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Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This is the report of a research study into the relationship between the churches and integrated schools and the approach to Christian ethos within integrated schools in Northern Ireland. The research was initiated by All Children Together (ACT), commissioned by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and funded through the Integrated Education Fund (IEF).

Independent researchers Macaulay Associates carried out the research between September 2007 and June 2008.

Methodology

A central part of the research methodology was a major survey of all integrated schools in Northern Ireland. The methodology also included desk research and semi structured interviews with a range of stakeholders.

Main Conclusions

The main conclusions of the research are as follows:

Relationship Between Integrated Schools and Churches

- 1) To date, none of the churches has played a formal role in the development of integrated education in Northern Ireland.
- 2) The churches have tended to prioritise the protection of existing schools (maintained and controlled schools) in which they have governance, over support for or involvement in the development of integrated education in Northern Ireland.
- 3) Catholic clergy have discouraged Catholic parents from sending their children to integrated schools. However in recent years, there is evidence of a “softening” to a more “pragmatic” approach towards Catholic parents choosing integrated schools. There is now a range of approaches among different Catholic Dioceses and different Catholic clergy.
- 4) Protestant clergy have expressed a level of support that is conditional on integrated schools not impacting negatively on controlled schools on which they are transferors. The Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches while not proactive in the development of integrated education, are supportive of integrated schools as long as they do not impact negatively on controlled schools.
- 5) Recently, the Presbyterian Church has publicly encouraged its ministers to play a full part within local integrated schools.

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- 6) The transforming of controlled schools has become a contentious issue for Protestant Churches who are transferors, as no Catholic school has ever transformed and Bishops do not take up the invitation to appoint Catholic governors to the places allocated to them within the Board of Governors of transformed Controlled Integrated Schools.
- 7) The vast majority of integrated schools in Northern Ireland regard links with churches as important and actively try to develop such links with local churches.
- 8) Most integrated schools have a relationship with their local Church of Ireland (73%), Roman Catholic (68%) and Presbyterian (66%) Churches.
- 9) The main types of link with local churches are pupil visits to churches, conduct of worship in school and church services, use of church premises for school events and preparation and reception for Roman Catholic sacraments.
- 10) The majority of integrated schools are visited by clergy at least once a term.
- 11) Two fifths of integrated schools have tried unsuccessfully to establish a relationship with a local church. Just under a quarter of integrated schools have been unsuccessful in trying to establish a relationship with a local Roman Catholic Church.
- 12) More than half of integrated schools have received public support from local clergy.
- 13) Just over a third of integrated schools have experienced public opposition by clergy, mainly Catholic clergy making public statements discouraging Catholic parents from choosing an integrated school rather than a Catholic school.
- 14) Just over half of integrated schools do not have a relationship with faith communities other than Christian. Among the just under half of schools that do have a relationship with different faith communities, this tends to be developed through parents rather than through formal links with religious leaders.
- 15) The vast majority of integrated schools have never declined an approach to develop links from a church or other faith group.
- 16) The nature of the relationship between clergy and local integrated schools is often dependent on the personal views of both principals and local clergy.

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Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

- 17) The majority of integrated schools indicate in their prospectus or mission statement that they have a Christian ethos.
- 18) Most integrated schools describe their school's approach to religion as either "all faiths and none" or Christian. This reflects an approach that is primarily Christian, but that includes people of different faiths as well as people of no religious faith.
- 19) The approach to Christian ethos of a particular school is often dependent on the personal views of the principal and staff of the school.
- 20) Integrated schools are facing the challenge of having a Christian ethos within an increasingly diverse society and in the context of an increase in secularism and atheism.
- 21) The main ways in which integrated schools reflect their Christian ethos is through Assemblies, the RE Curriculum and promoting values such as respect, tolerance and caring.
- 22) The majority of the schools have weekly assemblies and over half of the schools include a religious dimension in all assemblies. The two main religious occasions celebrated in the majority of integrated schools are Carol/Nativity Services and Harvest Services.
- 23) Some integrated schools have put considerable energy and attention into how they work out their Christian ethos in practice in a way that is inclusive of all the children at the school.

Other Issues

- 24) Most integrated schools have not had a religious event in the school that proved to be contentious. Where events have proved contentious this has usually involved complaints by a small number of parents.
- 25) Most integrated schools either have no policy or an open policy on the display of religious symbols.
- 26) There is a range of models of good practice around relationships with churches and Christian ethos within integrated schools that other schools can learn from.

Relevant Issues for Consideration

As a result of the issues raised in this research the following questions are offered for further consideration:

- 1) Is it possible for the churches in Northern Ireland, alongside their main priority of protecting their own school sectors, to develop new models of shared faith schools as a contribution towards peace and reconciliation in a divided society? If so, how?
- 2) What needs to happen to encourage the minority of Catholic clergy who are not yet prepared to enter an integrated school within their parish to develop a positive relationship with their local integrated school?
- 3) How can the four major churches be supported to develop a dialogue to discuss contentious issues regarding education such as transformation, the Bain Report, integrating education and the impact of their approaches on community relations?
- 4) How can integrated schools develop more formal links with the local leaders of different faith communities e.g. Muslim?
- 5) Why do most integrated schools either have no policy or an open policy on the display of religious symbols?
- 6) Is there a need for more than one integrated school in Northern Ireland to have a full time chaplaincy?
- 7) How can integrated schools be supported to develop their Christian and “all faiths and none” ethos in practice?

1 Introduction

This is the report of a research study into the relationship between the churches and integrated schools and the approach to Christian ethos within integrated schools in Northern Ireland.

The research was initiated by All Children Together (ACT), commissioned by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and funded through the Integrated Education Fund (IEF).

Independent researchers Macaulay Associates carried out the research between September 2007 and June 2008. It followed on from an initial unpublished partial research study into the same issues carried out by Grace Fraser between 2002-2005¹.

The report includes:

- An executive summary of the main findings
- An explanation of the background to the research
- A description of the research methodology
- A presentation of the main findings of the research
- A selection of examples of practice of Christian ethos
- A set of main conclusions
- A set of associated appendices
- A bibliography

¹ Ill health prevented Grace Fraser from completing the research project. Macaulay Associates is grateful to Grace for sharing her findings for this study.

2 Background

2.1 Integrated Education in Northern Ireland

The campaigning parent group All Children Together (ACT) established the first integrated school, Lagan College, in Belfast in 1981. They state:

'We had worked for eleven years, lobbying the churches, the educational establishment and the political parties to consider setting up shared Christian schools as a force for reconciliation in a troubled province. Failing to move any of these official bodies, we ourselves grasped the nettle and, against all the odds, established Lagan College. ACT believed that if the school was successful academically and was religiously and socially inclusive and with a respectful, caring Christian ethos, that it would be infectious. Indeed it was. Today it is the most oversubscribed school in the Belfast area....'

There are now 62 Integrated Schools across Northern Ireland:

- 21 Integrated Second Level Colleges
- 41 Integrated Primary Schools
- More than 19 Integrated Nursery Schools, most of which are linked to Primary Schools

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) was established in 1987, to co-ordinate efforts to develop Integrated Education and to assist parent groups in opening new integrated schools in Northern Ireland.

NICIE currently defines integrated education as:

'Education together in school of pupils drawn in approximately equal numbers from the two major traditions with the aim of providing for them an effective education that gives equal recognition to and promotes equal expression of the two major traditions. The integrated school is essentially Christian in character, democratic and open in procedures and promotes the worth and self-esteem of all individuals within the school community. The school as an institution seeks to develop mutual respect and consideration of other institutions within the educational community. Its core aim is to provide the child with a caring self-fulfilling educational experience which will enable him/her to become a fulfilled and caring adult'.

(NICIE Statement of Principles)

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The establishment of integrated schools has been a parent led initiative rather than a state led programme. The first policy introduced at government level was Clause 64 of the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 which placed a duty on the State in relation to integrated education for the first time. It stated:

'It shall be the duty of the Department to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education, that is to say the education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils.'

The Agreement signed in 1998 also included a commitment *'to facilitate and encourage integrated education...'*

2.2 The Churches, Christian Ethos and Integrated Education

The primary focus of this research has been to map the current relationships between the churches and integrated schools, rather than to analyse the historical roots of these relationships.

However, it is important to provide a brief history of relationships between the integrated schools and the churches to place the current situation in context. This section briefly outlines relationships between the churches and integrated schools over the past 25 years. The main sections of the report will focus on current relationships based on the field research carried out in 2007/2008.

As already stated, the development of integrated education in Northern Ireland has been a parent led initiative. It has not been a church led initiative. However the first parent group campaigning for integrated education, All Children Together, stated that they had worked to encourage the development of *'shared schools acceptable to all religious cultures in which the churches would provide religious education and pastoral care.'* (C.Linehan, M.Kennedy, Sr Anna, 1993)

The ACT Movement was formed in the early 1970's by Catholic parents whose children were attending non-Catholic schools. As the Roman Catholic Church refused to help with denominational instruction for these children, parents came together to run Catechism classes. In some Dioceses, the Sacrament of Confirmation was withheld from children. In the late 1970's this policy changed but the Church still refused to allow Catholic children attending non-Catholic schools to be confirmed with other children of their parish and arranged for them to be confirmed in separate confirmation services.

ACT later commented:

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'The suffering these sanctions have caused to Catholic parents in the past, and especially to parents of inter church families, just cannot be underestimated.' (ACT, 1998)

In the 1970's Irish Catholic leaders stated that Catholic parents had a duty to send their children to Catholic schools:

'The whole question was debated by the Second Vatican Council which affirmed the duty of Catholics to send their children to Catholic schools, when and where this is possible' (Cardinal William Conway, 1970)

This principle appears to have been the major barrier to relationships between integrated schools and the Irish Catholic Church over the past 25 years. This has often been expressed as opposition to integrated schools.

'Cardinal Conway (1971) stated that as a matter of religious principle, "Catholic children ought to be educated in Catholic schools where the specifically Catholic ethos is available to them". The Catholic Church has never wavered from this position, believing that this ethos is best sustained by a strong relationship between home, school and parish.' (Ellis, 2006)

Throughout the 1970's ACT campaigned for Catholic children attending non-Catholic schools to be treated in the same way as other children of their parish. The campaign included discussions with Irish Catholic leaders, drawing upon the different practices of the Roman Catholic Church in other countries and at one stage included an appeal to the Vatican².

Different interpretations of Vatican II and Canon Law have resulted in different approaches in different countries and in different Dioceses within Ireland over the years.

As far back as the 1960's Cardinal Ritter had stated:

'The Catholic school is not and must not be the only concern of the Church. Most of the Catholic children and students in the world are in State schools and must be in fact the object of the solicitude of the Church, the family, and particularly of the teachers in these schools for religious education...Our document on Christian education must emphasise that Catholic schools do not exist to serve narrow sectarian purposes, nor to protect the selfish interests of the Church...Catholic schools are and of their very nature must be of substantial benefit to the entire community where they serve and to society itself. Otherwise they would stand self-condemned and be unworthy

² (See Linehan, C. (2003). *All Children Together: The struggle of Catholic parents to have their children educated with Protestant children in Northern Ireland*. MPhil Dissertation, Irish School of Ecumenics.)

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of the title "Catholic". (Cardinal E Ritter, Archbishop of St Louis (Missouri), 1964)

The relevant Canon Law states:

'...Catholic parents have also the duty and the right to choose those means and institutes which, in their local circumstances, can best promote the catholic education of their children...

Parents must have a real freedom in their choice of schools...

Parents are to send their children to those schools which will provide for their catholic education. If they cannot do this, they are bound to ensure the proper catholic education of their children outside the school.' (The Code of Canon Law, 1983)

By the 1990's, as the number of integrated schools continued to increase, there was a discernable shift in tone from the Irish Catholic Church away from direct opposition to integrated education and towards an emphasis on the right of parents to choose, and the value of choosing a Catholic school.

'Integrated education supporters have welcomed comments by the new Archbishop of Armagh that parents sending their children to non-Catholic schools would not be penalised. Dr Sean Brady...said he respected the right of people to send their children "to the school of their choice, but I also know the value of Catholic schools". Parents favouring integrated education would not face "sanctions", he said.

The archbishop's remarks follow the claim by Msgr Denis Faul that people refusing to send their children to Catholic schools were in breach of Canon Law.³' ('Education Comments Welcomed' Irish News, 1996)

However the development of transforming controlled integrated schools⁴ did not gain the support of Catholic Bishops, as exemplified by this article:

'Some County Down controlled schools such as Bangor Central Primary and Priory College are changing from mostly Protestant to become integrated. The rule is that two of the four Protestant clergy on the Boards of Governors should be replaced by Catholics. But the South Eastern Board ran into problems when the Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor refused to nominate anyone...

A spokesman for the Bishop says the Church is very happy with Catholic schools and is willing to pass up the chance to have influence on

⁴ See Appendix IV for the Department of Education NI governance arrangements for controlled integrated schools

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transformed schools. It can't be seen to be formally associated with integrated schools which are in competition with them.' (Taggart, 1999)

The impact of this policy and the policy that no Catholic school should transform to integrated status had a knock on effect in the Protestant Churches who began to comment on transformation that "the loss was all one way".

'... to date, all of the transformation schools have been Controlled schools with predominantly Protestant enrolments. The authorities of Catholic schools are adamantly opposed to the principle of transformation, on the grounds that it abrogates the rights of trustees. Quite apart from the political problems that might, at some point, emerge, given that all the change has occurred within one sector, this situation has the potential to divert discussion away from the original goal (to promote integration) towards a debate over other more contentious issues. Education, like other areas of life in Northern Ireland, has been plagued by 'zero-sum' thinking, so there is an issue on how discussions on the goal of a more integrated education system might take place without falling into this trap.'
(Integrated Education In Northern Ireland, Participation, Profile and Performance by Tony Gallagher, Alan Smith, Alison Montgomery, 2003)

In 1978 Lord Dunleath had introduced into the House of Lords an Act that would have enabled Catholic or Protestant church representatives on school Boards to share places with each other and with parents to allow integrated schools to develop from existing schools. However, none of the churches invoked the Act, and as a result new integrated schools were established by parents groups.

However, in 1998 the Transferor Representatives' Council (TRC)⁵ stated:

'From the period before the "Dunleath Act" of 1978 each of the Transferor churches expressed its willingness to participate in agreed experiments to establish integrated schools on the proviso that the Roman Catholic Church, parents and Area Boards were involved. The basis of such consent was not forthcoming from the Roman Catholic authorities.' (Transferor Representatives Council, 1998)

In the 1970's and 1980's the Protestant churches were generally welcoming to the 'experiment' of integrated education:

'...the shock of the violence of the early 1970s did cause some to rethink their position with regard to education. Within the Protestant churches there began some positive movement. For example the Church of Ireland

⁵ The TRC comprises those Transferor Representatives serving on the five local education boards together with representatives from the Boards of Education of the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the Methodist Church in Ireland.

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General Synod of 1970 passed a resolution which stated “We would welcome, for the good of the children in our community, an agreed experiment within the Voluntary and State systems of education, towards encouraging integration in education, so long as all denominational interests are respected”. Further positive statements of support followed in 1975 and 1978’ (Ellis, 2006)

However, although these public statements were supportive, the Protestant churches did not become proactively involved in developing integrated schools. An example from the Minutes of the 1983 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church demonstrates this:

“The Moderator, Dr Gardner, having been invited to become a sponsor for Lagan College, asked the Board for guidance in the matter. While it was realised that Lagan College was integrated in so far as the pupils and staff were drawn from all denomination, it was not integrated to the extent that the Churches, Protestant and Catholic, had been invited officially to share in management. However since the project was of the nature of an experiment in integrated education the following advice was given:

“ The Board of Education of our Church, having discussed the request of the Lagan College that you agree to become a Patron, feel that, since this is a personal matter not affecting the Church directly and since no Church monies will be involved, they see no good reason why you should not become a Patron of the College, should you wish to do so.” (Presbyterian Church in Ireland State Education Committee, 1983)

By the 1990s, as the number of integrated schools had grown, the Protestant churches increasingly expressed concerns about integrated schools threatening the viability of neighbouring controlled schools in which they were transferors on the Boards of Governors. The Transferor Representatives’ Council referred to:

“The preferential treatment accorded to the integrated sector’ and ‘...the insensitive siting of grant maintained integrated schools within the catchment areas of controlled schools and a remaining Church of Ireland Maintained School.’ (Transferor Representatives Council, 1998)

Examples of comments from the Church of Ireland during this period are:

‘...it must be recognised that there are some areas where the opening of an integrated school would lead to the closing of an existing controlled school...conversely the church recognises that there may be one or two areas in which the only way to retain a school for Protestant children to attend, may involve opting out of a controlled school in order to establish a controlled integrated school.’ (McKelvey, 1990)

“The assumption that integrated schools would solve the sectarianism problem in Northern Ireland was a false one, a speaker told the Church of Ireland General Synod in Dublin yesterday. Canon Houston McKelvey,

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presenting the church's Education Board report, said the reality of residential segregation in the North had to be acknowledged. In many parts of Northern Ireland pupils could not be integrated without a massive daily bussing operation, he said.' (McGarry, 1999)

However there were clearly differences of opinion on the subject within the Church:

'The existence of Integrated Schools seems to be tolerated reluctantly and throughout the Board's (Church of Ireland Board of Education) reports and submission to the Department of Education there is a barely concealed hostile undertone especially towards grant maintained integrated schools... There are frequent complaints in the Board's reports about both the privileged treatment and positive discrimination accorded to integrated schools...' (Scarlett, April 1999)

The Presbyterian Church adopted a similar approach. Examples of comments from the State Education Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland in the 1990's are shown below:

"We welcomed grant maintained integrated status but hoped that this would not lead to serious disadvantage to other secondary schools" (1990)

"Concern has been expressed that the development of some existing schools has been impeded by the allocation of funds to neighbouring integrated schools. The principle of fairness should apply across the Board and any perceived inequalities ought to be monitored and reported" (1991)

"Legislation has weakened the church position. Thus there is no place as of right for the Church in the government of grant maintained integrated schools" (1995)

'A position paper on Integrated Education is printed below. Prepared as a result of an initiative from our own Committee it was unanimously endorsed by our own Board, attracted the support of our sister Churches' Boards of Education and has been lodged with the Minister. Already he has said that he is engaged in a re-think on the implementation of government policy with respect to integrated schools.' (Presbyterian Church State Education Committee, 1996)

"The assumption has been made and received immense political and financial support from the government that denominationally integrated education will make a major contribution to the resolution of the problems of a community which is composed of two major religious traditions. The Churches are firmly of the conviction that schools alone cannot deliver this goal due to certain basic facts e.g. (i) integrated education cannot be delivered in many of the major housing areas, and (ii) it is conscientiously opposed by the Roman Catholic Church which has stated and adheres to its policy on education..."

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The Churches remain extremely sensitive to their exclusion – by law- from the management of integrated schools and to the reduction of fifty per cent of their representation on school boards of governors consequent to any controlled school opting for controlled integrated status...

Good schools in areas which integrated schools have been established are affected in two ways, (i) the reduction of enrolment with attendant contraction of resources, and (ii) the removal from their parents' groups of the very people who would support education for mutual understanding...

The Churches' preferred model of an integrated school is that of a controlled integrated and the Churches recommend that wherever possible the Department, the Area Boards and the Churches consult as to the possibility of growing an integrated school from an existing controlled school rather than undertake unnecessary additional public expenditure' (Presbyterian Church State Education Committee, 1996)

However by 1999 there is evidence of an improving relationship between the Presbyterian Church and the integrated sector:

'Talks have taken place between the Transferors Representatives Council and a representative of NICIE. The TRC was pleased to learn the importance NICIE places on a Christian ethos in schools and discussions are ongoing about forming a close working relationship...

Both bodies have agreed to assist in building effective relationships between the local minister and the integrated school close to a congregation'.

The view of the Methodist Church in Ireland follows a similar pattern to the Church of Ireland and Presbyterian Churches, although the concerns are expressed less strongly. Initially very positive comments welcoming integrated education change to statements of concern over the definition of integration and concerns over integrated schools diverting funding from existing schools. Statements from the Reports and Agenda of the Methodist Conference demonstrate this:

'During the year members of the executive visited the College (Lagan) and were warmly received by the Chairman of the Board of Governors, the Head mistress and members of staff. The College was assured of the interest and support of the Methodist Church.' (Methodist Church Board of Education Northern Executive, 1985)

'Appreciation was expressed of the stress laid on integrated education...' (1989)

'Some teachers and governors in the controlled sector are of the opinion that the integrated schools are better funded than any other sector...

The ongoing review of the statutory recognition of integrated status is being closely monitored. The Minister has now presented guidelines concerning the way forward and many questions have to be answered. Not least of these is the criteria which the Department is willing to accept to determine what legally constitutes "integrated status". The Church has

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always welcomed integrated status if it is the will of the parents so to determine...However it is important to draw a distinction between choosing this course of action to achieve integration and not just as a way of achieving better financial allocation. Another factor which gives cause for concern is that there is a number of schools which in practice are integrated but because they do not meet the statutory criteria cannot be termed under the law integrated.' (1997)

To date, none of the churches have played a formal role in the development of integrated education in Northern Ireland.

The churches have tended to prioritise the protection of existing schools over which they have governance, over support for or involvement in the development of integrated education.

Catholic clergy have expressed clear opposition to Catholic parents sending their children to integrated schools while Protestant clergy have expressed a level of support that is conditional on integrated schools not impacting negatively on schools on which they are transferors.

Previous research has commented on this:

'Once the first schools had been established the attitude shifted from one which could have been characterised as 'we don't want it, but it won't happen anyway' to one which saw the integrated school movement as unwelcome but too small to have to worry about. There has also been a problem for the 'establishment' institutions in that although they may disapprove of integrated schools it has been quite difficult to focus opposition. It is hard to object to parents' wish to influence their children's education or to condemn an organisation which has as one of its central aims the desire to improve community relations and end sectarian violence.

This ambivalence is clearly seen in the attitude of the churches, particularly the Roman Catholic church, which on the one hand supports the right of parents to choose the appropriate education for their children but on the other seeks to ensure that all Catholic children are educated in Catholic schools.' (Valerie Morgan, Seamus Dunn, Ed Cairns, Grace Fraser, 1999)

'Given that both Christian traditions had effectively over the years developed their own sectors with various protections and state financial support, it was perhaps inevitable that the Catholic and Protestant churches tended to adopt defensive positions regarding the idea of shared schooling'. (Ellis, 2006)

This situation is not what ACT had originally envisaged:

'In our 1976 policy document entitled ACT on Shared Schools, we envisaged a partnership between the school and supportive clergy in the enhancing of religious education, pastoral care and shared worship. We believe that the

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key area for the churches in integrated schools is in strengthening their whole Christian ethos. This is still our view.' (C.Linehan, M.Kennedy, Sr Anna, 1993)

The founders of the integrated movement made an early decision to develop a clear Christian ethos within integrated schools:

'The ACT Movement in thinking about integration, spent long hours on the issue of "ethos"...there were two possible avenues which the movement could take:

- 1. Recognise the strengths and separate identities of existing schools which have, almost all, strong links with the churches, and create a completely secular system with no church involvement and no religious input to the curriculum.*
- 2. Recognise the strengths and identities of existing schools which have, almost all, strong links with the churches, and create a completely new system of schools with no direct church involvement, but with a strong Christian ethos and atmosphere and an ecumenical approach to religious education.*

...ACT and those pioneering thinking at that time were not convinced that the route to take was the first one, secular schools...The second option was chosen...but chosen not as in any way inferior but as more likely to be effective.' (Brown, 2000)

As the number of integrated schools grew so did the number and range of parents, governors, principals and teachers. This has resulted in an ongoing debate over the policy and practice of Christian ethos within the schools:

'The debate over the extent to which the schools should be 'Christian' in their ethos and how this should affect the attitude to the participation of teachers, parents and children of other religious backgrounds or none is... producing a range of strong opinions. This clearly echoes some of the debates currently surfacing in Britain about the place of religious education in multi-ethnic schools.' (Valerie Morgan, Seamus Dunn, Ed Cairns, Grace Fraser, 1999)

Having briefly outlined the historical context of relationships with the churches and Christian ethos within integrated schools, this report will now present the findings of the research to highlight the current situation in 2007/2008.

3 Terms of Reference

The terms of reference of the research study were as follows:

Aims of the Research

There were two main aims of the research:

- 1) The primary aim of the research was to assess the current role of the churches with regard to integrated schools in Northern Ireland
- 2) The secondary aim of the research was to examine practice regarding Christian ethos within integrated schools in Northern Ireland

Objectives of the Research

The research had five objectives:

- 1) To survey and analyse the nature of the relationship between the four main churches and the integrated sector in attitudinal terms
- 2) To survey and analyse the nature of this relationship at the level of existing practice within the integrated sector
- 3) To formulate a picture of how individual schools interpret Christian ethos in practice (including the common core RE curriculum)
- 4) To identify models of good practice in church/integrated school relations
- 5) To highlight relevant issues for integrated education in the context of religious, political, educational and policy changes in Northern Ireland

4 Research Methodology

The agreed methodology for achieving the aims and objectives of the research within the resources available was as follows:

(a) Initial Meetings

A series of initial meetings took place between the researcher and the research commissioners to discuss the background to the research, the primary focus, the proposed methodology, to gather initial information and details regarding stakeholders, and to agree the dates for the various meetings.

(b) Research Advisory Group

A Research Advisory Group of key stakeholders was established to support and advise the research. The group met at the beginning of the research to comment on the methodology and the main survey tool and again towards the end of the study to discuss the draft report and findings. The members of the Research Advisory Group are listed in Appendix I.

(c) Desk Research

The researcher carried out a review of relevant research and background information including relevant policies and reports (government, education, schools and churches) existing research, archive material (e.g. reports and press cuttings), websites and other secondary sources

A list of the main sources of information is in the Bibliography.

(c) Schools Survey

A central part of the research methodology was a major survey of all integrated schools in Northern Ireland. The survey (See Appendix II) asked the schools a series of questions about their relationships with churches and their approach to Christian ethos within the school.

Following a letter to all schools explaining the background and purpose of the research, the survey was circulated by email to all 62 existing integrated schools in October 2007. The email was then followed up with a series of telephone calls, to maximise the response rate. Surveys were either returned by post, fax or email or completed through a telephone interview.

By the end of February 2008, a total of 44 schools⁶ had completed the survey, a response rate of 71%⁷.

(d) Key Stakeholder Interviews

Another key aspect of the methodology was a series of 36 semi-structured interviews carried out with a sample of key stakeholders including representatives of the four main churches, ACT, NICIE, the Catholic Council for Maintained Schools (CCMS), the Transferors' Representative Council (TRC) and the Department of Education.

Interviews were also carried out with principals, teachers, parents, governors, local clergy and students in a sample of integrated schools (4 Grant Maintained Integrated Primary Schools, 2 Grant Maintained Integrated Colleges, 2 Controlled Integrated Primary Schools and 1 Controlled Integrated College).

⁶ Two schools declined to participate in the survey and sixteen schools did not respond to the various letters, emails and telephone requests.

⁷ This sample size gives an 8% margin of error for a 95% confidence level.

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The interviews explored the relationship between the churches and the schools and the practice of Christian ethos within schools. A list of the interviewees is in Appendix III.

An opportunity to contribute comments to the research was also provided on the NICIE website.

(e) Report

A draft research report was presented for discussion and then a final draft of the report was completed.

(f) Launch Seminar

The final report was launched at a seminar in January 2009 attended by a range of key stakeholders including those who had participated in the research. The purpose of the seminar was to discuss the findings of the research, to discuss the main issues for consideration and to identify practical recommendations for the future in light of the research findings.

5 Integrated Schools and the Churches

5.1 Churches and Integrated Schools

(a) Links with Churches

When schools were asked the question 'How important are links with local churches for your school?'

- 50% of respondents said 'Very Important'.
- 43% of respondents said 'Important'.
- 7% of respondents said 'Unimportant'.
- None of the respondents said 'Very Unimportant'.

When schools were asked the question 'Does your school actively try to develop links with local churches?'

- 91% of respondents said 'Yes'
- 9% of respondents said 'No'

When asked how they developed their links with churches, the schools indicated that they contacted local clergy by letter, telephone, email and one to one meetings and through existing personal contacts of staff members who are also members of local churches.

The schools indicated that they developed links through activities such as:

- Invitations to speak at assemblies
- Invitations to special events in the school
- Use of churches for school religious services
- Visits to churches

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

Schools were asked the question 'With which churches does your school have a relationship?'

In relation to the four larger churches in Northern Ireland the responses were:

- Church of Ireland: 73%
- Roman Catholic⁸: 68%
- Presbyterian: 66%
- Methodist: 41%

25% of schools had a relationship with a Baptist Church.

7% of schools answered that they had a relationship with 'all local churches' and one school said they had a relationship with no churches.

Relationships with other churches/faith communities mentioned by a small number of schools were:

- Elim Pentecostal (2 schools)
- Brethren (2 schools)
- Church of the Nazarene (1 school)
- Non Subscribing Presbyterian (1 school)
- Mormon (1 school)
- Jehovah's Witness (1 school)
- Salvation Army (1 school)
- Gateway Church (1 school)

(b) Clergy Visits

When asked 'How often do clergy from each of these churches visit your school?' 59% of respondents said clergy visited their school at least once a term. The main responses were:

- At least once a week: 16%
- Once a month: 16%
- Once a term: 27%
- Occasionally: 16%
- Never: 14%
- Roman Catholic Priest does not visit: 14%

⁸ The use of the terms 'Catholic' and 'Roman Catholic' are contentious in Northern Ireland. In this report 'Roman Catholic' is used to refer to the church institution and the term 'Catholic' is used to refer to the community or individuals of this tradition. In quotes from interviews and surveys the term used in the report is the same term that was used by the respondent or interviewee.

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

(c) Role of Churches

When schools were asked which roles local churches play in their school, the responses were as follows:

- Pupil visits to churches: 80%
- Conduct of/participation in worship in school e.g. in assemblies: 77%
- Conduct of/participation in worship in church services (mainly Christmas, Harvest and Roman Catholic Sacramental Services): 73%
- Use of church premises for school events: 66%
- Preparation for sacraments: 66%
- Informal contact with staff: 52%
- Involvement of church staff other than clergy (e.g. youth workers): 48%
- Pastoral role: 32%
- Teaching of RE/support for RE teachers: 34%
- Formal chaplaincy role: 20%
- Board of Governors: 16%

(d) Unsuccessful Attempts to Establish a Relationship

When asked 'Are there any local churches with which you have tried unsuccessfully to establish a relationship?'

- 41% of respondents said 'Yes'
- 54% of respondents said 'No'

Of the schools that had tried unsuccessfully to establish a relationship with a local church:

- Ten schools (23%) had been unsuccessful in trying to establish a relationship with a Roman Catholic Church. Comments included:

'The Roman Catholic priest will not visit our school'

'Catholic clergy are friendly but won't come into the building.'

'The Roman Catholic Church will not visit us'

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

- Three schools had been unsuccessful in trying to establish a relationship with a Presbyterian Church.
- Two schools had been unsuccessful in trying to establish a relationship with a Free Presbyterian Church, two schools had been unsuccessful in trying to establish a relationship with a Methodist Church and one school had been unsuccessful with a Congregational Church.

In response to the question 'If clergy have declined to become involved in your school, what reasons, if any, have they given?' respondents comments included:

'The parish priest does not agree with integrated education, therefore does not want to visit us - but he goes along with the sacraments and the preparation involved in it.'

'The local priest has been invited on quite a few occasions but declines without reason.'

'They don't agree with it, it's very blunt -saying to parishioners that an integrated school education is not acceptable and against the wishes of the Church.'

'He is not allowed to by the Bishop.'

'He is very clear that as chairman of local Maintained School, he can't be seen to be supporting an integrated school.'

'We are careful not to put Diocesan Catholic clergy in the position of having to refuse due to the Bishop's (present) policy. We are fortunate to have another priest coming regularly.'

'There is usually no reason given, no reply or are busy and could not make it.'

Several interviewees also commented on the difficulties they had experienced in attempting to develop links with churches:

'We felt that we were doing God's will by building bridges and we felt so let down that we did not receive warm and wholehearted support from the churches. We put it down to them not having power and control over integrated schools – it seems to be the only reason. In the early days we were so disappointed...we sent out invitations to seminars and conferences and they never came. ' (Interview)

'We felt over the years that the clergy who shouted us down didn't know what went on in an integrated school – they had never been to one and they seemed to deliberately misunderstand.' (Interview)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

'We were disappointed because in places like Lagan College we were bending over backwards to get RE and the Christian ethos right.'
(Interview)

(e) Links Severed

When the schools were asked the question 'Have you experienced any instances where links were established, then severed, by clergy?'

- 80% of respondents said 'No'
- 14% of respondents said 'Yes'

The schools that said yes, commented on why they think the link was severed with comments such as:

'Clergy have openly referred to the loss of pupils at 'their own' parish school and of their view that children should be brought up and educated within the church/school ethos/environment.'

(f) Public Support or Opposition from Clergy

When the schools were asked the question 'Have you received any public support for your school from local clergy?'

- 59% of respondents said 'Yes'
- 39% of respondents said 'No'

Examples given of the form this public support has taken included:

'When there was a threat of the school closing the local churches showed their support by sending letters.'

'When we opened a new nursery unit the local priest came along to the opening.'

'At the official opening - the Presbyterian, Methodist and Catholic clergy attended.'

'They give us moral support, come in on visits and the Church of Ireland allow use of their rooms and chairs etc.'

'The Presbyterian church next door loans us chairs, crockery etc.'

'Local Catholic clergy have made it clear that we are a school of the parish - announcements are made from the pulpit and in the parish bulletin - the same as the Catholic schools. There is similar informal support from other churches such as the Baptist Church.'

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

'We had spoken support – saying what a great job we're doing with the children's spiritual development.'

'The Roman Catholic clergyman endorses the school ethos and has said so in public bulletins.'

'Cardinal Brady has always treated us in the same way he has other parish schools. His endorsement and that of the then parish priest set the scene for all other Catholic clergy.'

'Public support is more likely to come from Protestant clergy. One example of public support from Catholic priest who thanked the school for preparing students for confirmation from the altar and an attempt from another priest to include our students in participation (readings etc) at confirmation.'

'The Church of Ireland support us by letting us use their church for services and rent their hall for exams.'

Several interviewees also spoke of support from local churches:

'The local churches are actively involved in the school. The ministers and priest are very positive. They seem to work together well...there is an openness and friendliness among them and they work with us in planning events.' (Interview)

When the schools were asked the question 'Have you been aware of any overt opposition by clergy towards your school?'

- 64% of respondents said 'No'
- 34% of respondents said 'Yes'

Examples given of the form this public opposition has taken included:

'There was hostility from clergy and a lack of acceptance. After eight years opinion began to change but it has taken another seven years since then to have almost everyone on board.'

'Some discouragement about enrolling children reported by parents. One statement during a sermon encouraging parents not to use integrated education was reported by parents and staff.'

'It is fairly obvious to us here that the Roman Catholic church are not particularly supportive to integrated schooling in general. However our local priest does everything in his remit to support us without upsetting his clergy hierarchy.'

'The local priest mentioned his disgust in the pulpit – saying a perfectly good Catholic school already exists.'

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

'At a confirmation service the Bishop presiding openly told parents that they should send their children to Catholic schools - children from our school were being confirmed by him. The local priest has made personal/home visits to confront families who have made the integrated choice.'

'The priest does not encourage children to attend this integrated school...he has spoken from pulpit and discouraged parents during pastoral visits. The parish school is constantly supported and the children from this school are ignored.'

'Twenty years ago all the clergy voiced their opinions loudly.'

'In the early days, we had the annual pronouncements from the pulpit (Roman Catholic) about the obligation on Catholic parents to send their children to Catholic schools.'

(g) Different Faith Communities

In response to the question 'Does your school have a relationship with other faith communities?'

- 52% of respondents said 'No'
- 45% of respondents said 'Yes'

Among the schools that do have a relationship with other faith communities, examples given of how links were developed included:

'Bahá'í parents have contributed to assemblies as a result of family links.'

'We have children of the Hare Krishna faith so we get advice on this from their parents.'

'We visit the Synagogue in Belfast and have invited the Rabbi to the school. We are also trying to establish a similar link with the Muslim community.'

'Through parents who are Buddhist and Bahá'í.'

'The school's community relations programme includes a day long visit to Muslim/Indian faith centres to explore faith/cultural issues.'

'Over the years we have had a number of Muslim students - we held a conference for Muslims and offer facilities for prayer.'

'We have Hare Krishna parents who come in to talk to the children and also we have "called" prayer for Muslim children, on an individual basis.'

'Links with the Muslim community are developing through contact with parents. On two occasions a Muslim leader was invited to explain his faith to seniors.'

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

(h) Schools Declining Approaches from a Faith Group

In response to the question 'Has your school ever declined an approach to develop links from a church or other faith group?'

- 89% of respondents said 'No'
- 7% of respondents said 'Yes'

Among the few schools that did decline approaches from a faith group, the main reason given was concerns that an evangelistic group was intending to '*use the classroom for evangelistic purposes.*'

(i) Conclusions

The vast majority of integrated schools in Northern Ireland regard links with churches as important and actively try to develop such links with local churches.

Most integrated schools have a relationship with Church of Ireland, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian Churches.

The main types of link with local churches are pupil visits to churches, conduct of worship in school and church services, use of church premises for school events and preparation for Roman Catholic sacraments.

The majority of integrated schools are visited by clergy at least once a term.

However, two fifths of the schools have tried unsuccessfully to establish a relationship with a local church. Just under a quarter of integrated schools have been unsuccessful in trying to establish a relationship with a local Roman Catholic Church.

More than half of the schools have received public support from local clergy. Just over a third of the schools have experienced public opposition by clergy, mainly Catholic clergy making public statements discouraging Catholic parents from choosing an integrated school rather than a Catholic school.

Just over half of integrated schools do not have a relationship with other faith communities. Among the just under half of schools that do have a relationship with different faith communities, this tends to be developed through parents who are Muslim, Bahá'í, Buddhist, Hare Krishna or Hindu.

The vast majority of integrated schools have never declined an approach to develop links from a church or other faith group.

5.2 Catholic Church in Ireland

Of the four larger churches in Northern Ireland, the Roman Catholic Church is the one with which integrated schools had, and continues to have the most challenging relationships.

When asked if they had any other comments they would like to feed into the research, the majority of comments related to the relationship with Catholic clergy. Comments included:

'I feel that Catholic kids are at a disadvantage because the priest refuses to visit the school on a pastoral basis but the Protestant clergy do.'

'The Catholic church does not treat our children equally to children in the Maintained Sector'

'We have always been and remain keen to develop our relationship to the point where local Roman Catholic clergy will enter the school.'

However not all comments were negative:

'The Catholic Church allows us to have our own separate services for communion and confession. We are treated equally with other parish schools.'

The survey found that although 23% of integrated schools had been unsuccessful in trying to establish a relationship with a Roman Catholic Church, the majority (68%) of integrated schools do have a relationship with their local Catholic clergy.

Experiences differ from school to school. Positive relationships were highlighted by a number of schools:

'The priest comes in and takes classes and liturgies. We have a close relationship and he knows we do a good job.' (Interview)

Relationships were particularly difficult in the early years of integrated education.

'The Catholic Church and local Catholic schools were extremely hostile in the beginning...we seemed to be stepping on toes and they believed another school was not needed...The local priest wouldn't allow the children to be confirmed in their own parish – Catholic children weren't welcome in their own parish!...We had a long battle to get our own First Communion but we persisted, we didn't give up- we spoke for the children who were being treated as second class citizens...We had to battle on for 10 years and it was very difficult and very stressful for parents...but there is an agreement now and the local clergy are more supportive...but I would still like to see the parish priest come into the school to take assembly. ' (Interview)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

'When integrated schools were set up my perception is the Roman Catholic Church did not wholeheartedly or warmly support it...although the Protestant churches weren't that wholehearted either.' (Interview)

'In the past it was common that we were denounced from Catholic pulpits. In the past year I know of an example of a parish priest telling parents from the pulpit not to send their children to the local integrated school.' (Interview)

'There has been a lot of very clear opposition. The Catholic hierarchy want to keep the Catholic kids in a Catholic School and they are afraid of losing some control. Some Catholic Primary Schools have been told to have nothing to do with us and some of their principals have apologised that we are not allowed into their schools to inform their pupils about the College. However others have welcomed us in – it seems to be dependent on the parish priest.' (Interview)

Relationships continue to be uneasy in various ways:

'We invited the parish priest to come to the school and he came – he said he was uncomfortable but was here for the children.' (Interview)

'If it wasn't for the sacraments, the Catholic Church would not be involved in the school...and in the past our children were tolerated rather than included...so it's better that we have a separate school event for first communion – it involves all the children and is an opportunity to celebrate difference.' (Interview)

'You could argue that Catholic children might not get enough doctrine in an integrated school...one hour a week is not enough- in a Catholic school it is part of the formal day every day.' (Interview)

'Catholic clergy accept the principle of parental choice but they say integrated education should not be the choice for a Catholic parent.' (Interview)

A few integrated schools have decided not to involve any clergy in their school because they have been unable to involve Catholic clergy.

'There has been a reluctance to invite clergy into the school because the Catholics wouldn't come.' (Interview)

'I have never once been invited to take an assembly at the integrated school next door. It appears that if the Roman Catholic Church chooses not to be involved then I am excluded under some equality basis' (Interview)

However a some integrated schools have been able to involve Catholic clergy from Religious Orders in places where diocesan priests will not visit the school.

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

A number of interviewees pointed out that Catholic clergy do not take regular Assemblies in Catholic schools in the same way that Protestant clergy take assemblies in controlled schools:

'Catholic clergy do not take Assemblies in Catholic Schools except perhaps for a special mass.'(Interview)

'There is less of a tradition of taking assemblies by parish priests in Catholic schools' (Interview)

Most interviewees were unable to cite a written Catholic policy on integrated schools in Northern Ireland.

'There is no written Catholic Policy Statement on integrated education...the position is that it is the right of the parents to identify and make the right choice of a school...There has been a change from the expectation that all Catholic children will go to Catholic schools .For example there is a recognition that this might be the choice for mixed marriages.' (Interview)

The most consistent policies suggested from the experience of interviewees were that:

- Parents have a right to choose how to educate their children
- Catholic parents are encouraged to educate their children within a Catholic school
- The importance of giving Catholic children an identity in a Catholic school
- Bishops do not take up the invitation to appoint Catholic governors to the places allocated to them within the Board of Governors of transformed Controlled Integrated Schools

However, when it comes to the relationship between Catholic clergy and local integrated schools there is a diversity of approaches among Catholic Dioceses and different Catholic clergy:

'One of the first questions other parents, particularly Catholic parents asked us when we were starting the school was "will religious preparation be provided?" The Bishop told us it came directly from the Pope not to have Catholic chaplains in integrated schools. The local parish said they were willing but their hands were tied and it was coming from the Bishop. At first there was overt criticism and a lot of our early intake of Catholics weren't practicing...but once we were up and running we were slotted in...it was all very superficial; they did what they had to do. They didn't want to provide preparation for the sacraments through the school but they put a teacher in touch with us to come and prepare the children.' (Interview)

'I am not aware of any policy that priests aren't allowed to go into an integrated school. The Church accepts that people will make their own decision...Most priests are prepared to support the preparation for the sacraments in integrated schools and most Bishops are quite accepting of this.' (Interview)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

Interviewees consistently highlight the impact of the personal views of individual Catholic clergy:

'It's very much a personal approach – priests do their own thing.'
(Interview)

'As an RE teacher and a Roman Catholic I feel a bit let down. The former priest in this area was very good with us – the problem was his line manager.' (Interview)

'The local parish priest is a regular visitor to both the primary and post primary integrated schools in this area...it depends on individual clergy and the integrated school.' (Interview)

'It would be great to have all clergy coming into integrated schools but Catholic priests find it difficult and I think we need to address this...I think the personal approach is very important' (Interview)

In situations where there are difficult relationships it is interesting that some interviewees explained this as a result of the personal views of the local parish priest while others indicated that this was a result of the policy of their Bishop.

A significant finding is that a considerable number of interviewees talked about what they called a “softening” of the approach of Catholic clergy in recent years, which they tended to describe as “pragmatic”.

'There has been a huge change...initially integrated education was taboo – now it's in the parish bulletin!' (Interview)

'They have drawn back from denouncing us from the pulpit and they are interested in the approach of 'integrating' education and promoting a culture of tolerance...locally they try to find an accommodation that doesn't break the rules.' (Interview)

'I am amazed at how much progress there has been in recent years...I cant believe it – there is a sense of valuing our children now and if parents are willing to bring them up in the Faith it should be valued.' (Interview)

'The approach of the Catholic Church has mellowed for pragmatic reasons – the 62 integrated schools are not going to go away.' (Interview)

'The parish priest came into the school one month ago for the first time in twenty years.' (Interview)

'We are now being actively invited out to Catholic primary schools to speak to P7s and we now have children transferring to us from the Catholic sector that previously wouldn't have come near us...in fact we get the least number of children from the local integrated primary school which feeds more into Grammar Schools outside of this community, because parents there perceive Grammar as the only education for their children ' (Interview)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

'The Catholic hierarchy are still hesitant. Are they going to neglect the spiritual education of their children? Their approach is more pragmatic than all embracing.' (Interview)

'In the past the parish priest drafted a letter to all the principals of all the Catholic primary schools saying we were not to be allowed into the primary schools to talk about the Integrated College. It was also said at mass that we were not allowed to send our children to an integrated school. But that has changed now because parents speak up more now and don't want to be dictated to by the Church.' (Interview)

'The parish priest here has been very upfront in his involvement in our school and has said so in front of the Bishop. Some people in the parish are supportive and others are not. He is a very brave man...and it would be hard to wind back progress now if another parish priest came in who was less supportive.' (Interview)

'If you have an interchurch marriage or a Catholic couple who think this is the right way to go then that's the right of their children. In the past the policy was for us not to go into integrated schools because parents should be sending their children to Catholic schools, but there has been a softening. Now Maintained Schools are seen as not just for Catholics and there is a greater emphasis on tolerance and respect.' (Interview)

'The approach of the Roman Catholic Church is very different from ten years ago. It's not perfect – we are still seen as a threat and they believe a Catholic child will lose out at an integrated school, but there has been a softening...a new Bishop brings new hope...However Diocesan priests still don't feel free to come here –they are never in the school' (Interview)

These changes are also reflected in an increased emphasis on diversity within Catholic schools:

'The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) in its Decree on Christian Education clearly embraced the belief that, through education, people "should be open to dialogue with others and willingly devote themselves to the common good" (Gravissimum Educationis, Para 1). There is an explicit demand that each school "by providing friendly contacts between pupils of different characters and backgrounds...encourages mutual understanding" (para 5).

Catholic schools "are no less zealous than other schools in the promotion of culture and in the human formation of young people. It is, however, the special function of the Catholic school to develop in the school community an atmosphere animated by a spirit of liberty and charity based on the Gospel." (Para 8).' (Building Peace Shaping the Future, 2001)

'Catholic schools exist to meet the wish of parents who desire a Catholic education for their children.'(Building Peace Shaping the Future, 2001)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

'In principle, therefore, Catholic schools are open to children of all denominations. Indeed, the presence of children from other denominations is seen as enrichment of the education experience offered by the school and as a practical expression to the commitment to inclusivity.' (Building Peace Shaping the Future, 2001)

A joint Roman Catholic/Church of Ireland school opened in the Republic of Ireland in 2005. oGaelscoil an tSli Dala, an Irish medium primary school in Ballaghmore, Borris in Ossory, Co Laois, opened in September 2005. It was the first school in Ireland to be established under joint patronage of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland.

'We welcome the possibility for the new venture in joint patronage of a primary school. The request for our joint patronage was made in the first instance by the parents' group at Ballaghmore. While this is a new entity in the concept of patronage of primary schools we are happy to support the request of our parents that their new school should incorporate a firm Christian ethos that it is highly respectful of both traditions. We congratulate the Ballaghmore Muintir Na Tire Council in the work they are doing to ensure that there is educational provision for the children of their area who wish to receive a Christian primary school education through the medium of Irish.' (Statement of Bishop Willie Walsh and Bishop Michael Mayes, 2007)

In 2000, representatives of the four major churches, supported by the Department of Education, took part in a study visit to England to see several Joint Church of England/Roman Catholic Faith Schools in action. According to the *"Joint Protestant – Roman Catholic School, Colleges and Universities Directory 2007"* there are 16 such schools in England and Wales. A shared faith school is not a unique concept in Britain, where church attendance is much lower than in Northern Ireland.

'...perhaps a town has not enough Catholics to fill a school, the Church of England wants to expand and the local authority is keen to reduce the number of schools. In several cases the churches have clubbed together rather than risk losing what might be the only Christian secondary school in the area.' (Combe, 2006)

The Study Visit in 2000 resulted in very positive comments from participants from the Protestant churches. For example, the Minutes of the Methodist Conference in 2000 stated:

"We continued to research the area of Integrated Education and we shared in an ecumenical visit to schools in Harrogate.... This was a profitable visit that gave us the opportunity to view an ecumenical initiative in integrated education. The two schools, one Church of England and other Roman Catholic, committed to integrating their 6th form pupils, represented a model that has much to encourage us in the pursuit of a possible way forward.' (Minutes of Methodist Conference, 2000)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

However, ideas of initiating research to explore the idea of a pilot for Northern Ireland have not progressed. Several interviewees believed the barrier to further development has been competing priorities within the Department of Education and a lack of enthusiasm towards the idea, particularly from the Roman Catholic Church.

'It took great vision and leadership of the two Bishops in Liverpool to make a joint school model work. We discussed a pilot and a scoping study, but it died a death. The Maintained Sector is organising separately for local area planning now so I am quite disillusioned. There will be very little move to integration unless there is a change in stance from the Roman Catholic Church, and the Department of Education appears to run shy of this.'
(Interview)

'The Joint Faith Schools idea seems to have been overtaken by other priorities in education, but it would be important to revisit this in time.'
(Interview)

Interviewees spoke of their hopes for an improved relationship between integrated schools and the Irish Catholic Church in the future but believed there would be ongoing challenges:

'The Catholic Church should appoint someone to look seriously at this issue – it is an extremely important issue.'(Interview)

'I would like to see Catholic priests in their pastoral role reaching into integrated schools and Catholic children at integrated schools being treated equally by priests.' (Interview)

'...there appear to be new messages being sent by the Catholic Church about the need for faith based schools to develop a welcome for other faiths and more inclusive practices. Supporters of the integrated movement may well ask if these aspirations will allow changes in governance and staff profiles to demonstrate meaningful inclusion.' (Ellis, 2006)

'I would like to see the Catholic Church providing Governors for Catholic Trustees in transformed schools – I would like to see that formally approved.' (Interview)

'I would like to see an active desire to say 'How do we shape new ways of sharing? How can we create new ways of being together? But at the minute the Catholic Education Sector is developing separate area based plans and the Controlled and Integrated Sectors are not consulted.' (Interview)

'Protestant Churches have been positive about integrated schools but the Catholic Church has not. But it's not going to work unless Catholics are involved- there is an ecumenical strength in us working together.'
(Interview)

'It seems like we are in a 'truce' now, but how do we negotiate new ways of being together? Can we be creative? Can we work on some local pilots together? Secularism is coming!' (Interview)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

'Following the Bain Report there may be a halt to new development and it might be more about integrating schools. There are some exciting ideas about more sharing but there has to be a will to do it...the onus is on the sectors to find creative ways of sharing space, staff, facilities management etc for greater collaboration.' (Interview)

'The Protestant Churches are not having difficult conversations with Roman Catholics about this in order to maintain good relations...There needs to be a more embracing position and attitude to integrated faith based schools from the Roman Catholic Church, in areas where that is possible.' (Interview)

Relations between integrated schools and the Roman Catholic Church have clearly improved in many places over the past 25 years. However, difficulties remain which continue to have a negative impact on relations between the integrated sector and the Roman Catholic Church. In addition to this, where there is a lack of discussion this can also have a negative impact upon relations between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland in general.

'The Roman Catholic Church's stance on integrated education...is not intended to be sectarian, it is about identity, ethos and community building. But in a society where the dividing lines are so substantial that in places they are built in brick and metal, the general refusal to engage in the conversation about integrated education at best tends to harden the boundaries between Roman Catholics and Protestants through suspicion of the Catholic Church's motives, and at worst lends itself to belittling Protestant or State education. It is important to note in this example that it is not a question of whether or not integrated education is seen as a good thing in and of itself. That is a wholly other discussion. Rather it is the destructive patterns of relating engendered by refusing to enter into discussion which attract the judgement of being sectarian.' (Cecilia Clegg and Joseph Liechty, 2001)

5.3 Church of Ireland

The survey found that 73% of integrated schools have a relationship with their local Church of Ireland clergy, the highest percentage for any church. None of the schools had been unsuccessful in trying to establish a relationship with the Church of Ireland.

Interviewees indicated that there was no written policy on the relationship of the Church of Ireland to integrated schools.

A few interviewees believed the Church had not been supportive:

'The Church of Ireland has been ambivalent, never saying anything openly in favour of integrated education.' (Interview)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

‘The Church of Ireland has been lukewarm – they have had no real heart to change the system...They look more to their loss of ‘wishing we had never handed our schools over’ rather than consider what could have been gained if they had endorsed integrated education as a way to advance a more peaceful Northern Ireland.’ (Interview)

However, the general view was that the Church of Ireland, while not proactive in the development of integrated education, is supportive of integrated schools as long as they do not impact negatively on controlled schools. Comments included:

‘The Church of Ireland has no written policy on integrated education. However speeches and statements around legislation for integrated education was initially largely supportive...but when integrated schools began to become a threat to the Controlled Sector to which the Church had an historical link, then the Church of Ireland became neutral and never really developed a policy...’ (Interview)

‘The Church of Ireland was careful and concerned about protecting controlled schools but now they have become very courageous in their support.’ (Interview)

‘There is no Church of Ireland policy on integrated schools. The main difference is that we are less involved in the classrooms in integrated schools.’ (Interview)

‘The Church of Ireland has been supportive but has not wanted to be at loggerheads with their Catholic counterparts’. (Interview)

‘The Church of Ireland has accepted that integrated education was there, but there was no policy decision to actively support it. However they do not discourage parents who choose it.’ (Interview)

‘There is a sense of loss in transformation of controlled schools to integrated status – one side experiences the loss because no Catholic school has ever transformed.’ (Interview)

‘The major work of reconciliation, the churches believe, must be tackled in the controlled, maintained and voluntary grammar school sectors. Accordingly the churches are beginning to speak of the need for “integrating education” in addition to integrated education’. (Ellis, 2006)

5.4 Presbyterian Church in Ireland

The survey found that two thirds of integrated schools have a relationship with their local Presbyterian Church.

Three schools had been unsuccessful in trying to establish a relationship with a Presbyterian Church.

Following a series of concerns about integrated education during the 1990's⁹, in 2000 the State Education Committee of the Church encouraged Presbyterian ministers to play a full part within integrated schools, with a statement commending the Christian ethos within integrated schools:

'The 1996 General Assembly supported the principle of Controlled Integrated Education where there is local demand for integrated school provision. Since that time the Church has increasingly come to appreciate the spiritual value which NICIE is committed to fostering as part of the integrated schools ethos and acknowledges the welcome accorded to ministers of religion into integrated schools, not only on the basis of the statutory right of entry, but also as having a significant role in the spiritual and moral formation of children and young people and as having a contribution to make to the overall work and life of the school...

Ministers are encouraged to visit to play as full a part in their local integrated schools as they would do in the controlled sector.'

(Presbyterian Church State Education Committee, 2000)

Interviewees highlighted different attitudes to integrated education within the Presbyterian Church dependent on the views of local clergy and/or congregations. Comments included:

'The approach of the Presbyterian Church has been a curious mixture including some great advocates for integrated education. It seems to be decided locally.' (Interview)

'Local Presbyterians can be interested or not interested – it depends on the clergy.' (Interview)

'The two Presbyterian churches have been positive and we have a Harvest Service in one of the Presbyterian Churches every year.' (Interview)

'In some situations the minister might be well disposed to the integrated school but needs to be sensitive to the views of the congregation.' (Interview)

⁹ *'At one point the Presbyterians were actively against a meeting between NICIE and the Transferors Representative Council.'* (Interview)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

'In the early days the Presbyterian clergy and elders who were supportive of integrated education were also those who were disinclined to pick fights with the Catholic hierarchy...they were the more ecumenically minded...However over the years when people began to realise that integrated schools took RE and Christian ethos seriously (more seriously in contrast with some controlled and Grammar Schools) more conservative Presbyterians have become more comfortable with integrated schools.'
(Interview)

'The focus was often on the Catholic clergy who were often saying no to integrated schools and that took the heat off the Protestant clergy.'
(Interview)

'It is hard to get a consistent Presbyterian view on integrated education. Some have theological concerns and others like our Christian ethos.'
(Interview)

In general interviewees felt that Presbyterian Church, while not proactive in the development of integrated education, is supportive of parental choice and encourages its ministers to play a full part within integrated schools. It is supportive of integrated schools as long as they do not impact negatively on controlled schools. Comments included:

'The Presbyterian Church's published views have been fairly positive...encouraging parents in their freedom to choose... Integrated education is seen as very laudable but the churches might be expected to be more supportive...support has been somewhat muted at a formal level but there are good relationships where integrated schools didn't threaten other controlled schools.' (Interview)

5.5 Methodist Church in Ireland

The survey found that 41% of integrated schools have a relationship with their local Methodist Church.

Two schools had been unsuccessful in trying to establish a relationship with a Methodist Church.

Several interviewees indicated that the Methodist Church had been the most supportive of the four major churches in Northern Ireland.

'The Methodists have been the most consistently positive and supportive Church towards integrated education.' (Interview)

'Methodists have been the most unequivocal in their support' (Interview)

'I have never heard anything other than support from the Methodist Church.' (Interview)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

'Our Church would like to see a Controlled School transform rather than close because a new integrated school has opened.' (Interview)

Once again there is no clear written policy. In general interviewees felt that the Methodist Church, while not proactive in the development of integrated education, is supportive of parental choice and integrated schools as long as this does not impact negatively on controlled schools.

'There is no clear written policy in Methodism but there have been statements during the Methodist Conference over the years...The Church has been supportive to bringing pupils together from different backgrounds, rather than just a wee bit of EMU, but as long as this does not result in the closure of another school.' (Interview)

5.6 Other Protestant Churches

The survey found that a quarter of schools had a relationship with a Baptist Church.

Interviewees talked about positive working relationships in some areas:

'When we were getting started we invited all the churches to our open evenings but no-one came...then the Baptist pastor came to apologise for not coming and on behalf of the local Inter Church Group to say that the churches are fully supportive.' (Interview)

'Each Baptist church is autonomous so I don't know about other Baptist churches but we see the integrated schools equally...and there is a healthy respect.' (Interview)

'Baptists have been pragmatic. If there is a school there they will be involved, but they won't be a guiding light in setting it up and there is a big diversity among Baptists – it's more about the local congregation.' (Interview)

Several interviewees referred to theological concerns around worship with Catholics:

'There have been occasions when Baptists withdrew their children from events where Catholic clergy were involved.' (Interview)

'Baptists seem to have a difficulty in taking part in public with other clergy.' (Interview)

Comments regarding other smaller Protestant denominations included:

'We have some Brethren children who opt out of Assembly and we try to accommodate them as best we can.' (Interview)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

'We are well supported by the Presbyterian, Church of Ireland and Methodist Churches and the local Community Church provides a counselling service.' (Interview)

'Smaller churches such as Christian Fellowship Church and Vineyard have a warm and open attitude to integrated schools. The exception has been Free Presbyterians, who have their own schools, and some Elim Pentecostal Churches who have concerns because of their theological view of Catholics.' (Interview)

5.7 Different Faith Communities

Just over half of integrated schools do not have a relationship with other faith communities. Among the just under half of schools that do have a relationship with different faith communities, this tends to be developed through parents rather than through formal links with religious leaders.

Comments included:

'We welcome parents who are Jehovah's Witnesses and those who have no religious beliefs. Their children can be withdrawn from Assemblies if they wish.' (Interview)

'Our Pakistani children are Muslims and were involved in our multi cultural day which included Muslim prayers...In assemblies we say "pray to your God" and at Christmas we include how different groups and nationalities including Muslims, celebrate at that time of the year.' (Interview)

'We have no formal links with Muslim leaders but we have visits from people of other faiths.' (Interview)

'Our Muslim children shared the meaning of Ramadan with their class.' (Interview)

'NICIE has good relationships with the Belfast Islamic Centre, the Synagogue and the Hindu Centre and we are represented on the Inter Faith Forum. We promote links with other faiths and we were an advocate for other faiths being involved in the review of RE.' (Interview)

6 Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

6.1 Statement

(a) Christian Ethos

When asked the question 'Does your school indicate in its prospectus/mission statement that it has a Christian ethos?'

- 80% of respondents said 'Yes'
- 9% of respondents said 'No'

When asked the reason for this the main responses given were:

- It is a legal requirement
- It is in the NICIE Statement of Principles
- The majority of children/parents/Northern Ireland is Christian
- It is part of the vision of the founders/governors

Schools were asked to choose one of a series of these words that best described their school's approach to religion. The results were as follows:

ALL FAITHS AND NONE	43%
CHRISTIAN	34%
ECUMENICAL	7%
HUMANIST	0%
MULTI FAITH	0%
SECULAR	0%
OTHER (mainly a Combination of Christian and All Faiths and None)	11%

Interviewees described the approach to Christian ethos within integrated schools in different ways. For example:

'We try to follow the NICIE Principles. Our Assemblies have a Christian slant to them but not at the expense of other faiths...Christianity is not rammed at our students – it's about underlying values of understanding and respect.'
(Interview)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

'We have a Christian ethos here...it's in the prospectus, but at open nights some parents think there is no religion at integrated schools...but I think it would be detrimental to the children's understanding of each other to take this away.' (Interview)

'Integrated schools have a light touch in their approach to religion, not a control approach, and this appeals to parents...What we find in integrated schools is not religion – it's faith. We do not have Christian religion in integrated schools in terms of formal denominations being in control.' (Interview)

'There should be freedom to express your religious beliefs within integrated schools.' (Interview)

'For me having a Christian ethos means our school is built on the values that Christ taught and I think that makes us a good school. I am talking about values such as citizenship, self esteem and sense of purpose.' (Interview)

'We don't shy away from telling Bible stories but we are not telling the children what to believe – it's not our job to tell you what to believe.' (Interview)

'Our Christian ethos is an important part of our school. Initially we identified specific festivals to include in our programme to encourage sharing. We did not feel it important at the outset to involve local churches other than to visit them. It was more important to impress our Christian identity on the school. We may now wish to change this position but are finding it difficult to know how.' (Survey Comment)

Bill Brown of ACT has defined Christian ethos as follows:

'A major question remains: How does one ensure that schools have a Christian ethos? Some negatives are required first to make that focus clearer.'

A Christian ethos is not a church ethos and the integrated schools are not "church linked" schools.

A Christian ethos is not one where any are uncomfortable with their own beliefs.

A Christian ethos is not one where alternative or different viewpoints cannot be aired easily or discussed.

A Christian ethos is not parochial or selective in anyway.

What is it positively?

Clearly the ethos must be centrally informed by the teaching of Christ:

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

- *It accepts all pupils as equally valuable and valid. So the all-inclusive, all ability intake, all under one roof philosophy is central, "For there is neither Jew nor Greek, bound or free...all one".*
- *It is not judgmental or condemnatory but caring and concerned in its treatment of and approach to pupils..."Neither do I condemn you."*
- *It stresses the "Kingdom of God" view of community and not individuals. Thus the all-inclusive notion is central. At the same time every individual is given special value.*
- *It stresses the importance or recognising the spiritual dimension of everyone and seeks to develop each person's spiritual quest.*
- *It welcomes light from any quarter.*
- *It seeks to rescue pupils from a narrow or sectarian view and release them to a world perspective.*
- *It promotes tolerance and adopts an ecumenical perspective, stressing caring and consideration to all different or all in need.*
- *It acknowledges the part traditional religion has played in this community and in education, and welcomes the interest and involvement of the churches, at the same time promoting bridge building.*
- *At its heart is the concern for consistency in all dealing with parents and pupils and a guarded stance against hypocrisy or any stance suggesting superiority.*
- *Finally, there must be an accepting and co-operative stance towards schools which are different'. (Brown, 2000)*

The approach of a particular school is often dependent on the personal views of the principal and staff of the school.

'It varies a lot – some schools are fully committed to a Christian ethos and others are more laissez faire – it depends upon the principal' (Interview)

'The approach to Christian ethos is often dependent on the personal religious beliefs of the principal, but there should be an ownership by the whole school community.' (Interview)

'I am in my third year at this school and I came as Principal. My observation is that there is a significant number of staff who have an evangelical Protestant background. Sadly the staff is very under represented with Roman Catholics and those we have do not seem keen on sharing their Church's faith or practice. I find it challenging to introduce and maintain a more balanced and fully integrated religious ethos. But then leadership is challenging.' (Survey Comment)

'Some teachers are seen by parents as being too religious, but I am pleased that the children can experience difference and I would like other faiths to be explored more.' (Interview)

'How do you maintain a Christian ethos if your principal and staff are not practicing Christians? You can't require it?' (Interview)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

Many of those consulted referred to the challenge of having a Christian ethos within an increasingly diverse society.

'We also spend a full month each year exploring a world faith or culture. We are keen that children should discuss aspects of belief, practice or observance. We are aware that 20% of parents do not wish to declare a religion, have none or are of another faith. It is my personal view that this group is not properly recognised in the context of the dominant Christian ethos.' (Survey Comment)

'You can have a very strong Christian ethos but be very welcoming to other faiths as well – exploring faith together is a key part of integration in practice.' (Interview)

'They seem to have more children from other world faiths and do a lot of diversity work in the schools such as integrating festivals into the life and worship of the school – it has been done well. I wonder how this approach would be received in a Controlled School – people expect it in an integrated school.' (Interview)

Several schools highlighted the challenge of approaching religion in the context of not just an increase in different faiths but also an increase in secularism and atheism.

The Summary of Enrolments at Integrated Schools by Religion 2007-2008 (NICIE, 2008) indicates a breakdown of pupils by religion as:

- 42% Protestant
- 39% Roman Catholic
- 5% Other Christian
- 1% Non Christian Faith
- 13% Other

Interviewees commented on the increase in people of no faith:

'Increasingly our students would designate themselves as a faith group but not participate in or understand that faith - they are cultural identities. However a perception would be that Protestant groups are quicker to re-designate as 'other' than Catholic counterparts. Pupils increasingly note in surveys that they want less overt religion in mass meetings.' (Survey Comment)

'With the growth of a secular community...we have noticed a trend towards opting out of RE. Religion is playing a different role these days as parents are not as interested in it.' (Survey Comment)

'When we say that we are an integrated school for all faiths and none, there is potential to be made uncomfortable. Genuine Atheists and Agnostics can be left out.' (Survey Comment)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

In response to the changes in Northern Ireland society, during 2007/2008 NICIE has been carrying out a consultation on a review of the Statement of Principles, which included a rephrasing of the section on Christian ethos to *'The integrated school, while essentially Christian in character is open to those of all faiths and none...'* (NICIE, March 2008)

The consultation raised some debate about the appropriateness of a Christian ethos in many schools. However, there was no significant call for this to be removed.

'Christian ethos in the NICIE Statement of Principles is a contentious issue among staff, but we live in a predominantly Christian society and our catchment area is predominantly Christian so why shouldn't we have a Christian ethos? Parents take this into consideration when comparing us with other schools. Of course it depends on what you mean by Christian ethos – some people associate it with churches rather than values. For us it's an awareness of spirituality and a promotion of values of understanding, caring, tolerance, respect and equality.' (Interview)

'In the recent NICIE consultation on updating the principles, there was no great desire to change the Christian ethos...there is no drive for secular education in Northern Ireland.' (Interview)

'The feedback from the NICIE Statement of Principles Review Consultation was that a very small minority were opposed to a Christian ethos.' (Interview)

However, there are voices within integrated schools calling for a more secular approach:

'How important is this issue to the schools? In the early days the religious dimension was very important...a decade later it appears to be no longer a priority – other things are more important.' (Interview)

'Some of the founders of our school wanted no religion in the school' (Interview)

'My observations mostly relate to an unease with the apparent growth of faith schools in England and the disappointing awareness that this description may well be applied to our integrated - i.e. Christian schools. I must admit that, when I first became involved, I was naive enough to believe that I would be helping to work towards true equality of integration between all peoples. Of course we pay lip service to this ideal but, in fact, our schools are dominated by external influence from the Christian churches, with particular privilege extended to the Catholic variety... I suspect that it was felt that the only way the integrated movement could get itself up and running in Northern Ireland was by giving credence to the Christian churches. Perhaps so - but I think we might have been better to have bitten the bullet and anticipated the example of our sister body in the South by adopting a secular approach.' (Email from a School Governor)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

There are also some perceptions that integrated schools are secular in their approach. Comments included:

'There might be a perception that integrated education favours secular education' (Interview)

"In some integrated schools the parents driving it are angry at the churches and can be quite anti-church."(Interview)

'Some clergy have a perception that integrated schools are not strongly Christian schools, that they are neutral or believe everything and anything, but that's not fair because their principles are quite clear.' (Interview)

Several of the schools consulted expressed a desire to further develop their policy and practices in relation to faith issues:

'We would be keen to develop more links with churches, to visit more churches and most of all to have clergy visit our school. Other schools seem to be linked closely with a particular minister or priest - we would appreciate more clergy involvement.' (Survey Comment)

'After twenty years there are a number of integrated primary schools so as we take on more of a multi faith culture it would be good to examine the Christian ethos more.' (Survey Comment)

'We would be very interested to know how to fund a chaplain to further our relationship with the churches.' (Survey Comment)

(b) Conclusions

The majority of integrated schools indicate in their prospectus or mission statement that they have a Christian ethos.

Most of the schools describe their school's approach to religion as either "all faiths and none" or Christian. This reflects an approach that is primarily Christian, but that includes a recognition of people of different faiths as well as people of no religious faith.

The approach of a particular school is often dependent on the personal views of the principal and staff of the school.

Many of those consulted referred to the challenge of having a Christian ethos within an increasingly diverse society and in the context of an increase in secularism and atheism. However, the recent review of NICIE's Statement of Principles did not reveal a demand for secular education.

6.2 Practice

(a) Christian Ethos in Practice

When asked how schools reflected a Christian ethos in practice, the main responses from respondents were as follows:

- Assemblies: 45%
- RE/Curriculum: 30%
- Values/moral code: 22%
- Pastoral care/caring: 18%
- Respect/Tolerance: 19%

Some schools have put considerable energy and attention into how they work out their Christian ethos in practice in a way that is inclusive of all the children at the school.

'Many Integrated Schools face up to Christian ethos in a more rigorous way than Controlled Schools where it's taken for granted. They have to think out their ethos and gather consensus on issues and they see the right of the children and parents to be consulted...they spent time and money on devising a curriculum for non-Catholic children to do when Catholic children are doing sacramental preparation. It's called 'Delving Deeper' and it's good stuff.' (Interview)

In some schools this includes awareness of parents or children who do not wish to participate in any religious act of worship. For example:

'When there are prayers in Assembly children of no religion are allowed to withdraw from the Assembly Hall...so people from a humanist background are respected as well.' (Interview)

'We teach Christianity as the main religion - looking at all the main denominations. Children who have humanist/atheist views etc may be if desired, withdrawn from RE.' (Survey Comment)

(b) Religious Events

The schools consulted indicated they had marked the following religious events in their school in the past year:

- Carol Service/Nativity 93%
- Harvest Service 68%
- Easter 43%
- Sacraments (first communion, confirmation, confession) 20%
- Ash Wednesday 14%
- Mass 14%
- St Patrick's Day 14%
- Remembrance Day 7%

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

Other events taking place in a small number of schools included Diwali - Hindu Festival of Lights and a variety of special assemblies.

When asked which religious activities take place in the school, respondents indicated the following:

- | | |
|--|-----|
| • Weekly religious assemblies | 86% |
| • Daily prayers | 39% |
| • Faith based extracurricular clubs/activities | 30% |
| • Daily religious assemblies | 27% |
| • Other religious activities | 14% |

When asked 'What percentage of your school assemblies include a religious dimension?'

- 57% of respondents said 100%
- 20% of respondents said between 50-99%
- 14% of respondents said between 20-40%

(c) Contentious Religious Events

When asked the question 'Have there been any religious events in your school which have proved contentious?'

- 70% of respondents said 'No'
- 27% of respondents said 'Yes'

Examples of the events that had proved contentious included:

'We invited in a travelling Bible show. Parents complained because a pack including the New Testament was handed to all the children but inside the New Testament was a sales flyer promoting this particular religious group.'

'St Patrick's Day Celebrations last year were seen as contentious by a small group of parents. They felt it was too much of a Catholic celebration'

'Following a Baptist presentation where the kids dress up and taste food from Biblical times and listen to Biblical stories, a small minority of parents objected.'

'We have had a few difficult situations involving separated parents with different views on religion.'

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'We provided an opportunity for Catholic children to observe the Pope's death by watching his funeral on television and objections were raised by some Protestant parents.'

'As a transforming school everything was contentious for somebody in the initial years, such as Ash Wednesday. There was a fear of the unknown, not part of one group's identity, outside their comfort zone... the list is endless.'

'The past Ash Wednesday - we identified and discussed issues and it is now well planned and working well.'

(d) Policy on Religious Symbols

In response to the question 'What is your school's policy on the display of religious symbols?' there was a wide range of responses.

- 30% of respondents did not have a policy or were in the process of developing one
- 27% of respondents had an 'open policy' in that all religious symbols could be displayed
- 16% of respondents did not permit the display of any religious symbols
- 16% of respondents had a policy of only displaying religious symbols in a classroom setting such as an RE class

The range of responses included the following:

'As with other aspects of school life, balance is seen as important: i.e. if one faith has a significant display this implies a balancing recognition of the other main faith.'

'We display a Cross and Bible, pictures of the Last Supper and a Papal Blessing. These were decided on following consultation.'

'We have a May table and an advent wreath.'

'We are open to the display of religious symbols in terms of educating the children and as a sign of respect for individual belief.'

'Christian symbols are visible around campus including seasonal symbols such as Advent Wreath, crib, Lenten Cross and posters. No flags, emblems, badges or jewellery etc of a perceived sectarian nature are allowed. Poppies are allowed to be worn around Remembrance Day with an assembly giving their meaning.'

(e) Conclusions

The main ways in which integrated schools reflect their Christian ethos is through Assemblies, the RE Curriculum and promoting values such as respect, tolerance and caring. The majority of the schools have weekly assemblies and over half of the schools include a religious dimension in all assemblies.

The two main religious occasions celebrated in the majority of integrated schools are Carol/Nativity Services and Harvest Services.

Some schools have put considerable energy and attention into how they work out their Christian ethos in practice in a way that is inclusive of all the children at the school.

Most integrated schools have not had a religious event in the school that proved to be contentious. Where events have proved contentious this has usually involved complaints by a small number of parents.

Most schools either have no policy or an open policy on the display of religious symbols.

7 Examples of Practice

In this section of the report a number of examples of practice are presented to promote learning in other schools.

7.1 Drumragh Integrated College

Within its Mission Statement Drumragh Integrated College in Omagh says the college aims to:

'Embrace those of diverse religious beliefs and none, whilst building on a Christian ethos.'

The school defines its approach to integration as follows:

'Integration creates a positive learning environment where students grow together in reasonably balanced numbers from the two major traditions and, equally, reflecting the many diverse cultures that live within Northern Ireland today. The key aims of integration involve the provision of the highest possible quality of education for each student and the fostering of an inclusive learning community where all feel welcomed, valued and inspired to excel. Drumragh Integrated College is based on Christian values, whilst embracing diverse beliefs and none, and we promote the worth and self esteem of all individuals within the college community. The college strongly seeks to both develop and uphold respect for one self and others.'

Integration involves:

- *Quality education for all, including the gifted and talented, the more able and those with special needs of any kind*
- *Embracing difference and diversity, including the main cultural traditions in Northern Ireland and those from other parts of the world*
- *Child centre education*
- *Mutual respect*
- *Encouraging students to actively help each other*
- *Celebrating the achievements of our students, whether they are academic, sporting, practical or creative*
- *Recognising effort as well as achievement, and the personal best of each individual*
- *Fostering the growth of each person within a Christian ethos whilst fully embracing those of diverse religious beliefs and none*
- *Striving to ensure that our students feel confident, valued and happy*

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

In practice the college has developed good relationships with local churches and an approach to religion that is valued by local clergy:

'The four main churches are invited to take part in special assemblies such as Harvest, Christmas, Easter and Ash Wednesday...they have talked to us about the idea of putting a chaplaincy service in place and there is a willingness to explore this...I've always enjoyed going in and feel welcomed. The assemblies are very well put together and there is a desire and willingness to involve all of the churches.' (Interview)

The school has introduced an educational and mutual understanding dimension around the celebration of religious events that are more closely associated with one or other tradition.

'For special occasions we try to have a Protestant/Catholic balance for example Ash Wednesday and Lent and Harvest and Remembrance. We want to increase respect, understanding and an acceptance that people can practice their religion. So we have built an education element into the programme before events such as explaining the history of the poppy or Ash Wednesday. This has reduced the level of contention over such occasions and clergy from all the main traditions attend these services' (Interview)

For example:

'At one stage we had complete segregation on Ash Wednesday but a working group was established who discussed this at length and we developed a new approach that was all about education beforehand leading up to the special assemblies.' (Interview)

The College developed this approach to Ash Wednesday:

'Ash Wednesday is the day Lent begins. Lent is a significant period in the Christian calendar and marks preparation for Easter. Ashes are a biblical symbol of mourning and penance. Ash Wednesday is a day not only for putting ashes on one's head, but also a day of fasting. Lent is a Christian service and all students are encouraged to reflect on their own life and to think about others. It is mainly Roman Catholics however who celebrate Ash Wednesday and have their foreheads marked with the cross of palm ash.

To ensure that all students understand the meaning of Lent and to encourage respect for those who choose to receive and wear ashes and those in College and those who choose not to, the following arrangements have been put in place: -

1. *Education – during form class to discuss the meaning of Lent as a Christian Service and the significance of receiving and wearing ashes. Tolerance and respect for all encouraged.*
2. *Ash Wednesday Service –*
 - a. *Key stage Assemblies – PD/form teacher to escort students to GH.*
 - b. *When possible the service will be held in the afternoon.*

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- c. *Students from all denominations attend the service.*
- d. *Key Stage 4/5 service will be held before Key Stage 3 – older students to act as role models.*
- e. *Representatives from the main churches invited to attend and to speak at the service.*
- f. *Readings and presentations to encourage reflection and to explain the significance and history of wearing/receiving ashes.*
- g. *Students wishing to receive Ashes do so in an orderly manner.*
- h. *Everyone to reflect on PowerPoint presentation and reflective music playing during the distribution of ashes.*
- i. *Students leave the hall in silence.'*

The principal and staff of Drumragh College believe this approach has been of great benefit to their students:

'Our students love learning about each other – sometimes they just sit and compare with each other their different religious practices.' (Interview)

'We actively educate our students that in the real world everyone is not the same religion. Our students are not segregated – they learn together. They are not frightened to give their opinion and they know they are allowed to ask questions and they won't be shut down.' (Interview)

'We are most proud of the openness and confidence of our students regarding faith issues and spirituality.' (Interview)

Comments from students confirm the effectiveness of this approach:

- *We used to be split up for RE at the integrated primary school but now we are all in together. Now we learn from the other students – I prefer it this way.*
- *In the Ash Wednesday Service everyone goes and you decide if you want to go up or not to receive the ashes. It's the same for the Remembrance Service – everyone attends and you can choose whether or not to wear a poppy. It's good...we are accepting each other's cultures and it's good to learn and experience things you wouldn't be used to.*
- *I've never met a student who wasn't happy about the approach to religion in the school.*
- *I feel clergy are interested in the school. I've never heard any negative stuff from clergy about our school.*
- *Everyone gets on and you can chat openly without being criticised. It's just accepted it's your religion and it's the same for people who don't have a religion.*
- *You're not told to believe anything – you're just told the different viewpoints.*
- *We don't just learn about Christians. We learn about other religions like Islam as well and so others who aren't Christian can feel part of the school.*

7.2 Millennium Integrated Primary School

Millennium Integrated Primary School was opened in 2000. Since then the school has developed a particularly good working relationship with a broad range of churches and has developed a clear approach to Christian ethos in practice.

The parent founders of the school explored the approach to ethos in other integrated schools as they developed Millennium.

'When the parents group was starting the school we looked at different integrated schools and they all seemed to approach religious ethos in a different way. Some schools liked to draw a veil over it and just stick with the curriculum while others want to explore religious difference...some parents wanted the children to experience difference and other parents wanted to avoid the divide.' (Interview)

As the school developed it was decided to take the approach of exploring religious difference. The parents group faced strong opposition to the establishment of the school at first and were grateful for the support of local clergy.

'The Church of Ireland minister came to all the public meetings about starting the school. He was very supportive and put us in touch with the other ministers. He was supportive at public meetings when the school was under attack...he offered moral support.' (Interview)

The school is based in the Carryduff area which has a high rate of inter church marriages and a strong inter church group with existing good relationships between the participating the churches. This appears to have contributed to good relationships with a wider range of churches.

The principal placed a priority on developing good working relationships with local clergy at an early stage:

'I spoke to all clergy separately before they came in, explaining that we put an emphasis on God's love and the need to be sensitive to children from different traditions.' (Interview)

'We believe in being prepared to respond to any overtures from churches and we respond when asked for any information for say the parish bulletin.' (Interview)

As difficulties have arisen from time to time this has been regarded as an opportunity to build stronger relationships.

'It has been difficult at times, but we have tried to behave appropriately when dealing with difficult issues and this has developed trust with the churches.' (Interview)

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As a result local clergy made very positive comments regarding the school:

'The relationship is excellent. From the very early days we were asked to take Assembly and we have been involved ever since. We have been involved regularly in Assemblies...and we have built good trust and respect...as ministers we know our boundaries and try to tie in with the curriculum.' (Interview)

'They primarily have a Christian ethos which seems to be worked out very strongly - although it's also cross-cultural. The key issue is the personal relationships and the trust and respect for differences. It comes from the key people and personalities...the principal and staff are excellent.' (Interview)

All local clergy are invited to come in once a term to take an assembly.

The school has a good relationship with Elim, Baptist and Church of Ireland clergy who regularly take assemblies. The Baptist Church presents "The Amazing Journey" an interactive journey through the Bible, children have visited an exhibition in the Brethren Hall and the Salvation Army has been involved in the P1 Dedication Service.

The school also has an exceptionally good relationship with the local Catholic parish. The parish priest is very supportive, comes into the school and treats the pupils as children of the parish in the same way as children attending the Catholic schools. Protestant children also take part in the Catholic children's First Communion Service.

'At Mass the parish priest says we have three schools in the parish - including us with the Catholic schools' (Interview)

'In preparation for the sacraments Millennium children are invited to a monthly mass which is organised by the three schools (two Catholic schools and Millennium). I see it as a parish preparation not a school preparation and so Millennium are very involved. They have smaller numbers but they are welcomed very warmly... Confirmation is a parish celebration rather than a school celebration. The children used to be in school uniforms but we thought that was divisive...the folk group involves children from all the schools and it has worked out very well - it is a great success. It's about cherishing all the children of the parish equally...and it's good that other P4s come to the first communion as well.' (Interview)

'We have an outstanding relationship with the Catholic Church here - it's been the opposite of my experience in another integrated school. Our school is mentioned as a part of the community' (Interview)

The school accessed support from NICIE to develop its approach to RE and Christian ethos. They decided that children should not be separated for RE. The teachers provide whole class teaching and then work in small groups where the Catholic children do preparation for sacraments in their small group and Protestant children use "Delving Deeper" in their small group.

'I am not happy with divided RE – that doesn't fit with our integrated ethos.'
(Interview)

'All of the teachers plan for their own class using the 'Alive O' materials. This is taught to the whole class and then we split into groups when the Catholic children do the preparation work and the Protestant children use "Delving Deeper."'(Interview)

7.3 Lagan College

Lagan College was the first planned integrated school in Northern Ireland. From the very beginning, the college placed an emphasis on having a Christian ethos and as part of putting that ethos into practice, established a shared Catholic/Protestant Chaplaincy.

'The idea of a chaplaincy was part of the original vision of the founders of Lagan College. They took a decision early on to have a strong Christian ethos as an outworking of Protestant/Catholic integrated ethos.'
(Interview)

'Lagan College was the first school created as part of the All Children Together Movement which sought to educate children from all traditions in Northern Ireland together. Although not linked to any one denomination or church, the college was created with a strong Christian ethos and a prominent place for RE which would be taught to children together, ecumenically...Historically the churches had not embraced integrated education, and Lagan College was set up in part with a view to demonstrating that integrated education was a valid expression of Christian education. Even without these expedient factors, the founders were convinced the college should be Christian in nature.'

Lagan College has since sought to be broad in its Christian nature (i.e. not associated with a particular expression of Christianity), and is not primarily concerned with Christian Catechesis, although it does support, encourage and provide this on occasion, where it is desired. The breadth of approach means that the college is not a place where anyone should feel uncomfortable with their own beliefs and alternative points of view can be held and discussed. Christian faith is not sought as a condition for admission, employment or association. It is hoped that everyone associated with the college would have an understanding of its ethos and be broadly supportive of it. People of all faiths and none are welcome in the College.'
(Lagan College, March 2007)

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The approach has developed over the years:

'In the first ten years interested clergy (including a Catholic sister) came in to look after their own flock and they met in separate rooms...however in 1992 after much fundraising two full time chaplains were appointed.'
(Interview)

The role of the two full time chaplains has also developed:

'A Protestant and Catholic Chaplain are appointed by Governors to work as a team to provide spiritual, denominational and pastoral care. The facilities of the Chaplaincy are available to all the staff and students of the college, of all denominations and faiths, and of none. The Chaplains are responsible for planning and co-ordinating assemblies, involving staff and students as much as possible. Honorary Chaplains from various Christian denominations visit periodically, speaking at assemblies and meeting with the full-time chaplains. Denominational care (e.g. preparation for sacraments) is provided, at the request of parents.' (Lagan College, 2008)

In practice the Chaplaincy is involved in a range of activities:

'The Chaplaincy plays a prominent part in College life. The Chaplains take a joint ecumenical approach, working together wherever possible. As well as pastoral care of staff and students, the Chaplains co-ordinate collective worship at assemblies. The tone of assemblies is intended to be welcoming and inclusive and can be led by chaplains, members of staff, students and visiting speakers, including Honorary Chaplains from various Christian denominations.' (Lagan College, March 2007)

'The various aspects of the work of the Chaplaincy can be loosely divided into the spiritual, the pastoral, the denominational, the integrative, the social and the administrative. These overlap in various and interesting ways in any one day, whether within the Chaplaincy 'hut', around the school, in the classroom, in the staff room, in the Assembly Hall, or whether with students, colleagues, parents, past-pupils or visitors.' (Lagan College Chaplaincy, 2008)

This includes worship, mainly through assemblies:

'The themes for the larger Assemblies followed the seasons of the Church Year, interspersed with issues of global and local concern. Such Assemblies are often linked with fundraising or campaigning throughout the school (see section on Fundraising). Representatives from Christian Aid, Trocaire and Concern came to the large Assemblies at appropriate times throughout the year.'

While Christian themes are still the main focus in our school worship, we are increasingly aware of the need to include reference to and explanation of particular feasts and customs of other faith traditions. This year, we highlighted the increasingly multi-cultural nature of our school community.'

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Throughout the year, staff members and students were involved in readings, prayers, drama, music, light and sound, and visual technology.

The usual 'special' extended Assemblies at Harvest, Remembrance, Christmas, Ash Wednesday, and Holy Week were held during the school day. Climate Change was the theme of our Harvest Assembly and the "harvest of coins" was given to the victims of the flooding in Africa, through Christian Aid. A special aspect of Remembrance this year was the focus on the Blitz in Belfast as well as an overview of the history of the Troubles. Staff members shared their own experiences and family memories. The Christmas Assembly had a special emphasis on how Christmas is celebrated in the home countries of some of our students, e.g. South Africa, India and Poland. Our Holy Week Assembly focused on the symbols associated with Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday. The use of photographs of these symbols in various places throughout the school, as well as the actual symbols used during the Assembly, gave food for thought.' (Lagan College Chaplaincy, 2008)

The Chaplains also arrange a series of visits to churches. For example, each Year 8 class visits a Catholic and a Protestant Church. Over the years the Chaplains have made contact with more than 20 churches.

The role of the chaplains also includes a pastoral dimension:

The chaplains complement the role of the Pastoral Teams by providing a "drop-in" facility for all students on a daily basis, at break and lunchtime.' (Lagan College, 2008)

'The Chaplaincy continues to be a safe place for all students and staff of whatever religious background or of none. The Chaplains are privileged to be invited into the lives of others, sharing their joys and sorrows...The 'drop in' facility at break and lunchtime was used on a daily basis. Often both rooms are used simultaneously. More formal one-to-one appointments were made with students going through a difficult time, such as bereavement, separation of parents, illness in the family, bullying, conflict with friends, etc. Difficulty in making the transition to secondary school can be a big issue for some Year 8 students. It is a real privilege when students ask us to pray with and for them and their families. Increasingly parents have made contact with the Chaplaincy mainly for pastoral reasons, through phone calls and visits. The link with the Parents' Council is kept through Sr Anne's regular attendance at the monthly meetings, during which she keeps them informed about the work of the Chaplaincy.' (Lagan College Chaplaincy, 2008)

'As chaplains for many students we are the face of the church.' (Interview)

The Catholic Chaplain also provides denominational care:

'Preparation of students for the Sacrament of Confirmation has always been part of Sr Anne's work. This usually takes place after school or at lunchtime. Over the last ten years, over 40 students have been prepared for

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Confirmation. A few of these were also prepared for Baptism and Holy Communion.' (Lagan College Chaplaincy, 2008)

The chaplaincy is also active in promoting integration, reconciliation and justice issues:

'Our Christian Ethos seeks to develop the College as a place of reconciliation. Forgiveness and compassion are practiced as a means of developing the whole person. Reconciliation involves removing barriers between all those who share College life, thus people are equipped to bring reconciliation across the divisions across the world.' (Lagan College, March 2007)

'Integration is at the heart of the Chaplaincy and needs to permeate every aspect of school life. The fact that Lagan College was founded with the specific intention of breaking down the 'dividing walls' of hostility and ignorance in Northern Ireland remains a founding imperative and inspiration. The choice to be a Christian school is also central to this founding spirit. The process of integrating includes other areas of diversity such as ability, special needs, gender, and the increasing growth in diversity of religion and culture. With the constant changes in society, the improved situation in Northern Ireland and the demands of an ever-changing educational policy, it is important that issues of integration are kept to the fore. The integration we desire for our students must be modeled among staff. Now that the Stormont Assembly has been up and running for a year, there is a new climate of hope and confidence. Yet the wounds of hurt and division run deep, and the walls of separation still stand. There is still much work to be done and many bridges to be built across the continuing divide...

The raising of awareness of justice issues is very important in the work of the Chaplaincy. This concern is expressed in the Assemblies, through fundraising, and in particular through the Justice Group, made up of Year 13 and 14 students who come to the Chaplaincy each Tuesday at lunchtime. The group focuses mainly on global issues...Schools Across Borders (SAB) was a new and exciting initiative introduced to Sixth Form students through the Chaplaincy. Nine Year 14 students availed of the opportunity to link with schools in Israel and Palestine as well as with schools in the North and South of Ireland.' (Lagan College Chaplaincy, 2008) (Lagan College Chaplaincy, 2008)

To date, Lagan College has been the only integrated school in Northern Ireland to develop a full time chaplaincy of this kind. A few schools consulted in the survey expressed an interest in developing a full time chaplaincy but they saw a lack of funding for this as the main barrier.

In 2008, Lagan College celebrated 25 years¹⁰ of its chaplaincy with a booklet that stated:

'Prayers have been spoken, debates have raged and silence has been kept. Conversations and dialogues have taken place, some leading to greater understanding between people, some leading to reconciliation. There is no doubt the Chaplaincy is a special place.' (Killick, 2008)

7.4 Mill Strand Integrated Primary School

Mill Strand Integrated Primary School in Portrush recently celebrated its 20th Anniversary. To reflect the ethos of the school, it was decided to organise a special anniversary event with a spiritual dimension, alongside the other 20th Anniversary celebrations.

The school decided to develop a 'Walking Carol Service'. This involved a torchlight walk and candlelit Carol Service between the Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland churches in Portrush. The local clergy were approached and agreed to facilitate the event.

The children from Mill Strand met firstly in St Patrick's Roman Catholic Church in Portrush for a candlelit Carol Service. Following the service the children then walked together, singing carols and carrying torches, through the centre of Portrush to the Church of Ireland Church. The Church of Ireland Rector welcomed the children at the door of the church and the children sang a carol outside before entering the church hall. The children and their families then had refreshments together in the Church of Ireland hall and there was also a charity collection to support a project in Malawi.

Following the success of the event, the school is planning to develop it further in the future to include stops during the torchlight walk to sing carols outside other churches in the main street en route between the two churches.

Positive feedback on the event highlighted the unique nature of the walking carol service as a public symbol of reconciliation in Portrush.

'The Walking Carol Service was very symbolic. It made people confront the principle of integration rather than ignore it...it was very visible, very tangible...There was something very special about that experience – it was very powerful for the children and it was powerful for us as parents who are non church goers.' (Interview)

¹⁰ During this time Lagan College has been awarded both the Templeton Award and the Coventry Cross of Nails

7.5 Oakgrove Integrated Primary School

As an expression of its Christian ethos, Oakgrove Integrated Primary School in Derry/Londonderry has developed a special annual P7 assembly. The assembly celebrates the Catholic children who have made confirmation. It also celebrates the practice of children of Protestant and other faiths and celebrates the talents of the children of all faiths and none.

Parents are invited to the assembly. Catholic children who have made confirmation wear their confirmation clothes and the other children wear their school uniforms.

The Catholic children explain the meaning of confirmation, the Protestant children talk about their churches and others such as Mormons and Hindus explain their faith. The children who do not practice a religious faith talk about their unique talents. The children, parents and staff spread out around room and sing hymns together.

The school describes the event as “*an overt celebration of difference*”.

Below is the script for a recent P7 Assembly at Oakgrove.

Oakgrove Integrated Primary School P7 Assembly

'Child

We would like to welcome you all to our Primary 7 Assembly. As everyone knows our school is an integrated school, which welcomes, respects and cherishes children of all faiths and none. It is committed to educating Protestant and Catholic children together and to helping us all to understand and learn more about our different traditions as well as learning about things that bind us together. We would like to invite you all to join with us in singing: “Together”.

Child (Non Confirmation)

*On Saturday ** May, our Roman Catholic friends were confirmed. The Sacrament took place in St. Oliver Plunkett Church, Strathfoyle. Some of us, their friends, went to watch this important ceremony.*

Child (Non Confirmation)

Confirmation is held by all Christian Churches which baptise babies. What is important in all churches is that the person being confirmed wants to make their own promise about being a Christian so that they make again (or confirm) the promises which were made for them when they were babies. Now some of our Catholic friends will tell you about their Confirmation.

Child (Confirmation)

The ceremony of confirmation in the Catholic Church begins with a renewal of our baptismal vows. During our confirmation, Bishop Hegarty signed our foreheads with a cross and said, "Be sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit". The Holy Spirit will now remain constantly with us as we work with other people in our community to make the world a better place for us to live in. During Confirmation Bishop Hegarty prayed that the Holy Spirit would pour out gifts of Love upon us.

Child (Confirmation)

The gift of the Holy Spirit helps us in different ways throughout our lives to work for God's Kingdom on Earth. The Holy Spirit gave us these gifts:

Child

The Gift of Wisdom

This is the gift of seeing things as God sees them.

Child

The Gift of Understanding

This is the gift of realising how to love God and others as Jesus did and others as Jesus did.

Child

The Gift of Right Judgement

This is the gift of knowing what to do in difficult situations.

Child

The Gift of Courage

This is the gift of being able to carry out what we know is right despite opposition.

Child

The Gift of Knowledge

This is the gift of knowing and loving God the Father and Jesus.

Child

The Gift of Reverence

This is the gift of loving and reverencing God as Jesus did.

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Child

The Gift of Wonder and Awe in God's Presence

This is the gift of knowing the holiness of God and the fear of losing His love.

Child

These gifts of the Holy Spirit bear fruit in our lives. This means that others can see the effects of the Holy Spirit in our lives, in our work, in our families and in the way we treat others. The fruits of the Holy Spirit are:

Child

Love

When we try to live our lives full of love for God and for others.

Child

Joy

When we try to be full of joy because of God's goodness to us.

Child

Peace

When we try to live in peace with God and with people around us.

Child

Kindness

When we try to be kind to those around us.

Child

Patience

When we try to be patient with those around us.

Child

Goodness

When we try to put the needs of others first.

Child

Faithfulness

When we are true and faithful to those around us.

Child

Gentleness

When we try to be gentle with other people.

Child

Self-Control

When we try to have self-control and control our temper.

Child

During the service of enrolment which took place in St. Columb's Church, Chapel Road we sang "We are the Greatest".

Child

*Protestant Churches also hold services of Confirmation, but they usually take place when their younger people are a little older. In the **Church of Ireland**, confirmation takes place in the early teen years when the young person is old enough to answer for himself or herself. It also involves the laying on of hands by a Bishop and it is also taught that the person being confirmed receives the gift of the Holy Spirit.*

Child

*In the **Presbyterian Churches**, members are not confirmed in the same way. Admission to receive communion is open to young people in their mid-teens. They must show a personal commitment to the Christian faith. They may be received into the membership of the Church at a special service, which is about a week before their first communion.*

Child

*In the **Methodist Church**, children become full members of the church when they are teenagers.*

They are encouraged to choose membership themselves. At the age of 25, they may take part in a service to become full members. From this point onwards, they can take communion.

Child

***Jehovah Witnesses** do not make confirmation, but we regularly attend meetings where we learn about God and how they can become close to him.*

Child

*The **Apostolic Church** practises the sacraments of Baptism by immersion, the Lord's Prayer and Communion. The service itself comprises of worship, prayer and teaching.*

Child

*In the **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints**, we believe that you must have faith in Jesus Christ and understand the principle of Repentance that Jesus Christ atoned for our sins. At the age of 8, we may be baptised by a man, who holds the office of a priest or an elder in the Holy priesthood. We receive the gift of the Holy Ghost by a man who holds the Melchizedek Priesthood and if we live our lives right, the Holy Ghost will always be with us as a shield and protection against evil. The Holy Ghost will bear witness to us by a warm feeling in our hearts and will give peace to our minds when we are taught the truths of Jesus Christ.*

Child

All Christians whether Protestants or Catholic, believe that the most important thing in life is to try and follow the teachings of Jesus and to become the people he wants us to be. Let us close our eyes and say together the prayer that Jesus taught us all:

Our Father...'

7.6 Kilbroney Controlled Integrated Primary School

Kilbroney is a Controlled Integrated Primary School in Rostrevor that has been through the process of transformation. The school has been successful in developing a positive working relationship with and between Catholic and Protestant clergy and the school.

These relationships have developed over the years, since the early days when the school first transformed. At first the school experienced a reticence from Catholic clergy, similar to that experienced in other parts of Northern Ireland.

'The Catholic Church was not very encouraging to parents at first and there was virtually no involvement but this has change a lot over the past ten years...interaction with the Catholic Church has improved a lot.' (Interview)

However the relationship improved through the influence of supportive clergy and a positive approach by the school.

'In the early days after transformation, Catholic parents organised preparation for First Communion but then a Catholic teacher with the Catholic Certificate was appointed and since then we have been treated like any other school.' (Interview)

'The Catholic parish accepts us.' (Interview)

'The Bishop treats us like the other schools in Rostrevor and we are included.' (Interview)

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It is now considered normal for the parish priest to visit the school.

'I would go in myself a few times a term and I would go into Assembly. There is a dedicated Catholic teacher who takes preparation for the sacraments. I work along with her and she does a good job.' (Interview)

However, the Catholic policy on not nominating Catholic representatives to the Board of Governors on transformation prevents any formal role in shared governance of the school.

'The Bishop was asked to nominate two Catholic representatives for the Board of Governors but he has never nominated, so there is no formal Catholic representative. However the Church of Ireland transferors went out of their way to invite two Catholics onto the board of Governors instead.' (Interview)

On transformation some Protestant parents were concerned and some parents who had chosen the school because they didn't want a Catholic influence also expressed concern.

However, the Church of Ireland has a strong historic connection to the schools and this was maintained following transformation. Two Church of Ireland clergy sit on the Board of Governors, visit the school, take assemblies and take a particular interest in the school.

'The Church of Ireland role is welcomed by the governors –they are not trying to push Anglicanism onto the school.' (Interview)

The Catholic and Protestant clergy co-operate in relation to the school and value the contribution of the school to good cross community relations in Rostrevor.

'The Protestant children sing in the choir in the Catholic Church on the day of First Communion –that means a lot.' (Interview)

Kilbroney refers to its transforming status in its RE Policy:

'We at Kilbroney Integrated Primary School are committed to providing appropriate religious education for all our pupils. The common aim of this teaching is that the Christian ethos underpins our whole approach. This is in line with the NICIE Statement of Principles.

As a transforming school we appreciate that we must endeavour to give both traditions equal weighting. We also recognise that there is a place in our school for those children from outside the main religious traditions. Appropriate provision will be made for children from religious minorities. The needs and wishes of parents will be accommodated where possible.

Religious Education in our school fosters understanding that diversity exists on a global as well as a local scale. We would aim to encourage children to appreciate the many different beliefs and help them developing an understanding.' (Kilbroney Integrated Primary School, 2008)

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

The school's RE curriculum includes a strand on "Religious Education for Mutual Understanding".

'All primary school pupils in Northern Ireland follow the Core Syllabus for RE agreed by the four mainstream churches. As an integrated school we have included a strand, Religious Education for Mutual Understanding, to encourage better understanding of our various denominations and traditions. At Key Stage Two the pupils are made aware of the existence of other world religions in addition to Christianity...

Religious Education for Mutual Understanding

Key Stage 1

...Through participation in school services at various churches, visits of clergy to school, and discussion of these events within class, children will be helped to appreciate the range and diversity of Christian traditions that exist.

The objectives are:

- Children should know that there are a number of different Christian denominations and churches*
- Children should have experience, through school services, of worshipping in churches of at least two different traditions/denominations*

Key Stage 2

This element of the curriculum will be timetabled separately, in order to provide opportunities for joint discussion about religious matter specific to each tradition and about the integrated nature of the school. These objectives are:

- That the children will have an understanding and appreciation of each other's religious traditions and cultural differences;*
- That they will have a greater tolerance and respect for each other;*
- That the children will have an awareness that there are other faiths practiced around the world*

Areas covered include:

- Places of Worship;*
- Methods of Worship;*
- Signs and symbols;*
- Special days/festivals*

Catholic Instruction in P4 and P7 including Prayers, Sacraments, Confirmation, The Mass, The Catholic Church, Devotion to Mary and the Saints

(Kilbroney Integrated Primary School, 2008)

8 Conclusions

'I think the Churches have been hard on the integrated sector. We haven't given them significant recognition of all they have done against the odds and without the Churches. They have worked through a lot of issues on how to share. They have a lot to teach us and their expertise should be tapped. Because we have been protective of our own sector we have not been able to offer as much support as we should.' (Interview)

The main conclusions of the research are as follows:

Relationship Between Integrated Schools and Churches

- 8.1 To date, none of the churches has played a formal role in the development of integrated education in Northern Ireland.
- 8.2 The churches have tended to prioritise the protection of existing schools (maintained and controlled schools) over which they have governance, over support for or involvement in the development of integrated education in Northern Ireland.
- 8.3 Catholic clergy have discouraged Catholic parents from sending their children to integrated schools. However in recent years, there is evidence of a "softening" to a more "pragmatic" approach towards Catholic parents choosing integrated schools. There is now a range of approaches among different Catholic Dioceses and different Catholic clergy.
- 8.4 Protestant clergy have expressed a level of support that is conditional on integrated schools not impacting negatively on controlled schools on which they are transferors. The Church of Ireland, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches, while not proactive in the development of integrated education, are supportive of integrated schools as long as they do not impact negatively on controlled schools.
- 8.5 Recently, the Presbyterian Church has publicly encouraged its ministers to play a full part within local integrated schools.
- 8.6 The transforming of controlled schools has become a contentious issue for Protestant Churches who are transferors, as no Catholic school has ever transformed and Bishops do not take up the invitation to appoint Catholic governors to the places allocated to them within the Board of Governors of transformed Controlled Integrated Schools.
- 8.7 The vast majority of integrated schools in Northern Ireland regard links with churches as important and actively try to develop such links with local churches.

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

- 8.8 Most integrated schools have a relationship with their local Church of Ireland (73%), Roman Catholic (68%) and Presbyterian (66%) Churches.
- 8.9 The main types of link with local churches are pupil visits to churches, conduct of worship in school and church services, use of church premises for school events and preparation and reception for Roman Catholic sacraments.
- 8.10 The majority of integrated schools are visited by clergy at least once a term.
- 8.11 Two fifths of integrated schools have tried unsuccessfully to establish a relationship with a local church. Just under a quarter of integrated schools have been unsuccessful in trying to establish a relationship with a local Roman Catholic Church.
- 8.12 More than half of integrated schools have received public support from local clergy.
- 8.13 Just over a third of integrated schools have experienced public opposition by clergy, mainly Catholic clergy making public statements discouraging Catholic parents from choosing an integrated school rather than a Catholic school.
- 8.14 Just over half of integrated schools do not have a relationship with faith communities other than Christian. Among the just under half of schools that do have a relationship with different faith communities, this tends to be developed through parents rather than through formal links with religious leaders.
- 8.15 The vast majority of integrated schools have never declined an approach to develop links from a church or other faith group.

Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

- 8.16 The nature of the relationship between clergy and local integrated schools is often dependent on the personal views of both principals and local clergy.
- 8.17 The majority of integrated schools indicate in their prospectus or mission statement that they have a Christian ethos.
- 8.18 Most integrated schools describe their school's approach to religion as either "all faiths and none" or Christian. This reflects an approach that is primarily Christian, but that includes people of different faiths as well as people of no religious faith.
- 8.19 The approach to Christian ethos of a particular school is often dependent on the personal views of the principal and staff of the school.
- 8.20 Integrated schools are facing the challenge of having a Christian ethos within an increasingly diverse society and in the context of an increase in secularism and atheism.

Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools

- 8.21 The main ways in which integrated schools reflect their Christian ethos is through Assemblies, the RE Curriculum and promoting values such as respect, tolerance and caring.
- 8.22 The majority of the schools have weekly assemblies and over half of the schools include a religious dimension in all assemblies. The two main religious occasions celebrated in the majority of integrated schools are Carol/Nativity Services and Harvest Services.
- 8.23 Some integrated schools have put considerable energy and attention into how they work out their Christian ethos in practice in a way that is inclusive of all the children at the school.

Other Issues

- 8.24 Most integrated schools have not had a religious event in the school that proved to be contentious. Where events have proved contentious this has usually involved complaints by a small number of parents.
- 8.25 Most integrated schools either have no policy or an open policy on the display of religious symbols.
- 8.26 There is a range of models of good practice around relationships with churches and Christian ethos in within integrated schools that other schools can learn from.

9 Relevant Issues for Consideration

As a result of the issues raised in this research the following questions are offered for further consideration:

- 9.1 Is it possible for the churches in Northern Ireland, alongside their main priority of protecting their own school sectors, to develop new models of shared faith schools as a contribution towards peace and reconciliation in a divided society? If so, how?
- 9.2 What needs to happen to encourage the minority of Catholic clergy who are not yet prepared to enter an integrated school within their parish to develop a positive relationship with their local integrated school?
- 9.3 How can the four major churches be supported to develop a dialogue to discuss contentious issues regarding education such as transformation, the Bain Report, integrating education and the impact of their approaches on community relations?
- 9.4 How can integrated schools develop more formal links with the local leaders of different faith communities e.g. Muslim?
- 9.5 Why do most integrated schools either have no policy or an open policy on the display of religious symbols?
- 9.6 Is there a need for more than one integrated school in Northern Ireland to have a full time chaplaincy?
- 9.7 How can integrated schools be supported to develop their Christian and “all faiths and none” ethos in practice?

Appendix I: Research Advisory Group

Research Advisory Group Members

- 1) Bill Brown
- 2) Margaret Kennedy
- 3) Helen Killick
- 4) Terry McMackin

NICIE / ACT Research Advisory Group:

Focus Group Questions

16th October 2007

1. How do you see nature of the relationship between the four main churches and the integrated sector?
2. What do you think should the relationship be ideally?
3. What do you think needs to change?
4. How do you see current practice in integrated schools regarding Christian ethos?
5. What do you think should be the practice ideally?
6. What needs to change?
7. Can you suggest any particular models of good practice in church / integrated school relationships?
8. Have you any other comments?

Appendix II: Schools Survey

INTEGRATED SCHOOLS

TELEPHONE/EMAIL QUESTIONNAIRE

CONFIDENTIAL

This is a confidential survey of integrated schools in Northern Ireland. It is being carried out as part of a research study into Churches and Christian Ethos in Integrated Schools in Northern Ireland. The research was initiated by ACT and NICIE and is being carried out by independent consultants Macaulay Associates.

If replying by email, please return to tonymacaulay@yahoo.co.uk

RELATIONSHIP WITH CHURCHES

1. How important are links with local churches for your school?

VERY IMPORTANT IMPORTANT UNIMPORTANT VERY UNIMPORTANT

2. Does your school actively try to develop links with local churches?

YES/NO

3. If YES, how do you do this?

4. With which churches does your school have a relationship?

**5. How often do clergy from each of these churches visit your school?
(please give details for each clergy)**

**6. Which of these roles do local churches play in your school? Please tick
where appropriate and give details for each church.**

- Conduct of/participation in worship in school e.g. in assemblies
- Conduct of/participation in worship in church services e.g. first communion, harvest.

If ticked, please specify both which church/churches and type of service?

- Pastoral role
- Formal chaplaincy role
- Informal contact with staff
- Preparation for sacraments
- Pupil visits to churches
- Teaching of RE/support for RE teachers
- Use of church premises for school events
- Involvement of church staff other than clergy (e.g. youth workers)
- Board of Governors
- Other (please give details)

7. Are there any local churches with which you have tried unsuccessfully to establish a relationship?

YES/NO

8. If YES, which church/churches?

9. If clergy have declined to become involved in your school, what reasons, if any, have they given?

10. Have you experienced any instances where links were established, then severed, by clergy?

YES/NO

11. If YES, why you think this happened?

12. Have you received any public support for your school from local clergy?

YES/NO

13. If YES, what form did this support take? (E.g. spoken/written public support by clergy; church members encouraged to become involved in the school, etc.)

14. Have you been aware of any overt opposition by clergy towards your school?

YES/NO

15. If YES, what form did such opposition take (e.g. spoken /written public opposition by clergy; church members discouraged from enrolling children, etc.)?

16. Does your school have a relationship with other faith communities? (E.g. Muslim)

YES/NO

17. If YES, how were these links developed?

18. Has your school ever declined an approach from a church or other faith group to develop links?

YES/NO

19. If YES, can you explain your reasons?

SCHOOL ETHOS

20. Does your school indicate in its prospectus/mission statement that it has a Christian ethos?

YES/NO

21. What is the reason for this?

22. If your school is described as having a Christian ethos, how is this reflected in practice?

23. Which one of these words best describes your school's approach to religion:

ALL FAITHS AND NONE

CHRISTIAN

ECUMENICAL

HUMANIST

MULTI FAITH

SECULAR

OTHER – please state

24. Which, if any, religious events have you had in your school in the past year e.g. harvest, Easter celebrations, carol services, mass, etc.?

25. Which of the following take place in your school? Please tick and give details.

- a. daily religious assemblies
- b. daily prayers
- c. weekly religious assemblies
- d. faith based extracurricular clubs/activities (please give details)
- e. other religious activities (please give details)

26. What percentage of your school assemblies include a religious dimension (e.g. prayer)

27. Have there been any religious events in your school which have proved contentious?

YES/NO

28. If YES, please explain why

29. What is your school's policy on the display of religious symbols?

30. Have you any other comments you would like to feed into this research?

Appendix III: Interviewees

1. Rev Harold Agnew, Omagh Methodist Church
2. Nigel Arnold, Principal, Glengormley Integrated Primary School
3. Jim Clarke, Deputy Chief Executive, CCMS
4. Stephen Creber, Principal, Brownlow Integrated College
5. Julie Cooke, Student, Drumragh Integrated College
6. Fr Kevin Donaghy, Principal St Patrick's Grammar School
Armagh, Archdiocese of Armagh
7. Grace Doone, Teacher, Mill Strand integrated Primary School
8. Rev Ian Ellis, Secretary to the Board of Education, Church of
Ireland & Transferor Representatives Council
9. Grace Fraser, Researcher
10. Nigel Frith, Principal, Drumragh Integrated College
11. Rory Gardner, Teacher, Millennium Integrated Primary School
12. Paulette Gallagher, Integration Co-ordinator, Drumragh
Integrated College
13. Rev Lee Glenny, Board of Education, Methodist Church in
Ireland & Transferor Representatives Council
14. Fr Michael Hackett, Parish Priest, Kilbroney
15. Rev Sam Jones, Church of Ireland Rector, Rostrevor
16. Margaret Kennedy, ACT
17. Helen Killick, Chaplain, Lagan College
18. Sr Anne Kilroy, Chaplain, Lagan College
19. Cecil Linehan, ACT
20. Maria Logue, Student, Drumragh Integrated College
21. Janice Marshall. Principal, Drumlins Integrated Primary School
22. Fr Sean McCartney, Parish of Drumbo & Carryduff
23. Rev Colin McClure, Convener of the State Education Committee,
Presbyterian Church in Ireland
24. Tracy McConnell, Teacher, Kilbroney Integrated Primary
School
25. Bronagh McElhone, Acting Head of RE, Drumragh Integrated
College
26. Terry McMackin, NICIE
27. Denise Moorehead, Principal, Kilbroney Integrated Primary
School
28. Anne Murray, Principal, Oakgrove Integrated Primary School
29. Pastor Mark Patterson, Carryduff Baptist Church
30. Peter Rafferty, Governor, Kilbroney Integrated Primary School
31. Phillip Reid, Principal, Mill Strand Integrated Primary School
32. Mary Roulston, Principal, Millennium Integrated Primary
School
33. Zoe Seaton, Parent Governor, Mill Strand Integrated Primary
School
34. Elaine Smyth, Teacher, Kilbroney Integrated Primary School
35. Louise Ward Hunter, Department of Education
36. Michael Wardlow, Chief Executive, NICIE

Appendix IV: Transforming Schools Governance

Controlled integrated schools

5.—(1) There shall be 14 or 21 voting members appointed to the Board of Governors of a controlled integrated school, other than a controlled integrated school to which sub-paragraph (3) applies, and, subject to paragraph 6, of those members—

- (a) two-sevenths shall be elected by parents of pupils attending the school from amongst the parents of such pupils;
- (b) two-sevenths shall be chosen by the board responsible for the management of the school;
- (c) one-seventh shall be nominated by the transferors and superseded managers of controlled schools (other than controlled integrated schools) in the area of the board responsible for the management of the school;
- (d) one-seventh shall be nominated by the nominating trustees of Catholic maintained schools in the area of the board responsible for the management of the school;
- (e) one-seventh shall be elected by assistant teachers at the school from amongst such assistant teachers.

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