

Council for Research & Development

# Factors Determining School Choice

*Report on a survey of the Attitudes  
of Parents of Children attending  
Catholic Primary Schools in Ireland*



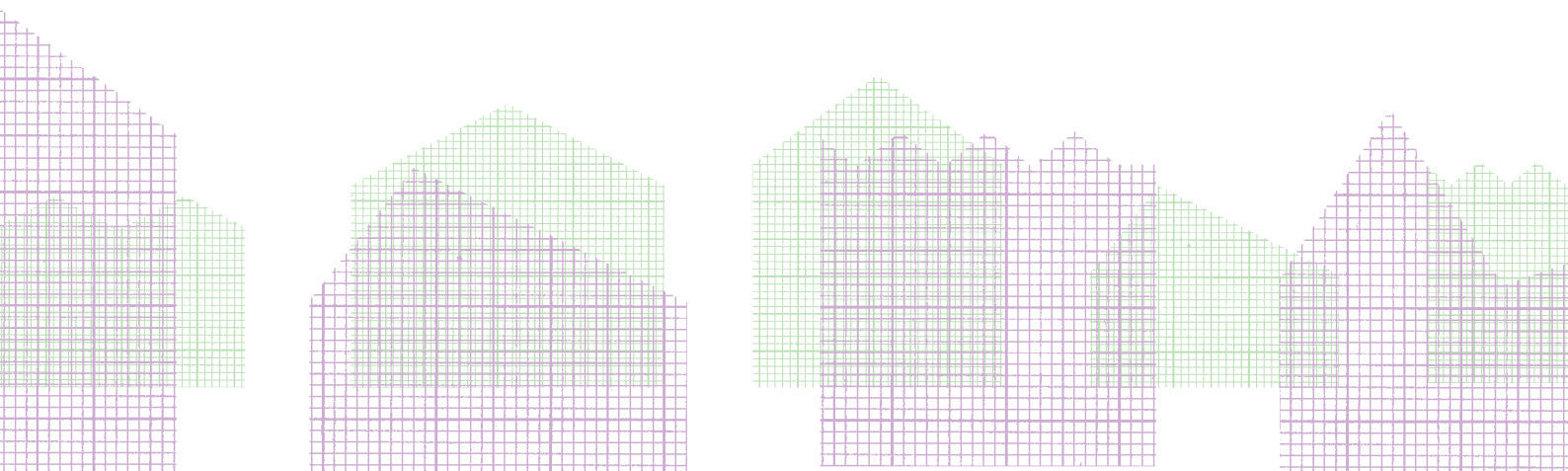
IRISH CATHOLIC  
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE  
COMHDHÁIL EASPAG CAITLICEACH ÉIREANN



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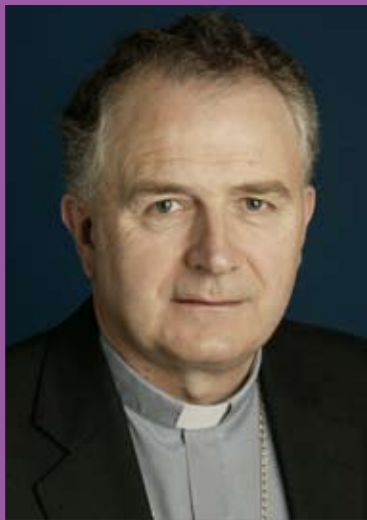
Compiled for the  
Commission for Education  
of the Irish Bishops' Conference  
by **Eoin O'Mahony**

**April 2008**



IRISH CATHOLIC  
BISHOPS' CONFERENCE  
COMHDHÁIL EASPAG CAITLÍCEACH ÉIREANN

## Foreword



Most Rev. Leo O'Reilly,  
Bishop of Kilmore.

Chair of the Episcopal  
Commission for Education,  
Irish Bishops' Conference.

I welcome this report on a survey of the attitudes of Parents of children attending Catholic Primary Schools in Ireland. The report explores a crucial issue for the future of education provision, namely factors determining school choice.

It is a core tenet of Church and State policy on education that parents hold an inalienable right and duty “to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.” The primacy of parents’ rights in regard to the education of their children is well established in International instruments of human rights as was pointed out in the policy document of the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference: *Catholic Primary Schools A Policy for Provision into the Future*. Given the commitment of the Church to upholding the rights of parents in the education of their children it was urgent that an effective and reliable means of ascertaining the views of parents of children attending Catholic Primary Schools be found.

It was with a view to getting a clear and accurate picture of parents’ attitudes that the Bishops’ Education Commission instituted the present survey of the attitudes of parents which was carried out by Mr. Eoin O’Mahony of the Council for Research and Development. The report of the survey will be a significant indicator in planning for the future of Catholic Education provision. It will also be of immense interest as it is the first such survey to be commissioned by the Irish Episcopal Conference into parents’ attitudes. Its findings will command interest from a broad education constituency as the Catholic Primary sector constitutes over 90% of education provision in the State at Primary Level.

The Survey is an attempt to understand the reasons why parents chose the school that their child is currently attending. It is evident that reasons governing choice of school are complex and accordingly it is all the more important to have as much information as possible on factors influencing such choice and indeed to find the factor that best indicates the reason for the choice.

The range of the survey is impressive in that it covers a broad spread of factors related to choice of school grouped under five headings: Management Model, Community and Choice, Faith, Parental Involvement and Diversity. The wide distribution of the survey (it was distributed in seven languages) reveals the rich diversity of the Irish Primary System of education: Catholic schools managed in two jurisdictions, North and South; Catholic schools with parents whose first language is not Irish or English but any one of five other languages. Among the respondents were Church of Ireland, Methodist, Presbyterian, Muslim, Jewish, Jehovah Witness, other religions and none. Overwhelmingly, of course, parents in Catholic Primary schools are Irish nationals. But there is diversity in Catholic Schools which is viewed as an enrichment according to the results of the survey and reflects the contemporary profile of Irish society.

The report highlights the achievement of the Irish education system while pointing to challenges facing the Catholic Church and Irish society as they relate to education provision. It is encouraging to find that 98.3% of respondents state that they were aware when applying to enrol their child that the school of choice was a Catholic school. It is also encouraging that between 76 and 80% of parents found it very easy to enrol their child. Parents choose early in a child's life and they do so in a determined manner. It is satisfying to learn that 63% of respondents believe that the churches should continue to have a prominent role in the provision of primary schooling. Somewhat fewer, namely 48% of respondents, would choose a school under the management of a religious denomination. Education as a partnership involving all the stakeholders is endorsed by the finding that 94% of the respondents answered that education is a shared responsibility between parents and the school.

Overall it is encouraging to find that 95.1% of respondents stated that they are very satisfied or satisfied with their decision to send their child to the school they currently attend.

Surveys are scientific instruments which give a sophisticated snapshot of current reality. They call for in-depth analysis to gather the outcomes. The survey surfaces challenges to Catholic primary education. There are children in Catholic schools whose parents have not chosen the school because it is Catholic. In some cases it was the only school with a place available. There are a number among the non-EU national respondents who did not find it easy to enrol their children. The figures for those who would choose schools under a religious denomination reveal differing approaches to faith schools. A substantial minority would not choose a school under the management of a religious denomination. These findings and others point to the challenges in the years ahead for Church and State.

The survey and report open up a fruitful dialogue with the parents of children in Catholic Primary schools. It is a valuable piece of work which will find its way into the hands and minds of all concerned with the future of Primary Education both in the denominational and non-denominational sector. Eoin O'Mahony and those who worked with him are to be warmly congratulated for producing this timely report.



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# Introduction

The ways in which primary schooling is provided in Ireland are changing. North and south, schools and the communities that they serve are accommodating to changed circumstances and new challenges. In the Republic of Ireland, while the patron model is not under threat, new patrons are emerging to establish schools for diverse populations of children. In Northern Ireland there are changes occurring that are related to the new political dispensation. In both parts of the island, there is an increasing awareness that change in the ways in which primary education is provided is leading to new questions.

Many of these changes relate to questions of the 'who': who is in charge of the running of the school? Who organises the ways in which the school interacts with the State authorities? Whom does the school serve? In the Republic of Ireland at least, primary schools are a partnership between interested parties: the patron body, the State and the parents of attending children. Primary schools are very much concerned with the 'who' questions then. There are competing interests in this model. The patron body seeks to impart the body's values to the child, giving them a sense of themselves, their place in the community and their responsibilities toward others. The State has a desire to educate all the children within its boundaries to a sufficiently high level as a matter of public and economic policy. Parents have interests to ensure that their children are given the best possible chances to learn creatively and effectively. In this model, the family holds the primary constitutional right as the natural educator of the child. In this sense, the child's family is the kernel of the model, the component of the model around which all of the others take their lead.

Historically, Irish primary education provision has been offered by one patron body, the Catholic Diocese. In 2006, 3,026 of the 3,290 ordinary primary schools in the Republic were under the patronage of the local Catholic Diocese. This represents 92% of all ordinary primary schools. In Northern Ireland, 409 of 879 primary schools were Catholic Maintained Schools, about 46% of the total. On the island as a whole, 82.4% of all of the primary schools are functionally related to a Catholic Diocese. In representing the interests of the Catholic population of the island, the Catholic Dioceses are the patron bodies for these schools. Parents of the children attending these schools are represented on the Boards of Management, irrespective of their child's faith. In this sense, Ireland has 'Catholic primary schools' in a majority.

These schools are not popularly known as Catholic primary schools for historic and cultural reasons. They are called 'the school', the 'national school' or the 'local school' in the Republic, where religious homogeneity has been assumed by much of the majority population. This assumption can no longer be made with larger numbers of non-Catholic people and people of a nationality other than Irish living and educating their children in Ireland. Religious homogeneity is not the only assumption that is being challenged however. There is also what might be termed an 'expectation gap': parents born themselves as Catholics but no longer regularly practising their own faith request the State to educate their child in a school in their own area. There is an expectation that the child's educational needs be met without a corresponding obligation to Catholic practice, once assumed. In Northern Ireland, it is suggested here that this gap is largely absent as choosing the local Catholic school is not so difficult a choice when you know precisely to which part of a religiously distinct community you belong.

The decision to send your child to an Integrated or a Catholic Maintained School is more directly a conscious one, borne out of an active choice. In the Republic, many parents do not make the distinction between the school and one under the patronage of a Catholic Bishop, choosing a nearby school with available places. Increasingly however, parents in Ireland are choosing other forms of primary education, e.g. multi-denominational patron models.

There have been many reports on the future of the Irish primary education system in recent years. These reports have been concerned with the future of Irish education from philosophical, pedagogical and economic perspectives. Many of these books and published conference proceedings have outlined the nature and scope of the primary system, placing emphasis on the various partners in it. Others have been concerned explicitly with the future for religious education within the primary curriculum. A small number have been focussed on the ways that the tripartite model is under strain or not facilitated by policy developments. As far as is known, none has asked parents of primary school children about the choices they have made on behalf of their children. This report outlines the results of a survey of these parents and their views on school choice and related matters. It is an attempt to fill a gap in the available information in this area. It is also an attempt to come to some better understanding of what is termed here the 'expectation gap' that may be present in the Republic and largely absent in Northern Ireland.

The report is structured in the following way. Section 1 outlines how the sample was drawn, the methods used in the administration of the survey and an outline of the motivation for the inclusion of particular questions. Section 2 summarises the main results of the survey from the approximately 500 completed questionnaires received between October 2007 and January 2008. Section 3 takes the basic results of the survey and analyses the data, using a small number of indices to come to a better understanding of the data. Section 4 consists of a series of conclusions based on the analysis. A number of appendices are also provided.

The data reproduced in this report are derived from responses gratefully received from members of the public with children in schools managed by the Catholic Dioceses. I wish to express my sincere thanks to the respondents as well as the numerous Diocesan and school personnel around Ireland who assisted in the administration of the questionnaire at a crucial time. Thanks are extended to Mgr. Jim Cassin, Ms Hilary O'Carroll and nameless others who assisted at all stages of the project.

Eoin O'Mahony

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## Section 1: Survey Design

The survey is an attempt to understand the reasons why parents chose the school that their child is currently attending. School choice is characterised by a plurality of choices and not the influence of merely one factor. Because of this, the questionnaire was structured in such a way as to collect as much information about these plurality of factors while at the same time giving respondents a chance to find the factor that best represents their decision making processes.

The first two sections of the questionnaire were designed to gather information about the respondent herself and the child of the respondent. These are sections gathering information on the gender, age grouping and religious affiliation of the respondent and the respondent's child. The second section (entitled 'your child and the school') contains a number of other school-related questions in order to gather some baseline information about school choice. A full copy of the questionnaire is available in appendix A at the rear. The structure of the remainder of the questionnaire is as follows:

**Section C: school choice** – this section consists of 13 factors each of which has a five point Likert scale, from very important to very unimportant.

**Section D: your opinions** – this section consists of 18 statements each of which has a five point Likert scale, from strongly disagree to strongly agree. This section also contained three other questions about general satisfaction with the school and the withdrawal of children from religious education.

The questionnaire also contained a section on the respondent's knowledge and marketing of the annual Lenten campaign of Trócaire, the official overseas development agency of the Catholic Church in Ireland. The agency took advantage of the occasion of the survey to include six questions to assist in the planning of the annual campaign.

The results of this section are not contained in this survey but the questions are included in the appendix.

The questionnaire consisted of these five sections over ten pages. The questionnaire was available in Polish, Lithuanian, French, Latvian and Spanish to facilitate completion by those parents whose first language is not Irish or English. These five European languages were selected, as these are the languages chosen by the Republic's Department of Education & Science when printing explanatory material for parents and others.

### Devising the Questionnaire

The structure of the questionnaire was developed from a similar questionnaire devised by Dr. Andrew McGrady at Mater Dei Institute, Dublin. Dr. McGrady's questionnaire was one of three constructed for a study about Catholic education at voluntary second level schools. The questionnaire used in the present survey was adapted from this to take account of the differential context at primary level and the factors that might influence school choice.

The factors that might influence school choice were devised from a list composed through extensive literature reviews of the primary school system in Ireland, north and south. A prolonged consultation with a number of agents in the primary education field was conducted in summer of 2006. These consultations also influenced the factors chosen and statements derived for the draft questionnaire. These included agents acting on behalf of Catholic Dioceses and school managers, individuals with experience of the primary school system and Diocesan personnel.

The questionnaire was piloted in late 2006 amongst a number of Bishops' Conference staff who are parents of primary school children. Alterations based on the pilot survey were made in early 2007.

## Drawing the Sample

Given that the survey was to be administered in all twenty six Catholic Dioceses and to include schools under the patronage of An Foras Patrúnachta and that a number of these cross the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, an effective means by which to draw a representative sample had to be found. Because the statistics contained in this report are based on a sample, they are subject to usual sampling error variances. From the enrolment data provided by both departments on the island of Ireland, there are 3,435 primary schools Catholic Diocesan patronage / Catholic maintained schools in Ireland. The data was listed by Catholic Diocese as well as county. In 2005/2006, these 3,435 schools had 506,902 pupils enrolled. 23.7% of these school pupils were enrolled in the Dublin Diocese with a further 6.2% in the Cork & Ross Diocese, the second most populous Diocese from a school enrolment point of view.

Using an online sample size calculator (available from [www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm](http://www.surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm)), tolerating a 95% confidence level (meaning we can be sure that we are 95% certain) and a confidence interval of 3, the minimum appropriate sample size is 1,065 respondents. The number of respondents per Diocese was then devised, calculating a proportion of the 1,065 sample size based on the weighted proportions of the total enrolment. This meant that each Diocese had a proportionate number of parents who would be surveyed. The sample drawn reflected the number of pupils enrolled in schools within that Diocese / patron body. In this case, the number of pupils represented a proxy for the number of parents, as each child enrolled in a listed primary school would have at least one parent / guardian who could complete the questionnaire. A list of the Dioceses and patron bodies and the number of respondents sought is provided in Appendix B.

Designated Special schools were also surveyed with each nominated school being asked to distribute the survey to as many pupils as possible. Those schools under the patronage of An Foras Patrúnachta were chosen for their geographic location. Schools in each Diocese were chosen according to a select number of criteria in coordination

with local Diocesan personnel. A detailed description of the way in which the questionnaire was administered is provided in the following section.

## Administration and Fieldwork

Given the resources and the time dedicated to the project, it was important that local Diocesan personnel be employed to assist in the administration of the questionnaire. Schools were being asked to distribute the questionnaire directly to parents at the school. Because of this, any local agent should have a reasonable knowledge of the schools in his / her area and be able to recommend which school would be most suitable for administration. Local Diocesan and other personnel responsible for primary education were contacted directly. Each local agent was provided with a list of the schools in their Diocese as drawn from the databases provided from the Departments of Education, north and south. Local Diocesan personnel were asked to select the proportionate number of schools from their Diocesan list, using the following criteria:

- School's location within the Diocese, e.g. urban, suburban or rural
- The size of the enrolment of the school
- Local knowledge of catchment areas, where possible and appropriate
- The gender balance of the individual school
- Any other local factors deemed appropriate

Diocesan personnel were asked to make some contact with these schools in advance of the administration of the questionnaire. While undoubtedly some schools were chosen because the local personnel knew the principal or another contact personally, schools were selected, as far as is practicable, according to the criteria set out above. Some of the local personnel admitted that some schools would be more cooperative than others when selecting the school. In these cases, other schools of similar size and composition were selected.

The questionnaire packs were distributed by the local Diocesan personnel, using the school's principal or another teacher to ensure an equitable distribution of the questionnaires and return envelopes.

Parents received the questionnaires by hand from the school principal or other teacher directly. It was felt that this was the best means to ensure that parents got sight of the questionnaire for their consideration. Handing the questionnaires to the children for their parent or guardian was not felt appropriate.

It was important to the administration of the questionnaire that local personnel be involved. It was believed that response rates for the survey would be higher if school principals / contact points received some communication from a local agent and not an anonymous office in Maynooth. Cooperation in this part of the administration was received from a majority of identified Diocesan personnel. These personnel were brought together in Portlaoise in April of 2007 to review the questionnaire, to select schools and to consult on other aspects of the project. By September 2007, all but five Dioceses had selected their schools. Those who did not select schools by this point received the same questionnaire pack as every other Diocese, asking them to contact the project office in Maynooth as soon as possible.

Each nominated Diocesan contact received the questionnaire pack which contained:

- an explanatory, personalised cover letter
- the requisite number of questionnaires for their Diocese according to the selected schools list,
- one copy each of the foreign language questionnaires as well as a copy as Gaeilge,
- a stamped and addressed return envelope for each questionnaire, and
- an explanatory cover letter for each preselected principal teacher / school contact.

The packs were distributed to the 26 Dioceses and the contact from An Foras Patrúnachta in October 2007 with a further posting for those Dioceses wholly contained in Northern Ireland in November 2007. This was to allow for delays caused by the industrial action in Royal Mail at this time. Support during the fieldwork was provided by the project office in Maynooth and returned, completed questionnaires were returned to the office in the period October 15th 2007 to January 11th 2008. A small number of completed questionnaires were returned in the period after January 11th. These were compiled and analysed separately from the main response set. This considerably smaller response set did not differ from the main response set when individual variables were compared. It was decided at this stage that this second response set of 30 responses would not be integrated into the main response set of 503.

In all 1,065 questionnaires were distributed, with 254 of these being sent to schools in Northern Ireland. 54.6% of the Republic's questionnaires were returned with 23.6% of the Northern Ireland questionnaires returned. **Overall, the crude response rate was 47.2%.** Other ways of measuring response rates take into account the number of unanswered questions in each questionnaire; this method was not followed here. The 503 responses were compiled, checked and analysed using SPSS 15, a commonly-used statistical application. SPSS allows the compilation and analysis of variables and values within the variables using standard univariate and multivariate statistical tests.

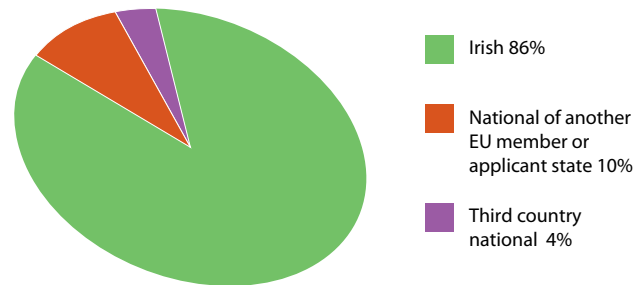
## Section 2: Results of The Survey

The questionnaire was available in a number of languages to facilitate completion for those parents whose first language is not Irish or English. 93% of the questionnaires returned were completed in English with just fewer than 2% completing them in the Irish language. The remaining 5% were divided as follows: French (0.2%), Polish (2.4%), Lithuanian (1.6%), Latvian (0.6%) and Spanish (0.2%). 88% of the completed and returned questionnaires were from residents of the Republic, totalling 443 respondents. The remaining sixty respondents or 12% of the sample were residents of Northern Ireland. While there is some difference in the data between the Republic and Northern Ireland in some variables, this is not the focus of the report. The 14 variables with statistically significant differences (where  $X^2 \leq 0.05$ ) between north and south are noted throughout the text and a list of these variables is provided in Appendix C.

### The Respondent

As outlined above, the questionnaires were handed directly to a parent by the school's principal or class teacher. It might be assumed that the majority of these questionnaires were distributed at the time that the child was collected from the school. Given this assumption, it might partly account for 83% of the respondents being female with the remainder being male. A small number of tests were carried out on the data (using SPSS's weighting function) and there was found to be no significant difference between the analyses of the variables before or after weighting when the gender of the respondent is taken into account. In this sense, the data presented in this report is not greatly influenced by the gender of the respondents.

Chart 1 : nationality of respondents



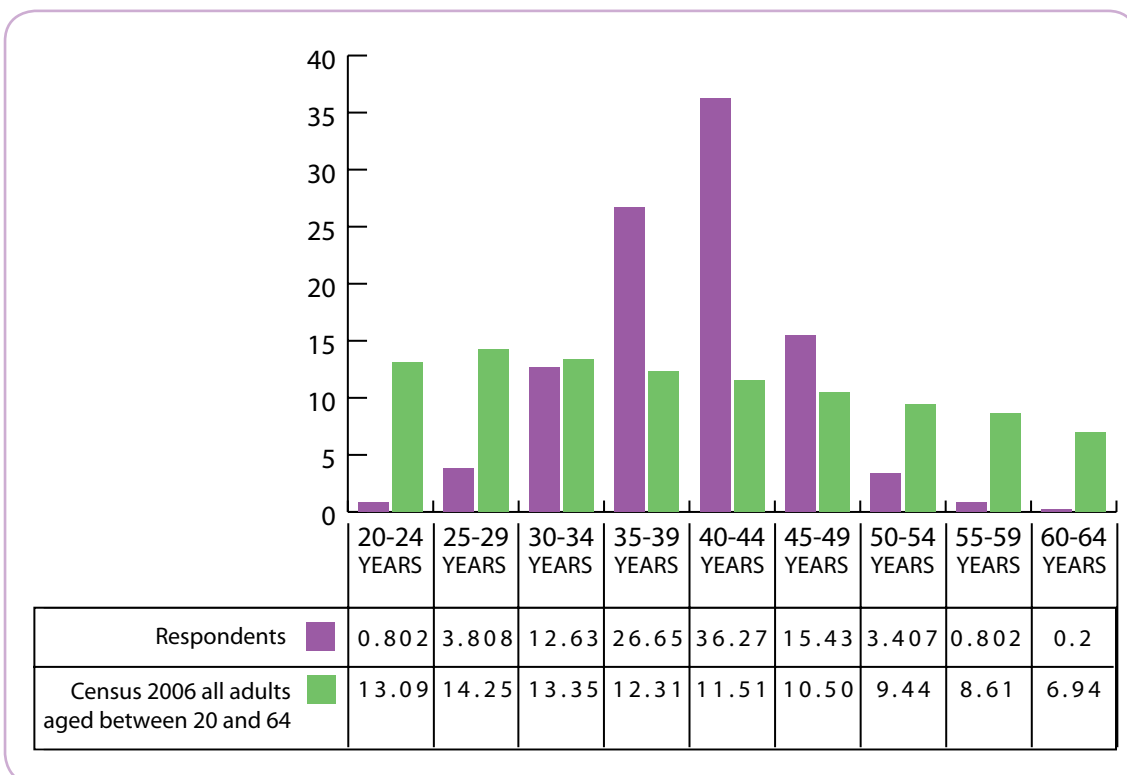
It is unsurprising therefore that 84% of the respondents are the mother of the child or a female legal guardian. 15% of the respondents are the father of the child or a male legal guardian. There is not a significant difference in views about school choice of mothers when compared with those of fathers. As can be seen from the pie chart above, 86% of the respondents are Irish nationals, broadly representing the proportion in the population as a whole. 10% are nationals of another EU member state and the remainder are nationals of a country outside the EU. This broadly reflects the newly emerging nationalities within the Irish primary school system. As will be seen in the following sections, there is a difference in the attitudes of the people whose nationality is not Irish when compared to those who are.

91% of the respondents are Catholic with about 1.6% being Church of Ireland. Of the other faiths, 2.6% are from other Christian faiths, accounted for principally by smaller Protestant churches and those of the Orthodox rite. The table below shows the breakdown of religions amongst the respondents.

Table 1: religious affiliation of respondents	
Religion	%
Roman Catholic	91
Church of Ireland	1.6
Methodist	0.2
Presbyterian	0.8
Other Christian church	2.6
Muslim	0.6
Jewish	0.4
Jehovah Witness	0.4
Hindu	0.2
No religion	1.6
Other religion	0.6

Again this breakdown points to a diverse range of non-Catholic pupils and parents. There is a higher percentage of respondents indicating they are Catholic than are of Irish nationality; is there some sense of deliberation in the choice made by non-Irish nationality parents to send their child to a school managed by the Catholic parish?

**Chart 2: age groups of respondents compared with selected Census 2006 (Republic) age groups.**



Respondents were asked to indicate their approximate age by choosing one of twelve age categories, matching those of the Republic’s Census categories to allow for comparison. As can be seen below, the largest age cohort amongst the respondents is that aged between 40 and 44 years – 36.2% of respondents. In all, almost 63% of all respondents are aged between 35 and 44 years. This is in contrast to the smaller percentages for these age groups found in the Republic’s population from Census 2006 – 33.8%. 12.6% of the respondents were aged between 30 and 34 years with a further 15.4% aged between 45 and 49 years.

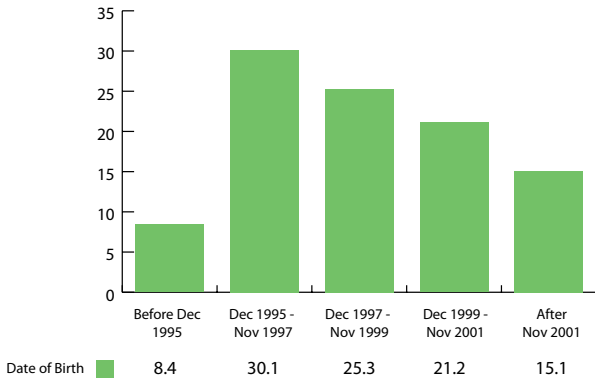
### The Respondent’s Child and The School

The next section of the questionnaire asked a number of demographic questions about the child. Although a small number of parents had indicated on the questionnaire that they had more than one child in attendance at the school, it was the first mentioned child that was taken in each case. Respondents were asked to note the age of their child in years and months. This data was then transformed to give an approximate date of birth from the time of administration of the questionnaire. The graph below shows the spread of scores for the ages of the children. The average age of



the respondents' children was 8 years and 10 months old and the median score was slightly older at 9 years and 1 month old.

**Chart 3: respondents' children date of birth**



30.1% of the respondents' children are aged between 10 and 12 years old with a further 25.3% aged between 8 and 10. In all, just over half of the children of the respondents are aged between 8 and 12 at the time of the administration of the questionnaire. This represents the upper end of the age scale in primary school (between 5 and 12 years) and as such is not representative of the primary school-going population. 15.1% of the children are aged 6 or younger at the time of administration. However, this study is of the views and attitudes of the parents, not of the children.

50.2% of the children are girls and 49.8% are boys. 89.5% of the children are Irish nationals, slightly higher than the proportion of parents declaring Irish nationality. The disparity in the percentages between respondents and children with Irish nationality can be accounted for by the fact that a small percentage of the children are Irish nationals with non-Irish national parents. 5.8% of the children are a national of another EU member or applicant state with the remainder being nationals of a country outside the EU. 93% of the children are Catholic and 1.2% are Church of Ireland. Just under 1.8% of the children are from another Christian church and 0.4% are of the Islamic faith.

Respondents were asked what type of primary school their child has attended in the previous two years. This is in order to gain some better understanding of the dynamics of school attendance and given that a high proportion are in the 8 to 12 year old age cohort, changing schools in the previous two years may not be that unusual. The table below shows the results of the question:

Table 2: type of primary school respondent's child attended in the previous two years.	
Percentage of respondents' children	%
Attended a denominational school	77.7
Attended a Gaelscoil	2.5
Attended an interdenominational school	1.5
Attended an Educate Together school	0.6
Attended a private school	1.5
Was educated outside of Ireland	3.4
Was educated at home	1.1
Has started school this year	11.8

As can be seen, just fewer than 78% of the children have attended a denominational school in the previous two years. 11.8% of the respondents indicated that their child has started school in the school year beginning September 2007. A relatively high proportion of the children have been educated in countries other than Ireland in the previous two years (3.4%) indicating continuing high levels of in-migration of younger families with children. 2.5% had attended one of the Gaelscoileanna (under diverse models of management) in the previous two year period.

**Table 3 : religious affiliation of respondent BY awareness of it being a Catholic school.**

When you applied to enrol your child in the school were you aware that it was a Catholic school?		
	YES	NO
Roman Catholic	98.4	1.6
Church of Ireland	100	
Methodist	100	
Presbyterian	100	
Other Christian church	100	
Muslim	100	
Jewish	100	
Jehovah Witness	100	
Hindu		100
No religion	100	
Other religion	100	

Respondents were asked if when they “applied to enrol your child in the school were you aware that it was a Catholic school” in order to determine some level of deliberation over the decision. Respondents were requested to proceed to the next question if it was not a school under Catholic parish management. It has already been acknowledged that many parents across Ireland have little choice within a reasonable distance when it comes to enrolling their child in primary school: the Catholic parish’s school is the local school. These and a small number of following questions are attempting to come to some understanding about decision-making processes in this context. From the data collected here, 98.3% of the respondents who answered this question (n = 404) stated that they were aware that it was a Catholic school. The lower numbers responding to this question can be accounted for by 99 non-responses, those who did not answer the question. This high proportion of parents who knew that it was a school under the management of the Catholic parish indicates to us that non-Catholic parents are knowingly sending their children to a Catholic school. Further analysis reveals that all but one of the

non-Catholic respondents knew that it was a Catholic school at the time of enrolment. The table on the left outlines the statistically significant difference ( $\chi^2 = 0.00$ ) between those who knew and did not know. In all but the Catholic respondents numbers are quite small. Fewer than ten Catholic respondents were unaware that it was a Catholic school at the time of enrolment.

Respondents were asked how many of their children are attending or have attended the school of the current child. This was asked to come to some understanding of the loyalty of respondents to the school which the current child is attending. 66% of the respondents had sent the current child plus one other child to the school in question. Just fewer than 90% of the respondents had sent this child plus two other children to this school. The data for this question are presented in the table below. Respondents were then asked to indicate which of the three presented statements best described their position when choosing this school.

**Table 4: number of children (including current child) sent to this school**

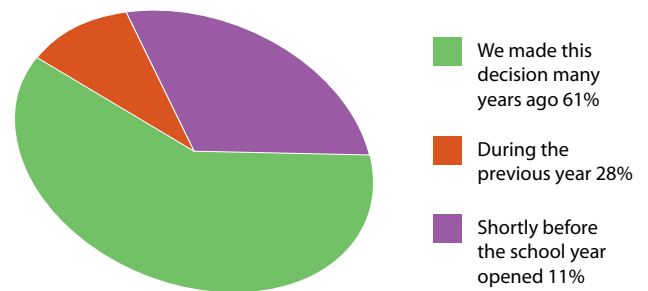
Percentage of respondents	%
1 child	30.0
2 children	36.0
3 children	23.5
4 children	7.5
5 children	1.9
6 or more children	1.0

90% of the respondents indicated that the school where their child was attending “was our first choice”. 6.8% of the respondents stated that “other schools with places were available” and the remaining 3.4% stated “this school was the only one with a place available”. At first sight, this would seem to indicate that almost all of the respondents had been able to enrol their child in the school of their choice.

In fact, almost the same proportion of respondents had been able to send this child plus two more of their children to the school. It would seem that parents in Ireland are sending their children to schools

of their choice in the full knowledge that they are schools under the management of the Catholic parish. Further analysis of this data in conjunction with another question yields a more subtle analysis. 396 of the respondents were aware that it was a Catholic school on enrolment. 90.2% of these respondents stated that this school was their first choice. 85% of those who were not aware it was a Catholic school stated that this was their first choice. As can be seen from the table below, 14.3% of those unaware that it was a Catholic school stated that other schools with places were available compared to 6.3% of those who were aware.

**Chart 4: when respondent made the decision to apply to send the child to this school.**



**Table 5: awareness of it being a Catholic school BY position when choosing the school.**

When you applied to enrol your child in the school were you aware that it was a Catholic school?			
	This school was our first choice	Other schools with places were available	This school was the only one with a place available
Aware that it was a Catholic school on enrolment	90.2	6.3	3.5
Not aware that it was a Catholic school on enrolment	85.7	14.3	0.0

Respondents were asked when did they make the decision to apply to the send their child to the school. This is a measure of how soon before enrolment parents apply to the school. Anecdotal evidence points to parents seeking a school place for their child shortly after that child’s birth or as soon as they move into a new neighbourhood. As the chart above illustrates, just less than two thirds (61%) of respondents made the decision many years ago and 28% made the decision to apply during the previous year. Taking the analysis a little deeper and given the age profile of the children of the respondents, these data were analysed with the date of birth data. There is the potential for ambiguity in the categories used in this question because those who made the decision many years ago might include a high percentage of those with children 8 years or older. As can be seen from the table overleaf, there is a difference between the respondents who stated that they made their decision shortly before the school year opened for the parents of 5 year olds and the parents of 9 year olds. We might state for example that parents now feel they have to think about decisions like this further in advance than five or ten years ago. There is some measurable difference but the difference between the age groups is not statistically significant.

$\chi^2 = 0.625$

The proportion of those unaware is not statistically significant from those who were aware but nonetheless these data give us a better understanding of the choices of parents. Those respondents who stated that other schools with places were available are more likely to be those unaware that the current school was a Catholic school.

**Table 6: age of respondent's child BY when respondent made the decision to apply to send the child to this school.**

	When did you make the decision to apply to send your child to this school?		
	Shortly before the school year opened	During the previous year	We made this decision many years ago
4 y.o.	3.8	38.5	57.7
5 y.o.	8.7	39.1	52.2
6 y.o.	7.3	22.0	70.7
7 y.o.	11.7	26.7	61.7
8 y.o.	9.5	20.6	69.8
9 y.o.	15.5	24.1	60.3
10 y.o.	8.3	23.8	67.9
11 y.o.	13.6	25.4	61.0
12 y.o.	18.4	36.8	44.7
13 y.o.	0	50	50

$X^2 = 0.465$

What is statistically significant however is an analysis of the respondents who indicated that the school was their first choice and made the decision shortly before the school year opened and those who made the decision during the previous year. As the table on the right indicates, the proportion who stated that this school was the only one with a place available and made the decision to enrol in this school “many years ago” is much higher than those who made the decision along a shorter timeframe. Additionally, the proportion of those who were able to choose this school as a first choice is much higher for those who made the decision many years ago when compared to those who made it shortly before the school year opened (64.4% and 8.7%). The differences between the respondents who chose the statement that best reflected their position on the rows of the table are statistically significant. Not only do parents choose a school early but they appear to do so in a determined way so as to get their first choice. For those parents who have no choice, i.e. it was the only school with a place available, just under one half (47.1%) of the respondents stated that they made this decision many years ago. This group of respondents represents merely 3.4% of the total.

**Table 7: position when choosing this school BY when was decision made.**

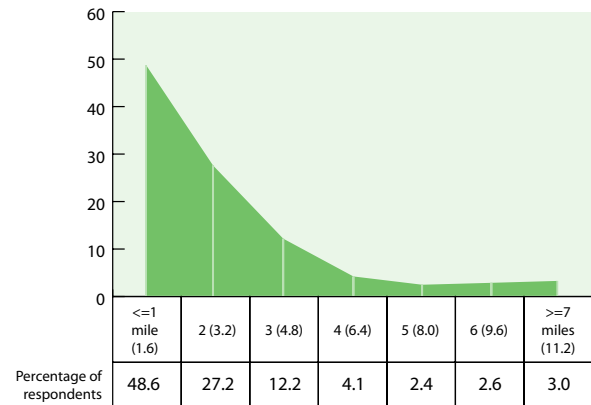
	When did you make the decision to apply to send your child to this school?		
	Shortly before the school year opened	During the previous year	We made this decision many years ago
This school was our first choice	8.7	26.9	64.4
Other schools with places were available	23.5	38.2	38.2
This school was the only one with a place available	29.4	23.5	47.1

$X^2 = 0.01$

When asked how easy or difficult it was to have their child enrolled in the school, 73% of the respondents indicated that it was very easy with a further 18.9% stating that it was easy. Overall then, 92% of respondents said that enrolling their child in the school was very easy or easy. We should be careful however from drawing conclusions based on this statistic too soon. Like the above analysis, enrolment being easy or difficult might mean administratively easy for some and logistically easy for others. To strength test these data, an analysis was carried out using some of the above questions. Taking only those respondents who indicated that it was very easy or easy (the vast majority), there was no statistically significant difference between a number of values within the variables presented in summary form in the table below. Amongst Irish nationals, 80.1% stated that it was very easy to enrol in the school against 70% amongst the non-EU nationals. Ease of enrolment might be related to language needs or pre-existing knowledge of the system for Irish nationals.

The only statistically significant result from this analysis is amongst those who stated that it was very easy and easy and as to when the decision was made – the last row of the table below. Those who had made the decision the previous year found it slightly less easy than for those who made the decision the year before or many years ago.

**Chart 5: distance travelled from child’s home to the school in miles (km in brackets).**



**Table 8: nationality, religious affiliation, position on choosing this school and when decision was taken and BY ease of enrolment to the school – selected responses.**

		It was very easy	It was easy
Nationality	Irish	80.1	19.9
	National of another EU member or applicant state	76.2	23.8
	National of a non-EU member state	70.0	30.0
Religion	Catholic	79.6	20.4
	Church of Ireland	66.7	33.3
	Other Christian church	83.3	16.7
Position on choosing this school	This school was our first choice	79.9	20.1
	Other schools with places were available	75.0	25.0
	This school was the only one with a place available	71.4	28.6
When was decision made?*	Shortly before the school year opened	82.6	17.4
	During the previous year	71.9	28.1
	We made this decision many years ago	82.2	17.8

\*X<sup>2</sup> = 0.047; all others X<sup>2</sup> > 0.05

20.4% of the Catholic respondents stated that it was easy to enrol their child in the school against 33.3% of those respondents who are Church of Ireland. There is no appreciable difference in the strength of the conviction amongst those who stated that the school was their first choice and for those whom there were other school places.

A feature of modern life in Ireland is the traffic and road congestion that is caused by the ‘school run’. This is the volume of road and other traffic at a particular time of each school day generated by children being driven to school. Distance from schools is an important factor for families with children

in choosing where they live. Census data for the Republic suggest fewer children than ever cycling and walking the short distance to school. The data presented here confirm that those distances are short. 75.8% of the respondents indicated that their child's house is two miles (3.2 km) or less from the school at which they are currently attending. The average distance is just 2.2 miles (3.5 km) with the median score being 2 miles (3.2 km). Respondents were also asked if they considered this school to be their "local primary school" and if this is the only school available to the child "within a reasonable distance". The data for these two questions is presented in tabular form below.

**Table 9 : respondent's views on the school being the local primary school and it being the only available school to the child within a reasonable distance.**

	Would you consider this school to be your local primary school?	Is this the only school available to your child within a reasonable distance?
YES	76.0	22.0
NO	24.0	78.0

Just over three quarters of the respondents (76%) stated that they considered this as their local primary school while just 22% reported that this is the only school available to their child within a reasonable distance. The mean for the 'local school' statistic is 1.24 while the mean for the 'reasonable distance' data is 1.78. When analysed further, the data tell us that there is a statistically significant difference between those who consider the school as their local school and that it was the only one available to them within a reasonable distance. 72.6% of those who believed the school to be the local primary school stated that this was not the only school reasonably available to them. In other words, they are two and a half times more likely to perceive their local primary school as one that is outside "a reasonable distance" than one inside the similarly considered distance.

**Table 10: respondent's views on the school being the local primary school BY it being the only available school to the child within a reasonable distance.**

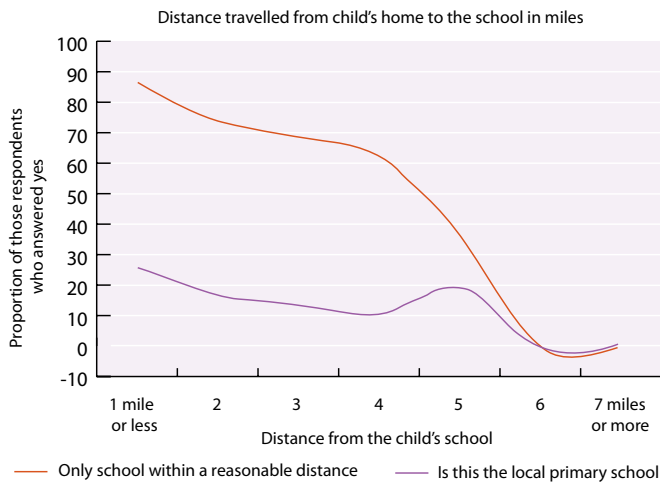
		Is this the only school available to your child within a reasonable distance?	
		YES	NO
Would you consider this school to be your local primary school?	YES	76.0	22.0
	NO	24.0	78.0

$\chi^2 = 0.00$

To examine this data further, the question as to whether the respondents consider this their local primary school, an analysis of distance was worked out along with an analysis of the 'reasonable distance' variable. For those whose children travel one mile or less to the school, just over 73.1% state that this is not the only school available within "a reasonable distance". For those travelling between 1 and 2 miles, the percentage increases to 82.5% and for those travelling between two and three miles the percentage of those who state this is not the only school reasonably distant increases to 85.9%. There is no statistical significance in the differences between those who travel distances longer than three or more miles ( $\chi^2 = 0.241$ ). Parents are being selective about which schools in their area that they choose for their child and are doing this well in advance of actual enrolment.

Of those respondents whose children travel one mile or less, 87.2% consider the school to be the local primary school with decreasing proportions of parents believing this to be the case, the further the distance the child has to travel to school. This relationship between consideration as to whether it is the local primary school and distance travelled is a statistically significant one, i.e. the difference between those children who travel further and their own parents' perceptions of the local primary school is a statistically real one. These three statistics (distance travelled, it being the local primary school and availability of another school within a reasonable distance) are summarised and graphed below.

**Chart 6: proportion of respondents who answered yes to it being the only available school to the child within a reasonable distance and respondent's views on the school being the local primary school BY distance travelled from child's home to the school in miles.**



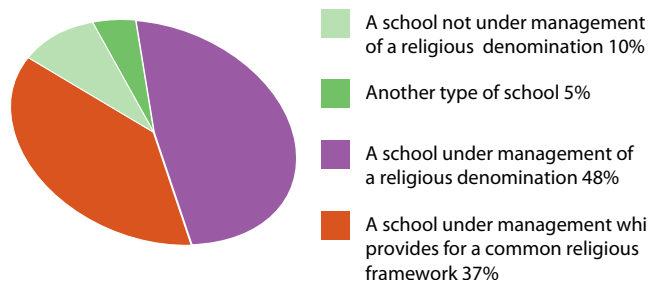
As can be seen from the graph, the proportion of those who answered yes to the question “the only school within a reasonable distance” is significantly lower than for those who answered yes to “is this the local primary school”. There is a consistent gap of about 50% of the respondents who answered ‘yes’. As distance from home to school increases, the percentage of those parents agreeing to the questions decreases but at different rates. For those children who travel 2 miles to school, the percentage of parents agreeing that this is the only school within a reasonable distance is approximately the same for those parents whose children who travel 5 miles. In contrast, there is a distinct fall off after the 4 mile mark for those parents who agree that this is the local primary school – in red above. It appears as if the local primary school is thought of as being within 4 miles distance but ‘a reasonable distance’ from home to school is more consistently judged across actual distance travelled.

Respondents were presented with Article 42.1 of the Constitution of Ireland, Bunreacht na hÉireann, and asked to choose an option from a list as to which of the items best represented their view on the Article. This was a measure of respondents’ opinion on the matter of who holds primary responsibility for education. 93.8% of the respondents answered that education is a shared responsibility between parents and the school. Education being the sole responsibility of the parents was chosen by 3.6% and by the school solely, 2.4%. There is no statistically significant difference between the nationalities, genders or age groups of respondents on this measure. There

is also no statistically significant difference between those respondents from the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland for these data.

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate their preference for different models of school management from a list provided. Again, this is a measure of preference for a generalised model currently available or if respondents wish to see a different model for their child’s school.

**Chart 7: what type of school would you choose for your child, given availability of all types.**



The question was phrased as “If all types of school were available to you as a parent, what type of school would you choose for your child?” In contrast to the previous question where adherence to a joint model was supported in large numbers, the responses here indicate a less distinct model of management.

48% of respondents selected that they would choose a school under the management of a religious denomination. 37.1% would choose a school under management that provides a “common religious framework” and a further 9.7% would choose a school not under the management of a religious denomination. Given that this sample was selected from parents who have their child already in a school under the management of a religious denomination, further analysis was necessary to test the strength of the values within the variable.

Amongst Irish nationals, 49.6% of them would choose a school under the management of a religious denomination compared with 34% of other EU member state nationals but it is the nationals of other countries who would choose management by a religious denomination in the highest proportions. This difference between the groupings of nationalities is statistically significant and so it can be stated that nationals of other EU member states are 3.8 times more likely to choose a school not under the management of a religious denomination than their Irish counterparts do. Nationals of other EU member states are also much more likely to want a school not under the management of a denomination (7.3% for Irish nationals and 27.7% for other EU nationals). Nationals from countries other than EU member states are most in favour of a school management system other than those presented (16.7%).



**Table 11: nationality of the respondent BY what type of school would you choose for your child, given availability of all types.**

	If all types of school were available to you as a parent, what type of school would you choose for your child?			
	A school under management of a religious denomination	A school under management which provides for a common religious framework	A school not under management of a religious denomination	Another type of school
Irish	49.6	38.6	7.3	4.4
National of another EU member or applicant state	34.0	27.7	27.7	10.6
National of a non-EU member state	58.3	8.3	16.7	16.7

$\chi^2 = 0.00$

There is a statistically significant difference too between respondents in terms of their religious beliefs. While the numbers under analysis for the less represented religions are quite small, some of the more salient are summarised in the table below.

**Table 12: religious affiliation of respondent (selected) BY what type of school would you choose for your child, given availability of all types.**

	If all types of school were available to you as a parent, what type of school would you choose for your child?			
	A school under management of a religious denomination	A school under management which provides for a common religious framework	A school not under management of a religious denomination	Another type of school
Catholic	50.2	37.1	8.0	4.7
Church of Ireland	37.5	50.0	12.5	0.0
Methodist	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Presbyterian	25.0	50.0	0.0	25.0
No religion	12.5	62.5	25.0	0.0

$\chi^2 = 0.00$

It is evident that a small percentage of the Catholic respondents favour another type of school if it was available but there is considerable support for schools that are under the management of a religious denomination. However, there is also some support for a management model that has a 'common religious framework' and amongst the Church of Ireland respondents, this is more in favour. Although there are small numbers of respondents claiming no religion for this question, almost two thirds of them would like a school system based on a 'common religious framework' for their children. Parents were asked overall how satisfied



they are with their decision to send their child to this school. 95.1% of the respondents stated that they are very satisfied or satisfied with their decision to send their child to this school. Parents of nationalities other than Irish are more likely to be just satisfied than very satisfied and this is a statistically significant difference ( $X^2= 0.02$ ). The disaggregated data for religious affiliation is too small for the other religions for the analysis to be meaningful and there is no difference between the age groups of parents and responses to this question of generalised satisfaction.

### School Choice and Parental Involvement

This section of the report is composed from two separate parts of the questionnaire. In section C, respondents were presented with a list of factors and asked to indicate how important or unimportant this particular factor is in choosing a school. These factors were selected to account for the reasons for the parent’s decision to send their child(ren) to this particular school. In recording information on the reasons for sending their child(ren) to this particular school, the research is gathering information on which factors are the most important in the decision-making process. Some of the factors are practical (distance from school, convenience) while others are notional (as a basis for secondary school).

Section D of the questionnaire asked respondents to provide their opinions on a number of statements. These were presented within quotation marks to elicit their views on what might be described as ‘common sense’: statements that one might hear in conversation on the topic of school choice. These condensations of commonly held positions can contain opinions that are more contentious and ask the respondent to agree or disagree on a five point Likert scale. It is not the importance or unimportance that the respondent attributes to a statement that matters, as much as their relative position compared with other respondents and questions.

Likert scaling is a bipolar scaling method, measuring positive and negative responses to a statement, factors or a combination of the two. A five point scale was used to

avoid a forced choice from respondents. Likert scales may be subject to distortion from several causes. Respondents may avoid using extreme response categories (central tendency bias); agree with statements as presented (acquiescence bias); or try to portray themselves in a more favourable light (social desirability bias). In this study, two different Likert scales are used:

Factors for school choice	Opinions on Statements
Very important	Strongly disagree
Important	Disagree
Neither important nor unimportant	Don’t Know
Unimportant	Agree
Very unimportant	Strongly Agree

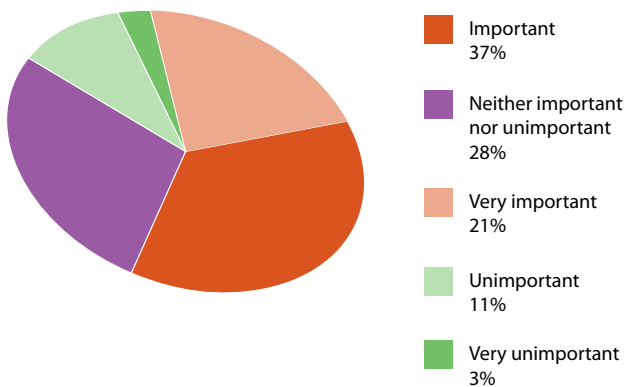
Using 29 different questions across these two sections, five groups were devised. These groups contained items from the questionnaire that have a common subject. The five groups are:

1. Management Model: to determine respondents’ views on patron models and State and Church involvement (4 variables)
2. Community and choice: to determine respondents’ views on the important factors for school choice (11 variables)
3. Faith: to understand the weight given to faith and Catechetical factors amongst respondents (5 variables)
4. Parental Involvement: to determine the respondents’ views on the extent of parental involvement in sacramental preparation (5 variables)
5. Diversity: to determine the respondents’ views to more diverse primary school classrooms (4 variables)

### Management Model

The purpose of this group of variables was to measure respondents' attitudes toward Catholic primary school management and the model of Church / State provision currently in place. Respondents were presented with four variables. Firstly, parents were asked if they chose this school due to the fact that it is under the management of the Catholic parish.

**Chart 8: importance / unimportance of the fact that it is a school under the management of the Catholic parish.**



As can be seen, 37% stated that this is an important factor while a further 21% stated that it was very important. 14% of the respondents stated that it was either unimportant or very unimportant. A high proportion of the respondents (28%) felt it was neither important nor unimportant. This would indicate that the school being under the management of the Catholic parish is an important factor for parents but that many parents do not feel strongly about this. Based on previously tabulated data, we can examine these data in more detail. Of those who stated that they would choose a school under management of a religious denomination, 36.8% stated that it was very important that the school actually chosen was under the management of the Catholic parish while 45.3% believed it to be an important factor. This compares with just 4.8% of those who sought a school with a common religious framework believing it to be very important and a further 34.3% believing it to be important. If you favour a common religious framework model for the school, you are over 7.5 times less likely to think that it is very important to have the school under Catholic management than those who favour a religious denomination.

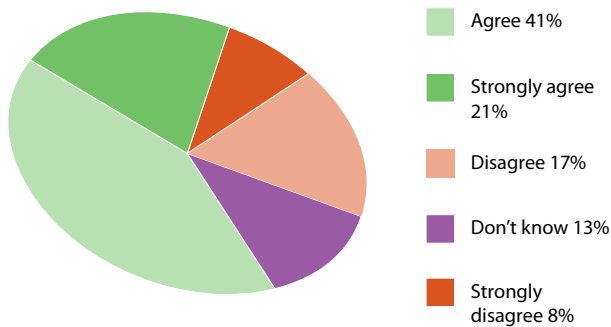
**Table 13: If all types of school were available to you as a parent, what type of school would you choose for your child? BY the fact that it is a school under the management of the Catholic parish.**

		The fact that it is a school under the management of the Catholic parish - some excludes				
		Very important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant	Very unimportant
If all types of school were available to you as a parent, what type of school would you choose for your child?	A school under management of a religious denomination	36.8	45.3	15.0	2.6	0.4
	A school under management which provides for a common religious framework	4.8	34.3	37.3	19.3	4.2
	A school not under management of a religious denomination	--	13.6	50.0	22.7	13.6
	Another type of school	15.0	15.0	45.0	20.0	5.0

$\chi^2 = 0.00$

Respondents were also asked if the Churches should continue to have a prominent role in the provision of primary schooling. Agreement with this statement would indicate that the current situation of primary provision should remain.

**Chart 9: agreement / disagreement with the Churches should continue to have a prominent role in the provision of primary schooling.**



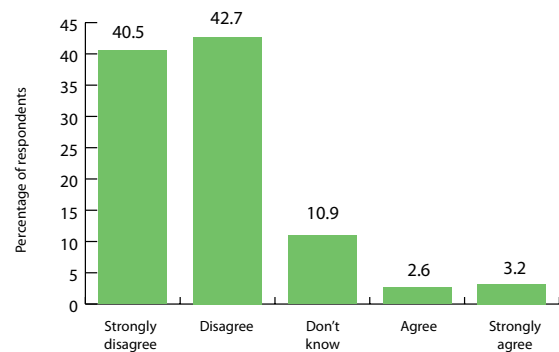
The chart above shows the results of the survey for this question. While 41% agree that the Churches should continue to play a prominent role and 21% strongly agreed, 17% (or about 1 in 6 respondents) disagree. Those who favour a continuing prominent role for the Churches in primary education provision outnumber those who do not by almost 2.5 times.

Respondents were also presented with the statement that the State’s main role is not to provide education itself but to assist others who provide education. This is in reference to the current policy context whereby the State employs and pays for teachers within schools of any denomination and none while the school is under the management of the local community. Disagreement with this statement would indicate that respondents do not agree with the present management model. 36.9% of the respondents agreed with this statement and a further 14.6% strongly agreed with it. 21.7% disagreed indicating that they seek some other role for the State in the provision of primary schooling.

Another 14.8% strongly disagree with the statement. While the parents generally support the current management model, there is a significant (perhaps as high as 1 in 3) proportion of parents who might be labelled model changers, i.e. they seek a

more direct role for the State in the provision of primary education. Finally, respondents were presented with the statement “my trust in the primary school to provide a safe environment for my child is lessened because it is under the management of the Catholic parish”. Support for this statement would indicate that parents do not believe recent scandals within the Church and wider society have weakened their trust in the local primary school. As can be seen, a high proportion of the respondents either strongly disagrees or disagrees with this statement. About 11% do not know and approximately 6% agree or strongly agree with the statement.

**Chart 10: agreement / disagreement with my trust in the primary school to provide a safe environment for my child is lessened because it is under the management of the Catholic parish.**



In order to further explore these data, the data from the group were cross-tabulated to see if there is any relationship between respondents’ orientation in one variable and another. Of those respondents who disagreed with the statement that the State’s main role is not to provide education but to assist those who do (model changers), 21.5% of them also disagreed with the statement that the Churches should continue to have a prominent role. 48.6% of this sub-sample agreed with the latter statement. Of those who agreed that the State’s main role is not to provide education itself but to facilitate others, 19.4% disagreed with the statement that Churches should continue to have a prominent role. 45.6% agreed with this latter statement. This can be summarised as follows:

**Table 14: The State’s main role is not to provide education itself, but to assist others who provide education BY the Churches should continue to have a prominent role in the provision of primary schooling**

		The Churches should continue to have a prominent role in the provision of primary schooling				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
The State’s main role is not to provide education itself, but to assist others who provide education	Strongly disagree – model changers	13.7	12.3	13.7	32.9	27.4
	Disagree – model changers	4.7	21.5	9.3	48.6	15.9
	Don't know	10.2	13.6	25.4	32.2	18.6
	Agree	3.3	19.4	11.1	45.6	20.6
	Strongly agree	15.3	9.7	9.7	34.7	30.6

$X^2 = 0.00$

This table indicates that there is no large difference between those who believe there should be a change in the current model, and those who favour no change. The percentage differences are small for those who agree with and those who disagree with the State’s main role. Of those who strongly agree that the State’s main role is to assist others in educational provision, 15.3% strongly disagree that the Churches should continue to have a prominent role. Almost double that proportion strongly agrees that the Churches should continue to have a prominent role in primary school provision.

We might also speculate that there is no relationship between choosing the school because it is under Catholic parish management and the role of the State in primary education provision. Of those who stated that it was important that the school was under parish management, 13.5% strongly disagreed that the State’s main role is not to provide education itself – model changers. 11.1% of this sub-sample strongly agreed that the State’s main role is not to provide education itself. Among those respondents who felt that Catholic parish management was an unimportant factor in school decision, 13.2% strongly disagreed that the State’s main role is not to provide education itself. Again only 11.3% strongly agreed ( $X^2 = 0.664$ ). These data indicate that there is little difference between parents who chose this school because it is important that it is under the management of the Catholic parish and those who feel it is unimportant.

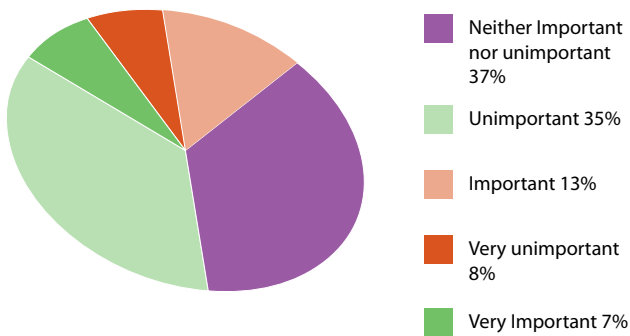
Data for this section can be summarised as follows:

	Very important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant	Very unimportant
The fact that it is a school under the management of the Catholic parish	20.7	37.1	27.7	11.3	3.2
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
The Churches should continue to have a prominent role in the provision of primary schooling	7.6	16.6	12.6	41.7	21.4
My trust in the primary school to provide a safe environment for my child is lessened because it is under the management of the Catholic parish	40.5	42.7	10.9	2.6	3.2
The State's main role is not to provide education itself, but to assist others who provide education	14.8	21.7	12.0	36.9	14.6

## Community and Choice

This group of variables – 11 in all – were designed to come to a better understanding of the practical factors in choosing a school. Are parents influenced by the attendance at the school of other family members, by distance from the home or by an emphasis on the development of the child’s imagination? Parents as respondents were asked how important or unimportant is the distance of the child’s home from the school. 59.1% of the respondents stated that this was very important or important in deciding the child’s school.

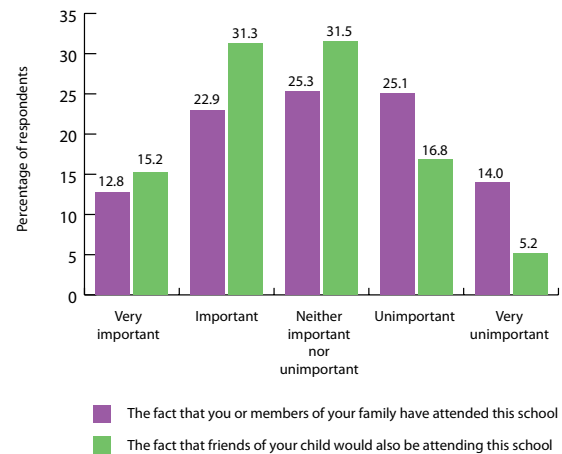
**Chart 11: Distance from child’s home to the school.**



27.1% said it was neither important nor unimportant. Just 13.8% of the respondents stated that it was unimportant or very unimportant. The mean score for this variable was a relatively high 2.35 with 95% of the scores within 1.03 standard deviations. While not all of the respondents were able to state how important or unimportant the fact that it is a single sex school, of those who did, 19.3% felt that it was important or very important. 43.1% stated that it was unimportant or very unimportant. A high proportion of the respondents (37.6%) stated that it was neither important nor unimportant. The total number of respondents for this question was 36% of the total sample as many of the respondents have children who did not attend a single sex school.

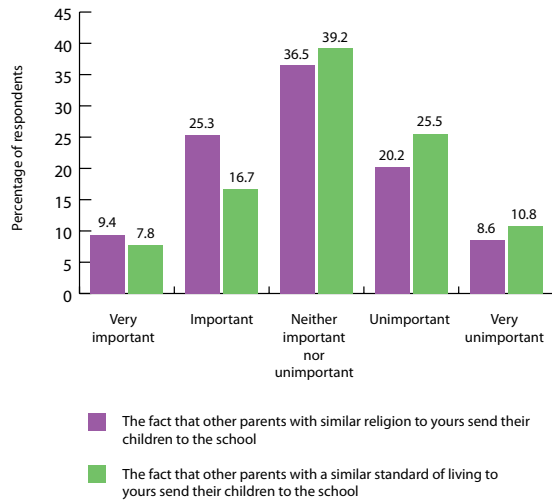
Respondents were presented with a number of other factors and statements. These might be loosely grouped under the heading ‘community’ – did members of their own family attend this school, other parents with a similar standard of living send their child to this school etc. These are factors and statements to indicate a similarity with the community around them as well as priorities for parents in choosing this particular school over others, e.g. priority given to religious education and the development of their child’s imagination.

**Chart 12: importance / unimportance of the fact that other members of your family have attended this school and the fact that friends of your child would also be attending this school.**



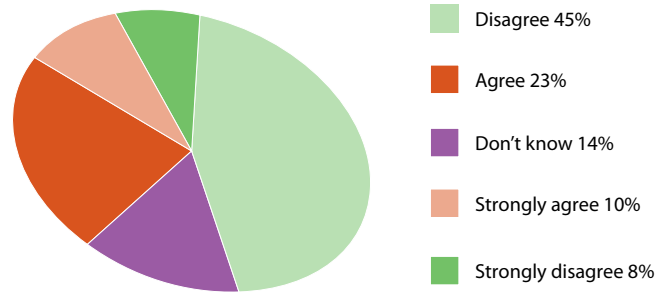
As can be seen from the graph here, while almost 23% of respondents feel it is important that other family members went to this school as a choice factor, 31.3% of them felt that the friends of the child being in attendance was important. Other family members having attended this school seems to be less important for the respondents than the friends of the child attending. In choosing the school, 46.5% of parents feel that it is very important or important that friends of the child are already attending this school. The same figure for members of the family attending is 35.7%. It would appear as if friends of the child attending are more important for parents than other family members having attended the school. Again, high proportions of respondents stating that these were neither important nor unimportant are evident from the data (25.3% and 31.5%).

**Chart 13: importance / unimportance of the fact that parents with similar religion to yours and a similar standard of living send their children to the school.**



Respondents were asked to rate how important or unimportant two ‘similarity’ variables are to them in school choice. These are the fact that other parents of similar religion and of similar standard of living also sent their child to the school. As can be noted from the graph, the highest proportions in each factor are for those who state these two to be neither important not unimportant. Between 36% and 40% of all respondents state that these factors are neither important nor unimportant. Just under 35% of parents state that the fact that other parents with a similar religion to their own send their child to this school is very important or important. This compares to just under 25% of parents who state that the fact that other parents with a similar standard of living to their own send their children to this school. Overall, respondents feel that similarity of religion and standard of living is relatively unimportant in choosing their child’s school. The large proportions of those who are ambivalent or do not know about these factors is again evident. (The mean scores for these variables are relatively high at 2.9 and 3.1 respectively.) Religious homogeneity appears to be more important to parents than homogeneity of standard of living.

**Chart 14: agreement / disagreement on the religious, moral and spiritual education provided for respondent’s child is the most important aspect of primary schooling.**



Respondents were presented with the statement “the religious, moral and spiritual education provided for my child is the most important aspect of primary schooling.” Support for this statement would indicate that parents choose the primary school because of the quality of this aspect of the education curriculum at primary level and accord primacy to this factor above others. The data tell us that 45% of the respondents disagree with this statement with a further 8% strongly disagreeing. In all, 33% of the respondents either strongly agree or agree with the statement. There is a clear majority in disagreement with the statement. It would appear as if parents feel that there are other factors that are more important than the religious, moral and spiritual education, although not strongly in great numbers. What are these other factors?

A factor presented to the respondents was that the quality of the education the school provides as a basis for secondary school. 77.6% of the respondents felt this was a very important factor in choosing the school with another 17.4% stating that it was an important factor. There was just about 5% of the respondents who felt that this was either unimportant or very unimportant. It would appear as if the school being a basis for progression to secondary school is more crucial than the religious moral and spiritual education provided. We might speculate that there is no relationship between seeing an importance to the school as a basis for later education and the importance accorded to religious, moral and spiritual education as a primary factor in school choice. In other words, how strongly is this felt amongst those parents?

As 95% of the respondents chose either 'very important' or 'important' in reply to the factor "The quality of the education it provides as a basis for secondary school", only these data are examined here. As can be seen from the table below, there is a small difference between those who stated that quality of education is an important and very important factor in school choice. Amongst those in the sub-sample who felt that the education provided as a basis for secondary education was very important, 24.6% of them agreed that the religious education provided is the most important aspect of

their child's primary schooling. Of those that stated it was merely important, about 15% of them agreed that the religious education provided is the most important aspect of their child's primary schooling. This small difference is the only one seen in this sub-sample when examining the data in more detail. Those who think it is very important or important and disagree that the religious education provided is the most important aspect of their child's primary schooling, show only a small difference. The difference is not statistically significant.

**Table 15: The quality of the education it provides as a basis for secondary school BY The religious, moral and spiritual education provided for my child is the most important aspect of primary schooling – selected.**

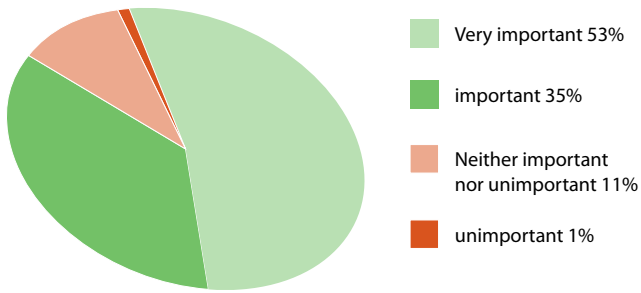
	The religious, moral and spiritual education provided for my child is the most important aspect of primary schooling					
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
The quality of the education it provides as a basis for secondary school	Very important	8.3	44.6	12.7	24.6	9.8
	Important	8.2	49.4	17.6	15.3	9.4

$X^2 = 0.573$

If, as appears from the above, preparation for secondary school is a key factor in primary school choice, what are the other factors? A further factor presented to the respondents at this stage was the school's approach to discipline. This factor came out as very important to parents in school choice, as the data below make clear. 53% of the respondents felt that it is a very important factor in school choice and a further 35% stating that it is important. Just 1% of the respondents felt that this is unimportant as a factor in the choice of this particular school.



**Chart 15: importance / unimportance of the school's approach to discipline.**



It is clear then that large numbers of parents feel that the school's approach to discipline is a key factor in choosing this particular school for their children.

When compared with the data from the next strongest factor (quality of education as a basis), the data show a particular relationship to each other. Of those respondents who felt that approach to discipline is very important, 92% felt that the quality of the education provided as a base is very important. Just 6.4% of this sub-sample felt it to be important. Of those who felt that discipline was important, 65.1% stated that quality of education as a base was very important. These statistically significant differences between the data are summarised below.

**Table 16: The school's approach to discipline BY The quality of the education it provides as a basis for secondary school**

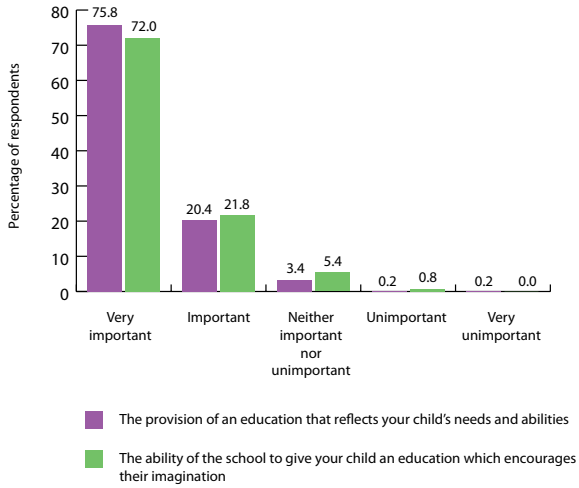
		The quality of the education it provides as a basis for secondary school			
		Very important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant
The school's approach to discipline	Very important	92.1	6.4	1.1	0.4
	Important	65.1	30.2	4.7	0.0
	Neither important nor unimportant	44.2	30.8	23.1	1.9
	Unimportant	66.7	33.3	0.0	0.0

$\chi^2 = 0.00$

It is evident so far that the distance from the school, the school's approach to discipline and the education it provides as a basis for secondary school are key factors in school choice. Some degree of religious and class homogeneity is also important to parents. If the religious, moral and spiritual education provided for the child is not the most important aspect of primary schooling, what are the other, related factors? Respondents were presented with two other factors: the provision of an education that reflects the child's needs and abilities and the ability of the school to give the child an education that encourages their imagination. In effect, these two factors are pedagogical factors that might be considered more important than the purely religious elements of the curriculum.

It has been noted above that parents do not consider the religious, moral and spiritual educative elements as the most important factor in primary school choice.

**Chart 16: importance / unimportance of the provision of an education that reflects your child's needs and abilities and the ability to give an education which encourages their imagination.**



From the data gathered, both an education that reflects their child's needs and abilities as well as one that encourages their imagination are very important factors for parents. 75.8% of parents stated that needs and abilities were very important while 20.4% stated that it is important. 72% stated that an education which encourages their child's imagination is very important and a further 21.8% stated that it is important. Very small fractions of respondents thought that these were unimportant factors. It is clear that these factors and the quality of the education as a basis for secondary schooling are important for these respondents. Choice of school is thus determined by factors other than family allegiance to a particular school or the importance given to the religious, moral and spiritual educative elements of the curriculum. Are there factors related to the faith formation and sacramental preparation of the child that are of influence in choosing their child's school?

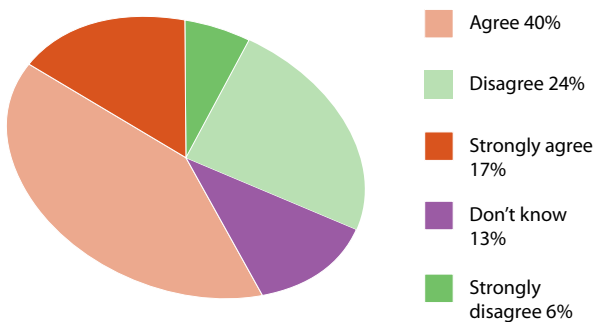
Data for this section can be summarised as follows:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
The religious, moral and spiritual education provided for my child is the most important aspect of primary schooling	8	45.6	14	22.6	9.8
	Very important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant	Very unimportant
The fact that you or other members of your family have attended this school	12.8	22.9	25.3	25.1	14.0
The fact that friends of your child would also be attending this school	15.2	31.3	31.5	16.8	5.2
The fact that other parents with a similar standard of living to yours send their children to the school	7.8	16.7	39.2	25.5	10.8
The fact that other parents with similar religion to yours send their children to the school	9.4	25.3	36.5	20.2	8.6
The provision of an education that reflects your child's needs and abilities	75.8	20.4	3.4	0.2	0.2
The ability of the school to give your child an education which encourages their imagination	72.0	21.8	5.4	0.8	0.0
The quality of the education it provides as a basis for secondary school	77.6	17.4	4.6	0.4	0.0
The fact that it is a single sex school - some excludes	6.6	12.7	37.6	35.4	7.7
The school's approach to discipline	53.5	34.7	10.6	1.2	0.0
The distance from the child's home to the school	22.2	36.9	27.1	10.8	3.0

## Faith

Respondents were then presented with five variables to measure the important or unimportance of a series of faith formation factors. Firstly, parents were presented with the statement that the school should seek to strengthen the religious faith of the child. This is a measure of how parents perceive the role of the school in the faith formation of their own child. Support for this variable would mean that the school is seen by parents to be an important part of their child's religious education. Past studies have shown that schools may well be carrying a disproportionate amount of the responsibility for the faith formation of the child.

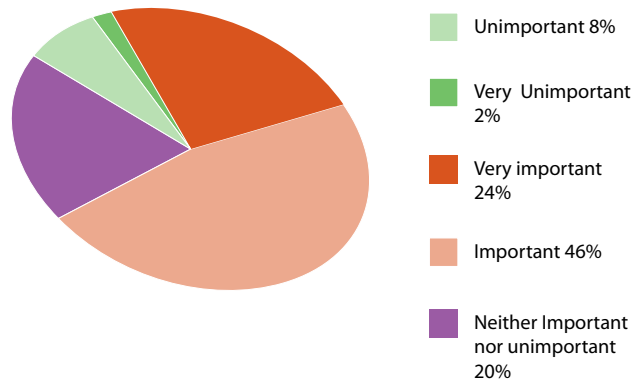
**Chart 17: agreement / disagreement on that the school should seek to strengthen the religious faith of the child.**



40% of the parents as respondents agree with the statement that the school should seek to strengthen the religious faith of their child. 17% strongly agree with this statement. In all 30% of the parents either strongly disagree or disagree with the statement and so do not think that the school should seek to strengthen the faith of the child. Parents were also presented with the statement that “the school’s teachers should promote the religious life of the school”. 46.9% of the respondents agree with this statement and a further 13.4% strongly agree. Parents see a clear role for the teacher in promoting the religious life of the school. 19.2% disagree with the statement and just 3.4% strongly disagree. A relatively high proportion (17%) responded that they do not know.

As a factor in school choice, respondents were presented with the religious education provided by this particular school. Seeing this as important would imply that parents chose this school because of the importance accorded to religious education.

**Chart 18: importance / unimportance of the religious education provided by this particular school.**



Given that many respondents did not believe that the religious, moral and spiritual to be the most important factors, what do the data tell us? 46% of the respondents thought that RE provided at this school was important and 24% believed it to be very important. Small percentages of the respondents stated that it was unimportant or very unimportant. There is also a high proportion of ambivalence toward this factor with 1 in 5 stating that they deem it neither important nor unimportant. The religious education provided by the school as a factor in choice is important but not centrally important to parents.

Examining these data in more detail, we can see some more subtlety in the analysis. Taking data from a previous group - the fact that it is a school under the management of the Catholic parish - and comparing it to the spread of scores from the factor “the school that my child attends should seek to strengthen the religious faith of my child” we can note the following:

**Table 17: The fact that it is a school under the management of the Catholic parish BY The school that my child attends should seek to strengthen the religious faith of my child**

		The school that my child attends should seek to strengthen the religious faith of my child				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
The fact that it is a school under the management of the Catholic parish - some excludes	Very important	6.3	8.3	4.2	41.7	39.6
	Important	1.2	20.2	11.0	49.7	17.9
	Neither important nor unimportant	8.5	31.8	15.5	38.8	5.4
	Unimportant	9.4	41.5	22.6	15.1	11.3
	Very unimportant	13.3	40.0	33.3	13.3	0.0

$$X^2 = 0.00$$

8.3% of those who believed it very important that the school is under Catholic management disagreed that the school should seek to strengthen the religious faith of their child. This is compared with 20.2% of those who felt it was important and who disagreed with the statement. High proportions (40 – 50%) of those who feel that Catholic management is a very important or important factor agreed that the school should seek to strengthen the faith of the child. As might be expected, high numbers of respondents (39.6%) who felt that Catholic parish management was a very important factor strongly agreed that the school should seek to strengthen the faith of the child. The scores in this analysis are clustered to the top and right of the table above. This indicates that those who chose a school because it is under Catholic management tend to think that the school has a role to play in strengthening the child's faith. This role might be a more explicitly Catholic one but no firm conclusion can be drawn as yet.

How might this faith be strengthened in the school? Respondents were asked to rate how important / unimportant the worship provided at the school is. This was exemplified by daily prayer and the celebration of religious festivals and events. 41.3% of parents felt that this was an important factor with 28.9% stating that it was very important. Just under 10% of the respondents stated that it was either unimportant or very unimportant. There might be seen to be a contradiction in the data at this stage: parents do not think that the religious, moral and spiritual education of their child is the most important factor and yet high proportions chose this school because of the worship provided there and that teachers should promote the religious life of the school. The school is the site of the faith formation for the respondents of this survey. What role do parents themselves play? This will be examined in detail in the next group of variables.

Finally, respondents were presented with the statement “when approaching moral and social topics the teacher should favour the position of the Catholic Church”. A support of this statement would indicate that teachers in schools under the management of the Catholic parish should advocate the position of the Church in moral and social topics. The data is unclear in this regard with almost 1 in 5 (18%) stating that they do not know. 31.9% state that they disagree with this and a further 9.1% strongly disagree. In all, this is 41% of the respondents disagreeing with the position as presented. 30.1% agree with

the statement with another 10.9% strongly agreeing, aggregating to 41%. The mean score for this variable is 3.02 indicating a high degree of ambivalence in the group of respondents surveyed. To unpack this data in more detail, we can compare these data with another variable to test its strength. Another measure of adherence already discussed here is the respondents’ views on differing types of school management. Here the hypothesis is that there is no relationship between school management type and teachers favouring the position of the Catholic Church in moral and social topics.

**Table 18: If all types of school were available to you as a parent, what type of school would you choose for your child BY when approaching moral and social topics the teacher should favour the position of the Catholic Church.**

		When approaching moral and social topics the teacher should favour the position of the Catholic Church				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
If all types of school were available to you as a parent, what type of school would you choose for your child?	A school under management of a religious denomination	3.4	18.9	18.5	41.2	18.0
	A school under management which provides for a common religious framework	11.0	42.0	16.0	25.4	5.5
	A school not under management of a religious denomination	27.1	52.1	14.6	6.3	0.0
	Another type of school	15.4	42.3	26.9	11.5	3.8

$\chi^2 = 0.00$

As we have already noted, the vast majority of the respondents would select a school under the management of a religious denomination given the choice of all types. Of these respondents (row 2 above), 41.2% agree that the teacher should favour the position of the Catholic Church and 18% strongly agree. This is in contrast to those parents who state that they would choose another type of school (row 5 above) where 11.5% agree and 3.8% strongly agree. If you favour a school with denominational management, you are more likely as a parent to think that teachers should favour the position of the Church in these topics. Those who would favour a school not under the management of a religious denomination are more likely to disagree that the teacher favours the position of the Church.

Data for this section can be summarised as follows:

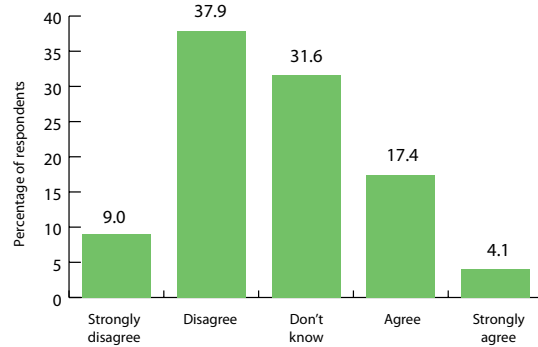
	Very important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant	Very unimportant
The worship provided at the school, e.g. daily prayer, celebration of religious festivals and events	28.9	41.3	20.2	7.2	2.4
The religious education provided by this particular school	24.2	46.1	20.2	7.6	1.8
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
The school that my child attends should seek to strengthen the religious faith of my child	5.8	24.4	12.6	39.9	17.2
The school's teachers should promote the religious life of the school	3.4	19.2	17.0	46.9	13.4
When approaching moral and social topics the teacher should favour the position of the Catholic Church	9.1	31.9	18.0	30.1	10.9

## Parental Involvement

Respondents were presented with five related factors and statements to measure the involvement of parents in sacramental preparation. There has been a concern in recent years that the primary school is doing a disproportionate amount of the work involved in preparation for the sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation. Much of the preparation takes place within the school time and parents express either that they are left out of these important times or are not interested. The data presented here attempts to come to some better understanding of the views of the parents in this regard. Firstly, respondents were presented with the statement “the sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation are best prepared for outside of the school setting”. 41% of the respondents disagreed with this statement, indicating a high degree of support for preparation in the school. A further 27% strongly disagree with the statement meaning that just over two thirds of the respondents either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement. Fewer people agreed with the statement than selected the Don't Know option. This shows that a high proportion of the parents of primary school children believe that sacramental preparation is best done within the school setting.

Although not a widespread practice amongst parents in primary schools in Ireland, withdrawing children from religious education is one means that has been suggested by which parents can ensure a more secular education. 98% of the respondents polled for this survey had never done this but when presented with the statement “when parents want their child to have a secular education, withdrawing them from religious education lessons is the best way to ensure this”. This is a displaced measure of a commitment to a secular education where respondents are asked about ‘parents’ in the abstract. As can be seen, 37.9% disagree with this statement and 9% strongly disagree. Again however there is a high percentage indicating a Don't Know – 31.6%. 17.4% agree with this means by which to ensure a secular education. There may be other means of ensuring a secular education but it seems as if withdrawing their child from religious education is not it.

Chart 19: agreement / disagreement with when parents want their child to have a secular education, withdrawing them from religious education lessons is the best way to ensure this.



To expand upon this analysis we compared these data with data from the previous section: reaction to article 42.1 of the Constitution of Ireland. We hypothesise here that parental attitudes to responsibility for education is not related to agreement or disagreement with withdrawing children from religious education as the best means to ensure a secular education. For those respondents who believe that education is the sole responsibility of the school, 16.7% disagree that withdrawing the child from RE is the best way while 25% agree. Amongst those who state that education is a shared responsibility (the vast majority of parents), 38.7% disagree that withdrawing the child is the best way to ensure a secular education whereas just 16.8% agree that it is the best way. These are not statistically significant differences but do show a difference between respondents who believe that education is the sole responsibility of the school and those who believe it is a shared responsibility. It would also appear as if there is a relationship, albeit not a strong one, between stating that education is a shared responsibility and disagreement on the withdrawal of the child from RE. Parents do not believe that withdrawing a child from RE is the best way to ensure a secular education although there is also a high proportion who do not know if this is the best way.



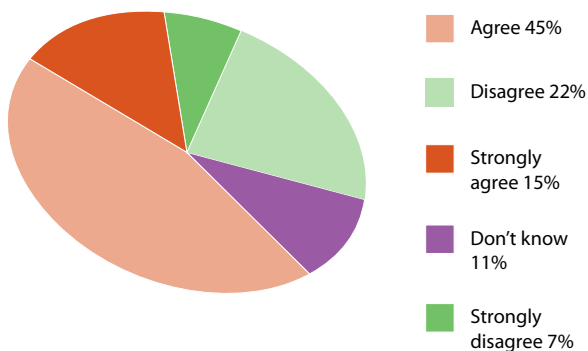
**Table 19: Which of the three following statements best describes your view on Article 42.1 BY when parents want their child to have a secular education, withdrawing them from religious education lessons is the best way to ensure this.**

		When parents want their child to have a secular education, withdrawing them from religious education lessons is the best way to ensure this				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
Which of the three following statements best describes your view on Article 42.1	Education is the sole responsibility of the school	8.3	16.7	41.7	25.0	8.3
	Education is the sole responsibility of the parents	11.1	33.3	27.8	22.2	5.6
	Education is a shared responsibility between parents and the school	9.0	38.7	31.5	16.8	3.9

$\chi^2 = 0.897$

Respondents were presented with the statement that in Ireland today parents are sufficiently involved in the primary schooling of their children. Again, this is a measure of respondents' abstracted sense of sufficient parental involvement.

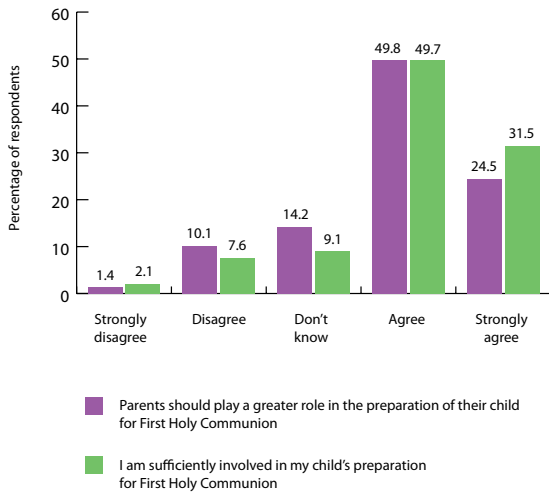
**Chart 20: agreement / disagreement on parents are sufficiently involved in the primary schooling of their children.**



As can be seen 45% of the respondents agree with the statement while another 15% strongly agree with that parents are sufficiently involved. About half this proportion of respondents disagrees or strongly disagrees – just under 30% in total. There is a smaller percentage of respondents who do not know than for many of the preceding variables. A majority of the parents of primary school children believe that parents are sufficiently involved in the primary education of their children. As for the part played by parents in specific sacramental preparation, the following two statements were put before the respondents:

- Parents should play a greater role in the preparation of their child for First Holy Communion – a measure of general acceptance / rejection of involvement, and
- I am sufficiently involved in my child's preparation for First Holy Communion – a measure of specific, personal acceptance / rejection of involvement.

**Chart 21: agreement / disagreement on parents should play a greater role in the preparation of their child for, and I am sufficiently involved in my child's preparation for First Holy Communion.**



The graph on the left outlines the data gathered from these two variables. Approximately equal numbers of respondents agree to both statements – 49.7 and 49.8%. There are slightly higher numbers of people strongly agreeing to their sufficient involvement in preparation and this may be due to a social desirability bias – they would like to be regarded as being sufficiently involved. There is a wish to see more parental involvement in preparation for First Holy Communion but amongst these parents there is also agreement that they themselves are sufficiently involved. In the abstract, parents would like more involvement in preparation but in the particular, they themselves are sufficiently involved. People in general need to be more involved in preparation for First Holy Communion.

Just fewer than 10% of the respondents for both variables disagree. Higher numbers of respondents do not know if parents should play a greater role when compared to their own involvement – 14.2% and 9.1% respectively.

When compared in cross-tabulation, 81% of the respondents in these two variables lie within the agree and strongly agree positions in the independent variable (“I am sufficiently involved in my child’s preparation for First Holy Communion”). Examining these two categories in more detail, it can be hypothesised that there is no relationship between respondent’s belief that they are sufficiently involved in their child’s preparation for First holy Communion and that parents should play a greater role in that preparation. Those who agree that they themselves are sufficiently involved in their child’s preparation are more likely to agree that parents should play a greater role more generally than those who hold that opinion more strongly (61% and 36.2%). It would appear from the data presented below that strongly agreeing to both statements is more prevalent than agreeing to personal involvement and strongly agreeing to general parental involvement. If you agree that you are sufficiently involved, you are more likely to agree that parents should play a greater role more generally.

**Table 20: I am sufficiently involved in my child's preparation for First Holy Communion BY Parents should play a greater role in the preparation of their child for First Holy Communion**

		Parents should play a greater role in the preparation of their child for First Holy Communion				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
I am sufficiently involved in my child's preparation for First Holy Communion	Agree	0.0	13.3	11.6	61.0	14.1
	Strongly agree	2.6	7.9	7.9	36.2	45.4

$$\chi^2 = 0.00$$

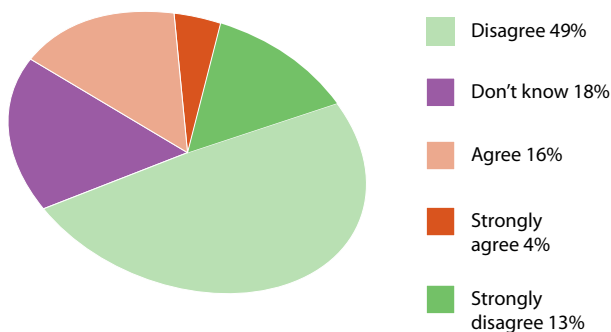
Data for this section can be summarised as follows:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
In Ireland today parents are sufficiently involved in the primary schooling of their children	7.0	22.0	11.4	44.7	15.0
The sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation are best prepared for outside of the school setting	26.7	41.3	16.8	9.8	5.4
When parents want their child to have a secular education, withdrawing them from religious education lessons is the best way to ensure this	9.0	37.9	31.6	17.4	4.1
I am sufficiently involved in my child's preparation for First Holy Communion	2.1	7.6	9.1	49.7	31.5
Parents should play a greater role in the preparation of their child for First Holy Communion	1.4	10.1	14.2	49.8	24.5

## Diversity

Finally, respondents were presented with a series of statements on the subject of the changing composition of primary schools in Ireland given large increases in numbers of children from ethnic minority backgrounds. At this stage, it is reasonable to suggest that a substantial portion of the ethnic minority children in Irish primary schools is Irish born. (In this sample, 86.3% of respondents are Irish nationals whereas 86.3% of the respondents' children are.) It is also reasonable to suggest that the numbers of ethnic minority children in schools in Ireland will increase in the coming years. Given these two suggestions, and in the absence of data from the educational authorities, a discussion of the effects on educational outcomes because of increasing diversity of cultural backgrounds is very limited.

**Chart 22: agreement / disagreement on the cultural diversity in today's school makes my child's spiritual development more difficult.**

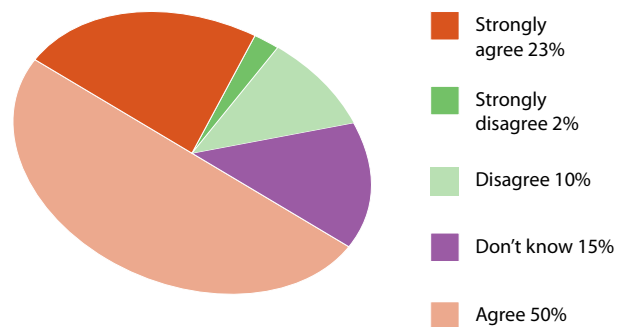


Previously homogeneously Irish and Catholic schools are facing new logistical challenges to the preparation of children for First Holy Communion. Anecdotal evidence suggests that teachers are locally managing these challenges very well.

Respondents were presented with the statement "the cultural diversity in today's school makes my child's spiritual development more difficult". Agreement with this statement suggests that there are perceptions of some degree of difficulty with the management of the cultural diversity to be found within schools in Ireland. Just under half - 49.5% - of the respondents disagree with this statement. A further 12.7% strongly disagree with this statement. In all, about 1 in 5 of the respondents stated that

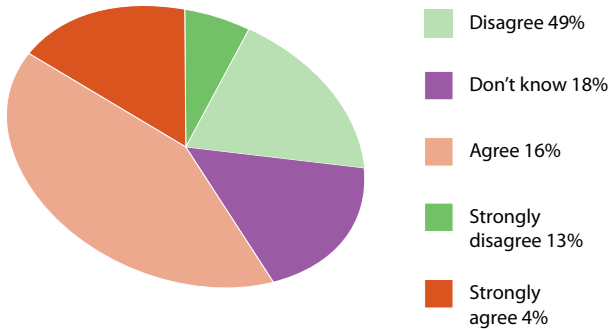
they agree with or strongly agree with the statement. We do not know what aspect of their child's spiritual development is made more difficult as this was not asked. Respondents were then presented with the statement "a classroom with many different cultural and religious backgrounds enhances my child's education". Support for this statement would indicate that parents believe that the diversity that may be found in their child's class is good for their own child's education. The chart below shows the responses received through the survey.

**Chart 23: agreement / disagreement on a classroom with many different cultural and religious backgrounds enhances my child's education.**



50% of the respondents agreed with the statement with another 23% strongly agreeing. This is almost 75% of parents who responded to the question. 12% of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed. These data point to a high degree of acceptance of – a positive disposition toward - diversity within their child's classroom. Most of the parents surveyed disagree that their child's spiritual development is made more difficult by diversity and almost three quarters believe that pupils of different backgrounds actually enhances their child's education. Given these facts, how willing are parents able to integrate these viewpoints into the religious education provided in the school? Respondents were presented with the statement "religious education in the school should present the beliefs and practices of all the world's religions and faiths". Support for this statement would tell us a little of the parent's knowledge of the current RE programme as well as determining if they are open to diversity being a practical as well as an aspirational goal for their child's education.

**Chart 24: agreement / disagreement on religious education in the school should present the beliefs and practices of all the world's religions and faiths.**



41% agree that RE should present the beliefs and practices of all the world's religions and faiths with a further 17% strongly agreeing. 18% do not know, which is the same proportion as those who disagree. 6% strongly disagree. To compare these two sets of data ('present all the faiths' and 'diversity enhances education'), a cross tabulation

of the data was run. The results of this comparison are presented in the summary table below. Diversity enhancing education is presented here as the independent variable. 72% of the sub-sample is amongst those respondents that agreed or strongly agreed with the 'diversity enhances education' statement. While the relationship between the two variables is a statistically significant one, the numbers choosing the other options for this variable are small. Of those who agree that diversity enhances their child's education, 17.5% disagree that RE should present beliefs and practices of the world's faiths while 49.2% agree that it should. Small percentages of those who strongly agree with the diversity statement disagree or strongly disagree with the world's faiths statement, as might be expected. There is a difference in those that agree that the diversity of the classroom enhances their child's education and those that feel strongly about the RE programme presenting all of the world's faiths. This is indicated by the 37.7% and 40.4% in the bottom right of the table as presented.

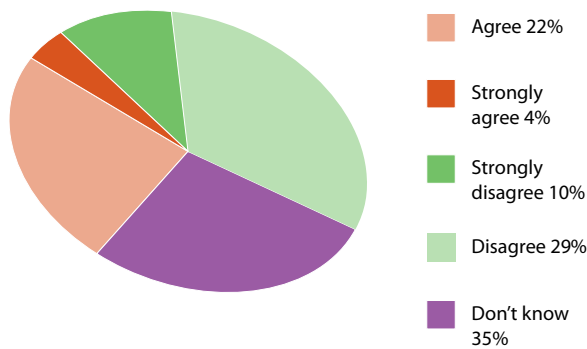
**Table 21: A classroom with many different cultural and religious backgrounds enhances my child's education BY Religious education in the school should present the beliefs and practices of all the world's religions and faiths**

		Religious education in the school should present the beliefs and practices of all the world's religions and faiths				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
A classroom with many different cultural and religious backgrounds enhances my child's education	Strongly disagree	30.0	10.0	0.0	30.0	30.0
	Disagree	9.8	45.1	11.8	23.5	9.8
	Don't know	5.4	23.0	32.4	33.8	5.4
	Agree	4.5	17.5	17.9	49.2	11.0
	Strongly agree	6.1	3.5	12.3	37.7	40.4

$\chi^2 = 0.00$

Finally, respondents were presented with the statement “my child’s preparation for sacraments is enhanced by the presence of children from different cultural and religious backgrounds who are not being prepared”.

**Chart 25: agreement / disagreement on my child’s preparation for sacraments is enhanced by the presence of children from different cultural and religious backgrounds who are not being prepared.**



Again, agreement with this would indicate support for the enhancement of the child’s moral and spiritual education occurring

through the diversity present in the classroom. A high proportion of respondents do not know if they agree or disagree with this statement. This is partially due to their child not yet being prepared for the sacraments as they might be between 2nd class and 6th class. As can be seen, 22% agree and 4% strongly agree with 29% disagreeing with the statement and 10% strongly disagreeing. There is no firm consensus on the position presented in this statement with roughly equal percentages of respondents agreeing and disagreeing, if expressing a view. Overall, 39% disagree or strongly disagree compared with 26% agreeing or strongly agreeing indicating that most parents believe that their child’s preparation for the sacraments is not enhanced by the presence of children from other backgrounds who are not being prepared.

It would seem to be the case, that parents of primary school children have little problem with the faith of other cultures presented in religious education and that cultural diversity is an enhancement to their child’s education but, that when there are children who are not making preparation the sacraments in the classroom, their own child’s preparation is not enhanced.

Data for this section can be summarised as follows:

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree
My child's preparation for sacraments is enhanced by the presence of children from different cultural and religious backgrounds who are not being prepared	10.1	29.0	35.0	21.6	4.3
Religious education in the school should present the beliefs and practices of all the world's religions and faiths	6.0	17.7	17.7	41.2	17.3
A classroom with many different cultural and religious backgrounds enhances my child's education	2.0	10.4	14.9	49.8	22.9
My child's preparation for sacraments is enhanced by the presence of children from different cultural and religious backgrounds who are not being prepared	10.1	29.0	35.0	21.6	4.3

At this stage, we can review the five most important and unimportant factors in choosing their child's school as well as those statements that are most important and unimportant in deciding what kind of school parents choose. This is achieved by aggregating the very important and important scores to create a score for Total Importance. Likewise, an aggregation of the very unimportant and unimportant scores can yield a Total Unimportance score. For the thirteen factors presented to respondents in the questionnaire, four factors in particular are of high importance. The table below shows the factors ranked in descending order by Total Importance.

Rank	Factor	Total importance score	Total unimportance score	Neither
1	The provision of an education that reflects your child's needs and abilities	96.2	0.4	3.4
2	The quality of the education it provides as a basis for secondary school	95.0	0.4	4.6
3	The ability of the school to give your child an education which encourages their imagination	93.8	0.8	5.4
4	The school's approach to discipline	88.2	1.2	10.6
5	The religious education provided by this particular school	70.3	9.4	20.2
6	The worship provided at the school, e.g. daily prayer, celebration of religious festivals and events	70.1	9.6	20.2
7	The distance from the child's home to the school	59.1	13.8	27.1
8	The fact that it is a school under the management of the Catholic parish - some excludes	57.8	14.5	27.7
9	The fact that friends of your child would also be attending this school	46.5	22.0	31.5
10	The fact that you or other members of your family have attended this school	35.6	39.1	25.3
11	The fact that other parents with similar religion to yours send their children to the school	34.7	28.9	36.5
12	The fact that other parents with a similar standard of living to yours send their children to the school	24.5	36.3	39.2
13	The fact that it is a single sex school - some excludes	19.3	43.1	37.6
Standard Deviation		27.4	15.5	12.8

It is also worth noting that for only two of the thirteen factors, the Total Unimportance score is greater than the Neither score. This would imply a high level of ambivalence towards factors like friends attending the same school and parents with a similar standard of living sending their child to the school. Parents are most concerned about education (with emphasis on the child's needs and progression) and discipline. The three factors with the highest Total Importance scores all had Very Important proportions above 70%. Parents ascribe least importance to religious and standard of living homogeneities and coeducational attendance.

In a similar fashion, aggregating the scores across the Likert scale for each of the fifteen statements presented, scores for Total Agreement and Total Disagreement can be constructed. Those statements that respondents agreed with most strongly in greater numbers appear at the top of the list, i.e. the highest Total Agreement scores.

Table 23: Total Agreement and total Disagreement of all statements presented to respondents.				
Rank	Statement	Total agreement score	Total disagreement score	Remainder
1	I am sufficiently involved in my child's preparation for First Holy Communion	81.2	9.7	9.1
2	Parents should play a greater role in the preparation of their child for First Holy Communion	74.3	11.5	14.2
3	A classroom with many different cultural and religious backgrounds enhances my child's education	72.7	12.4	14.9
4	The Churches should continue to have a prominent role in the provision of primary schooling	63.1	24.2	12.6
5	The school's teachers should promote the religious life of the school	60.3	22.6	17.0
6	In Ireland today parents are sufficiently involved in the primary schooling of their children	59.7	28.9	11.4
7	Religious education in the school should present the beliefs and practices of all the world's religions and faiths	58.6	23.7	17.7
8	The school that my child attends should seek to strengthen the religious faith of my child	57.1	30.3	12.6
9	The State's main role is not to provide education itself, but to assist others who provide education	51.5	36.5	12.0
10	When approaching moral and social topics the teacher should favour the position of the Catholic Church	41.0	41.0	18.0
11	The religious, moral and spiritual education provided for my child is the most important aspect of primary schooling	32.4	53.6	14.0
12	My child's preparation for sacraments is enhanced by the presence of children from different cultural and religious backgrounds who are not being prepared	25.9	39.1	35.0
13	When parents want their child to have a secular education, withdrawing them from religious education lessons is the best way to ensure this	21.5	46.9	31.6
14	The cultural diversity in today's schools makes my child's spiritual development more difficult	19.7	62.2	18.1
15	The sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation are best prepared for outside of the school setting	15.2	67.9	16.8
16	My trust in the primary school to provide a safe environment for my child is lessened because it is under the management of the Catholic parish	5.8	83.3	10.9
Standard Deviation		23.4	21.3	7.1



As can be seen from the summary table, respondents agreed in greater numbers to statements about involvement in preparation for their child's First Holy Communion, parental involvement in this preparation more generally and believing that ethnically diverse classrooms enhance their child's education. It would appear that respondents rank the Churches' role in primary education above withdrawing their child from RE to ensure a secular education. The respondents' Total Disagreement scores are highest for those statements that relate to cultural diversity making their child's spiritual development more difficult, sacramental preparation is best prepared for outside of school and the trust in the school being lessened because it is under Catholic management.

It might also be noted that there is some difference in the proportions in the remainder categories for both statements and factors. There is also a greater variation in the scores for the factors than for the statements. The statements presented seemed to have polarised the respondents more than the factors.

## Section 3: Analysis of the Results

Thus far, we have seen a small number of factors emerging as the most important in school choice:

- The provision of an education that reflects your child's needs and abilities – total importance of 96.2% of all respondents.
- The quality of the education it provides as a basis for secondary school – total importance of 95% of all respondents.
- The ability of the school to give your child an education which encourages their imagination – total importance of 93.8% of all respondents.
- The school's approach to discipline – total importance of 88.2% of all respondents.

We have also noted a small number of statements which best sum up parents' position on Catholic primary education:

- I am sufficiently involved in my child's preparation for First Holy Communion.
- Parents should play a greater role in the preparation of their child for First Holy Communion.
- A classroom with many different cultural and religious backgrounds enhances my child's education.

These are the most important factors and the statements with most agreement amongst the respondents. This was not a survey of all primary schools in Ireland; nor were respondents drawn from a sample of all parents of primary school children in Ireland. 92% of all the Republic's primary schools are under Catholic Diocesan management and 46% of those in Northern Ireland. As an exploration of the views of those parents who send their children to these schools, the project has tabulated the preferences and factors that go into making their decision. To what extent is this decision based on religious preference? How strongly felt are the religious convictions of the parents when choosing a school for their child(ren)? Are there other factors in play when parents make decisions about school choice?

The age profile of the children in the survey points to a school population heavily concentrated in the later stages of the primary school system. 15% of the children of the survey's respondents are aged 6 years or younger and with 11.8% of the survey having started school this year, it is evident that a small percentage of new entrants were educated abroad or enrolled shortly before the school year. Further analysis of the demographics of the children and their previous two years education we can note the following:

- 43.9% of the children educated outside of Ireland in the previous two years are aged between 7 and 9.
- 42.9% of those who had attended an interdenominational school in the previous two years are nationals of other EU member states.
- 66.7% of those who had attended an Educate Together school in the previous two years are nationals of other EU member states.
- 30.2% of five year olds attended a denominational school in the previous two years but 76.3% of 6 year olds had.
- 98.3% of all respondents knew that it was a Catholic school at the time of enrolment and this is consistently high for all measured nationalities.

There is some evidence to suggest that there are reasonable numbers of transfers out of primary schools with other management models by the age of 6. If a child attended a form of primary school other than a denominational school in the previous two year period, there is a reasonable likelihood that she will be in a denominational school within a period. Almost all of the respondents knew that the school they were enrolling their children in was a Catholic Diocesan school. Amongst the respondents with nationalities other than Irish, there is a high degree of awareness amongst parents of it being a Catholic school. We have already noted that distance to the school is a positive contributory factor in school choice, albeit with a high degree of ambivalence. Parents of all nationalities wish to be close to the school and are aware that

this school is one under the management of a Catholic structure. Parents are unwilling to travel long distances for their child(ren) to receive a primary education and this is known amongst those parents recently arrived in Ireland as well. There are more important factors than distance from school and whether or not it matters if it is a school under Diocesan management. What are these?

As shown above, two thirds of the parents had sent this child plus one other child to this particular school. Choosing a school for the current child would be influenced in some way by the experiences of an older child. Of those who have sent two children to this school, 65.9% of them had made the decision many years ago. For those with three or more children in this school, proportions as high as 81% had made the decision many years ago when compared with those who had made it only the previous year. Parents choose a school well in advance and also invariably get the school they wanted as their

first choice. There is a high degree of loyalty to the school that parents deem to be the local school; they send their children to this school and choose the school well in advance of the child enrolling. Parents appear to be exhibiting high levels of awareness of the benefits of the local school but, as we shall see, not necessarily because of other family members attending. What are these benefits for the child and the parents when distance does not appear to be a determining factor?

Of major concern to parents is the basis that the school provides for secondary school. For 77.6% of the respondents this is very important and important to a further 17.4%. This particular factor correlates strongly with only one other factor: the provision of an education that reflects your child’s needs and abilities (0.51). This is seen also when the two variables are compared using a cross-tabulation table, with a high proportion of the scores clustering the top left corner of the table.

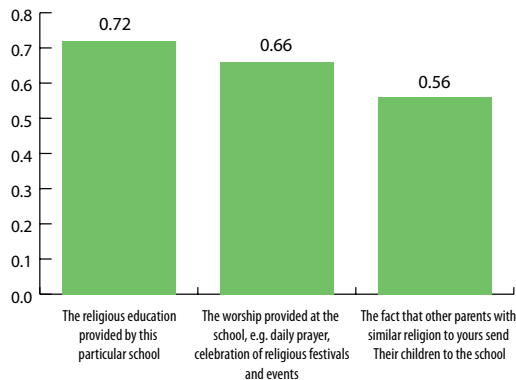
**Table 24: The quality of the education it provides as a basis for secondary school BY The provision of an education that reflects your child’s needs and abilities.**

		The provision of an education that reflects your child’s needs and abilities				
		Very important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant	Very unimportant
The quality of the education it provides as a basis for secondary school	Very important	87.0	12.5	0.5	0.0	0.0
	Important	41.4	51.7	5.7	0.0	1.1
	Neither important nor unimportant	34.8	21.7	39.1	4.3	0.0
	Unimportant	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

$X^2 = 0.00$

For parents in this survey, there is a defined difference amongst those that think the quality of the education as a basis is very important when compared to those who think it is important – 87.0% and 41.4%. The quality of the education it provides along with the reflection of their child’s needs and abilities are very important for parents. Respondents were asked about the religious education provided by this particular school and from the above data we note that 46.1% felt it was an important factor with a further 24.2% deeming it to be very important.

**Chart 26: correlation of 'Religious Education Provided by this School' and selected related variables.**



This is the highest ranked 'religious' factor amongst the factors presented. This factor correlates strongly (Pearson  $\Rightarrow$  0.50) with a small number of other factors. The higher the correlation figure, the stronger the relationship between the variables. These other factors are presented in the graph below. The fact that these other factors are also 'religious' factors tells us something about the importance of these factors for the respondents. It has a low correlation with other factors like distance from school and the fact that friends of the child would also be attending. All of these correlations are significant to the 0.01 level.

While these religious factors in and of themselves are not ranked highly on the total importance table above, their relationship between each other is a strong one. There is evidence here that parents believe the religious education provided at the school to be important to their child's development. This is the most strongly correlated variable with the school being under the management of the Catholic parish. The two other variables on the graph above are less strongly correlated but are important for parents as factors in choosing this school. These other factors are also strongly correlated to each other indicating that there is reasonable importance given to these 'religious' factors.

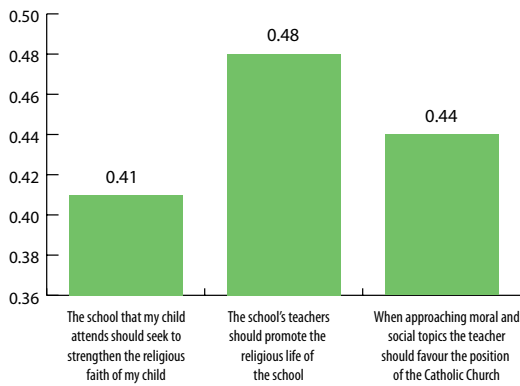
Although strong relationships between variables are an indicator of a clustering of opinions around a theme, weaker correlation data also tells us something about the parents' choices. When the fact that the school chosen is under Catholic parish management is looked at again, it is weakly correlated with the school's approach to discipline, the fact that you or other members

of the family have attended this school and the fact that other parents with a similar standard of living to yours send their children to the school. It is evident then the parents' choice of a school managed by the Catholic parish is important because of the Religious Education and worship provided as well as its approach to discipline. Factors like personal or family loyalty to that school and similarity of standard of living are not so important for parents. These weakly correlated data are also significant at the 0.01 level.

Turning finally to the statements presented to the respondents as parents. We have seen above that almost two thirds of parents agree that the Churches should continue to have a prominent role in the provision of primary schooling but we ought not to downplay the not inconsiderable numbers of parents who do not agree with this position – perhaps as high one quarter of all parents. Those parents who disagree with the continuation of the prominent role of the Churches in primary school provision are a minority of the respondents. However, and as has been noted above, these respondents are also more likely to disagree with the current model of State provision and Church patronage. This is a relatively strongly held conviction amongst these parents with 26.2% of those labelled above as 'model changers' disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the continuing prominent role. This compares with 22.7% who agree with the current model and yet who also disagree or strongly disagree with the continuing role.

How does this agreement with the continuing role correlate with factors noted directly above and the other statements that parents agree with in higher proportions? The only factor that correlates with prominence in role for the Churches in any meaningful way is agreement with the statement 'I am sufficiently involved in my child's preparation for First Holy Communion'. With the other statements presented to parents, the data can be summarised as follows.

**Chart 27: correlation of ‘The Churches Should Continue to Have a Prominent Role in the Provision of Primary Schooling’ by selected related variables.**



This variable correlates most strongly with the statement that the school’s teachers should promote the religious life of the school. To a lesser extent there is a relationship between this variable and the other two represented in the graph on the left. More interestingly perhaps are those that are less strongly correlated. Among

this subset, parents are less likely, although there is some relationship, to ‘The cultural diversity in today’s schools makes my child’s spiritual development more difficult’, ‘The religious, moral and spiritual education provided for my child is the most important aspect of primary schooling’ and ‘I am sufficiently involved in my child’s preparation for First Holy Communion’. There is evidence here that parents once again believe the religious aspects of their child’s primary schooling as important in choosing a school but that other statements represent their views more precisely.

We have seen already from the above that parents believe strongly that they are sufficiently involved in their child’s sacramental preparation but that parents should play a greater role in this preparation more generally. They also wish to see that preparation taking place within the school setting. Those statements that correlate most strongly seem to confirm this orientation. In the table below we can see Pearson correlation scores for a select number of highly related statements. Again, the higher the Pearson score, the stronger the relationship in the responses.

**Table 25: Correlation of selected variables relating to religious factors influencing school choice.**

	The Churches should continue to have a prominent role in the provision of primary schooling	The cultural diversity in today’s schools makes my child’s spiritual development more difficult	The school that my child attends should seek to strengthen the religious faith of my child	The religious, moral and spiritual education provided for my child is the most important aspect of primary schooling	When approaching moral and social topics the teacher should favour the position of the Catholic Church
The school that my child attends should seek to strengthen the religious faith of my child	0.41	0.19	--	0.29	0.48
The school’s teachers should promote the religious life of the school	0.48	0.20	0.55	0.43	0.54

As can be seen, the orientation toward religious primary schooling is relatively strong amongst these parents with a reasonably strong relationship between believing that the school should seek to strengthen the religious faith of the child and the continuing role for the Churches. There appears to be no negative impact brought about by increasing classroom diversity amongst these respondents. The relatively strong relationship between teachers promoting the religious life of the school and favouring the position of the Catholic Church is also of note. In short, parents know that these are Catholic schools and make the choice for a Catholic managed school and so expect that to be borne out in the curriculum and the role of the teacher. It might be remembered at this stage though that the Total Disagreement score for ‘the school that my child attends should seek to strengthen the religious faith of my child’ is 30.3% of the respondents.

Parents know that they are choosing a Catholic school for their child(ren). They believe that distance from the school is not that important and yet a very high percentage of their children live within 2 miles of the school. Religious, ethnic and standard of living homogeneities are not centrally important for the parents at this stage. They see the school as the best site for sacramental preparation and that the school should meet the needs and abilities of their children as well as provide a strong basis for progression to second level. There is some small difference to be seen in the responses for generalised satisfaction and other variables amongst the different nationalities in these data. Although most respondents do not see any adverse effect from more culturally diverse classrooms, it is in the expectations of respondents of nationalities other than Irish that we see the most divergence. There may well be some divergent views on what the primary school system ought to be when we compare those with Irish nationality and those with nationalities other than Irish.

## Section 4: Conclusions

1. Parents are able to get their first choice of school but plan well in advance of enrolment, which high proportions find easy to complete.
2. High percentages of parents wish to see a continuing role for the Churches in the provision of primary schooling and for most parents, faith in education retains its importance.
3. Teachers have a role to play in the strengthening of the faith of their child and that the school, even with increasing classroom religious and ethnic diversity, is still the best place for sacramental preparation.
4. Parents are sufficiently involved in the preparation for First Holy Communion of their own child but would like to see more involvement from parents generally.
5. There is a sophisticated understanding amongst parents of the variety of the roles for both the Church and the State as they now exist and this model is endorsed by a majority of parents.
6. There is a correlation of reasonable strength between the 'religious' factors in the survey, i.e. respondents who believe that the school and teachers have a role to play in faith formation are likely to choose schools because of the worship provided and the religious education provided in this particular school.
7. Most parents believe that a plurality of faiths and practices in the classroom enhances their own child's education and that classroom diversity does not affect their spiritual development.
8. Parents choose a school because of the chances it gives to allow their child to progress through the education system and prioritise the school's ability to meet their child's needs and abilities.
9. Religious factors are important for parents in choosing a school for their child but not as important as more formal pedagogical factors.
10. Approaches to discipline within the school and the school's ability to encourage imagination are important factors.

# Appendix A: Questionnaire as Administered

## Council for Research & Development Irish Bishops' Conference School Choice Survey

Thank you for taking some time to complete this questionnaire. As the parent of a child enrolled in primary education, you have an important part to play in the changing nature of education in Ireland. This research is being coordinated by the Council for Research & Development which is an agency of the Irish Bishops' Conference. The results of this questionnaire will be analysed with one thousand others to give a picture of education at primary level. Your cooperation in this research is of course, voluntary and the survey complies with the ethical standards used currently by researchers. Your responses are anonymous and confidential to this project. The primary school does not view your responses.

The questionnaire has five parts, sections A to E. It should take no more than 20 minutes of your time. When completing the questionnaire please note the following:

1. Answer all questions honestly.
2. Complete the survey using a pen not a pencil.
3. Select a response by carefully placing a tick (✓) next to the relevant item response box.
4. If you wish to change a response then you should change the tick for the incorrect response to an (X) and then tick the alternative response that you wish to select.

### Section A: you

#### 1. Are you female or male?

- Female     Male

#### 2. What is your nationality?

- Irish  
 National of another EU member or applicant state  
 National of a non-EU member state  
 Other

#### 3. What is your relationship to the child?

- Mother  
 Father  
 Legal female guardian  
 Legal male guardian  
 Another relative, male or female

#### 4. What is your religion?

- Roman Catholic  
 Church of Ireland  
 Methodist  
 Presbyterian  
 Other Christian church  
 Muslim  
 Jewish  
 Jehovah Witness  
 Hindu  
 no religion  
 other religion

#### 5. In which age group are you?

- 19 years or under  
 20-24 years  
 25-29 years  
 30-34 years  
 35-39 years  
 40-44 years  
 45-49 years  
 50-54 years  
 55-59 years  
 60-64 years  
 65-69 years  
 70 years or above



## Section B: Your Child and the School

6. What is the current age of your child? Please specify in years and months

Years \_\_\_\_\_ Months \_\_\_\_\_

7. Is your child female or male?

Female  Male

8. What is the nationality of your child?

- Irish  
 National of another EU member or applicant state  
 National of a non-EU member state  
 Same as your own nationality  
 Other

9. What is the religion of your child?

- Roman Catholic  
 Church of Ireland  
 Methodist  
 Presbyterian  
 Other Christian church  
 Muslim  
 Jewish  
 Jehovah Witness  
 Hindu  
 no religion  
 other religion

10. What type of primary school did your child attend in the two years previous to this school year? (Please tick all that apply)

- Attended a denominational (e.g. Catholic, Church of Ireland, Islamic) school  
 Attended a Gaelscoil  
 attended an interdenominational school  
 attended an Educate Together school  
 attended a private school  
 was educated outside of Ireland  
 was educated at home  
 has started school this year

If you ticked the first choice above, proceed now to question 11; otherwise proceed to question 12.

11. When you applied to enrol your child in the school were you aware that it was a Catholic school?

Yes  No

12. How many of your children (including this child) are attending or have attended this school?

\_\_\_\_\_

13. When did you make the decision to apply to send your child to this school?

- Shortly before the school year opened  
 During the previous year  
 We made this decision many years ago.

14. Which statement best describes your position when you chose this school?

- This school was our first choice  
 Other schools with places were available  
 This school was the only one with a place available

15. How easy or difficult was it to have your child enrolled in the school?

- It was very easy  
 It was easy  
 Neither easy nor difficult  
 It was difficult  
 It was very difficult

16. How far is the school from the child's house?

Miles \_\_\_\_\_ or Km \_\_\_\_\_

17. Would you consider this school to be your local primary school?

Yes  No

18. Is this the only school available to your child within a reasonable distance?

Yes  No

**19. Article 42.1 of the Constitution of Ireland says “the State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children.” Which of the following three statements best describes your view on this statement? (please tick only one)**

- Education is the sole responsibility of the school
- Education is the sole responsibility of the parents
- Education is a shared responsibility between parents and the school

**20. If all types of school were available to you as a parent, what type of school would you choose for your child? (please tick only one)**

- A school under management of a religious denomination
- A school under management which provides a common religious framework
- A school not under management of a religious denomination
- Another type of school

### Section C: School Choice

In the following set of questions you are asked how important various factors were in choosing your child’s school. Please tick only one answer that represents your view for each statement:

**21. The distance from the child’s home to the school**

- Very Important
- Important
- Neither Important nor unimportant
- Unimportant
- Very Unimportant

**22. The fact that friends of your child would also be attending this school**

- Very Important
- Important
- Neither Important nor unimportant
- Unimportant
- Very Unimportant

**23. The school’s approach to discipline**

- Very Important
- Important
- Neither Important nor unimportant
- Unimportant
- Very Unimportant

**24. The fact that it is a school under the management of the Catholic parish (if not, please leave blank and continue)**

- Very Important
- Important
- Neither Important nor unimportant
- Unimportant
- Very Unimportant

**25. The religious education provided by this particular school**

- Very Important
- Important
- Neither Important nor unimportant
- Unimportant
- Very Unimportant

**26. The ability of the school to give your child an education which encourages their imagination**

- Very Important
- Important
- Neither Important nor unimportant
- Unimportant
- Very Unimportant

**27. The worship provided at the school, e.g. daily prayer, celebration of religious festivals and events**

- Very Important
- Important
- Neither Important nor unimportant
- Unimportant
- Very Unimportant

**28. The fact that you or other members of your family have attended this school**

- Very Important
- Important
- Neither Important nor unimportant
- Unimportant
- Very Unimportant

**29. The quality of the education it provides as a basis for secondary school**

- Very Important
- Important
- Neither Important nor unimportant
- Unimportant
- Very Unimportant

**30. The fact that it is a single sex school (if not a single sex school, please leave blank and continue)**

- Very Important
- Important
- Neither Important nor unimportant
- Unimportant
- Very Unimportant

**31. The fact that other parents with a similar standard of living to yours send their children to the school**

- Very Important
- Important
- Neither Important nor unimportant
- Unimportant
- Very Unimportant

**32. The fact that other parents with a similar religion to yours send their children to the school**

- Very Important
- Important
- Neither Important nor unimportant
- Unimportant
- Very Unimportant

**33. The provision of an education that reflects your child's needs and abilities**

- Very Important
- Important
- Neither Important nor unimportant
- Unimportant
- Very Unimportant

**Section D: Your Opinions**

For the following set of questions you are asked if you agree or disagree with a series of statements. Please tick only one answer for each statement that represents your view:

**34. "The State's main role is not to provide education itself but to assist others who provide education."**

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

**35. "My child's preparation for sacraments is enhanced by the presence of children from different cultural and religious backgrounds who are not being prepared."**

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

**36. "When parents want their child to have a secular education, withdrawing them from religious education lessons is the best way to ensure this."**

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

37. "The Churches should continue to have a prominent role in the provision of primary schooling."

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

38. "In Ireland today parents are sufficiently involved in the primary schooling of their children."

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

39. "The cultural diversity in today's schools makes my child's spiritual development more difficult."

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

40. "My trust in the primary school to provide a safe environment for my child is lessened because it is under the management of the Catholic parish."

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

41. "The school that my child attends should seek to strengthen the religious faith of my child."

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

42. "A classroom with many different cultural and religious backgrounds enhances my child's education."

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

43. "The religious, moral and spiritual education provided for my child is the most important aspect of primary schooling."

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

44. "The school's teachers should promote the religious life of the school."

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

45. "The sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation are best prepared for outside of the school setting."

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

46. "I am sufficiently involved in my child's preparation for First Holy Communion."

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

47. "Religious education in the school should present the beliefs and practices of all the world's religions and faiths."

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

48. "When approaching moral and social topics the teacher should favour the position of the Catholic Church."

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

49. "Parents should play a greater role in the preparation of their child for First Holy Communion."

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

50. Have you withdrawn your child from the religious education provided by the school?

- Yes       No

51. If yes, please tick one of the following reasons:

- I did not wish my child to study the Catholic religion
- I did not wish my child to study ANY religion
- I disagree with the way the Catholic religion is taught in this particular school

Another reason.

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52. Overall, how satisfied are you with your decision to send your child to this school?

- Very Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Indifferent
- Dissatisfied
- Very Dissatisfied

### Section E:

Trócaire, the overseas development agency of the Irish Catholic Bishops, wishes to collect some additional information on its annual Lenten Campaign. Please take some time to answer the following questions.

53. In any of the last three years, has your household received a Trócaire Box at Lent?

- Yes       No

If no, please proceed to number 57.

54. Who in your household brings the Box home?

- Son or daughter
- Partner / spouse
- I do

55. From where does that person get the Box?

- School
- parish Church
- through the door at home
- another location

56. At the end of Lent, where is the money returned to?

- School
- parish Church
- directly to Trócaire
- another location

**57. “It is important to my household that we receive a Trócaire Box at Lent.” Do you**

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

**58. What is the easiest way for you to receive a Trócaire box? (Tick all that apply)**

- Parish Church
- Local school
- through the door at home
- local supermarket
- direct mail marketing
- as a newspaper insert

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please place it in the paid envelope provided, seal the envelope and post it as soon as possible. Remember that your responses will be treated with absolute confidentiality at all stages of the research. Your location or child will not be mentioned individually in any public material arising from the research. Should you have questions about this research please contact the Council for Research & Development at the address on the envelope.

## Appendix B: Drawn Sample by Diocese / Patron Body

Diocese / patron body of the school	Frequency (weighted by enrolment)	Percentage of weighted total	Number of respondents based on 95% confidence level, 3% confidence interval and a population of 506,902 enrolled children
Achonry	4,140	0.8	9
An Foras Patrúnachta	5,111	1.0	11
Ardagh & Clonmacnoise	8,632	1.7	18
Armagh	25,085	4.9	53
Cashel & Emlý	10,617	2.1	22
Clogher	10,609	2.1	22
Clonfert	4,241	0.8	9
Cloyne	16,142	3.2	34
Cork & Ross	31,650	6.2	66
Derry	21,986	4.3	46
Down & Connor	29,016	5.7	61
Dromore	8,173	1.6	17
Dublin	119,942	23.7	252
Elphin	9,864	1.9	21
Ferns	15,014	3.0	32
Galway	12,375	2.4	26
Kerry	16,167	3.2	34
Kildare & Leighlin	29,313	5.8	62
Killala	4,384	0.9	9
Killaloe	15,914	3.1	33
Kilmore	7,886	1.6	17
Limerick	17,566	3.5	37
Meath	31,027	6.1	65
Ossory	9,213	1.8	19
Raphoe	10,750	2.1	23
Tuam	15,092	3.0	32
Waterford & Lismore	16,993	3.4	36
Total	506,902	100.0	1065

## Appendix C: Variables With Statistically Significant Differences Between The Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

### Crosstab

% within Rol or NI

		What is the current age of your child - years										Total
		4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Rol or NI	Republic of Ireland	4.5%	9.8%	8.3%	12.9%	13.3%	12.1%	16.2%	13.3%	9.0%	.5%	100.0%
	Northern Ireland	12.1%	8.6%	10.3%	10.3%	12.1%	12.1%	29.3%	5.2%			100.0%
Total		5.4%	9.6%	8.6%	12.6%	13.2%	12.1%	17.8%	12.3%	7.9%	.4%	100.0%

### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.168(a)	9	.024
N of Valid Cases	478		

a 5 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .24.

### Crosstab

% within Rol or NI

		When did you make the decision to apply to send your child to this school?			Total
		Shortly before the school year opened	During the previous year	We made this decision many years ago	
Rol or NI	Republic of Ireland	11.6%	28.6%	59.9%	100.0%
	Northern Ireland	3.3%	20.0%	76.7%	100.0%
Total		10.6%	27.5%	61.9%	100.0%

### Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.201(a)	2	.027
N of Valid Cases	501		

a 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 6.35.



**Crosstab**

% within Rol or NI

		If all types of school were available to you as a parent, what type of school would you choose for your child?				Total
		A school under management of a religious denomination	A school under management which provides for a common religious framework	A school not under management of a religious denomination	Another type of school	
Rol or NI	Republic of Ireland	45.2%	38.8%	10.3%	5.7%	100.0%
	Northern Ireland	68.3%	25.0%	5.0%	1.7%	100.0%
Total		48.0%	37.1%	9.7%	5.2%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.791(a)	3	.008
N of Valid Cases	496		

a 1 cells (12.5%) have expected count less than 5.  
The minimum expected count is 3.15.

**Crosstab**

% within Rol or NI

		The fact that it is a school under the management of the Catholic parish - some excludes					Total
		Very important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant	Very unimportant	
Rol or NI	Republic of Ireland	17.3%	38.8%	29.5%	11.2%	3.2%	100.0%
	Northern Ireland	44.1%	25.4%	15.3%	11.9%	3.4%	100.0%
Total		20.7%	37.1%	27.7%	11.3%	3.2%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	24.135(a)	4	.000
N of Valid Cases	469		

a 1 cells (10.0%) have expected count less than 5.  
The minimum expected count is 1.89.

**Crosstab**

% within Rol or NI

		The religious education provided by this particular school					Total
		Very important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant	Very unimportant	
Rol or NI	Republic of Ireland	21.0%	47.4%	21.6%	8.2%	1.8%	100.0%
	Northern Ireland	48.3%	36.7%	10.0%	3.3%	1.7%	100.0%
Total		24.2%	46.1%	20.2%	7.6%	1.8%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.812(a)	4	.000
N of Valid Cases	499		

a 2 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.08.

**Crosstab**

% within Rol or NI

		The worship provided at the school, e.g. daily prayer, celebration of religious festivals and events					Total
		Very important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant	Very unimportant	
Rol or NI	Republic of Ireland	26.0%	42.6%	21.9%	7.5%	2.1%	100.0%
	Northern Ireland	50.0%	31.7%	8.3%	5.0%	5.0%	100.0%
Total		28.9%	41.3%	20.2%	7.2%	2.4%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.242(a)	4	.001
N of Valid Cases	499		

a 2 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.44.

**Crosstab**

% within Rol or NI

		The fact that other parents with similar religion to yours send their children to the school					Total
		Very important	Important	Neither important nor unimportant	Unimportant	Very unimportant	
Rol or NI	Republic of Ireland	7.3%	26.0%	37.8%	20.0%	8.9%	100.0%
	Northern Ireland	25.0%	20.0%	26.7%	21.7%	6.7%	100.0%
Total		9.4%	25.3%	36.5%	20.2%	8.6%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	20.491(a)	4	.000
N of Valid Cases	499		

a 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5.  
The minimum expected count is 5.17.

**Crosstab**

% within Rol or NI

		The Churches should continue to have a prominent role in the provision of primary schooling					Total
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	
Rol or NI	Republic of Ireland	8.2%	18.0%	13.2%	41.4%	19.3%	100.0%
	Northern Ireland	3.4%	6.8%	8.5%	44.1%	37.3%	100.0%
Total		7.6%	16.6%	12.6%	41.7%	21.4%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.313(a)	4	.006
N of Valid Cases	499		

a 1 cells (10.0%) have expected count less than 5.  
The minimum expected count is 4.49..

**Crosstab**

% within Rol or NI

		In Ireland today parents are sufficiently involved in the primary schooling of their children					Total
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	
Rol or NI	Republic of Ireland	7.7%	23.8%	11.8%	42.6%	14.1%	100.0%
	Northern Ireland	1.7%	8.3%	8.3%	60.0%	21.7%	100.0%
Total		7.0%	22.0%	11.4%	44.7%	15.0%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.683(a)	4	.005
N of Valid Cases	501		

a 1 cells (10.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.19.

**Crosstab**

% within Rol or NI

		My trust in the primary school to provide a safe environment for my child is lessened because it is under the management of the Catholic parish					Total
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	
Rol or NI	Republic of Ireland	39.4%	44.0%	11.5%	1.8%	3.2%	100.0%
	Northern Ireland	48.3%	33.3%	6.7%	8.3%	3.3%	100.0%
Total		40.5%	42.7%	10.9%	2.6%	3.2%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.058(a)	4	.017
N of Valid Cases	496		

a 2 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.57.

**Crosstab**

% within Rol or NI

		The school's teachers should promote the religious life of the school					Total
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	
Rol or NI	Republic of Ireland	3.9%	20.9%	17.5%	46.1%	11.6%	100.0%
	Northern Ireland		6.8%	13.6%	52.5%	27.1%	100.0%
Total		3.4%	19.2%	17.0%	46.9%	13.4%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	17.950(a)	4	.001
N of Valid Cases	499		

a 1 cells (10.0%) have expected count less than 5.  
The minimum expected count is 2.01.

**Crosstab**

% within Rol or NI

		The sacraments of First Holy Communion and Confirmation are best prepared for outside of the school setting					Total
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	
Rol or NI	Republic of Ireland	24.8%	41.7%	17.5%	9.8%	6.2%	100.0%
	Northern Ireland	40.0%	38.3%	11.7%	10.0%		100.0%
Total		26.7%	41.3%	16.8%	9.8%	5.4%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	9.476(a)	4	.050
N of Valid Cases	499		

a 1 cells (10.0%) have expected count less than 5.  
The minimum expected count is 3.25.

**Crosstab**

% within Rol or NI

		When approaching moral and social topics the teacher should favour the position of the Catholic Church					Total
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	
Rol or NI	Republic of Ireland	9.4%	32.8%	17.9%	30.7%	9.2%	100.0%
	Northern Ireland	6.8%	25.4%	18.6%	25.4%	23.7%	100.0%
Total		9.1%	31.9%	18.0%	30.1%	10.9%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.873(a)	4	.018
N of Valid Cases	495		

a 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.36.

**Crosstab**

% within Rol or NI

		Parents should play a greater role in the preparation of their child for First Holy Communion					Total
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't know	Agree	Strongly agree	
Rol or NI	Republic of Ireland	1.1%	11.0%	12.9%	49.4%	25.5%	100.0%
	Northern Ireland	3.4%	3.4%	23.7%	52.5%	16.9%	100.0%
Total		1.4%	10.1%	14.2%	49.8%	24.5%	100.0%

**Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.819(a)	4	.029
N of Valid Cases	494		

a 1 cells (10.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .84.





Council for Research & Development  
Irish Bishops' Conference  
Columba Centre  
Maynooth  
Co. Kildare

