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Francis, L.J., Henchley, F. and McKenna, U. (2024) *Sustaining church attendance and a positive attitude toward Christianity among students at Church of England voluntary primary schools: effects of parental church attendance and the perceived Christian character of the school*. British Journal of Religious Education. ISSN 0141-6200

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Accepted 10.12.2024: *British Journal of Religious Education*

Sustaining church attendance and a positive attitude toward Christianity among students
at Church of England voluntary primary schools: Effects of parental church attendance
and the perceived Christian character of the school

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Abstract

This study employs data provided by 531 students attending year 3, 4, 5 and 6 classes within Church of England voluntary primary schools to examine the effect of perception of the Christian character of the school and the effect of parental church attendance on sustaining church attendance and a positive attitude toward Christianity among students, after taking into account the effects of sex and age. The data demonstrated first that the main predictors of student church attendance were parental attendance (positive) and age (negative), with no additional effect for perception of the Christian ethos of the school. Second, the data demonstrated that the main predictors of a positive attitude toward Christianity were personal church attendance (positive), perception of the Christian ethos of the school (positive) and age (negative). These findings suggest that perception of the Christian ethos of the school helps to sustain a positive attitude toward Christianity, while other factors (mothers and fathers not attending church) may inhibit this positive attitude toward Christianity from translating into more frequent church attendance among students.

Keywords: faith transmission, parental influence, school influence, church schools

Introduction

The partnership between the three primary agencies of home, school, and congregation in the Christian formation and Christian education of the young has been well crystallised by the Catholic Church. The case is clearly made in primary documents from the Second Vatican Council (Tanner, 2012), including *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic constitution on the Church) and *Gravissimum Educationis* (Declaration on Christian Education). The priority among these three primary agencies may emerge differently in different social and educational contexts. Evaluating the situation within modern plural and secular societies, John Paul the Second (1981), in *Familiaris Consortia* (The role of the Christian family in the modern world), was clear in prioritising the family and drew on the terminology of *Lumen Gentium* that spoke of the family as ‘the domestic church’. Building on the foundation in *Familiaris Consortia*, John Paul the Second (1981) commented as follows:

In our own time, in a world often alien and even hostile to faith, believing families are of primary importance as centres of living, radiant faith. For this reason, the Second Vatican Council, using an ancient expression, calls the family the *Ecclesia domestica*. It is in the bosom of the family that parents are ‘by word and example ... the first heralds of the faith with regard to their children’. (*Familiaris Consortio* 1656)

From a very different ecclesial background, the primacy of the home in the Christian formation and Christian education of the young was emphasised in three recent reports published in England.

The first of these reports, *Faith in our families*, commissioned by Care for the Family (2016), was based on three sources of data: a quantitative web-based survey among 983 parents, 175 church leaders and 479 children’s workers recruited through Care for the Family’s database; qualitative research among 21 parents and 6 children’s workers who responded to open questions and kept a diary of anything that related to faith with their

children over a week; and a focus group held in Northern Ireland. The data indicated that 95% of parents considered that it was largely their responsibility to teach their children about the Christian faith. However, at the same time 92% of parents felt that they should be doing more in this regard.

In the second of these reports, *Passing on faith*, Mark (2016) reviewed the findings of 54 published studies concerned with various aspects of faith transmission. She concludes that ‘research reveals that high quality relationships in the home are key to successful faith formation’ (p. 12), the faith commitment of both parents matters, that grandparents play an important part too, and that modelling is key in the sense that parents need to be people of faith as well as to practise faith.

The third of these reports, *Growing faith: Churches, schools and households*, was a paper presented to the General Synod of the Church of England in 2019. Following on from two earlier reports that had focused attention on the role of congregations in work among young people (Church of England Education Office, 2016a) and the role of Church of England schools in work among young people (Church of England Education Office, 2016b), *Growing faith* took the stance that ‘research shows that parents have the largest influence on their children in matters of faith’ (General Synod, 2019, paragraph 11).

Wisely, however, the report presented to the General Synod of the Church of England, attempts neither to summarise nor to cite directly the research evidence on which the claim is based. From a research perspective the construct ‘matters of faith’ like the ambition for ‘growing faith’ may be problematic both to conceptualise and to operationalise. The present study stands in a particular research tradition that has focused on two outcome measures: church attendance and religious affect. Attention will now be given to these two constructs.

Measuring church attendance

A series of studies, stimulated by the Australian National Church Life Survey, has taken frequency of church attendance as the outcome measure. For example, Francis, Penny, and Powell (2018), in their report from the 2011 Australian National Church Life Survey on data provided by 6,252 8- to 14-year-old attenders, found that these data confirmed the predictive power of parental example on frequency of church attendance. Frequent attendance among young churchgoers occurred when *both* parents attended as well.

Francis, McKenna, and Powell (2020), in their report from the 2016 Australian National Life Survey, concentrated on data from 2,131 8- to 14-year-old attenders who completed surveys while attending Catholic churches. This study employed multiple regression modelling to examine the effects of home environment (in terms of family encouragement and religious engagement within the home) and parental church attendance (treating mother and fathers separately) on frequency of child church attendance. The data demonstrated that parental church attendance was the strongest predictor. Young Catholics were more likely to attend church frequently when both mother *and* father attended church frequently. At the same time, after taking parental church attendance into account, the home environment added additional predictive power. Young Catholics were most likely to attend church frequently when both parents attended church and supported faith within the home environment through both family encouragement and religious engagement within the home. After home environment and parental churchgoing had been taken into account, other factors like attending a Catholic school or engaging with online religious resources added no further positive predictive power in sustaining churchgoing among young Catholics.

Working within a somewhat different research tradition, focusing on schools rather than congregations, Francis and colleagues have reported on three studies exploring the place of the home in sustaining young Anglicans in England and Wales. In the first study, Francis (2020) employed data collected within schools in England and Wales (half of the schools

were church schools within the state-maintained sector and half were schools without a religious character within the state-maintained sector) to focus attention on those 13- to 15-year-old students who self-identified as Anglicans. This method allowed research to be undertaken among non-churchgoing young Anglicans as well as churchgoing young Anglicans. From a total sample of 7,059 students, 645 self-identified as Anglican (Church of England or Church in Wales), that is fewer than one in ten of the participants. This study employed multiple regression to take into account the effects of psychological factors (psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion) and personal factors (age and sex) before testing for the effects of parental factors and peer-related factors. These data demonstrated that young Anglicans who attended church did so mainly because their parents were Anglican churchgoers. Moreover, young Anglican churchgoers were most likely to keep going if their churchgoing parents also talked with them about their faith. Among this age group of young Anglicans peer support seemed unimportant in comparison with parental support.

In the second study, Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, and McKenna (2020) employed data provided by 2,019 9- to 11-year-old students attending 88 Church in Wales primary schools who self-identified as Anglicans. These data demonstrated that the single most important factor in sustaining churchgoing among young Anglicans was the church attendance of their mothers. The effect of maternal example was, however, augmented when fathers were also seen to support mothers' pattern of church attendance and when mothers took the opportunity within the home to talk with their children about God, Jesus, prayer, and church.

In the third study, Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, and McKenna (2020) employed data provided by 2,323 11- to 16-year-old students attending eight Church of England secondary schools, one joint Anglican-Catholic secondary school, and one secondary school operated by a Christian foundation. These data confirmed that parental church attendance provided the strongest prediction of church attendance among young Anglicans. More frequent attendance

was associated with mother attending church and with father attending church. These two factors operated cumulatively, with the stronger influence being when both parents attended church.

Also working within this research tradition, Francis and colleagues have reported on two studies exploring the place of the home in sustaining young Catholics. In one study, Byrne, Francis, Sweetman, and McKenna (2019) employed data from 1,942 students who self-identified as Catholics from among 3,000 participants to a survey conducted in the Republic of Ireland. In the other study, Francis and Casson (2019) employed data from 2,146 students who self-identified as Catholics from among 9,810 participants to a survey conducted in England, Scotland, and Wales. Both studies employed multiple regression analyses to assess the predictive power of five sets of factors: personal factors (age and sex), psychological factors (psychoticism, neuroticism, and extraversion), parental religious identity (treating mothers and fathers separately), parental religious practice, and peer-related practice. The data suggested that young Catholics who practised their Catholic identity by attending church did so largely because their parents were Catholic churchgoers. Moreover, young Catholics were most likely to keep going when both mother *and* father were Catholic churchgoers, and when they discussed faith with their mother. Peer-related factors and psychological factors added little additional predictive power to the model.

Measuring religious affect

Although church attendance may be an accessible and convenient proxy measure for growing faith during childhood and adolescence, it may fail to get to the heart of the matter. Whether or not a young person attends church services on a Sunday may be subject to a range of external or social constraints. It is for this reason that in a series of early studies Francis (1978a, 1978b) argued for prioritising a measure of religious affect rather than religious practice for operationalising the notion of religious development or growing faith during

childhood and adolescence. The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity introduced in those early studies was designed to assess affective responses to five areas: God, Jesus, Bible, prayer, and church. This 24-item Likert-style scale has been shown to be both reliable and valid among children and adolescents (Francis, 1987, 1989; Francis, Lankshear, & Eccles, 2017; Lewis, Cruise, & Lattimer, 2007; Lewis, Cruise, McGuckin, & Francis, 2006) and among adults (Francis, Lewis, Philipchalk, Brown, & Lester, 1995; Francis & Stubbs, 1987; Lewis, Cruise, & McGuckin, 2005). This instrument has also been translated into a number of languages to facilitate cross-cultural studies, including: Arabic (Munayer, 2000), Chinese (Francis, Lewis, & Ng, 2002; Tiliopoulos, Francis, & Jiang, 2013), Czech (Francis, Quesnell, & Lewis, 2010), Dutch (Francis & Hermans, 2000), French (Lewis & Francis, 2003, 2004), German (Francis & Kwiran, 1999; Francis, Ziebertz, & Lewis, 2002), Greek (Nazar, 2019; Youtika, Joseph, & Diduca, 1999), Italian (Crea, Baiocco, Ioverno, Buzzi, & Francis, 2014), Norwegian (Francis & Enger, 2002), Portugese (Ferreira & Neto, 2002), Romanian (Francis, Ispas, Robbins, Ilie, & Iliescu, 2009), Serbian (Flere, Francis, & Robbins, 2011), Slovakian (Lewis, Adamovová, & Francis, 2008), Slovenian (Flere, Klanjsek, Francis, & Robbins, 2008), Spanish (Campo-Arias, Oviedo, Díaz, & Cogollo, 2006), Swedish (Eek, 2001), and Welsh (Evans & Francis, 1996; Francis & Thomas, 2003).

The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, together with other cognate affective measures have been introduced to research exploring the impact of home on growing faith during childhood and adolescence. In an early study, Francis and Gibson (1993) drew on data provided by two groups of students who completed the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity alongside measures of personal and parental church attendance: 815 male and 932 female students between the ages of 11 and 12 years, and 847 male and 820 female students between the ages of 15 and 16 years. These data demonstrated, in relation to student church attendance, that parental attendance was important for both sexes

and both age groups, that there was little difference in overall parental influence on sons and daughters, and that this influence increased rather than decreased between the ages of 11 to 12 and 15 to 16. The findings also demonstrated that parents' church attendance exerted a much clearer and more direct influence over their children's church attendance than over their children's attitude toward Christianity.

Using a measure of attitude toward church included in the 2001 Church Life Survey designed primarily for use in England (Churches Information for Mission, 2001), Francis and Craig (2006) drew on data provided by 10,153 8- to 14-year-old churchgoers. They found that parents played a crucial role through what they do and what they model in addition to their pattern of church attendance. The maintenance of a positive attitude toward church during the tweenage years is associated with having parents who supported the faith in conversation and example at home.

Using a measure of attitude toward church included within the 2011 Australian National Church Life Survey, Francis, Penny, and Powell (2018) reported that opportunities to talk about God with their parents was associated with a more positive attitude toward church. Moreover, while peer influence within church did not make much contribution to frequency of attendance, it made a contribution to shaping positive attitude toward church.

Fawcett, Francis, and McKenna (2021) administered the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, together with measures of frequency of church attendance for themselves, for their mother and for their father to 299 participants between the ages of 12 and 18 years attending a summer youth programme sponsored by the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada. These data identified father's religious attendance as a statistically significant factor augmenting the effect of mother's religious attendance in sustaining a positive attitude toward Christianity among young Canadian Baptists.

Assessing influence of school

While acknowledging the key role of the household in growing faith (General Synod, 2019), the Church of England also maintains the role of church schools in growing faith. In the report, *Church of England vision for education: Deeply Christian, serving the common good*, the Church of England Education Office (2016b) framed a vision for church schools serving the common good of the whole community. This vision for human flourishing was inspired by four basic elements: wisdom, hope, community, and dignity. The vision also expressed the following aspiration:

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)

Recognising that Anglican church schools in England and Wales may take diverse positions on the extent to which they make explicit their church-related character and Christian identity, Lankshear and colleagues collaborated on a three-year student voice project conducted within the Anglican church schools in Wales (see for example, Francis, Lankshear, & Eccles, 2018; Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, & McKenna, 2021; Lankshear, Francis, & Eccles, 2017, 2021). The primary aim of this project was to identify the core characteristics of Anglican primary schools as identified within the church school inspection system, and then to operationalise those characteristics in ways recognisable by the students. In their revised form the Lankshear Student Voice Scales operationalised eight themes, identified as attitude toward: the general character of the school, the religious character of the school, the experience of the school, the teachers and staff, relationships in school, the stewardship of creation, the stewardship of the school, and school worship. It is the scale of attitude toward the religious character of the school that may be of greatest relevance to the present study. This scale comprised seven items, with each item rated on a five-point Likert scale, from agree strongly (5), through not certain (3), to disagree strongly (1). Lankshear,

Francis, and Eccles (2021, p. 215) reported high endorsement of the items in this scale among the 4,803 participants in their survey. Adding together the agree strongly and agree responses provided the following levels of endorsement. At least nine out of every ten students agreed that God is very important in their school (94%), that Jesus is very important in their school (93%), that prayer is very important in their school (91%), that church is very important in their school (91%), and that the Bible is very important in their school (91%). The proportion dropped to 83% who agreed that the Christian festivals are very important to their school.

Research agenda

Against this background, the research agenda of the present paper is to examine the effect of the perceived Christian character of the school and parental church attendance on predicting individual differences in church attendance and in attitude toward Christianity among the students. In order to address this research agenda, the following six specific aims have been specified:

1. to develop a measure of perception of the Christian ethos of the school;
2. to examine the effect of sex and age on student church attendance and attitude toward Christianity;
3. to examine the effect of parental church attendance on the church attendance of students, after taking sex and age into account;
4. to examine the effect of perception of the Christian ethos of the school on the church attendance of students, after taking parental church attendance into account;
5. to examine the effect of student church attendance *and* parental church attendance on student attitude toward Christianity, after taking sex and age into account;
6. to examine the effect of perception of the Christian ethos of the school on student attitude toward Christianity, after taking student church attendance and parental church attendance into account.

Method

Procedure

Over a three-year period from 2015 to 2018, students in years 3, 4, 5, and 6 attending a cluster of five Church of England voluntary schools within the Diocese of Truro were invited to participate in the Primary School Attitude Survey. The survey was administered in class groups. Students were asked not to write their names on the booklet and to complete the instrument without discussing it with their peers. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity and given the choice not to participate. The project received ethical approval from the University of Warwick. A total of 531 students provided full data on all the variables employed in the current analyses.

Measures

Attitude toward Christianity was assessed by the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (Francis, 1978a, 2009). This is a 24-item instrument concerned with affective responses to God, Jesus, Bible, prayer, and church. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3), disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1).

Perception of the Christian ethos of the school was assessed by a new 3-item Scale of the Perception of the Christian Character of the School generated for this study from the school ethos items within the Lankshear Student Voice Scales (see Lankshear, Francis, & Eccles, 2021). Each item is rated on a 5-point scale: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3), disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1).

Church attendance was assessed by the question, ‘Do you go to a place of worship when not at school? (e.g., church or mosque)’, with 5 responses: weekly (5), at least once a month (4), sometimes (3), once or twice a year (2), and never (1).

Parental church attendance was assessed by two questions, one for mother and one for father: ‘Apart from special occasions (like weddings) how often does your mother (father)

attend a place of religious worship? (e.g., church or mosque)', with 6 responses: nearly every week (5), at least once a month (4), at least six times a year (3), occasionally (2), never (1), and don't know (9).

Age was assessed by school year: year three (3), year four (4), year five (5), and year six (6).

Sex was coded: male (1), and female (2).

Participants

The 531 participants comprised 285 males and 246 females; 107 in year 3, 118 in year 4, 148 in year 5, and 158 in year 6.

Analysis

The data were analysed by SPSS using the frequency, correlation, reliability and regression routines.

Results and discussion

- insert table 1 about here -

Table 1 presents the frequency of church attendance reported by the students for themselves as well as for their mother and father. These data demonstrate that the majority of families associated with these Church of England voluntary schools were not closely involved with the Church. Three quarters of the parents never attended church services: 73% of the mothers and 75% of the fathers. Three fifths of the students themselves never attended church services (59%). The proportion of students who attended church at least once a month (including those who attend weekly) was closely in line with the proportion of parents who attended church at least once a month: 13% of mothers and 8% of fathers attended church at least once a month, and so did 11% of students.

- insert table 2 about here -

Table 2 presents the properties of the new Scale of the Perception of the Christian Character of the School, developed from items within the Lankshear Student Voice Scales. This three-item scale, combining items concerning the Christian nature of the school, the place of worship in the school, and the place of prayer in the school, recorded a satisfactory alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) of .69. The item endorsements show that 78% of the students agreed strongly that their school is a Christian school, 65% agreed strongly that prayer is very important in their school, and 62% agreed strongly that worship is very important in their school. Although the majority of students were not themselves churchgoers, the majority of students recognised their Church of England voluntary primary school as a place that was witnessing to the Christian faith.

- insert table 3 about here -

Table 3 presents the properties of the 24-item Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, as an instrument that explores affective responses to five components of the Christian faith: God, Jesus, prayer, church, and Bible. In line with previous studies (Francis, 2009), this instrument recorded a high alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) of .97. The item endorsements demonstrated that around half of the students took a positive view of God: 57% believe that God helps people, 49% believe that God helps them to live a better life, 47% said that the idea of God means much to them, 47% agreed that God helps them, 46% agreed that God is very real to them, 45% liked to know about God very much, and 44% agreed that God means a lot to them. Looked at from the opposite perspective, 47% found it hard to believe in God.

In terms of Jesus, half of the students believed that Jesus still helps people (51%) and agreed that Jesus helps them (49%). The proportions dropped to 42% who know that Jesus is very close to them, and to 42% who agree that they want to love Jesus. Looked at from the opposite perspective, 30% agreed that Jesus doesn't mean anything to them.

In terms of prayer, half of the students thought that praying is a good thing (51%) and that God listens to prayers (50%). The proportion dropped to 39% who agreed that saying their prayers helps them a lot and to 39% who agreed that prayer helps them a lot. Looked at from the opposite perspective, 31% thought saying prayers does no good, and 12% thought people who pray are stupid.

In terms of church, two fifths of the students agreed the church is very important to them (40%). Looked at from the opposite perspective, 35% thought church services are boring, and 33% thought going to church is a waste of time. In terms of the Bible, 43% of the students found it boring to listen to the Bible, and 34% thought the Bible is out of date.

- insert table 4 about here -

Table 4 employs bivariate correlational analysis to explore the association between the variables under consideration in this study: sex, age, fathers' church attendance, mothers' church attendance, students' church attendance, students' attitude toward Christianity, and students' perceptions of the Christian ethos of their school. Three features of this correlation matrix deserve commentary.

First, there are no significant correlations between sex and the other variables, including students' attitude toward Christianity and students' church attendance. Given other research that generally identify higher levels of religiosity among females than among males in Christian and post-Christian societies (Francis & Penny, 2014) this finding is surprising. This may possibly be explained in light of the low level of religiosity within the sample as a whole. The low level of religiosity among parents may suggest a culture in which religion is largely invisible at home and consequently inaccessible to both female and male students.

Second, there are significant negative correlations between age and all the markers of religiosity. Older students reported lower levels of church attendance for their parents as well as for themselves. Older students reported a less positive attitude toward Christianity, and a

less positive perception of the Christian ethos of their school. This finding is consistent with the classic study reported by Kay and Francis (1996) regarding progressive drift away from the church during the years of childhood and adolescence.

Third, there are significant correlations between the religious variables. In terms of religious practice, there are high correlations between mothers' attendance and fathers' attendance ($r = .69$) and between students' attendance and both mothers' attendance ($r = .64$) and fathers' attendance ($r = .51$). There are significant correlations between students' church attendance and both attitude toward Christianity ($r = .48$) and perception of the Christian ethos of their school ($r = .12$).

- insert table 5 about here -

Table 5 examines the cumulative effect of sex, age, parental religious attendance, and perception of the Christian ethos of the school on individual differences in students' church attendance. This table presents the series of three regression models, in which fixed order entry was employed. In model one, personal factors (sex and age) were entered first. In model two, parental church attendances (mother and father) were entered second. In model three, perception of the Christian ethos of the school was entered. These data demonstrate that the main predictor of student church attendance is the church attendance of mother ($\beta = .53$) and that the church attendance of father offers additional predictive power ($\beta = .13$). Alongside parental church attendance age exercises a significant negative effect ($\beta = -.10$) and sex is not significant. Furthermore, when these other factors are in the model perception of the Christian ethos of the school provides no further predictive power.

- insert table 6 about here -

Table 6 examines the cumulative effect of personal factors (sex, age, and church attendance), parental church attendance (mothers and fathers considered separately), and perception of the Christian ethos of the school on individual differences in students' attitude

toward Christianity. This table presents the series of four regression models, in which fixed order entry was employed. In model one, personal factors (sex and age) were entered first. In model two, the students' church attendance was added. In model three, parental church attendance was added, separately for mothers and fathers. In model four, perception of the Christian ethos of the school was added. These data demonstrate that the three main predictors of student attitude toward Christianity are their personal attendance, their age, and their perception of the Christian ethos of their school. A more positive attitude toward Christianity is associated with higher levels of church attendance ($\beta = .30$), and with a positive perception of the Christian ethos of their school ($\beta = .29$). After taking personal church attendance and perception of the Christian ethos of the school into account, increasing age remains associated with a less positive attitude toward Christianity. After taking the students' own level of church attendance into account there remains a small additional positive influence exerted by the church attendance of mothers ($\beta = .09$). Although the correlations between student attitude toward Christianity and parental church attendance were quite strong ($r = .36$ for mothers and $r = .37$ for fathers), the regression model demonstrates that this effect is largely mediated through parental influence on student church attendance.

Conclusion

The present study was set within the context of a developing body of literature concerned with identifying the effects of church attendance, home, and school on sustaining church attendance and shaping a positive attitude toward Christianity during childhood and adolescence. The specific factor introduced to this developing body of literature for the first time by the present study concerns the effect of student perception of the Christian ethos of the school. In order to contribute to this developing body of literature, the present study was structured to address a research agenda shaped by six specific aims.

The first research aim was to develop a measure of perception of the Christian ethos of the school, drawing on the items within the Lankshear Student Voice Scales (Lankshear, Francis, & Eccles, 2021). The aim was achieved in the development of the three-item Scale of the Perception of the Christian Ethos of the School, a short instrument that achieved an acceptable level of internal consistency reliability ($\alpha = .69$) and good face validity. Construct validity was supported by correlation with attitude toward Christianity ($r = .41$). This new scale can be commended for use in the present study and in future research.

The second research aim was to examine the effect of sex and age on student church attendance and attitude toward Christianity. These data supported the general finding of previous research, as crystallised by Kay and Francis (1996), that both attitude toward Christianity and frequency of church attendance decline during years 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the primary school. The present study confirms that this is the case within Church of England voluntary primary schools. On the other hand, these data did not support the general finding that females report higher levels of religiosity than males in Christian and post-Christian societies (Francis & Penny, 2014). This is an intriguing finding that may reflect the growing secularisation of the society in which these young students are living. Further research is needed to build on this finding.

The third research aim was to examine the effect of parental church attendance on the church attendance of students, after taking sex and age into account. These data support the general finding from previous research (see Francis, Lankshear, Eccles, & McKenna, 2020 for an overview) that the frequency of mother's church attendance is the primary predictor of child church attendance, and that the frequency of mother's church attendance is most powerful when fathers also attend.

The fourth research aim was to examine the effect of perception of the Christian ethos of the school on the church attendance of students, after taking parental church attendance

into account. The data offer a new insight within the developing body of literature, suggesting that perception of the Christian ethos of the school provides no further predictive power on the frequency of student church attendance. This new finding is consistent with the view that child church attendance on a Sunday is socially structured by parental behaviour, independently of the agency of the child.

The fifth research aim was to examine the effect of student church attendance *and* parental church attendance on student attitude toward Christianity, after taking sex and age into account. The correlation matrix confirmed that, considered separately, student attitude toward Christianity is highly correlated with student church attendance ($r = .48$), mother's church attendance ($r = .37$), and father's church attendance ($r = .36$). The regression model suggests that the influence of mother's church attendance on attitude toward Christianity is mediated entirely through the influence of mother's church attendance on child's church attendance. However, frequency of father's church attendance added further significant predictive power, indicating that the effect of father attending church goes deeper than only affecting the child's religious practice.

The sixth research aim was to examine the effect of perception of the Christian ethos of the school on student attitude toward Christianity, after taking student church attendance and parental church attendance into account. The data suggest that, although perception of the Christian ethos of the school added no additional predictive power to frequency of student church attendance, perception of the Christian ethos of the school added significant additional predictive power to student attitude toward Christianity.

The main contribution to knowledge from the present study, therefore, is that the Christian ethos of Church of England voluntary primary schools (as perceived by the students) appears to make a significant contribution to the Christian formation of their students at the most fundamental level of influencing their attitude toward Christianity. The

impact of this positive influence on attitude toward Christianity does not easily translate in an observable impact on frequency of church attendance, since church attendance is a social activity in relation to which parents seem to function as the primary gatekeepers.

A clear limitation with the present study is that it was limited to a small number of Church of England voluntary primary schools within one diocese (the Diocese of Truro). However, the intriguing findings suggest that the study may be worth replication elsewhere in England. A second limitation is that this study has considered only one behavioural measure of religiosity, the public measure of church attendance. Future research may wish to consider a second behavioural measure of religiosity, the personal measure of private prayer. A third limitation is that this study measured the perception of the Christian ethos of the school by a novel three-item scale. Future research may wish to consider developing and testing other ethos measures. The present study has suggested that perception of the Christian ethos of church schools can impact the highly personal measure of attitude toward Christianity, but not the public behavioural measure of church attendance. The hypothesis worth testing is that perception of the Christian ethos of church schools may also impact the behavioural measure of private prayer.

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Table 1

Frequency of church attendance

	Self %	Mother %	Father %
Never	59	73	75
Sometimes	30	15	17
At least once a month	4	4	2
Weekly	7	9	6

Table 2

Scale of the Perception of Christian Ethos

	<i>r</i>	Yes %
My school is a Christian school	.38	78
Worship is very important in my school	.58	62
Prayer is very important in my school	.58	65
Alpha	.69	

Note: *r* = correlation between individual item and the sum of the other two items

Yes % = proportion who agree strongly

Table 3

Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity

	<i>r</i>	Yes %
I find it boring to listen to the Bible*	.54	43
I know that Jesus helps me	.83	49
Saying my prayers helps me a lot	.80	39
The Church is very important to me	.80	40
I think going to church is a waste of time*	.61	33
I want to love Jesus	.82	42
I think church services are boring*	.51	35
I think people who pray are stupid*	.44	12
God helps me to lead a better life	.84	49
I like to learn about God very much	.88	45
God means a lot to me	.89	44
I believe that God helps people	.86	57
Prayer helps me a lot	.85	39
I know that Jesus is very close to me	.87	42
I think praying is a good thing	.84	51
I think the Bible is out of date*	.44	34
I believe that God listens to prayers	.82	50
Jesus doesn't mean anything to me*	.70	30
God is very real to me	.83	46
I think saying prayers does no good*	.63	31
The idea of God means much to me	.87	47
I believe that Jesus still helps people	.84	51
I know that God helps me	.87	47
I find it hard to believe in God*	.53	47
Alpha	.97	

Note: * these items are reverse coded to calculate *r*

Table 4

Correlation matrix

	Sex	Age	Fat	Mot	Chu	Att
Ethos (Eth)	.06	-.21***	.09*	.05	.12**	.41***
Attitude (Att)	.03	-.43***	.36***	.37***	.48***	
Church (Chu)	-.02	-.19***	.51***	.64***		
Mother (Mot)	-.06	-.11**	.69***			
Father (Fat)	-.02	-.12**				
Age	-.02					

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 5

Regression on church attendance

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
<i>Personal factors</i>			
sex	-.02	.01	.01
age	-.19**	-.11***	-.10**
<i>Parental factors</i>			
mother		.53***	.53***
father		.14**	.13**
<i>School factors</i>			
ethos			.06
Total r^2	.04	.43	.43
Δ	.04***	.39***	.00

Note: ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 6

Regression on attitude toward Christianity

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<i>Personal factors</i>				
sex	.02	.03	.04	.02
age	-.43***	-.36***	-.35***	-.30***
church attendance		.42***	.33***	.30***
<i>Parental factors</i>				
mother			.05	.08
father			.11*	.09*
<i>School factors</i>				
ethos				.29***
Total r^2	.19	.36	.37	.45
Δ	.19***	.17***	.02**	.08***

Note: * $p < .01$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$