact flawed from the start, with denominational education remaining the practice in almost all situations. The next section will trace the development of the education system in the twentieth century, tracking how the Irish Free State, and then the Department of Education (later the Department of Education and Science and the Department of Education and Skills, and since 2020, the Department of Education) conducted curricular reform. This department stayed away from interfering in the universally denominational status of the primary school system, and especially from the subject of religious instruction. The final years of the twentieth century saw the enactment of The Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998), and a brief overview of some of its key components with relevance to this research will be provided.

It will be shown how the emergence of new models of school patronage in the closing decades of the twentieth century and the opening decades of the twenty-first century, heralded a process of expansion in school provision. This expansion was designed to offer choice to the parent population, some of whom no longer wished for a school with religious patronage for their children.

The final section of this chapter will provide an overview of the education system in 2019, when the empirical research in this study was undertaken. This overview will present the statistical and demographic data available about the schools in terms of patronage, and the Church of Ireland primary school will be discussed under the themes of family, patronage, religious education, and school size. The chapter's conclusion will set the context for chapter two, in which the explicit ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school will be explored.

The Education of Children in Ireland before 1831

Coolahan (1981) noted the Irish education system was rooted in a "strong and well-recognised tradition of active interest in education evident among the general Irish population" (p. 4). Ireland was often described as the land of saints and scholars and a positive attitude to learning can be traced back to ancient monastic schools such as Glendalough and Clonmacnoise, which were founded by Christian missionaries in the early fifth century, and subsequently sent graduates throughout Europe. Education was also provided in the ancient bardic schools, which probably predated the arrival of Christianity. Bardic schools declined during the era of the monastic school, but were revived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when monastic schools lapsed in popularity and influence. These bardic schools such as Ua Dálaigh in Cork and Ua hUiginn in Sligo tended to be associated with poetic families, and had a primary purpose to preserve the heritage of the Irish people.

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the continental religious orders such as the Benedictines, Franciscans, Cistercians, Augustinians, and Dominicans, were established in Ireland; but after the Reformation in England, most religious orders closed in Ireland. Following the Reformation, English policymakers began a process of setting up schools in Ireland to spread the Protestant faith and English language, however, Coolahan (1981) noted that these English schools did not succeed in reaching the majority of the Irish people. The education of Irish children faced further challenges in the seventeenth century, when penal laws forbade Catholics to educate their children

in Ireland or to send them abroad, resulting in the establishment of unofficial hedge schools throughout rural Ireland.

The penal laws were mostly repealed in the last decade of the eighteenth century, and Catholic religious orders such as the Presentation Sisters, the Christian Brothers, and the Loreto Sisters started to "lay the foundations of an educational apostolate" (Coolahan, 1981, p. 8). Voluntary Protestant societies, such as the Association for Discountenancing Vice, the London Hibernian Society, the Baptist Society for Promoting the Gospel in Ireland, and the Sunday School Society for Ireland, also took on educational roles; these received some public funding, which Coolahan alleged was of concern to "Catholic opinion", as they had overtly proselytising intentions. A report of 1824 showed that there were about 11,000 schools of all types in Ireland, catering for upwards of half a million children, and staffed by about 12,000 teachers. Coolahan suggested that about two of every five children attended school at that time, although attendance could be short term and irregular (pp. 9-10).

One voluntary society was founded in 1811, with the specific aim of educating the poor. Its formal name was The Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in Ireland, but it used the more popular Kildare Place Society name, because of its geographical location. Founded by a group of philanthropic men, its aim was, according to Parkes (2011), the provision of education for the poor in Ireland, and its leading principle was "to afford the same facilities for Education to all classes of professing Christians without any attempt to interfere with the peculiar religious opinions of any" (p. 17). The reading of the Bible was separated from the rest of the secular activities of the day and the Bible was to be read "without note or comment" (p. 18).

Parkes (2011) provided evidence of the initial success of these schools, indicating that in 1825 there were 1,490 schools, containing about 100,000 pupils, supported by the Society (p. 18). She outlined some of the challenges faced by the Society, primarily that of reading the Bible "without note or comment" (p. 18). This, she said, was acceptable to Protestants, but not to the majority Catholic Church. It appears that this enterprise of universal education for all, without religious divides, was not altogether successful, as the results of a Government enquiry in 1825 highlighted a number of failures linked to the Kildare Place Society (Parkes, 2011).

With the passing of the Act of Union in 1800, uniting Great Britain and Ireland, it might have been expected that there would also be a new coherent and unifying structure of education in Ireland. Not much change happened for the next thirty years,

but then it became clear that the English government had other ideas than simply supporting and formalising what was already in existence. In the 1830s, Ireland was, according to Coolahan (1981), "used as an experimental milieu for social legislation which might not be tolerated in England" (p. 4). Organised education, health services, a Board of Works, and a police force were all introduced as part of this initiative. Coolahan noted that Ireland was in ways an unlikely place for such governmental intervention in education, as it was not a growing industrial nation requiring a more educated workforce, neither was there significant growth in urban areas. The national school education system was introduced in Ireland in 1831, but, as will be shown, it was not received positively by all sectors of society, and the fall-out from this social experiment has resonated in the education system ever since its inception.

1831 and the Stanley Letter

The Stanley Letter of 1831 is known as the foundation document of the new national school system. This letter was written by Lord Stanley to the Duke of Leinster, inviting him to become chairman of the Board of Commissioners for National Education. A government-appointed, mixed-denominational board was to be set up, to exercise complete control over the new schools it would erect. Local funding would be required for teacher salaries, furniture, and maintenance; the cost of the site and one-third of the building costs were to be met from local sources. Schools would open for four or five days each week for literary instruction, with religious instruction to take place on the other one or two days. The Board of Commissioners for National Education would control textbooks and inspect schools.

Akenson (1970) described the new education system as *The Irish Education Experiment,* in the title of his book, which traced the beginnings of the education system in nineteenth century Ireland. It was indeed an experimental plan, full of complexities from its beginnings, as it sought to implement the operation of a "non-denominational primary education system wherein children of all denominations would be educated together in secular subjects and separate arrangements would be made for doctrinal instruction according to different denominational tenets" (Coolahan, 1981, p. 5).

It was going to be difficult to harness support for the new plan, because, although state financial support for education was welcome, the idea of mixed schools was actually hard to grasp by the churches, who had provided all the education until this point in time. To pivot to a non-denominational system and retain religious instruction, which was regarded as the key learning for children, would require moral and financial

incentives. In a first attempt to push through the new model of school, the State blocked funding for denominational schools, to stem their existence. The different churches did not remain silent to allow the move to un-denominational education, as they wanted to retain their separate roles in education, largely due to the centrality of religious instruction.

Responses from the Churches

The three main Christian churches, traditionally the centres of educational provision, held a sense of moral duty to educate children in the faith. Each reacted strongly in a bid to maintain its position as educator. State support was very welcome, but the Catholic Church, Church of Ireland, and Presbyterian Church each wanted the State to provide financial support for their own denominational schools. It will be shown that the wealthier Church of Ireland (the Established Church at that time) simply refused to enter the system, while the Presbyterian Church and the Catholic Church found themselves working for changes from within the system, through strategies Coolahan (1981) described as "negotiation, lobbying and intimidation" (p. 15). In 1840, only nine years after the beginnings of the system, the churches had won some of the changes they required, and began to give greater support to national education. They achieved the right to funding for non-vested schools (schools built without the aid of the Commissioners) and the permission to timetable religious instruction on any day (rather than on a separate day) so long as advance notice was given. Parents could also request exclusion of their children from religious instruction, which was a departure from the initial plan, where the onus had been placed on the teacher to take on the personal responsibility of excluding children of a different denomination. The Church of Ireland, however, remained outside the system for most of the nineteenth century (Parkes, 2019, p. 252).

The Church of Ireland's Response to the National School System

When focussing on the Church of Ireland in this period, it is invaluable to draw on the significant primary research conducted by Parkes (2011; 2019), as her detailed analysis of the nineteenth century history of Church of Ireland primary education and teacher training provides the key evidence for this discussion.

When the national school system was established in 1831, the Church of Ireland refused to support it. The stated reason for this was that it was due to the requirement to separate religious instruction from secular instruction, maintaining "religion was central to the education of a child and should not be excluded from other knowledge" (Parkes,

2011, p. 14). Parkes suggested that the Church of Ireland was actually "affronted" at the plan for national education because it had been "one of the major agencies of education in the early nineteenth century, and it believed that it had a right to use the education system for missionary work among the Roman Catholic poor" (p. 37).

At the time, the Church of Ireland had sufficient funding through voluntary subscriptions to continue with its own schools, and it formalised this in 1839 by setting up its own school system, the Church Education Society, in direct opposition to the national school system. Its function was, according to Parkes (2011), to "support schools and provide Anglican children with a scriptural education, that is an education where the Bible was given a central role in the curriculum and the teacher could refer to it throughout the school day" (p. 37). This ideology was clearly in contrast to the national school non-denominational approach, with separate religious and secular instruction. The schools that belonged to the Church Education Society were open to children of all faiths, but only children from the Church of Ireland were required to attend religious instruction. By 1850, the Church Education Society supported 1,882 schools (p. 38), and maintained its separate provision of education, until funding became more difficult after the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland in 1871.

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education (Ireland)

The Catholic and Presbyterian Churches had joined the national school system, but each continued to call for changes. Some of these were sparked by internal church rules, for example, in 1863, Catholics were banned from the multi-denominational model schools (teacher training schools). Over the next number of years, the Catholic Church, which had initially "tolerated the national school system", grew increasingly dissatisfied, and in the 1870s, it began to demand a separate state-supported education for Catholics, as a right (Coolahan, 1981, p. 17). The system showed signs of falling apart.

The English Treasury required a review of the system; the challenges of running the national school system as originally planned were too great to surmount, and concessions were needed, along with saving reforms. Reviews were also ongoing in the education systems, which were by then running in England and Scotland (Coolahan, 1981, p. 25). A Royal Commission was set up in 1868 to investigate the whole system, and the resultant report, the Powis Commission Report (1870), covered areas such as the condition of the school buildings, the pay of teachers, poor attendance rates, poor teacher training, and low levels of literacy. Recommended changes that were

implemented included a payment-by-results scheme in addition to fixed salary for teachers, further local funding needs, and formal pre-service training of 12 months. The report appeared at least to acknowledge, and possibly even endorse, the then practically universal denominational trend of school provision, by stating that "in locations where only one school (of denominational patronage) existed, religious instruction should be at fixed hours and be confined to pupils of particular denominations" (Coolahan, 1981, p. 26). This might be seen as a hopeful gesture to try to retain the Catholic Church as the majority provider within the national school system.

Sullivan (2018) considered that the changes implemented following the report of the Powis Commission, "had far-reaching implications for primary education in Ireland". He concluded that it "facilitated the dominant patrons of the time in having free reign within the primary education sector", a situation that was to continue throughout the twentieth century (p. 26). The three main Churches could simply enrol children of their own religious denominations in their schools. Each of the Churches was pleased with this decision, the Catholic Church stated, according to Coolahan (1981), that the national system of education was "as denominational almost as we could desire" (p. 37). The denominational system was set to remain, as no provision was made for introducing any other type of school in Ireland, even though non-denominational schools were, by then, in place in England.

The Church of Ireland enters the National School System

The Church of Ireland had remained determined to maintain its separate school system, and had the finances to do so up until the closing decades of the nineteenth century. The Church Education Society ran its school system by the provision of grants. This financial support came with strict conditions, according to Parkes (2011), including the Society's approval of all books used in the school, daily reading of the Bible in the Authorised Version, the learning of the catechism, and the requirement that all teachers had to be Anglican (p. 38). The Society had to fundraise to gather the necessary money for grants and this was successfully achieved on a national basis through diocesan committees, and even at one stage through a national Great Bazaar that ran for six days in 1886, with each diocese taking charge of a stall. Parkes concluded there was great support for all these fundraising efforts, as the Church of Ireland was determined "to resist the national school system and never to accept state aid" (p. 38).

By 1855, the Church Education Society had taken over the responsibility of running the teacher training institution in Kildare Place, maintaining some of the

structures and practices, but imposing a religious ideology on what had been a non-denominational system of teacher training. From researching in the archives of the Church Education Society, Parkes noted that applicants for teacher training had to be recommended by the clergy and their application forms completed in the presence of the "clergyman of the parish" (Parkes, 2011, p. 39). When trained, teachers were regarded as the "willing assistant of the clergyman in parochial life" (p. 40).

The first principal of the renamed Church of Ireland Training College was the Revd Henry Kingsmill Moore. He was, by the end of the nineteenth century, "at the height of his powers, negotiating with the Government and becoming the leading spokesman on Church of Ireland educational policy" (Parkes, 2011, p. 86). The ongoing need for finance continued to be an issue, and Archbishop Plunkett and the Revd Kingsmill Moore travelled the dioceses, speaking at meetings and seeking voluntary donations. Parkes notes that at the end of the 1880s "the Church of Ireland Training College had established itself as a stable and well-organised institution, with the confidence and support of the Church of Ireland clergy and community and sent well-qualified teachers out to the Church's national schools throughout the country" (p. 82).

With such successful funding, the Church of Ireland stayed separate from the national school system until the late 1880s, not long after the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland and the subsequent loss of major funds (Akenson, 1970, p. 187). Then, Church of Ireland schools, which were non-vested, were permitted to enter the national school system, like Presbyterian and Catholic schools. As they were also eligible to receive the much-needed capitation and salary grants, many more Church of Ireland schools joined the national school system in the 1880s and 1890s (Parkes, 2019, p. 252).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Irish national school system was almost 70 years in existence, yet not as originally envisaged. Hyland concluded that the system, although un-denominational in theory, was in practice denominational in 97% of cases (Hyland, 1989, p. 92). This structure continued to have an impact on educational provision through the twentieth century, and beyond.

Small Irish Schools

With the changes in regulations after the Powis Report (1870), which had in practice, allowed for the provision of widespread denominational education, there was a great expansion recorded in the number of schools in the country. In 1903, the Government requested an inspection of the school system, and one of the key items in

Dale's report was the "multiplicity of small schools, demonstrating how the denominational divide within the national system had increased this trend" (Parkes, 2011, p. 92). Under the rules, grants were only available for schools with 15 pupils or more, and the Church of Ireland argued against this minimum number with the government on more than one occasion. Parkes provided an example of this appeal, explaining that the two Church of Ireland archbishops issued a joint letter in 1891, stating they "consider it to be of the utmost importance that the children committed to the spiritual care of our church should be early and earnestly taught in schools whose managers and teachers belong to one communion" (p. 93).

The government acceded to the requests from the Church of Ireland, changes were made to the provision of grants to schools, and schools with as few as 10 pupils became eligible for grants. The result of this was that the small parish school was set to become a feature of the Church of Ireland landscape for decades to come. Parkes showed that by 1909, despite a further failed attempt by the Government to increase school populations to a minimum of 30, there were 1,371 schools under Church of Ireland management and "the denominational divide was strengthened". Parkes commended the work of Kingsmill Moore and others, who persuaded the Chief Secretary that "the small school was of vital importance to the Church of Ireland" (2011, p. 113).

The small Church of Ireland primary school remained a significant feature of the education system throughout the following decades. It reached a critical point in the 1960s, in response to a governmental call for the amalgamation of small schools. At that time, the Church of Ireland had no choice but to support the governmental policy, according to Parkes, or its schools could become substandard. A school bus scheme was introduced to transport children from the geographical area of a closed school to the larger central school. This was regarded as a positive opportunity for children, yet losing their parish school was also seen as a loss to affected parishes (Parkes, 2019, p. 255).

Education in the Twentieth Century

Although school structures remained largely unchanged, the early years of the twentieth century saw a number of developments in the approach to education. These included a move to more child-centred education, the introduction of practical and manual subjects, the abolition of the payment by results programme, and a more "varied and interesting" school life for children (Coolahan, 1981, p. 36). The subject of

religious instruction was still untouched, remaining separate from secular instruction, and deemed as outside any State responsibility. In practice, this meant that each Church produced its own religious instruction programme of learning, for example, the General Synod Board of Education was responsible for the religious education in Church of Ireland schools (Parkes, 2019, p. 253). The refusal of the State to be involved in religious instruction or religious education is a legacy that continues to exist in the twenty-first century. Any attempts to bring a united focus to a national religious education curriculum were strongly challenged and resisted, as was demonstrated in Sullivan's (2018) doctoral research, focussed on such an initiative.

Education was valued by the new Irish Free State, and in its Constitution (1922) it stated that "all citizens of the Irish Free State (Saorstát Éireann) have the right to free elementary education" (Government of Ireland, 1922, Article 10). In this new political era, there was a need for significant curricular reform, including a central role for the inclusion of the Irish language and culture in subjects such as music, geography, and history. Coolahan (1981) noted that there remained an acknowledgement of the denominational structure of the education system, which was not interfered with (p. 46). As in the previous decades, each church continued to revise and produce a religious programme for its schools, with no State oversight or direction.

The Church of Ireland had an immediate concern to face, due to the political changes in the country. Although the Church of Ireland was a whole island church; with partition there was a sudden divide in schools into north and south, with two separate education authorities, and a new teacher training college in Northern Ireland located at Stranmillis, Belfast. Teacher training recruitment for schools in the Irish Free State became a major challenge, as according to Parkes (2011), many of the teachers employed in Church of Ireland schools had traditionally come from northern counties. Now with a decline in the overall Church of Ireland population in the Free State, and the need for new teachers each year to staff the 800 primary schools, the Church of Ireland Training College went on a recruitment drive. A circular was issued entitled *A Very Grave Need*, and it warned of disaster if teachers were not recruited from southern and western counties (p. 149).

The denominational school system was set to continue as the unopposed practice in the Irish Free State, with the majority of schools being Catholic schools. When reviewing government documents from this period of time, there were only occasional references to the denominational nature of schools. One early example was in the 1926

School Attendance Act, which stated that children between 6 and 14 years were legally obliged to attend school every day. An exception was noted where there was not a "national or suitable school" accessible to the child, which she or he could attend and that the parents do not object to "on religious grounds" (Government of Ireland, 1926).

The Irish Constitution (1937)

The Irish Free State was created in 1922, following the Anglo-Irish Treaty. In 1937, a new constitution was adopted. In this constitution, the state was formally named Ireland, and effectively became a republic with an elected president, although Ireland was not officially declared a Republic until 1949. There are several key articles in the Irish Constitution of 1937 that underpin education, especially Articles 42 and 44. The primary role of the parents in the education of their children is enshrined in Article 42:

> The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children. (Government of Ireland, 1937. Article 42.1)

Article 42 also states that "The State shall not oblige parents in violation of their conscience and lawful preference to send their children to schools established by the State, or to any particular type of school designated by the State" (Government of Ireland, 1937, Article 42.3). This again safeguarded the denominational nature of schools. With regard to the State provision of education, the Constitution states that:

> the State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation. (Government of Ireland, 1937. Article 42.4)

These articles remain unchanged in 2022, and underline the primary role of the parent in the education of their child, and the responsibility of the State to provide free primary education.

Denominational Schools and the Place of Religious Instruction

The theme of religious instruction or education has featured throughout the narrative of the Irish education system, and its special status was safeguarded in the twentieth century. Hyland and Milne (1992) reviewed documents from the Second

National Programme Conference (1925) and identified key statements that showed how religious instruction was to be protected, including, “of all the parts of a school curriculum Religious Instruction is by far the most important”, and that “a religious spirit should inform and vivify the whole work of the school”. They concluded that these government documents reiterated that Religious Instruction was “outside the competence of the Department of Education” (p. 106).

Religious Instruction was rarely mentioned in government speeches, an exception being a speech from the then Minister for Education in 1950. He stated that the State “accepts that the foundation and crown of youth’s entire training is religion”, and held the “desire that its teachers, syllabuses and textbooks in every branch be informed by the spirit underlying this concept of education” (Hyland & Milne, 1992, p. 25).

Each church continued to take responsibility for the denominational religious instruction taught in its schools; however, a new primary school curriculum in 1971 promoted an educational philosophy of the integration of teaching and learning to underpin education. This raised the question as to whether religious education was also part of this new theory of integrated education? The curriculum documents stated that “the integration of the curriculum may be seen in the religious and civic spirit which animates all its parts” (Department of Education, 1971, p. 19). This was a clear acceptance and endorsement of the denominational character of all schools. The department provided no curriculum for religious instruction, but such an integrated approach to education pointed to a denominational ethos that impacted beyond the untouchable subject of religious instruction.

Denominational schools 1950-2000

There was an attempt in 1954 to consider the public profile and identity of national schools. The Council of Education report (Department of Education, 1954) proposed that there should be a re-statement of the reality of educational provision, which acknowledged that “the fullness of denominational education may be legally sanctioned in those schools which are attended exclusively by children of the same religious faith” (Hyland & Milne, 1992, p. 93). The same Council of Education report expressed the fear that an unhealthy perception of state control could be created by the term national school and recommended that the designation of ‘primary school’ be used instead, to indicate that Irish schools were not entirely controlled by the State (Walsh, 2012, p. 110). The use of the term primary school continues to this day to refer to that

stage of the education of children, although the words national school are in the name of almost every primary school in the system.

The *Rules for National Schools* stated in its preface "the State provides for free primary education for children in national schools and gives explicit recognition to the denominational character of these schools" (Department of Education, 1965, 4.4). Hyland (1989) saw this statement as taking an unsatisfactory stance, proposing that:

> It is one thing to recognise that denominational schools are an acceptable element in the system and to guarantee that all schools will receive equal treatment - it is quite a different thing to say that all schools are denominational and to enshrine such a statement in the official rules for national schools. (p. 96)

Hyland (1989) also commented that the integration-focussed 1971 curriculum showed that the State ignored those citizens who might have felt that denominational education was in violation of their conscience and lawful preference (p. 96).

In the decade following the publication of the new curriculum, a new type of school emerged, the multi-denominational school. This development would raise questions about the State's approach to religious instruction, and the centrality of the religious spirit promoted in the 1971 Primary School Curriculum. It would also necessitate a review of educational policy and a discussion about the previously exclusive role of the Churches in educational provision.

The Balance of Power in Educational Provision

Walsh described a gradual shift in the balance of power between "the state and the private educational authorities" as taking place in the late 1960s (Walsh, 2012, p. 110). He noted that this subtle shift in power began with a recognition of parents as stakeholders in education and set the context for the establishment of school boards of management in 1975, which replaced the sole clerical school manager. Boards of management included elected teachers and parental members, along with the principal and nominees of the patron. This lessened clerical control over schools, and encouraged parents to become involved in their schools, reinforcing the constitutional primary role of the family in the education of their children. It also showed the management of schools to be a democratic process, rather than being held in the hands of the church representative. The role of parents as stakeholders in education became of greater importance in 1985, with the foundation of the National Parents' Council.

With such reforms occurring, the Church of Ireland realised it needed an official voice in policy decisions. The remit of the General Synod Board of Education expanded

to include more than its previous single brief of religious education. Since 1963, it has appointed a full time Board of Education secretary and the Board fulfils four major functions for schools under Church of Ireland management. These are: day-to-day support and advice to school management; representation of the management interests in discussions of correspondence with the Department of Education; liaison with the schools and representation of their interests at national level; and the promotion of a consistency across the schools in relation to management and compliance with governance (Parkes, 2019, p. 253).

The 1970s also saw significant developments in school provision as a new model of school emerged. Dalkey School Project was founded in 1978 by a parent group who wished their children to be "educated in a multi-denominational school" which would be "equality based, co-educational, child-centred and democratically run" (Educate Together, 2021). By 1984, two other similar schools were founded: Bray School Project (1981) and North Dublin School Project (1984). Educate Together, a coordinating umbrella body and patron was established in 1984. Legislation was urgently needed to ensure that all schools met State requirements in educational provision and, that as the potential for new school types emerged, there was clarity in structure and organisation.

The 1998 Education Act

For the first time in its history, Ireland legislated fully for education in 1998 with the enactment of the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998). In his consideration of the impact of the 1998 Education Act, Sullivan (2018) stated that "the enactment and commencement of the Act brought an end to the legislative lacuna within which education had been operating up to that point" (p. 35).

The Education Act (1998) was the product and culmination of discussion and reports in the 1990s. A Green Paper entitled *Education for a Changing World* (Government of Ireland, 1992) was responded to in a National Education Convention (1993), where 43 stakeholders, including the Department of Education, engaged together on a number of educational issues. Renehan (2014) acknowledged that a core aim of the convention was to promote dialogue and collective agreement among the various interest groups involved in Irish education (p. 35). The work of the National Education Convention found expression in a published report (Coolahan, 1994), and a Government White Paper on Education (Government of Ireland, 1995).

Williams analysed the Education Act (1998) in terms of how it responded to the societal changes of the day, where there was a need to preserve the constitutional rights of children and parents, as outlined in Articles 42 and 44 (Government of Ireland, 1937). There was also a need to consider "the rights of parents whose world view is non-religious, particularly those who live outside the main urban centres and who in practice have no option but to send their children to religious schools" (Williams, 1999, p. 327). The Government White Paper (1995) had raised this second point when it stated that the denominational nature of schools:

> must be reasonable and proportionate to the legitimate aim of preserving the ethos of schools and must balance this right of schools and their students against the rights to education of students of different denominations or none and the rights of teachers to earn a livelihood. (Government of Ireland, 1995, p. 217)

The overall philosophy of education was described in the preamble to the Education Act (1998) as being "conducted in a spirit of partnership between schools, patrons, students, parents, teachers and other school staff, the community served by the school and the State" (p. 5). There is evidence of an awareness of the context of the changing Ireland of the day, and a need to reflect this in the legislation for the education system. The preamble recognised that the State "respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions of Irish society" (p. 5). Yet a new inclusive education system was not prescribed, neither was there an attempt to prescribe the ethos or characteristic spirit of all schools on a national basis, but instead the legislation required individual schools, under the core responsibility of their patrons, to take responsibility for their characteristic spirit.

In defining a school, the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) stated that a school shall "promote the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education for them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school" (p. 13). The characteristic spirit was to be determined by "the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school" (p. 19).

The Education Act (1998) also provided clear information about the organisation and structure of schools; it legislated for further and new types of school patronage, but did not disturb the models of patronage already in existence. It also recognised the rights of the patrons to design and implement programmes of religious

education, religious instruction, or another patron-designed programme to support the ethos of their schools (Glendenning, 2007, p. 327). The role of the patrons was defined clearly in terms of the establishment of schools, yet the door was opening to a broader range of school patronages, particularly those that would meet the demands of parents who did not wish for a religious ethos in the primary school their children would attend.

A Change in Context: A Demand for Non-Religious Schools

Since the emergence of multi-denominational schools in the 1970s and the legislative-backed provision for schools of different patronages in Ireland, there had been increased demand for non-religious or multi-denominational schools. Diversity in Irish society, brought about through inward migration and by a growth in the numbers of people identifying as non-religious, compounded the changes, showing the need for greater diversity in school provision (Faas et al., 2016). A frequently reported lack of availability of places in non-religious or multi-denominational schools, led to increased pressure on the government to increase school places, or to provide new schools to cater for the parents who wished this type of education for their children.

By 2011, the government had seen a need to provide a coherent policy on this issue and established The National Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector. The aim was to examine how it could "best be ensured that the education system can provide a sufficiently diverse number and range of primary schools catering for all religions and none" (Coolahan et al., 2012, p. 3).

The National Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector

The remit of the Forum arose from the viewpoint that there was "a mismatch between the inherent pattern of denominational school patronage and the rights of citizens in a much more culturally and religiously diverse contemporary Irish society" (Quinn, 2012). Its terms of reference were to plan for a more inclusive primary education system by suggesting and recommending changes to the existing school structure; but from the outset, it was clear that there was never a plan to re-design an education system from scratch. Minister Quinn called for submissions on three specific themes: how to establish the demand for diversity of patronage, the practicalities of managing the divesting of patronage, and how diversity can be accommodated where there are just one or two schools serving a community (Coolahan et al., 2012). The Forum consulted widely and took account of 215 written submissions from all major stakeholders, including parents, patrons, teachers, and the general public. Open meetings and consultations were also held.

The Church of Ireland's Submission to the Forum

The Church of Ireland made a submission to the Forum, through its Board of Education, stating that:

> Church of Ireland schools exist primarily to serve the community of the Church of Ireland and the other Protestant Churches. Their right and mandate to do so is founded upon the legal and moral right of parents in our Church to have their children educated within their Christian ethos. (Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, 2011, p. 1)

The submission highlighted the importance of retaining the primary school as part of the Church of Ireland mission, stating that "for a community which is spatially dispersed and demographically small, the primary school is essential to the mission of the Church" (p. 2). This mission was seen as functioning in three roles: first as providing a school of "their own religious denomination" to Church of Ireland and other Protestant parents; second as a means of the transmission of the "faith and culture of the community to the next generation"; and finally as a point of "group solidification" for the distinctive religious minority group, and a presence for, sense of equality for, and recognition of Irish Protestants in society (Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, 2011, p. 2).

In terms of the possible divesting of Church of Ireland schools (i.e. allowing them move to a new patron), the Board of Education noted the inclusion and diversity that already existed in its school network. It warned of the complex considerations that would need to be taken by all stakeholders prior to any moves to divest schools, as it was "unlikely that the Church of Ireland will ever be in a position to establish another school to replace it" (p. 6).

The Report of the Advisory Group of the National Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector (2012)

Following widespread consultation, including the publication of an interim report, to which the Board of Education of the Church of Ireland issued a reply, re-emphasising its stance (Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, 2012); the Advisory Group published a final report in April 2012. Included in the final recommendations was the request that patrons would be open to divesting a school in areas where there was an absence of different patronage types of schools, and where there was demand from parents for alternative school patronage (Coolahan et al., 2012,

p. 62). The report also recommended that all schools (particularly where transfer of patronage was not an option in the area) practise a policy of inclusion.

The Advisory Group also made recommendations regarding the content of religious education. This was the first time in its history that the State became involved in the curricular subject of religious education. The recommendations from the Advisory Group relating to religious education in primary schools included the deletion of Rule 68 from the *Rules for National Schools* (Department of Education, 1965), which stated that religious education was the most important subject in the school day. The national curricula implemented in 1971 and 1999 had advocated an integrated curriculum tied to the ethos of the schools; the Advisory Group now recommended that faith formation/religious instruction should be taught as a discrete subject, and not integrated within and across the curriculum. It was recommended that a new subject content be developed, namely Education about Religions and Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics. This was to be developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the body holding responsibility for all other curricular subjects. It was intended that this new programme would complement and support existing patron programmes in the provision of religious education (Coolahan et al., 2012, pp. 111-112).

Sullivan's doctoral thesis provided a narrative of the process undertaken by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment to attempt to bring the new curriculum to fruition. He described this task as taking place in "a complex landscape of power relations, vested interests and influential partners in education", where the curricular development space became an "arena for negotiations between religious denominations and the State to be played out in the public domain" (Sullivan, 2018, p. 9). The researcher concluded that a cautionary lesson could be learned from "the challenges presented by having a curriculum politically-mandated with the aim of addressing a need (i.e. inclusive religious and ethical education) that is hampered by the legislative and structural (i.e. patronage system in Ireland) features of the system" (p. 124). It is clear from Sullivan's narrative, that the State's attempt to enter into the curricular area of religious education at primary level was met with significant and insurmountable barriers, preventing collaborative partnerships and curricular development. The denominational responsibility for the provision of religious education or an equivalent subject, remains with the individual school patrons.

The final section of this chapter will outline the structure of the education system in Ireland as it was in 2019, this will lay the basis for the empirical research in this study.

The Structure of the Education System in 2019

In the introduction to chapter one, three themes (family, patronage, and religious education) were highlighted as important components in the narrative of the primary school education system in Ireland. These will be discussed in relation to the Church of Ireland primary school in 2019. A fourth theme, the small Church of Ireland school, will also be considered.

Family

The role of the family continues to impact on the parental choice of school. It will be shown in chapter two, how the Education (Admission to Schools) Act, 2018 (Government of Ireland, 2018) sought to level the access to schools, so that schools were no longer permitted to prioritise children according to their religious identity, removing the so-called 'baptism barrier'. Parents continue to hold a right of withdrawal from religious education in school for their child. Parents are also stakeholders in the school community, serving on boards of management and parent associations and represented by the National Parents' Council.

Patronage

The patronage structure continued to influence the education system in 2019. Primary schools in Ireland were predominantly privately owned, located on church-owned land, but were fully State-funded, and educated children on behalf of the State. The patron had overall responsibility for each primary school, and delegated authority to a school board of management. This board of management took responsibility for the daily organisation of the school on behalf of the patron (Department of Education and Skills, 2019c).

Table 1.1 presents the patronage of schools from 2009 to 2019. It shows nearly all primary schools were denominational, they also tended to be located in a parish, or linked to a parish. The Church of Ireland bishops were individual patrons to 2.9% of the schools (172 schools). Educate Together Schools and Community National Schools are not parish based, and have patron bodies rather than individual patrons.

The report from the National Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the primary school sector set out the need to provide for more choice in type of school patronage (Coolahan et al., 2012). To meet this challenge, new schools were planned for areas of

high population, and a policy of divesting some denominational schools commenced. Some changes are clear from the data in table 1.1.

Table 1.1

School Provision 2009-2019

School Type (Ethos)	2009	2011	2013	2015	2017	2019
Catholic	2,878	2,865	2,838	2,805	2,785	2,760
Church of Ireland	178	177	176	174	174	172
Multi-denominational	89	97	111	125	132	150
Other	20	20	20	20	20	24
Total	3,165	3,159	3,145	3,124	3,111	3,106

Department of Education, 2020

In the decade 2009-2019, the number of Catholic schools fell by 118, the number of multi-denominational schools rose by 61, and the number of Church of Ireland schools fell by six. The Department of Education's bulletin (2020) explained the changes as due to some closures of small schools with declining enrolments, the amalgamation of some schools in close proximity to each other, and the opening of new multi-denominational schools in response to parental choice.

All 38 new mainstream primary schools that opened between 2014 and 2019 were multi-denominational in ethos, although they were founded under different patrons (Educate Together, Community National School, or Education and Training Board). The trends in closures, amalgamations, and openings led to a gradual overall decline in the number of primary schools (Department of Education, 2020).

The changes in school provision can also be set against the backdrop of census statistics, which demonstrated changes in the population in terms of religious identity from 2006 to 2016, as shown in table 1.2. The key change between the census returns of 2011 and 2016, as highlighted in the census report, was the increase of 73.6% of those who stated they had no religion. The highest percentage of those with no religion was recorded in the 30- to 34-year age group (12.1%). The 2016 census data also showed that 82.1% primary school age children in 2016 identified as Catholic, 6% primary school age children had no religion, and 2.5% (14,379) primary school age children identified as Church of Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2017).

Table 1.2

Religious Identity in Ireland (Census Data, 2016)

Religious Identity	2006 %	2011 %	2016 %
Catholic	86.8	84.2	78.3
Church of Ireland	2.8	2.9	3.0
No religion	4.4	5.9	9.8
Orthodox	0.5	1.0	1.3
Muslim	0.8	1.1	1.3
Presbyterian	0.6	0.5	0.5
Methodist	0.3	0.1	0.1
Other stated religion	2.1	2.7	3.2

Central Statistics Office, 2017

The Small School

One feature of the primary school network in Ireland is that it is composed of a high proportion of small schools. This is particularly true in terms of the Church of Ireland school sector. There is no one commonly agreed definition of what constitutes a small school, and this varies from country to country, however the most frequently used definition is less than 100 students as a small school, and less than 50 students as a very small school (Department of Education and Skills, 2013). The current definition is that a school is a small school when it has four mainstream classes or lower (Department of Education, 2021). The average class size is 23.1 students in a Catholic school and 24.7 students in a multi-denominational school (Department of Education, 2021, p. 8), therefore a benchmark of <100 students is often seen as a working definition for a small school.

Ireland has the highest proportion of small schools in Europe, with nearly half (41.6%) of all primary schools deemed as small, these schools enrolling only 14.2% of all students (Department of Education, 2021, p. 12). The majority of small schools are rural schools, which are integral parts of rural communities, many with geographical constrictions making consideration of closure or amalgamation a complex prospect.

Only one third of Church of Ireland primary schools have an enrolment of more than 100 students, therefore most Church of Ireland primary schools are designated as small schools. Of the 172 Church of Ireland primary schools listed on the Department of

Education database in 2020, 118 schools (69%) had less than 100 students and 54 schools (31%) had more than 100 students (Department of Education, 2021). There were 64 schools (37%) with less than 50 students. This provides a picture of the Church of Ireland primary school composition, demonstrating that over two-thirds of the schools are clearly small schools.

In a published *Value for Money Review*, the Department of Education and Skills (2013) defined small schools as those with less than 50 students. The aim of the Review was to present the financial implications of retaining small schools (p. 75). In the publication, it was noted there were 582 small schools with less than 50 pupils in Ireland in 2009/10. Church of Ireland primary schools comprised 12% of these schools (72 schools). The report noted that these small Church of Ireland schools were located in 22 counties, but particularly in the counties of Donegal and Cork, and to a lesser extent in Cavan, Monaghan, Dublin, and Wicklow (p. 2). Within 10 years, the number of small Church of Ireland schools had decreased to 64 schools (Department of Education, 2020).

When considering the financial implications of retaining small schools, one metric commonly used is the measurement of distances between schools to allow for amalgamation. Analysis of distances between schools of a similar ethos showed that 68% of the small Church of Ireland schools were further than 8km from the next school. The amalgamation of schools, seen as a logical solution to small schools under other patronages, was therefore not as possible in the case of the Church of Ireland primary school (Department of Education and Skills, 2013, p. 116). The report acknowledged "proposals to re-organise schools raise anxiety and strong feelings and debate within communities, particularly in regard to rural areas" (Department of Education and Skills, 2013, p. 89). Research by Lodge and Tuohy (2016), conducted in response to the departmental report, sought to provide a positive picture of small protestant primary schools. This study will be referred to in more detail in chapter five.

The Patron's Programme (Religious Education)

The status and content of religious education/instruction was discussed at many points in the historic overview of the education system in this chapter. Strongly tied to the Church's influence on education through the patronage system, and the reluctance of the State to get involved in religious instruction or religious education programmes; the teaching of religious education or an equivalent programme has been left to the individual Patrons. The attempt to introduce a State programme in recent years was

unsuccessful (Sullivan, 2018). Therefore, each school type has a distinct programme. In Church of Ireland primary schools this is the *Follow Me programme* (Wilkinson, 2001-2010). The Department of Education or its Inspectorate does not inspect the content or teaching of religious education or equivalent ethical programmes.

Conclusion to Chapter One

Chapter one has provided a narrative of the Irish education system, particularly as political and legislative changes impacted on the Church of Ireland primary school. The themes of family, the role of the Churches, and religious education have featured prominently at all chronological phases highlighted in this chapter.

The Irish education system is in the first instance a State system, underpinned by a number of legislative documents, the Irish constitution (Government of Ireland, 1937) and the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) being the most important. Irish primary schools follow the Primary School Curriculum (National Council of Curriculum and Assessment, 1999). This curriculum contains seven areas of learning: language, mathematics, social environmental and scientific education, arts education, physical education, social, personal and health education, and religious education. The religious education curriculum (or equivalent) is the responsibility of the school patron.

The Irish education system is a system with a structure defined by school patronage. In 2019, when the empirical data for this research study was gathered, the Church of Ireland held responsibility for 172 primary schools (2.9% of the schools). The data presented from Department of Education datasets, when read along with census data, painted a picture of a changing Ireland, where those with no religion occupied an increasingly larger population segment in society, particularly in the 30-year old to 34-year old age groups (Central Statistics Office, 2017). Demand for a broader choice in school type, particularly for schools without a religious ethos, looks set to grow in future years. There is, however, little appetite to change the structure of the patronage system completely, a fact bemoaned by O'Toole (2015).

In a more diverse marketplace, where all schools are State schools teaching the same secular curriculum, it is possible to distinguish between types of school in terms of what makes them distinctive. In terms of the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998), this is the school ethos. In chapter two it is intended to analyse school ethos in the context of the legislation that underpins its importance, and to investigate what the Irish education system, individual stakeholders in education, and in particular the Church of Ireland, understand by school ethos.

Chapter Two

Investigating the Ethos of the Church of Ireland Primary School

The research focus of this study is to investigate the ethos and identity of Church of Ireland primary schools. In chapter one, the history and structure of the Irish education system was outlined, and the Church of Ireland's role in primary school education explored. All primary schools within the State system teach the primary school curriculum; all teachers are paid by the State and are registered with the Teaching Council. Under the terms of the 1998 Education Act, the patron is the body that establishes and operates a school, appoints the board of management of the school, and is responsible for the school's characteristic spirit or ethos (Government of Ireland, 1998).

The aim of chapter two is to investigate the elements of the ethos of a primary school, with a particular focus on the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school. The chapter is divided into seven sections, leading to a conclusion. First, it is intended to explore definitions of school ethos from Irish research literature and to identify a working definition of school ethos for this study. Then, the key legislation relating to school ethos will be introduced. Research has shown that school ethos has both explicit and implicit components and the explicit or prescribed components of ethos will first be explored. It will be proposed that these components are sourced from two external agencies, the State and the patron. The specific role of school patrons in terms of defining a school's ethos will be outlined, and it is then planned to examine the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school under the lens of its patronage, drawing on evidence from publications issued by central church bodies and school patrons. In the second part of the chapter, the focus moves to the implicit or lived experience component of school ethos, sometimes referred to as the hidden curriculum. The challenges of the articulation of a school's ethos through a published ethos statement will also be considered.

Finally, it will be proposed that the construct of, and subsequent expression of, the ethos of a Church of Ireland primary school requires a space for dialogue, drawing on the explicit components of ethos as prescribed by the State and the patron, with the inclusion of the implicit and lived experiences of those in the school community. It will be suggested that dialogue at the interface between the prescribed dimensions of school ethos and the lived experience dimensions of school ethos has the potential to deliver a

rich and unique narrative, which can then be presented in an individualised school ethos statement.

The conclusion of chapter two will provide a summary of the investigation into the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school, and a number of key themes or components of ethos will be identified, to be developed in chapter three.

Defining School Ethos in the Irish Primary School

In surveying the literature pertaining to primary school ethos, it is apparent that the main challenge in working with the construct of ethos is that there is no definitive definition. In Ireland, the term ethos was historically and traditionally used to refer to the religious patronage of a particular school (for example a Catholic school or a Methodist school). In the 1998 Education Act, the word ethos was avoided, possibly due to its traditional use in denoting the religious identity of the school, and it was replaced by the term "characteristic spirit of the school" (Government of Ireland, 1998). Both terms are occasionally used in publications (see Department of Education, 2022). The term ethos will be used in this chapter, unless in direct quotations when another term is used, or when the term characteristic spirit, as used in the words of the Education Act (1998), is deemed more suitable.

On reviewing definitions in Irish educational publications, various descriptors of ethos have been recorded. It has been described in terms of related constructs such as ambience, atmosphere, climate, and culture (McLaughlin, 2005, p. 308). It has been described as the "crucial intangible character of the school" encompassing "collective attitudes, beliefs, values, traditions, aspirations and goals" (Government of Ireland, 1995, p. 11); as the "totality of underlying values" (O'Flaherty, McCormack et al., 2018, p. 317); as a "distinctive range of values and beliefs which define the philosophy or atmosphere" (Darmody et al., 2012, p. 3); as the "lived reality of the values of the school" (Fischer, 2010, p. 4); as "school culture", as "shared vision and common values" (Daly, 2008, p. 5); and as the "shared beliefs and practices of the school community" (Coolahan, 2000, p. 117). The complexity of the construct of ethos was emphasised by Colton (2011), who stated that ethos was "a broader canvas that embraces deeply felt but hard-to-put-into-words notions such as culture, educational, moral, social, linguistic, spiritual values and traditions" (p. 8).

One recurring key theme emerging from the above descriptions of ethos is values; these are frequently promoted and expressed in school, and the descriptors demonstrated a sense of those values being shared by all in the community, thereby

contributing to the school's ethos. It is said that there is no such thing as a value-neutral school (see McLaughlin, 1994), therefore values are equally present in religious and non-religious schools, but can differ in source or impulse, as they may, for example, be linked to foundational religious teachings in a school with a religious identity.

In reviewing the literature, one description relating to school ethos appears to capture all necessary elements of the construct, is valid for schools of religious and non-religious identity, and is a practical working definition for this study. This definition of ethos was designed for use in the multi-denominational sector by O'Brien (2020). School ethos was defined as "the core shared values, beliefs, attitudes and practices of an educational community" (p. 4).

Key Irish Legislation pertaining to School Ethos

Legislation introduced in the Education Act (1998), required Irish schools to consider and articulate their ethos or characteristic spirit (Government of Ireland, 1998). This was a key moment, as prior to this there was no onus on schools or patron bodies to articulate their ethos (O'Flaherty, Liddy, et al., 2018), and in fact, the term was generally used to describe the values (mostly scriptural values) found in religious denominational schools (O'Higgins-Norman, 2003). Schools were in practice Catholic or not-Catholic (mainly Church of Ireland) and this was shown in their enrolment demographics. With the emergence of multi-denominational schools in the closing decades of the twentieth century, there was a growing need to legislate for the structures and operation of a new education system, designed to meet the needs of stakeholders in the twenty-first century. This legislation included provision for different school types (or patronages), each distinguishable by their articulated school ethos.

The path to the definition of characteristic spirit in the Education Act (1998) commenced in 1995, when a Government White Paper stated ethos was the "critical intangible character" of the school and that it encompassed "collective attitudes, beliefs, values, traditions, aspirations and goals". It concluded, saying that ethos was "organic" and arose from "actual practices" (Government of Ireland, 1995, p. 11). In the Education Act (1998), ethos was re-named as the "characteristic spirit of the school", and defined as "the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school" (Government of Ireland, 1998). The definition suggested that the ethos was aspired, prescribed, or explicit, as it informed the objectives and conduct of the school. It also suggested that it was implicit, or part of the lived experience of those in

the school, as the elements were to be "characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school".

The current structure of school patronage in the Irish education system divides schools according to their ethos or characteristic spirit. There is an expectation that all schools under a certain patronage will share much in common in terms of ethos, presuming that Educate Together schools will have a distinct ethos, different from that in Catholic schools, Muslim schools, or Church of Ireland schools. It is therefore assumed there are patronage-specific explicit or prescribed elements of ethos, described by McLaughlin (2005) as both articulated and defensible. These are often first encountered by prospective parents entering the school enrolment process.

School Enrolment and Ethos

Traditionally, it was through clear and patron-approved school enrolment policies that a school could uphold its ethos, by prioritising students whose religious identity was consistent with that of the school patronage (Faas et al., 2018a). Research showed that parents with a specific religious background traditionally tended to select schools with an ethos that corresponded to their own beliefs and religious identity (Darmody et al., 2010). According to Darmody and Smyth (2018), children travelled further to attend minority faith and multi-denominational schools, indicating that their families were making active choices of school patronage by going outside the local area. This was also found in research by Lodge and Tuohy (2011), who gathered information on parental school choice in the protestant school sector. Darmody et al. (2010) suggested that this was not solely due to parental choice, and that denominational schools might prefer to enrol children who shared the same beliefs and values as promoted by the school ethos.

The Church of Ireland primary school has historically viewed itself as a diverse community, attracting those beyond the local parish population. Research showed that less than 50% of the students in Church of Ireland primary schools were members of the Church of Ireland, or members of another Protestant church (Lodge & Tuohy, 2011). Colton (2009), writing from a patron's perspective, considered the range of reasons why parents chose a Church of Ireland school in his diocese, and suggested it could be because they were "genuinely attracted to its characteristic spirit", because the school was representative of their own outlook, or "approximated their own belief system, or was the least different from their belief system". Colton also suggested that due to the plurality of religions in a school, parents may have assumed the school was multi-

denominational. He acknowledged that others selected the Church of Ireland school for practical reasons; because it was the most local school, or because it was a small school (Colton, 2009, p. 262).

In the early years of the twenty-first century, there was demand for a greater choice in school type (in terms of patronage). This was seen as a response to the growing number of parents who no longer wished their child to attend a school with a religious identity. The Department of Education agreed that the school marketplace and choice of type of school was restrictive in terms of parental choice, due to the predominance of the Catholic primary school, and the limited number of places that were available in over-subscribed multi-denominational schools. The growth in the availability of multi-denominational schools was too slow, and not as had been envisaged in response to the recommendations in the report from the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the primary sector (Coolahan et al., 2012).

One strategy, designed to increase diversity in the school system, was the lifting of religious barriers to school admission across the majority of State primary schools. In 2018, the Education (Admission to Schools) Act was enacted (Government of Ireland, 2018). Under this legislation, the majority of schools could no longer prioritise children based on their religion. This had a major impact on Catholic schools, which could no longer require certificates of baptism on enrolment. Each school was still required to have an enrolment policy, but this was primarily needed to manage geographical catchment areas. It will be shown that there was concern within the Church of Ireland community during the discussion stages of this act, as to how it might impact on Church of Ireland schools. In the enacted legislation, there was an exemption to the policy for schools considered minority religion schools (serving a religious community of < 10% of the national population). These minority religion schools (including those of the Church of Ireland) were permitted, but only if over-subscribed, to prioritise a student where:

> the school is satisfied the student concerned is a member of a minority religion and the school provides a programme of religious instruction or religious education which is of the same religious ethos as, or a similar religious ethos to, the religious ethos of the minority religion of the student concerned.
> (Government of Ireland, 2018)

Interestingly, this legislation clearly ties religious education or religious instruction to school ethos. The centrality of the religious education programme in a school was

emphasised as a recurring theme in Irish educational history in chapter one, and in the 2018 legislation it is upheld as a core area in school life where ethos is distinctive. Religious education is therefore identifiable as a key element of the explicit ethos of a school with a religious identity.

Explicit Components of Ethos

Ethos is a complex construct, with a number of key elements, defined as "the core shared values, beliefs, attitudes and practices of an educational community" (O'Brien, 2020, p. 4). It is proposed that some aspects of these elements of an individual school's ethos come from outside agencies: the State in its role as education provider, and upholder of human rights, based in international law and policy; and the patron with a distinct function in terms of ethos. These agencies act as lenses to focus the philosophy, ideology, and ethos of the school in a particular direction. All primary schools will share many elements of a prescribed or explicit ethos, but schools of a particular patronage will also share other distinct elements of ethos.

The State holds responsibility for the free education of its children, in safe and suitable school premises, taught by qualified and registered teachers. It provides the curriculum to be taught, inspects its schools, pays the teachers and staff, regulates for child protection, monitors school attendance, and issues policies and circulars covering all aspects of school life. Its explicit lens on school ethos is therefore consistent across all its schools and should not vary from school to school.

The National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (2015) connected the ethos of the school with human rights, stating that it was important that the ethos, mission statement, and vision statement of a school should be cognisant of the rights of the children, including Article 29 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Ireland is a signatory. Article 29 emphasised that children and young people had a right to "have a voice in matters which affect them", and that "their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity" (United Nations, 1989). This dimension not alone stressed the centrality of the child in education, but also required the voice of each child to be heard and valued in all aspects of their lives, including their school life. This acts as a reminder that the child is not merely a silent or passive receptor of the ethos of the school as prescribed by the patron or State, but that the child is central to the school ethos, and holds the right to have an active voice.

As this chapter moves to explore the explicit lens of patronage on school ethos, it is worth taking note of the warning by Colton (2011), who cautioned against the over-

dependence on aspirational and broad sweeping statements of school ethos which could be prescribed by external agencies. He did not question the worthiness of these concepts or ideological statements, but realised the possibility of multiple plausible interpretations of their ethos narratives (p. 8).

The Patron

Under the terms of the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998), the patron is the body that establishes and operates the school, appoints the board of management of the school, and is responsible for the school's characteristic spirit. The school board of management is subsequently accountable to the patron for upholding the characteristic spirit or ethos.

The government recognises schools when they provide an education in accordance with the national curriculum (Tuohy, 2008, p. 125), but requires each primary and secondary school to have a patron; for Church of Ireland schools, this is the Church of Ireland diocesan bishop. The Department of Education ignores any sense of complexity in its use of the term ethos, simply using it to differentiate between patronages of Irish primary schools. The publicly available database of all Irish primary schools includes a column headed "Ethos Description"; the variables listed are Catholic, Church of Ireland, Methodist, Presbyterian, Multi-denominational, Inter-denominational, Quaker, Jewish, and Muslim (Department of Education, 2022). It is possible for any member of the public to view the brief information about different school types provided on the Department of Education's website, it is primarily for use by prospective parents when applying to schools, when completing parental surveys for the choice of patronage for a new school, or where a school is changing its patronage. The information provided about the ethos of a Church of Ireland school referenced the religious education programme (Follow Me) and specifically commented on ethos in the final paragraph, linking it to values and beliefs, and alluding to events that would be considered as connected to the church:

> The aim of all Church of Ireland schools is to seek to express the beliefs and scriptural values of the Church of Ireland, among which are honesty, justice, fairness, respect, sensitivity to others and civic responsibility. Events where parents play an active role, such as Christmas carol services and plays; harvest thanksgiving and Eastertide are important in nurturing ethos in Church of Ireland primary schools. (Department of Education, 2022)

Prospective school patrons are added to the Department of Education's register, however:

> prospective patrons who wish to be included on the register must demonstrate that they comply with criteria of suitability, as set out by the Department of Education and Skills. They should also define the characteristic spirit of schools under their patronage. (Coolahan et al., 2012, p. 61).

The function of the patron as defining the characteristic spirit of the schools has subtly changed from the earlier role of the patron, outlined in the 1995 Government White Paper, which was only to ensure "the continuity of the ethos of the school concerned, including a distinctive religious ethos" (Government of Ireland, 1995, p. 156). O'Flaherty, McCormack, et al. (2018) took a different view of the role of the patron, saying that the patron was the "guardian of the characteristic spirit of a school" (p. 317). The term guardian also appeared in descriptions of the role of patron as issued by the Board of Education of the Church of Ireland (2011). The Board stated that the role of the Patron was to "ensure the school remains true to the Christian principles of its foundational theology", and that "the Patron has the responsibility to be the guardian and guide of the expression of the faith of the Church in the life of the school" (p. 2). This suggested the Church of Ireland saw a prescriptive role for the patron in terms of the faith-aspects of school ethos.

In all primary schools, the faith-aspect function of the patron is specifically obvious in the provision of religious education programmes (or the equivalent in denominational, multi-denominational or non-denominational primary schools). Religious education, or an equivalent ethics programme is under the total responsibility of the patrons, and not the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment.

If the patron holds legislative responsibility for ethos together with a guardianship role, it might be concluded that she or he has the unilateral responsibility for school ethos, however Colton refuted that by stating that "ethos is more than patronage, but it is inseparable from it" (Colton, 2011). In 2009, Colton sought a definition of his role as patron, in terms of the ethos function. He moved beyond a prescriptive brief or guardianship brief to a judicial brief, attesting that "the patron is the arbiter of what the ethos is" (p. 259). In a wide-ranging paper, Colton, patron of 21 primary schools, considered patronage from a legal perspective. He discussed the links between his office as bishop, with its remit to "teach", "guard the faith", and "interpret the gospel", with his position as patron of schools (p. 255). He pondered his role as

patron in defining ethos, noting that schools look to their patrons for help with this process. This is not a straightforward procedure, as there is no mechanism available to patrons to enable the imposition of a single statement of ethos on all Church of Ireland primary schools. Colton acknowledged that:

> in common with much of the rest of Anglicanism, such is the breadth of the Church of Ireland's self-understanding that it is impossible for patrons to lay down a single template statement of characteristic spirit to be adopted and implemented by each and every school. (pp. 259-260)

Colton's paper therefore implied an expectation of diversity in the expressions of explicit ethos that might be prescribed by the ten Anglican bishops, who are patrons of Church of Ireland primary schools. If ethos is defined as the beliefs, attitudes, values, and practices of the educational community (O'Brien, 2020), the term "educational community" may be as broad as the whole educational community (for example the 172 Church of Ireland primary schools), or may be more localised (for example a patron and the schools in her or his diocese). It could also simply refer to the ethos of an individual school, which is an educational community in itself.

The diversity in Anglicanism raised by Colton (2009), was also noted by Edwards (2014) in her research, which focussed on the culture of Anglican secondary schools in three eastern dioceses in Australia. She noted diocesan differences between schools, concluding that:

> the diversity between the dioceses has produced diverse patterns of relationship between schools and a specific diocese. The diocesan flavour has contributed to the character of individual schools and has had a degree of cumulative effect on the shape of Anglican schools within particular dioceses. (p. 49)

Lodge and Tuohy (2016) were more optimistic than Colton (2009) that a coherent and explicit Church of Ireland statement of ethos could be devised. They issued a summary report on research into the communities, cultures, benefits, and challenges of small Protestant primary schools in Ireland, recommending the patrons create a "dynamic vision that integrates educational, social and religious aspirations into a coherent statement of ethos that is inclusive and affirmative of a range of experiences" (p. 3). This suggested a preference for a general patron-directed articulation of ethos for Church of Ireland schools.

The report by Lodge and Tuohy (2016) also considered the difficulties facing board of management members and teachers in articulating a vision of ethos in their

schools, and the authors suggested that volunteer members of boards of management would be "challenged by the complex educational, social, cultural, and political environments" in which they were required to operate (p. 3). This implies that the authors sought to emphasise the external and prescribed voice over any implicit voice emerging from the stakeholders in the community. In fact, the authors recommended that "patrons may need to look at new structures beyond the current management support structures for communicating an ethos statement that incorporates both the denominational and small school elements" (p. 6). This suggests a generic, well-defined, patron-led prescribed ethos, a model that Colton (2009) had declared not possible; and an ethos statement that ignores the possibility of articulating the lived experiences of those in the school community.

Under the terms of the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998), the responsibility for the day-to-day upholding of a school's ethos lay with the board of management, which was accountable to the patron for this task.

The Board of Management

Boards of management were introduced in Irish primary schools in 1975, with the primary goal being "to ensure that the school is managed in a manner that provides all of its pupils with the best possible education" (Department of Education and Skills, 2019c). A voluntary board, it includes teacher, patron, and parent representatives, and can dialogue on a broad range of issues, whilst working as a corporate body.

The Education Act (1998) outlined the role of the board of management in terms of ethos, stating that it should:

> uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school. (Government of Ireland, 1998)

The term accountable implies a legal function, however the governance manual (Department of Education and Skills, 2019c) does not state how this is to be implemented. In practice, the board of management submits a written ethos statement to the patron for approval. No evidence is available as to how the board of management works out the articulation of its school's ethos, whose voices are listened to in any decision making, and how much of the statement is determined by external influences and requirements, or is prescribed by the patron. From the perspective of the board of

management, Faas et al. (2018b) proposed the reciprocal benefit of such an approved ethos document for a school was that "a well-defined school ethos has been shown to guide leadership practice" (p. 470).

As has been discussed, the patron is deemed the guardian or arbiter of school ethos, and the board of management is accountable to the patron for upholding this ethos. Tuohy (2013) commented that "in effect, the board acts as a gatekeeper between the patron and the school community" (p. 276). Therefore, the voice of the patron is a key external or explicit influence on the ethos of the schools under her or his patronage.

On a number of occasions, in its role as a stakeholder in national education debates and policies, the Church of Ireland through its Board of Education, has made statements that have included reference to the ethos of its schools.

The Church of Ireland and School Ethos

One function of the Board of Education of the General Synod of the Church of Ireland is to "define the policy of the Church in education, both religious and secular, and, in promotion of this policy, to take such steps as may be deemed necessary to co-ordinate activities in all fields of education affecting the interests of the Church of Ireland" (Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, n.d.). It is under this function that discussions about ethos could take place; however, a systematic search of annual reports issued by the Board of Education of the Church of Ireland (1994 to 2022) revealed no items specifically relating to school ethos (Church of Ireland, 1994-2022).

The National Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, 2011.

In 2011, the Church of Ireland, along with other educational stakeholders, was invited to make a formal presentation to the National Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, sitting under the chair of Professor John Coolahan, whose remit was to look at models of education and school patronage, with the aim of planning into the future. This was set against the backdrop of a changing Ireland, where denominational (primarily Catholic) schools were frequently the only options for parents, and a growing number of parents requested an option of secular or multi-faith schools. A planned programme of divesting schools (re-allocating patronage) was on the horizon.

The submissions by the Church of Ireland and other patron bodies needed to consider their distinct offerings to the educational marketplace, and also to prove their ideology and openness in support of diversity and pluralism in the Irish primary education system. This dual context had an impact on the tone and focus of the

submissions. The Church of Ireland submission focussed on two themes: first, safeguarding its schools in the face of any rationalisation, and second, proving that its school network was already diverse and inclusive. In reading the published submission by the Church of Ireland, even with the lens of its necessary focus on a particular audience, it can be regarded as a key document in terms of its public articulation of an understanding of its overall school ethos.

The Church of Ireland submission stated "Church of Ireland schools exist primarily to serve the community of the Church of Ireland and the other Protestant Churches". The importance of the Church of Ireland school was seen as essential to "the mission of the Church", serving the local Church of Ireland and broader Protestant communities in four different ways: parents could access a school of their own religious denomination; the Church could "transmit the faith and culture of the community to the next generation"; the school was a point of "group solidification" for this religious minority group; and Irish Protestants were valued and their identity recognised in society (Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, 2011, p. 2).

The report continued by stating the patronage of a Church of Ireland primary school was "strongly bound up in the life of the Church" and "connected and deeply embedded in the life of the local faith community" (p. 3). In a paragraph specifically focused on a definition of the ethos of Church of Ireland schools, the document argued:

> The ethos of Church of Ireland schools is inclusive. It encourages and celebrates diversity of Christian belief while recognising the search for the Divine can take many forms. The focus of school life is to make the pupil aware of the citizenship of being a member of the Church. This is what gives identity to both the school and the individual pupil. (p. 4)

This paragraph is paradoxical, as, having emphasised the inclusion found in the school and the diversity of Christian beliefs (and other beliefs) present in the school population, the statement refers to making pupils aware of the citizenship of being a member of the Church, suggesting a stronger missional role. The submission also stated that, if schools were divested, "the Church of Ireland would be removing from itself the opportunity to make its children aware of their Church of Ireland and Protestant faith and heritage" (p. 4). Safeguarding the identity of the Church of Ireland school and securing its future, were clear concerns of the authors, yet they were also determined to assert a positive approach to diversity.

The next official statement on primary schools was issued by the Board of Education in 2017. This was set within the context of a new challenge, a potential admissions bill that might prevent Church of Ireland schools from prioritising Church of Ireland children, or other Protestant children, in enrolment policies.

The Church of Ireland and the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018

In 2017, there was much debate in educational fora about school admission policies in light of the forthcoming School Admissions Bill, which could undermine "the provision of education by and to minority faiths" (Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, 2017). The House of Bishops, a collective body of the patrons of Church of Ireland primary schools, issued a statement to address school admission, and referenced the ethos of a Church of Ireland school. This is a key statement, being the first and only statement that included a united expression of school ethos from all Church of Ireland patrons, a task previously flagged as impossible by Colton (2009), in his role as school patron. Reinforcing the key concepts of inclusion and diversity, as stressed in the 2011 submission to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary School Sector, the statement moved to discuss the ethos of the school:

> A Christian ethos demands of its school that every child should be enabled to flourish and that every child understands the importance of striving to reach their potential with integrity and humility.
>
> Schools under Church of Ireland patronage *(have)* an attractive ethos that responds to the academic, cultural, personal and spiritual needs of pupils.
>
> While the Church of Ireland ethos permeates all aspects of the education of the pupils, the schools under Church of Ireland patronage work to take those moral and personal values which are strongest in Christian faith and promote those values amongst the entire student body regardless of their faith background.
>
> Many non-religious parents choose schools under Church of Ireland patronage as they see the ethos of Church of Ireland schools as an attractive moral and spiritual framework within which they wish their children to be educated.
>
> (Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, 13 April 2017)

This united statement, by all ten bishops who were patrons of Church of Ireland primary schools, called for the protection of the Church of Ireland primary schools, so they could continue to serve the Church of Ireland and Protestant communities in which they were located. On close examination, the statement is broad in content, as schools of all patronages could claim their ethos showed respect for diversity, enabled the flourishing

of each child, and that their ethos was attractive. The State would expect this of all schools. Unlike the presentation in 2011, which emphasised the identity linked with citizenship of the Church, the only exclusive reference to the Church of Ireland in the 2017 document related to the moral and personal values "strongest in the Christian faith". What the patrons were then offering as a distinctive Church of Ireland school ethos was "an attractive moral and spiritual framework", with unidentified Christian values to be promoted amongst the entire student body, regardless of its diversity. In retrospect, Colton (2009) may have been correct in his attestation that a unilateral statement on ethos was impossible, as this statement of ethos lacked detail, implying the challenges patrons may have faced in creating a public united statement on ethos.

The sentiments in this statement have not featured in subsequent schools' published ethos statements (Wilkinson, 2021), suggesting that it was not intended as a framework document for schools, but served a purpose of being an agreed broad statement offered into the political debate, with an underlying aim to provide sufficient pressure to those in the Department of Education and Skills to preserve the future of the Church of Ireland primary school. As has been discussed, the Education (Admission to Schools) Act (2018) did, in fact, safeguard the ethos of minority faith schools.

Patrons have from time to time presented papers or written about school ethos. Mindful of the expected diversity between these patrons, as outlined by Colton (2009) and Edwards (2014), a number of these publications will be reviewed, each of which is written from the personal perspective of a patron, and demonstrates his consideration of school ethos. It is acknowledged that the articles were crafted for particular audiences, some external to the Church of Ireland community.

Patrons' Writings on Ethos

In 2013, Archbishop Clarke wrote a series of articles for *The Irish Times* newspaper, and emphasised the diversity of the Church of Ireland school, and its value as an educational provider. He argued that "the ethos of the Church of Ireland school is now regarded not only as of crucial value to the children of the Church of Ireland but also as of worth for a wider community, and for a common good" (Clarke, 2013). He stated that:

> The ethos for which we must always strive is a wholesome place, sited at some distance from a crude indoctrination on the one hand, and a vapid, vague congeniality on the other; a "faith-culture" with a definable element of specific religious faith and commitment in the character of the school but also a way of

life that unselfconsciously reflects spiritual values, priorities and standards. (Clarke, 2013)

This article created a new definition of the ethos of the Church of Ireland school, showing how the culture of the school was enhanced by the essence of faith. In his articles, Clarke also referred to distinctive values as part of a hidden curriculum in schools. The articles suggested a sense of a distinctive offering by Church of Ireland primary schools into the educational marketplace, an offering also available to those of other faiths and none.

In 2011, Bishop Colton focussed on the ethos statement as a tangible output of the ethos of a school. In his address to the Annual Convention of the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools, he outlined the challenges with devising ethos statements, stating "it is notoriously difficult to articulate an ethos statement". He acknowledged that ethos is "profoundly personal" and "shapes us as individuals", suggesting when ideas are propounded in the area of ethos that "we are treading the ground of other people's stories and beliefs: religious and non-religious; Christian and other faiths; conservative and liberal", and asked, "how is the State, how is a local school to enflesh such profoundly felt things?" (Colton, 2011, p. 8). Colton warned that ethos statements could become simplistic and all-purpose, providing examples of potent words that could "lose their force in an ethos statement context: caring, friendly, inclusive, high standards, broad and balanced curriculum, high standards of behaviour, and full potential", acknowledging that all schools would say and hope for such things (p. 8). He reminded his listeners that ethos was more than patronage, being a multi-dimensional construct with both external and internal components.

Archbishop Jackson (2017), in a paper delivered to the Catholic Primary School Management Association Annual Conference, considered the elements of the ethos of a small neighbourhood Church of Ireland school and proposed that the ethos in such a school was twofold: an ethos of "educational content and delivery" and "an ethos of religious or faith principles, values and practices in human relationships and in civic responsibilities, which infuse a secular school that is under religious patronage" (Jackson, 2017).

Having suggested this twofold structure of ethos in church schools (educational and religious), Jackson argued, as had Clarke (2013), that a religious ethos imparted a specific value system on a school. Jackson stated this had a significance beyond the time spent in the school community:

> the imparting of a religious ethos as a contribution to the educational ethos of a school is a specific value system described and imparted in such a way that those involved in the school at every level and in every part, live and share and learn and apply to the school day critical human values of compassion, tolerance, justice, and altruism through the focus of a faith system that is not dead and that is driven by 'caritative' altruism (looking out for others as well as looking out for yourself; recognising the neighbour as a gift to the community); and that these qualities, which need exponents of their belief system to apply them to the life of the community of the school but do not presuppose from the outset full adherence on the part of those who feel their benefit in their preparation for life within and beyond school, contribute to the social DNA of the school and prepare people for active participative, adult citizenship through a lived world view which, with both confidence and humility, works on the premise that values derived from the presence of God in the world of God's creation contribute tangibly to the common good. (Jackson, 2017)

In this extract, Jackson emphasised Christian values as being core to the school ethos, exemplifying a lived faith. He also stressed the universality of the values, so that those of other faiths and none could appreciate and benefit from the centrality of the values in the school community, both in their time at school and afterwards.

In the same paper, Jackson proposed there were three core faith-related aspects of a Church of Ireland school: first, that the school was faith-based (holding a systematic lived World Faith as its bedrock of engaged identity); second, that it was Christian in ethos (offering to all members of the school the values of what he coined 'caritative altruism'); and third, that it was located within the Church of Ireland and Anglican patronage (presenting the way of believing, living and worshipping of the contemporary Church of Ireland tradition as its bedrock of joyful expression of community life and a celebration of God in the world). These three elements, Jackson stated were "each distinct, yet made a specific whole". Jackson's discussion adds a deeper narrative to what is frequently the opening line of a Church of Ireland primary school ethos statement, which reads that the school is a Church of Ireland school under the patronage of the Bishop.

In 2019, Bishop Kearon delivered a paper on the topic of religious ethos in Church of Ireland primary schools at the annual conference of the Church of Ireland Primary Schools' Management Association. He discussed his understanding of the

elements of school ethos, and concluded that the language of individuals, the rights of children, a commitment to diversity and inclusiveness, and an openness to others of different faiths and none, should be part of a Church of Ireland school's ethos statement. He justified these themes as not just part of what modern Irish society required, but as part of what Anglicans are (Kearon, 2019).

The Church of Ireland Primary School Ethos Statement

Each school is required to have an up-to-date ethos statement. These are public documents, approved by the school patron, and shared with parents of students who are requested to agree formally on the contents when enrolling their child. The parents are therefore agreeing to their child being part of a school life and participating in a school community informed by a distinct ethos, or as Jackson stated, a philosophy of life (Jackson, 2017). Colton recommended that the ethos statement should be "a clear and unambiguous statement of the origins, allegiance, vision and practice of the school so that people don't misunderstand what type of school they are choosing" (Colton, 2011, p. 9).

The need for some external guidance from patrons to support schools in the articulation of their school ethos has been discussed in this chapter. It was suggested this is perhaps possible at diocesan level, as Colton (2009) had dismissed the possibility of uniform thinking by all patrons on the ethos of their schools, citing the diversity and breadth of the Anglican Church in Ireland.

Other school patrons have issued agreed statements of ethos, for example Educate Together, which produced a charter on ethos. In an ethos framework document that will be discussed in more detail in chapter five, the explicit elements of the Educate Together ethos were listed (O'Brien, 2020). Despite the ethos being prescribed, there was a realistic understanding presented in the document that factors at school level would significantly impact on its implementation. It was suggested that shared understandings and good practice were the benchmarks at school level for effective implementation of the ethos. The document stated that:

> the formal expression of ethos as stated in the Charter should be reflected in the lived experience of students in the school and expressed through the curriculum, activities, interactions and behaviours. A school's ethos can also be felt through the general atmosphere of the school as perceived by members of the school community and visitors to the school. In this way, the ethos of an Educate

> Together school impacts significantly on the kind of education delivered to its students. (O'Brien, 2020, pp. 3-4)

The framework document contained statements of practice for a school to use in evaluating its implementation of the stated ethos, as part of School Self-Evaluation processes. It was acknowledged that there was the potential of "ongoing tension between the intended ethos and the experienced ethos" (p. 4).

There is no agreed Church of Ireland primary school statement of ethos, however in 2003, responding to the demand for a guidance ethos document for schools, a sample or template was issued. This document was not written by a patron, but was printed in a supplementary handbook published by The Church of Ireland Primary Schools Management Association (2003) and is reproduced in figure 2.1. The Department of Education and Skills had at that stage set out its draft criteria, saying that "the optimal level to be achieved is the existence of such a clear and concise statement of the characteristic spirit of the school that is readily accessible to all members of the school community" (Church of Ireland Primary Schools Management Association, 2003, p. 23). It was recommended that "unlike other policy areas an Ethos Statement would need a framework that was at least agreed at Diocesan level under the direction of the Patron" (p. 22).

Figure 2.1

Sample Ethos Statement (2003)

1. The Church of Ireland school is a community where all pupils are equally valued and respected – irrespective of sex, social background, family circumstance, educational achievement, physical characteristics or intellectual functioning. Pupils experience a sense of caring and belonging, they are treated fairly and their spiritual, moral and religious development is encouraged as is their intellectual, social and academic achievement.
2. It is a community where moral values such as honesty, truthfulness, justice, fairness, sensitivity to others, and civic responsibility are nurtured and protected. The justification for these qualities is based on Biblical teaching and interpreted by the Church.
3. The Church of Ireland Primary School is a part of the local church community and has strong links with the Parish. This, for example, is shown by the fact that pupils attend services in the local church and the Rector visits the school on a regular basis.
4. The work of the school is conducted in an atmosphere of tolerance and respect for religious differences. The admission policy of schools often allows those of other faiths or none to become pupils.
5. Religious education occupies a central position in the school curriculum and is regarded as a core subject; generally speaking, all pupils in the school

attend classes in Religious Education. The teaching of religious doctrine is restricted to specific times in the school timetable.

6. The Church of Ireland school is one where the traditions and teaching of that Church inform the position taken in regard to moral issues which arise in the teaching of secular subjects.
7. The school nurtures freedom of thought and a personal relationship with God. This is most evident in the teaching of Religious Education, and in the prayer life of the school community.

(Church of Ireland Primary Schools Management Association, 2003, p. 27)

The "basis of an ethos statement for the guidance of a Board of Management and the parents of prospective pupils" was purely issued as a guidance document and not 'a public document', but, in practice, was found to be simply reproduced in many schools, and presumably approved by the relevant school patron (Wilkinson, 2021, p. 77). As is shown in figure 2.1, the statement was articulated through seven key themes, and examples were provided to add depth to each theme, possibly as an encouragement to schools to provide local evidence of the lived experiences of ethos.

A few years later, Colton, in his role as school patron, set out what he saw as important to include in an ethos statement, stating it "should be a clear and unambiguous statement of the origins, allegiance, vision and practice of the school". He stated that a school under the patronage of the Church of Ireland should therefore say that clearly, listing the patron and the parish in the statement. He then listed six elements: the school's approach to partnership, education, admission, religious education, religious observance, the inclusion and participation of students and families of other Christian denominations, faiths, and of no religion. He concluded that "typically it (the ethos statement) will set out what the school is good at and where it excels" (Colton, 2011, p. 9).

This guidance for schools was clear in terms of what the patron regarded as key elements of the ethos of a Church of Ireland primary school, yet it provided scope for including implicit and lived experiences unique to a particular school. These could be worked out by the board of management in the draft ethos statement, prior to the patron's approval.

By 2018, it was clear that change was coming in the Education (Admission to Schools) Act (2018); and that Church of Ireland schools would need to ensure they demonstrated a clear and unambiguous statement of their ethos in line with their designation as both a Church of Ireland school, and a school which, in accordance with the Education (Admissions to Schools) Act, served mainly those of a minority religion.

A desk-based research study was conducted in 2018, with a focus on the examination of the published school ethos statements available on publicly accessible, online websites of Church of Ireland primary schools in the months before the new legislation came into effect (Wilkinson, 2021). The 97 ethos statements available to the researcher were analysed and a key finding was the dependence of 53% of the schools on the 2003 sample template in formulating some or all elements of their ethos statements (p. 77).

Wilkinson (2021) showed that seven key themes emerged from analysis of the published ethos statements: self-identification as a Church of Ireland school, parish-school links, school assembly, religious education, values underpinning the life of the school, diversity and inclusion, and the importance of the individual child (p. 78). Close analysis of the ethos statements under the identified themes led to four conclusions. First, schools under-reported practices such as religious education, school assemblies, church services, and parish-school links. Second, although schools highlighted values as part of their ethos statement, they seemed unsure of what values they cherished. Third, inclusion and a welcome of all prospective pupils was emphasised, building on the tradition of diversity (pp. 82-83). Finally, the dependence by many schools on a 13-year-old sample template (Church of Ireland Primary Schools Management Association, 2003, p. 23) implied a lack of engagement with ethos statements by the individual school community.

Since the enactment of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act, 2018, a number of schools have developed new detailed ethos statements. In one diocese, (Dublin and Glendalough) a desk-based website search revealed that identical ethos statements were to be found on several school websites, demonstrating a prescriptive statement of ethos issued by the patron for those diocesan schools. This new patron-issued statement is shown in figure 2.2. The statement itself is anonymised, yet its source is credited below.

Figure 2.2

2021 School ethos statement

School Patron: ……
Ethos, Aims & Objectives across schools under his patronage
N is a co-education primary school under Church of Ireland management. The Archbishop of Dublin. is the school's Patron. The school endeavours to promote the moral, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, physical and social development of all the pupils in its care. The school reflects the ethos of the Church of Ireland and values of honesty, charity, kindness, patience and personal responsibility are encouraged.

Equally it encourages and practises respect for the traditions and teachings of other churches and spiritual communities. The teaching of Religious Education in this school does not involve religious formation or specifically confessional teaching as this is a matter for each family and their Church. The constitutional right of parents to withdraw their child from Religious Education is acknowledged. However the attention of parents is drawn to the fact that due to accommodation constraints and the limited availability of staff a child who is withdrawn from RE may have to remain in the classroom for the duration of the lesson. Children of other faiths and none are welcomed and affirmed.
N is a community where all pupils are equally valued and respected – irrespective of gender, social or ethnic background, family circumstances, educational achievement, physical characteristics or intellectual capacity.
N is a community where the traditions and teaching of the Church of Ireland inform the position taken in regard to moral issues which arise in the teaching of secular subjects. The work of the school is conducted in an atmosphere of inclusion, tolerance and respect for religious differences. The admission policy of the school allows those of other faiths or none to enrol as pupils. *N* values and recognises the contribution that pupils of different faiths bring to the life of the school.
N is a part of the local church community and has strong links with the Parish. Pupils take part in services in the local church (eg. Advent, Easter etc.) Special events take place in the school to mark religious festivals and celebrations eg. Christmas, Harvest etc. The Rector visits the school and takes part in Assembly on a regular basis.
Time spent teaching Religious Education is per Department of Education guidelines. All pupils generally take part in Religious Education lessons. The 'Follow Me' programme (developed by the Church of Ireland, Methodist and Presbyterian Boards of Education) is in used throughout all the classes. Please see the Religious Education Policy for further details.

(St Brigid's National School, n.d.)

In reviewing this ethos statement, it is clear that each of the four elements of school ethos (shared values, beliefs, attitudes and practices) was incorporated, and that all were rooted in the religious identity of the school, with Christian values, beliefs and attitudes highlighted, and references made to practices that were distinctive to the Church of Ireland primary school. These included parish school links, services, assemblies, and religious education. The statement also referred to diversity and inclusion, which, as was previously discussed, were themes emphasised in statements and papers issued by the Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, and by individual school patrons.

There was no scope in the 2021 prescribed ethos statement, shown in figure 2.2, for schools to engage with the elements of ethos and to bring an expression of their unique context or ethos to the articulation of the school ethos. This had been strongly recommended by Colton (2011). There was no acknowledgement, as was seen in the ethos framework issued by Educate Together (O'Brien, 2020), that dialogue and evaluation would be important, that there was "likely to be ongoing tension between the

intended ethos and the experienced ethos" and that the development of the ethos statement should be "discussed, considered, planned for, applied, monitored and evaluated" (p. 4). It is of course inevitable that each school would interpret the explicit ethos statement in its own context. It is also true that the ethos statement would be at the root of other school-devised policies, including, for example, enrolment policies and behaviour policies.

The Role of the Patron in Determining School Ethos: Concluding Comments

In this section, the legal role of the patron, in terms of school ethos, was outlined. The Church of Ireland's engagement with the construct of ethos was investigated through primary sources, including school ethos statements, and a broad range of themes was identified, centred on an underlying vision of being founded in Christianity, promoting Christian values, and teaching religious education. There was clear evidence of a desire to preserve and maintain the Church of Ireland primary school, with an emphasis placed on its Christian ethos and practices, as was noted in the submissions voiced by the Church of Ireland in the national arena. The narrative also demonstrated the importance of diversity and inclusiveness in the schools, whose enrolments are open to those of all religions and none. Diversity is, however, no longer a niche offering by the Church of Ireland, as diversity in enrolment is increasingly provided by other school sectors.

Returning to the working definition of ethos as "the core shared values, beliefs, attitudes and practices of an educational community" (O'Brien, 2020, p.4) the lens of patronage has much to offer explicitly to each of the four elements of ethos, in terms of prescription and guidance.

Implicit and Experienced Ethos

Reflecting on the definition of characteristic spirit in the Education Act (1998), it is without doubt that, when considering the seven elements that were included in the definition of characteristic spirit, "the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school" (Government of Ireland, 1998), that no two schools, even under the same patron, could be identical, in terms of lived experience. It is proposed that many elements of an individual school's ethos are found in the lived experiences of ethos, also referred to as the implicit expressions of ethos.

Lived experiences are unique to an individual school, because the school in its essence and operation is about the interactions of people at their most intimate and

influential, interactions between the students, students and teachers, and teachers and teachers. Donnelly (1999) argued that processes related to shaping ethos were characterised by inherent contradictions and inconsistencies, meaning that the lived ethos of a school was in fact a negotiated process, where stakeholders agreed on what was of value.

The report issued by the advisory group from the National Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the primary sector stated that:

> The reality for children is that the ethos they experience is whether their rights and dignity are respected and celebrated in the everyday life of the school. It is about the day-to-day experience of the interaction of the members of the central school community, children, teachers and other school staff, parents and visitors. All schools, whatever their patronage, should share these attributes. (Coolahan et al., 2012, p. 76)

Darmody et al. (2010) stated "the ethos of a school or organisation emerges from individual and group interaction and their interpretation of events". They proposed that ethos "is a process of social interaction" (p. 45). If true, each school can construct an expressed articulation of its ethos, to which each member of the school community contributes, and within which each member of the school community works.

The implicit dimension of ethos is sometimes referred to as the hidden curriculum, defined by Edwards as "the whole way of life, patterns of relationships and modes of operation which are taken for granted by those participating in the school" (Edwards, 2014, p. 55). Wilkinson noted that some of the key ethos-linked practices that took place in schools were never expressed in school ethos statements (2021, p. 82), possibly because they were simply regarded as part of the traditional pattern of lived school life, were unconsciously hidden, but never thought of as essential components of their school's ethos.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2004) described the hidden curriculum as that which related to the important messages that are conveyed to all those who enter the school, whether as teacher, visitor, parent, or child, by the physical and social environment of the school (p. 32). Re-visiting the construct of ethos in 2015, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment described it as "the intentional pursuit towards an educational aspiration" and stated that "as a school strives towards its aspiration, unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values and perspectives arise in a school environment; these are often referred to as the hidden

curriculum" (p. 18). The reality of these elements of ethos remaining unwritten and unintended means that they can also be forgotten, and too much emphasis placed on the explicit elements of ethos, often provided in prescribed format by a school patron.

If a school is to articulate an ethos composed of shared values, beliefs, attitudes, and practices (O'Brien, 2020), the word 'share' highlights the importance of the implicit or lived experiences of members of the school community. Beliefs, attitudes, and values cannot simply be imposed on a school community, if they are to be shared in the school community. It is, for example, easy for external agencies to promote certain values as elements of the prescribed ethos of schools. Values were listed in the patron-prescribed ethos statement: "honesty, charity, kindness, patience and personal responsibility" (St Brigid's National School, n.d.), but included no comment on how these values were experienced in the school. There was also evidence of prescribed values in the Educate Together framework document, which stated that "the school community actively promotes the development of social and emotional competencies among students, such as fairness, kindness, caring, respect, solidarity, compassion, and concern for others" (O'Brien, 2020, p.7). There is a sense in the framework document for Educate Together schools, that through the self-evaluation process, the school can evidence the importance of the named values in their community.

The implicit and lived experience dimension of ethos has a significant, but undervalued contribution to offer to the school's ethos. It is suggested that a space is required for dialogue and school evaluation, based on the prescribed or explicit elements of ethos, but providing space to listen the narrative of the lived experiences of the school community.

An Interface for Dialogue

It is proposed that, at the interface between the explicit or prescribed lenses of ethos and the implicit or lived experience expressions of ethos, a space is to be found, for dialogue, since McLaughlin (2005) stated that no two schools could ever be the same (p. 312). In relation to the framework of the prescribed ethos in Educate Together schools, O'Brien noted that "the formal expression of ethos as stated in the Charter should be reflected in the lived experience of students in the school and expressed through the curriculum, activities, interactions and behaviours" (2020, p. 3). Reflection and expression are positive outcomes from dialogue. One limitation in this discussion is, that ethos statements, as with other policy documents, may not necessarily translate

into practice (Donnelly, 1999), and therefore it must be noted that both the official statement and the lived experience merit consideration in any investigation of the ethos of a school.

The report of the advisory group from the National Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector included recommendations about the issuing of guidelines/exemplars of good practice by the Department of Education and Skills to assist schools to evaluate their ethos, emphasising that the views and experience of young people should also inform the guidelines (Coolahan et al., 2012, p. 77). Recommendations in research by Sai (2018) were that schools should be involved in self-evaluation and assessment at this precise interface. Dialogue was recommended in the Educate Together framework, and in its handbook it provided a set of statements of good practice to facilitate:

> ensuring that ethos is formally discussed at meetings, that time and resources are set aside for the School Self Evaluation process and the implementation of actions. It also means that there is planned consultation and communication in relation to ethos, with members of the school community. (O'Brien, 2020, p. 3)

In considering the interface between the explicit prescribed elements of ethos and the implicit lived experience of the ethos of schools, it can be regarded as a particular space where stakeholders: patrons, teachers, boards of management, and students, should be working on the articulation of their school's ethos. This was argued for by the Irish Commission for Justice and Peace (1994), as quoted in the report of the advisory group from the National Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, which stated:

> there are intangibles at the heart of a living ethos which cannot really be compelled. Ethos is best expressed, helped to develop, and enriched within the school community as the result of the continuing interaction between a shared dialogue on the core values of the school, embracing the patron, trustees, principal, staff, parents and students, and the daily practice which endeavours to embody those values. (Coolahan et al., 2012, p. 76)

As has been shown, Educate Together has developed a self-evaluation programme for schools in relation to ethos. The Catholic Church has also developed opt-in resources for schools to sign up to undertake a programme of work on ethos, this process will be outlined in chapter five. There is no evidence of similar projects of dialogue or self-evaluation materials recommended by other patron bodies, including

the Church of Ireland. This suggests the articulation of the ethos of a Church of Ireland school tends to be dependent on the explicit or prescribed ethos statements as issued by the school patron.

Conclusion to Chapter Two

This chapter has tracked the narrative of ethos in Irish primary schools, including its construct in literature and the legislation that underpins its articulation in each individual primary school. A working definition of ethos was accepted as referring to "the core shared values, beliefs, attitudes and practices of an educational community" (O'Brien, 2020, p.4), this was used as a basis to explore the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school. The explicit or prescribed elements of ethos were introduced, and the role of the patron was investigated. The ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school was scrutinised under the lens of patronage, drawing on statements and publications by the Church of Ireland, issued through its Board of Education and by individual school patrons. The published ethos statement of the Church of Ireland primary school was also discussed, drawing on desk-based research.

In the second section of the chapter, the implicit or lived experience dimension of ethos was introduced by referring to relevant literature and policy recommendations, and it was proposed that there was a necessary space for dialogue in the school community, and that schools should engage on a local level, reflecting and expressing their lived experiences of the prescribed ethos. A self-evaluation model implemented in Educate Together schools was referenced as one method of engaging schools in this process.

In this chapter, key components of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school have emerged. Throughout the literature and publications there was a focus on the provision of a lived experience for all students which reflected the values, beliefs, and attitudes of the Church of Ireland, as particularly expressed in practices including assembly, parish school links, and religious education. There was also a sense of the importance of respect for diversity in the enrolment and inclusion of children of other faiths and none in the Church of Ireland primary school.

Five key elements of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school are concluded to be part of the prescribed or explicit ethos of the school and will be explored further in chapter three: the school's identity as a Church of Ireland school, the diversity and inclusion provided for and experienced in the school community, the importance of parish-school links, regular experiences of religious based practices

including religious education and school assembly, and the promotion of core values which are grounded in Christianity. In chapter three, it is intended to investigate how these elements of ethos are encountered in another Anglican school context, the Church of England primary school.

Chapter Three

Anglican Primary Schools: Explicit Elements of Ethos

The research focus of this study is to investigate the ethos and identity of Church of Ireland primary schools. In chapter one, the history and structure of the Irish education system was outlined and the Church of Ireland was introduced as one of the providers of education within the State system. In chapter two, the elements of the ethos of a primary school were investigated, with a particular focus on the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school. Ethos was shown to be composed of explicit or prescribed elements and implicit or lived experience elements. Under the system of school patronage, each Church of Ireland patron is responsible for the ethos of their school, patrons approve the school ethos statements, and in some dioceses the patron issues the complete school ethos statement.

Five key elements of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school were concluded to be core to the ethos of the school: the school's identity as a Church of Ireland school, the diversity and inclusion provided for and experienced in the school community, the importance of parish-school links, regular experiences of religious based practices including religious education and school assembly, and the promotion of core values grounded in Christianity.

It was suggested that dialogue at the interface between the explicit or prescribed dimensions of school ethos and the lived experience of school ethos had the potential to deliver a rich and unique narrative, for presentation in a school ethos statement. This study is primarily based on empirical research, capturing the student voice through appropriate instruments, thereby reflecting the student attitudes toward, and lived experiences of, the Church of Ireland primary school onto the explicit and prescribed elements of the ethos of the school.

Before the introduction of the empirical research in chapter four, it is intended to further investigate each of the five identified elements of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school. As there is limited literature about ethos in an Irish Anglican primary school context, it is planned to interrogate these themes in the English Anglican school context, by reviewing relevant literature, policy documents, and practices, and to identify similarities and differences between the two school contexts. Conclusions will be drawn about each theme's inclusion as a prescribed element of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school.

The Anglican Communion is one of the traditions or expressions of Christianity, as is, for example, the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church, and Lutheran Church. The word Anglican originates in the term *Ecclesia Anglicana*, a medieval phrase meaning the English church, but in the past two centuries has expanded from its English origins, and national or regional Anglican or Episcopal churches currently have a membership of tens of millions of people in more than 165 countries in the world. The Anglican Communion is structured into provinces, each province (the Church of Ireland and Church of England are examples of Anglican provinces) is divided into dioceses, and each diocese is divided into parishes. Each Church in the Anglican Communion is independent, and has an independent synodical governance and structure led by bishops, clergy, and lay people. Each province is also autonomous and free to make its own decisions, but is guided by recommendations from the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lambeth Conference, the Primates' Meeting, and the Anglican Consultative Council (Anglican Communion, n.d.). It is also important to note that the Church of England is the established church in England, whereas the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland took place at the end of the nineteenth century.

Chapter three is structured in six sections. As the five themes will be investigated in the Church of England and Church of Ireland contexts, the Church of England education system and the system of inspection of church schools will be the focus of the opening section. The theme of Anglican school identity will then be explored, followed by the theme of inclusion, and then the theme of mission and parish-school connections. The focus will then move to the theme of collective worship and school assembly, and finally, the fifth theme of values will be reviewed. The conclusion will pave the way for the introduction of the empirical research, integral to this study, in chapter four.

Church of England Primary Schools

There are many providers of primary school education in England, and the majority of schools are state funded. The Church of England reports that one quarter of all primary schools are Church of England schools, and one million children attend Church of England primary and secondary schools (Church of England, 2022a). In this section of the chapter, it is intended to provide a brief overview of a number of key events and related legislation that impacted on the Church of England's provision of education over the past two hundred years.

Historical Context

Although education was provided by the churches prior to the nineteenth century; the vision for widespread education for all children began in 1811, with the foundation of the National Society for the Promotion of the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, and a commitment to establish a Church of England school in every parish in England and Wales through a process of fundraising, and from 1833, through government grants (Church of England, 2014b, p. 84).

In the 1870s, a structured approach to opening non-denominational schools, known as board schools, commenced with a rapid building programme (Loudon, 2012). The church schools already in place, were by this time in crisis, facing the challenges of maintaining buildings and paying teachers. With the foundation of Local Education Authorities in 1902, funding for the running costs of church schools and board schools was met by the Government, with building repair costs to be retained by the Church. This system did not work well, according to Loudon (2012), and ended up with Local Education Authorities withholding money due to voluntary (church) schools.

Finally, in the 1944 Education Act, a publicly funded dual system of voluntary schools and Local Education Authority board schools was legislated for (UK Parliament, 1944). From then, church schools could choose to be voluntary aided or voluntary controlled. Schools, which were voluntary controlled, were fully funded by the Local Education Authority, however the church retained much influence, appointing a third of the governors, controlling the denominational worship in the school, providing denominational religious education for those parents who requested it, and could appoint reserved teachers on religious criteria. Although voluntary controlled schools could not admit pupils on religious grounds, they were positioned, according to Brown (2003) "at the interface of schooling and society" in a way in which the voluntary aided schools were not. Brown concluded that this meant that all pupils could see something of religious belief and practice (p. 105). Village (2018) noted, after the 1944 Education Act, church schools were popular as they were seen to have high standards of education and behaviour. Schools provided places for all children in their parish or catchment area, and applied faith-based criteria if oversubscribed (p. 216).

Schools, which were voluntary aided, retained their influence over the ethos of the schools and controlled religious education, admissions, worship, and the appointment of staff (Church of England, 2014b; Village, 2018). In essence, according to Brown (2003), the Church had a "powerful stake in defining the school's religious

character", as religious groups were found to prefer voluntary aided schools. Brown reflected that "although it may be denied in public, the central educational arm of the Church of England would also regard such schools as more desirable" (p. 104). Cox (2011) stated that the statistics showed that many of the Church of England schools ended up opting for voluntary controlled status, which was a practical decision, as many school buildings needed repair or replacement, and parishes and dioceses lacked the necessary funds (p. 30).

The publication of the *Durham Report* (1970), entitled *The Fourth R*, shaped the Church of England's education policy during the 1970s and 1980s. It laid out the two roles that the Church of England held in the provision of education, a general function and a domestic function. Francis (1990b) described these two functions as "a theology of service" and a "theology of nurture" (p. 356). The domestic function was to "equip the children of the church to take their place in the Christian community", whereas the general or service function focussed on the importance of educating all children. According to Francis (2000), the Durham Report "recommended that the Anglican Church should concentrate on the general function and that church schools were then seen as providing a service to the nation rather than a service to the church" (pp. 101-102). Chadwick (1997; 2001) acknowledged that the Church of England had traditionally aimed to hold these two aspects of its educational involvement in balance.

By the year 2000, approximately half of the Church of England schools were voluntary controlled and had inclusive enrolment policies, and many voluntary aided schools were not oversubscribed. Many of England's church schools were in fact multi-faith in nature; a newspaper article in 2011 gave an example of one diocese, Bradford, where there were three Church of England primary schools with 90% of the school population being children of non-white British heritage, eight Church of England primary schools with 75% of the school population being children of non-white British heritage, and twelve Church of England schools with a 50:50 mix of pupils (Baines, 2011).

The Church of England Primary School: Balancing Service and Nurture Roles

The identity of the church school began to undergo a major shift in focus in the final decades of the twentieth century. A new Church of England approach saw church schools regarded as existing at the heart of the church's mission, a very different purpose from that non-affirming role assigned by the 1970 Durham Report. Fresh consideration was given to the domestic or nurture role of the Church of England school

(Francis, 2000, p. 111), and 'distinctive' became a key word used to describe the ethos of a church school. This was evidenced in publications, including a green paper, *A future in partnership* (Waddington, 1984), and several books by Lankshear (1992a; 1992b; 1992c) focussing on the visible signs of distinctiveness that could be found in a church school. This was followed by the commissioning of a Church of England report in 1998, to survey the provision of Church of England education throughout the country. It attested that "Church Schools stand at the centre of the Church's mission to the nation" (Cox, 2011, p. 31; Worsley, 2013, p. 10).

A key report was issued, under the chair of Lord Dearing, and was known as the *Dearing Report,* or by its title *The Way Ahead* (Church of England Archbishops' Council, 2001). Amongst the recommendations of *The Way Ahead* report was the expansion of Church of England schools (Village, 2018), and a focussed need for more Church of England secondary schools. All church schools, according to the report, were to be "distinctively Christian and inclusive" (Worsley, 2013, p. 10).

Writing ten years after *The Way Ahead* report, Cox (2011) reflected on the resultant increase in the number of secondary schools and academies, but set this growth against the backdrop of "internal controversy" in the Church, and the challenges of society, which was becoming more diverse in terms of culture and faith. He also stated that "secularism has found an increasingly strident and confrontational voice, and government commitment to the dual system has sometimes appeared ambivalent" (p. 31).

In 2016, a new Church of England Vision for Education was published, with the title *Deeply Christian, serving the common good*. It was heralded as a "fresh articulation of the Church of England's vision for education" (Church of England, 2016, p. 2), and was introduced as a vision for education that could be taken on by any school, and not just those with a Christian ethos. It proposed the vision was Christian in source, but plural in implementation. The vision was comprised of four key elements: wisdom, hope, community, and dignity, all explored in the document in the context of their scriptural roots, but set within a universal aim for "human flourishing" (p. 2). Village (2018) commented that the vision document focussed on theology and values rather than "secular visions that focus on intellectual attainment" (p. 218).

To conclude, it is apparent from this brief historic overview, that the challenge of balancing the inclusive and service roles, and the domestic and nurture roles of the Church of England in education, has underpinned the narrative. Looking at recent

publications and strategies, it is clear that the Church of England is continuing to work within both these functions. In 2018, there were 4,371 Church of England primary schools, of which 35% were Voluntary Aided, 42% Voluntary Controlled, and 966 were academies (Government of England, 2018). Recent reports published by the Church of England have focussed on: character and values education (Church of England, 2015); guidance for schools to prevent homophobic, bi-phobic and transphobic bullying (Church of England, 2017); the challenges affecting rural schools and their role within the mission of the Church (Church of England, 2014a; 2018a); Collective Worship guidelines (Church of England, 2021); and leadership practices (Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership, 2017).

The structure of the education system, within which the Church of England is situated, is very different from the models of patronage in the Republic of Ireland; yet similar concerns relating to identity, mission, and inclusion were identifiable in the historic overview. These were also shown as being significant to the Church of Ireland as it sought to safeguard the future of its schools, for example in its 2011 submission to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector (Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, 2011).

In England, unlike in Ireland, there is a dual system of inspection, which involves State inspection and the Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools (SIAMS), which is church school inspection. It is within the rationale for church school inspection that many of the prescribed elements of the ethos of a Church of England school are identifiable.

Statutory inspection of Anglican Schools

In England, according to the Education Act (2005) Section 48:1:

> It is the duty of the governing body of any voluntary or foundation school in England which has been designated under section 69(3) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 by the Secretary of State as having a religious character to secure that any denominational education given to pupils, and the content of the school's collective worship, are inspected under this section. (UK Government, 2005)

According to the legislation (Section 48:4), the inspector was required "to report on the quality of the denominational education provided by the school for any pupils to whom denominational education is given by the school, and to report on the content of the

school's collective worship". It was also noted that the inspector could "report on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at the school".

The inspection of Church of England schools under the Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools (SIAMS) is conducted every three to five years, with the aim to evaluate one question: "how effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?" (Church of England, 2022b).

The Church of England stated that:

> The purpose of SIAMS Inspection is the improvement of Church school education through a focus on the centrality of Christian vision, shining a spotlight on the fundamental right of all pupils and adults to flourish. SIAMS inspectors ask questions about and seek evidence that demonstrates the impact that the school's vision has directly on the lives, learning, and development of all within the school community. (Church of England, 2022b)

The inspection process was designed to answer the question of effectiveness across seven strands, with one overall grade awarded. The seven strands were:

> vision and leadership; wisdom, knowledge, and skills; character development: hope, aspiration, and courageous advocacy; community and living well together; dignity and respect; the impact of collective worship; and the effectiveness of religious education. (Church of England, 2022b)

A further stand-alone grade was to be awarded to all schools for collective worship, and to voluntary aided schools for the teaching and learning of religious education, thus implying the importance of these religious practices. It was also acknowledged that "church schools will employ a variety of strategies and styles appropriate to, and reflective of, their particular context in order to be distinctively and effectively Christian in their character and ethos" (Church of England, 2022b).

In contrast, Church of Ireland schools have Department of Education inspections that do not inspect religious education, neither is there inspection from the church. This means the school's Church of Ireland ethos, its content and teaching of religious education, and its content and approach to school assembly are never externally evaluated. It was noted in chapter two that a new school self-evaluation framework was issued for multi-denominational schools under the patronage of Educate Together (O'Brien, 2020), and that some self-evaluation materials were available for Catholic schools, however this strategy was not adopted by the Church of Ireland. There are

therefore no statutory expectations of school self-evaluation, or inspection of ethos-related elements.

Christian Identity, Distinctiveness and the Anglican Primary School

The first element of ethos to be examined in this chapter is the school's Christian identity. Clarity in the name and identity of a school is important in Ireland, as it often defines the school's patronage. Some schools may share a patronal or saint's name with the parish church, for example St Luke or St Matthew. Other schools may not indicate they are a parish school by their name, as they may be named after their town or townland, for example Gorey Central National School or Wandesforde National School. Identifying signage, school logos, and clear information on websites and ethos statements are increasingly important, as schools seek to enrol students.

The provision of certainty about the identity of the school a parent was choosing was highlighted by Colton (2011) as essential in any articulation of ethos. The opening line of the ethos statement of a Church of Ireland primary school frequently states that "N school is a Church of Ireland primary school under the patronage of Bishop N". A school's identity is more than a name or a logo, it suggests that that the school occupies a particular niche in the provision of education and therefore requires clarity of expression about its identity. For example, on the outskirts of a commuter town located 50 km from the capital city of Dublin, three schools occupy a site. The Church of Ireland school re-located there from an old town centre building. The other two schools are new schools, one is a Gaelscoil (an Irish-medium school under Catholic patronage), and the third school is a multi-denominational school under the patronage of Educate Together. There are other Catholic primary schools in the catchment area, but on this site there are three schools, three target markets, and each is required to have a clear understanding and articulation of its identity.

Distinctiveness and the Church of England Primary School

When investigating identity in terms of the ethos of Church of England schools, the term 'distinctive' frequently emerged from the literature, and it was to the fore of thinking about identity in the Church of England school setting for many years. The concept of distinctiveness suggests that the Anglican primary school was different from other primary schools in specific and identifiable ways. The use of the term distinctive, as relating to the ethos of the Church of England school, grew in favour after the publication of a green paper (Waddington, 1984), which included a list of church school characteristics, aimed to emphasise their distinctiveness. The green paper stated "the

Christian churches must provide a distinctive contribution, one that grows out of theological reflection on the nature and practice of education" (p. 105).

The concept of distinctiveness gained popularity and was further developed by Lankshear in a series of publications (1992a; 1992b; 1992c), they focussed on the visible signs of distinctiveness that could be found in a church school. These included a connection with the church community in terms of the parish, diocese, and national church (Lankshear, 1992b). Lankshear promoted a consistent connection between school and church so that each knew about the other and could provide support for the other (Lankshear, 1992c).

Jelfs (2010) stated that distinctiveness emerged in the late 1990s as a way of describing the religious character of Church of England schools, to justify the Church's ongoing involvement in education, and to establish the role of the schools within the maintained education system. She described how the concept was incorporated into *The Way Ahead* report (Church of England Archbishops' Council, 2001). In terms of distinctiveness, *The Way Ahead* report stated that Church of England schools offered an "attractive alternative within an increasingly secular society, a distinctively Christian approach to education in a community of Christian belief and practice, and a spiritual dimension to the lives of young people within the traditions of the Church of England" (p. 3). The publication also listed examples of practices for a school to implement to exemplify its distinctiveness, including:

> the adoption of a school ethos statement; the leadership of a headteacher committed to the school's Christian character; a meaningful daily act of Christian worship; a school life that incorporates the values of the Christian faith; the provision of quality religious education; the observation of Christian festivals; a partnership with a parish church; and the declaration of Church of England status. (p. 20, Section 4.6)

The examples of distinctive practices listed above are, for the most part, very similar to the elements of ethos that emerged in chapter two in the investigation of the ethos of the Church of Ireland school.

Jelfs (2010) noted that *The Way Ahead* report stopped short of recommending policies for teaching, learning, and the curriculum, apart from emphasising the provision of religious education (p. 30). She conducted empirical research in one Church of England diocese to explore how the schools understood and demonstrated Christian distinctiveness, as she had noted the limited empirical research in this field,

and detected an overall lack of coherence in how schools were guided and supported in articulating their distinctiveness. The conclusions to her study were that distinctiveness was best understood at school level, through links between the local church and the school, by having a religious dimension in school life, and by promoting a way of life in the school that was grounded in Christian beliefs with core values of love, care, and respect (p. 36). Personal development and academic achievement were also seen as important. Jelfs commented that Christian distinctiveness influenced all aspects of school life and argued for a distinctive Christian approach towards the whole curriculum, along with a cohesive theory and practice for Church of England schools (p. 37).

In 2016, the construct of distinctiveness appeared to have fallen from favour from national policy, as it was not a term used in documentation when the Church of England published the *Church of England Vision for Education*. This vision document had a tag line "deeply Christian, serving the common good" and an aim to speak into all sectors of educational provision. (Church of England, 2016, p. 1). The executive summary stated that "in Church schools the deeply Christian foundation for this vision will be seen explicitly in teaching and learning both in RE and across the curriculum, and also in the authentically Christian worship and ethos of those schools" (p. 2).

The conclusion to the vision document stated "we want pupils to leave school with a rich experience and understanding of Christianity, and we are committed to offering them an encounter with Jesus Christ and with Christian faith and practice in a way which enhances their lives" (p. 13). This demonstrated an underlying premise that the school held a core understanding of its Christian foundation and promoted a lived experience of Christianity that students should encounter through the ethos of the school, and particularly through practices of school worship, and the religious education programme. This approach can be seen in a recent practical guide authored by Hodgson (2017) and intended for staff in church schools, there, a church school was described as one where "life, faith and culture are one" (p. 33).

Despite distinctiveness not featuring in the *Church of England Vision for Education* (2016), it remained central to the inspection process, as in 2018 it was noted that SIAMS inspected:

> how well the school has developed and implemented an inclusive and distinctive Christian vision, monitoring its impact to ensure the school's original foundation is maintained, and how well the school lives out that Christian vision

in relationships and partnerships with key stakeholders. (Church of England, 2018b, p. 2)

The school was required to self-evaluate its vision and leadership under six key questions as shown in figure 3.1. The self-evaluation guidelines indicated a school-based process, initiated by establishing a vision rooted in Christian identity, and moving to using the vision to shape policy and practice, particularly in relation to collective worship and religious education. Staff, but not specifically students, were to be involved in developing, maintaining, and evaluating the vision or ethos of the school.

Figure 3.1

Vision and leadership in the Church of England school

> a) To what extent is the school's vision and its associated values grounded in a clear theology firmly rooted in a Christian narrative? To what extent do leaders show awareness and understanding of current thinking in Church school education?
> b) To what extent does the school's Christian vision shape school policies and Church school development plans? How is priority given to collective worship and to religious education (RE)?
> c) How well do leaders ensure that the school's formal partnerships are supported, sustained and informed by the school's Christian vision and associated values? This includes how well school leaders work with the local diocese/circuit and churches.
> d) How well do leaders ensure that all staff members at all levels are supported in the development of their understanding of the school as a Church school? How well are future Church school leaders prepared and supported through professional development leading to improved practice?
> e) How well do governors ensure that a robust and continuous self-evaluation process is in place that involves the school community in evaluating their effectiveness as a Church school?
> f) Have the recommendations from the previous SIAMS inspection been addressed and brought about positive outcomes for pupils?
> (Church of England, 2018b, p. 3)

Distinctiveness and the Church of Ireland Primary School

The tag line for the *Church of England Vision for Education* (2016) was "deeply Christian, serving the common good" (Church of England, 2016). It was shown in chapter two that Jackson (2017) described the Church of Ireland school as Christian in ethos, and yet accessible to the whole school community. Interestingly, on reviewing the content of Church of Ireland ethos statements, the word Christian was not commonly found (Wilkinson, 2021). It was demonstrated in chapter one that the vast majority of primary schools in Ireland are Christian primary schools, 88.7% of these schools being Catholic schools (Department of Education, 2022). Identifying a school

as a Christian school is not therefore a distinctive attribute in Ireland. It was also concluded by Wilkinson (2021) that 35% of Church of Ireland schools did not indicate they were Church of Ireland schools on their website homepage. This left the website visitor to search for the ethos statement to ascertain the school patronage (p. 82).

As was seen in chapter two, the Church of Ireland was historically regarded as *not* the Catholic school, and at other times it was seen as the co-educational school, or the multi-denominational school; with enrolment decisions by parents ranging from holding a shared religious identity, to simply being a matter of geography or personal choice (Colton, 2011). It is possible that the Church of Ireland school struggled with creating its own positive church school identity, as it was attempting to distance itself from the traditional practices of the majority provider, the Catholic school, with its strong focus on in-school sacramental preparation. Wilkinson posited that, for the Church of Ireland school to be different, there may have been a perceived need to omit religious elements from the school information expressed on school websites (Wilkinson, 2021, p. 83).

Whilst not using the word distinctive, when Church of Ireland school ethos statements were analysed, it was noted that they included many of the elements of distinctiveness, as previously outlined in terms of the Church of England schools. These included assembly (i.e. worship), church services (for example at Christmas), the religious education programme, and the active links between school and parish (Wilkinson, 2021, p. 78). It was also shown in chapter two that these practices were found to be referenced in public statements about Church of Ireland ethos; for example the descriptions of ethos on the Department of Education website (2022) highlighted church services and religious education, and references were made in official statements and presentations to the school pupils being citizens of the church (for example, Board of Education of the General Synod of the Church of Ireland, 2011).

Unlike in Church of England schools, there is no inspection of ethos-related elements of school life, and Church of Ireland schools do not receive guidelines or self-evaluation principles linked with expression of the Christian identity of the school. As Ireland embraces greater requirements for school self-evaluation (see Brown, McNamara, O'Brien, Skerritt, & O'Hara, 2020; Brown, McNamara, O'Brien, Skerritt, O'Hara, Faddar, et al., 2020), and with initial moves to the inclusion of ethos in school self-evaluation in the multi-denominational sector (O'Brien, 2020), there is the

potential, and an opportunity for Church of Ireland schools, to consider the development of ethos-focussed school self-evaluation guidelines and descriptors.

The second theme, raised in chapter two, was that of diversity and inclusion. The Church of Ireland primary school has traditionally emphasised this aspect of school ethos, however it is not exclusive to this school sector. As the provision of schools in the multi-denominational sector increases, with 74 new schools opening between 2011 and 2020 (Department of Education, 2021, p. 4), there is a clear importance ascribed to the role of diversity and inclusion in schools in Ireland.

Inclusion and the Anglican Primary School

Despite being a complex construct in its interpretation, the educational term 'inclusion' in this context implies the valuing of the individual (regardless of their religious identity) for who they are, so they can fully be involved in the life of the school. The term 'diversity' refers to the individual and group differences that shape a community. Irish school patronage is largely based on religious identity (as was shown in chapter one), so this theme involves the welcoming of students who are of the Church of Ireland or other Protestant faith, Christian faith, other faiths, and no faith.

Inclusion and the Church of England Primary School

The Church of England website stated that its church schools were "inclusive and serve equally those who are of the Christian faith, those of other faiths, and those with no faith" (Church of England, 2022a). There is a challenge for Church of England primary schools to maintain this service role, in tension with the more domestic role, which prioritises engagement with Christian attitudes and values. This tension was described succinctly by Cox (2011), who stated "as a provider of schools, the Church seeks to make a distinctive contribution but also one that is accessible to all" (p. 32).

Enrolment guidance for Church of England schools reminded schools that they were required to balance the service and nurture roles. This posed challenges to the church school, with its diverse school population including children of many different faiths and none, as it had to balance inclusion with its expressed Christian ethos. In reviewing the literature, there did not appear to have been agreement between stakeholders in how the balance was to be maintained. Lankshear (1992a) showed how some saw the Church's role as that of mission and evangelism, whilst others saw the Anglican school as "a good school within a Christian community" (p. 18). Johnson (2000) commented that some church leaders would like the schools to become more Anglican, while others preferred the "usual Anglican light touch" (p. 126). Brown

(2003) raised concerns about the true inclusion found in a Church of England school, where a diverse school population is still subject to the rituals and practices that are part of a church school. He questioned whether the Church of England school may actually be exclusive in construct and stated that this raised theological problems for the Church (p. 107).

The Church of England report *Working Together: the future of rural Church of England schools* (Church of England, 2014a) highlighted some issues underpinning the use of the word 'inclusive' in relation to Church of England schools. Stating that "the vast majority of Church of England schools do not restrict the majority of their places to those of Christian faith", the report was confident that the schools were therefore inclusive. It then raised the question as to whether inclusion was only to be referenced in terms of faith, and whether it should be also read as serving the vulnerable in society (pp. 10-11). This further underlines the philosophical challenges in the use of language such as inclusion or inclusive to describe the themes of ethos.

Inclusion and the Church of Ireland Primary School

It was concluded in chapter two, that the concept of welcoming those of all faiths and none was regarded as very important to stakeholders in Church of Ireland primary schools, this was reflected in an article that included information about the religious identity of parents of students in Church of Ireland primary schools (Lodge & Tuohy, 2011). It was also shown that many of the published statements by stakeholders made reference to inclusion, including the patrons' statement in 2017 (Board of Education of the General Synod, 2017), and the patron's ethos statement from Dublin and Glendalough diocese referenced in chapter two, which stated that:

> the work of the school is conducted in an atmosphere of inclusion, tolerance and respect for religious differences. The admission policy of the school allows those of other faiths or none to enrol as pupils. [The school] values and recognises the contribution that pupils of different faiths bring to the life of the school. (St Brigid's National School, n.d.)

In an interesting juxtaposition, the phrase that immediately followed the above quotation described the school as part of the parish community, and listed the religious activities that took place there:

> [The school] is a part of the local church community and has strong links with the Parish. Pupils take part in services in the local church (e.g. Advent, Easter etc.) Special events take place in the school to mark religious festivals and

> celebrations e.g. Christmas, Harvest etc. The Rector visits the school and takes part in Assembly on a regular basis. (St Brigid's National School, n.d.)

This ethos statement also referenced the legal right of parents to withdraw their children from religious education. The challenge remains, as raised by Brown (2003), as to whether it is possible to balance inclusion with an expectation of participation in the rituals and practices of the church school; is the school then exclusive in nature? (p. 107).

Almost all Church of Ireland schools are, by definition, inclusive in enrolment, as under the terms of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act (2018) (Government of Ireland, 2018), only oversubscribed Church of Ireland primary schools can prioritise enrolment to those who share the ethos of the school in terms of the religious education provided in the school. Nine Church of Ireland primary schools closed between 2011 and 2020 due to reduced enrolments (Department of Education, 2021, p. 4). The school patron, school board of management, and the Department of Education agreed these closures after consultation. These consultations would inevitably have included discussion about the enrolment of Church of Ireland and other Protestant students, and the future role of the school as an educational provider in the community. Closures like this raise the question as to whether the Church of Ireland primary school is primarily there to educate children who identify as Church of Ireland, Methodist, or Presbyterian, or whether there is a broader inclusive role for the Church of Ireland primary school?

Not all small Church of Ireland schools follow an inevitable path toward closure. In 2008, one small Church of Ireland school (previously located in a village but due to urban spread was then located in the commuter belt of the capital city), responded to the population needs in the area for a new Christian school, and accepted the challenge to expand over one summer from a three-teacher school to a 15-teacher school by welcoming a diverse enrolment, whilst retaining its Church of Ireland ethos. In 2021, the school had 410 students and was the largest Church of Ireland primary school. Its website clearly stated that the school was under the patronage of the Church of Ireland: "Being Church of Ireland, we seek to express the beliefs and scriptural values of the Church of Ireland among which are honesty, justice, fairness, respect and openness to all others". It also noted "within our community there are 54 different languages" (St George's National School, n.d.).

One point to consider in this debate is the place of the school in terms of the mission of the Church. The Church of Ireland primary school has traditionally been

regarded as part of the parish community; this implies strong links between church and school and includes consideration of a mission role; this has also been a key theme in discussions about the ethos of the Church of England school.

The Mission Role of the Anglican Primary School

The relationship between the parish church and the school is complex and as it will be shown, it can vary greatly in different contexts. Often sharing the patronal or parish name of the church, the school may be viewed as part of the parish, and this is expressed by movement between school and church for liturgical events, and between the church and school, most obviously in the person of the rector.

Connections between the Church of England Primary School and Parish

The domestic and service roles of the Church of England, in terms of educational provision, have been discussed; the literature suggests there is a third role for Anglican schools, a mission role. Some writers about Church of England schools have emphasised this; the report *The Way Ahead* (Church of England Archbishops' Council, 2001) saw the role of the school as mission, stating "if the children are not coming to us we must go to them". It stated that church schools were "the Church's main opportunity to serve young people" (p. 12), and gave children "the opportunity to know Christ, to learn in a community that seeks to live by his word, and to engage in worship" (p. 10). Other writers have focussed on a sense of encounter and invitation. Terry (2013) stated that:

> the Church School is now, *de facto*, the main place in which the children, young people and many of the adults of our country meet Christian beliefs. Ecclesiologically, the school is a face and form of the Church of England comparable with the local parish church. (p. 127)

This was endorsed by Astley (2014), who stated that "lay people cannot but live in a secular world; they and the schools they run are at the front line of the Church's dialogue, mission and ministry with and to the world, operating as its 'ordinary theologians'" (p. 86). Astley (2014) unpacked the term Christian education, distinguishing between "education into Christianity" and "the implicit Christian nature of church schools". He stated that the "implicitly Christian nature of much of this education is particularly impressed in values learned through the hidden curriculum of the institution's relationships, discipline, decision making etc." (p. 75). He emphasised the importance of a church school, saying it was a threshold with the secular world.

Chesters (2001) regarded the church school as having a dual role, nurturing those

who came from Christian homes and providing a positive experience of a Christian community in church schools to those of other faiths and none. He also emphasised the importance of an attitude of respect toward, and understanding of, those of other faiths and none. Cox (2011) stated "at the heart of what makes a school and its ethos distinctive lie beliefs". Discounting the possibility of a belief-neutral education, he underlined the fact that "in a church school the foundational beliefs are those of the Christian Church. They are distinctive" (p. 34). This faith-centred distinctive approach to education in the church school was not to be "mealy-mouthed, but real, joyful and confident even while it remains faith and not a guaranteed certainty", within the arms of a missional "invitation and an opportunity, not an insistence or indoctrination" (p. 34).

Cox (2011) advocated strongly for a mutual relationship between parish and school, with a potential to enrich both institutions. He highlighted the importance of the visibility of the clergy in the school and at school events, opportunities for lay people to contribute to the life of the school, and noted the key roles of governors. He also advocated the use of the church building as a resource for schools in many curricular areas, and as an educational means of understanding the Christian faith (p. 161).

The Church of England report on rural schools *Working Together: the future of rural Church of England schools* referred to the working partnership of schools and churches in the education of children, enabling them to "truly grown and flourish" (Church of England 2014a, p. 3). The schools were described as "another expression of the Church of England's presence in a community as it seeks to serve children and people of all ages" and the report stated the church schools were "at the heart of our mission to the nation". Churches were said to grow where there was "a local school and a focus on ministry with children and young people". The million hours of time that clergy gave to supporting school was also seen as "a gift to the nation" (pp. 8-10).

The SIAMS inspection guidelines also referred to partnerships between school, parish church, and diocese. Questions were included such as:

> How well do leaders ensure that the school's formal partnerships are supported, sustained and informed by the school's Christian vision and associated values? This includes how well school leaders work with the local diocese and churches. (Church of England, 2018b, p. 2)

Grade descriptors for a 'good' school stated "a distinctive feature of the school is that it understands itself as a partner with the local church and diocese. Leaders are proactive

in seeking and maintaining mutually beneficial partnerships with the local church and diocese". In an 'excellent' school it was stated:

> leaders ensure that the relationship between the school, church and diocese is supportive and sustainable, enhancing the learning of both pupils and the congregation. It is a link that is widely acknowledged and valued by all members of the school community. (Church of England, 2018b, pp. 3-4)

A brief search of Church of England diocesan websites indicated advice and support for schools from a number of diocesan boards of education and resource staff. Guidelines for praying for and supporting a parish school were recommended to parishes and clergy (for example in the Diocese of St. Albans and the Diocese of Lincoln). Clearly, in many dioceses there is a sense that support for schools is an element of the mission of the church. Despite an emphasis in the literature on the Church of England as provider of education for all, it is apparent that the sense of mission is intertwined with this role. This is also clear in the *Church of England Vision for Education* (Church of England, 2016), which stated that "we want pupils to leave school with a rich experience and understanding of Christianity, and we are committed to offering them an encounter with Jesus Christ and with Christian faith and practice in a way which enhances their lives" (p. 16).

The theme of mutual support also arose in a 2020 report *Faith in the Nexus* (Casson et al., 2020), this project's findings found that "positive relationships between church and school are characterised by invitational worship, celebration of festivals, the presence of the minister in the school, and a sense of belonging and connection to the church community and building", and that "a strong relationship between church and the school has a strong association with attitudes and behaviours which facilitate faith-talk and interactions at home" (p. 87).

The authors of the report discussed church belonging, and stated that for many parents and pupils, they considered themselves belonging to the church, but identified as "Christians who do not attend church". They commented if "ministers do not work closely with school, they are disconnecting from people who consider themselves to be part of the Christian family" (p. 43). There is some ambiguity in Church of England writings as to how the Church or parish regards the school. Astley (2014) implored resistance to viewing children as members of the church and suggested the church school was a "half-way house" or "mixed economy" between the Church and State, and local community (p. 78).

Casson et al. (2020) concluded there was evidence "to inspire collaborative working between church and school, church and home" and that relationships between school and church should be "strategically prioritised" (p. 88). Furthermore, Casson et al. stated "church schools are places where talking about faith is normal" and "church schools offer a view of Christianity as a lived religion" (pp. 11-12). Although the authors of the study did not explicitly suggest there was a mission role for the school, the key aim was to investigate ways to facilitate opportunities for children to explore faith and spiritual life in the home. The church school was seen to have a key role in this, nurtured by the parish church.

Connections between the Church of Ireland Primary School and Parish

The strength of the link between the Church of Ireland parish church and school varies from school to school, obvious factors being the proximity of the school to the church, and the presence and availability of a rector. There is an explicit or prescribed expectation that the parish church will be strongly connected with the school, this is found in phrases such as this from the Dublin and Glendalough patron-issued diocesan ethos statement, which indicated the expected parish school connections:

> [The school] is a part of the local church community and has strong links with the Parish. Pupils take part in services in the local church (e.g. Advent, Easter etc.) Special events take place in the school to mark religious festivals and celebrations e.g. Christmas, Harvest etc. The Rector visits the school and takes part in Assembly on a regular basis. (St Brigid's National School, n.d.)

This was also the expectation and aspiration in an earlier 2003 sample ethos statement:

> The Church of Ireland Primary School is a part of the local church community and has strong links with the Parish. This, for example, is shown by the fact that pupils attend services in the local church and the Rector visits the school on a regular basis. (Church of Ireland Primary Schools Management Association, 2003, p. 27)

The ethos description for the Church of Ireland, found on the Department of Education website, included a phrase suggesting that the church was a space where parents of the school students were involved, stating "events where parents play an active role, such as Christmas carol services and plays; harvest thanksgiving and Eastertide are important in nurturing ethos in Church of Ireland primary schools" (Department of Education, 2022). Interestingly, this statement does not refer to the involvement of the students in these events.

In its submission to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, the Board of Education of the Church of Ireland stated that "the focus of school life is to make the pupil aware of the citizenship of the Church" (Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, 2011, p. 4). In the contextual information supplied in its submission to the forum, the Church of Ireland school was seen as "often closely related to the local parish" and "therefore connected and deeply embedded in the life of the local faith community" (p. 3).

In its plea for caution in the divesting of schools it was stated that:

> in attempting to divest itself of a school, the Church of Ireland community would be removing from itself the opportunity to make its children aware of their Church of Ireland or other Protestant faith of heritage and that this would be a significant deprivation for the children of that community. (p. 4)

Practical examples of diocesan support and links for schools in Ireland are seen in annual diocesan school events. Most Church of Ireland dioceses held diocesan school services in 2019, gathering schools from the diocese together for worship (for example the diocese of Kilmore, Elphin, and Ardagh; and the diocese of Cork, Cloyne, and Ross). Other dioceses held diocesan art competitions or choral festivals (for example the diocese of Cashel, Ferns, and Ossory). These events support connections between schools of the same patronage, and between the patron (bishop) and the diocesan schools.

In a desk based research study, Wilkinson (2021) analysed the ethos statements of 97 Church of Ireland primary schools and demonstrated that 37% of the schools did not mention the parish or rector in their ethos statements, and that only 38% of schools mentioned the rector visiting the school (Wilkinson, 2021, p. 78). This implied a disparity between the explicit strong connections between school and parish and rector, and how it was expressed in school ethos statements.

It is concluded that sustaining a link between parish church and school was seen as important in Anglican schools in both England and Ireland, some relevant evidence was provided of a mission role for the church school in England, ideally supported by the parish church and clergy. Diocesan supports that were practical, resource-based, and spiritual, provided evidence of the importance of the church school to mission in the diocese. Diocesan school services and events were also noted as occurring in the Church of Ireland in 2019, and the rector's involvement in school services and school assemblies appeared to be important tangible markers of parish-school links.

Wilkinson's research (2021) implied a disparity between the explicit or prescribed strong connections between school and parish and rector, and how the relationship was expressed in school ethos statements. As with the theme of school identity, the provision of guidance and self-evaluation descriptors would be of potential benefit.

Collective Worship and School Assembly in the Anglican Primary School

The inclusion of daily worship in school is mandatory in England (UK Parliament, 1944); and in Church of Ireland primary schools it is a traditional (often weekly) component of the school timetable, and strongly tied to the school's identity. School assembly is often seen as part of the parish-school connection, due to the rector's involvement; it is also deemed part of the religious education programme with reference to be found in the religious education teachers' manual (for example Wilkinson, 2007, p. xiv).

Collective Worship and the Church of England Primary School

The Christian faith holds a privileged role in English schools. This was underlined in the 1944 Education Act, which stated that all schools "should hold a daily act of collective worship" (UK Parliament, 1944). This collective worship was to be Christian in character. Even as society changed in the second half of the twentieth century, this was again reinforced in the 1988 Education Reform Act, which stated that "all pupils in attendance at a maintained school shall on each school day take part in an act of collective worship", such worship should be "wholly or mainly of a broadly Christian character" (UK Parliament, 1988). Recent guidance from the Church of England stated that Church of England schools "are places that recognise and value collective worship as central to fostering a sense of community and to expressing the school's Christian vision" and that collective worship "is the unique heartbeat of the school" (Church of England, 2021, p. 1).

Some commentators were enthusiastic about the importance of collective worship in England. Village (2018) said "school assemblies are moments when pupils and teachers from the whole school (or parts of a large school) gather in one place. They are opportunities to exchange information, but also moments that express something of the ethos and atmosphere of a school" (p. 215). Cox (2011) attempted to lay out the distinctiveness of collective worship in a church school. He drew on opportunities for reflecting the context, for example the links with the parish; and suggested a liturgical shape to worship, concluding that the distinctiveness "grows out of the life of a community where faith is held and lived by", and that it "both reflects and shapes the

Christian ethos of that community" (p. 148). He also stated that distinctiveness was a mystery "and that is why it is in worship that one comes closest to it" (p. 149). Terry (2013) reflected on the diversity of enrolment in a church school and stated that when daily worship is conducted well "this balances the gentle offering of the Christian faith with a clear and unpatronizing respect for those who are not Christians" (p. 120).

Loudon (2012) also acknowledged the challenges of including those of Christian identity and those with other faith backgrounds and none in the daily worship, noting that:

> Commitment to daily worship persists, with visits to church especially on festivals and holy days, but with a clear understanding that pupils are not there as part of the religious community. Understanding worship as an activity promoting the spiritual development of all pupils of whatever faith background or none, is just as evident in Church of England schools as community schools. There is significant involvement of Church of England clergy and members of parish communities, leading worship in church or in school. Their aim is to enable all children to understand something of the nature and impact of worship in the Christian tradition from the inside, and let that help shape their own emergent spirituality. (p. 5)

A guidance document for collective worship in Church of England schools was issued in 2021. It sought to reimagine collective worship in the church school under the key themes of it being inclusive, invitational, and inspiring (Church of England, 2021, p. 2). Daily worship provided all members of the school community with an opportunity to gather as a community and support one another, with a structure that was recognisable and would be led confidently and professionally by trained and resourced worship leaders. Aims and objectives to be inspected were published and are presented in figure 3.2.

Figure 3.2

Guidance for Collective Worship in the Church of England

Collective worship in a Church of England school will do the following: *Explore the school's vision and how that underpins shared values and virtues. In doing so, it will reflect on moral values such as compassion, gratitude, justice, humility, forgiveness and reconciliation; and develop virtues such as resilience, determination and creativity that develop character and contribute to academic progress.

*Help pupils and adults to appreciate the relevance of faith in today's world by encountering the teachings of Jesus and the Bible and developing understanding of the Christian belief in the trinitarian nature of God.
*Offer the opportunity, without compulsion, to all pupils and adults to grow spiritually through experiences of prayer, stillness, worship and reflection.
*Enable all pupils and adults to appreciate that Christians worship in different ways, for example using music, silence, story, prayer, reflection, as well as through the varied liturgical and other traditions of Anglican worship, festivals and, where appropriate, the Eucharist.
*Enable pupils to develop skills through engaging in the planning, leading and evaluation of collective worship in ways that lead to improving practice.

(Church of England, 2021, p. 3)

These aims are broad in scope, with full pupil involvement at all stages of the process, and support the three key themes underpinning the approach to collective worship, "inclusive, invitational, and inspiring".

Worship and the Church of Ireland Primary School

Traditionally, Church of Ireland primary schools hold Christmas carol services, and sometimes Easter or end of year graduation services in the local church, with parents invited to be present, this was noted in the ethos guidance on the Department of Education website (Department of Education, 2022).

Many schools hold at least a weekly school assembly with a religious element. School assembly is regarded as part of the patron's religious education programme in the Church of Ireland primary school, and is not subject to State inspection. There are no published guidelines or policies relating to school assembly. There was no reference to school assembly in the sample ethos statement of 2003 (Church of Ireland Primary Schools Management Association, 2003, p. 27), and the diocesan statement issued in 2021 only referred to the rector's involvement in school assembly. The empirical research in this study will fill a gap in the knowledge by providing some data about student attitudes toward school assembly and its role in Church of Ireland schools.

The provision of visible and event-based expressions of ethos such as school assembly are valuable components of the articulation of the ethos of the school and are experience-based events. The teaching of religious education is conducted on a separate and denominational basis in Ireland, therefore comparisons are not easily possible with the provision of the subject in Church of England schools. As with collective worship, religious education is subject to inspection (SIAMS) in England.

In chapter two, when defining ethos, a key theme was the selection of values experienced and expressed in the school, and a sense of those values being shared by

those in the community. These implicit values, integral to the ethos of the school, are often present in published ethos statements.

Christian Values and the Anglican Primary School

As was mentioned in chapter two, the implicit dimension of ethos is sometimes referred to as the hidden curriculum and can be defined as "the whole way of life, patterns of relationships and modes of operation which are taken for granted by those participating in the school" (Edwards, 2014, p. 55). Expression of the implicit dimension of ethos usually incorporates a list of core values, the challenges the list presents to a researcher is, that there is frequently no source or rationale for the selected values, and the cautious reader wonders as to how the listed values were identified as central to the school's ethos?

Christian values were, according to Astley (2014), key to the role of the Church of England and its schools (p. 86). The Church of England's National Society intended that character in its schools would be formed by exposure to, engagement, and participation in the teachings of the Church and its worship (Church of England, 2014b). *The Way Ahead* report commended the promotion of Christian values in Anglican Church schools and suggested consideration of the biblical foundation of the Christian values (Church of England Archbishops' Council, 2001).

Values and the Church of England Primary School

A report was commissioned to mark the 200th anniversary of the National Society, and to identify the challenges and opportunities for Church of England schools (Louden, 2012). One of its recommendations, which clearly influenced the Church of England vision document of 2016, was a website *Christian Values for Schools*. This explored the Christian roots of 14 named values, and suggested how they could be expressed in the whole life of the school. These 14 values were reverence, wisdom, thankfulness, humility, endurance, service, compassion, trust, peace, forgiveness, friendship, justice, hope, creation, and koinonia.

A Church of England discussion paper was published with a focus on character education; it warned that even the most inspiring lists of values or virtues "can lead to schools focusing on ticking off items on the list, rather than genuinely embedding it into school life" (2015, p. 8). It stated that lists of virtues and values required "a coherent and rigorous sense of purpose underpinning them. This sense of purpose will inevitably be culturally specific, rooted in particular communities and their beliefs and practices" (Church of England, 2015, p. 3).

Lists of values did not appear in the *Church of England Vison for Education* (Church of England, 2016), which simply introduced the ultimate purpose of education as "life in all its fullness" (p. 2). This implied the holistic development of the students in all aspects of their lives: spiritual, moral, social, and cultural, and is often regarded as the concept of flourishing. Values reappeared in the Church of England guidelines for collective worship (Church of England, 2021), which included as an aim, that the "moral values such as compassion, gratitude, justice, humility, forgiveness, and reconciliation" will be reflected on in collective worship as part of the school's vision (p. 3).

An online search of diocesan statements and advice to Church of England schools, in relation to core values, showed they were seen as important to the distinctiveness of the school and its overall vision. This is illustrated with two examples, first from the Diocese of Chichester, giving broad advice to its schools:

> Although each church school will be unique, all church schools will share core values based on the Gospel values. Our church schools should therefore be places where loving God and loving our neighbours, is lived out in the daily life of the school. (Church of England, Diocese of Chichester, n.d.)

The Diocese of Chichester added that schools should "incorporate the values of the Christian faith". No specific list of named values was provided. The Diocese of York (2018) produced a guidance document to support schools in developing their vision and values. The document was to encourage work at individual school level and incorporated examples of output from a number of its schools. It advised that:

> It is important to involve the whole school community in establishing core Christian values that drive what you do. Each school community is unique and therefore there is not a set model for how to do this or which values would be your core values. The Christian values for Schools website is an excellent resource to support conversations about your core Christian values and their Christian underpinning, though it does not purport to be the definitive list of Christian values. What is key is that your values are the outworking of your vision and distinctively Christian. (Church of England, Diocese of York, 2018, p. 5)

The final sentence of this guidance links the values to the individual school and its vision, but also reminds church schools that their vision and values need to be clearly rooted in Christianity.

Values and the Church of Ireland Primary School

It was shown in chapter two, that values regularly featured in Church of Ireland primary school ethos statements. As in Church of England schools, many core values in Church of Ireland schools could be seen as centred on religious faith or scripture, others may evolve from the school community and the values its members see as important. In 2003, a sample ethos statement was provided for Church of Ireland primary schools; one element of the statement contained a list of six values, "honesty, truthfulness, justice, fairness, sensitivity to others, and civic responsibility" (Church of Ireland Primary Schools' Management Association, 2003, p. 27). Most of these were quoted in the ethos descriptor on the Department of Education website which referenced the "beliefs and scriptural values of the Church of Ireland, among which are honesty, justice, fairness, respect, sensitivity to others and civic responsibility". In the list, 'truthfulness' in the 2003 document, was replaced by 'respect' (Department of Education, 2022). In her review of school ethos statements, Wilkinson (2021) found that many schools simply copied the 2003 list of values (pp. 80-81), showing little attention to the unique context of the school, or the "lived reality of the values of the school" (Fischer, 2010, p. 4).

The Dublin and Glendalough patron's ethos statement included the statement that "the school reflects the ethos of the Church of Ireland and values of honesty, charity, kindness, patience and personal responsibility are encouraged" (St Brigid's National School, n.d.). The term "ethos of the Church of Ireland" is not expanded on in the document, and there is no indicated source or justification for the selected values, neither a definition for the values (which in the case of 'charity', with several dictionary meanings), might have been helpful to schools.

Jackson (2017) noted that a religious ethos in a primary school implied a value system that was "derived from the presence of God in the world of God's creation" and contributed "tangibly to the common good". He cited the values of "compassion, tolerance, justice and altruism", which were focussed through a living "faith system" (p. 3). The ten school patrons (bishops) stated in 2017 that "the schools under Church of Ireland patronage work to take those moral and personal values which are strongest in Christian faith and promote those values amongst the entire student body regardless of their faith background" (Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, 2017).

In 2011, Colton had expressed concern about the wording of ethos statements, stating they could become simplistic or all-purpose, with many potent words, including

key values, losing their force because they could be interpreted in any school context. Wilkinson's (2021) analysis of school ethos statements supported Colton's concerns, as lists of values featured in the ethos statements of 63% of the analysed ethos statements, with 18 different values emerging from the coding process. This could be regarded as a positive outcome, as it implied that schools were at least considering the values they wished to include in their ethos statements. It was also noted by Wilkinson that 64% of schools did not suggest a source of justification for the values they included, and she suggested that there was "scope for conversation in schools about the values they may cherish, and whether in a church school these are in fact sourced from Christian teachings?" The author recommended that "guided discussion materials would be of benefit for schools initiating this process" (pp. 80-81). If Christian schools are expected to promote Christian values, and if their hidden curriculum and the students' lived experience of school are expected to reflect those values; there is potential for discussion about values at individual school level. The resulting construct of values for the ethos statements would be of greater value to schools, than simply the receipt of a list of prescribed values.

The Educate Together school self-evaluation ethos framework included descriptors under the theme of values, naming them social and emotional competencies, and stating that effective practice was to be found when "the school community actively promotes the development of social and emotional competencies among students, such as fairness, kindness, caring, respect, solidarity, compassion, and concern for others" (O'Brien, 2020, p. 6). These schools are multi-denominational schools, yet show very similar prescribed values as those reported in the Church of Ireland primary school ethos statements (Wilkinson, 2021). The challenge for church schools, specifically the Church of Ireland primary schools, is to take the values that are prescribed or that emerge from school dialogue, to consider their relevance and importance in their individual school setting; and furthermore to reflect on "their Christian underpinning", ensuring that the values are distinctively Christian (as recommended in the Church of England Diocese of York, 2018, p. 5).

Selecting an Anglican Primary School in the Educational Marketplace

It was suggested at the end of chapter two that Church of Ireland schools did not have a clear sense of their distinctiveness, or what they offered in terms of choice in the educational marketplace. There is a similar sense of questioning seen in the literature surrounding school choice in England.

Researchers have demonstrated that families tend to choose faith-based schools for a variety of reasons, ranging from academic performance to discipline and uniform policies to religious values. Hemming and Roberts (2018) suggested that for minority religious communities, this choice may be to "protect and reproduce cultural identity" (p. 503). Another example is cited by Butler and Hamnett (2012), who showed how non-religious parents and those from minority ethnic groups were often keen to send their children to church schools, due to positive perceptions regarding school ethos, values, and pupil behaviour.

In the English context, Village saw choice as both an advantage and a disadvantage as "it offers the Church more opportunities to control the ethos and distinctiveness of its schools, but could also lead Church of England schools to become more narrowly denominationally focused and less useful as instruments of mass education" (Village, 2018. p. 220). Research in Ireland, in schools of Church of Ireland patronage, showed that faith was a factor in parental choice of schools, but that it was not the sole reason parents selected a particular school (Lodge and Tuohy, 2011). With an expanding choice of school type in Ireland, many of the pull factors seen in Church of Ireland schools, including being small schools, co-educational schools, and having diversity in enrolment, may be also present in schools of other patronages.

Conclusion to Chapter Three

In this chapter, themes relating to the identity and ethos of the Church of England school were mapped onto themes highlighted in the research literature of the Church of Ireland primary school. Although the word Anglican was not referenced in the literature relating to the Church of Ireland primary school, it is the overarching backdrop for all these schools. Terry (2013) reflected on Anglicanism as a place of 'encounter', with a diverse tradition holding a wide range of variables together. He transferred that concept to the Anglican school context and stated that Anglican schools:

> have the possibility of being places of unavoidable encounter between the local and the national, the parochial and the catholic, the overall educational endeavour and the unique possibilities of each child, between the general nature of spirituality and the specific Christian worship of God, all within the richly diverse Anglican tradition. (Terry, 2013, pp. 126-127)

There is no unique definition of an Anglican school, no unifying ethos statement, no one way of working with the local parish, no one homogenous enrolment of pupils, and no one approach to explicit and implicit Christian ethos within these

schools. It is however possible that “church schools will employ a variety of strategies and styles appropriate to and reflective of, their particular context in order to be distinctively and effectively Christian in their character and ethos” (Church of England, 2021).

This provides a theoretical framework or model of what is aspired for in terms of the ethos of an Anglican school, and in particular the Church of Ireland primary school. This model states that the individual school has certainty about its Christian identity, it promotes inclusion, parish-school links are important, school assembly and religious education are valued, and there are core Christian values regarded as important to the school community.

In chapter two, the lived experience was seen as equally important in the articulation of the ethos of the school. Ethos is not done to students or imposed on them. It is now intended to listen to the student voice through appropriate instruments, reflecting the resulting student attitudes toward, and lived experiences of, the Church of Ireland primary school, onto the prescribed explicit vision and ethos of the school.

Chapter Four

Introducing the Empirical Research

The research focus of this study is to investigate the ethos and identity of Church of Ireland primary schools. In chapter one, the history and structure of the Irish education system was outlined, and the Church of Ireland was introduced as one of the providers of education within the State system. In chapter two, the elements of the ethos of a primary school were investigated, with a particular focus on the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school. Ethos was shown to be composed of explicit or prescribed elements and implicit or lived experience elements.

In chapter three, five key elements of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school were further investigated. By exploring the themes in another Anglican school context with a strong literature base (Church of England), it led to a clearer understanding of the ethos of the Anglican primary school in Ireland. A model of explicit ethos was presented, which stated that the individual school has certainty about its Christian identity, it promotes inclusion, parish-school links are important, school assembly and religious education are valued, and there are core Christian values regarded as important to the school community.

In chapters two and three, it was concluded that the lived experiences of students, teachers, and other members of the school community, were important to consider in terms of the articulation of the ethos of the school. It was shown that dialogue ideally happens in the individual school community, so that each school considers its articulation of ethos, engaging with the explicit or prescribed elements of ethos received from the State and the patron, and reflecting on the lived experience of those within its unique school community. Listening to the students is an important part of this process.

In terms of the methodology of this study, it is located within the research area of student voice, in that it aims to listen to the voice of the student and to add this voice to the investigation of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school. This study is not focussed on the individual student or school, but plans to provide an overall understanding of the student voice in relation to the Church of Ireland primary school ethos. To this end, the construct of the 'educational community' as referenced in the working definition of ethos ("the core shared values, beliefs, attitudes and practices

of an educational community" (O'Brien, 2020), is defined as the overall Church of Ireland primary school community.

This chapter is in five sections. The opening section will locate the study within the context of Irish student voice research. The study will then be positioned within the well-established body of student voice school-based research in Church in Wales primary schools. The aim and research questions for the empirical research will be presented and the methodology for the study will be outlined, together with a narrative of the research process. This includes the chosen research methods, the design of the instrument, the pilot studies, and the final design of the survey. The process of the distribution of the survey to schools in October 2019 and the data collection and input will be outlined; and in the final section, results will be presented from the data analysis of the first section of the survey, to answer the first research question. This will introduce the student cohort and their schools.

Locating the Research within Student Voice School-Based Research

It is planned to listen to the student voice through quantitative research, and to capture data that will provide an overall picture of student attitudes toward school ethos, and their lived experiences of the Church of Ireland primary school. Engagement with the student voice provides opportunities for students to be in "dialogue, discussion, and consultation" on issues and decisions that involve teaching and learning that directly affect their education (see Fleming, 2013; Fleming, 2015, p. 223; Cook-Sather, 2014). Qvortup (1994) argued that children should not be regarded as 'becomings' but rather as 'beings'. As such, they are participants in their own lives.

The concept of the student voice was legislated for in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC] (United Nations, 1989). It stated that children and young people have a right to "have a voice in matters which affect them" and that "their views will be given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity". This statement was subsequently developed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 2009), which noted that the "views expressed by children may add relevant perspectives and experience", should be seen not just as a "momentary act", but as part of an ongoing exchange between adults and children (United Nations, 2009, p. 7).

One key researcher in the area of student voice is Lundy. She said that the strongest argument for guaranteeing the implementation of Article 12 (UNCRC, 2009) derives from "its capacity to harness the wisdom, authenticity and currency of

children's lived experience in order to effect change" (Lundy, 2007, p. 940). Lundy developed a rights-based model of child participation with a focus on ensuring that all children's views were valued and respected. The *Lundy Model of Participation* highlighted four components necessary to ensure that Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) was achieved: space, voice, audience, and influence. Lundy proposed that children were given 'space' through a safe and familiar location where they were encouraged to express their views freely; 'voice', by being assured that their voices were heard by the 'audience', identified as those who had power to make decisions. Finally, Lundy said that children should know that they have 'influence', in that their views would be responded to. This implies that children's views are not merely data to support decisions, but that they have power to influence change (p. 933). The *Lundy Model for Participation* has been endorsed by the Irish Department of Children and Youth Affairs in its publication of the *National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015, p. 15).

In their consideration of student voice literature, Jones and Bubb (2021) suggested that a number of key themes emerged: partnership, consultation, the student voice as a mechanism to improve schools, and the student voice as a changemaker. It was acknowledged that a tension existed between the place of the student as a data source where their voice is captured for quality control reasons, and the place where the student voice is authentic and has power (p. 2).

In recent decades in Ireland, there has been a move to ensure students are listened to, and involved in school life and decision-making. Second level schools in Ireland were encouraged, under Section 27 of the Education Act (1998), to introduce school councils (Government of Ireland, 1998), and published guidelines noted that:

> Students have a voice and a contribution to make to their school. It is important that they be given the opportunity to express their views on issues of concern to them in the school. It is equally important that they are listened to and encouraged to take an active part in promoting the aims and objectives of the school. (Department of Education and Science, 2002)

Many primary schools also have school councils and school-based committees involving student representation, often focussed on specific programmes, for example environmental awareness.

Fleming (2015) analysed the status of the student voice in the education system in Ireland, and concluded that in an educational setting the student voice was seen primarily in student councils, which he described as "tokenistic and redundant in practice", and in external (inspection) and internal (self-evaluation) evaluation policies, where students' views are included. He concluded that these processes lack "any centrality for a person-centered, rights-based, dialogic and consultative student voice within an inclusive classroom and school culture" (p. 223).

Since 2006, whole school inspections have included data collected in focus group interviews with children in the school, alongside data from focus groups of parents, members of the board of management, the principal, and staff members. The chief inspector of education in Ireland, argued that this data resource, which has tended to be peripheral, should be of greater use, but he admitted that improving the ways students and parents engage in school inspections would be a challenge (Hislop, 2017, p. 20).

Evaluating school quality is increasingly regarded as more complex and multi-layered than the traditional model of external inspection, and since 2012, all primary schools have been required to engage in systematic school self-evaluation (Department of Education and Skills, 2012, p. 1). This involves schools taking on much more responsibility for developing and guaranteeing educational quality. From a policy perspective this makes sense, as parents and students "have a right to be consulted about many aspects of school decision making" and "are central to both the evaluation of the performance of the school and key actors in planning its future direction" (Brown, McNamara, O'Brien, Skerritt, O'Hara, Faddar, et al., 2020, p. 98). The Department of Education and Skills defined school self-evaluation as:

> a collaborative, inclusive, reflective process of internal school review. During school self-evaluation the principal, deputy principal and teachers, under the direction of the board of management and the patron and in consultation with parents and pupils, engage in reflective enquiry on the work of the school. (Department of Education and Skills, 2012, p. 3)

On reviewing the quality framework for primary schools (Department of Education and Skills, 2012), it is noted that one domain 'Leading school development' has a natural link to school ethos. The statements of effective practice and highly effective practice under this standard are presented in figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1

School self-evaluation quality framework. Domain 3: Leading school development.

Statements of effective practice	**Statements of highly effective practice**
The patron, board of management and principal are proactive in establishing and maintaining a guiding vision for the school.	The patron, board of management and principal are proactive in establishing and maintaining a guiding vision for the school.
The school's guiding vision sets out goals and expectations for the school as a learning community. The principal and other leaders in the school take responsibility for communicating this guiding vision, supported by the trustees and board of management.	The school's guiding vision sets out goals and expectations for the school as a learning community. The principal and other leaders in the school take responsibility for communicating this guiding vision, and does so very effectively, working with the trustees and board of management.
The principal and other leaders in the school communicate the guiding vision to teachers in a way that encourages them to see their responsibilities as fulfilling it.	The principal and other leaders in the school clearly communicates the guiding vision to teachers, parents and pupils in a way that empowers the whole school community to translate the vision into action.
The principal and other leaders in the school take positive steps to support and motivate staff, and to set high expectations for learners.	The principal and other leaders in the school inspire and motivate pupils, staff and the whole school community. They set high expectations for every learner.

Department of Education and Skills, 2012, p. 26.

The first statement in figure 4.1 reinforced the roles of the patron, board of management, and principal, in establishing and maintaining a guiding vision for the school, as discussed in chapter two. This was legislated for under the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998), however its location within the school self-evaluation process, requires schools to self-evaluate and consider this in terms of their successes and the areas for improvement. The third element of the 'statements of highly effective practice' highlights the communication of the vision to the pupils and other stakeholders, i.e. the leadership informs the students about the school vision and ethos, and the school community puts the vision into action. It is interesting to note that actual input from stakeholders is not proposed, only simple implementation of the vision. In recent years, the domains and statements of practice in the Self-Evaluation Framework were seen as leadership competencies on application forms for leadership positions in

schools, for example in the teacher application forms published for schools by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (2019).

As has been noted, the school inspection process involves both external formal inspection and self-evaluation (Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate, 2016). Brown, McNamara, O'Brien, Skerritt, O'Hara, Faddar, et al. (2020) discussed this combination of "external inspection with systems of internal self-evaluation"; showing that in recent years there was consideration of how to include more than teachers, and to look at the role of "other actors, primarily parents and students in the process" (p. 86). In a paper focussed on a review of self-evaluation literature and documentary analysis, these researchers explored the concerns of teachers and schools in accessing the parental and student voice. They referred to resistance, objections, and drawbacks to engaging the student voice in schools, citing issues such as the immaturity of children (see Lodge, 2005; Bragg, 2007); the divisiveness of the student voice in a school community, where some voices were heard and others unheard (see Robinson & Taylor, 2013); and even the threatening nature of the student voice on teachers (see Bragg, 2007). Despite these challenges, the researchers concluded that there was a positivity towards engaging both the parent and student voice in school self-evaluation, but acknowledged this was slowed by other issues such as increased workload and lack of training and support (pp. 87-88).

Brown, McNamara, O'Brien, Skerritt, O'Hara, Faddar, et al. (2020) also noted that students were involved in the consultation part of the process, but not in "the decision making, target setting or action planning aspects of the process" (p. 94). As part of a four-year Erasmus + research project '*Distributed Evaluation and Planning in Schools*' (DEAPS), focussing on self-evaluation in four European countries (Belgium, Ireland, Portugal, and Turkey), Brown and colleagues at the Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection in Dublin City University have published a number of papers evaluating and analysing the effectiveness of school self-evaluation in the post-primary school (see Brown et al., 2021; O'Brien et al., 2022). One common theme that emerges from the papers published from the Centre is that workload and demands of school self-evaluation are significant, and in many situations, unmanageable. Skerritt et al. (2021) concluded that there is no possible and consistent way of implementing a universal school self-evaluation policy in schools, as was originally envisaged by the policymakers.

Despite these challenges, with the publication of a framework for ethos in Educate Together Schools (O'Brien, 2020), there is scope for the future consideration of ethos within the self-evaluation policies of schools of each patronage.

The Student Voice in Research Studies in Ireland

Ireland is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), and there have been a number of agency and governmental projects focussed on accessing the voice of the child in education, through a rights-based approach to research. These include school readiness research (Ring et al., 2016), *Better outcomes, brighter futures: The national policy framework for children and young people 2014-2020* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014), *Life as a child and young person in Ireland: Report of a national consultation* (Coyne et al., 2012), A *national strategy on children and young people's participation in decision making 2015-2020* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015).

There are two ongoing longitudinal studies in Ireland. The *Growing up in Ireland study* (2006) was commissioned by the Department of Health and Children in association with the Department of Social Protection and the Central Statistics Office, and was designed to capture the major domains of a child's life, to "help us to improve our understanding of all aspects of children and their development". The study follows two cohorts of children, 8,500 children aged 9 years (Child Cohort/ Cohort '98) and 11,000 children aged 9 months (Child Cohort/ Cohort '08), and reports are issued periodically (see Economic and Social Research Institute, 2009; 2018).

The *Children's School Lives* study is a longitudinal study, commissioned by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and running from 2019-2024, with the remit to explore the lived experiences of over 4,000 children in 189 primary schools across Ireland. Although the children's voice is only one aspect of this study, the report stated that capturing this "not only recognises children's rights to be consulted on matters that directly affect them, but also provides unique insights that will inform both curricular and wider educational change" (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2020, p. 9). Data were collected from two cohorts of students – those entering 2nd class in 2018 and those entering junior infants in 2019, and data were also collected from their parents, classroom teachers, and school principals.

A review of published literature reporting empirical studies of children's experiences in schools in Ireland found a limited number of research studies. Some have focussed on minority groups in Ireland. Ní Raghallaigh and Gilligan (2010) studied the

experiences of young unaccompanied minors, McGorman and Sugrue (2007) focussed on intercultural education in Dublin 15, and Devine (2005) researched immigration and ethnic diversity in Irish schools. Research by McGuckin et al. (2014) considered the religious socialisation of young people in secondary schools, and Darmody et al. (2012) researched school sector variation among primary schools. A report published by the Economic and Social Research Institute outlined the place of religious education in Ireland as part of the *Religious Education in a Multicultural Society* (REMC) project. Its purpose was to provide a holistic understanding of the interaction between home and school in shaping the formation of religious and other beliefs among children, and innovatively adopted the position of viewing children as active agents in their socialisation, by including their voices, collected through focus groups and questionnaires, alongside those of parents and teachers (Smyth, 2010, pp. 2-5).

Harmon (2018) worked with 11- to 13-year-old children as co-researchers in a participatory-based exploration of their views on religion and religious education in a Catholic primary school. He explored how a child regarded their own religious identity, and adapted and blended it into their home, school, and some church contexts. O'Farrell (2016) analysed 10- to 11-year-old children's opinions in relation to religion and spirituality following the introduction of Godly Play methodology in school. Kitching and Shanneik (2015) conducted whole school activities and 'friendship group' interviews to research children's beliefs and identity as part of a larger project: *Making communion: disappearing and emerging forms of childhood in Ireland's schools, homes and communities.*

This study on student attitudes toward the ethos of their schools will therefore be positioned within the research area of primary school student voice in Ireland.

The Student Voice Project in Anglican Primary Schools in Wales

This research study is also located in the research academy of Anglican primary school student voice studies, pioneered in Wales by Francis and Lankshear. The value of listening to the student voice about lived experiences of school ethos was explored through empirical research in Wales in a three-year Student Voice Project. This research employed the *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* (see Lankshear, 2017; Francis et al., 2022; Lankshear et al., 2021) and its development and associated publications will be discussed in chapter five.

The research outcomes from the Student Voice Project provided an overall sense of the ethos of Church in Wales schools. Part of its remit was to provide schools with

detailed feedback, allowing them to self-evaluate and work on improving aspects of ethos. A number of research papers stemming from these data have explored the overall student attitudes toward the ethos of their schools, and hypotheses have been tested with regard to possible links between student attitudes toward Christianity and attitudes toward school ethos (including Francis et al., 2017; Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, & McKenna, 2020). These studies will be discussed in detail in chapters five and six. Francis et al. (2021) stated that the Student Voice Project

> can be commended for further use within other Provinces of the Anglican Church in which the Anglican Church is actively involved in the provision of denominationally distinctive schools within the state-maintained sector, including England and the Republic of Ireland. (p. 312)

This research study intends to listen to the student voice in a particular cohort of schools, specifically those under the patronage of the Church of Ireland. The research is also located within the broader research academy of student voice research about ethos in Anglican schools. As its methodology is quantitative academic research, it will provide an overall picture of the student population of these schools, and student attitudes toward the culture and ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school.

The Scope of the Research: The Aim and Research Question

This section commences by introducing the exact purpose of this enquiry. It will outline the specific aim and the related research questions. Next, the method of data collection will be discussed, with consideration of the purpose of the enquiry, the population, and the specific issues on which the research is to focus. The construct and analysis of the pilot project will be outlined, and the process of data collection for the main study will be narrated.

The Aim and Research Question

The aim of this research study is to investigate the ethos and identity of Church of Ireland primary schools through the voice of its students, and to answer the overarching research question: What are the key elements of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school as articulated through student attitudes and lived experiences? This question will be addressed through four embedded questions, which are rooted in the emergent themes from chapters two and three:

1. Who attends Church of Ireland primary schools and what ethos-related activities are found in these schools (religious education, school assembly, parish-school links)?

2. What is the student experience of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school?
3. Are Church of Ireland primary schools Christian in ethos?
4. Do students in Church of Ireland primary schools demonstrate good levels of wellbeing, and does school ethos have an impact on student wellbeing?

Methods

Quantitative research methods were chosen for three reasons. First, these methods were consistent with the work by other researchers investigating Anglican school ethos (see Francis et al., 2017; Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, & McKenna, 2020; Francis et al., 2021; Francis et al., 2022; Lankshear, 2017; Lankshear et al., 2018). The findings, based in a new research context, can therefore add to the expanding knowledge in this area of research.

Second, the Church of Ireland primary school community is a minority sector in educational provision in Ireland, and as this researcher was involved in Initial Teacher Education and Continuing Professional Development in these schools, quantitative research methods allowed for distance and objectivity when requesting and collecting data.

Third, quantitative research methods allowed for the collection and analysis of numerical data. In this study, the data will be used for descriptive research; to provide an overall summary of the attitudes of the students toward their schools, the attitudes of the students toward Christianity, and the overall wellbeing of the student cohort. The data analysis will also be used for correlational research, where relationships between the different study variables will be investigated. Finally, the data will be used to test hypotheses or predictions proposed by the research questions.

Paper surveys were selected as the instrument for data collection. Surveys gather data at a particular point in time allowing for the desired descriptive and correlational research (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 334). By gathering a large amount of data, including nominal and relevant personal details, along with a number of attitude scales, it is possible to draw conclusions, with a measure of statistical confidence, about observed characteristics, and to make evidence-based statements about the factors and correlates that affect these characteristics. Online surveys were considered, however feedback from schools involved in the pilot study strongly indicated that paper surveys were more

practical in the classroom setting, due to limited access to sufficient tablets or computers to complete the survey[1].

It was therefore decided to issue individual surveys, to be anonymously completed by 4th, 5th, and 6th class students (the final three classes in primary school). It was intended that surveys would be completed under the supervision of the class teacher in class time, thus adhering to the first component of Lundy's (2007) student voice model, space. It was proposed that the students were given space through a safe and familiar location.

Whole Population or Sampling

At the early stages of the research, it was decided to invite the total population of schools to participate in the study. This was for four reasons: first, the Church of Ireland primary schools in the Republic of Ireland made up a small, distinct, and defined niche in educational provision. The second reason was that the Church of Ireland school network was unevenly distributed through the country, and schools varied in enrolment from 11 pupils to 401 pupils. It would be challenging to achieve a representative sample of the population using sampling methods. Third, it was predicted that not all schools would choose to be part of the study, and could not be mandated to participate, therefore a whole-population invitation would allow for the largest possible response. Finally, it was decided that the large-scale study increased the anonymity and confidentiality of the data, not allowing individual schools in this small demographic niche to be identifiable.

The challenges with this approach were the cost of printing and posting surveys, and the time required to input the data into Microsoft Excel by the researcher. It was decided, that as this was a 'one time' opportunity to listen to the voices of these students, to invite the principals of all schools to participate, and to set aside the time for data input.

The Structure of the Survey

The survey was composed of a series of separate scales. The first section collected personal information, and this was followed by the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010). Section 3 was a combination of nine ethos scales, adapted from the *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* (2017), designed to collect data on the

[1] The environmental impact of survey production was offset by a donation to Crann (Trees for Ireland) to support their project to plant one million trees with Ireland's one million schoolchildren.

student's attitudes toward school. Section 4 contained *The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* (Francis, 1978a, 1978b). The survey is in Appendix A.

Personal information relating to the individual student. The first nine items in the survey collected personal information about the students: sex, age, church attendance, parental church attendance, and personal prayer practices. These data were collected for the purposes of providing descriptive results, and to be considered as factors in correlation analysis.

Personal information relating to the school. The next four items related to religious education, school assembly, and parish school links; these data were collected to provide a descriptive picture of some ethos elements and religious practices of the Church of Ireland primary school.

Wellbeing. The next scale included in the survey was the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010). Designed as a scale to measure emotional and psychological wellbeing in children between the ages of eight and 15, it was a simple, 12-item positively worded scale. Students were provided with statements or descriptions about how they might have been feeling or thinking about things over the previous couple of weeks; they selected from the following options to describe their thoughts or feelings: all of the time, quite a lot of the time, some of the time, not much of the time, and never. The aim was that the analysis of these data would provide a large-scale picture of the wellbeing of the students in Church of Ireland primary schools, and possible connections between student wellbeing and student attitudes toward school ethos could be investigated.

Ethos of the school. Nine scales assessed student attitudes toward their school under the themes: attitude toward the general character of the school, attitude toward the religious character of the school, attitude toward the experience of school, attitude toward the teachers, attitude toward relationships in school, attitude toward the stewardship of creation, attitude toward the stewardship of the school, attitude toward school assembly, and attitude toward religious education. Eight of these scales were adapted from the *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* employed by Lankshear (2017) in the Student Voice Project (Wales). A new scale, focussed on religious education, was introduced, developed, and tested by this researcher.

Attitude toward Christianity. This instrument in the survey was composed of one 24-item scale, *The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* (Francis, 1978a; 1978b). This scale consists of 24 Likert-type items concerned with affective responses

to five key aspects of the Christian tradition that are common across different denominations, but can be engaged with and understood by children, adolescents, and adults: God, Jesus, bible, church, and prayer. For each of the 24 statements, students selected from the options: agree strongly, agree, not certain, disagree, and disagree strongly as a response to the question "How true is this for how I feel?"

The Pilot Study

The draft survey was piloted in June 2019 in two ways. First, a cognitive testing group was established, composed of five students from 5th and 6th classes in a small school. Second, the survey was anonymously completed by 100 students in a variety of school settings (three large urban schools and one small rural school).

Cognitive Testing Group

At the outset, it was explained to the group that they were undertaking an important task. They were instructed to complete the survey in pencil, but to use a red pen to highlight any statements that were unclear, confusing, or lacked relevance. The class teacher left the room and the scales were completed and discussed, one at a time.

The cognitive testing group found the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* accessible, with no significant challenges. At the end of the discussion, one of the group members suggested changing the order of the columns for this scale so that the columns ran from 'best' to 'worst' in all scales in the survey, as she found switching direction confusing. As this instrument initially ran left to right from 'never' to 'all of the time', it was decided it would be re-ordered for the main study, to ease completion.

The cognitive testing group members found the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* manageable, but reported that it involved a lot of thought to work out their responses to negatively worded statements. They did suggest rewording these statements, but as this scale is being utilised as a replicated scale in the study, it was retained in its original state.

In terms of the ethos scales, the cognitive testing group members noted the planned similarities between phrasings of some sentences, and felt they were asked the same question a few times. The group suggested that statements referring to 'teacher' and 'adult' were confusing and recommended that only 'teacher' was used in the statements. Other statements were queried in terms of their applicability and relevance, for example students noted that many small schools, including their own, did not have a school hall, and students were unsure about the word 'displays' (which can refer to a performance or an exhibition on a school wall). They suggested some minor changes to

the wording of some of the statements such as replacing ‘we take pride in’ with ‘we are proud of’, stating Christmas and Easter in place of Christian festivals, and replacing ‘vicar’ with ‘rector’. The updated pilot study scale included these changes and all statements were phrased as succinctly and accessible as possible (see Appendix A for the final survey, Appendix B for the pilot study, and Appendix C for the *Lankshear Student Voice Scales*).

The students enjoyed completing the survey and found the language straightforward and unambiguous. They highlighted the need for privacy and for the understanding that their answers would not be read by the teacher. However, they also said that some of the statements could be talked about in class after the session, and would be useful conversations for a school council or senior classroom to consider.

Analysis of the Pilot Study Survey

Data from the 100 questionnaires were entered into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and then transferred into SPSS (IBM, 2018; 2020) for analysis. The internal consistency reliabilities of the scales were expressed in terms of the alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951; Kline, 1993; 1999) and are shown in table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Statistical Properties of the Pilot Survey Scales

Scale	N	α
Stirling Children’s Well-being Scale	12	.72
Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity	24	.98
Attitude toward the general character of the school	7	.89
Attitude toward the religious character of the school	7	.87
Attitude toward the experience of school	7	.82
Attitude toward the teachers	6	.74
Attitude toward relationships in school	7	.89
Attitude toward the stewardship of creation	7	.80
Attitude toward the stewardship of the school	5	.84
Attitude toward school assembly	8	.85
Attitude toward religious education	11	.91

N = number of items, α = Cronbach’s alpha

Both the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* and the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* were seen as reliable scales for replication in the main study. Variability in the alpha coefficients of the nine ethos scales indicated that closer scrutiny of these measures could be beneficial.

The next test of reliability explored each of the nine ethos scales in detail, analysing the correlation between each item, and the sum of the other items in each separate scale (*r*). Table 4.2 presents the results of these tests

Table 4.2

Analysis of Reliability of Ethos Scales

Scale	*r*
Attitude toward the general character of the school	
My school is a really good school	.51
My school is a really caring school	.70
My school is a really friendly school	.72
My school is a really welcoming school	.69
My school treats every child fairly	.73
My school treats every child with respect	.77
My school treats every child kindly	.76
Attitude toward the religious character of the school	
School assembly is very important in my school	.34
Prayer is very important in my school	.70
God is very important in my school	.78
Jesus is very important in my school	.75
Church is very important in my school	.63
The Bible is very important in my school	.81
Christmas and Easter are very important in my school	.52
Attitude toward the experience of school	
In my school the rules are fair	.44
In my school I can be myself	.61
My school is a peaceful place	.52
My school is a safe place	.60
My school looks good	.54
My school is a clean place	.59
I like coming to my school	.69
Attitude toward the teachers	
The teachers in my school care a lot for all the children	.63
The teachers in my school care a lot for each other	.29
The teachers in my school care a lot for the world around us	.64
The teachers in my school care a lot for the school	.55
When I do well in school the teachers praise me	.34
In my school I can go to my teacher when I am unhappy	.50
Attitude toward relationships in school	
My school teaches me to respect other people	.52
My school teaches me to respect other people's things	.60

My school teaches me to care for other people	.68
In my school we value each other	.78
Caring for others is very important in my school	.76
In my school we care a lot for each other	.74
In my school I know that people care for me	.74
Attitude toward the stewardship of creation	
My school teaches me to respect things that grow	.59
My school teaches me to respect wonderful things	.57
My school teaches me to care for the world around me	.51
My school teaches me to take care of plants	.47
My school teaches me to take care of animals	.51
My school teaches me to take care of insects	.53
My school teaches me not to waste things	.59
Attitude toward the stewardship of the school	
In my school we take pride in our school grounds	.55
In my school we take pride in our classrooms	.61
In my school we take pride in the school looking tidy	.66
In my school we take pride in the school looking clean	.71
In my school we take pride in our school looking good	.70
Attitude toward school assembly	
In assembly I enjoy being with the whole school	.64
In assembly I enjoy visits from the rector	.57
In assembly being quiet and still is important to me	.55
In assembly listening to the Bible is important to me	.59
In assembly having prayers is important to me	.65
In assembly I enjoy the songs we sing	.65
I like when my class leads assembly for the school	.47
In assembly singing is important to me	.61
Attitude toward religious education	
In RE I enjoy Bible stories	.72
In RE it is important to learn about Christmas and Easter	.70
In RE I enjoy saying prayers	.77
In RE it is important to ask questions about God	.55
In RE learning about other people's beliefs is important to me	.41
In RE it is important to read Bible stories	.69
In RE it is important to learn about the church	.81
In RE I enjoy learning about the church and church services	.77
In RE it is important to learn about Jesus	.72
In RE my beliefs are respected	.56
In RE I enjoy singing	.51

r = correlation between each item and the sum of the other items in each scale

In terms of the scale to measure student attitudes toward general school ethos, the statement ‘My school is a really good school’ showed a lower item-rest of test correlation than the others, and when removed from the scale, the alpha coefficient remained at $\alpha = .89$. The statement was therefore deleted from the scale. In terms of the scale to measure student attitudes toward the religious character of the school, the

statement ‘School assembly is very important in my school’ scored lowest, however, due to its relevance to the research question, it was retained.

All the items in the scale that measured student attitudes toward the experience of school were retained, as removing the lower scoring elements did not alter the reliability. In terms of the scale to measure student attitudes toward the teachers, two statements received a much lower correlation than the others: ‘The teachers in my school care a lot about each other’ and ‘When I do well in school the teachers praise me’. It was decided to omit the first of these statements, but to retain the second and reword to ‘When I do well in school my teacher praises me’, the rewording ensured consistency with other items in the scale. The reliability test was re-run and the alpha coefficient remained at $\alpha = .74$.

All items in the scale that measured student attitudes toward relationships in school were retained, as were all items in the scale that measured student attitudes toward the stewardship of creation, and all items in the scale that measured student attitudes toward the stewardship of the school. One statement in the scale that measured student attitudes toward school assembly scored lower than the other statements. It referred to class-led assemblies, and was removed from the scale without affecting the overall reliability of the scale. Finally, the scale to measure student attitudes toward religious education was assessed in terms of the individual items. It contained a larger number of items, as it was a new scale. The scale demonstrated a high reliability, and as each element related to a different aspect of religious education and the scale measured attitudes and experiences, it was decided to retain all 11 statements for the main study.

Each of the nine ethos scales was therefore shown to be robust enough for the full study, with alpha coefficients ranging from $\alpha = .80$ to $\alpha = .91$. The process of conducting the pilot study led to two conclusions. First, for the ease of completion by participants and the subsequent input of data into spreadsheets, all scales were ordered from positive to negative (‘agree strongly’ to ‘disagree strongly’ and ‘all of the time’ to ‘never’). This was implemented by re-ordering the answers for the *Stirling Children’s Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010). Second, wording of statements was ensured to be as consistent and simple as possible, to support understanding.

Ethical Considerations

The requirement of *primum non nocere* meant that every step was taken to address the ethical considerations surrounding collecting data from primary school

children. Ethical approval was sought and received from the University of Warwick on 28 January 2019.

A tiered approach to consent was implemented. Emails were initially written to the bishops of the Church of Ireland, as patrons of the primary schools. Permission was sought to invite the schools in each diocese to participate in the research study. Next, principals of schools were emailed and permission requested to allow their school be involved in the research study. The schools that agreed to participate in the study received plain language statements and consent forms for parents of students in 4th, 5th, and 6th classes (Appendix E). The class teacher was requested to administer the survey in class time and to seek assent from each student as they commenced the survey. This was also made clear on the cover page of the survey. Parents and students were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and privacy at all stages of the data collection and analysis. They were also encouraged to participate, so as the student's voice would be clearly heard. Schools were promised early feedback in terms of the core findings of the study, so class students were aware that their voice was heard and that it was reaching an audience (voice and audience being two further key elements of Lundy's 2007 model of student voice).

All ethical requirements for collection, storage of data, use of data, dissemination of data, and archiving of data have been adhered to throughout the study.

The Survey and Data Collection

The database of Irish primary schools was accessed and downloaded from the publicly available information on the Department of Education and Skills website (Department of Education and Skills, 2019b). This database included contact details for the school and principal, enrolment numbers, and the patronage of the school. The schools identified as being under Church of Ireland patronage were extracted from the website to form a cohort of 172 schools. This formed the total population for the study.

Invitation to Schools

In September 2019, emails were sent to the ten patrons of the Church of Ireland primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. These are the bishops of the dioceses in which the schools were located. All bishops were satisfied that schools in their dioceses would be invited to participate in the research project. Email invitations, along with the Participation Information Leaflet for Schools (Appendix D) were sent to the principals of all 172 schools listed as Church of Ireland on the Department of Education and Skills website (2019). There were three schools, traditionally affiliated to the Church of

Ireland, but were under the patronage of the Minister of Education due to their historical status as Model Schools. These schools also received invitations. A follow-up email was sent two weeks later to all schools that did not respond to the initial invitation.

After this communication, 105 principals (60%) agreed to accept surveys for 4th, 5th, and 6th class students in their schools. 4,488 surveys were packaged and sent to schools in October 2019, with parental plain language information sheets, parental consent forms, instructions for the class teacher (Appendix E), and stamped addressed envelopes for the returned surveys. Each school was ascribed a school code, and a list of schools and codes was printed to record postage and return of surveys, so thank-you emails or reminders could be sent.

Each school was asked to follow a standard procedure. The surveys were administered by the class teacher and the students were informed that they were participating voluntarily. Students were asked not to write their name on the booklet, and to complete the survey without conferencing with other class members. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity and that their teachers would not read their answers. The surveys would be returned immediately to the researcher.

Data Return and Input

In total 3,259 surveys were returned by 92 schools, and the data from these were entered into a series of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. Each survey was ascribed a unique number. The school code was also included in this database, but not the school name, in order to maintain anonymity and privacy. Where a student did not complete one section of the survey, this information was left blank in the database, and the remainder of the survey data included. There were ten spoiled surveys, including surveys with names written on the pages and surveys with observed lack of engagement (ticking the same box throughout or creating a pattern in answer blocks).

The Microsoft Excel Spreadsheets were imported into SPSS (IBM, 2018; 2020) and the data were analysed, using the frequency, reliability, correlation, and regression routines.

Data Analysis

The central research question in this study asks: What are the key elements of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school as articulated through student attitudes and lived experiences?' The first embedded research question will be addressed in this chapter: Who attends Church of Ireland primary schools and what ethos-related

activities are found in these schools (religious education, school assembly, parish-school links)?

In chapter five, the second embedded research question will be investigated: What is the student experience of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school? In chapter six, the third embedded research question will be explored: Are Church of Ireland primary schools Christian in ethos? In chapter seven, the fourth embedded research question will be addressed: Do students in Church of Ireland primary schools demonstrate good levels of wellbeing, and does school ethos have an impact on student wellbeing?

Feedback to Schools and Early-Stage Dissemination of Findings

In March 2020, all schools closed for the remainder of the academic year, as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This curtailed the opportunities for the dissemination of early findings. In January 2020, a paper was presented at the Postgraduate Learning Community, based in Liverpool Cathedral, this focussed on the back page of the survey where students had space to add any comments. Although not many students added comments, a review of these showed some positive comments, particularly appreciative of the opportunity to share their thoughts anonymously, one student commenting on the space to speak about their faith, and one student indicating that although they did not have a Christian faith that they respected those who did. A small number of students responded negatively, stating the survey was too long, others reflected that very personal questions were asked.

In May 2020, all participating schools received a brief feedback infographic which presented early findings from data analysis. Principals were requested to share this with class teachers, and with the students who participated in the study. This was to ensure that students realised their voice had been heard, adhering to the voice and audience elements of the *Lundy Model of Participation* (Lundy, 2007, p. 933). It also demonstrated the potential of the research findings to principals and teachers.

In October 2020, early findings about student attitudes toward prayer were presented in a paper delivered as part of the Irish Institute for Catholic Studies online lecture series. An adapted paper on this topic was also presented online at the Postgraduate Learning Community symposium (Liverpool Cathedral) in October 2020.

In January 2021, a paper entitled *The ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school: the student voice* was presented at the Educational Studies of Ireland annual conference. This located the research in the field of student voice and presented early

findings about student attitudes toward school ethos, based on an analysis of the frequency scores generated by the scales designed to measure student attitude toward ethos. In May 2022, findings related to student attitudes toward school assembly were presented in an online webinar for Church of Ireland primary schools. The aim of this Continued Professional Development webinar was to encourage principals and teachers to dialogue with pupils as they returned to whole school in-person assemblies after Covid-19 restrictions.

Research Question One

In this section, it is intended to present findings from the first section of the survey, which focussed on biographical information about the student and the school. Through this analysis, it is aimed to answer the question: Who attends Church of Ireland primary schools and what ethos-related activities are found in these schools (religious education, school assembly, parish school links)?

Personal Questions: Are you a boy or a girl? What class are you in?

A total of 3,249 unspoiled surveys were received from 92 schools. As shown in table 4.3, 50% of the students were boys and 50% of the students were girls. There were similar numbers of students in 4th, 5th, and 6th classes.

Table 4.3

Student Cohort

	Total	Boy	Girl
	N	*N*	*N*
4th class	1072	502	570
5th class	1065	534	531
6th class	1101	573	528
Total	3249	1609	1629

N = Number. Note. 11 students did not state gender, 10 students did not state class

Religious Affiliation: Do you go to a place of worship (e.g. a church) by yourself or with your family?

The aim of this question was to ascertain who, in terms of religious affiliation, attended Church of Ireland primary schools. It was noted in chapter two, that the Church of Ireland primary school was historically a diverse community in terms of enrolment, and aimed to be an inclusive community in terms of religious affiliation. Published official statements demonstrated a desire to retain schools to meet the needs

of the Church of Ireland and Protestant communities (see The Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, 2011; 2017). It is intended in this section to report on the data, analysis of the findings in terms of religious affiliation will be presented in chapter six.

Table 4.4

Attendance at a Place of Worship.

	Total %	Boy %	Girl %
Attend weekly	19	18	20
Attend at least once a month	12	11	13
Attend sometimes	45	44	45
Never attend	24	27	22

Table 4.4 presents the data in relation to attendance at a place of worship. Nearly one third of the students (31%) stated they went to church at least once a month or weekly, and almost one quarter of students never went to church.

An independent-samples t-test was run to determine if there were statistically significant differences in church attendance between boys and girls. It was found that boys (Mean = 2.3, *SD* = 1.0) attended church significantly less frequently than girls (Mean = 2.2, *SD* = 1.0) t (3233) = -3.6, $p < .001$. A one-way-between-subjects ANOVA test was conducted to compare the effect of class (age) on church attendance. There was no significant effect of age on the mean scores (F (2,3233) = 2.8). Church attendance therefore remains consistent across the three final classes in primary school, however girls are significantly more likely to attend church than boys.

The survey asked students to identify the church or place of worship they attended. These data are presented in table 4.5 (and for ease of interpretation include the percentage of those students who stated they did not attend a place of worship). In the category labelled ‘other’, students wrote in the name of the place of worship they attended. It was found that a small number of students attended Pentecostal churches (14 students), Orthodox churches (10 students), Lutheran churches (5 students), and Quaker meetings (3 students). There were 13 Muslim students, 5 Hindu students, 1 Buddhist student, and 4 Jehovah’s Witness students in the cohort.

Table 4.5

Place of Worship attended by Participants

	%
Attend Church of Ireland	50
Attend Catholic Church	13
Attend Presbyterian Church	3
Attend Baptist Church	3
Attend Methodist Church	2
Attend other Christian Church	4
Attend other place of worship	1
Do not attend place of worship	24

It is concluded that that more than half of the students stated that they attended a Church of Ireland church, Methodist church, or Presbyterian church, at least 'sometimes', members of these churches being the target population for the schools. In terms of diversity, it is concluded that the Church of Ireland school also attracts those who never attend church. Participants did not tick more than one option; it is therefore possible that some students may have attended more than one place of worship.

Life at School: Questions about religious education, school assembly, and parish-school links.

A number of questions in the survey sought to ascertain the religious practices of schools, including religious education, school assembly, and visits to the local church. These were elements of prescribed ethos highlighted in chapters two and three. The questions were: In school how frequently do you have Religious Education (Religion/ R.E.)? Do you have school assembly? Does the rector come to your school assembly? In the past year, have you been to the Church of Ireland church with your class or school for a church service or other school event?

Church of Ireland primary schools teach the religious education programme as prescribed by the Church of Ireland bishops in their roles as patrons. Guidelines for school timetabling in 2019 suggested 30 minutes per day for religious education (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2019). The students were asked about the frequency of religious education lessons in their school. As the number of participants from individual schools varied (from less than 20 to over 200 students), to understand the data in terms of school practices a mean score was calculated for each

school using the school's identification code. The data emerging from these mean scores are presented in table 4.6.

Table 4.6

School Religious Practices

	Religious Education %	School Assembly %
Experience every day	7	9
Experience more than once a week	46	19
Experience once a week	35	61
Experience sometimes	12	11
Never experience	0	0

Note: Mean % scores were calculated from the student scores per school

This analysis showed that over half of the schools (53%) have religious education lessons more than once a week, with 7% of schools having religious education each day. Most schools (61%) hold school assembly once a week. One-fifth of schools hold assembly more than once a week and 9% of schools hold daily assemblies. This demonstrates the perceived importance of school assembly in the school week, as discussed in chapter three.

On reviewing the responses by individual students, it was noted that 12% of students said they rarely had school assembly (answering 'sometimes' or 'never'). Subsequent analysis of these individual student responses showed that almost half of this cohort of students (44%) stated they 'sometimes' or 'never' have religious education. It is possible that these students are withdrawn from school assembly and religious education (due to the parental legal right of withdrawal of pupils from these elements of the school day).

Students in 35% of schools stated the rector came to every assembly, and to some assemblies in 62% of schools. This supports the importance of parish-school links, as discussed in chapters two and three. The rector never attended assembly in 3% of schools, this could be due to a parish vacancy.

On the same theme of parish-school links, the students were asked if they went to the Church of Ireland church with their class or school in the past year. The mean school responses, as presented in table 4.7, indicated a high percentage of schools attending church for school services.

Table 4.7

Church Visits

	School %
Visit for school assembly	17
Visit for Christmas carol service	45
Visit for Easter service	14
Visit for end of year service	30
Visit for another church service	40
Visit for RE lesson	9
Visit for another school subject	9

Note: Mean % scores were calculated from the student scores per school

Table 4.7 shows that students in 45% of schools said they visited the church most frequently for a Christmas carol service, for another (unnamed) service, and for an end of year service. It was noted that some schools did not visit the church. Without the narrative from each school, it was impossible to know if this was due to distance from the church, size of school, or accessibility of the church.

It is concluded that the schools mostly engage to a high level with key elements of visible and active school ethos, including religious education and school assembly, as well as connecting with the parish rector and the church building. In chapters two and three, these elements of ethos were regarded as significant, in terms of the prescribed ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school.

Conclusion to Chapter Four

In this chapter, the empirical research was located within the fields of student voice research in Ireland and in Anglican schools in Wales. The research question for the study was introduced as: What are the key elements of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school as articulated through student attitudes and lived experiences? Four embedded questions were also outlined. The first question was addressed in this chapter. The remaining three questions will be investigated in the next three chapters. The chosen research methodology of survey-based quantitative research was outlined and the process of pilot study, ethical approval, data collection, and analysis was narrated.

The first embedded question was: Who attends Church of Ireland primary schools and what ethos-related activities are found in these schools (religious education, school assembly, parish-school links)?

A similar number of boys and girls attended Church of Ireland primary schools, and over half of these students stated that they attended the Church of Ireland church, Presbyterian church, or Methodist church, thus being part of the target population. One quarter of students do not attend church, yet it is noted that their parents have selected a primary school with a Church of Ireland ethos for their education.

Religious education and school assembly take place in all schools, religious education not being taught on a daily basis as in the curriculum guidelines, but mostly at least once a week. School assembly takes place in four-fifths of the schools, at least once a week. It is therefore an important element of school ethos, being a Christian act of worship. The rector is a regular participant in school assemblies and students attend school services in the church (particularly at Christmas, but also at Easter, and at the end of the school year). These findings support the importance of parish-school links, as discussed in chapter three.

It is concluded that the religious practices of school assembly and religious education, and strategies to uphold positive parish-school links are to be found in Church of Ireland primary schools. Their presence in the life of the school supports the prescribed elements of ethos, as discussed in chapter three.

Finally, it is noted that school assemblies moved online or outdoors during the Covid-19 pandemic, and even two years later, many schools have not resumed regular whole-school assemblies or church services or events. This research is therefore valid for October 2019, and would benefit from replication, to record the post-pandemic practice.

Chapter Five

The Ethos of the Church of Ireland Primary School: The Student Voice

In chapter four, the key research questions for this study were identified. The overarching research question is: What are the key elements of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school as articulated through student attitudes and lived experiences? In this chapter it is planned to answer the second of the four questions embedded in the overall research question: What is the student experience of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school?

It is also planned to explore factors that affect or predict student attitudes toward school ethos. To research this topic, it is intended to employ an established survey instrument, the *Lankshear Student Voice Scales*, initially developed for use in Anglican primary schools in Wales by Lankshear (2017). This study introduces an adapted version of these scales to the Irish context.

This chapter is in two parts. It will commence with a review of relevant studies focussed on the topic of school ethos that have been conducted in different sectors of school patronage in Ireland. A number of empirical research projects focussed on school ethos, which were conducted in England and Wales in recent decades, will be presented and discussed. The foundational instrument, the *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* (Lankshear, 2017) will then be introduced, and published research studies employing this instrument will be reviewed.

For the research in Ireland, the *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* were initially extended, piloted, and edited; this process will be outlined. The data collection and analysis process will be documented. The reliability of the scales will be presented, and the overall results will be analysed to give a picture of the student experience of Church of Ireland primary school ethos, and to answer the research question. Further analysis of the data will add to the research findings already published in this field, and will test the validity of predictions relating to students' sex, age, religious practices, and attitude toward Christianity, in terms of their perceptions and lived experiences of school ethos. Finally, as two-thirds of Church of Ireland schools are designated as small schools, the particular experience of students in this school context will be investigated. A summary of findings will form the chapter conclusion.

Ethos in Irish Primary Schools: Published Empirical Studies

There are few published ethos-themed studies located in primary schools in Ireland, even in the majority Catholic sector. Those recent studies of particular relevance to the research question will be briefly discussed, commencing with those studies in the Anglican (Church of Ireland) sector, followed by a study from the Muslim sector, and a study from the Catholic sector. Reference will also be made to research in the multi-denominational sector, which demonstrated a lack of clarity about ethos and a call for guidance from patron bodies. This call was responded to in 2020, with the publication of a framework of support for the quality assurance of the Educate Together ethos (O'Brien, 2020).

Church of Ireland Primary Schools and Ethos

There are four published studies from the Church of Ireland sector, which focus specifically on the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school: a parental study (Lodge & Tuohy, 2011), a whole school study of small schools (Lodge & Tuohy, 2016), and two studies on ethos and school websites (Wilkinson, 2019; 2021).

The parental study (Lodge & Tuohy, 2011), was designed to provide evidence to support the submission of the Board of Education of the Church of Ireland to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector. A survey was posted to all Protestant primary schools, and distributed to parents of junior infants and 6th class. The survey explored the attitudes and values of parents, and specifically gathered information on what influenced them in their choice of primary school, their expectations of the school experience for their child, and their experiences of the school. The areas surveyed included "governance, academic excellence, social development and pastoral care of pupils, religious education and faith formation, inclusion and involvement of parents" (p. 188).

The large amount of data gathered (85% response rate) had the potential to provide novel insights into the attitudes of parents toward the Protestant primary school, its ethos, and how their expectations of the school were met in practice. It is disappointing that only one minor paper was published using the findings of this survey, and that the data are no longer available. The published paper by Lodge and Tuohy (2011) focussed on only one aspect of the study: the religious identities of parents, and their views on school patronage and religious education. It was concluded that 54% of parents rated 'school patronage' as very important in their choice of school, ranging from 73% of parents who were members of the main Protestant Churches to 10% of

parents who had no religious affiliation. The authors concluded that "clearly, there is a strong element of support and loyalty among the Main Protestant community for their schools" (p. 191). It was also shown that the schools catered for a wide diversity of Christian denominations, and that there was satisfaction amongst all parents for what the schools were doing, including in areas of faith (p. 193).

In 2016, a summary report was published, based on research about the culture of small Irish Protestant primary schools. This was in response to a national debate about the financial future of small schools. Conducted by Lodge and Tuohy, surveys were sent to all teachers, principals, chairpersons, and parents of pupils in 2nd class in Protestant schools with less than five teachers. The surveys were supported by researcher visits to 11 of these schools, this included conducting pupil focus groups. The summary report highlighted key findings and recommendations, which were shown to fit into four themes: ethos, satisfaction with the school, the multi-grade classroom, and challenges of resources and workload. It was stated that "children were very positive about their experiences of their schools, the positive relationships, their enjoyment of life and learning in school and their sense of belonging" (2016, p. 3). As with the earlier study, no further data analysis has been published and the data are no longer available. Both of these studies, however, fulfilled their aims, by justifying in the public arena, a positive rationale for continued state-support for Protestant schools, especially small schools.

A research study was conducted by Wilkinson, with a focus on what was publicly said by schools on their school websites about the ethos and identity of Church of Ireland primary schools. Wilkinson demonstrated that 35% of schools did not make it clear that they were Church of Ireland schools on their website home pages. By using content analysis methodologies to analyse ethos statements on the school websites, it was shown that there was little consistency in the narrative of what schools articulated in terms of being Church of Ireland primary schools (Wilkinson, 2019; 2021). Wilkinson concluded that there was great uncertainty as to the niche Church of Ireland primary schools saw themselves as occupying in the educational marketplace, and a corresponding lack of clarity amongst stakeholders as to what a Church of Ireland school ethos might look like. This research study will therefore be the first detailed analysis of student attitudes toward the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school.

Muslim Primary schools and Ethos

There are three Muslim schools in Ireland, and research by Sai (2018) aimed "to provide insight and understanding into the role of ethos as a lived experience among

children in Muslim primary schools in contemporary twenty-first century Ireland" (p. 29). Sai collected data from observations and interviews with Muslim parents and religion teachers in two Muslim Irish State-funded schools, and concluded that, despite being under the same patronage, there were similarities and differences between the schools in terms of ethos, notably in the elements of prayer, dress code, and the physical environment (p. 29). These, he argued, "resulted in different educational and religious experiences for Muslim children" (p. 42). Sai suggested that, in terms of "the objectives of any given school", the possibility of "defining an 'Islamic' ethos becomes even more complex, especially considering the diversity of Muslims, their denominations and interpretations of Islam" (p. 33). He called for schools to be involved in frequent self-evaluation and critical assessment as a way to identify where gaps lay between what he labelled the 'intended' and the 'actual' ethos of the school (p. 42).

> Finally, it is important that Muslim schools, in general, progress beyond being 'like every other school'. Rather, the overall aim ought to be to provide a unique holistic educational experience for Muslim children that truly reflects the faith and its values, which, in turn, contributes and adds real value to their respective educational systems. (p. 42)

Sai's study has highlighted some of the complexities in defining ethos within schools of a particular patronage, one such issue was shared and raised by Colton, (2009) with regard to schools in the Church of Ireland sector, when he stated that "such is the breadth of the Church of Ireland's self-understanding that it is impossible for patrons to lay down a single template statement of characteristic spirit to be adopted and implemented by each and every school" (p. 260).

Catholic Primary Schools and Ethos

The vast majority of primary schools in Ireland are under Catholic patronage. A report published in 2008 by the Council for Research and Development of the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, presented the views of parents across a range of themes, including why they might select a Catholic school for their child. The study concluded that 58% of parents stated that the Catholic identity of primary schools was important or very important (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2008).

Mahon (2017), in her doctoral research, explored the religious identity of Catholic primary schools. She collected data from eight schools, outlining the explicit and intended ethos of the schools from the patron's perspective and demonstrated that, despite much external expectations by the patrons, the religious identity of the schools

was mixed. Schools had varied levels of commitment to their Catholic identity, and little or no support was being provided by parents or parish community (p. 18).

Mahon concluded there was a significant and widening gap between the intended and operative ethos of the surveyed schools and she recommended intervention as a means to prevent the further "dilution of their religious identity" (p. 148). Mahon drew attention to the self-evaluation resources provided by The Catholic Schools Partnership, established in 2010 as "an umbrella group providing strategic thinking on major issues facing Catholic schools" (Catholic Schools Partnership, 2012a; 2012b; 2016). Mahon noted that, although the actual process of assessing a school's religious identity would be of benefit, that concrete action, including continued professional development (CPD) along with external support for implementing recommendations, would be required to ensure the process of dialogue and reflection moved into action (p. 148).

One way the recommendation for self-evaluation has been recently addressed, is through a dialogue-based process published by the Catholic Schools Partnership in 2019. It was designed to be initiated by the patron, and supported by a diocesan liaison team. The board of management would complete an ethos reflection and select a facilitation model and leaders to complete the process on its behalf. The leaders would recommend one of five characteristics of ethos to be worked on over one year, and after approval by the board of management there would be engagement with staff, parents, and 5th and 6th class pupils, before the target would be worked on for the year by the whole school community. After the year, reports would be furnished to the board of management and to the patron, and progress disseminated to the school community. At this point in time, there have been no updates, or research published on the effectiveness of this process, this has been undoubtedly hampered by school restrictions as a result of Covid-19.

Multi-Denominational Schools and Ethos

There is some published research specifically focussed on ethos within the multi-denominational sectors (Educate Together and Education and Training Board schools). Educate Together is patron of 95 primary schools (Educate Together, 2021), and promotes an understanding of its ethos as based in inclusion, with schools which are multidenominational, co-educational, child centred, and democratically run (Rowe, 2000). Lalor (2013) conducted doctoral research, based on case studies of Educate Together schools, with the aim to investigate the inclusion found in the Educate

Together school, as measured against best practice across the European Union. One of the key findings was the "variety of understandings of fundamental principles of the Educate Together ethos", and an "absence of a shared understanding of the ethos underpinning the schools". He called for Educate Together to "reconsider how it communicates the essence of its ethos and how this operates in the schools themselves" (p. 171).

A study focussed on ethos in multi-denominational schools in the Education and Training Board (ETB) sector was conducted by Faas, Smith, and Darmody (2018a). It was the first empirical study exploring the views of principals, teachers, and pupils in this sector. It focussed on the articulation of the official formal ethos of schools, and highlighted how ethos was lived and challenged in practice. The study employed a mixed-methods approach including pupil focus groups (p. 6). The main conclusions were that the schools recognised the multi-denominational ethos of their schools and took "active steps to accommodate all faiths and beliefs equally", but that differences existed in how individual schools recognised and celebrated diversity, and in how they handled "belief-specific teaching". The authors suggested "a more standard approach be developed to assist in promoting an over-arching sector identity" (p. 15).

Similar calls to the patron of Education and Training Board schools (ETB) for assistance in articulating ethos were highlighted in studies conducted by a group of researchers (see published articles by O'Flaherty, Liddy, et al., 2018 and Liddy et al., 2019). It was found that, where the ETB had not provided an external expression of a collective ethos, this had led to confusion and schools had been left "to form their own school-specific values and traditions" (O'Flaherty, Liddy, et al., 2018, p. 11). Liddy et al. demonstrated that over half of the teachers in their study stated their understanding of characteristic spirit was average or below (p. 105), and proposed that there was the need for this sector to provide an "explicit articulation of characteristic spirit" for their schools (Liddy et al., 2019, p. 115).

This call was responded to by the Centre for Evaluation, Quality and Inspection (EQI) in Dublin City University, and a handbook was published in 2020 (O'Brien, 2020). This handbook offered a framework of support for the quality assurance of the Educate Together ethos and included an Educate Together charter, ethos quality statements and statements of effective practice, along with an ethos self-evaluation process and national supports for ethos. There are six domains of ethos in this charter: equality, ethical education, child/learner centred, democratic structures, participation,

and sustainable practice. Notably, there is an awareness expressed in the handbook of the likelihood of tension between the 'intended ethos' and the 'experienced ethos' in individual schools. O'Brien recommended that "developing and living the Educate Together ethos should be discussed, considered, planned for, applied, monitored and evaluated" (p. 4). This again underlines the conclusions from the studies drawn from other Irish educational sectors, that ethos requires dialogue at national and individual school levels.

From reviewing the Irish empirical research into school ethos, it is clear that a key theme has emerged. Within each sector, there was a lack of coherence and clarity in how individual schools articulated their understanding of ethos, leading to a demand for clarity and guidance in terms of the explicit and prescribed ethos for the particular patronage model.

Ethos in Anglican primary schools in England and Wales: Published Empirical Studies

There are a number of research studies focussed on the ethos of Anglican schools in the United Kingdom, predominantly led by Francis and Lankshear. Research in Anglican school education has been conducted in several key areas, including what clergy and lay church members had to say about church schools (Francis, Robbins, & Astley, 2005); the views of church school governors (Francis & Stone, 1995), and the views of teachers (Francis, 1986a; Francis & Grindle, 2001). In his study of the attitudes of teachers towards the church school system, Francis found that younger teachers were less likely to hold strong positive attitudes toward church schools than their older colleagues (Francis, 1986a). Francis also compared church schools and county schools in terms of religious ethos and character, and concluded that, even within the church school, the predictors of head-teacher age and personal religious commitment had a significant influence on the school's religious ethos (Francis, 1987). These influences were also found in a research study about the attitudes of school governors toward the ethos of the Church of England primary school (Francis & Stone, 1995).

Jelfs (2010) conducted a survey of 45 schools in one Anglican diocese and ethnographic case studies of a further three schools in the same diocese. Her aim was to investigate how schools understood and demonstrated Christian distinctiveness. She suggested that schools did this in two ways: through a commitment to their Christian and Anglican foundation, and through values which reflected Christian beliefs and promoted personal development and academic achievement. According to Jelfs,

commitment to a school's Christian and Anglican foundation was demonstrated in strong church-school links and with "a significant religious dimension in the corporate life of the school" (p. 33). Jelfs described these as informing the school's identity and providing "cultural anchor points in the life of schools" (p. 36). The primary values of "love, care, respect, and responsibility towards each other" were identified as core Christian values. Yet, Jelfs concluded, there were inconsistencies in the understanding and demonstrating of Christian distinctiveness in the schools in her study, and she noted that schools "do not have a clear understanding of how their Christian character relates to the core pedagogical practices of teaching, learning, and curriculum". She called for the development of a distinct theory and practice of education in Anglican schools (p. 37).

Some recent empirical studies have focussed on parental choice in school selection, and considered how ethos plays a role in marketing and decision-making. Hemming and Roberts (2018) studied the ethos of the Church of England primary school through the lens of school choice. They conducted qualitative case studies in rural primary schools with participant observation, semi-structured teacher interviews, parental focus groups, and paired pupil interviews; the results included analysis of the impact of the religious character or ethos of the school on parental choice. It was found that the religious character of the school influenced parental choice, a school being partly chosen for the "close-knit school community and caring ethos" but also for the way it enhanced the construction of the "rural idyll" in terms of cultural heritage and nostalgia to which the church contributed (p. 514).

School Ethos in England and Wales: The Student Voice

As was discussed in chapter four, there has been some advocacy in recent years for educationalists to engage the student voice in research and policy making. Since the 1970s, Francis has conducted extensive empirical studies, with the key focus of listening to the students attending Anglican schools, thus providing insight into the ethos of these schools from a pragmatic student perspective. A number of these studies have compared attitudes of students attending Church of England (Anglican) schools, with those of their peers attending non-denominational state-maintained schools. Published studies have focussed on student attitudes towards Christianity (Francis, 1986b; Francis, 1987; Francis & Carter, 1980), and on student spiritual health (Francis et al., 2012). Lankshear (2005) has also compared the religious and moral values of

students attending Church of England schools with those attending non-denominational state schools.

Francis and Penny (2013) sought to compare the collective worldview of students attending Anglican state-maintained secondary schools, with that of students attending state-maintained schools with no religious character. They hypothesised that "it is the collective values of the pupils as a body that both reflects and informs the ethos of the school and that the clearest voice on school ethos should be accessed by listening to the students themselves" (p. 135). Further empirical research has sought to explore the voices of students attending ten Christian ethos secondary schools (Francis, Lankshear, & Eccles, 2018; Francis & Village, 2019). As in the study by Francis and Penny (2013), Francis, Lankshear, and Eccles (2018) argued that the collective worldview of the students is crucial in reflecting and in shaping the ethos of schools. Their analysis of the collective worldview of students attending Christian ethos schools, as compared with the collective worldview of students attending schools with no religious character, led them to conclude that the differences were in fact school-specific, and illustrated this by demonstrating differences between Anglican schools that "voice their interpretation of the Church's mission in education differently" (p. 445).

Listening to the student voice is increasingly important in educational policy and research, if "the students themselves are central to shaping and to determining the prevailing ethos of schools" (Francis & Penny, 2013, p. 135), and if "the assessment of student attitudes may provide an important indicator of school ethos" (Lankshear et al., 2018, p. 113). A major project, designed to gather data about student attitudes in Anglican primary schools, was the *Student Voice Project* in Wales, which ran from 2014 to 2017.

The Student Voice Project (Wales)

The value of listening to the student voice about their lived experiences of school ethos was explored through empirical research in Wales, in a three-year Student Voice Project. This empirical research employed the *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* (Lankshear, 2017; Francis et al., 2022; Lankshear et al., 2021).

The Student Voice Project (Wales) was nested within the context of denominational school inspections, which are legally required in Wales. As was outlined in chapter three, state-maintained schools in England and Wales are required to undergo inspection, a main inspection by government and a separate denominational inspection of school ethos and collective worship, under the responsibility of the

religious foundation (e.g. Church in Wales) and the school governors. Religious education is also included for voluntary aided schools.

Lankshear et al. (2021) noted that "the development of the church-related inspection system stimulated the Anglican Church to reflect more creatively about the qualities that characterised good practice in church schools and defined the distinctive ethos in church schools" (p. 211). As an aid to schools in developing discussion about ethos and to inspectors as they assessed this aspect of Anglican schools, a number of publications were issued, containing discussion, guidelines, and descriptors on the ethos, character, and distinctiveness of Anglican schools. These were written by Lankshear (1992a; 1992b; 1992c; 1997; 2000) and published by the National Society, and were "designed to encourage, shape and inform the inspection of Anglican schools in England and Wales" (Brown & Lankshear, 1995; 1997; 2000).

After the devolution of power to the Welsh government, the Church in Wales worked to produce an adapted model of the National Society's inspection framework that would work in their schools' context. A key new approach to inspection in Church in Wales state-maintained schools was introduced in 2013, with a corresponding survey designed to capture the student voice on school ethos and collective worship. The Church in Wales had invited Lankshear and colleagues to design a set of scales, focussed on the areas of school ethos and collective worship, identified under the Section 50 inspection criteria.

The *Student Voice Project* was launched with a survey for all students between the ages of 8 and 11 years in Church in Wales primary schools. Lankshear et al. (2017; 2021) stated that it allowed for the voices of students to be heard and the development of a "common set of standards against which individual schools can be compared or can compare themselves". This provided objective data for inspectors, as well as for schools to use in self-evaluation programmes, as it drew on specific strengths and highlighted potential weaknesses (Lankshear et al., 2017, p. 242; Lankshear et al., 2021, p. 211).

Francis et al. (2017) traced the process that had been followed in designing and developing the scales for the Student Voice Project. The scales were developed, reviewed, refined, and expanded through all stages of the project, which started with an initial survey in 2014-2015. The original scales were mapped onto six key areas, identified by Lankshear as key themes in the Section 50 inspection criteria (Lankshear, 1992b); these key areas were: "attitude toward school ethos, attitude toward school experience, attitude toward school teachers, attitude toward relationships in school,

attitude toward school and environment, and attitude toward school worship" (Francis et al., 2017, p. 4).

After the first two years of the project (2014-2015 and 2015-2016), the scales were reviewed and some changes made, "including the expansion and reconceptualising of some scales designed to make them both more useful to schools and also more internally consistent" (Lankshear, 2017, p. 6). The original scale that measured attitudes toward school ethos was replaced with two scales, one to measure attitudes toward general school ethos and the other to measure attitudes toward the religious character of the school. The scale that explored attitudes toward school and the environment was also replaced with two scales, to measure attitudes toward stewardship of creation, and attitudes toward stewardship of school environment (Francis et al., 2022; Lankshear et al., 2021). Further items were also added to a number of the scales in advance of the third year of the survey (2016-2017). By then, there were 57 items (an increase of 21 items) across eight scales (increased from six scales). These measured attitudes toward: general school ethos, the religious character of the school (Christian ethos), personal experience of school, personal experience of adults, relationships, teaching about stewardship of creation, experience of stewardship of the environment, and experience of school worship. Lankshear et al. (2021) reported that these eight scales generated alpha coefficients higher than the previous six scales, ranging from $\alpha = .76$ to $\alpha = .86$ for year-four students to $\alpha = .83$ to $\alpha = .90$ for year-six students (p. 214).

At the end of the three-year project, it was concluded by the researchers that "it has proved possible to operationalise some of the criteria identified by the Section 50 inspection process in ways accessible to students within the age range of 8 to 11 years, enabling the student voice to be heard in the context of the inspection process" (Francis et al., 2017, p. 9). Francis et al. (2022) stated that the data generated by the project allowed the Church in Wales to "move beyond aspirational statements about the kind of ethos it would like its schools to reflect to descriptive statements about the lived experience of the students and how they perceive the ethos of the school they attend" (p. 94).

These researchers also highlighted those aspirations regarding school ethos that were not recognised, or identified as important, by the students. This reflects what McLaughlin (2005) described as a necessary tension between the aspirational ethos and the experienced ethos, which is "an inescapable part of ethos in an educational context" (p. 312). When noting the items endorsed by less than four-fifths of the students,

Francis et al. (2022) concluded that "further reflection on these items may result in Anglican schools agreeing that such issues are not really core to their school ethos, or in Anglican schools exploring how students' perceptions may be enhanced in such areas" (p. 95).

In one Welsh Anglican diocese (Llandaff), the Diocesan Director of Education used the issued reports in work with senior leadership teams in participating schools, as a means to enhance school improvement and effectiveness. It was found that this intervention, which involved active engagement with the research findings as a way to influence policy and practice, had a measurable impact on scores, with students' mean scores increasing between years one and two of the project. A control group, comprised of students from 41 schools within four other dioceses, did not record similar results (Francis et al., 2021, p. 312).

This again shows the importance of the student voice in school ethos, and specifically the possibilities for the employment of the *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* in school self-evaluation processes, so that schools can identify what is going well, and pinpoint areas where there is need for improvement. Lankshear et al. (2021) concluded that analysis of the data from the eight scales "provides a richer and better focused account of the distinctive characteristics of church schools as identified by the Section 50 inspection criteria", and noted that there is "evidence that the new set of scales may be of greater benefit both to the inspection process and to the process of school self-evaluation" (p. 219).

Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, and McKenna (2021) concluded their study of the effectiveness of the student voice project in the diocese of Llandaff, by stating that the student voice project "can be commended for further use within other Provinces of the Anglican Church in which the Anglican Church is actively involved in the provision of denominationally distinctive schools within the state-maintained sector" (p. 312). This research study therefore employs the *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* in a new Anglican school context.

Preparation of the Research Instrument

The research question addressed in this chapter is: What is the student experience of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school?

At the early stages of this study, it was decided to bring the eight *Lankshear Student Voice Scales*, as used in 2016/2017 in Anglican primary schools in Wales, into the Irish context. It was not clear at the start as to whether all items in these scales

would be relevant and reliable in this different context, which does not have the same background narrative of church school inspection. A pilot project was planned to investigate the suitability of the instrument in the Irish context.

Process of Adaptation of Lankshear Student Voice Scales

Permission was granted by the authors of the *Lankshear Student Voice Scales*, as used in the Student Voice project in Wales (2016/2017), for the eight scales to be adapted and extended for use in Church of Ireland primary schools. After ethical approval was granted from the University of Warwick on 28 January 2019, a pilot study was planned to test the reliability of the scales in the Irish context. A new scale was introduced to measure student attitude toward religious education, as in Ireland this falls under the remit of school patronage, and is strongly connected to the articulation of school ethos.

The draft instrument was piloted in June 2019 in two ways. First, a cognitive testing group of pupils from 5th and 6th class in one small school was formed, to allow for in-depth discussion about the individual statements and the overall questionnaire. The amended survey was then anonymously completed by 100 students in a variety of school settings (Appendix B).

The nine scales in the survey were analysed in terms of their reliability. It was found that each scale generated a good alpha score, ranging from $\alpha = .74$ to $\alpha = .91$, demonstrating good internal consistency reliability (Cronbach, 1951; Kline, 1999). The second test of reliability explored each scale in detail and analysed the correlation between each item and the sum of the other items in the particular scale (r). Some items were removed from the scales in this process, as it was intended to ensure that each scale was functioning reliably, and had sufficient, but not an excess, of items. This process was outlined in chapter four.

The resulting nine scales contained 62 reliable items, and measured attitudes toward a number of elements relating to school ethos: the general character of the school, the religious character of the school, the experience of school, the teachers, relationships in school, the stewardship of creation, the stewardship of the school, school assembly, and religious education.

Data Collection and Analysis

Student surveys were posted to participating schools in October 2019, along with teacher and parental consent forms (as per ethical guidelines). These surveys included the adapted *Lankshear Student Voice Scales*. Class teachers were asked to

administer the surveys in class time with students in 4th, 5th, and 6th classes, and to return the completed surveys to the researcher. Anonymity was assured.

A total of 3,249 surveys were received back from 92 schools. Surveys were received from 1,609 boys, 1,629 girls, and 11 with unstated gender. Surveys were received from 1,072 4th class students, 1,065 5th class students, 1,101 6th class students, and 10 with unstated class group. These data were entered into Microsoft Excel databases, then transferred to SPSS and analysed by the SPSS statistical package (IBM, 2018; 2020), using the frequency, reliability, correlation, and regression routines.

Reliability of the Scales

The nine scales are Likert scales, where students selected an option according to their agreement with the statement. The options were allocated points: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3), disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1). Total scores and mean scores were calculated for each scale.

Table 5.1

Statistical Properties of the Nine Ethos Scales

Scale	*N*	α	Range of Scores	Mid-point of scale	Mean	*SD*
General character of the school	6	.90	6-30	18.0	25.4	4.35
Religious character of the school	7	.88	7-35	21.0	28.0	4.82
Experience of school	7	.83	7-35	21.0	28.0	4.87
Teachers	5	.77	5-25	15.0	20.9	3.25
Relationships in school	7	.86	7-35	21.0	30.3	3.91
Stewardship of creation	7	.82	7-35	21.0	28.6	4.35
Stewardship of the school	5	.85	5-25	15.0	20.8	3.32
School assembly	7	.88	7-35	21.0	24.9	6.14
Religious education	11	.92	11-55	33.0	41.1	9.00

N = number of items, α = Cronbach's alpha, *SD* = standard deviation

Table 5.1 presents the structure of each of the nine scales: the number of items in each scale, the reliability of each scale (in terms of Cronbach's alpha), the range of possible scores, the mean score, and the standard deviation. The scales contain different numbers of items, ranging from 5 to 11 items, this is apparent in the range of scores and the mean scores.

The internal consistency reliabilities of the adapted *Lankshear Student Voice Scales*, are expressed in terms of the alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951; Kline, 1999). These were found to range from α = .77 (attitude toward the teachers) to α = .92 (attitude toward religious education). It was also noted that the scales generated alpha coefficients ranging from α = .72 to α = .90 for 4th class students, alpha coefficients ranging from α = .79 to α = .93 for 5th class students, and alpha coefficients ranging from α = .79 to α = .92 for 6th class students.

The next test of reliability explored each of the individual scales in detail, analysing the correlation between each item and the sum of the other items in the scale (*r*). Table 5.2 shows the results of these tests, along with the percentages of students who agreed with each statement (calculated by adding together those who stated they agree strongly and those who stated they agree), those who disagreed with the statement (calculated by adding together those who stated they disagree strongly and those who stated they disagree), and those who were uncertain. All scales demonstrated good internal consistency reliability.

Table 5.2

Analysis of Reliability of Scales and Percentage Endorsement of Scale Items

Scale	*r*	Agree %	Uncertain %	Disagree %
Attitude toward the general character of the school				
My school is a really caring school	.67	89	9	2
My school is a really friendly school	.71	86	11	3
My school is a really welcoming school	.69	90	8	2
My school treats every child fairly	.75	75	15	10
My school treats every child with respect	.78	81	13	6
My school treats every child kindly	.79	82	12	6
Attitude toward the religious character of the school				
School assembly is very important in my school	.52	69	26	5
Prayer is very important in my school	.68	65	26	9
God is very important in my school	.76	77	19	4
Jesus is very important in my school	.76	77	18	5
Church is very important in my school	.72	71	23	5
The Bible is very important in my school	.74	73	22	5
Christmas and Easter are very important in my school	.47	80	17	3
Attitude toward the experience of school				
In my school the rules are fair	.58	77	16	7
In my school I can be myself	.52	73	17	10
My school is a peaceful place	.60	72	20	8

My school is a safe place	.65	87	9	4
My school looks good	.59	77	16	7
My school is a clean place	.59	82	13	5
I like coming to my school	.55	62	21	17
Attitude toward the teachers				
The teachers in my school care a lot for all the students	.60	88	10	2
The teachers in my school care a lot for the world around us	.56	87	11	2
The teachers in my school care a lot for the school	.60	92	7	1
When I do well in school my teacher praises me	.47	67	21	12
In my school I can go to my teacher when I am unhappy	.56	70	19	11
Attitude toward relationships in school				
My school teaches me to respect other people	.58	94	5	1
My school teaches me to respect other peoples' things	.58	93	6	1
My school teaches me to care for other people	.64	93	6	1
In my school we value each other	.67	83	14	3
Caring for others is very important in my school	.67	94	5	1
In my school we care a lot for each other	.69	84	13	3
In my school I know that people care for me	.60	76	18	6
Attitude toward the stewardship of creation				
My school teaches me to respect things that grow	.55	84	13	2
My school teaches me to respect wonderful things	.56	88	11	1
My school teaches me to care for the world around us	.59	91	8	1
My school teaches me to take care of plants	.63	73	20	7
My school teaches me to take care of animals	.59	76	16	8
My school teaches me to take care of insects	.59	51	30	19
My school teaches me not to waste things	.49	86	11	3
Attitude toward the stewardship of the school				
At my school we are proud of our school grounds	.55	81	16	3
At my school we are proud of our classrooms	.61	77	20	3
At my school we are proud when our school looks tidy	.69	84	13	3
At my school we are proud when our school looks clean	.72	82	15	3
At my school we are proud when our school looks good	.73	82	15	3
Attitude toward school assembly				
In assembly I enjoy being with the whole school	.59	63	26	11
In assembly I enjoy visits from the rector	.59	66	25	9
In assembly singing is important to me	.70	46	30	24

In assembly being quiet and still is important to me	.61	58	28	14
In assembly listening to the Bible is important to me	.74	57	24	19
In assembly saying prayers is important to me	.75	57	23	20
In assembly I enjoy the songs we sing	.73	52	23	25
Attitude toward religious education				
In RE I enjoy Bible stories	.72	57	27	16
In RE it is important to learn about Christmas and Easter	.63	80	15	5
In RE I enjoy saying prayers	.76	52	27	21
In RE it is important to learn about God	.77	86	9	5
In RE it is important to learn about other religions	.36	74	19	7
In RE it is important to hear and read Bible stories	.80	73	18	9
In RE it is important to learn about the church	.76	69	22	9
In RE I enjoy learning about the church	.79	52	29	19
In RE it is important to learn about Jesus	.77	80	13	7
In RE my beliefs are respected	.56	73	20	7
In RE I enjoy singing	.57	48	25	27

r = correlation between each item and the sum of the other items in each scale

Student Attitudes toward the Ethos of the School

The mean scores, as calculated for each scale, were reviewed and it was concluded that, in terms of each scale, these exceeded the mid-point of the scale (table 5.1). This shows an overall positive attitude toward the ethos of the school, as expressed across the nine elements of ethos investigated by the adapted *Lankshear Student Voice Scales*. This answers the first research question: What is the student experience of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school? The overall student experience is positive towards the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school.

Each of the nine scales will be discussed, in light of the data presented in table 5.2, to build up a more detailed and textured narrative of the student attitude toward the ethos of the school.

Attitude toward the general character of the school: It was found that 90% of students agreed that their school is a really welcoming school, 89% of students agreed their school is really caring, and 86% of students agreed their school is a really friendly school. The lowest scoring statement was where 75% of students agreed that their school treats every child fairly.

***Attitude toward the religious character of the school*:** It was found that 80% of students agreed that Christmas and Easter are very important in their school, 77% of

students agreed that God is very important in their school, and 77% of students agreed that Jesus is very important in their school. The lowest scoring statement was where 65% of students agreed that prayer is very important in their school.

***Attitude toward the experience of school*:** It was found that 87% of students agreed that their school is a safe place, and 82% of students agreed that their school is a clean place. The lowest scoring statement was where 62% of students agreed they like coming to their school.

***Attitude toward the teachers*:** It was found that 92% of students agreed that the teachers in their school care a lot for the school, 88% of students agreed that the teachers in their school care a lot for all the students, and 87% of students agreed that the teachers in their school care a lot for the world around them. The proportion dropped to 70% of students who agreed they could go to their teacher when they are unhappy, and 67% of students who agreed that when they do well in school their teacher praises them.

Attitude toward relationships in school: It was found that students were very positive in terms of attitudes toward relationships in school, with 93% of students agreeing that their school teaches them to respect other people and other people's things, and 94% of students agreeing that caring for others is very important in their school. The lowest scoring statement was where 76% of students agreed that in their school they know that people care for them.

***Attitude toward the stewardship of creation*:** It was found that 91% of students agreed that their school teaches them to care for the world around them, and 88% of students agreed their school teaches them to respect wonderful things. Only 51% of students agreed that their school teaches them to take care of insects.

Attitude toward the stewardship of the school: It was found that 84% of students agreed they are proud when their school looks tidy, 82% of students agreed they are proud when their school looks clean, and 82% of students agreed they are proud when their school looks good. The proportion dropped to 77% of students who agreed they are proud of their classrooms.

***Attitude toward school assembly*:** It was found that 66% of students agreed that in assembly they enjoy visits from the rector, and 63% of students agreed that in assembly they enjoy being with the whole school. When examining the various elements of school assembly, it was noted that 52% of students agreed with the statement 'In assembly I enjoy the songs we sing', with 25% of the students disagreeing with that

statement, and 46% of students agreed with the statement that 'in assembly singing is important to me', whilst 24% of students disagreed with this statement.

***Attitude toward religious education*:** It was found that 86% of students agreed that in RE it is important to learn about God, and that 80% of the students agreed that in RE it is important to learn about Jesus. When analysing the statements that investigated student attitudes toward the elements of a typical RE lesson, it was found that 48% of the students agreed with the statement 'In RE I enjoy singing' and 27% of students disagreed with that statement. It was also noted that 52% of students agreed with the statement 'In RE I enjoy saying prayers', whilst 48% of students were uncertain about prayers, or disagreed with the statement.

This detailed analysis of the responses to each of the nine ethos scales in the adapted *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* has provided an overall positive picture of student attitude toward the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school. The set of nine scales provided a rich description of the distinctive ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school, which may be of potential value for stakeholders.

The next stage of the research study explores a number of personal factors, which may affect student attitudes toward the ethos of the school.

Factors Affecting Student Attitudes toward the Ethos of the School

Based on data collected from the Student Voice Project (2014-2017) Francis et al. (2022) investigated factors that influenced student attitude toward school ethos. They demonstrated that student attitudes toward school ethos were associated with the personal factors of sex, and age, and the religious factors of church attendance, personal prayer, and attitudes toward Christianity. Exploring these factors in the Irish context has the potential to add further depth and texture to the findings of this study, and subsequent validity to the *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* in a new Anglican context.

Sex and Student Attitudes toward the Ethos of the School

In their research study, Francis et al. (2022) stated that girls recorded significantly higher scores than boys on six of their eight ethos scales: attitude toward the general character of the school, attitude toward the religious character of the school, attitude toward the experience of school, attitude toward the teachers, attitude toward school worship, and attitude toward relationships in school. They recorded no significant difference between boys and girls in terms of attitude toward stewardship of creation, or attitude toward stewardship of the school. It was concluded that "a more positive attitude toward the ethos of Anglican primary schools in Wales is reported by

female students, and this difference emerges with greatest clarity in relation to the explicitly religious aspects of the schools (including school worship)" (p. 95).

To investigate these factors in the Irish context, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores between girls and boys on each of the nine scales. These data, shown in table 5.3, found that girls recorded significantly higher scores than boys in all nine attitudinal areas.

Table 5.3

Exploring Girls' and Boys' Attitudes toward School Ethos

Scale	Girls		Boys		*t*	*p*<
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*		
General character of the school	26.1	3.9	24.7	4.7	-9.4	.001
Religious character of the school	28.1	4.7	27.8	5.0	-2.0	.001
Experience of school	28.9	4.5	27.1	5.1	-10.5	.001
Teachers	21.3	3.0	20.4	3.4	-8.1	.001
Relationships in school	30.8	3.7	29.7	4.1	-7.8	.001
Stewardship of creation	29.1	4.3	28.2	4.4	-6.0	.001
Stewardship of the school	21.2	3.0	20.3	3.5	-7.6	.001
School assembly	25.9	5.7	23.8	6.4	-10.0	.001
Religious education	43.1	8.2	41.1	9.0	-6.4	.001

SD = standard deviation

The differences between the attitudes of girls and boys emerged most strongly in relation to attitudes toward school assembly and in relation to attitudes toward the experience of school. This is demonstrated in more detail in table 5.4, where scores are presented in terms of girls and boys who agreed (calculated by adding together the scores for agree strongly and agree) with each statement.

Table 5.4

Girls' and Boys' Responses: Percent agreeing with Individual Scale Items

Scale	Girl %	Boy %
Attitude toward the general character of the school		
My school is a really caring school	93	85
My school is a really friendly school	90	82

My school is a really welcoming school	93	86
My school treats every child fairly	79	72
My school treats every child with respect	85	78
My school treats every child kindly	86	78
Attitude toward the religious character of the school		
School assembly is very important in my school	72	67
Prayer is very important in my school	66	64
God is very important in my school	77	77
Jesus is very important in my school	76	78
Church is very important in my school	71	70
The Bible is very important in my school	72	73
Christmas and Easter are very important in my school	81	79
Attitude toward the experience of school		
In my school the rules are fair	81	73
In my school I can be myself	75	72
My school is a peaceful place	74	71
My school is a safe place	90	85
My school looks good	82	71
My school is a clean place	86	78
I like coming to my school	69	54
Attitude toward the teachers		
The teachers in my school care a lot for all the students	92	85
The teachers in my school care a lot for the world around us	88	85
The teachers in my school care a lot for the school	93	90
When I do well in school my teacher praises me	71	62
In my school I can go to my teacher when I am unhappy	72	67
Attitude toward relationships in school		
My school teaches me to respect other people	95	92
My school teaches me to respect other peoples' things	92	91
My school teaches me to care for other people	95	91
In my school we value each other	84	81
Caring for others is very important in my school	96	91
In my school we care a lot for each other	86	81
In my school I know that people care for me	77	74
Attitude toward the stewardship of creation		
My school teaches me to respect things that grow	87	81
My school teaches me to respect wonderful things	91	84
My school teaches me to care for the world around us	93	85
My school teaches me to take care of plants	74	71
My school teaches me to take care of animals	76	76
My school teaches me to take care of insects	51	50
My school teaches me not to waste things	88	84
Attitude toward the stewardship of school		
At my school we are proud of our school grounds	84	78
At my school we are proud of our classrooms	81	74
At my school we are proud when our school looks tidy	86	81
At my school we are proud when our school looks clean	85	77

At my school we are proud when our school looks good	85	79
Attitude toward school assembly		
In assembly I enjoy being with the whole school	68	57
In assembly I enjoy visits from the rector	68	64
In assembly singing is important to me	55	37
In assembly being quiet and still is important to me	62	54
In assembly listening to the Bible is important to me	58	55
In assembly saying prayers is important to me	61	57
In assembly I enjoy the songs we sing	61	53
Attitude toward religious education		
In RE I enjoy Bible stories	57	56
In RE it is important to learn about Christmas and Easter	82	78
In RE I enjoy saying prayers	55	48
In RE it is important to learn about God	87	84
In RE it is important to learn about other religions	77	71
In RE it is important to hear and read bible stories	74	72
In RE it is important to learn about the church	70	69
In RE I enjoy learning about the church	55	48
In RE it is important to learn about Jesus	81	79
In RE my beliefs are respected	77	70
In RE I enjoy singing	58	37

Table 5.4 shows that girls demonstrated higher endorsement scores in terms of each statement. These differences were obvious in terms of statements that referred to singing in religious education and in school assembly, where boys' endorsement scores were up to 21% lower than girls' scores. In terms of attitudes toward the experience of school, 81% of girls agreed the rules were fair, compared with 73% of boys; and 82% of girls agreed their school looked good, compared to 71% of boys. In terms of attitudes toward the teachers, 71% of girls agreed that when they do well in school their teachers praise them, compared with 62% of boys.

It is concluded that a more positive attitude toward the ethos of Church of Ireland primary schools is reported by girls, and that this is consistent across all nine scales in this study, and therefore in all nine attitudinal area of ethos. This difference is strongest in relation to attitudes toward the experience of school and in relation to attitudes toward school assembly.

Age and Student Attitudes toward the Ethos of the School

In their research study in Wales, Lankshear et al. (2021) demonstrated that older students held "a significantly less positive attitude toward the distinctive qualities of their church school than younger students" (p. 12). To investigate these factors in the

Irish context, the mean scores on each of the nine scales were compared in terms of 4th, 5th, and 6th class students and these data are presented in table 5.5.

In this study, students in 4th class were found to have more positive attitudes toward all scales than those in 5th class, who were also found to have more positive attitudes toward all scales than those in 6th class. This implies that the lived experience of these students in Church of Ireland primary schools and their perceptions of their school ethos decline in positivity as they reach the senior classes of the school.

Table 5.5

Exploring Age and Attitudes toward School Ethos

Scale	4th class		5th class		6th class		*t*	*p*<
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*		
General character of the school	26.1	4.1	25.3	4.4	24.8	4.5	7.1	.001
Religious character of the school	29.0	4.4	27.9	4.9	27.0	4.9	10.1	.001
Experience of school	28.6	4.9	27.9	4.8	27.4	4.9	5.4	.001
Teachers	21.4	3.1	20.8	3.4	20.5	3.2	6.5	.001
Relationships in school	30.8	3.8	30.1	3.8	29.9	4.0	5.7	.001
Stewardship of creation	29.4	4.3	28.5	4.3	28.0	4.4	7.4	.001
Stewardship of the school	21.2	3.3	20.9	3.2	20.3	3.4	6.2	.001
School assembly	26.3	5.8	24.6	6.2	23.7	6.2	10.2	.001
Religious education	43.6	8.0	41.6	9.0	41.1	8.7	7.1	.001

Note: The t-test was performed comparing 4th class and 6th class mean scores
SD = Standard Deviation

To further investigate these factors, an independent-samples t-test was run in terms of each scale, to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores between the youngest and oldest groups of students, i.e. 4th class and 6th class students. The findings are that 4th class students recorded significantly higher scores than 6th class students on all nine scales. This was especially pronounced in the scales relating to student attitudes toward the religious character of the school and student attitudes toward school assembly, also consistent with the findings by Lankshear et al. (2021).

Table 5.6

Individual Scale Items and Age Differences

Scale	4th class %	6th class %
Attitude toward the general character of the school		
My school is a really caring school	92	87
My school is a really friendly school	88	84
My school is a really welcoming school	90	88
My school treats every child fairly	79	72
My school treats every child with respect	85	79
My school treats every child kindly	84	81
Attitude toward the religious character of the school		
School assembly is very important in my school	74	64
Prayer is very important in my school	71	60
God is very important in my school	83	73
Jesus is very important in my school	81	73
Church is very important in my school	76	68
The Bible is very important in my school	80	66
Christmas and Easter are very important in my school	80	80
Attitude toward the experience of school		
In my school the rules are fair	80	73
In my school I can be myself	75	71
My school is a peaceful place	72	72
My school is a safe place	88	87
My school looks good	80	73
My school is a clean place	81	82
I like coming to my school	64	61
Attitude toward the teachers		
The teachers in my school care a lot for all the students	90	85
The teachers in my school care a lot for the world around us	90	85
The teachers in my school care a lot for the school	93	91
When I do well in school my teacher praises me	63	70
In my school I can go to my teacher when I am unhappy	77	63
Attitude toward relationships in school		
My school teaches me to respect other people	93	94
My school teaches me to respect other peoples' things	92	84
My school teaches me to care for other people	93	93
In my school we value each other	83	82
Caring for others is very important in my school	94	92
In my school we care a lot for each other	85	81
In my school I know that people care for me	77	76
Attitude toward the stewardship of creation		
My school teaches me to respect things that grow	83	85
My school teaches me to respect wonderful things	89	87
My school teaches me to care for the world around us	92	91
My school teaches me to take care of plants	78	69
My school teaches me to take care of animals	78	74
My school teaches me to take care of insects	58	46
My school teaches me not to waste things	89	95
Attitude toward the stewardship of the school		

At my school we are proud of our school grounds	84	80
At my school we are proud of our classrooms	79	74
At my school we are proud when our school looks tidy	85	81
At my school we are proud when our school looks clean	82	80
At my school we are proud when our school looks good	83	80
Attitude toward school assembly		
In assembly I enjoy being with the whole school	67	58
In assembly I enjoy visits from the rector	70	63
In assembly singing is important to me	55	37
In assembly being quiet and still is important to me	66	52
In assembly listening to the Bible is important to me	66	50
In assembly saying prayers is important to me	65	52
In assembly I enjoy the songs we sing	62	44
Attitude toward religious education		
In RE I enjoy Bible stories	65	50
In RE it is important to learn about Christmas and Easter	82	80
In RE I enjoy saying prayers	57	46
In RE it is important to learn about God	88	84
In RE it is important to learn about other religions	74	76
In RE it is important to hear and read bible stories	78	68
In RE it is important to learn about the church	73	66
In RE I enjoy learning about the church	59	49
In RE it is important to learn about Jesus	84	78
In RE my beliefs are respected	73	76
In RE I enjoy singing	58	39

The decline in positive attitudes from 4th class to 6th class is presented in more detail in table 5.6, demonstrating the percentage endorsement scores for 4th class students and 6th class students, calculated for each statement by adding together the scores for ‘agree strongly’ and ‘agree’.

In terms of the scale that measured attitudes toward the general character of the school, the main drop in endorsement between 4th and 6th class was for the item ‘My school treats each child fairly’, from 79% to 72%. The scale that measured attitudes toward the religious character of the school recorded higher drops in endorsement, with attitudes toward the importance of school assembly dropping from 74% to 64%, attitudes toward the importance of prayer dropping from 71% to 60%, and attitudes toward the importance of the Bible dropping from 80% to 66%.

In terms of the scale that measured attitudes toward the experience of school, the main drop in endorsement was recorded in the item ‘In my school the rules are fair’, which dropped from 80% to 73%. In terms of the scale that measured attitudes toward teachers, there was an interesting rise in endorsement for the statement ‘When I do well

in school my teacher praises me', from 63% to 70%, but a drop in endorsement for the statement 'In my school I can go to my teacher when I am unhappy', declining from 70% to 63%.

Very little change between 4th and 6th classes was recorded in terms of the level of endorsement for individual statements in the scale that measured attitudes toward relationships in school. In terms of the scale that measured attitudes toward the stewardship of creation, the main drop of endorsement was for the item 'My school teaches me to take care of insects', which dropped from 58% to 46%. The item 'My school teaches me not to waste things' increased in endorsement from 89% to 95% from 4th to 6th class.

When the scale that measured attitudes toward school assembly was analysed, it was noted that there was a drop in endorsement in terms of all seven items, particularly noticeable in terms of statements concerned with singing. These results demonstrate a much less positive attitude amongst 6th class students toward, what might be regarded as, the traditional components of school assembly. In terms of student attitudes toward religious education, the main drop in endorsement between 4th and 6th class concerned the items 'In RE I enjoy Bible stories', from 65% to 50%, and 'In RE I enjoy singing' which declined from 58% to 39%.

It is concluded that a more positive attitude toward the ethos of Church of Ireland primary schools, as measured across nine attitudinal areas, is reported by younger students. This difference is strongest in relation to attitudes toward school assembly and attitudes toward religious education.

Student Attitudes toward the Ethos of the School: Other Factors

Data were collected about students' religious practices (church attendance and personal prayer), attitudes toward Christianity, and student wellbeing. Lankshear et al. (2021) reported more positive attitudes toward school ethos when students had a higher frequency of either church attendance, personal prayer, or both. Lankshear et al. (2017) also concluded that there was a strong connection between positive attitudes toward school ethos and positive attitudes toward Christianity, as measured using the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* (Francis, 1978a; 1978b).

The correlation routines were run in SPSS, and table 5.7 presents the correlation coefficients between each of the nine scales and the personal factors of sex and age (already discussed), the religious practices of church attendance and personal prayer,

and student attitudes toward Christianity, as was measured by scores on the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity*.

The factors of sex and age were concluded to be significant factors in terms of all nine attitudinal areas, as measured by the adapted *Lankshear Student Voice Scales*. Girls held more positive attitudes than boys did, and younger students held more positive attitudes than older students did.

In terms of the religious practices of church attendance and personal prayer, it was found that more positive attitudes were recorded across all nine attitudinal areas, where students demonstrated a higher frequency of either personal church attendance or personal prayer; this is consistent with findings by Lankshear et al. (2017). The correlations with church attendance were low for many of the scales but were shown to be stronger factors, as may have been expected, in terms of attitudes toward the religious character of the school (r = .24) and even stronger for attitudes toward school assembly (r = .33), and attitudes toward religious education (r = .40). The correlations recorded with personal prayer showed strong correlations with attitudes toward the religious character of the school (r = .35), with attitudes toward school assembly (r = .45), and with attitudes toward religious education (r = .48).

Table 5.7

Correlation Matrix: Ethos Scales with Selected Personal Factors

Scale	Correlations				
	Sex	Age	CA	Prayer	FSAC
General character of the school	.16***	-.12***	.05**	.14***	.31***
Religious character of the school	.04*	-.17***	.24***	.35***	.59***
Experience of school	.18***	-.10***	.10***	.17***	.36***
Teachers	.14***	-.11***	.08***	.15***	.34***
Relationships in school	.14***	-.10***	.08***	.18***	.37***
Stewardship of creation	.11***	-.13***	.07***	.17***	.34***
Stewardship of the school	.13***	-.11***	.09***	.18***	.34***
School assembly	.17***	-.18***	.33***	.45***	.74***
Religious education	.11***	-.12***	.40***	.48***	.81***

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

CA – Church Attendance FSAC – Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity

When considering attitudes toward Christianity, as measured by the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* (Francis, 1978), the analysis demonstrated that the

students who recorded higher scores on the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity*, also recorded significantly more positive attitudes toward school ethos. This is also consistent with the findings of Lankshear et al. (2017) and is particularly seen in relation to the scales that measure attitudes toward the religious character of the school (r = .59), toward school assembly (r = .74), and religious education (r = .81).

To investigate the relative impact of these factors, a series of regression models were constructed. These had a focus on the key factors of age, sex, religious practices (church attendance and personal prayer), and attitudes toward Christianity in respect of each of the elements of school ethos. These models are presented in table 5.8.

For each of the nine scales, in model one, variables of sex (girl, boy), and age (4^{th}, 5^{th}, 6^{th} class) are regressed on the ethos scale. In model two, religious practice variables are added (frequency of church attendance, personal prayer). In model three, student scores on the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* are added. The coefficient of determination (R^2) is calculated for each model, and any increases or decreases noted.

Table 5.8

Regression Models

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Attitude toward the general character of the school			
Sex	.16***	.15***	.14***
Age	-.12***	-.11***	-.07***
Church attendance		-.01	-.11***
Personal prayer		.12***	.06*
Attitude toward Christianity			.38***
R^2	.04	.05	.13
Increase in R^2	.04***	.01***	.08***
Attitude toward the religious character of the school			
Sex	.03	-.01	-.02
Age	-.17***	-.15***	-.09***
Church attendance		.12***	-.06*
Personal prayer		.30***	.02***
Attitude toward Christianity			.60***
R^2	.03	.16	.36
Increase in R^2		.13***	.20***

Attitude toward the experience of school			
Sex	.18***	.16***	.16***
Age	-.09***	-.08***	-.03
Church attendance		.03	.10***
Personal prayer		.14***	-.06*
Attitude toward Christianity			.43***
R^2	.04	.06	.17
Increase in R^2	.04***	.02***	.11***
Attitude toward the teachers			
Sex	.14***	.12***	.12***
Age	-.11***	-.10***	-.05*
Church attendance		.02	-.10***
Personal prayer		.13***	-.07***
Attitude toward Christianity			.42***
R^2	.03	.05	.15
Increase in R^2	.03***	.02***	.10***
Attitude toward relationships in school			
Sex	.13***	.12***	.11***
Age	-.10***	-.09***	-.04*
Church attendance		.23	-.10***
Personal prayer		.16***	-.05***
Attitude toward Christianity			.43***
R^2	.03	.05	.16
Increase in R^2	.02***	.02***	.11***
Attitude toward the stewardship of creation			
Sex	.10***	.09***	.08***
Age	-.13***	-.12***	-.07***
Church attendance		.00	-.11***
Personal prayer		.15***	-.04***
Attitude toward Christianity			.40***
R^2	.03	.05	.14
Increase in R^2	.03***	.02***	.09***
Attitude toward the stewardship of the school			
Sex	.13***	.11***	.11***
Age	-.10***	-.09***	-.05**
Church attendance		.02	-.09***
Personal prayer		.16***	-.02
Attitude toward Christianity			.38***

R^2	.03	.06	.14
Increase in R^2	.03***	.03***	.08***
Attitude toward school assembly			
Sex	.16***	.12***	.10***
Age	-.17***	-.15***	-.06**
Church attendance		.18	-.03*
Personal prayer		.36***	.01
Attitude toward Christianity			.73***
R^2	.06	.27	.57
Increase in R^2	.06***	.21***	.30***
Attitude toward religious education			
Sex	.16***	.12***	.10***
Age	-.17***	-.15***	-.06**
Church attendance		.18	-.03*
Personal prayer		.36***	.01
Attitude toward Christianity			.73***
R^2	.06	.27	.57
Increase in R^2	.06***	.21***	.30***

*p< .05 **p<. 01 ***p<.001

Findings were consistent across all nine scales in terms of the model design. In terms of each scale, model 1 demonstrates that higher attitude scores toward school ethos are associated with being a girl and with being in a younger class (lower age).

The increase in the coefficient of determination (R^2), as shown in model 2 in each scale, confirms that church attendance, and more particularly, personal prayer, are statistically significant predictors of higher attitude scores toward ethos, after sex and age remain in the equation. This was most obvious in the scale that measured student attitudes toward the religious character of the school, where the increase in the coefficient of determination (R^2) was $R^2 = .13$ ($p < .001$); in the scale that measured student attitudes toward school assembly where $R^2 = .21$ ($p < .001$); and in the scale that measured student attitudes toward religious education where $R^2 = .26$ ($p < .001$).

In model 3, the increase in the coefficient of determination (R^2) confirmed that, in terms of each scale, students who hold a more positive attitude toward Christianity will also hold more positive attitudes toward the ethos of their school. This was seen across all nine attitudinal areas, although it was most obvious in the scale that measured attitudes toward the religious character of the school $R^2 = .20$ ($p < .001$), the scale that measured attitudes toward school assembly $R^2 = .30$ ($p < .001$), and the scale that

measured attitudes toward religious education $R^2 = .37$ ($p < .001$). The link between the students' attitudes toward Christianity and school ethos will be explored in greater detail in chapter six.

Student Attitudes toward the Ethos of the Small Church of Ireland primary school

As was discussed in chapter two, the Church of Ireland school sector has a high proportion of small schools (<100 students). An investigation was conducted to determine if there was a measurable difference in attitude toward school ethos between students in small schools, and students in large schools. Two-thirds of the survey participants attended larger schools (>100 students).

Table 5.9

Mean Ethos Scores: Small Schools and Large Schools

Scale	All schools		Schools < 100		Schools > 100		*t*	*p*<
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*		
General character of the school	25.4	4.4	25.4	4.4	25.4	4.3	-0.1	ns
Religious character of the school	28.0	4.8	28.5	4.7	27.7	4.9	4.2	.001
Experience of school	28.0	4.9	27.9	5.0	28.0	4.8	1.0	ns
Teachers	20.9	3.3	21.0	3.3	20.8	3.2	1.5	ns
Relationships in school	30.3	3.9	30.1	3.9	30.3	3.9	0.9	ns
Stewardship of creation	28.6	4.4	28.7	4.4	28.6	4.3	0.5	ns
Stewardship of school	20.8	3.3	20.8	3.4	20.8	3.3	0.0	ns
School assembly	24.9	6.1	25.6	6.1	24.5	6.1	4.6	.001
Religious education	41.1	9.0	43.1	7.5	41.6	8.7	4.5	.001
N (students)	3249		1066		2183			

N= Total number *SD* = Standard deviation *ns*= not significant

Table 5.10 demonstrates this in more detail by presenting positive endorsement scores for each statement in the nine scales, in terms of those students who attended small schools (<100 students), and those students who attended large schools (>100 students). The positive endorsement score was calculated by adding together the scores of students who selected 'agree strongly' and 'agree'.

Although there are few differences in the positive responses for most statements between students from large schools and students from small schools, some key

discrepancies were noted. These were in terms of the scales that measured attitudes toward the religious character of the school, school assembly, and religious education. In terms of the scale that measured attitudes toward the religious character of the school, 69% of students from small schools agreed that prayer is very important in school, compared with 62% of students from large schools, and 77% of students from small schools agreed the Bible is very important in school, compared with 69% of students from large schools. In terms of the scale that measured attitudes toward school assembly, students from small schools demonstrated higher endorsement scores for each statement, most noticeably where 62% of students from small schools agreed listening to the Bible is important to them in assembly, compared with 52% of students from large schools. In terms of the scale that measured attitudes toward religious education, students from small schools demonstrated higher endorsement scores in all but one of the statements, most noticeably where 58% of students from small schools agreed they enjoy saying prayers, as compared with 48% of students from large schools. Singing in school assembly and singing in RE were also endorsed more highly by students from small schools than those from large schools.

Table 5.10

School Size: Percent Agreeing with Individual Scale Items

Scale	All schools %	School < 100 %	School > 100 %
Attitude toward the general character of the school			
My school is a really caring school	89	88	89
My school is a really friendly school	86	86	85
My school is a really welcoming school	90	90	89
My school treats every child fairly	75	75	75
My school treats every child with respect	81	82	79
My school treats every child kindly	82	82	81
Attitude toward the religious character of the school			
School assembly is very important in my school	69	70	68
Prayer is very important in my school	65	69	62
God is very important in my school	77	79	76
Jesus is very important in my school	77	79	75
Church is very important in my school	71	73	69
The Bible is very important in my school	73	77	69
Christmas and Easter are very important in my school	80	80	78
Attitude toward the experience of school			
In my school the rules are fair	77	77	76
In my school I can be myself	73	72	74
My school is a peaceful place	72	70	73

My school is a safe place	87	86	87
My school looks good	77	77	76
My school is a clean place	82	81	82
I like coming to my school	62	62	61
Attitude toward the teachers			
The teachers in my school care a lot for all the students	88	87	88
The teachers in my school care a lot for the world around us	87	88	86
The teachers in my school care a lot for the school	92	92	91
When I do well in school my teacher praises me	67	68	65
In my school I can go to my teacher when I am unhappy	70	70	68
Attitude toward relationships in school			
My school teaches me to respect other people	94	94	93
My school teaches me to respect other peoples' things	93	92	94
My school teaches me to care for other people	93	92	93
In my school we value each other	83	83	82
Caring for others is very important in my school	94	94	93
In my school we care a lot for each other	84	84	82
In my school I know that people care for me	76	74	76
Attitude toward the stewardship of creation			
My school teaches me to respect things that grow	84	84	83
My school teaches me to respect wonderful things	88	88	87
My school teaches me to care for the world around us	91	91	91
My school teaches me to take care of plants	73	73	72
My school teaches me to take care of animals	76	77	74
My school teaches me to take care of insects	51	52	49
My school teaches me not to waste things	86	86	84
Attitude toward the stewardship of school			
At my school we are proud of our school grounds	81	80	81
At my school we are proud of our classrooms	77	78	76
At my school we are proud when our school looks tidy	84	84	82
At my school we are proud when our school looks clean	82	82	80
At my school we are proud when our school looks good	82	82	81
Attitude toward school assembly			
In assembly I enjoy being with the whole school	63	66	60
In assembly I enjoy visits from the rector	66	70	64
In assembly singing is important to me	46	49	44
In assembly being quiet and still is important to me	58	60	56
In assembly listening to the Bible is important to me	57	62	52
In assembly saying prayers is important to me	57	61	54
In assembly I enjoy the songs we sing	52	55	50
Attitude toward religious education			
In RE I enjoy Bible stories	57	61	54

In RE it is important to learn about Christmas and Easter	80	80	79
In RE I enjoy saying prayers	52	58	48
In RE it is important to learn about God	86	88	84
In RE it is important to learn about other religions	74	75	73
In RE it is important to hear and read Bible stories	73	77	70
In RE it is important to learn about the church	69	74	66
In RE I enjoy learning about the church	52	56	48
In RE it is important to learn about Jesus	80	83	78
In RE my beliefs are respected	73	73	73
In RE I enjoy singing	48	51	45

It is concluded that the student voice from large schools and small schools shows an overall positivity towards the school. This is a welcome finding for the Church of Ireland school sector. The study showed that there was no significant difference between those attending large and small schools in terms of the scales that measured attitudes toward the general character of the school, the experience of school, the teachers, relationships in school, the stewardship of creation, and the stewardship of the school.

The student voice that emerged from the small school was more positive than the student voice from the large school in terms of the scales that measured attitudes toward the religious character of the school, school assembly, and religious education. When the small school factor was entered into the school ethos regression models (as with other factors presented in table 5.8), it was found that attendance at a small school did have a small significant impact on school ethos. The impact was too small to be concluded as being a key factor, as the increase in the coefficient of determination (R^2) was negligible (<1%) for each scale. As students from small schools are demonstrating positivity toward certain attitudinal areas of school ethos, this impact must be predominantly due to the other factors already discussed.

Conclusion to Chapter Five

The analysis of findings from the data collected from the adapted *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* (2019) in Anglican primary schools in the Church of Ireland leads to six key conclusions.

First, this study has enabled the student voice to be heard at a particular point in time, it demonstrates a methodology for articulating the lived experience of students in Church of Ireland primary schools, and captures their attitudes toward the ethos of Church of Ireland primary schools.

Second, the study confirms the reliability and validity of the adapted *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* (Lankshear, 2017) for use in Ireland. All scales reported high levels of internal consistency reliability. The study has introduced a new reliable scale to measure attitudes toward religious education, with potential and data from its early-stage operationalisation to allow for that scale to be effectively modified to form a shorter yet still robust scale, consistent in length with the other eight scales, for future empirical studies.

Third, the research question asked: What is the student experience of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school? Students in Church of Ireland primary schools were found to have positive attitudes toward the ethos of their school in the nine core areas: general character of the school, religious character of the school, experience of school, the teachers, relationships in school, the stewardship of creation, the stewardship of school, school assembly, and religious education.

Answering this question adds the students' lived experiences of school ethos and their attitudes toward school ethos to the understanding of ethos identified in chapters two and three. This provides an opportunity for the construct of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school to "move beyond aspirational statements about the kind of ethos it would like its schools to reflect, to descriptive statements about the lived-experience of the students and how they perceive the ethos of the school they attend" (Francis et al., 2022, p. 94).

More than 90% of students agree their school is a really welcoming school, where the teachers care a lot about the school, where the school teaches them to respect and care for other people and to respect other people's things, where caring for others is important in the school, and where the school teaches the students to care for the world around them. This narrative is important to hear from the students and highlights the importance of their voices.

Fourth, in their research, Francis et al. (2022) concluded there were aspirations regarding school ethos that were not recognised or identified as important by the students, and that "further reflection on these items may result in Anglican schools agreeing that such issues are not really core to their school ethos, or in Anglican schools exploring how students' perceptions may be enhanced in such areas" (p. 95). Reviewing those statements, not recognised or identified as important by students from Church of Ireland schools, merits further reflection by stakeholders, especially in terms of school assembly and religious education. No aspect relating to attitudes toward school

assembly received greater endorsement than from two thirds of students; and in terms of student attitude toward religious education, it was found that eight of the eleven items in this scale were endorsed by less than 75% of students.

Fifth, the lived experience of school life and attitudes toward school ethos were found to be reported differently by girls and boys, and declined in positivity as students moved upward in the school. All Church of Ireland primary schools are co-educational, the more positive attitudes displayed by girls in relation to each scale were noted, most strongly in relation to their experiences of school and school assembly. This merits further reflection by stakeholders. The decline in positive endorsement observed in students as they moved toward the end of primary schooling was present, but small, in all nine attitudinal areas, but emerged most strongly in relation to school assembly and religious education, with statements relating to singing in religious education and school assembly showing particular decline. This also merits further reflection by stakeholders.

Sixth, students who demonstrated positive attitudes toward Christianity also showed positive attitudes towards the ethos of their schools, across all nine attitudinal areas. This was particularly noted in terms of attitudes toward the religious character of the school, school assembly, and religious education, these have all been presented in earlier chapters as core elements of the explicit ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school.

Chapter Six

Are Church of Ireland Primary Schools Christian in Ethos?

In chapter four, the key research questions for this study were identified. The overarching research question is: What are the key elements of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school as articulated through student attitudes and lived experiences? In this chapter, it is planned to answer the third question embedded in the overall research question: Are Church of Ireland primary schools Christian in ethos?

The construct of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school was discussed in chapter three, and amongst the tapestry of definitions and statements outlined, one short definition issued by the Board of Education of the Church of Ireland was referenced. It stated that the Church of Ireland primary school was "faith based, Christian in ethos" (Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, 2017, p. 1). Unlike in England and Wales, there is no process of specific church school inspection in Ireland; this description of the Church of Ireland primary school as "faith based, Christian in ethos" lacks any formal consideration of quality, and has no associated assessment criteria.

The methodology for this investigation is based in a foundational empirical study conducted by Lankshear et al. (2018). Researching in Church in Wales (Anglican) primary schools, these researchers suggested that if students and their attitudes are central to shaping and determining the prevailing ethos of the school, as has been discussed in chapter five of this study, then assessing their attitudes toward Christianity may provide an indicator of the Christian ethos of the school. In this chapter, it is intended to work within this hypothesis, and by analysing the student attitudes toward Christianity, to test the definition of the Church of Ireland primary school as being "Christian in ethos".

This chapter is in two parts. It will commence with an exploration of the methodology utilised to measure religiosity and will discuss the challenges in developing a scale to measure this affective dimension of religion. An instrument designed to measure religiosity, *The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* (Francis, 1978a; 1978b) will be introduced, and its expansion and development outlined. The construct validity of the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* will be explored by analysing research findings and published articles that considered the impact of the factors of sex, age, religious practices, religious affiliation, parental influences, and church schools, on student attitudes toward Christianity. Six recent

empirical studies will be discussed, these each employed the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity*. The context will then be set for the data collection and analysis, which will be introduced in the second part of the chapter.

In the second part of the chapter, the data collection and analysis will be documented. The religiosity and religious practices of the students will be analysed using frequency scores. The reliability of the instrument, the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity*, will be discussed, and analysis of the frequency scores will provide an overall picture of the attitude toward Christianity of the student population. This will answer the research question as to whether Church of Ireland primary schools are Christian in ethos. Further analysis of the data will test predictions relating to the factors impacting on student attitudes toward Christianity. A summary of findings will form the chapter conclusion.

Measuring Religiosity

Since the 1970s, Francis has advocated the importance of children's attitudes in explaining individual differences in religiosity, showing that attitudes demonstrate how deeply children feel about religion. Francis recognised the multi-dimensional nature of religiosity, describing the individual differences approach he had worked on within the field of psychology of religion, in terms of four named dimensions of religion: affiliation, belief, practice, and attitudes. These dimensions are each worth consideration in determining the religiosity of an individual, however Francis regarded the attitudinal dimension (as a measure of the affective component of religion) as being able to get closest to the heart of religion within individual lives (2009; 2019, p. 9).

Before focussing on the attitudinal or affective dimension of religiosity, it is planned to consider the other three dimensions: affiliation, belief, and practice, both in terms of how they may be measured, and how the information about these dimensions can add to what is known about the religiosity of a young person.

Religious Affiliation

Religious affiliation measures belonging and involves self-identification with a particular religious tradition. For some young people, a question regarding their religious affiliation may be answered with surety, but for others, it is less clear to them as to whether they self-identify as a member of a specific religious tradition. The specificity of this data measure in the research context highlights uncertainties such as whether an individual should self-identify as a member of a religious tradition if not engaging or participating in religious practices; for example, can a person identify as a

member of a particular religious tradition if they do not attend a place of worship? It is also possible that some children may not attend church with parent(s), but may attend church with their school, if the school is a church school. This attendance could be on a regular basis for school assemblies, school carol services, or graduation services. As was noted in chapter three, Casson et al. (2020) discussed this cohort of attendees and suggested an "expression of a sense of belonging to church through school, which is perhaps best expressed as a sense of being occasional belongers" (p. 43). It was also shown in chapter three that other researchers were more cautious about defining parents of school children, or the children themselves, as members of the church.

Other questions about religious affiliation experienced by young people may include, not actually knowing the name of a religious tradition or denomination within a religious tradition, and what to do when either or both parents identify as members of different world faiths, different Christian denominations, or may not self-identify as religious. Furthermore, as already noted, religious affiliation may not necessarily predict other aspects of a student's religiosity, for example religious beliefs or religious practices. Despite the limitations discussed, Francis (2019) recommended that it was of interest and value to assess the religious affiliation of students in connection with other measurements of religiosity.

Religious beliefs

Religious beliefs relate to the cognitive component of religion and are complex to measure on a reliable scale, especially when differences in denominational practices and theology are considered. Penny (2014) noted that the creation of such a test, where a child's cognitive knowledge and understanding of theology could effectively measure religiosity, would be challenging (p. 24). This would particularly be the case in a primary school context with a diverse group of students, as the sources of their religious beliefs would vary, including home, church, and school. Church of Ireland schools teach denominational religious education but not faith formation, and therefore it would not be appropriate to assess students' cognitive religious beliefs in this research study.

Religious Practices

Religious practices refer to the behavioural component of religion and can be sub-divided into those that are public practices, such as attendance at a place of worship, and those that are more private, such as personal prayer. Students can be asked if they attend a place of worship alone, or with their parent(s), and if they pray regularly at home. Affirmation of church attendance and personal prayer could be seen as

measures of religiosity, however when this is considered in terms of 10- to 12-year old students, it is obvious that there will be external factors to be noted. A student's church attendance will be strongly influenced by factors such as parental church attendance, as parents who pray at home may model and teach children these practices. The emphasis on attendance at worship or prayer practices may also vary in significance between different Christian denominations, as some emphasise the importance of attendance at worship or regular prayer more than others do (Francis, 2019, p. 11). Despite these limitations, it is of interest and value to assess the religious practices of students in connection with other measurements of religiosity.

Measuring the Affective Dimension of Religion

Assessing the positive and negative attitudes a student has toward religion is regarded as providing a potential measure for the affective dimension of religion. The assessment requires a specifically devised attitude scale, which, as noted by Francis (2019) "is able to calibrate individual differences in religiosity across age groups and across denominational divides" (p. 11). This is because attitudes are psychological constructs, made up of affective components, and these collectively represent a person's evaluation of certain beliefs or objects (Francis & Kay, 1984). Measurement of attitudes relates to a personal state that changes over time, but whose depth and consistency may not be as influenced by external social factors or denominational teaching as other dimensions of religion such as cognitive components would be (Francis & Burton, 2007, p. 86). The measurement of attitudes can therefore get to the centre of individual religiosity, as it is freed from some of the external limitations, previously discussed in relation to other measures of religiosity.

A well-developed attitude scale usually contains large numbers of items, which link with each other to create a total score, thus ascertaining an overall positive or negative attitude. It allows patterns in attitude to be expressed mathematically, giving precision in measurement; and provides the researcher with scope to examine factors that could affect individual differences. Its strength in empirical research is that it operationalises an objective method to examine the deeply personal state of an individual. In their discussion of the development of the *Francis Attitude toward Christianity scale,* Kay and Francis (1996) highlighted the importance of distinguishing attitudes from beliefs, traits, and values. They described the process Francis undertook to select the most appropriate method of attitude-scale construction, ending up with a

Likert scale where people communicated their attitudes in terms of a negative or positive response (pp. 186-187).

The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity

This instrument was developed in the 1970s by Francis (Francis 1978a; 1978b; Kay & Francis, 1996), who realised the strength in inviting other researchers to use one common measure, and so build up a secure basis of empirical information regarding the correlates, consequences, and antecedents of individual differences in attitude toward Christianity. Francis (1993a) described this as a 'jigsaw' and stated that "as each new piece is put into place further questions are raised or sharpened about the wider picture" (p. 5). By the mid-1990s, Kay and Francis (1996) were able to draw together around one hundred individual studies employing this instrument, and this has now greatly increased (Francis & Village, 2019).

The *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* consists of 24 Likert-type items. Some of these are phrased positively, and some negatively. The items are concerned with affective responses to five key aspects of the Christian tradition: God, Jesus, the bible, church, and prayer. These are elements of Christianity found across different Christian denominations, but it is noted that each element can be engaged with by people of any age: children, adolescents, and adults.

The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity: Empirical Research and Expansion of the Instrument

Replication of a scale is a proven method of providing its validity and reliability across different age groups, and in different contexts. The English language version of the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* has been administered with a variety of age cohorts in England (Francis, 1987; 1989; 1992a; Francis & Stubbs, 1987; Adamson et al., 2000; Lewis et al., 2006), Kenya (Fulljames & Francis, 1987), Nigeria (Francis & McCarron, 1989), the Republic of Ireland (Maltby, 1994; Wilkinson, 2016), Northern Ireland (Francis & Greer, 1990; Greer & Francis, 1991; Lewis & Maltby, 1997), Scotland (Gibson, 1989; Gibson & Francis, 1989), UK, USA, Australia, and Canada (Francis, Lewis, Brown, et al., 1995; Francis, Lewis, Philipchalk, et. al., 1995), South Africa (Francis, Kerr, & Lewis, 2005), the USA (Lewis & Maltby, 1995), and Wales (Robbins et al., 2003; Francis et al., 2017; Francis, Lankshear & Eccles, 2020; Lankshear et al., 2018).

A shorter 7-item instrument was tested among primary school pupils (Francis, 1992b; Lewis et al., 2007; Lewis et al., 2005; Francis, McKenna, & Powell, 2020),

secondary school pupils (Francis, Greer, & Gibson, 1991), and adults (Francis, 1993b; Francis, Lewis, Philipchalk, Lester, et al., 1995; Lewis et al., 1998; Maltby & Lewis, 1997). An even shorter five-item version was tested by Campo-Arias et al. (2009); Miranda-Tapia et al. (2010); Cogollo et al. (2012); Ceballas et al. (2015); and Campo-Arias et al. (2017). A four-item instrument has recently been tested by Campo-Arias and Ceballos-Ospino (2020).

The research was initially restricted to those working through the medium of English, however the second generation of this research involved the translation of the instrument into other languages including German (Francis & Kwiran, 1999; Francis, Ziebertz, & Lewis, 2002), French (Lewis & Francis, 2004), Italian (Crea et al., 2014), Chinese (Francis, Lewis, & Ng, 2002; Tiliopoulos et al., 2013), Czech (Francis, Quesnell, & Lewis, 2010), Dutch (Francis & Hermans, 2000), Estonian (Elken et al., 2010), Greek (Youtika et al., 1999; Nazar, 2019), Norwegian (Francis & Enger, 2002), Portuguese (Ferreira & Neto, 2002; Francis, Ispas, et al., 2009), Serbian (Flere et al., 2011), Slovakian (Lewis et al., 2008), Slovenian (Flere et al., 2008), Spanish (Campo-Arias et al., 2006), Swedish (Eek, 2001), and Welsh (Evans & Francis, 1996; Francis & Thomas, 2003).

A third phase of research has involved the development of parallel instruments, shaped within other religious contexts. The first of these scales was to measure attitudes toward Islam: the *Sahin-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Islam*, and its employment was reported in several empirical studies (Sahin & Francis, 2002; Francis, Sahin, & Al-Ansari, 2006; Francis, Sahin, & Al-Failakawi, 2008; Musharraf et al., 2014; Hamid et al., 2016; and Francis, Tekke, & Robbins, 2016).

The second instrument was to measure attitudes toward Judaism: the *Katz-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Judaism*. Studies have been conducted and research reported by Francis and Katz (2007), Yablon et al. (2014), and Lumbroso et al. (2016). The third instrument measured attitudes toward Hinduism, the instrument is named the *Santosh-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Hinduism* and studies have been reported by Francis, Santosh, et al. (2008); Tiliopoulos et al. (2010); Lesmana et al. (2011); and Francis, Kamble, & Robbins (2016). The fourth instrument has been recently developed: the *Athwal-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Sikhism* and an early paper has been written by Francis, Athwal, and McKenna (2020).

The final instrument that is part of this broader range of instruments, stemming from the original *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity*, is the *Astley-Francis*

Scale of Attitude toward Theistic Faith, which has been assessed in research by Astley et al. (2012); Francis, Brockett, and Village (2013); Francis and Lewis (2016); Francis and Crea (2020); and Erken and Francis (2021).

In more than forty years, all these studies have moved beyond a two-dimensional 'jigsaw' of research (Francis, 1993a), to a multi-layered international 'tapestry' of research on attitudes toward Christianity, other religions, and world views, stitched together from the voices of children, young people, and adults.

Critics and the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity

Not long after the survey was developed, Greer (1983) considered the influence of belief on an individual's attitude. He questioned as to whether it was possible to measure one without the other, suggesting that they were linked inextricably. Francis and Kay (1984) countered this by acknowledging that attitudes and beliefs were indeed linked, but provided suggestions of situations when a positive belief system might still accompany a negative attitude toward Christianity.

Levitt (1995) questioned the use of quantitative methods for assessing student attitudes toward Christianity, and took issue with the validity of the actual wording of the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity*, arguing that in scoring a participant's response to a statement, one is implying how they read and understand the statement. Francis (1995) responded to Levitt, highlighting the benefits of large scale quantitative studies, and confirmed that, by measuring results across the whole scale, it was possible to be confident in the "underlying cumulative attitudinal continuum on which they cluster" (p. 136). This alleviated the need for confidence in each separate item in the scale.

Although there have been some criticisms of the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity*, it should be noted that the strength of its consistent reliability and validity across over forty years of research must outweigh these.

Reliability of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity

Replication is a key method for assessing and maintaining the reliability and validity of an instrument, and as over 500 studies have employed the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity*, this fact in itself supports its strength as an instrument. Any psychometric test must be reliable and measure consistently over time; in each new context it is important that its reliability is tested.

One method of testing the reliability of a scale is test-retest reliability, where the relationship is tested between measures taken at two different times. Empirical studies

have shown good reliability scores in test-retest studies of the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* over one week with a reliability of $r = .92$ (Lewis et al., 2005); over five weeks with a reliability of $r = .95$ (McGuckin et al., 2006); over six weeks with a reliability of $r = .74$ (Lewis et al., 2006); and over 15 weeks with a reliability of $r = .79$ (Lewis et al., 2007). Lewis et al. (2007), however noted that there was a significant change in the mean scores between the two tests over a 15-week period, he referred to predictions by Francis (2005), who had indicated that there were two issues that could impact on test-retest results: the student remembering the answers, and their possible exposure to life experiences between tests, which could impact on answers.

A preferred method of assessing reliability of a scale is internal consistency reliability (Francis, 2005). In this analysis, the correlations between the scores of each item in the test and the sum of all the other items are calculated, realising as many correlations as there are items in the test. The key advantage of this method of measuring reliability is that it may be calculated on one set of test data. The reliability is presented in terms of Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which takes into account all the inter-associations between all items on the scale and thereby provides a view of the homogeneity of the whole set of items in the scale (Kay & Francis, 1996; Francis, 2005). Cronbach coefficients of $\alpha = .70$ (Kline, 1993; 1999) or $\alpha = .65$ (DeVellis, 2003) are recommended as acceptable reliability levels for a scale.

It is also of value to test the factor structure of an attitude scale such as the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity*. This is assessed through principle component analysis, a statistical procedure that determines whether the items in the scale work well together as a coherent whole. Principle component analysis examines how each item of a scale contributes to the overall score, by demonstrating how each item loads on the first factor. Factor loadings range from +1.0 through 0 down to -1.0, with higher factors showing how well an item contributes to the scale as a whole. Factors are identified that explain as much variance as possible and these are then shown as percentages of variance explained by the first factor.

When the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* has been introduced in a new study or context, its reliability and scale coherence is reported, and it has consistently shown very good reliability and scale coherence in all contexts. A recent study employed amongst primary school students in Wales reported that the scale was characterised by homogeneity, unidimensionality, and internal consistency reliability within the sample, demonstrating alpha coefficients ranging from: $\alpha = .95$ to $\alpha = .97$,

and the factor structure of the scale demonstrated a proportion of variance accounted for by the first factor ranging from 50% to 63% (Francis et al., 2017, p. 925).

Validity of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity

As well as demonstrating reliability, a psychometric test should also demonstrate validity, as it is possible that a test may be reliable but not valid (Francis, 2005). Validity in its simplest terms means that it measures what it has been designed to measure. Since its inception, the validity of the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* has been measured using construct validity assessment methods. This involves assessing the extent to which predictions are reflected in the findings of empirical studies. Repeated studies, based on data from the employment of the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity,* have identified a close relationship between a student's attitude toward Christianity and religious practices such as church attendance, parental church attendance, and personal prayer. Other empirical studies have demonstrated relationships between sex and attitude toward Christianity, and age and attitude toward Christianity. Further studies have focussed on relationships between religious affiliation, home influences, school influences, and attitude toward Christianity. As each new empirical study tests the relationships with key constructs in different contexts, it potentially adds a layer of validity to the instrument, thus strengthening its suitability and potential value for future use.

Predictive Factor: Sex

There are a number of published research studies, which showed girls demonstrated more positive attitudes toward Christianity than boys did. Tamminen (1996) conducted long-range studies in Finland, using scales other than the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity*, he concluded that "girls' attitudes toward the Christian faith were found among all grade-levels to be more positive than the boys" (p. 169), but he moved to qualify his finding by stating that "it is much easier to show differences in the religiosity of girls and boys than to explain by what they are caused" (p. 183).

Kay and Francis (1996) stated that girls showed a greater commitment to public and private religious practices than boys, and demonstrated more positive attitudes toward Christianity than boys did, as measured on the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity*. Recent studies operationalising this scale at primary school level have replicated these predicted trends. In 2016, Wilkinson found that 10- to 12-year old girls showed more positive attitudes toward Christianity than boys did: girls' mean score

93.4 (*SD* 21.0), boys' mean score 87.6 (*SD* 25.0). Lankshear et al. (2018) also recorded that girls showed a significantly higher score of positive attitude toward Christianity than boys did: girls' mean score 90.1 (*SD* 22.0), boys' mean score 86.6 (*SD* 24.0) (p.120).

Researchers have suggested reasons for the differences between girls and boys in terms of attitude toward Christianity (see Kay & Francis, 1996; Francis, 1997; Francis & Penny, 2014). Francis suggested that indications showed connection with gender orientation, and that this factor became more significant as children moved through adolescence; but that "among the younger age group, gender still explained additional variance in attitude toward Christianity, after taking gender orientation into account" (Francis, 1997, p. 88). Francis and Penny focussed on personality-based theories, based on the work of Eysenck and showed that "differences in the personality of psychoticism can account for gender differences in religiosity". They concluded that gender differences can be "most adequately conceptualized in terms of personality differences" (Francis & Penny, 2014, p. 327). Lankshear et al. (2018) concluded that the difference between male and female students was not particularly strong, and that there was "no strong evidence among this group of students that Christianity may be acceptable to girls but not to boys" (p. 124).

Predictive Factor: Age

Lankshear et al. (2018) reported on data from the 1990s, which showed that attitudes toward Christianity became less positive as students got older, this was found to be true both in church schools and non-religious schools (Kay & Francis, 1996). In Wales, Lankshear et al. (2018) and Francis et al. (2017) found that there was a significant decline in positive attitude between students in year-5 and those in year-6. They suggested that schools "may find themselves harder pressed to support the Christian faith of year-6 students than is the case for students lower down the school" and that strategies could be considered to address this issue (Lankshear et al., 2018, p. 125). This conclusion would be relevant to schools in Ireland, especially as students attend Irish primary schools for one year more, than students in schools in England and Wales do.

Predictive Factor: Religious Practices

It was shown that religious practices can be assessed as a measure of the religiosity of individuals, although with awareness of the potential impact of external or social influences on these practices (for example where parents bring children to

church). Francis (1990a) studied the religious self-affiliation of 11-year olds in terms of their self-reported church membership, church attendance, and their attitudes toward Christianity, and concluded that those children with no religious affiliation tended to have no contact with church at all, and demonstrated less positive attitudes toward Christianity. Interestingly, the research found that those students who self-identified as members of a denomination but did not attend church, held a more positive attitude toward Christianity, as compared with students who identified as having no religious affiliation (Francis, 1990a).

Lankshear et al. (2018) also tested the connection between church attendance and student attitude toward Christianity, and found that attitude toward Christianity was significantly correlated with worship attendance (pp. 122-123). These findings were also reported in Francis, Lankshear, and Eccles (2020); they compared student attitudes toward Christianity in church aided schools and in church controlled schools. The strength of the relationship between church attendance and attitude toward Christianity was regarded as very significant by Lankshear et al. (2018), concluding that any future decline in church attendance in Wales "may be reflected in an overall decline in positive student attitude toward Christianity and a consequent shift in the ethos, culture and climate of church schools" (p. 125).

The impact of other religious practices on student attitude toward Christianity has been investigated, and Kay and Francis (1996) predicted that private religious practices such as personal prayer had a stronger correlation with attitude toward Christianity than public religious practices such as church attendance, as they were less affected by contextual and social constraints. This proposal was tested by Robbins et al. (2004) who demonstrated a strong link between personal prayer practice and attitude toward Christianity, and concluded that the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* "accesses a deep underlying level of religiosity which is reflected more closely in personal religious behaviour (like prayer), than in public religious behaviour (like church attendance)" (p. 306).

Francis and Gibson (1993) concluded that parental influence was a factor in both public religious practices and the attitudes toward Christianity of 11- to 12-year old children. The mother was found to be a stronger influence than the father was, for both boys and girls, and the mother was a stronger influence for daughters than sons. In a more recent study in Christian ethos secondary schools, parental church attendance

emerged as a decisive factor in promoting a positive attitude toward Christianity among the students (Francis & Village, 2019).

Predictive Factor: Attendance at a Church School

There are a number of published studies where the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* has been used to examine the potential influence of Anglican schools on student attitude toward Christianity, including Francis (1979; 1986b; 1987), Francis and Carter (1980), Boyle and Francis (1986), and Swindells et al. (2010). At primary school level, Francis, Lankshear, and Eccles (2020) acknowledged the need to make an "up to date contribution to the ageing literature on the connection between attending Anglican primary schools in England and Wales and student attitudes toward Christianity", and concluded that students held a significantly higher score of attitude toward Christianity in voluntary aided schools. This was found to be consistent, even when factors including sex, age, and church attendance were accounted for (p. 56).

Published Empirical Studies Employing the Francis Attitude toward Christianity (2000 – 2020)

Francis et al. (2017) noted that there had been a number of foundational studies that employed the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* and concentrated on exploring the psychometric properties of this instrument among young children between the ages of eight and 11 (see Francis, 1978a; 1978b; 1988; 1989; 1992b). A desk-based search was conducted to identify more recently published articles, which included research studies employing the 24-item *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* in primary schools. Criteria for inclusion were that the article was published between 2000 and 2021 in a peer-reviewed journal, and used the English language 24-item test in a primary school context. These findings are presented in figure 6.1.

Figure 6.1

Literature Review 2000-2021. The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity

Title of Study	Year/ journal	Author	Relevance
Temporal stability of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity among 9- to 11- year-old English children: Test-retest data over six weeks.	2006 *Social Behaviour and Personality, 34* (9), 1081-1086.	Lewis, Cruise, McGuckin, & Francis	Reliability study using test-retest in 24-item and 7-item test

Shaping attitude toward Christianity among year seven pupils: The influence of sex, church, home and primary school.	2010 *Journal of Beliefs and Values 31*(3), 343-348.	Swindells, Francis, & Robbins	Validity of instrument and factors impacting on attitude toward Christianity
Reliability of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity among 8 year olds.	2003 *Psychological Reports, 92*(1), 104.	Robbins, Francis, & Williams	Reliability of instrument in younger children
The internal consistency reliability and construct validity of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity among 8- to 11-year old students in Wales.	2017 *Mental Health, Religion & Culture, 20*(9), 922-929.	Francis, Lankshear, & Eccles	Reliability and construct validity of the instrument in 8-11 year old students in Wales
Monitoring attitude toward Christianity among year 5 and year 6 students attending Church in Wales primary schools.	2018 *International Journal of Christian Education, 22*(2), 112-127.	Lankshear, Francis, & Eccles	Attitudes toward Christianity and school ethos
Assessing student attitude toward Christianity in Church in Wales primary schools: Does aided status make a difference?	2020 *British Journal of Religious Education, 42*(1), 56-64	Francis, Lankshear, & Eccles	Church schools and attitude toward Christianity

A number of published articles that focussed on research using the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* in primary schools were omitted, as they related to the shorter-form instrument (for example: Lewis et al., 2006; 2007; McGuckin et al., 2006; Francis, Penny, & Powell, 2018; Francis, McKenna, & Powell, 2020).

The six retained articles were read in more detail. Lewis, Cruise, et al. (2006) examined the temporal stability of the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* over a 6-week period with 9-to 11-year olds, finding no significant change over the 24-item instrument (r = .74).

Swindells et al. (2010) undertook a study of attitudes toward Christianity in year-7 students, with a focus on determining whether the primary school they had

attended had any impact on their attitudes toward Christianity. They found that school type was not a significant factor in shaping attitudes toward Christianity, and concluded that higher attitude scores were found in girls, in students who attended church, and in students whose parents attended church (pp. 346-347).

Robbins et al. (2003) explored the suitability of the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* for younger children, studying a small cohort of eight-year old students, and concluded that it was a suitable instrument to measure attitudes in this age group. The study showed a reliability of $\alpha = .92$, and internal construct validity was demonstrated by showing strong correlations with church attendance and parental church attendance.

Since 2017, there have been a number of articles reporting on the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity*, as measured in a large-scale research study in Church in Wales primary schools (detailed in chapter five). In 2017, Francis et al. examined the psychometric properties of the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity*, to ensure it could still be commended for use at primary school level, 40 years after its introduction. It was found to be reliable with alpha coefficients ranging from $\alpha = .95$ to $\alpha = .97$ (p. 926).

Lankshear et al. (2018) analysed these same data from Church in Wales primary schools and concluded that there was a greater support for Christianity amongst girls than boys, but noted that this support was not as strong as in earlier studies. A decline in positive attitude was found between students in year-5 and students in year-6, and a close relationship between church attendance and attitude toward Christianity was also reported (pp. 124-125).

Francis, Lankshear, and Eccles (2020) returned to the question of whether the aided status of the school affected student attitudes toward Christianity, and concluded that students in aided schools demonstrated higher attitude scores, but also recorded a significantly higher frequency of church attendance. This finding raised the question for the researchers, as to whether the higher attitude scores were actually as a result of church attendance, or school effectiveness (p. 62)?

In a study in 2018, Lankshear et al. had posed a new research question, suggesting that assessment of student attitudes provided insight into "the culture and climate of schools" by reflecting and informing the ethos of the school (p. 112). By totalling the attitude scores toward Christianity and comparing them to the mean score,

this was seen as a means to assess the Christian ethos of the surveyed schools, a higher than mean score demonstrating an overall Christian ethos.

The recent studies emerging from the data collection in Wales have demonstrated that the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* remains a robust and relevant instrument for measuring the religiosity of primary age children, and has introduced a secondary application of this measure of religiosity, as it speaks into the field of research into school ethos.

Measuring Student Attitude toward Christianity as an assessment of the Christian Ethos of the School

The study by Lankshear et al. (2018) was the first study at primary school level to link the attitude toward Christianity of a student cohort, with the Christian ethos of their school, and is foundational to this current research study. Replication of this study, by analysing student attitudes toward Christianity using *the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* as a measure of affective religiosity, along with reference to the students' religious affiliation and religious practices, will provide an overall picture of the attitude of the student population of Church of Ireland primary schools. After analysis, this can provide an overall assessment of the Christian ethos of the surveyed schools, to provide an answer to the research question.

Data Collection and Analysis

Student surveys were posted to schools in October 2019, along with teacher and parental consent forms (as per ethical guidelines). These surveys included the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* and questions regarding religious affiliation and religious practices. Class teachers were asked to administer the surveys in class time with students in 4th, 5th, and 6th classes, and to return the completed surveys to the researcher. Anonymity was assured.

A total of 3,249 surveys were received back from 92 schools. Surveys were received from 1,609 boys, 1,629 girls, and 11 with unstated gender. Surveys were received from 1,072 4th class students, 1,065 5th class students, 1,101 6th class students, and 10 with unstated class group. Data from these surveys were entered into Microsoft Excel databases and then transferred to SPSS for data analysis routines. The data were analysed by the SPSS statistical package (IBM, 2018; 2020), using the frequency, reliability, correlation, and regression routines.

Religious Affiliation and Religious Practices of Students

Before investigating religiosity in terms of attitude toward Christianity, it is intended to explore two other dimensions of religion: religious affiliation and religious practices. The schools in this study are Church of Ireland (Anglican) primary schools, but serve a diverse population in terms of religious affiliation. As was discussed earlier in this chapter, religious affiliation is a complex element to measure. It was defined for this study, as it was in research by Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, and McKenna (2021), by asking the students if they attended a church or place of worship, and if so, to identify the church they attended from a list of options, or to write the name of the church in an empty box.

This question advised the students not to include school services in their consideration of the answer. This was to try and ascertain affiliation, as apart from attendance at a school carol service or graduation event; however this decision does not allow for inclusion of a potential cohort of 'occasional belongers' (see Casson et al., 2020, p. 43). The data show that 2,347 students (75% of the students) attended a school carol service, and it is possible that a proportion of these could consider themselves 'occasional belongers' of the Church of Ireland, however this cannot be deduced from the data.

The data were analysed in terms of attendance at a place of worship in response to the question: Do you go to a place of worship by yourself or with your family? Students selected from the options: weekly, at least once a month, sometimes, never. These data are presented in table 6.1.

Table 6.1

Attendance at a Place of Worship

	Total %	Boy %	Girl %
Weekly	19	18	20
At least once a month	12	10	13
Sometimes	45	45	45
Never	24	27	22

Nearly one third of the students (31%) stated they went to church weekly or at least once a month, and almost one quarter of students never went to church. An

independent-samples t-test was run, to determine if there were statistically significant differences in church attendance between boys and girls. It was found that boys (Mean 2.3, *SD* 1.0) attended church significantly less frequently than girls did (Mean 2.2, *SD* 1.0) $t(3233) = -3.6$, $p < .001$. A one-way between subjects ANOVA test was conducted to compare the effect of class (age) on church attendance. There was no significant effect of age on the mean scores $F(2,3233) = 2.8$. Church attendance remained consistent across the three final classes in primary school, however girls were significantly more likely to attend church than boys were.

A secondary question provided detailed information about where students (who stated they attended a place of worship) saw their religious affiliation. These data are presented in table 6.2, and this table also includes the percentage of students who did not attend a place of worship.

Table 6.2

Place of Worship Attended by Participants

Place of Worship	Total %
Do not attend church	24
Church of Ireland	50
Catholic Church	13
Presbyterian Church	3
Methodist Church	2
Baptist Church	3
Other place of worship	1
Other Christian Church	4

Only a small number of students attended Pentecostal churches (14 students), Orthodox churches (10 students), Lutheran churches (five students), and Quaker meetings (three students). There were 13 Muslim students, 5 Hindu students, one Buddhist student, and four Jehovah's Witness students in the cohort. In this study, 55% of students stated they attended a Church of Ireland, Methodist, or Presbyterian church, and 24% students had no religious affiliation.

Parental practices

Research has shown that parental church attendance has a measureable effect on the church attendance of the student (see Kay & Francis, 1996; Bengston et al., 2013; Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, & McKenna, 2020; Francis, Penny, & Powell, 2018). This seems an obvious conclusion, in that families may attend church together, and many students of primary school age would not attend church without one or other parent.

Data analysis showed that on average, 17% of students' mothers and 14% of students' fathers attended church weekly, with 51% of students' mothers and 46% of students' fathers attending sometimes, and 32% of students' mothers and 40% of students' fathers never attending church.

Table 6.3

Correlation matrix: Personal and Parental Church Attendance

	Correlations	
	Mother's Attendance	Father's Attendance
Personal Attendance	.74***	.66***
Father's Attendance	.65***	

*** $p < .001$

The correlations between personal church attendance, mother's church attendance, and father's church attendance are presented in table 6.3. The mother's attendance was the stronger predictor of the student's church attendance. Further analysis showed that this was significantly true for both boys and girls, the mother's attendance was stronger for girls than boys ($r = .76$ $p < .001$), but the father's attendance was a stronger predictor for boys than girls ($r = .67$ $p < .001$). This is consistent with findings by Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, & McKenna (2020).

Praying at Home

Research by Francis, apSion, Lankshear, and Eccles (2019) explored the factors that impacted on students' personal prayer practices, showing a strong link to the home as the primary influence. These researchers referenced studies that reviewed the impact of prayer frequency on wellbeing and higher levels of prosocial attitudes, which may include positive attitudes towards school.

Data were therefore collected to measure the students' prayer frequency, and the findings are presented in table 6.4. In terms of the frequency of student prayer, it was found just over one quarter of the students (27%) stated they pray at least once a week, and over one third of the students stated they never pray (34%), with 40% of boys saying they never prayed compared with 27% of girls.

An independent-samples t-test was run to determine if there were statistically significant differences in prayer practices between boys and girls. It was found that boys (Mean 2.0, *SD* 1.0) prayed significantly less frequently than girls did (Mean 2.1, *SD* 1.0) t (3229) = -5.5, $p < .001$. A one-way between subjects ANOVA test was conducted to compare the effect of class (age) on prayer practices. There was a significant effect of age on the mean scores F (2,3229) = 8.0, $p < .001$. Post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test indicated the mean score for 4th class was significantly higher than that for 5th class ($p < .01$), but that there was not a significant difference found in mean scores between 5th and 6th classes.

Table 6.4

Exploring Prayer Practices

		Never %	Sometimes %	At least once a week %
4th class	Boy	32	39	29
	Girl	24	47	29
5th class	Boy	44	34	22
	Girl	29	40	31
6th class	Boy	43	33	24
	Girl	29	42	29

Conclusions relating to Religious Affiliation and Religious Practices of Students

The analysis of the data, in terms of frequency and correlation scores, has led to three key conclusions relating to two dimensions of religion: religious affiliation (measured through attendance at a place of worship) and religious practices.

First, 55% of the students self-identified as members of the Church of Ireland, Methodist, or Presbyterian churches, according to their attendance at the relevant place of worship. This implies the Church of Ireland primary school is serving the target

population. One quarter of students have no religious affiliation, a cohort also recognised and positively included in Church of Ireland school ethos statements, as discussed in chapter three. Second, when practices of church attendance and personal prayer were investigated, it was shown that girls were significantly more likely to attend church and to pray on their own than boys were.

Third, data on religious practices provided a profile of those students who participated regularly in religious practices (31% of students attended a place of worship at least once a month and 27% of students stated they prayed on their own at least once a week). In terms of those who did not participate in religious practices, it was found that 24% of students never attended church and 34% of students never prayed.

The analysis of the students' religious affiliation and religious practices has provided some insight into the religiosity of the cohort, particularly those at each end of the spectrum of engagement. These data were collected in October 2019, and provide a unique snapshot of religious affiliation and practices prior to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on church attendance, in the short or long term.

It was noted earlier in this chapter, that the attitudinal dimension (as a measure of the affective component of religion) was regarded by Francis (2019) as being able to get closest to the heart of religion within individual lives. The *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* was designed to measure this component of religion.

Reliability of the Scale

The first step in analysis of the data from the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* was to determine the reliability of the scale in this new context. The eight negatively worded statements were reverse coded to calculate the reliability of the scale. After running the reliability routine, the internal consistency reliability of the test, as expressed in terms of the alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) was found to be $\alpha = .98$, which showed very satisfactory levels of internal consistency reliability.

The second test of reliability explored the scale in detail, analysing the correlation between each item, and the sum of the other items in each scale (r). This is shown in table 6.5. The loadings on the first factor of the unrotated solution proposed by principal component analysis are also presented in this table. The proportion of variance accounted for by the first factor is 67.8%, and along with the overall reliability alpha score of $\alpha = .98$, this suggests that the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* is a reliable scale in this context, and the data suitable for further analysis.

Table 6.5

Reliability Item- Rest of Test Correlation (with reverse coded statements)

	r	Loadings
I find it boring to listen to the bible*	.68	.70
I know that Jesus helps me	.86	.88
Saying my prayers helps me a lot	.83	.85
The church is very important to me	.82	.84
I think going to church is a waste of my time*	.75	.76
I want to love Jesus	.83	.85
I think church services are boring*	.66	.68
I think people who pray are stupid*	.47	.49
God helps me to lead a better life	.87	.89
God is very real to me	.89	.89
God means a lot to me	.90	.92
I believe that God helps people	.86	.88
Prayer helps me a lot	.85	.87
I know that Jesus is very close to me	.89	.90
I think praying is a good thing	.85	.86
I think the bible is out of date*	.56	.58
I believe that God listens to prayers	.86	.88
Jesus doesn't mean anything to me*	.80	.82
I think saying prayers does no good*	.77	.78
The idea of God means much to me	.87	.88
I believe that Jesus still helps people	.86	.87
I know that God helps me	.90	.91
I find it hard to believe in God*	.74	.76
Alpha coefficient/ Percentage variance explained by first factor	.98	67.8

*reverse coded items *r*= correlation between each item and the sum of the other items in the scale.

Total Scores

The *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* is a Likert scale, where students select an option according to their level of agreement with each statement. The options are allocated points: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3), disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1). After reverse-coding the negatively worded items, students' total scores were calculated. As the scale is a 24-item scale, the minimum possible score was 24, and the maximum was 120. Students reported a mean score of 88.8 (*SD* 24.1). This mean score exceeded the mid-point score of the scale (72.0), and therefore demonstrated an overall positive attitude toward Christianity among the students. This is consistent with conclusions drawn by Lankshear et al. (2018) in a similar study in Church in Wales schools, which recorded a mean score of 88.3 (*SD* 22.8) (p. 118).

The individual items in the scale were then analysed by category: God, Jesus, prayer, the bible, and church; and the responses recorded in terms of total percentage that agreed (agree strongly and agree), are not certain, and disagreed (disagree strongly and disagree). For this analysis, the negatively worded statements were retained in their original form. The findings are presented in table 6.6. After reverse coding the negatively worded statements, the mean percentage endorsement (agree) for each category was calculated and it was found that the category that measured student attitudes toward Jesus recorded a mean percentage endorsement of 65%, followed by prayer (64%), God (62%), bible (56%), and church (53%).

Table 6.6

Analysis of Scale Items by Category

	Agree %	Not Certain %	Disagree %
Attitude toward God			
God helps me to lead a better life	62	23	15
I like to learn about God very much	56	24	20
God means a lot to me	60	21	19
I believe that God helps people	79	17	13
God is very real to me	60	22	18
The idea of God means much to me	61	22	17
I know that God helps me	62	21	17
I find it hard to believe in God	28	18	54
Attitude toward Jesus			
I know that Jesus helps me	63	22	15
I want to love Jesus	64	21	15
I know that Jesus is very close to me	56	24	20
Jesus doesn't mean anything to me	12	15	73
I believe that Jesus still helps people	67	19	14
Attitude toward prayer			
Saying my prayers helps me a lot	48	28	24
I think people who pray are stupid	3	9	88
Prayer helps me a lot	49	26	25
I think praying is a good thing	70	19	11
I believe that God listens to prayers	63	21	16
I think saying prayers does no good	14	19	67
Attitude toward church			
The church is very important to me	49	28	23
I think going to church is a waste of my time	17	22	61
I think church services are boring	25	26	49
Attitude toward bible			
I find it boring to listen to the bible	25	23	52
I think the bible is out of date	16	24	60

The Relationships between Key Factors and Scores

As was previously discussed, a psychometric test should also demonstrate validity, as a test may be reliable but not valid (Francis, 2005). Student attitudes toward Christianity have been shown, through replicated research studies, to be associated with sex, age, religious practices (church attendance and personal prayer), and religious affiliation. These factors will be explored and analysed separately, then multiple regression modelling will take into account the simultaneous impact of sex, age, church attendance, and private prayer practices.

Sex and Age

The data were analysed in terms of sex and age differences. Table 6.7 presents the mean scores and standard deviation recorded on the scale for girls and boys from 4th class, 5th class, and 6th class. Data analysis shows that girls recorded a higher mean score than boys did, and older students recorded lower mean scores than younger students did.

Table 6.7

Mean Attitude Scores: Girls and Boys

		Mean	*SD*
4th class	Boy	91.4	24.4
	Girl	95.9	20.9
5th class	Boy	86.3	24.8
	Girl	89.0	23.6
6th class	Boy	82.7	25.3
	Girl	82.7	23.4
All students	Boy	86.6	25.1
	Girl	91.0	22.9

SD=standard deviation. *Note 11 students did not select girl or boy

An independent-samples t-test was run to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores between boys and girls on the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity*.

It was found that boys (Mean 86.6, *SD* 25.1) demonstrated significantly lower mean scores than girls did (Mean 91.0, *SD* 22.9) t (3171) = -5.2, $p < .001$. This is consistent with research by others (see Kay & Francis, 1996; Francis, 1997; Francis & Penny, 2014; Lankshear et al., 2018).

Table 6.8

Exploring Attitude Scores by Age

	4th class		5th class		6th class		*t*	*p*<
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*		
Student scores	93.8	22.7	87.7	24.2	85.1	24.5	37.4	.001

SD=standard deviation

A one-way between subjects ANOVA test was conducted, to compare the effect of age on the mean scores in the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity.* The findings are presented in Table 6.8. A significant effect of age was noted F (2,3171) = 37.4, $p < .001$. Post hoc comparison using the Tukey HSD test indicated the mean score for 4th class was significantly higher than that for 5th class ($p < .001$) and the mean score for 5th class was significantly higher than that for 6th class ($p < .05$). This is also consistent with research by Lankshear et al. (2018).

The significant effect of sex can be further illustrated by analysing the 'agree responses' for each statement for girls and boys. Table 6.9 presents the items (not reverse coded) and the percentage of agree responses (agree strongly and agree). It is clear that the more positive attitudes toward Christianity recorded for the overall scale were also present in terms of each statement, the percentage difference between responses between girls and boys ranging from 2% to 8%. Table 6.9 also shows the scale items and the percentage of agree responses (agree strongly and agree) for 4th class and 6th class. In almost every statement, there was an observable clear decline in positive attitude from 4thclass to 6th class. This decline in positive attitude toward Christianity, as children move up the primary school, is consistent with previous research by Lankshear et al. (2018).

Table 6.9

Girls' and Boys' and 4th class and 6th class Responses: Percent Agreeing with Individual Scale Items

	Girl %	Boy %	4th class %	6th class %
Attitude toward God				
God helps me to lead a better life	63	61	70	53
I like to learn about God very much	57	55	66	49
God means a lot to me	62	58	68	54
I believe that God helps people	71	67	77	64
God is very real to me	61	58	69	53

The idea of God means much to me	63	59	70	54
I know that God helps me	65	59	70	56
I find it hard to believe in God	25	31	23	32
Attitude toward Jesus				
I know that Jesus helps me	64	61	75	55
I want to love Jesus	66	62	70	60
I know that Jesus is very close to me	57	55	66	49
Jesus doesn't mean anything to me	9	15	10	15
I believe that Jesus still helps people	69	64	74	60
Attitude toward prayer				
Saying my prayers helps me a lot	51	44	57	42
I think people who pray are stupid	2	5	5	3
Prayer helps me a lot	53	45	59	43
I think praying is a good thing	74	66	76	66
I believe that God listens to prayers	65	60	71	57
I think saying prayers does no good	10	18	13	15
Attitude toward church				
The church is very important to me	52	46	57	44
I think going to church is a waste of my time	13	22	16	19
I think church services are boring	21	29	22	28
Attitude toward bible				
I find it boring to listen to the bible	24	27	22	30
I think the bible is out of date	12	20	17	18

Religious Practices

Research has consistently shown that religious practices, including personal church attendance and personal prayer, are predictors of a student's attitude toward Christianity (Swindells et al., 2010; Kay & Francis, 1996; Lankshear et al., 2018; Francis, Lankshear, & Eccles, 2020). The influence of parental church attendance was demonstrated by Francis and Gibson (1993), and Kay and Francis (1996), and the influence of personal private prayer was shown in research by Robbins et al. (2004).

Table 6.10

Correlation Matrix: Attitude toward Christianity Scores with Selected Personal Factors

	Correlations			
	FSAC	FA	MA	PA
Personal Prayer	.60***	.36***	.38***	.42***
Personal Attendance (PA)	.48***	.66***	.74***	
Mother's Attendance (MA)	.44***	.65***		
Father's Attendance (FA)	.41***			

***p<.001 FSAC= Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity

The correlations between attitude toward Christianity, personal prayer, personal church attendance, mother's church attendance, and fathers' church attendance are presented in table 6.10. It is demonstrated that personal prayer was the strongest predictor of positive attitude toward Christianity, followed by personal church attendance. Mother's church attendance was a lower, but still significant predictor of positive attitude toward Christianity, with father's church attendance lower still.

It has been shown that sex, age, and religious practices have an impact on students' scores on the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity*. By running a series of regression models (table 6.11), it is possible to explore the relative impact of each of these factors on the student scores.

In model one, variables of sex (girl and boy) and age (4^{th}, 5^{th}, 6^{th} class) were regressed on attitude toward Christianity scores. The beta weights confirm, as was concluded by analysing the mean scores, that higher scores of attitude toward Christianity are associated with being a girl, and with being in a younger class (lower age).

In model two, a religious practice variable was added (frequency of church attendance). The increase in the coefficient of determination (R^2) confirmed that church attendance was a statistically significant predictor of higher attitude toward Christianity scores after sex and age remained in the equation, the additional variance was R^2= .23.

Table 6.11

Regression Models

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Sex	.09*	.05	.02*
Age	-.14***	-.15***	-.12***
Church attendance		.48***	.29***
Personal prayer			.47***
R^2	.03	.26	.44
Increase in R^2		.23***	.18***

*p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

In model three, a second religious variable was added (personal prayer). The increase in the coefficient of determination (R^2) was R^2 = .18, and therefore prayer predicts additional variance in the student attitude scores, after church attendance has

been taken into account. The beta weights in model 3 show that personal prayer was a much stronger variable than church attendance; and these beta weights, along with the known significant correlation between personal prayer and church attendance as shown in table 6.12, indicate that it is possible to intuit that the stronger beta weight associated with church attendance in model 2 is due to the influence of personal prayer, being mediated in this model via church attendance.

This analysis leads to the conclusion that students with the same sex and age (class) will hold a significantly more positive attitude toward Christianity if they attend church, and that students with the same sex and age (class) who pray on their own, will hold a significantly more positive attitude toward Christianity, than those who attend church. These findings are very consistent with those in the studies conducted in Church in Wales primary schools by Lankshear et al. (2018).

Conclusion to Chapter Six

The analysis of findings from the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* leads to five key conclusions.

First, this empirical research has demonstrated that the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* (Francis, 1978a; 1978b) is a suitable and reliable scale for measuring the attitude toward Christianity in Anglican primary schools in Ireland.

Second, the research has demonstrated that the majority of students in this study have a positive attitude toward Christianity, with the mean score of 88.8 (*SD* 24.1) exceeding the mid-point of the scale (72.0).

Third, the research has shown that girls demonstrated higher positive attitudes toward Christianity than boys did, and that there was a decline in positive attitude toward Christianity between 4th class and 6th class. Students who attended church held a significantly more positive attitude toward Christianity, than their peers who did not attend church. Parental church attendance was found to be a significant predictor of positive attitude toward Christianity, with the mother's influence greater than the father's influence. Students who prayed on their own held a significantly more positive attitude toward Christianity, than their peers who did not pray on their own, and a significantly more positive attitude toward Christianity, than those who attended church. This emphasises the greater impact on religiosity of private religious practices over public religious practices.

Fourth, the research question addressed in this chapter was: Are Church of Ireland primary schools Christian in ethos? This was responded to in terms of the

hypothesis raised by Lankshear et al. (2018). In applying this hypothesis that assessing student attitude may provide an "indicator of school ethos" (Lankshear et al., 2018, p. 113) and that "assessment of student attitudes provided insight into the culture and climate of schools" by reflecting and informing the ethos of the school (p. 112), it can be concluded that the Church of Ireland primary school in 2019 was in practice "Christian in ethos" (Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, 2017, p. 1). Church of Ireland primary schools are serving a cohort of young people who are open to Christianity, and the ethos of the schools reflects an overall Christian environment and culture.

The fifth conclusion was that there are strong connections between religious practices and attitudes toward Christianity. Lankshear et al. (2018) highlighted one such practice, that of church attendance, and suggested that any future overall decline in church attendance in Wales could be reflected in a decline in positive student attitudes toward Christianity, which could lead to "a consequent shift in the ethos, culture and climate of church schools" (p. 125). This serves as a pertinent reminder that the Christian ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school is dependent on factors outside the control of the school, and outside the control of those with oversight of its ethos, including the patron.

Chapter Seven

Wellbeing and School Ethos: Investigating the Connections

In chapter four, the key research questions for this study were identified. The overarching research question is: What are the key elements of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school as articulated through student attitudes and lived experiences? In this chapter, it is planned to answer the fourth question embedded in the overall research question: Do students in Church of Ireland primary schools demonstrate good levels of wellbeing, and does school ethos have an impact on student wellbeing? It is also planned to explore factors that may affect student wellbeing. This topic will be investigated by employing a short instrument, specifically designed for measuring wellbeing in children: the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010).

This chapter is in two parts. It will commence with an investigation of the construct of wellbeing in the educational context. Then the policy statements and strategies pertaining to wellbeing in primary schools in Ireland will be outlined. The hypothesised link between school ethos and wellbeing will be explored, along with a review of relevant studies in England, Australia, and Ireland. Connections between religiosity, religious attitudes and practices, and wellbeing will be investigated. The instrument, the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010), will be introduced and relevant international empirical studies employing this instrument will be outlined. The context will then be set for the data collection, analysis, and presentation of findings, which will form the second part of the chapter.

In the second part of the chapter, the data collection and analysis will be documented. The reliability of the scale will be discussed, and the frequency scores will provide an overall picture of the wellbeing of the student population. Further analysis of the data will test predictions relating to factors affecting student wellbeing, including sex, age, religious practices, religiosity, and school size. Finally, data analysis will test the suggested link between school ethos and wellbeing. A summary of findings will form the chapter conclusion.

Although well-being is a common spelling of the term, for the purposes of this study, the un-hyphenated term 'wellbeing' will be used (unless in direct quotations), as this is most frequently found in educational policy documents in Ireland.

Wellbeing: A Working Definition

The construct of wellbeing is complex to define, and its multi-faceted nature has meant that researchers have tended to focus on particular aspects or dimensions of the construct in theoretical and empirical studies; these include, but are not limited to, mental health, self-concept, psychological wellbeing, and behavioural issues.

Mental health was defined by the World Health Organisation (2014) as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community" (p. 1). Research has suggested that wellbeing is affected by all of the social environments in which the individual lives, and that its construct is the combination of maintaining positive protective factors and becoming resilient to risk factors. As young people spend 183 school days per academic year in primary school in Ireland (Department of Education, 2021), the school is one core social environment with the potential to have an impact on the child's overall wellbeing.

It is now intended to investigate Irish education policies in terms of wellbeing in schools, and then to specifically focus on possible connections between school ethos and wellbeing.

Wellbeing in the Irish Educational Context

The Education Act (1998) stated that "a recognised school shall provide the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students and provide health education to them, in consultation with their parents, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school" (Government of Ireland, 1998). In recent years, the inclusion of wellbeing strategies and focussed wellbeing lessons in the primary school gained popularity, seen as a response to a greater awareness of the need to support the mental health of young people. In 2014, the Government gave a commitment to improve the wellbeing of children and young people (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014, p. xiv), and in 2018, the Department of Education and Skills launched a five-year proactive framework and policy strategy for wellbeing, to be run in Irish primary schools from 2018 to 2023 (2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2019a).

Several broad definitions of wellbeing in the school context were to be found in departmental publications in 2015 and 2019. The Department of Education and Skills and the Health Service Executive (2015) defined wellbeing in the school context as "the presence of a culture, ethos and environment which promotes dynamic, optimal development and flourishing for all in the school community" (p. 9). The document

expanded on this definition of wellbeing, stating "it encompasses the domains of relationship, meaning, emotion, motivation, purpose, and achievement" and "it includes quality teaching and learning for the development of all elements related to healthy living whether cultural, academic, social, emotional, physical or technological, with particular focus on resilience and coping" (p. 9). In a later publication, the Department of Education and Skills (2019a) defined wellbeing as being present when "a person realises their potential, is resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their life, takes care of their physical wellbeing and has a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to a wider community" (p. 10).

In the policy documents, much responsibility appeared to fall on school leadership and staff to create the required culture, ethos, and environment to promote and support wellbeing. The whole school community was also referenced in the policy documents as being central to wellbeing promotion, noting the relevance of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development which proposed that "to be human is to be relational and that wellbeing is always realised in a community" (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a, p. 10).

The actual contents of the primary school wellbeing strategy stemmed from an inventory of child wellbeing conducted by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2005). This inventory of key domains and criteria aimed to conceptualise child wellbeing as it was viewed in a number of different countries, and revealed more than 2,500 indicators of child wellbeing (Brooks & Hanafin, 2005, p. 10). These were then refined through a rigorous process to a 42-item *National Set of Child Wellbeing Indicators*, with seven socio-demographic indicators. The framework documents and subsequent policy statements, issued by the Department of Education and Skills, were based on these indicators.

Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (2019)

Whilst emphasising that wellbeing was a shared responsibility across all sectors of society, the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* highlighted the particular importance of the school in the context of the wellbeing of young people. The document stated "the school, situated within the community can be a powerful context for healthy development in enhancing protective factors and minimising risks" (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a, p. 12).

Wellbeing policy was divided into two core areas for action: risk factors and protective factors. Nine protective factors were listed, which encompassed all elements

of school life, including relationships in school and the development of knowledge and skills. Eight risk factors were listed which included cultural differences, social factors such as disengagement, absenteeism, isolation and alienation, and behavioural factors. One of the protective factors, which specifically connects to this research study, highlights "a sense of belonging, security and connectedness to school through a positive school climate and participation in school and community activities" (pp. 12-13).

Noting that protective and risk factors were woven into all aspects and relationships in school life, the Department of Education and Skills (2019) recommended a whole-school approach to promote the protective factors, and minimise the risk factors. The emergent five-year plan, involving all members of the school community, would be supported across four key areas: culture and environment, curriculum (teaching and learning), policy and planning, and relationships and partnerships. Each school was expected to have a *Self-Evaluation Wellbeing Promotion Process* in place by 2023, and a number of measures of success were suggested for schools to consider: "student attendance, successful student completion or transitions of students, data collected in school and in consultation with children and young people, parents, teachers, and other staff members, and information from inspection reports" (pp. 22-23).

The self-evaluation process was supported by indicators of success and statements of effective practice. Two examples of indicators of success relating to the key area of culture and environment were:

> Children, young people and staff experience a sense of belonging and feel safe, connected and supported.
>
> Systems are in place so that the voice of the child/young person, teacher and parent are heard and lead to improvements in school culture and ethos. (p. 21)

Although the key area of culture and environment appears to have the most obvious connection to school ethos, other statements of practice include reference to community links (which could include the parish), and curricular areas (which could include religious education). One statement of effective practice relating to the area of culture and environment said "the wellbeing of the whole school community is central to the school's ethos/mission statement and school leaders and management actively promote wellbeing" (p. 40).

Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (2020)

Consultation for a new primary curriculum commenced in Ireland in 2018 and a draft curriculum framework document was published in 2020. The draft framework contained seven key competencies, including "fostering wellbeing". Wellbeing was seen as supporting:

> children's social, emotional and physical development now and into the future. It enables children to develop self-awareness and knowledge, build life-skills and develop a strong sense of connectedness to their school and to their community and wider society. (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2020a, p. 13)

There were seven attributes attached to this competency:

> showing awareness of how to make good choices in relation to wellbeing
> participating with growing confidence and skill in physical activity
> being self-aware and resilient
> acting responsibly and showing care towards self and others
> being spiritual and having a sense of purpose and meaning
> being persistent and flexible in solving problems
> being able to assess risk and respond. (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2020a, p. 10)

It is clear from this brief analysis of wellbeing in curricular and policy documents for primary schools in Ireland, that its value is determined in terms of the promotion of protective factors and the minimisation of risk factors (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a). This value will be tangibly documented in future primary school policy and planning through the 'fostering wellbeing' key competency (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2020a).

School Ethos and Wellbeing: Empirical Research

There is limited research in the UK and Ireland investigating the impact of the ethos of the school on the wellbeing of the student. The complexity of the construct of wellbeing means that the researcher has first to arrive at a decision as to the aspect or aspects of wellbeing to be measured, and must be clear about the definition of wellbeing that is being investigated. Some relevant studies connecting school ethos and wellbeing will be presented.

When surveying the literature, it was noted that the construct of wellbeing varied between the studies, even to the point where there was debate about the correct usage of

the terms mental health, positive mental health, and wellbeing. An awareness of the complexity of the construct and its related terminology must be present as the literature is discussed, and it is also acknowledged as a limitation of this analysis, as it is not truly possible to compare studies which may be working within different constructs. Yet, the studies which will be presented in this review share a common conclusion, that school had an important influence on student wellbeing.

Adams (2013) acknowledged "a school's ethos has a strong link to and impact on children's sense of well-being and on their experience of childhood, not least because children spend so much of their young lives in school" (p. 532). The quality of a student's school life was identified as a key indicator of wellbeing (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2017) and Tomyn and Cummins (2011) stated school satisfaction was an important aspect of student wellbeing.

Paulus et al. (2016) suggested, both the characteristics of the school itself and the experience of young people within the school environment likely have an influence on the development of mental health difficulties. Smyth (2015) stated "primary school experiences are found to matter in themselves in shaping how children view themselves as learners and in other dimensions of their self-image" and concluded they have an impact on influencing longer-term wellbeing and engagement with school (p. vii). Patalay et al. (2020) described the limited number of studies that explored the link between school ethos and wellbeing as a gap and a critical omission in the research on mental health.

In this section, three relevant studies based in the UK, one study from Australia, and one study located in Ireland will be outlined. There also have been several research papers from the United States that suggested a definite link between school climate and wellbeing (or mental health). These include Loukas and Robinson (2004); Kuperminc et al. (2001); and Suldo et al. (2012). Typical findings in the US studies were that school climate acted as a protective factor in terms of wellbeing, and that working to promote a positive school climate should be a key strategy for schools (Suldo et al., 2012, p. 79).

Research in England and Scotland

Gutman and Feinstein aimed to fill a perceived gap in the literature surrounding children's wellbeing by examining school effects on children's wellbeing in English primary schools. Their study was drawn from data based on children aged eight-years and ten-years in the *Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children*. Pupil level characteristics were assessed by hands-on clinical tests under standardised

circumstances. Parental questionnaires and head teacher questionnaires were also utilised to collect relevant data. School characteristics assessed in the study encompassed school structure (including type of school), school composition (including social economic status, and staff/pupil ratio), and context variables (including parental involvement and disputes with parents).

The researchers examined four dimensions of children's wellbeing: mental health, pro-social behaviour, anti-social behaviour, and achievement. Mental health was investigated in terms of psychological and emotional wellbeing. Pro-social behaviours were examined in terms of children talking to their teacher, liking school, and having satisfying friendships. Anti-social behaviours were analysed under the areas of peer victimisation, bullying, involvement in anti-social activities, and association with anti-social friends. Finally, achievement was measured using Key Stage scores (Gutman & Feinstein, 2008, pp. 2-5).

Pupil-level measures included a shortened version of the *Nowicki-Strickland Internal-External scale* (Nowicki & Duke, 1974) which measured the pupil's locus of control at age eight. The pupil answered 'yes' or 'no' to questions read to them such as "Do you feel that wishing can make good things happen?" Scholastic competence was measured using a six-item version of *Harter's Self-Perception Profile for Children* (Harter, 1985). Depression was measured at age ten using 12 statements from the *Short Mood and Feelings Questionnaire*, including statements such as "I felt lonely" (Angold et al., 1995). *The Bullying and Friendship Interview Schedule* (Wolke et al., 2001) was conducted at both age eight and age ten. *The Self-Reported Antisocial Behaviour for Young Children Questionnaire* (Loeber et al., 1989) was administered at age eight, including questions such as "Have you ever taken something from a shop without paying for it?" Children were asked about anti-social behaviours of their friends at age ten such as "Have any friends stolen something?" Questions were asked about the frequency of "talks with teachers", and about whether the pupil liked school at both eight-years and ten-years. Finally, five questions from the *Cambridge Hormones and Moods Project Friendship questionnaire* (Goodyer et al., 1990) were used at both eight-years and ten-years, which included questions such as "Do you talk to your friends about problems?" (Gutman & Feinstein, 2008, pp. 11-13). This wide range of tests demonstrates the breadth of wellbeing elements being examined in the research study.

The researchers first examined the characteristics and continuity of children experiencing high or low levels of wellbeing in primary school; then using multilevel

modelling, they analysed the proportion of variation that could be explained by the children themselves, and the proportion of variation that was due to attendance at a particular school. Pupil-level and school-level characteristics were subsequently analysed (Gutman & Feinstein, 2008, pp. 5-6).

Gutman and Feinstein found that patterns of wellbeing began early in primary school (p. 32), and that most children followed a path of relatively positive wellbeing (p. 29). Although school factors were found to explain 3% or less of the variation in pupil's mental health and behaviour (p. 17), it was suggested that, for those 20% of children who experienced a negative path of wellbeing, school factors could act as protective factors, and therefore "the school ethos could have an important effect on the individual" (p. 23).

Gutman and Feinstein concluded that pupils who attended voluntary-aided schools (most of which were faith-based) had higher wellbeing, in terms of a number of outcomes, than pupils in other schools. They stated "these findings highlight the importance of school ethos for children's wellbeing" (p. 22). Several reasons were suggested for this: a greater emphasis on moral education in faith schools, central tenets that united the families who select the schools, and schools' admissions policies with greater control over pupil admissions. They concluded that "even controlling for pupil background, voluntary-aided schools have an atmosphere which is conducive to children's wellbeing" (p. 23). Gutman and Feinstein's conclusion is of particular relevance to this study, which is located in the context of the Anglican primary school.

The small but significant effect of school ethos on student wellbeing was also demonstrated in other studies, and researchers have tended to agree that school ethos is an element of school life that is malleable (Patalay et al., 2020), can be improved at local school level, and that even a small measurable impact on student wellbeing is worth achieving. Adams concluded her research based on a UK 'childhood in crisis' discourse by stating that a good childhood is inextricably linked with wellbeing, and that the school has a key role in shaping childhood (2013, p. 534).

Patalay et al. (2020) researched the childhood onset of mental health difficulties in relation to factors of school composition and school climate. Analysing data from 23,215 primary school children in England, the researchers found that between 3% and 4.5% of the variation in children's mental health outcomes could be attributed to schools, and that 29.5% to 48.8% of this variation was explained by school climate.

The research conducted by Patalay et al. (2020) operationalised the ten-item emotional difficulties and six-item behavioural difficulties scales of Deighton's *Me and My Feelings* self-report questionnaire to measure mental health difficulties. The emotional difficulties scale included statements such as 'I am unhappy' and 'I worry a lot', and the behavioural difficulties scale included statements such as 'I hit out when I am angry' and 'I lose my temper'. Students responded by selecting an option 'always', 'sometimes', or 'never' (Deighton et al, 2012, pp. 249-250). Students also responded to a seven-item questionnaire to measure perceptions of their school climate (Fink et al., 2018, p. 20). Items on this scale included 'We can talk to teachers about problems' and 'At this school we care about each other'. Students responded to these statements by selecting 'never', 'sometimes', or 'always'.

Analysis of the results found, when school climate scores were low, girls demonstrated greater levels of emotional symptoms, and boys demonstrated greater levels of behavioural symptoms. This impact increased as experiences of school climate decreased. Patalay et al. (2020) concluded by suggesting school climate was a malleable factor in terms of prevention of mental health difficulties, that working on its improvement did not place demands on curriculum time, was within the scope of schools' remit, and had broader benefits in terms of school engagement and academic outcomes (p. 6).

One further research paper focussed on the risk factor of behaviour in relation to perceptions of school ethos, not by students, but by teachers and support staff in schools in Scotland. It concluded that for the teachers and support staff, the strongest predictor of negative behaviours was their perception of school ethos; those who gave a lower rating to a question relating to their perception of the ethos of their school reported that they experienced negative behaviours more often. The research study was conducted in 2016 and had quantitative (survey) and qualitative elements. The authors of the study concluded "this demonstrates the strong link between ethos and behaviour" (Black et al., 2017, p. 4). They outlined an understanding of positive school ethos, stating that:

> Staff, pupils and parents felt that a positive ethos was characterised by: a school feeling like a community; shared values (including, above all, respect,); strong leadership from the SMT (Senior Management Team); communication and openness among staff; and 'everyone's voice'- particularly the pupil voice - being heard. (p. 5)

Research in Australia

In a report published in Australia, Skrzypiec et al. (2014) analysed the wellbeing of middle years aged students (aged 11-16 years) attending International Baccalaureate schools. The project had a mixed-method design, including a questionnaire, interviews, and focus groups. A *Well-Being Questionnaire* was developed which operationalised three scales to assess the social, emotional, and psychological wellbeing of the students; as well as to ascertain whether or not they were generally flourishing, languishing, or had moderate mental health. The *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010), and the *Mental Health Continuum* were used to measure 'languishing' and poor mental health, and the *Flourishing Scale* (Diener et al., 2009), and the *Mental Health Continuum* (Keye, 2002) were used to measure 'flourishing'.

The report findings showed 92% to 94% of students demonstrated good to moderate wellbeing, while 54% to 55% of students were flourishing and 6% to 8% of students were languishing. The authors concluded these schools were making "concerted efforts to build the empathy, global self-concept, peer relationships, school relationships, self-reflection, resilience and the confidence" of the students (Skrzypiec et al., 2014, p. 13).

Some sections of the *Well-being Questionnaire* focussed on the student's experience of school, with a 12-item scale measuring school satisfaction, which included statements such as 'I feel proud of belonging to my school', a question indicating school commitment, and eight questions designed to measure the students' sense of belonging at school and perceived school support (p. 109). Analysis of the data collected in the study led the authors to attest that being happy at school was significantly associated with student wellbeing (p. 125).

Research in Ireland

In an Irish research study, Smyth (2015) noted there was an increased recognition of the importance of "taking account of children's own perspective on their well-being" (p. iv), however she acknowledged the lack of studies, focussed on the factors which influenced this subjective wellbeing. Most studies investigated the experiences of adolescents and not younger children, and those directed at younger children were limited, according to Smyth, to exploring their perceptions "within the family context" (p. 1). Smyth stated "the neglect of the potential impact of school experiences on child wellbeing is all the more striking in a context where educational

policy is increasingly taking account of the concept of wellbeing" (p. 2). This emphasis on wellbeing in Irish educational policy was discussed earlier in the chapter.

As part of the output from the longitudinal *Growing Up in Ireland* study (Economic and Social Research Institute), Smyth analysed student wellbeing in the nine-year-old cohort (8,568 children). In her study, the measurement of wellbeing was operationalised and defined in terms of the child's own perspective on wellbeing, which Smyth defined as 'self-image' (p. 7). Child wellbeing was measured in terms of the *Piers-Harris Children's Self-Concept Scale 2nd Edition* (Kenny & Vazquez, 2017). This instrument captured a general measure of the respondent's overall self-concept and includes six domain scales across six dimensions: behavioural adjustment, intellectual and school status, physical appearance and attributes, freedom from anxiety, popularity, and happiness and satisfaction. Respondents selected from 'yes' or 'no' to a series of 60 statements, some of which reflected positive attributes such as 'I am good in my schoolwork' or 'My classmates in school think I have good ideas', and others which reflected more negative behaviours or attributes such as 'I think bad thoughts' and 'I give up easily' (Smyth, 2015, p. 7).

Smyth developed models of individual and social background factors, which she found predicted wellbeing or self-image, reporting that, as was expected, most of the difference in self-image was among children within the same class or school, and therefore at the individual child level (implying family and individual factors have the greatest impact on wellbeing). Significant differences were, however, also found at the school and class level, and these were concluded to have an effect of between 4.6% and 8.8% on the variation in child self-image (p. 23).

Better outcomes in terms of self-image were found among children in larger schools with more than 100 students. Smyth acknowledged this was surprising, as international research had tended to highlight small schools as having better academic and social outcomes (see Darmody et al., 2010). Smyth discussed possible reasons for her analysis, suggesting that learning in a multi-grade setting negatively influences wellbeing (especially in girls); she also found that the quality of relationship between teacher and student tended to be weaker in smaller schools. Finally, Smyth commented that stronger levels of wellbeing and self-image were noted in more urban areas, where larger schools tended to be located (pp. 29-30).

Smyth recognised "social relationships with teachers and peers as important protective factors in fostering positive self-image", and found that girls appeared more

sensitive to school and classroom contexts than boys did, particularly when the girls were taught in multi-grade classes. Students who did not like school, demonstrated poorer wellbeing in all dimensions. Smyth explored possible factors that may impact on wellbeing and concluded that both boys and girls had lower happiness levels in schools where environmental awareness was not seen as important. No significant differences were found by school language medium (Irish or English) or by religious patronage (pp. 33-36).

As the *Growing Up in Ireland study* is a longitudinal study, Smyth then looked at the extent to which self-image (wellbeing) levels at primary school could predict those at secondary school, by tracing changes in the children's self-image between nine-years of age and four years later at age thirteen. She concluded that self-image at age nine significantly predicts self-image four years later; but acknowledged that many people experience a change in how they view themselves, in response to their changing school context as they transition to secondary school (p. 57).

Smyth concluded that "primary school experiences are found to matter in themselves in shaping how children view themselves as learners and in other dimensions of their self-image" and that they have an impact on influencing longer-term wellbeing and engagement with school (p. 69). This supports the findings by Gutman and Feinstein (2008), although Smyth does not identify the faith school as being of greater impact in terms of wellbeing than schools of other patronages.

Reviewing the Research Studies

The common finding in the studies discussed in this section is that, over and above the strong influence of the home, school ethos does have a small but measurable impact on the wellbeing of the child, predominantly as a protective factor. It has been shown that studies connecting ethos and wellbeing are limited in number, and that due to the complexity of the construct of wellbeing, the studies have employed different instruments. Some have, in fact, measured different facets of wellbeing. Combining a number of different wellbeing measures, designed to focus on different aspects of wellbeing (as in the studies by Gutman & Feinstein, 2008, and Skrzypiec et al., 2014), provided the most detailed and multi-layered analysis of the wellbeing of a cohort.

There has been some research linking religion, spiritual health and wellbeing, literature pertaining to this, located in the context of the school-going student, will be briefly considered.

Wellbeing and Religion

In an article which called for religious education to be valued as having a role to play in supporting wellbeing in secondary schools, Meehan (2020) acknowledged the complexities surrounding the construct and definitions of wellbeing, and referenced the work of Spencer et al. (2016). These authors highlighted the breadth of the construct of wellbeing across 139 individual studies that focussed on the relationship between religion and wellbeing.

Meehan discussed research by Chen and VanderWeele (2018), which examined the associations between religious involvement in adolescence and a number of measures of wellbeing: psychological wellbeing, mental health, health behaviour, physical health, and character strength. Data were analysed, sourced from a cohort of respondents, aged 12-years to 19-years, in a longitudinal *Growing Up Today Study*. Religious involvement was assessed through questions about frequency of church attendance and frequency of prayer or meditation. Psychological wellbeing was measured across five scales: life satisfaction, positive affect, self-esteem, emotional processing, and emotional expression. Chen and VanderWeele concluded that, in terms of wellbeing, 'at least weekly' church attendance, when compared with 'no attendance', was associated with significantly greater life satisfaction and positive affect, and a number of character strengths. Compared with never praying or meditating, 'at least daily' practice was associated with significantly greater positive affect, emotional processing, and emotional expression; and to a lesser and not statistically significant extent, with greater life satisfaction and self-esteem (p. 2357). The researchers concluded that encouragement of attendance at worship and prayer by young people already holding religious beliefs, may possibly lead to better wellbeing (p. 2363).

Whereas there is little research linking overall wellbeing and religious practices in primary schools, there have been a number of studies with a focus on spiritual wellbeing. A study in Anglican primary schools in Wales by Francis, Fisher, et al. (2018) analysed a number of factors that affected scores on a spiritual wellbeing scale *Living Life*, previously developed by Fisher. It was concluded that personal prayer was a more significant factor in predicting individual differences in spiritual wellbeing than church attendance, or than personal factors such as sex and age. This would appear to concur with the study by Chen and VanderWeele (2018), and similar findings were also recorded in a smaller replicated study in Ireland (Wilkinson et al., 2018).

Francis et al. (2012) employed Fisher's model of spiritual health to explore the spiritual health of students attending three different types of secondary schools in England and Wales. The research question sought to profile the "ethos of these three types of schools in terms of the overall levels of spiritual health displayed by their pupils". The researchers proposed that differences between schools might be as a result of different admission policies or influences present in the different schools (p. 359). The three types of schools investigated were state schools with a religious character, state schools without a religious character, and independent Christian schools.

The authors concluded that the spiritual health of young people in Anglican schools was indistinguishable from that of young people attending non-religious schools, apart from two elements of the model, where it was concluded that students in Anglican schools were more likely to believe in God (35% of students as compared to 22% of students), and were more likely to believe in life after death than those in non-religious schools (p. 365). The students attending the third type of school (new independent Christian schools) demonstrated much higher levels of spiritual health, suggesting these schools have a different aim and ethos than the other schools (state schools with a religious character and state schools with a non-religious character). This study therefore shows a strong link between independent Christian schools and positive spiritual health, but does not conclude on whether the link is sourced from the students themselves (home factors and personal religious practices), or from their lived experience of the ethos of the school. Planned further research on this theme by the researchers did not result in publications.

Although Gutman and Feinstein (2018) found a significant link between attendance at a voluntary (faith) school and wellbeing, they only speculated as to the reasons for this impact, and did not reference religious education. The referenced studies implied that religious practices (church attendance and personal prayer) have an impact on personal wellbeing, and it is therefore most likely that personal and home-based religious factors have a stronger impact on wellbeing than the curricular subject of religious education as encountered in school.

Anglican schools and Wellbeing

When searching through writings on ethos in the Church of Ireland sector, and the publicly available Church of Ireland primary school ethos statements, no specific reference to wellbeing was to be found. Phrases were, however included, which indicated support for the holistic development of children, in terms of their moral,

spiritual, emotional, intellectual, physical, and social development. The Church of England published a vision for education in 2016, with a core aim of 'life in all its fullness', worked out from a theological and educational approach through four elements: wisdom, hope, community, and dignity (p. 2). The Church of England documents, as with the Church of Ireland literature, avoided the use of the term wellbeing, although the holistic approaches in both Anglican contexts encompass much of what is understood by wellbeing.

In the first part of this chapter, it was acknowledged that research into wellbeing in the educational context is made more challenging due to the multi-faceted nature of the definition of the construct of wellbeing. One theme has emerged from the contextual review of the literature, that the school has a small but key role in supporting the wellbeing of the child. This provides an affirmative answer to part of the research question under investigation: does school ethos have an impact on student wellbeing? The literature and educational policies suggest this is true. It is now intended to explore this question using data collected, employing the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010).

The Stirling Children's Well-being Scale

This research study, based in Church Ireland primary schools, is a multi-dimensional study, therefore there was only limited space in the survey to assess one aspect of wellbeing. After considering employing a spiritual health measure, it was decided rather to focus on psychological wellbeing and to employ the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010). The *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* is a short, child-centred instrument designed to measure psychological wellbeing, it is a suitable instrument to measure well-being across large cohorts, it is accessible to children of the ages being surveyed, and has not been previously utilised to explore links between wellbeing and school ethos in Ireland.

Analysis of the data from this study will be used to explore connections between school ethos and wellbeing in the Irish context and to answer the research question: Do students in Church of Ireland primary schools demonstrate good levels of wellbeing, and does school ethos have an impact on student wellbeing?

The scale, which became known as the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale*, was developed by Liddle and Carter as a means to measure psychological wellbeing in children. In an article describing the development of the scale, Liddle and Carter (2015) explained there had been limited research into what could be defined as psychological

wellbeing for children, including how it might develop over childhood and into adulthood. Most research, they stated, was based on adult models of psychological wellbeing, or of mental illness among children (p. 176). Liddle and Carter defined the term psychological wellbeing as composed of the dual wellbeing structures of subjective wellbeing or 'hedonic' wellbeing, which incorporated life satisfaction, the presence of positive mood, and the absence of negative mood and psychological wellbeing, with a 'eudaimonic' perspective, which incorporated autonomy, personal growth, self-acceptance, life purpose, mastery, and positive relatedness (p. 175).

In developing an instrument to measure psychological wellbeing in children, which they described as "entering unchartered territory", Liddle and Carter (2015) found themselves turning to a well-tested scale for adults: *The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale* (pp. 180-181). Analysis of this scale by Tennant et al. (2007) had shown that the scale had a "positive and holistic approach to mental wellbeing" and Liddle and Carter noted that "considering the lack of available theory on children's positive well-being, these aspects were used as a basis for the SCWS's [Stirling Children's Well-being Scale] initial development" (2015, p. 176).

The *Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Sca*le was designed as an instrument to "monitor mental well-being at population level" (Tennant et al., 2007, p.1) and was originally developed using ten aspects of wellbeing as identified by Kammann and Flett (1983). These were "confidence, usefulness, interest in life, problem solving, autonomy, positive relationships, thinking clearly and creatively, energy, happiness, and optimism" (p. 259). The scale developers chose to use positively-worded questions to measure positive aspects of psychological wellbeing, and the scale utilised the following indicators: "positive affect comprising feelings of optimism, cheerfulness, and relaxation; satisfying interpersonal relationships; and positive functioning comprising of energy, clear thinking, self-acceptance, personal development, competence, and autonomy". The scale was shown by Tennant et al. (2007) to demonstrate high levels of internal consistency and reliability, it was found to be meaningful to different general population groups, and appeared to lack ceiling effects. This made it a practical and accessible general scale to measure the psychological wellbeing of a population (p. 1).

To develop the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale*, Liddle and Carter commenced with a 24-item scale based on the *Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale* theory and indicators of wellbeing. Liddle and Carter followed the process of

testing their new scale to improve its internal reliability by reducing and refining the elements. This led to a 12-item scale to be tested for its internal reliability, construct validity, and external reliability. The final 12-item scale was found to cover the same two areas measured by the *Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale*: positive affect and positive functioning. This new 12-item test comprised two sub-components: positive emotional state and positive outlook, which were seen to relate to the previously discussed theory of psychological wellbeing, being subjective (hedonic) and psychological (eudaimonic). A social desirability indicator was added to the test, to detect an individual set of responses, which could show either a lack of active engagement, or the provision of a response set of answers.

Liddle and Carter introduced the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* as a "holistic, positively worded scale measuring emotional and psychological well-being in children aged eight to 15 years" (Liddle & Carter, 2010, p. 3), a "robust scale that is easy to administer, and straightforward for children to complete" (Liddle & Carter, 2015, p. 181), eminently suitable for paper and pencil testing" (2015, p. 182), and a test showing good internal reliability, construct validity, and external validity. It was also seen as having little in the way of ceiling affects, allowing for change to be measured, for example before and after an intervention measure or input (2015, p. 181).

The scale consists of 15 positively worded statements, of which three are social desirability indicators and not scored. The student responds to the statements using a five-point Likert scale, ticking a box which describes how they might have been feeling or thinking about things over the past couple of weeks. Scores are allocated on the basis of the box ticked: 'all of the time' (5), 'quite a lot of the time' (4), 'some of the time' (3), 'not much of the time' (2), and 'never' (1). High scores indicate positive wellbeing. The three social desirability indicators are used to gauge the occurrence of 'response set' answers, which would indicate the need for caution with the main set of scored responses.

Scores on the scales range from 12 to 60. Scores under 30 are regarded as demonstrating poor mental health. In the initial testing of the instrument in 2010, Liddle and Carter found the instrument showed good internal reliability with an alpha score exceeding the $\alpha = 0.8$ benchmark, and good external reliability (tested through a test-retest process) with a strong Pearson's correlation of $r \geq 0.7$. The scale resulted in a mean score of 43.95 (*SD* 7.29) (Liddle & Carter, 2010, p. 18).

Empirical Studies Employing the Stirling Children's Well-being Scale

Liddle and Carter described the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* as a suitable measure to establish levels of wellbeing. They proposed that in the educational context, the implications of having such a measure were wide-ranging. Its ease of administration and scoring would lend itself to whole-school or authority-wide surveys of psychological wellbeing, monitoring of trends, and intergroup comparisons (2015, p. 181).

The scale has been employed in a number of empirical studies in the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Turkey, and Bangladesh, but there is no evidence of a published study utilising the scale in Ireland. Most researchers have administered the instrument before and after intervention programmes, although one study in Australia (Skrzypiec et al., 2014) employed the scale at secondary school level to measure wellbeing across a population.

Skrzypiec et al. (2014)

The aforementioned research study by Skrzypiec et al. (2014) was undertaken to measure student social-emotional wellbeing and school success practices in a cohort of Middle Years International Baccalaureate students (aged 11-years to 16 -years) in schools in Australia. In this study, the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* was one of three instruments used to assess wellbeing, the others being the *Flourishing Scale* (Diener et al., 2009), and the *Mental Health Continuum* (Keye, 2002).

A number of conclusions were presented, based on data gathered from the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale*. Total scores were calculated showing a mean score of 42.1 (*SD* 8.6). This was noted as being lower than the mean score calculated by Liddle and Carter (2010), but as the student cohort in the Australian study was older in age, it was possible that this was due to a predicted decline in scores with age. It was found that 8.4% students (12% of girls and 5% of boys) demonstrated poor mental health (with an overall score of under 30). Skrzypiec et al. also found that males' self-reported scores were higher than females ($F(1) = 37.5$, $p < .000$), suggesting that males were more likely to be experiencing positive wellbeing than females (pp. 68-69).

The research study explored a number of factors that affected student wellbeing; of particular relevance to this study was an investigation of the link between school satisfaction and wellbeing. It was shown that school satisfaction was a good predictor of wellbeing, as measured on the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (p. 119). This

connection had also been suggested in the qualitative research elements of the study (p. 125).

The Stirling Children's Well-being Scale: Other Research Studies

The *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* has also successfully been used as a benchmark of wellbeing before and after interventional projects, for example before and after the introduction of a mindfulness programme for 9- to 11-year old students in schools in New Zealand (see Bernay et al., 2016; Devcich et al., 2017). The researchers demonstrated high internal consistency for the overall scale with an internal reliability score of $\alpha = .87$. Post intervention tests also showed high reliability scores. The test-retest reliability was $\alpha = .86$. The results showed a mean score of 50.5 (*SD* 3.0), the researchers acknowledging this was a high score compared to the foundational study by Liddle and Carter (2010) (Devcich et al., 2017, pp. 318-320).

Vickery and Dorjee (2016) administered the scale as one of several tests to measure wellbeing before and after implementing an eight week *Paws b mindfulness programme* with seven- to nine-year old children in North Wales, and showed the scale had good internal consistency each time, with reliability scores ranging from $\alpha = .65$ in the Positive Outlook subscale, prior to implementing the programme, to $\alpha = .82$ in the Positive Emotional State subscale, three months after the programme ended. Amundsen et al. (2020) also used the scale to test wellbeing before and after a 6-week mindfulness programme (*Living Mindfully Programme*) with nine- to ten-year old students in the north-east of England; and showed the scale had good internal consistency, with each subtest's reliability in excess of $\alpha = .80$ before and after the implementation of the mindfulness programme.

Nelson et al. (2021) investigated the effects of school-based mindfulness programmes on wellbeing and resiliency in UK school children. *The Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* was employed two weeks before, and two weeks after intervention.

Manyeruke et al. (2021) examined differences in attachment, wellbeing, and educational development in children aged eight-years and 14-years in Zimbabwe. The *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* was employed to compare the wellbeing between two cohorts of children, those in transnational families, and those in conventional families. In the study, the scale generated a reliability of $\alpha = .86$.

Başaran et al. (2021) used the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* to determine the relationship between psychological resilience and psychological wellbeing of primary school children in Turkey. The researchers concluded there was a positive

relationship between psychological resilience and psychological wellbeing, and that psychological wellbeing was a significant predictor of psychological resilience.

The test has also been tested for use in Bangladesh and the *Bangla Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* was found to be a reliable test for measuring positive wellbeing, and has been recommended as a tool to assess changes in children's wellbeing from a positive psychological perspective (Haque & Imran, 2016).

Other researchers have selected elements of the instrument rather than the whole test. Godfrey et al. (2015) used the six items from the Positive Outlook subscale along with one item from the Positive Emotional State subscale as part of a 15-item scale to measure wellbeing in young people, before and after participating in surf courses in England.

The *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* has been shown in all these research studies to be a robust and reliable measure of wellbeing. Although published studies reveal it has been most frequently employed as a measure of wellbeing before and after an intervention programme, due to it having low ceiling effects; it was also designed to be used as a large-scale measure of wellbeing in a population, as was its parent scale, the *Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale* (Tennant, et al., 2007).

In this research study, the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010) has been selected as the instrument to measure the wellbeing of the cohort of students in 4th, 5th, and 6th classes attending Church of Ireland primary schools. This instrument is not being employed as a diagnostic tool, but will provide an overall picture of the wellbeing of students in Church of Ireland primary schools.

Data Collection and Analysis

Student surveys were posted to participating schools in October 2019, along with teacher and parental consent forms (as per ethical guidelines). These surveys included the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale.* Class teachers were asked to administer the surveys with students in 4th, 5th, and 6th classes, and to return the completed surveys to the researcher. Anonymity was assured.

A total of 3,249 surveys was received back from 92 schools. Surveys were received from 1,609 boys, 1,629 girls, and 11 with unstated gender. Surveys were received from 1,072 4th class students, 1,065 5th class students, 1,101 6th class students, and 10 with unstated class group. These data were entered into Microsoft Excel databases, then transferred to SPSS and analysed by the SPSS statistical package (IBM, 2018; 2020), using the frequency, reliability, correlation, and regression routines.

The Reliability of the Scale

The internal consistency reliability of the *Stirling Children's Well-being scale*, as expressed in terms of the alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951; Kline, 1999), was calculated to be α = .88. This was higher than in the study by Liddle and Carter (2015), which reported an alpha coefficient of α = .85 (p. 180).

The mean score of 45.0 (*SD* 6.9) compares favourably with the mean score from the foundational study (Mean 44.0, *SD* 7.3) (Liddle & Carter, 2010), and is higher than that in the study by Skrzypiec et al., (Mean 42.1, *SD* 8.6) although that study was with an older cohort of 11-16 year old students (Skrzypiec et al., 2014, p. 68). The second test of reliability explored the scale in detail, analysing the correlation between each item, and the sum of the other items in each scale (*r*). This analysis is presented in table 7.1.

Table 7.1

Analysis of Reliability of Stirling Children's Well-being Scale

	r
I've been feeling calm	.57
I've been feeling cheerful about things	.41
I've been feeling relaxed	.53
I've been in a good mood	.51
I've been getting on well with people	.53
I enjoy what each new day brings	.60
I think there are many things I can be proud of	.61
I feel that I am good at some things	.64
I think good things will happen in my life	.59
I can find lots of fun things to do	.53
I think lots of people care for me	.70
I've been able to make choices easily	.63

r: item-rest of test correlation coefficients

There are three other items that are built into the scale, these form a Social Desirability Indicator: 'I have always told the truth'; 'I like everyone I have met'; and 'I always share my sweets'. Liddle and Carter (2015) noted that overall total scores of 3, 14, or 15 on the Social Desirability indicator would indicate that a participant's

wellbeing scores should be treated with caution. The data showed that 153 students (5% of total survey cohort) fitted these criteria. The guidance provided by Liddle and Carter (2015) was to visually inspect these responses and to ascertain if a pattern of response was present; this process was followed, and it was found that these students' other responses did not raise any concern, therefore their data was retained for analysis.

Total Scores

After removing the three Social Desirability items from the scale, total scores were calculated. The minimum possible score was 12, and the maximum was 60. Students reported a mean score of 45.0 (*SD* 6.9), this mean score exceeds the mid-point score of the scale (36.0), thus implying an overall positive level of wellbeing amongst the student cohort. Liddle and Carter (2010) suggested that wellbeing scores less than 30 were an indicator of poor mental health. It was noted that 79 students, or 2% of the total cohort (39 boys and 40 girls,) fell into this category.

Table 7.2

Exploring Wellbeing

	Frequently %	Sometimes %	Rarely %
I've been feeling calm	57	31	12
I've been feeling cheerful about things	63	28	9
I've been feeling relaxed	55	30	15
I've been in a good mood	66	27	7
I've been getting on well with people	78	18	4
I enjoy what each new day brings	60	32	8
I think there are many things I can be proud of	73	21	6
I feel that I am good at some things	68	26	6
I think good things will happen in my life	53	40	7
I can find lots of fun things to do	70	22	8
I think lots of people care for me	77	17	6
I've been able to make choices easily	41	40	19

The individual items in the scale were analysed, and the responses recorded, subdivided into three categories: those who said the statement described their thoughts and feelings frequently (the sum of those who responded 'all of the time' and 'quite a

lot of the time'), those who agreed the statement described their thoughts and feelings sometimes, and those who said the statement described their thoughts and feelings rarely (the sum of those who said the statement described their thoughts and feelings 'not much of the time' and 'never'). These results are presented in table 7.2. It was found that 78% of students frequently felt they got on well with people, and 77% of students thought that lots of people cared for them. The item with the lowest endorsement level was 'I've been able to make choices easily', where 41% of students agreed they frequently felt this way, and 19% of students agreed they rarely felt this way.

The Relationships between Key Factors and Total Scores

Research, previously discussed in this chapter, has confirmed that much of the variance in wellbeing is attributable to personal and individual factors. In this section, links between sex and wellbeing, and age and wellbeing will be investigated. The proposed impact of religiosity and the religious practices of church attendance and personal prayer will also be explored. Later, the factors of school size and school ethos will be investigated.

Sex and Age

The data were analysed in terms of sex differences and age differences. Table 7.3 presents the mean scores and standard deviations on the scale as recorded for girls and boys. Skrzypiec et al. (2014) had found that boys recorded higher scores than girls on the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale,* and that 12% of girls, as compared to 5.2% of boys, were experiencing poor mental health (pp. 68-69). An independent-samples t-test was run to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores between boys and girls, although the raw scores had revealed that boys scored higher. No overall significant difference was recorded between boys and girls in the scores.

Table 7.3

Exploring Girls' and Boys' Wellbeing

	Girls		Boys		*t*	*p*<
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*		
Wellbeing	44.9	7.0	45.0	6.9	0.8	ns

SD= Standard Deviation ns= not significant

Table 7.4 presents the percentage of those girls and boys who endorsed each of the statements by responding that it 'frequently' described their thoughts and feelings

(the sum of those who responded ‘all of the time’ and ‘quite a lot of the time’). This table demonstrates some of the fluctuations that were present. It shows that boys felt that they could make choices easily, that there were many things they could be proud of, and that they felt calm and relaxed, more frequently than girls did. Girls felt that people cared for them, and felt they enjoyed what each day brings, more frequently than the boys in the cohort felt.

Table 7.4

Investigating Responses of Girls and Boys to Individual Scale Items

Statement	Girl %	Boy %
I've been feeling calm	55	58
I've been feeling cheerful about things	64	62
I've been feeling relaxed	54	57
I've been in a good mood	65	67
I've been getting on well with people	79	77
I enjoy what each new day brings	63	57
I think there are many things I can be proud of	71	75
I feel that I am good at some things	65	73
I think good things will happen in my life	53	54
I can find lots of fun things to do	71	70
I think lots of people care for me	79	75
I've been able to make choices easily	37	46

Note: these percentages were calculated by adding the student responses ‘all of the time and ‘quite a lot of the time’

When considering the impact of age on wellbeing, Smyth (2015) noted changes in wellbeing between students aged nine and 13 in the data from the *Growing Up in Ireland Study*. In her study, the students had moved to secondary school, which implies a new context and different school experiences. The impact of new external factors on wellbeing as children get older was also suggested by Liddle and Carter (2010), who argued that other factors than simply age may be at play, when considering declining scores in wellbeing. They suggested that as children get older, their sphere of dependence on parents and families becomes weaker, as they form their own sense of identity and self-awareness. They also proposed that the decrease in wellbeing with age

had an "intuitive logic" as newer pressures begin to mount on children to perform academically, socially, and with greater independence (p. 14).

In this study, analysis of the data presented in table 7.5 showed that mean scores decreased from 4th class to 6th class, suggesting that age may be an independent factor in predicting wellbeing.

Table 7. 5

Exploring Age and Wellbeing

	4th class		6th class		*t*	*p*<
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*		
Whole group	45.4	6.7	44.6	7.1	2.5	.05
Girls	45.4	6.7	44.9	7.0	3.2	.01
Boys	45.1	6.9	45.0	7.0	0.4	ns

Note: The t-test was performed comparing 4th class and 6th class mean scores
SD = Standard Deviation ns= not significant

To further investigate these factors, an independent-samples t-test was run to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the mean scores between 4th class and 6th class students. It is concluded that 4th class students recorded significantly higher scores than 6th class students did, in terms of overall wellbeing. This is consistent with the findings by Liddle and Carter (2010), where scores showed a decline in wellbeing as children got older (p. 18), and in the study by Skrzypiec et al. (2014), where scores declined as children moved up the year levels (p. 69). It was also found that there was a significant overall decline in wellbeing scores for girls; however boys did not demonstrate any significant decline in wellbeing. This analysis has therefore shown that the overall decline in wellbeing found in students from 4th class to 6th class, primarily related to girls.

The individual scale items were investigated, in order to add more depth to this analysis, and this is presented in table 7.6. This shows the percentage of those students in 4th class and 6th class who endorsed each of the statements by responding that it 'frequently' described their thoughts and feelings (the sum of those who responded 'all of the time' and 'quite a lot of the time'). The decline in wellbeing levels, in terms of age, is most apparent for the items 'I enjoy what each new day brings', 'I think there are many things I can be proud of', and 'I've been feeling relaxed'. Most items show marginal difference between students of different ages. Students in 6th class showed an

increase in the experiences of 'I've been getting on well with people' and 'I've been able to make choices easily'. This supports the findings by Smyth (2015), who noted "both girls and boys report improved popularity over time" (p. 49).

Table 7.6

Individual Scale Items and Age Differences

	4th class %	6th class %
I've been feeling calm	58	56
I've been feeling cheerful about things	63	60
I've been feeling relaxed	58	53
I've been in a good mood	68	64
I've been getting on well with people	77	79
I enjoy what each new day brings	64	56
I think there are many things I can be proud of	75	71
I feel that I am good at some things	70	67
I think good things will happen in my life	53	51
I can find lots of fun things to do	72	70
I think lots of people care for me	77	77
I've been able to make choices easily	40	42

Note: these percentages were calculated by adding the student responses 'all of the time and 'quite a lot of the time'

In assessing the impact of age on wellbeing, there are limitations to be considered, as it is likely that multiple factors may be impacting on the scores; for example, as proposed by Liddle and Carter (2010), external pressures on children change as they get older, as does their independence and self-awareness. Awareness of the measurable decline in wellbeing with age, particularly for girls, is of relevance to teachers and policy makers.

Religious Practices

In chapter five, it was concluded that church attendance, personal prayer, and religiosity had a significant effect on the student's attitude toward school. In this chapter, the possibility of a connection between religiosity and/or religious practices and wellbeing has been raised. The correlation matrix in table 7.7 explores the influence of religious practices on wellbeing in this study. It also analyses the impact of a student's religiosity on student wellbeing scores. Religiosity was measured with the

Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (Francis, 1978a; 1978b), as investigated in chapter six.

Table 7.7

Correlation Matrix : Wellbeing Scale with Religious Attitudes and Practices

Scale	Correlations		
	FSAC	PA	Prayer
Wellbeing (SCWBS)	.26***	.11***	.16***
Personal Prayer	.60***	.43***	
Personal Church Attendance (PA)	.48***		

*** $p < .001$ PA = Personal Attendance at church, FSAC= Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, SCWBS=Stirling Children's Well-being Scale

The correlations demonstrate that personal church attendance, personal prayer, and religiosity, each has a significant impact on students' overall wellbeing.

A series of regression models was constructed to focus on the relationships between age, sex, religious practices (church attendance and personal prayer), and religiosity, on wellbeing scores. These three models are presented in table 7.8.

Table 7.8

Regression Model based on Wellbeing Scores

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Sex	-.02	-.02	-.04*
Age	-.05*	-.05**	-.01
Church Attendance		.12***	.02
Personal Prayer		.13***	.01
Religiosity			.27***
R^2	.00	.03	.07
Increase in R^2		.03***	.04***

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

In model one, variables of sex (girl and boy) and age (4th class, 5th class, 6th class) were regressed on wellbeing scores. The beta weights confirm, as was suggested by analysing the mean scores, that higher scores on the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* are generally associated with being in a younger class (lower age). Analysis has already determined this primarily affects girls. In model two, religious practice variables were

added (frequency of church attendance and personal prayer). The increase in the coefficient of determination (R^2) confirms that these religious practices are statistically significant predictors of wellbeing scores, after age remains a factor.

In model three, a final religious variable was added (religiosity). This was measured using the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* (Francis, 1978a; 1978b). The increase in the coefficient of determination (R^2) was $R^2 = .04$ ($p <. 001$), and therefore high scores on the scale of attitude toward Christianity predict additional variance in the wellbeing scores, after the religious practices of church attendance and prayer have been taken into account. This implies that the effects, which were attributed to church attendance and personal prayer in model two, are now being interpreted though religiosity (as measured by student attitudes toward Christianity). It is therefore concluded that student attitudes toward Christianity, as a measure of religiosity, which may be supported by church attendance and personal prayer, is a strong predictor of student wellbeing.

School Size

In her research, Smyth had expressed surprise at the finding that students in smaller schools demonstrated lower wellbeing scores than those in larger schools (2015, p. 29). With the majority of Church of Ireland primary schools identifying as small schools (<100 students), this is investigated in terms of the data, and is presented in table 7.9.

Table 7.9

Exploring School Size and Wellbeing

	>100 pupils		<100 pupils		*t*	*p*<
	Mean	*SD*	Mean	*SD*		
Whole group	45.1	7.0	44.0	6.7	6.7	.01
Girls	45.0	7.0	44.2	6.5	6.5	ns
Boys	45.3	6.9	43.7	6.8	6.8	.01

SD= Standard deviation ns=not significant

An independent-samples t-test was run to determine if there were statistically significant differences in wellbeing between students who attended large schools and those who attended small schools. It was found that those who attended large schools (Mean 45.1, *SD* 7.0) demonstrated significantly higher levels of wellbeing than those who attended small schools (Mean 44.0, *SD* 6.7) t (3229) = 6.7, $p < .01$. When the data

were analysed in terms of boys and girls, it was found that this was manifest in terms of boys and not girls.

Ethos of Schools and Wellbeing

The Department of Education and Skills (2019) referenced school ethos as a component in its policy strategies for wellbeing. In this section, it is intended to explore possible links between the ethos of the school and wellbeing, in relation to the data from this study.

In their research study, Gutman and Feinstein (2008) concluded that students attending voluntary aided schools (predominantly faith schools) recorded higher levels of wellbeing than those attending other school types. Francis et al. (2012) demonstrated that students attending independent Christian schools showed higher levels of spiritual wellbeing than those attending state schools (whether of a religious or non-religious character). Skrzypiec et al. (2014) concluded there was a strong link between school satisfaction levels and wellbeing.

Table 7.10

Exploring Wellbeing and School Ethos

Ethos Scale (adapted *Lankshear Student Voice Scales)*	*r*
General character of the school	.35***
Religious character of the school	.26***
Experience of school	.42***
Teachers	.38***
Relationships in school	.43***
Stewardship of creation	.31***
Stewardship of the school	.33***
School assembly	.34***
Religious education	.31***

r: item-rest of test correlation coefficients

In this research study, data were collected relating to student attitudes toward nine elements of school ethos using the adapted *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* (see chapter five). The bivariate correlations were explored between the overall wellbeing score in the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* and the student attitudes toward the nine elements of school ethos. These are presented in table 7.10.

The analysis shows school ethos has an impact on the wellbeing of the students, and the wellbeing of the student impacts on the overall ethos of the school, under each of these nine key areas. The strongest correlations were noted with the scale that measured the student attitude toward relationships at school. This is consistent with the research by Smyth (2015), who noted that relationships at school had an impact on student wellbeing. Strong correlations were also found with the scale that measured the student attitude toward the experience of school, this may support the findings of Skrzypiec et al. (2014), which showed that student satisfaction with school was linked with wellbeing scores.

Table 7.11

Construction of a Composite Ethos Scale

	r	Loadings
My school is a really caring school	.69	.72
My school is a really friendly school	.74	.76
My school is a really welcoming school	.71	.74
My school treats every child fairly	.75	.77
My school treats every child with respect	.79	.81
My school treats every child kindly	.79	.82
In my school the rules are fair	.62	.64
My school is a peaceful place	.64	.67
My school is a safe place	.70	.73
The teachers in my school care a lot for all the students	.69	.71
The teachers in my school care a lot for the school	.64	.66
In my school I can go to my teacher when I am unhappy	.61	.63
In my school we value each other	.67	.69
Caring for others is very important in my school	.65	.67
In my school we care a lot for each other	.73	.76
In my school I know that people care for me	.66	.67
Alpha coefficient / percent variance	.94	54.4

r: item-rest of test correlation coefficients

Since the nine ethos scales in the adapted *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* are themselves highly inter-correlated, it would not be sensible to regress all nine measures at the same time on wellbeing scores, given the known problems with collinearity. For

this reason, it was decided to subject the items comprising these nine scales to factor analysis, in order to identify the set of items that best captured the common variance within these scales. This process and the resulting 16-item scale, is shown in table 7.11. This table presents the item-rest of test correlation coefficients between the individual items and the sum of the other 15 items in respect of all 16 items, together with the alpha coefficients. The table also presents the loading on the first factor of the un-rotated solution proposed by principal component analysis, together with the percentage of variance explained by that factor.

This reliability analysis supports the scale's homogeneity, unidimensionality and internal consistency reliability. The alpha coefficient of $\alpha = .94$ shows a strong reliability whilst the proportion of variance accounted for by the first factor is 54%. This scale is seen as providing a coherent unified measure of school ethos, the impact of which on student wellbeing can then be tested using a regression model, as presented in table 7.12.

Table 7.12

Regression Models

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Sex	-.02	-.02	-.04*	-.09***
Age	-.05*	-.05**	-.01	.02
Church Attendance		.12***	.02	.03
Personal Prayer		.13	.01	.03
Religiosity			.27***	.10***
Ethos – 16 item scale				.39***
R^2	.00	.03	.07	.20
Increase in R^2		.03***	.04***	.13***

$^{*}p< .05$ $^{**}p<. 01$ $^{***}p<.001$

After accounting for the personal factors of sex, age, religious practice, and religiosity, it is found that school ethos predicts wellbeing with a strong beta weight of .39 ($p<.001$) and an additional increase in the coefficient of determination (R^2) of $R^2 = .13$. This finding is stronger than that concluded by Gutman and Feinstein (2008), and Smyth (2015), and suggests a key significant link between student attitude toward school ethos and student wellbeing.

Conclusion to Chapter Seven

Wellbeing is a multi-dimensional construct, challenging to define, measure and assess; yet is central to much education policy. Wellbeing in the educational setting is

considered of reciprocal and mutual value, the student's wellbeing affecting the school life across all four dimensions of culture, curriculum, relationships, and policy and planning (Department of Education and Skills, 2019), and these same four dimensions affecting the wellbeing of the school's student cohort, and the wellbeing of the individual student.

The analysis of findings from the employment of the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010) in Anglican primary schools in the Church of Ireland leads to six key conclusions.

First, this empirical research has demonstrated that the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* is a suitable and reliable scale for measuring the wellbeing of 4th, 5th, and 6th class students in Irish primary schools.

Second, the first part of this chapter's research question can be answered: Do students in Church of Ireland primary schools demonstrate good levels of wellbeing? It was found that students in Church of Ireland primary schools had an overall positive level of wellbeing (Mean 45.0 *SD* 6.9); this mean score exceeds the mid-point score of the scale (36.0). It was recorded that 2% of students demonstrated poor mental health.

Third, the research has shown that overall student wellbeing is not affected by sex. A decline in overall wellbeing between 4th class and 6th class was recorded, this was found to be significant in terms of girls and not boys.

The fourth conclusion is that student attitudes toward Christianity, as a measure of religiosity, which may be supported by church attendance and personal prayer, is a strong predictor of student wellbeing.

The fifth conclusion is that students attending smaller schools (<100 students) demonstrated lower levels of wellbeing than those who attended larger schools. Boys were particularly affected by this, in terms of their wellbeing.

The final conclusion answers the second element of the research question: Does school ethos have an impact on student wellbeing? It was demonstrated that school ethos (as operationalised through one cohesive ethos scale with a foundation in the adapted *Lankshear Student Voice Scales*) had a significant impact on student wellbeing. The connection between school-based factors and wellbeing is small, however not unimportant when set in the context of the quantity of time children spend in school (Adams, 2013), and in the context of the published research which hypothesised that school ethos can act as a protective factor in terms of wellbeing (Suldo et al., 2012), especially for students who have low levels of wellbeing (Gutman & Feinstein, 2008).

This empirical study and its findings confirm the Department of Education and Skills (2019) statement that "the school, situated within the community can be a powerful context for healthy development in enhancing protective factors and minimising risks" (p. 12), and that "primary school experiences matter" and have an impact on influencing wellbeing in the present and in the future (Smyth, 2015, p. 69). This finding may be of benefit to stakeholders in Church of Ireland primary schools as they consider the articulation of their school ethos, and take on wellbeing themes in their day-to-day school life and curriculum.

Conclusion

This research study is situated in the Republic of Ireland, specifically within the Church of Ireland (Anglican) primary school sector. Rooted in a complex and historic educational structure based on a system of school patronage, the Church of Ireland primary school occupies a small niche in educational provision, serving less than 3% of the enrolled school population. Each Church of Ireland primary school is legally required to have a published ethos statement, which is approved by its school patron, the diocesan bishop (Government of Ireland, 1998).

The overall aims of this research study were to investigate what was understood by the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school, and to consider how this ethos was experienced by the student population of these schools. As the first large-scale, student-focussed study to capture data from Church of Ireland primary schools, it is located in a clear gap in the limited research on school ethos in Ireland. It provides a detailed narrative of the Church of Ireland primary school at a particular point in history, 150 years after the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, and five months before Covid-19 impacted on the education system and wider society.

The empirical research captured the overall narrative of the lived experience of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school, as it was voiced by its students. Its conclusions are of potential value to a number of stakeholders in the user community. First, the students (present and future) will recognise their voice as being of importance in dialogue about school ethos. Second, the findings may be of use to the Church of Ireland and its school patrons, particularly in reference to themes of identity and school ethos. Finally, the research may be of value to school principals and members of the school communities, who are responsible for articulating and supporting the ethos of their schools on behalf of the patron. This research also supports a positive and practical attitude towards including the student voice in school dialogue about ethos, which may be of value in future school self-evaluation activities.

The research study is also of value to the Anglican primary school research community as it effectively tested the reliability and validity of three research instruments, and thus adds evidence-based findings to the academy of research into Anglican primary school ethos.

This research study was structured in seven chapters, each chapter's research question and core findings are presented in this conclusion. Four final summarising conclusions from the study will then be outlined.

Chapters one, two, and three located the research in its historical and educational context, and primarily investigated the explicit elements of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school. Key themes and questions were raised, and these formed the basis for the empirical research, data collection, and analysis, which were presented in chapters four, five, six, and seven.

Chapter One

In chapter one, the research question was to investigate and present the context for the research study. Key historic events and factors, which had, or continue to have, an impact on the Irish education system, and in particular on the Church of Ireland primary school, were investigated. There are three conclusions.

First, the State education system, which began in 1831, was a complex plan. Its fall-outs led to separation rather than inclusion, its legacy remains in the structure of the education system today, organised in terms of school patronage and predominantly denominationally divided. This is how the Church of Ireland primary school has historically occupied, and is still located in, a distinct niche in the State education system.

Second, the enactment of the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) was core to the provision of an organised, legislated structure to the education system, including the delegation of the task of expressing a school's characteristic spirit (or ethos) to the patron.

Third, as over two-thirds of Church of Ireland primary schools have an enrolment of less than 100 students, the descriptor of "small school with multi-grade classrooms" is applicable to most of these schools, particularly in rural areas, this factor was important to consider in the data collection and analysis.

The key implication for stakeholders is that those involved in a Church of Ireland primary school need to develop a clear understanding of their school's identity, articulate their school ethos effectively, and positively recognise the niche of provision the Church of Ireland primary school occupies in the crowded educational marketplace.

Chapter Two

In chapter two, the research question was to examine the construct of school ethos, with a focus on the explicit ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school. The construct of ethos was found to be composed of explicit or prescribed elements, and implicit or lived experience elements of ethos. The explicit elements were shown to have been prescribed by the State, particularly through legislation, and by the Church of

Ireland, most notably though central church statements and by individual patrons. Analysis of published ethos statements demonstrated an emphasis on a number of explicit elements of school ethos, common to all Church of Ireland schools.

The key implication for stakeholders is that the existence of prescribed ethos statements, uniformly issued by school patrons, suggests that school ethos has not been subject to in-school dialogue. Without such dialogue, as had been recommended by Coolahan et al. (2012), the school ethos statement does not include the lived experiences of those in the school community, and those in the school community do not take on the necessary ownership of the ethos statement of their school.

Five key elements of the prescribed ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school emerged from the review of the literature and the analysis of published ethos statements: the school's identity as a Church of Ireland school, the diversity and inclusion provided for and experienced in the school community, the importance of parish-school links, regular experiences of religious based practices including religious education and school assembly, and the promotion of core values grounded in Christianity.

Chapter Three

In chapter three, the primary research question was: What are the core elements of the ethos of an Anglican primary school? Very little literature exists pertaining to the Church of Ireland primary school and its ethos, therefore the themes of school ethos raised in chapter two were investigated by exploring published literature relating to the ethos of Church of England (also Anglican) primary schools. It was first noted that church school inspection takes place in England and includes inspection of school ethos and collective worship, and that school inspection in Ireland intentionally avoids any religious or denominational aspects of the school day.

The first theme of school identity was analysed in terms of the Church of England construct of 'distinctiveness'. It was concluded that many of the elements of distinctiveness, as identified in Church of England schools, were also present in ethos statements in Church of Ireland primary schools, however, unlike in Church of England schools, there were no inspection criteria, descriptors of quality, or guidance for self-evaluation in Church of Ireland schools.

The second theme of inclusion was analysed, apparent in Church of England primary schools in the balancing of service and nurture roles, and in both Church of England and Church of Ireland primary schools in terms of welcoming students of all

religions and none. The issues that arise in both school contexts are similar: the challenges of balancing the rituals and lived experiences of a church school, with a positive approach to diversity and inclusion.

The third theme explored the sense of a mission role for the church school and the importance of parish-school links, these emerged clearly in the literature from the Church of England context, in phrases such as "partnerships" (Church of England, 2022b) and "collaborations" (Casson et al., 2020). The parish-school link was found to be frequently highlighted in ethos statements and in submissions by the Church of Ireland (see Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, 2011), however, unlike in the Church of England, where this was included as an element of the inspection process, there was no published guidance for sustaining and supporting parish-school links.

The fourth theme investigated in this chapter was worship. It was noted that collective worship in England was a required element in the school day, and subject to inspection. In Ireland, there was no such requirement, although school assembly is a regular practice, and frequently articulated in school ethos statements as occasions when the rector visits school. Where school assembly takes place in schools in Ireland, it is not subject to any guidelines, policies, or quality evaluation.

The final theme investigated in this chapter was that of values. With lists of values emerging in literature from both the Church of England and Church of Ireland contexts, it was concluded that values required "a coherent and rigorous sense of purpose underpinning them" (Church of England, 2015) so they did not become "simplistic or all-purpose" as warned by Colton (2011). Wilkinson (2021) identified 18 different values emerging from ethos statements from Church of Ireland schools, noting that the majority of schools did not provide a rationale or purpose for the values they listed.

A framework for the explicit ethos of a Church of Ireland school was presented. The individual school has certainty about its Christian identity, promotes inclusion, regards parish-school links as important, values worship (school assembly) and religious education, and holds to a set of core values with a foundation in Christianity, that are regarded as important to the school community.

The key implication for the stakeholder community is that, largely due to the lack of inspection and evaluation of the elements of the aspired ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school, guidance across all elements of the framework would be

beneficial for schools to effectively engage with, and develop their understanding of, school ethos.

Chapter Four

In chapter four, the primary research question was to locate the research within the field of empirical research, and to identify the key research questions that were to be investigated. Chapter four therefore acted as a bridge between the literature and the empirical research components of this study. The literature had provided a clear model of the explicit components of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school. The aim of this research study was to interrogate the student voice about their attitudes toward, and lived experiences of, the ethos of their schools, and therefore add depth and dialogue to the explicit elements of ethos.

Lundy's (2007) model of student participation, emphasising four components of space, voice, audience, and influence, was regarded as being central to the effective operationalisation of the study, as it was located within the field of student voice research in Ireland. School self-evaluation was also introduced as an emerging context within which the student voice is being heard in Ireland. The study was also situated within the field of Anglican primary school student voice research, as pioneered in Wales by Lankshear and Francis (see Lankshear, 2017; Francis et al., 2022; Lankshear et al., 2021).

The core research question was identified, along with the instruments that were to be included in the study. The overarching research question was identified as: What are the key elements of the ethos of the Church of Ireland school as articulated through student attitudes and lived experiences?

Four embedded questions were also raised, to be separately investigated:

1. Who attends Church of Ireland primary schools and what ethos-related activities are found in these schools (i.e. religious education, school assembly, parish-school links)?
2. What is the student experience of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school?
3. Are Church of Ireland primary schools Christian in ethos?
4. Do students in Church of Ireland primary schools demonstrate good levels of wellbeing, and does school ethos have an impact on student wellbeing?

In terms of research methodology, quantitative research methods were selected for three reasons. First, this was consistent with the work by other researchers in the

field of Anglican school ethos; second, to ensure objectivity and distance for the researcher in the small minority community of Church of Ireland primary schools. Finally, these methods allowed for the collection and analysis of numerical data, to provide descriptive and correlational research, and to test hypotheses raised by the research questions. The data were collected through paper surveys in November 2019.

To ensure broad geographical spread, all Church of Ireland primary schools were invited to participate in the study. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Warwick in January 2019. The survey was piloted in June 2019 and amendments made. The final survey contained a number of sections with separate themes and instruments, each designed to investigate one of the embedded questions. The opening section gathered personal information about the participant, and personal information about the school. Other sections presented a school ethos survey adapted from the *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* (Lankshear et al., 2017), the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* (Francis, 1978a, 1978b), and the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010).

In total, 3,249 unspoiled surveys were received (1,609 boys, 1,629 girls, 11 did not state gender). 1,072 students were in 4th class, 1,065 students from 5th class and 1,101 students were in 6th class (10 students did not state the class).

The first research question investigated was: Who attends Church of Ireland primary schools and what ethos-related activities are found in these schools (i.e. religious education, school assembly, parish-school links)? The biographical and school-based survey sections were analysed under three headings: first, the diversity of population in terms of gender, age, and religious affiliation (measured through reported attendance at a place of worship); second, parish-school links, measured through reported attendance at school church services and rector visits to school; and third, religious practices in school, measured through reported frequency of school assembly and religious education. These findings were presented, along with associated implications for the stakeholder community.

In terms of religious identity, the overall national picture of the Church of Ireland primary school was that it served a mostly Christian and predominantly protestant population, and that it also served those of no religious affiliation. In terms of parish-school links, the link between school and parish church was concluded to be strong, with the vast majority of students attending school carol services and other services, and the rector attending school assembly in almost all schools. In terms of

school religious practices directly linked to explicit expressions of the Church of Ireland ethos, almost nine-tenths of schools held weekly assemblies and more than half of schools taught religious education at least once a week.

These findings prove that the framework of school ethos, as discussed in chapter three (diversity of population in terms of religious affiliation, parish-school links, rector visits, school assembly, and religious education), was experienced by most students in Church of Ireland primary schools. The key implication for stakeholders is that the Church of Ireland should resource and support schools, principals, and teachers in these core areas of school ethos.

This analysis was frequency-based and described what happened in the schools; the analysis in chapters five, six, and seven, added another layer to the dialogue: the student voice and student attitudes toward school ethos.

Chapters Five, Six, and Seven.

Three key instruments were included in the empirical study, and chapters five, six, and seven each focussed on one instrument and one element of the student experience of the Church of Ireland primary school. In chapter five, the student voice about school ethos was investigated; in chapter six, student attitudes toward Christianity were explored; and in chapter seven, a study was undertaken, focussed on the overall student experience of wellbeing in the Church of Ireland primary school, to investigate the potential impact of school ethos on wellbeing.

Chapter Five

In chapter five, the research question was: What is the student experience of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school? Factors that potentially affected the student experience of school ethos were examined, and conclusions formed.

Data were collected from a nine-scale instrument, adapted and extended from the *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* employed by Lankshear in Church in Wales primary schools (Lankshear, 2017). There are four core conclusions with potential value for the Church of Ireland school community and patron body, and for the broader research academy involved in investigating the ethos of Anglican primary schools.

First, this study enabled the student voice to be heard at a particular point in time, demonstrated a methodology for articulating the lived experience of students in Church of Ireland primary schools, and captured student attitudes toward the ethos of Church of Ireland primary schools. Nine key themes pertaining to school ethos were

identified, and these could be developed into guideline descriptor statements and self-evaluation frameworks for schools under Church of Ireland patronage.

Second, the study confirmed the reliability and validity of the adapted *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* (Lankshear, 2017) for use in the Republic of Ireland. All scales reported high levels of internal consistency reliability. The adapted scales included a new 11-item scale to measure attitudes toward religious education, and an extended 7-item scale to measure attitudes toward school assembly. These two scales were internally reliable and are commended to the research academy for use in other contexts.

Third, the research question asked: What is the student experience of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school? Students in Church of Ireland primary schools were found to have positive attitudes toward the ethos of their school in the nine core areas: attitude toward the general character of the school, attitude toward the religious character of the school, attitude toward the experience of school, attitude toward the teachers, attitude toward relationships in school, attitude toward the stewardship of creation, attitude toward the stewardship of the school, attitude toward school assembly, and attitude toward religious education.

Answering this question has provided an opportunity for the construct of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school to "move beyond aspirational statements about the kind of ethos it would like its schools to reflect, to descriptive statements about the lived-experience of the students and how they perceive the ethos of the school they attend" (Francis et al., 2021, p. 15). It was concluded that girls were more positive than boys toward the ethos of their school, and that 4th class students were more positive than those in 5th and 6th classes, particularly in relation to religious education and school assembly.

Finally, some areas of school ethos received less positive levels of endorsement, including elements of Christian ethos (the importance of the bible, prayer and the church), school assembly, and religious education. Francis et al. (2022) had come to similar conclusions and commented that "further reflection on these items may result in Anglican schools agreeing that such issues are not really core to their school ethos, or in Anglican schools exploring how students' perceptions may be enhanced in such areas" (p. 95). This is a core recommendation for the Church of Ireland community to consider, as the highlighted elements are seen frequently in ethos statements.

Chapter Six

In chapter six, the research question was: Are Church of Ireland primary schools Christian in ethos? This question was underpinned by the hypothesis, proposed by Lankshear et al. (2018), that assessing student attitude toward Christianity provided an indicator of the Christian ethos of the school. Data were collected using the instrument, the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* (Francis, 1978a; 1978b). Factors that affected student attitudes toward Christianity were identified and examined, providing greater understanding of the findings and implications of the research.

There are four core key findings with potential value for the Church of Ireland school community and patron, and for the broader research academy investigating the ethos of Anglican primary schools.

First, the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* is a reliable and valid instrument to measure the religiosity of 4th class, 5th class, and 6th class students (10-years to13-years) in Anglican schools in the Republic of Ireland, thus introducing the instrument in a new context.

Second, the majority of the students demonstrated a positive attitude toward Christianity. Since assessing student attitudes may provide an "indicator of school ethos" and "assessment of student attitudes provided insight into the culture and climate of schools" by reflecting and informing the ethos of the school (Lankshear et al., 2018, pp. 112-113); this hypothesis is supported in a new context which is of value to those investigating the ethos of Anglican schools. It also confirms that the Church of Ireland primary school in 2019 was, in practice, "Christian in ethos" (Board of Education of the Church of Ireland, 2017, p. 1).

Third, this study revealed very similar results to previous studies in Wales, in terms of the factors that predicted positive attitudes toward Christianity. It was found that girls and younger students held more positive attitudes toward Christianity than boys did and older students did. These findings add new data to the repository of the international research community. Awareness of the findings relating to the personal factors of sex and age can have implications for religious practices and religious education in primary schools, are important to share with teachers, and worthy of consideration in guidelines and curricular developments.

Fourth, the home is the central influence on attitudes toward Christianity; the study showed that religious practices of church attendance and prayer had the strongest connections with, and influence on, pupil attitudes toward Christianity. Students who

prayed on their own held a significantly more positive attitude toward Christianity than their peers who did not pray on their own, and a significantly more positive attitude toward Christianity than those who attended church. This emphasises the greater impact on religiosity of private religious practices over public religious practices, and the importance of the home in supporting positive attitudes toward Christianity. This finding serves as a pertinent reminder that maintaining the Christian ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school is largely dependent on factors outside the control of the school, and outside the control of those with oversight of its ethos, including the patron.

Chapter Seven

In chapter seven, the fourth research question was investigated: Do students in Church of Ireland primary schools demonstrate good levels of wellbeing, and does school ethos have an impact on student wellbeing?

The school's culture and ethos was regarded as playing a key role in supporting and enhancing the wellbeing of its students (Department of Education and Skills, 2015), and the aim of this study was to investigate the levels of student wellbeing in Church of Ireland primary schools. It was also planned to add to the research literature that suggested connections between school ethos and wellbeing (e.g. Gutman & Feinstein, 2008; Smyth, 2015). The data were collected using the instrument, the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010).

This chapter had four core key findings, with potential value for the Church of Ireland school community and patron body, and for the broader research academy investigating the ethos of Anglican primary schools.

First, the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010) was found to be reliable, thus proving its inclusion in the study. This has value for the research community as it introduces a child-friendly, short, and reliable scale into educational research into wellbeing in Ireland.

Second, the students had an overall positive level of wellbeing, although 2% of students demonstrated poor psychological wellbeing. These findings would be of interest to the school community and to the patron body, and add to the national understanding of children's wellbeing, mostly found in research from longitudinal studies such as *Children's School Lives* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, and *Growing Up in Ireland* (Economic and Social Research Institute).

Third, the overall student wellbeing scores were not found to be affected by sex, but there was a decline in wellbeing noted between 4th class and 6th class, which was

significant in terms of girls but not boys. Students, particularly boys, who attended smaller schools (<100 students) demonstrated lower levels of wellbeing than those in larger schools. This finding, although only based on one dimension of wellbeing, is of importance to the Church of Ireland sector, which has a high proportion of small schools, and is also of relevance in the national debate about the future of small schools.

Fourth, school ethos (as operationalised through one cohesive ethos scale) had a significant impact on student wellbeing. The implications of this are of relevance to the research community, supporting the limited research that suggests a link between church school ethos and wellbeing. Further research is recommended, potentially across different school types, to expand the field of research into the impact of school ethos on student wellbeing.

Research Conclusion: Four Key Findings

The overall aim of this research study was to investigate what was understood by the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school as experienced by, and articulated through the voice of the students. This research study had a unique focus on the previously un-studied, student voice from the Church of Ireland primary school population, and fills a gap in the research on school ethos in Ireland. It furthermore adds a new study to the international field of research in Anglican primary school ethos. In this final section of the conclusion, there are four key findings presented.

First, the students in Church of Ireland primary schools have positive attitudes towards the ethos of their schools, demonstrate positive levels of psychological wellbeing, and hold positive attitudes toward Christianity. This shows the schools are working well in terms of ethos and wellbeing, and are Christian in ethos. These findings are important and relevant to all involved in supporting the Church of Ireland primary school, from the Church of Ireland central bodies and school patrons, to those directly involved in the school communities, especially the students.

Second, as was demonstrated in the findings from each survey instrument (chapters five, six, and seven), the in-depth analysis of the research data has provided new understanding about the factors affecting student attitudes toward their schools. Consideration of these factors is of importance for the Church of Ireland patrons, for those in the research academy investigating in this field, and for those interested in the promotion of student voice in self-evaluation and dialogue about school ethos.

Third, three instruments have been employed in this research study in primary schools in Ireland, demonstrating their reliability in this context and furthering the

literature supporting their validity as instruments. The *Lankshear Student Voice Scales* (adapted from Lankshear, 2017), *The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* (Francis, 1978a; 1978b), and the *Stirling Children's Well-being Scale* (Liddle & Carter, 2010) are all commended as research instruments in Anglican primary schools.

Fourth, this study has demonstrated the value and importance of listening to the student voice about their lived experiences of the ethos of the Church of Ireland primary school. The study has opened the potential for student involvement in policy and in self-evaluation processes, as well as in dialogue with stakeholders in the Church of Ireland primary school. It was proposed that, with the inclusion of the student voice, articulated ethos statements may become organic and school-specific. They will encompass and support the explicit and prescribed dimensions of school ethos, but will add the critical layers of unique school-based content, firmly rooted in dialogue with the lived experiences of the students.

Appendix A

The Survey

Primary Attitudes Survey

2019

Dear Student.

In this survey you will find lots of questions about you and your family and your school

You are not to put your name anywhere on the survey

Please be as honest as you can in filling out the survey and don't compare your answers with what anyone else writes.

You only need a pencil or pen. If you change your mind just cross out your first choice and make it clear which answer you have chosen.

There are not right and wrong answers for a lot of these questions – it is your attitudes and feelings that are important

This is an important survey as it really helps me to find out what students in schools all across Ireland are thinking about God, about their schools, and about what they do in assembly and RE. Your answers will help us all think about what is important in our schools now and as we plan for the future.

Jacqui Wilkinson

PART 1: Here are a few questions about you. Where there is a choice please answer by placing a tick (✓) in the right box.

Are you a boy or girl?	1	boy	
	2	girl	

What class are you in?	6	6th	
	5	5th	
	4	4th	

Do you go to a place of worship (e.g. a church) by yourself or with your family? Don't include school services in your answer.	4	Yes weekly	
	3	Yes at least once a month	
	2	Yes sometimes	
	1	No never	

If you go to a place of worship, what sort of place of worship do you go to?	1	Baptist	
	2	Church of Ireland	
	3	Methodist	
	4	Roman Catholic	
	5	Presbyterian	
	6	Other (Write in the name)	

Does your **mother** go to a place of worship (e.g. a church) apart from special occasions like weddings?	3	Yes, weekly	
	2	Yes, sometimes	
	1	No, never	

Does your **father** go to a place of worship (e.g. a church) apart from special occasions like weddings?	3	Yes, weekly	
	2	Yes, sometimes	
	1	No, never	

Do you pray when you are on your own?	4	Yes, every day	
	3	Yes, at least once a week	
	2	Yes, sometimes	

	1	No, never	

If you pray **on your own** when do you most often pray? Tick only **ONE** box	6	when I wake up	
	5	in the morning	
	4	in the afternoon	
	3	in the evening	
	2	when I go to bed	
	1	when I can't sleep	

What do you most often say when you pray? Tick only **ONE** box	6	A prayer my family say	
	5	A prayer from church	
	4	A prayer from school	
	3	I make up my own prayer	
	2	I say the Lord's Prayer	
	1	I am silent	

In school how frequently do you have Religious Education (Religion/ R.E.)?	5	every day	
	4	more than once a week	
	3	once a week	
	2	sometimes	
	1	never	

Do you have school assembly?	5	every day	
	4	more than once a week	
	3	once a week	
	2	sometimes	
	1	never	

Does the rector come to your school assemblies?	3	Yes, every assembly	
	2	Yes, some assemblies	
	1	No. never	

In the past year have you been to the Church of Ireland church with your class or school for the following events?	Yes	No
School assembly		
Christmas carol service		
Easter service		
End of school year service		
Other church service		
RE lesson		
Other school subject		

PART 2 Here are some statements or descriptions about how you might have been feeling or thinking about things over the past couple of weeks. For each one please put a tick in the box
which best describes your thoughts and feelings; there are not right or wrong answers.

	All of the time	**Quite a lot of the time**	**Some of the time**	**Not much of the time**	**Never**
I think good things will happen in my life					
I have always told the truth					
I've been able to make choices easily					
I can find lots of fun things to do					
I feel that I am good at some things					
I think lots of people care for me					
I like everyone I have met					
I think there are many things that I can be proud of					
I've been feeling calm					
I've been in a good mood					
I enjoy what each new day brings					
I've been getting on well with people					
I always share my sweets					

I've been feeling cheerful about things					
I've been feeling relaxed					

PART 3: These questions are about you and what you <u>feel</u> about things that take place in your school. Please read the sentence carefully and think 'how true is this for how I feel?'

If you *Agree Strongly*, put a ring round	**AS**	A	NC	D	DS
If you *Agree*, put a ring round	AS	**A**	NC	D	DS
If you are *Not Certain*, put a ring round	AS	A	**NC**	D	DS
If you *Disagree*, put a ring round	AS	A	NC	**D**	DS
If you *Disagree Strongly*, put a ring round	AS	A	NC	D	**DS**

My school is a really caring school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE I enjoy Bible stories	AS	A	NC	D	DS
School assembly is very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
The teachers in my school care a lot for all the students	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to respect other people	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to respect things that grow	AS	A	NC	D	DS
At my school we are proud of our school grounds	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school the rules are fair	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In assembly I enjoy being with the whole school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE it is important to learn about Christmas and Easter	AS	A	NC	D	DS
Prayer is very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school I can be myself	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to respect other people's things	AS	A	NC	D	DS

My school teaches me to respect wonderful things	AS	A	NC	D	DS
At my school we are proud of our classrooms	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In assembly I enjoy visits from the rector	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE I enjoy saying prayers	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE it is important to learn about God	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE it is important to learn about other religions	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school is a really friendly school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
God is very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school is a peaceful place	AS	A	NC	D	DS
The teachers in my school care a lot for the world around us	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to care for other people	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to care for the world around us	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In assembly singing is important to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE it is important to hear and read Bible stories	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE it is important to learn about the church	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school is a really welcoming school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE I enjoy learning about the church	AS	A	NC	D	DS
Jesus is very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school is a safe place	AS	A	NC	D	DS
The teachers in my school care a lot for the school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school we value each other	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to take care of plants	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In assembly being quiet and still is important to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE it is important to learn about Jesus	AS	A	NC	D	DS

In RE my beliefs are respected	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school treats every child fairly	AS	A	NC	D	DS
Church is very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school looks good	AS	A	NC	D	DS
When I do well in school my teacher praises me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
Caring for others is very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to take care of animals	AS	A	NC	D	DS
At my school we are proud when our school looks tidy	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In assembly listening to the Bible is important to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school treats every child with respect	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE I enjoy singing	AS	A	NC	D	DS
The Bible is very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school is a clean place	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school we care a lot for each other	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to take care of insects	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In assembly saying prayers is important to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school treats every child kindly	AS	A	NC	D	DS
Christmas and Easter are very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I like coming to my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school I can go to my teacher when I am unhappy	AS	A	NC	D	DS
At my school we are proud when our school looks clean	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school I know that people care for me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me not to waste things	AS	A	NC	D	DS
At my school we are proud when our school looks good	AS	A	NC	D	DS

In assembly I enjoy the songs we sing	AS	A	NC	D	DS

PART 4: Some more questions about how you feel about things? Remember please read the sentence carefully and think 'how true is this for how I feel?'

I find it boring to listen to the bible	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I know that Jesus helps me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
Saying my prayers helps me a lot	AS	A	NC	D	DS
The church is very important to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I think going to church is a waste of my time	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I want to love Jesus	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I think church services are boring	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I think people who pray are stupid	AS	A	NC	D	DS
God helps me to lead a better life	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I like to learn about God very much	AS	A	NC	D	DS
God means a lot to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I believe that God helps people	AS	A	NC	D	DS
Prayer helps me a lot	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I know that Jesus is very close to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I think praying is a good thing	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I think the bible is out of date	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I believe that God listens to prayers	AS	A	NC	D	DS
Jesus doesn't mean anything to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
God is very real to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I think saying prayers does no good	AS	A	NC	D	DS
The idea of God means much to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I believe that Jesus still helps people	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I know that God helps me	AS	A	NC	D	DS

I find it hard to believe in God	AS	A	NC	D	DS

Do you have any comments to make about this questionnaire?

Thank you for filling out this questionnaire.

Appendix B

Pilot Study Ethos Scales

These questions are about you and what you <u>feel</u> about things that take place in your school. Please read the sentence carefully and think 'how true is this for how I feel?'

If you *Agree Strongly*, put a ring round	**AS**	A	NC	D	DS
If you *Agree*, put a ring round	AS	**A**	NC	D	DS
If you are *Not Certain*, put a ring round	AS	A	**NC**	D	DS
If you *Disagree*, put a ring round	AS	A	NC	**D**	DS
If you *Disagree Strongly*, put a ring round	AS	A	NC	D	**DS**

My school is a really good school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE I enjoy Bible stories	AS	A	NC	D	DS
School assembly is very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
The teachers in my school care a lot for all the children	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to respect other people	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to respect things that grow	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school we take pride in our school grounds	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school the rules are fair	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In assembly I enjoy being with the whole school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE it is important to learn about Christmas and Easter	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school is a really caring school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
Prayer is very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school I can be myself	AS	A	NC	D	DS
The teachers in my school care a lot for each other	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to respect other people's things	AS	A	NC	D	DS

My school teaches me to respect wonderful things	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school we take pride in our classrooms	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In assembly I enjoy visits from the rector	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE I enjoy saying prayers	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE it is important to ask questions about God	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE learning about other people's beliefs is important to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school is a really friendly school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
God is very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school is a peaceful place	AS	A	NC	D	DS
The teachers in my school care a lot for the world around us	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to care for other people	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to care for the world around us	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school we take pride in our school displays	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In assembly singing is important to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE it is important to read Bible stories	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE it is important to learn about the church	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school is a really welcoming school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE I enjoy learning about the church and church services	AS	A	NC	D	DS
Jesus is very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school is a safe place	AS	A	NC	D	DS
The teachers in my school care a lot for the school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school we value each other	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to take care of plants	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school we take pride in our school hall	AS	A	NC	D	DS

In assembly being quiet and still is important to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE it is important to learn about Jesus	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE my beliefs are respected	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school treats every child fairly	AS	A	NC	D	DS
Church is very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school looks good	AS	A	NC	D	DS
When I do well in my school the teachers praise me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
Caring for others is very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to take care of animals	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school we take pride in the school looking tidy	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In assembly listening to the Bible is important to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school treats every child with respect	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In RE I enjoy singing	AS	A	NC	D	DS
The Bible is very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school is a clean place	AS	A	NC	D	DS
When I do well in my school the adults praise me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school we care a lot for each other	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me to take care of insects	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school we take pride in the school looking clean	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In assembly having prayers is important to me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school treats every child kindly	AS	A	NC	D	DS
Christmas and Easter are very important in my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I like coming to my school	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school I can go to my teachers when I am unhappy	AS	A	NC	D	DS

In my school I know that people care for me	AS	A	NC	D	DS
My school teaches me not to waste things	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school we take pride in our school looking good	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In my school I can go to the adults when I am unhappy	AS	A	NC	D	DS
In assembly I enjoy the songs we sing	AS	A	NC	D	DS
I like when my class leads assembly for the school	AS	A	NC	D	DS

Appendix C

The Lankshear Student Voice Scales:

Questionnaire statements issued to Church in Wales schools in 2016

General School Ethos

My school is a really good school

My school is a really caring school

My school is a really friendly school

My school is a really welcoming school

My school treats each child fairly

My school treats every child with respect

My school treats every child kindly

Christian Ethos

Worship is very important in my school

Prayer is very important in my school

God is very important in my school

Jesus is very important in my school

Church is very important in my school

The Bible is very important in my school

Christian Festivals are very important in my school

Personal Experience

In my school the rules are fair

In my school I can be myself

My school is a peaceful place

My school is a safe place

My school looks good

My school is a clean place

I like coming to my school

Personal Experience of Staff

The teachers in my school care a lot for all the children

The teachers in my school care a lot for each other
The teachers in my school care a lot for the world around us
The teachers in my school care a lot about the school
When I do well in my school the teachers praise me
When I do well in my school the grown-ups praise me
In my school I can go to the teachers when I am unhappy
In my school I can go to the grown-ups when I am unhappy

Relationships
My school teaches me to respect other people
My school teaches me to respect other peoples' things
My school teaches me to care for other people
At my school we value each other
Caring for others is very important in my school
In my school we care a lot for each other
In my school I know people care for me

Teaching about the Stewardship of Creation
My school teaches me to respect things that grow
My school teaches me to respect wonderful things
My school teaches me to care for the world around us
My school teaches me to take care of plants
My school teaches me to take care of animals
My school teaches me to take care of insects
My school teaches me not to waste things

Experience of Stewardship of Environment
At my school we are proud of our school grounds
In my school we take pride in our classrooms
In my school we take pride in our school displays
In my school we take pride in our school hall
In my school we take pride in our school looking tidy
In my school we take pride in our school looking clean

In our school we take pride in our school looking good

School Worship

In assemblies I enjoy being with the whole school

In assemblies I enjoy visits from the vicar

In assemblies singing is important to me

In assemblies being quiet and still is important to me

In assemblies listening to the Bible is important to me

In assemblies having prayers in important to me

In assemblies I enjoy the sings we sing

Appendix D

Participant Information Leaflet for Schools

Participant Information Leaflet for Schools

Study Title: **Establishing, developing and maintaining the ethos and identity of Church of Ireland primary schools: the student voice**.

Investigator: **Jacqui Wilkinson**

Introduction

Your school and its students are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information.

Who is organising and funding the study?

My name is Jacqui Wilkinson, I lecture in Religious Education and am based in the Church of Ireland Centre in Dublin City University. I am conducting this study as part of a doctoral thesis in the University of Warwick.

What is the study about?

Church of Ireland primary schools are required to have an ethos statement. This study is about listening to the students and adding their attitudes and voice about ethos topics to the discussion.

What would taking part involve?

Taking part would involve the school receiving questionnaires for students in 4th, 5th and 6th classes to complete in class time with parental permission. The questionnaires should be completed anonymously, not read by teachers and returned to the researcher.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

The benefits of taking part in this study are that the students' voices about ethos will be heard. The Department of Education and Skills and the NCCA both advocate listening to students in policy development and this is an example of how this can take place.

Each school is unique and a further benefit to the individual school is that if wished they may receive analysis of their own school's data in relation to the national data. This could help individual schools as they work to develop and maintain their identity as Church of Ireland schools and compose the necessary policy documents.

It is very important to the research study that as many questionnaires are completed as possible to add strength to the analysis and results, by taking part your school adds its unique voice to the study.

What are the possible disadvantages, side effects or risks, of taking part in this study? There are no disadvantages or risks, of taking part in this study. No individual school will be identified in the thesis or any related papers. There are no consequences if you choose not to participate, neither will your school be identified as not participating.

Expenses and payments

There are no payments for participating in the study, however the school should not incur any expenses as all questionnaires will be returned in stamped addressed envelopes.

Will my school's taking part be kept confidential?

- The data will be collected by anonymous paper questionnaires. If any questionnaires have names on them they will be seen as spoiled and immediately shredded.
- The school will be identified on the questionnaire by a code for the purposes of filing of data. These codes will be kept securely and stored separately to the research data. • Data will be input into password locked computer files and stored on the researcher's computer. Paper questionnaires will be retained for the duration of the research study and these will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's office. At the end of the research study they will be shredded using a confidential shredder facility.
- Only the researcher and her supervisor will be able to access the data.
- There is no possibility that an individual or school will be identifiable in the thesis or any papers resulting from the research.
- Any school that declines to participate will not be named.
- If a school wishes to have feedback on their individual school's data analysis in relation to the national findings this may be requested and facilitated.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the study are primarily for a doctoral thesis and it is also intended to present the findings to at least one conference and to publish at least one academic paper.

Who should I contact if I want further information?

If you want further information do contact Jacqui Wilkinson (Jacqueline.wilkinson@dcu.ie).

Who should I contact if I wish to make a complaint?

Any complaint about the way you have been dealt with during the study will be addressed.
Please address your complaint to the study supervisor.

The Revd Canon Professor Leslie J. Francis, PhD, DLitt, ScD, DD, FBPsS, FAcSS
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Thank you for taking the time to read this Participant Information Leaflet.

Appendix E

Parental Consent Forms and Survey Instructions for Teachers

Dear parent/ guardian

Your school and its students are invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for the students. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and talk to your school principal if you have any questions.

Who is organising and funding the study?

My name is Jacqui Wilkinson and I work as a lecturer in the Church of Ireland Centre in Dublin City University. I am conducting this study as part of a doctoral thesis in the University of Warwick.

What is the study about?

Church of Ireland primary schools are required to have an ethos statement. This study is about listening to the students and adding their attitudes and voice about ethos topics to the discussion.

What would taking part involve?

Taking part would involve the students in 4th, 5th and 6th classes completing questionnaires in class time with your permission. The questionnaires will be completed anonymously, they will not read by teachers and will be returned to the researcher. If you do not wish your child to be involved, please let his/her class teacher know.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

The benefit of taking part in this study is that it allows each pupil's voice to be heard, and their attitudes towards ethos to be included in the project.

What are the possible disadvantages, side effects or risks, of taking part in this study?

There are no disadvantages or risks, of taking part in this study. No individual child or individual school will be identified in the thesis or any related papers. There are no consequences if a student chooses not to participate.

What will happen to the results of the study?

The results of the study are primarily for a doctoral thesis and it is also intended to present the findings at conferences and to publish academic papers.

Who should I contact if I want further information?

If you want further information do contact your school principal.

✂---------- ----------

I agree that my son/ daughter _____may complete the survey in class time in school.

_____ Date_____

Directions for Conducting the Survey

Study Title: **Establishing, developing and maintaining the ethos and identity of Church of Ireland primary schools: the students voice**.

Investigator: **Jacqueline Wilkinson**

Dear Class Teacher

Thank you for agreeing to facilitate the completion of this questionnaire in your classroom. It probably best fits in a RE lesson slot on your timetable. The questionnaire is designed for students in 4th, 5th and 6th classes (but if you have 3rd class in the same room they may also fill out the survey). It will take about 25-30 minutes to complete the survey.

Please ensure that all students are made aware that they are **voluntarily** filling out the survey and that they may finish at any time. Please highlight to the students that their attitudes and answers are important and personal to them, not to share answers and to be honest in filling in the survey.

Students should not put their names or any other identifying information on the sheets and should only fill in the boxes as requested.

I suggest you work through the survey section by section. You may like to explain what 'agree strongly, agree, disagree and disagree strongly' might mean to the students. Students may find using a ruler helps them select their preferred response.

When finished do remind the students that their names should not be anywhere on the pages and show the students that you are placing their questionnaires in the 'return' envelope and that you are not checking or reading their replies.
Do please then return the completed questionnaires to me as soon as possible.

Thank you again for your participation in this study.

Jacqui Wilkinson

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