

Religion and Schooling in Ireland:

Parents' Perspectives

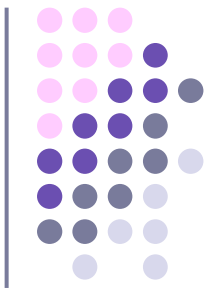


Overview of Parental Characteristics



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| <p>Case Study Schools: 26 Interviews</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gender composition: 4 male and 22 female• Religious composition: 18 Catholic parents; 2 Christian; 1 Church of Ireland; 1 Presbyterian; 4 no religion |
| <p>Non-Case Study Schools: 13 Interviews</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gender composition: 7 male and 6 female• Religious composition: 9 Muslim parents; 1 atheist; 1 agnostic, 1 Catholic; 1 no specific religion• School Type: 6 Catholic schools; 2 Muslim; 2 Gaelscoil; 2 Church of Ireland |

Primary School Choice



❑ Active Choosing

❑ Child's Role

❑ Constraints on School Choice

..the waiting queue [for the Muslim school] is humongous.. (*Parent 27, ET school, Muslim*)

..[ET school was] well booked out...from birth.. (*Parent 6, Catholic school, Catholic*)

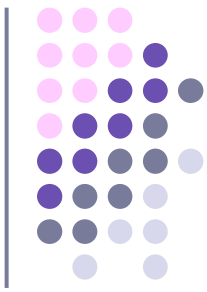
..the secretary rang me back a few weeks later and she was saying 'on the form, you wrote that you were of no religion. And I said 'Yeah, well we are of no religion' and she said 'Look, I have to tell you that you just won't get a place if you write that...If you write *any* religious at all, you'll be further up the pecking order than if you write none'...She really wanted to give us a place...literally, we would have gotten a place if we had lied and said we were [trails off] (*Parent 38, Church of Ireland school, No-religion*)

..the whole thing about a birth cert...if you have a birth cert, it just makes life a little bit easier...that's why we had our kids baptised...not really as a religious belief.." (Parent 13, Church of Ireland school, No-religion)



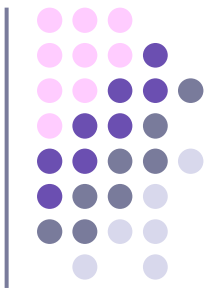
Parents don't have choice. If there was a choice, it would be a different thing...the amount of people who have very little interest in religion but practically everyone will baptise their child because of schools. We didn't do that. There was no way I could possibly [trails off]...I just would not, could not do that. I mean I would be sick. I've been to a baptism 'Do you renounce the devil and all his evil works?' ...There's no way I could do that. It would be just like such a horrendous lie. I couldn't do it. (Parent 38, Church of Ireland school, No-religion)

..even though it's your local school, it's hard sometimes to feel part of it because you feel like that's the Church of Ireland community's school, the one down the road is the Catholic community school and where are we supposed to go? ..To be honest, in the end, having tried so many different schools, you almost feel like you're happy that someone's giving you a place! It's horrendous...(Parent 38, Church of Ireland school, No-religion)



- ❑ Rationale for Choice (where available)
 - ❑ Proximity to home
 - ❑ Pre-existing connection with school
 - ❑ Single-sex/co-educational schooling
 - ❑ Nature/atmosphere of school
 - ❑ Reputation of school

Secondary School Choice



❑ Feeder Schools

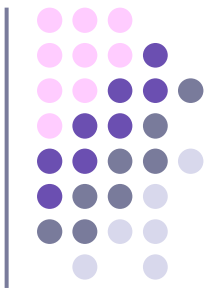
I think it's harder as they get older to keep them interested in religion...I wouldn't have liked her to have gone to a non-Catholic school. *(Parent 8, Catholic school, Catholic)*

❑ Child's Role

I would kind of like her to have input definitely and it just so happens that she really wants to go there and most of her class are going there, so it worked out. *(Parent 14, Church of Ireland school, Catholic)*

❑ Single-sex/co-educational schooling

Parents' Religious Identity



□ Religious practices

□ Majority – religious festivals; minority – more regularly

□ Changing nature of formal religious practice

..it's a lot easier to guild them together and get them going to mass...it's more fractured as they got older. *(Parent 9, Catholic school, Christian/Catholic)*

□ Religious practice within the home

I don't have them kneeling down or anything in the house. *(Parent 19, Catholic school, Catholic)*

..if they don't get used to it, they won't do it when they have to do it...So we have to try and train them from young. *(Parent 28, Catholic school, Muslim)*

□ Non-religiously affiliated



□ Self-labelling of religious beliefs

□ Assertion of a traditional belief system

I believe that we have to follow our religion...In Islam, we have five pillars. We have to do them...We have to follow what our prophet Mohammad do..
(Parent 28, Catholic school, Muslim)

□ Affirmation of childhood religious affiliation

It's just something that you grow up with. It's not anything that I would think too deeply about. I'm Catholic and that's it. *(Parent 8, Catholic school, Catholic)*

In Ireland...everyone's a Catholic...whereas if you go somewhere else...you really are making a commitment to something...It's part of the culture here.. *(Parent 6, Catholic school, Catholic)*

□ Negotiation of relationship with institutional religion

I prefer to think of myself as a good Christian Catholic than a bad Roman Catholic.
(Parent 22, Catholic school, Christian/Catholic)

If you feel you need to go to mass or a church, fine, if you don't, that's fine as well...as long as you know in your heart where you are.. *(Parent 7, Catholic school, Christian)*

..even just going for a walk beside the sea, you can you know maybe have a...conversation with God. *(Parent 15, Church of Ireland school, Church of Ireland)*

I definitely don't go to Church every Sunday, but I try and bring him up in the best way...to know right from wrong. *(Parent 26, Catholic school, Catholic)*



❑ Explicit rejection of childhood religious affiliation

I couldn't see any basis for believing there was any God at all so that's where I've stood ever since. *(Parent 3, ET school, No-religion)*

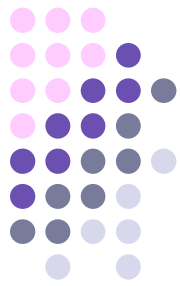
It's a very important part of my identity - that I don't believe, that I'm convinced there is not such thing as God. *(Parent 3, ET school, No-religion)*

If you have a belief in a particular religion...you can tie all that in a nice neat package...it is easier, particularly as a parent...but I just haven't found one that would work for me...If I did, God it would be great! *(Parent 2, ET school, No-religion)*

❑ Impact of having children on own religious beliefs

❑ Perceived importance of sharing beliefs with partner

Parent-child interaction in relation to beliefs and values



- Parents sought to impart a variety of messages, e.g. a familiarity with religious symbols and artefacts

- Prevailing belief among parents - children learn appropriate values through observation rather than express teaching

You teach by your actions...you don't sit down and teach them. You show them by your actions. *(Parent 1, ET school, Catholic)*

- Age impacted on the nature of parent-child interaction, with parent-initiated discussions less likely as children got older.

- Religious-based morality utilised by some parents to handle issues of a behavioural nature with older children

- Religion was not a significant point of discussion for most families.

Children's role in construction of religious identity



- ❑ Desire to provide a religious grounding – children develop own religious outlook

..we brought him up as a Catholic...But I believe after that, he is an individual in his own right and he has his own right to choose. *(Parent 11, Catholic school, Catholic)*

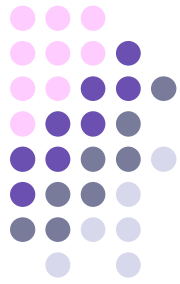
- ❑ Assertions of children's agency in relation to religion – tempered by age concerns

He has a mind of his own and he can make up his own as he grows up. *(Parent 17, Catholic school, Christian)*

- ❑ Children can be perceived as source of expertise about religion

My kids are now a source of information and education for me about religion which I didn't have because I never learned about any of those sorts of things. *(Parent 3, ET school, No-religion)*

Religious/moral education at school



- Lack of familiarity with nature of religious/moral education

I'm not too sure now...God, I don't even know the name of the book!
(Parent 20, Catholic school, Catholic)

The children bring home homework and various work that they do and you can see the essence of language...and reading and numbers and maths and colouring...But there's not mention of religion. So it's not taught in an overt, explicit way. It's inculcated throughout the system.
(Parent 39, Church of Ireland school, No-religion)

- Criticisms:

- 'too woolly' or downgraded to colouring

- Scope of curriculum too limited (denominational schools)

..people should be told there is all religious beliefs out there and that all religious beliefs have a place but...that doesn't happen. *(Parent 16, Church of Ireland school, Catholic)*

Home-school interaction and belief formation



□ Role of school and family

- Some parents characterised school as the “best place” for religious/moral education
- Where there was a mismatch between school’s ethos and home religious affiliation, parents often saw responsibility for faith formation as residing with the family.

□ Potential tensions between home and school

- Majority of parents did not perceive any tensions between (religious/moral/value) messages received at school versus worldview imparted at home

It’s not a Christian school. It’s an Educate Together school [where] all viewpoints are aired. *(Parent 5, ET school, No-religion)*

..the school wouldn’t be telling them anything that they shouldn’t be told so I’m happy enough with what the school tells them. *(Parent 20, Catholic school, Catholic)*

- For some parents, particularly those from minority or non-religious backgrounds, particular issues arose re messages received at school



..we teach him what's in the Bible...they teach like the Hail Mary and stuff like that...I wouldn't pray the Hail Mary...whereas he has been taught it in school. *(Parent 17, Catholic school, Christian)*

..after a few months, when she came home one day with this 'God made the clouds and the rain thing'...I thought that's the end of that now. I've studied a lot of meteorology and God never came into any of my Met. exams. So, we went over and had a chat with the principal...[and] I said I just wanted [child's] teacher to have a chat with her and say to her that there was a difference between the stuff they taught about God and religion - not everybody believed that - and that it wasn't the same kind of thing as the English and the Science and the Maths and all the other things that she does. And that some people believe it and some people don't...I find that very, very offensive - that it's just all treated as the same kind of 'knowledge' let's say, when it's not. *(Parent 38, Church of Ireland school, No-religion)*

- Lack of congruence in messages – not necessarily perceived as problematic

I can teach her and show her that this is the way we believe [and] this is the way they believe - that builds up the knowledge of the child more. *(Parent 27, ET school, Muslim)*



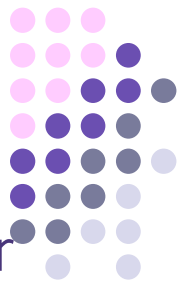
□ Predominantly denominational nature of schooling in Ireland resulted in difficult decisions for some parents (particularly in terms of withdrawing their children from religious/moral education)

I wouldn't push hard against the [Church of Ireland ethos] if it makes the kids stand out...I wouldn't have liked to have them stood out as being different.
(Parent 13, Church of Ireland school, No-religion)

If you're sending your child to the local school and you decide that they're not making their Holy Communion...it's a very unfair thing to do to the child because you're isolating them and they don't get to go through the whole thing..
(Parent 6, Catholic school, Catholic)

I wouldn't be in favour of [withdrawing from religious education class] because you're making the child appear different in front of its peers..
(Parent 39, Church of Ireland school, No-religion)

..you're faced with the choice of either go along with it...or have them feel 'What did I do wrong? I'm being thrown out of the class. I have to go somewhere else. What's wrong with me?' and you're loading that on a 4 or 5 year old child...You're telling them that they're different.
(Parent 38, Church of Ireland school, No-religion)

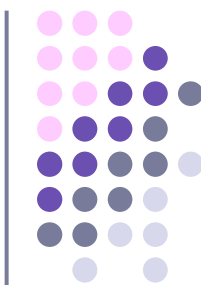


- ❑ Common theme among Christian parents (with different affiliation to the ethos of the school) – felt they had limited say in terms of nature RE as they had chosen schools “outside their faith”

I would accept that we are Catholic in a Church of Ireland school and I would have to respect that...I mean, you bought into it.. *(Parent 16, Church of Ireland school, Catholic)*

- ❑ Concern on the part of a small minority of parents (primarily among those whose religious affiliation matched the ethos of the school) in terms of the impact of accommodating those from minority/non-religious backgrounds on their own child’s education

..if it can be done...without changing anything in our lives, then it is fine...If someone wants to pray five times a day [and a] teacher has to go and supervise it and then leave my children unattended or if they have to stand out in the rain to make a room free, it would probably impact on me.. *(Parent 16, Church of Ireland school, Catholic)*



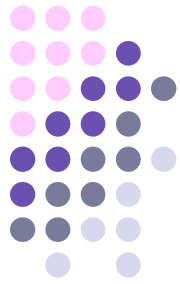
□ Increased diversity of pupil intake viewed both negatively (diminution of school's ethos):

It's a Catholic school and I personally believe if you're sending a child to a Catholic school that's what you're sending them for - Catholic beliefs...I can't understand people to send their children to [Catholic school] who are not Catholics. I don't know why they send them...If they don't want their children taught in a Catholic school, they shouldn't send them to a Catholic school...I am just totally disgusted so I just don't attend [Christmas service]. (Parent 22, Catholic school, Catholic)

and positively:

..it hugely lessens the sense of difference if you're not part of a traditional Irish, religious kind of - you know, typical Irish kind of Catholic family...I think it does make it easier to be different..
(Parent 3, ET school, No-religion)

Emerging Conclusions



- ❑ School choice problematic for some parents
- ❑ Parents perceived their religious identities in complex ways
- ❑ In terms of religious/moral education:
 - ❑ Parents had varied expectations of the role the school would play
 - ❑ In practice though, the majority had limited knowledge of its nature
- ❑ Some evidence of tensions between home and school - conflict over religious issues reported by some parents from minority/non-religious backgrounds.