

The GRACE Research Report on Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools in the Republic of Ireland

- 1. Summary:** Commitment to Catholic ethos is on a trajectory of decline, dropping steadily at primary level and more dramatically at secondary level. Belief in God, religiosity and religious practice are in decline among all cohorts studied, Board of Management (BoM) members, principals, teachers and other staff. There is a shrinking pool of both voluntary and professional personnel from which to recruit those who can give effect to Catholic ethos.
- 2. Teachers as practising Catholics:** Whilst 48% of RE teachers and 25% of all other teachers (belonging to a faith community) report that they attend a religious service at least once per week, only 17% of those aged under 29 years report doing so (and 18% of those under 39). Whilst a large majority of older staff in primary schools state that they witness to Catholic ethos, only 53% under 29 report doing so. At secondary level, 28% under 29 years report not witnessing to Catholic ethos or doing so only to a limited extent.
- 3. Key ICBC texts:** Of the combined BoM and staff cohorts at primary level, 83% are unsure or state they have not heard of *Share the Good News*. The same is reported of 72% of secondary BoM members, principals and RE teachers. Similar figures are reported regarding familiarity with other key ICBC texts.
- 4. Ethos Formation:** At primary level, 32% of BoM members, 54% of principals and deputy principals and 60% of teachers report not having received training or CPD from their patrons or trusts. At secondary level, 14% of BoM members, 22% of principals and deputy principals and 46% of Religious Education (RE) teachers state likewise. For those who received training, it was mostly once-off and unrelated to ethos. Ethos rarely appears as an agenda item at BoM meetings. **The qualitative data reports an almost universal appeal from principals for meaningful ethos-related professional development and support.**
- 5. Reporting to Patrons/Trusts:** Where BoMs provide such a report, only 14% receive some form of feedback, whether written (4%), through a feedback meeting (2%), or via a patron or trust nominee (8%).
- 6. Religious Education (RE):** Whilst 84% of primary school principals state that they ensure RE receives its allotted time, only 17% of primary teachers report providing RE daily. 18% report teaching it four times a week, and 25% report teaching it three days a week. 8% report rarely or never teaching RE. Just 53% of primary teachers report that their RE classes include to a large extent faith formation, sacramental experience and awareness of stewardship for creation, with 39% reporting that this happens only to some or to a limited extent. Whilst 90% of principals report that they always or mostly ensure that curriculum and textbooks are followed, in contrast, 33% of teachers report following ICBC approved curriculum and textbooks only to some or a limited extent, and 5% not at all. Non-examination Senior Cycle Religious Education (SCRE) is reported as 'directionless, lacking standards, support and oversight'.
- 7. Faith Formation for staff:** Just 18% of primary teachers report having had faith development opportunities provided to them.
- 8. Diocesan Adviser (DA):** 20% of principals reported that a DA has not visited the school over the past three years; 25% of primary school teachers reported having no idea of the DA role or ever hearing of DAs.
- 9. Review and Audit:** The Report recommends that ITE programmes at Catholic HEIs and all staff induction and CPD programmes be reviewed in light of the ICBC's vision and requirements for Catholic schools.

The Global Researchers Advancing Catholic Education Research Project 2021 – 2024 *Identity and Ethos in Catholic Primary and Secondary Schools in Ireland* was published on April 22 2024. The research questions drew upon: *Vision '08, Share the Good News* (2010), *Understanding and living the ethos in a Catholic voluntary secondary school: a process centred on conversations* (CSP 2016) and *Understanding and living the ethos in a Catholic primary school: a process centred on conversations* (CSP 2019). While recognising that pupils and their parents, patrons, management and trust bodies are all crucial stakeholders, this study focuses on cohorts with direct, on-the-ground responsibility for the delivery of Catholic education in Ireland: Board of Management (BoM) members, principals, deputy principals, teachers and other school staff. Just under 4000 people participated. For resource reasons the study was confined to the Republic of Ireland. The authors are Prof E Conway (University Notre Dame Australia), Dr D Doherty (Mary Immaculate College [MIC]), Dr E Duffy (MIC), Dr C McCormack (MIC), Dr A Meehan (Dublin City University), Dr B O'Caomh (Consultant) and Dr D O'Connell (MIC, lead researcher). The project was funded substantially by the Irish Jesuits, the All Hallows Trust, and the Irish Presentation Sisters (both provinces), with contributions from others including the Diocese of Kerry. The 250 page Report in seven volumes is available as open access at the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Mary Immaculate College website (click [here](#)).