



## Student Teachers' Opinions, Beliefs and Attitudes Concerning Faith-based Education and Identity



Jim Gleeson and Maureen O'Neill  
**May 2015**

# Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the student teachers who completed the survey and engaged conscientiously and respectfully with the process.

We wish to acknowledge the cooperation of Dr. Irene Cheong and Dr. Ian Ginns, Faculty of Education and Arts, Australian Catholic University, Brisbane, who kindly gave us access to the final thirty minutes of one of her lab sessions for purposes of administering the survey.

---

## Contents

Executive summary	1
Introduction	3
Profile of respondents	3
Main findings	6
Reasons for choice of secondary school	6
Perceived purposes of schooling	10
Achievement of school purposes	14
Characteristics of Catholic schools	16
Ratings of the importance of given characteristics of the identity of a Catholic school	16
Rankings of the importance of given characteristics of the identity of a Catholic school	25
Educational beliefs and values	34
Main issues facing Catholic/faith-based education today	36
General conclusion	37
References	38
Appendices	39

# Executive summary

This report outlines and analyses the opinions, beliefs and attitudes of student teachers with regard to certain aspects of faith-based education and identity. The data were collected using a survey (Appendix 1) of student teachers who entered ACU in 2014. This summary sets out the profile of respondents and the main findings which are presented under the following headings: reasons for choice of secondary school; students' perceptions of their knowledge of Catholic teaching; educational values; perceived purposes of Catholic education; perceptions of the characteristics of Catholic schools; main issues facing Catholic/faith-based education today.

## Profile of respondents

168 of the 195 first year students responded to the survey, giving a response rate of 86%. Four of every five respondents were female. Almost two-thirds of respondents had entered university by the OP route while the remainder had entered by other routes including rank entry and mature entry. Almost half the respondents were Roman Catholic with more than one quarter in the 'Other Christian' category including Anglican, Lutheran, and Presbyterian. Almost 60% had attended Catholic schools and a similar proportion indicated that they would prefer to teach in Catholic schools. One quarter of respondents rated religion as important or very important to the way they live their lives with over one-third saying that religion was somewhat important for them.

## Choice of secondary school

The top three reasons identified by students for attending a particular secondary school were 'convenient location', 'reputation as a caring school' and 'reputation for academic excellence'. Choice of school on religious grounds had a lower mean weighted score than almost all other given reasons.

However, Catholic respondents and those who had attended Catholic schools had higher mean weighted scores than others for choice of school on 'religious grounds' and 'reputation for safe and caring environment' at levels that were statistically highly significant. Graduates of state schools gave higher ratings at highly significant levels to 'location' and 'friends were going there', while Independent school graduates ranked academic achievement and good discipline more highly than others and these differences were also highly statistically significant.

## Catholic students' perceptions of their knowledge of their faith

More than two thirds of Catholic respondents felt they had good knowledge of Catholic teaching and Catholic moral teaching. Over half felt their knowledge of Catholic social teaching was good, while three quarters rated their knowledge of Scripture texts as fair or poor.

## Perceived purposes of schooling

When asked to rank given purposes of schooling in order of importance the three most popular choices were to provide a safe and caring environment, academic achievement, and values education. The importance afforded faith-based education was low, reflecting the low level of importance attached to choice of school on religious grounds.

Catholic respondents and those who saw religion as very important to how they lived their lives were more likely than other students to see the purpose of schools in terms of faith-based education and these differences were statistically significant. Students who had attended a Catholic secondary school were more likely than others to see the purpose of schools in terms of faith-based education and values education but these differences were not statistically significant. Other variable such as age, gender and entry pathway to university had little influence on respondents' perceptions of the purposes of schooling.

Students were generally very positive about the effectiveness of their secondary schools in achieving most of the given purposes of schools although more than one-third of respondents rated the effectiveness of schools with regard to faith-based education as poor or very poor. Catholic school attendees gave higher ratings to faith-based education and also to 'develop good citizens', 'safe and caring environment' and 'teach values', all at very statistically significant levels.

## Characteristics of Catholic schools

From a given list of fifteen characteristics of Catholic schools, drawn up in consultation with Catholic Education Office representatives, the three most highly rated characteristics were, in order of popularity: caring community, provision of annual age appropriate religious retreats and the accreditation of teachers of RE. Respondents attached little importance to the integration of Catholic teachings across all learning areas. When students' weighted mean ratings for these given characteristics were analysed using relevant independent variables it emerged that:

- Catholic respondents had the highest weighted mean scores for all give characteristics, while those who identified themselves as 'No Religion' or 'Atheist' had the lowest scores. Most of these differences were statistically highly significant.
- Catholic school attendees returned the highest weighted mean scores for each characteristic and most of these differences were statistically significant.

- Students with high levels of religiosity had the highest weighted mean score for each characteristic and these differences were also statistically significant.
- No statistically significant differences emerged for age, gender, or, with one exception, entry pathway to university.

Respondents were asked to use their ratings to rank the same set of characteristics in order of importance. When weighted mean scores were computed for each item, 'caring community' received twice as many points as the next most popular item, 'engagement in outreach and social justice activities'. This was followed by the accreditation of RE teachers, school as community of faith, RE 'programmes present the teaching of the Catholic Church', celebration of liturgies, school retreats, Catholic symbols and 'prayer is integral to school's daily life'. While instances of highly significant statistical differences were fewer for the rankings of characteristics, the following interesting differences did emerge.

- Students from the 'Other Christian' category attached greatest importance to the integration of prayer into the daily life of the school while those in the 'No Religion/atheist' category gave this a very low ranking. Those for whom religion is important/very important also gave the highest mean ranking to this item.
- Those who had attended Catholic schools had the highest mean rankings for the following five characteristics: Catholic symbols throughout the school; prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students; the school community celebrates school liturgies frequently; the school engages in outreach and social justice programmes; the vast majority of students are Catholic.
- Mature-age students had the highest mean scores for principal is Catholic, the vast majority of students are Catholic and the vast majority of teachers are Catholic.
- Male respondents gave higher rankings to 'Catholic symbols throughout the school' while female respondents gave higher rankings to 'caring community' and engagement in outreach and social justice.
- Students with OP scores <15 had the highest weighted mean ranking scores for engagement in outreach and social justice activities.

## Educational values

While respondents were generally holistic rather than instrumental in their views regarding the aims of education, the majority regarded the promotion of critical and independent thought and the transmission of knowledge, beliefs and values to future generations as equally important. Respondents held a mixture of 'life-liberating' and 'life-limiting' (Sergiovanni, 1996) perspectives on teaching and learning. On the one hand they believed that 'students learn best by collaborating rather than competing with each other' and that all rather than a few students are capable of high academic achievement. On the other hand, they generally favoured expository teaching over discovery learning while half the respondents were undecided about the merits of mixed ability grouping.

## Main issues facing Catholic education

Those who responded to this open-ended question saw the main issues facing Catholic/faith-based education in terms of the loss of and/or lack of faith and religion on the part of today's youth as well as the growing numbers of 'non-religious' students attending Catholic schools.

## Main issues arising from the study

The importance of the caring school emerges as a key theme from the data for choice, purposes and characteristics of school. Regardless of religion or school attended, respondents generally supported holistic over utilitarian educational aims. From a Catholic perspective it is encouraging to note that membership of the Catholic Church, levels of religiosity, and attendance at a Catholic school were all positively related to respondents' ratings of the characteristics of Catholic schools, while attendance at a Catholic school was positively related to respondents' rankings of certain faith-related characteristics.

Although respondents rated 'faith-based-education' quite lowly as a purpose of schooling, Catholics, Other Christians, those who had attended Catholic schools and those with high scores on religiosity gave it higher mean ratings than others and these differences were highly statistically significant in the case of religious affiliation and religiosity.

Students who had attended Catholic schools (Table 19) rated their schools as being more effective than graduates of Independent or state schools in achieving the various given purposes apart from academic achievement and they were particularly positive about faith-based education ( $p=.000$ ).

Overall then, it appears that respondents clearly distinguished between the purpose of schools in general and the characteristics of Catholic schools in particular. Students generally gave low ratings to faith-based education by comparison with the other given purposes of schooling. However, those who are Catholic, more religious, or have attended Catholic schools, appear to have a deeper appreciation of faith-based identity than other respondents. It should also be noted that respondents attached little importance to the planned integration of Catholic teachings across all learning areas.

From the perspective of faith-based education, the findings are consistent with those from a number of existing studies. Rymarz and Graham (2006, 80) noted 'the disassociation of most students with the faith tradition, while Flynn and Mok (2002) reported that students in Catholic schools and their parents afford a higher priority to personal and social development, academic achievement and preparation for employment than to religious goals. They are also consistent with the findings of the 'Who's Coming to School Today?' study (Dowling et al., 2009) as well as those of Mason et al. (2007, 227) who concluded that 'many young people in Australia are following an avowedly secular path' and Dorman (1999, 38) who found that 'for many students [in Catholic schools in New South Wales], the Church as an institution has simply lost its relevance'.

# Introduction

The opinions, beliefs and attitudes of beginning student teachers at the ACU, Brisbane, campus with regard to certain aspects of faith-based identity and education were established using a survey (see Appendix 1) designed to collect the following information:

- demographic profile: gender, age, religion and type of school attended;
- reasons for choice of secondary school;
- beliefs about the purposes of schooling and the effectiveness of secondary schools attended in achieving these purposes;
- perceptions of the characteristics of Catholic schools;
- perceptions of the aims of education and some fundamental beliefs about teaching and learning;
- knowledge of various aspects of the Catholic faith (Catholic respondents only).

The researchers negotiated access to first year ACU students who were taking the B.Ed. Primary and B.Ed. Early Childhood Education and Primary programmes during the first semester

of 2014. The survey was administered in eight separate tutorial groups where students were allowed the final 30 minutes of lab time for this purpose. Having been assured that the research had the approval of the ACU Ethics Committee and that their responses were anonymous and confidential, students completed the survey individually.

The total number of enrolled first year students at census date (Week 6, Semester 1, 2014) was 195 and 168 students responded to the survey, giving an 86% response rate. Respondents were equally divided between the Early Childhood/Primary and Primary teacher education courses. While students were encouraged to make themselves available for follow-up interviews, no volunteers came forward.

All survey data were coded into Qualtrics and exported into SPSS. The subsequent analysis produced frequency distributions and cross-tabulations using independent variables based, as appropriate, on raw scores and weighted means to two degrees of freedom (df=2). Throughout this report the relevant levels of statistical significance for particular associations are indicated by the inclusion of P values.

## Profile of respondents

Student characteristics are reported according to gender, age, teacher education course, entry pathway to university, religion, religiosity (the importance of religion to how they live their lives) and secondary school attended.

### Gender and Age

Table 1: Respondents by Gender and Age (N = 168)

Gender	% (N)
Female	81% (136)
Male	19% (32)
Age	
< 18 years	32.1% (54)
18 – 21 years	51.2% (86)
22+	16.7% (28)

### University entrance routes

The students' entry routes to university were diverse as can be seen from Table 2.

Table 2: Students' entry routes to university (N = 168)

Entry route	% (N)
OP 1-8	8.3 (14)
OP 9-16	44.6 (75)
OP 17- 25	10.1 (17)
Rank Entry Score	25.0 (42)
Mature-age & transfers	10.7 (18)
IB Program	1.2 (2)

63% (106) had entered university via Overall Position (OP) score with 37% entering by other routes including: rank entry score, International Baccalaureate and mature age entry which accounted for 11% of students, eight of whom had transfer credits from other university courses.

Of those who entered with OP scores, the mean score was 16. Almost half (45%) of all respondents fell into the 9 -16 OP band entry levels, with 8% scoring between 1 and 8 and 10% scoring between 17 and 25. This picture is broadly similar to institutional and national patterns. The mean OP entry score for teacher education at ACU in 2012 was 15-18 (ACU, 2012). When ATAR scores are converted to OP, the national mean score in 2014 is also 15-17 (Department of Education, 2014).

According to Lloyd (2013), initial teacher education (ITE) programs have the highest percentage of students entering with low ATAR scores i.e. below 50 and between 50 and 60. Research commissioned by the Ministerial Advisory Group on Teacher Education (Ingvarson et al, 2014, p.65) found that:

The proportion of Year 12 entrants to undergraduate [teacher education] programs with ATAR scores less than 50 nearly doubled over the past three years. Only 21.5% of Year 12 offers went to students with ATAR scores above 80, compared with an average of well over 50% across all other university programs... More than 20% [of entrants in Victoria] (over 2000 students) had ATAR scores less than 60 in 2013, twice the proportion for any other state.

Since almost 50% of students in the study cohort had OP scores of 16 or more (under 60 in ATAR terms) when those who had entered by the non-OP route are taken into account, it appears that a considerably greater proportion of them are performing at an academically low level by comparison with Victoria. It has not been possible to establish the proportion of student teachers either nationally or in Queensland entering teacher education without an ATAR or OP score.

## Religion and religiosity

Survey respondents were asked to state their religious affiliation using the religion categories listed in the 2012 Census conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey.

Table 3: Religion of respondents (N=168)

Religion	% (N)
Roman Catholic	46.4 (78)
Other Christian	27.9 (47)
Buddhism	1.3 (2)
No Religion or Atheist	19.0 (32)
Other e.g. Mormon, 'spiritual'	5.4 (9)

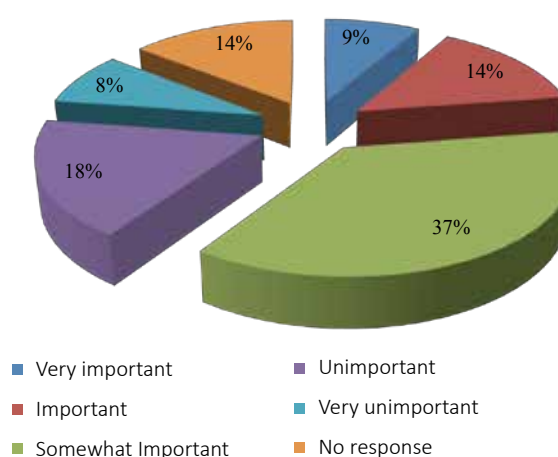
Almost half (46%) the students were Roman Catholic while more than one quarter were in the 'Other Christian' category with one fifth choosing no religion or atheist. 'Other Christian' was made up of 13 Anglican, 17 Lutheran and 17 Presbyterian. Two respondents were Buddhist while no respondents nominated Hinduism, Islam or Judaism.

As an indication of their religiosity, students were asked

"how important is your religion to the way you live your life?" Their responses were coded on a 5 point Likert scale (very important, important, somewhat important, unimportant, and very unimportant) with provision also for the option of 'no response'. The results are shown in Chart 1.

### Importance of Religion to the way you live your life

Chart 1: Students' Religiosity (N=168)



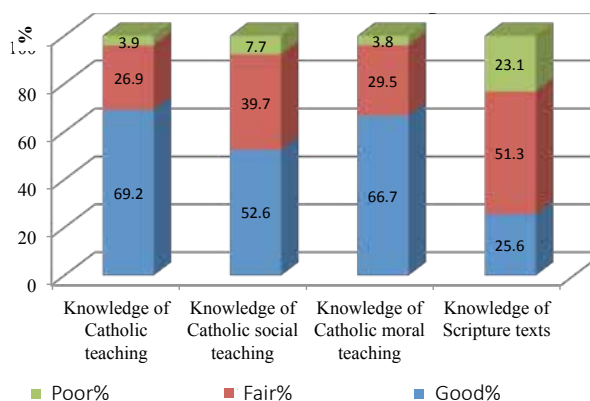
60% of students attached at least some importance to religion with 23% rating it as important or very important to the way they live their lives and 37% saying it was somewhat important. 26% said it was unimportant and 14% did not respond.

## Knowledge of Catholic faith

The 78 respondents who identified themselves as Roman Catholic were invited to rate their knowledge of Catholic teaching, Catholic social teaching, Catholic moral teaching and Scripture texts on a 5-point Likert scale. For statistical reasons these data were recoded to three scales (Good, Fair, Poor) as set out in Chart 2 below.

### Catholic students' knowledge

Chart 2: Catholic students' knowledge (N=78)



More than two thirds of Catholic students felt that their knowledge of Catholic teaching (69.2%) and Catholic moral teaching (66.7%) was good, while slightly over 50% rated their knowledge of Catholic social teaching as good. A rather different pattern emerged in the case of Scripture texts, with one quarter rating their knowledge as good, over half rating it as fair, and almost a quarter rating it as poor.

## Type of secondary school attended and post-qualification preferences

Types of secondary school attended and students' preferred post-qualification workplace are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: Types of secondary schools attended and post-qualification preferences**

School type	School Attendance	Post-qualification preferences
Catholic school	99 (59%)	96 (57%)
State school	44 (26%)	25 (15%)
Independent School	25 (15%)	47 (28%)
Total	168	168

Some 60% had attended Catholic schools while over 40% had attended state or Independent schools including Anglican, Lutheran and Presbyterian.

The breakdown for type of secondary school attended by religion (Catholic, Other Christian, No religion/atheist, Other) is presented in Table 5

**Table 5: Secondary school attended by Religion (N=168)**

Religion	Schools type		
	Catholic school	Independent school	State school
Catholic (N=78)	64(82.1%)	6(7.7%)	8(10.3%)
Other Christian (N=47)	24(51.1%)	12(25.5%)	11(23.4%)
No religion & Atheist (N= 43)	8(25.0%)	6(18.8%)	18(56.3%)
'Other'(N=11)	3(27.3%)	1(9.1%)	7(63.6%)
Totals (N=168)	99(58.9%)	25(14.9%)	44(26.2%)

Over 80% of Roman Catholic students had attended a Catholic secondary school and more than half of those in the Other Christian category had also attended Catholic schools. Some 60% of students in the 'No religion/Atheist' category had

attended State schools while one fifth of this group had attended Catholic schools. The majority of those in the 'Other religion' category attended state schools.

The proportion of respondents who would prefer to teach in Catholic schools corresponds closely with the proportion of students that attended Catholic schools. On the other hand, the proportion preferring to work in the Independent school sector is greater than the proportion that attended such schools, while the inverse is true for State schools. When asked to explain their preferences, more than half of those who would like to teach in Catholic schools mentioned their Catholic background, their Catholicity and their faith e.g. *Because I've attended a Catholic school in both primary and secondary I'm deeply entrenched in the Catholic faith; believing in the faith.* Seven students suggested that Catholic schools help 'guide' their students to achieve better 'morals' and 'values'. Some students had identified teaching in a Catholic school once qualified as a personal goal e.g. *I have always had a passion to teach in a Catholic school once I qualify as a teacher.* Other respondents valued the environment of Catholic schools e.g.

*I am Catholic and like being in a Catholic environment that is safe*

*I believe that Catholic schools show to a greater extent good values as well as a very welcoming environment*

Respondents who would like to teach in a State school on qualification made reference to cultural differences, noting that state schools provide access for "various religions", and the role of schools in providing equality [for] families who cannot afford private schools with a high quality of learning and culture. Many of those who would like to teach in the Independent sector spoke of being *familiar* with and/or *comfortable* in such settings e.g. *having access to quality teaching resources.*

## Summary profile of respondents

168 (195) first year students responded to the survey, representing a response rate of 86%. Four of every five respondents were female. Almost two-thirds of respondents had entered university by the OP route while the remainder had entered by other routes including rank entry and mature entry. Almost half the respondents were Roman Catholic with more than one quarter in the 'Other Christian' category including Anglican, Lutheran, and Presbyterian. Almost 60% had attended Catholic schools and a similar proportion indicated that they would prefer to teach in Catholic schools. One quarter of respondents rated religion as important or very important to the way they live their lives with over one-third saying that religion was somewhat important for them. More than two thirds of Catholic respondents felt they had good knowledge of Catholic teaching and Catholic moral teaching. Over half felt their knowledge of Catholic social teaching was good, while three quarters rated their knowledge of Scripture texts as fair or poor.

# Main Findings

The main findings are now presented under the following headings:

- students' reasons for choice of secondary school with cross-tabulations by religion, religiosity, type of secondary school attended, age, gender.
- students' ratings and rankings of given purposes of schooling with cross-tabulations by religion, religiosity, type of secondary school attended, age, gender, teacher education programme and entry pathway to university.
- students' perceptions of the achievement of stated school purposes by type of secondary school attended.

- students' ratings and rankings of fifteen given characteristics of Catholic schools with cross-tabulations by religion, religiosity, type of secondary school attended, age, gender, teacher education programme and entry pathway to university.
- Students' responses to open-ended question regarding main issues facing Catholic/faith-based education today.

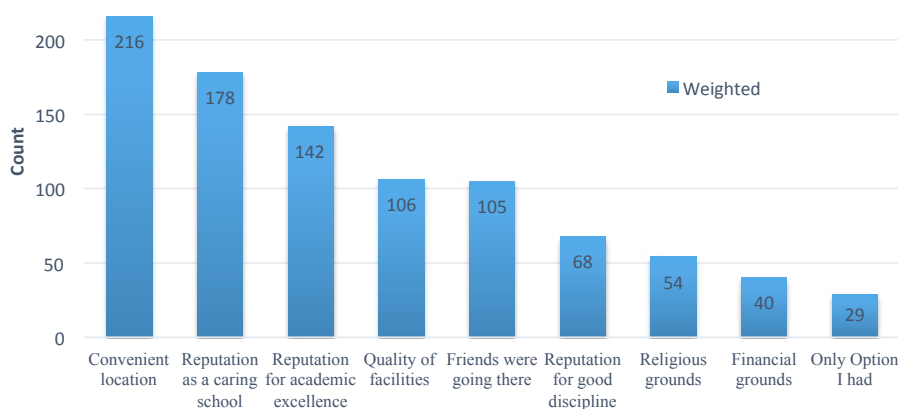
The symbol *p* indicates the degree of statistical significance. *P* values equal to or greater than .1 are not reported.

## Reasons for choice of secondary school

Students were asked to identify at least three reasons for their choice of secondary school from a given list (they were also invited to add other reasons if they wished). An overall weighted score was calculated by giving three points to the first choice, two points to the second choice, and one point to the third choice, and the results are set out in Chart 3.

### Reasons for choice of secondary school

Chart 3: Reasons for choice of secondary school (N=168)



The mean score for each weighted reason is presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Reasons for choice of secondary school (N = 168)

Reasons	Mean
Convenient location	1.30
Reputation for safe & caring environment	1.06
Reputation for academic achievement	.85
Quality of facilities	.63
Friends were going there	.62
Reputation for good discipline	.42
Religious grounds	.32
Financial grounds	.24
Only option available	.17

The three main reasons for choice of secondary school were 'convenient location', 'reputation as a caring school' and 'reputation for academic excellence' while 'religious grounds' scored lower than all other options except 'financial grounds' and 'only option available'.

Based on the weighted scoring system already introduced, analyses of variance (Anova) were computed for the mean scores for religion, religiosity, type of secondary school attended, age, gender, course, and entry pathway to university for each of the given reasons for school choice.



## Reasons for school choice by religion

Using the three main categories of religion introduced earlier the mean weighted scores for reasons for choice of school by religion are presented in Table 7. The responses of eleven students (2 Buddhist, 9 'Other') were not included for statistical reasons.

Table 7: Mean weighted scores: reasons for choice of secondary school by religion (N=157)

Reasons for choice of secondary school	Weighted mean score for Religion				
	Catholic (N=78)	Other Christian (N=47)	No Religion & Atheist (N=32)	Total (N=157)	Sig.
Convenient location	.99	1.49	1.69	1.28	.02
Financial grounds	.18	.23	.34	.23	.45
Friends were going there	.56	.66	.69	.62	.80
Only option available	.22	.06	.28	.18	.24
Quality of facilities	.67	.51	.75	.64	.52
Religious grounds	.49	.28	.09	.34	.07
Reputation for safe and caring environment	1.36	.96	.63	1.09	.01
Reputation for academic achievement	.82	.98	.78	.86	.69
Reputation for good discipline	.42	.51	.19	.40	.23

Convenient location received a high score from those in the 'no religion/atheist' category ( $p=.02$ ) while Catholic respondents had higher mean scores for 'religious grounds' ( $p=.07$ ) and 'reputation for safe and caring environment' ( $p=.01$ ).

## Reasons for school choice by religiosity

Weighted means scores for reasons for choice of school by religiosity are presented in Table 8. The five possible responses are consolidated into three categories of importance for statistical reasons and 24 respondents who said religiosity was non-applicable have been omitted.

Table 8: Mean weighted reasons for choice of secondary school by religiosity (N=144)

Reasons for choice of secondary school	Weighted mean scores for importance of Religion				
	Very important/ Important (N=38)	Somewhat important (N=62)	Unimportant/ Very unimportant (N=44)	Total (N=144)	Sig.
Convenient location	1.29	.94	1.65	1.25	.03
Financial grounds	.18	.23	.32	.24	.60
Friends were going there	.50	.47	.82	.58	.18
Only option available	.13	.19	.07	.14	.51
Quality of facilities	.37	.77	.55	.60	.10
Religious grounds	.61	.29	.30	.37	.17
Reputation for safe and caring environment	1.24	1.31	.68	1.10	.03
Reputation for academic achievement	.82	.98	.73	.86	.50
Reputation for good discipline	.58	.55	.25	.47	.16

High levels of religiosity did not influence school choice on religious grounds at a statistically significant level. Convenient location was particularly important to those for whom religion is unimportant ( $p=.03$ ) while 'safe and caring environment' was an important consideration to those for whom religion was important or somewhat important ( $p=.03$ ).

## Reasons for school choice by type of secondary school attended

Weighted means scores for students' reasons for choice of secondary school by secondary school attended are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Weighted mean scores for reasons for choice of secondary school by type of secondary school attended (N=168)

Reasons for choice of secondary school	Weighted mean scores for secondary school attended				
	Catholic school (N=99)	Independent school (N=25)	State school (N=44)	Total (N=168)	Sig.
Convenient location	1.00	1.16	2.07	1.30	.00
Financial grounds	.15	.20	.45	.24	.03
Friends were going there	.59	.08	1.00	.62	.00
Only option available	.11	.04	.39	.17	.02
Quality of facilities	.68	.80	.43	.63	.23
Religious grounds	.47	.16	.07	.32	.01
Reputation for safe and caring environment	1.51	1.00	.09	1.06	.00
Reputation for academic achievement	.76	1.36	.75	.85	.05
Reputation for good discipline	.46	.64	.18	.42	.06

Catholic school attendees had the highest mean scores for 'religious grounds' ( $p = .01$ ) and 'safe and caring environment' ( $p = .00$ ). Graduates of state schools gave the highest scores to location ( $p = .00$ ) and 'friends were going there' ( $p = .00$ ), while Independent school graduates had the highest mean scores for academic achievement ( $p = .05$ ) and good discipline ( $p = .06$ ).

## Reasons for school choice by age

Weighted means scores for school choice by age are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Weighted mean reasons for choice of secondary school by age (N=168)

Reasons for choice of secondary school	Weighted mean scores for age				
	< 18 years (N=54)	18 – 21 years (N=86)	22+ (N=28)	Total (N=168)	Sig.
Convenient location	.78	1.58	1.46	1.30	.00
Financial grounds	.30	.14	.43	.24	.08
Friends were going there	.35	.77	.68	.62	.06
Only option available	.04	.24	.21	.17	.12
Quality of facilities	.69	.64	.50	.63	.70
Religious grounds	.43	.27	.29	.32	.53
Reputation for safe and caring environment	1.52	.93	.57	1.06	.00
Reputation for academic achievement	.93	.76	.96	.85	.57
Reputation for good discipline	.41	.47	.29	.42	.62

The mean score of younger students (<18) for 'reputation for safe and caring environment' was higher than in the case of other age groups at a highly statistical level. Convenient location ( $p = .00$ ) and 'friends were going there' ( $p = .06$ ) mattered most to respondents aged 18-21. Younger students also gave a somewhat higher mean score to 'religious grounds' but these differences were not statistically significant.

## Reasons for school choice by gender

Weighted means scores for school choice by gender are presented in Table 11.

Table 11: Weighted mean scores for choice of secondary school by gender (N=168)

Reasons for choice of secondary school	Weighted mean scores for gender			
	Male (N=32)	Female (N=136)	Total (N=168)	Sig.
Convenient location	1.25	1.32	1.30	.80
Financial grounds	.28	.23	.24	.69
Friends were going there	.84	.57	.62	.16
Only option available	.09	.19	.17	.40
Quality of facilities	.63	.63	.63	.97
Religious grounds	.44	.29	.32	.38
Reputation for safe and caring environment	.84	1.11	1.06	.27
Reputation for academic achievement	.84	.85	.85	.99
Reputation for good discipline	.56	.38	.42	.28

Male students gave higher scores to 'friends' and 'religious grounds' and female students gave higher scores to 'safe and caring environment'. However, none of the differences were statistically significant.

## Summary

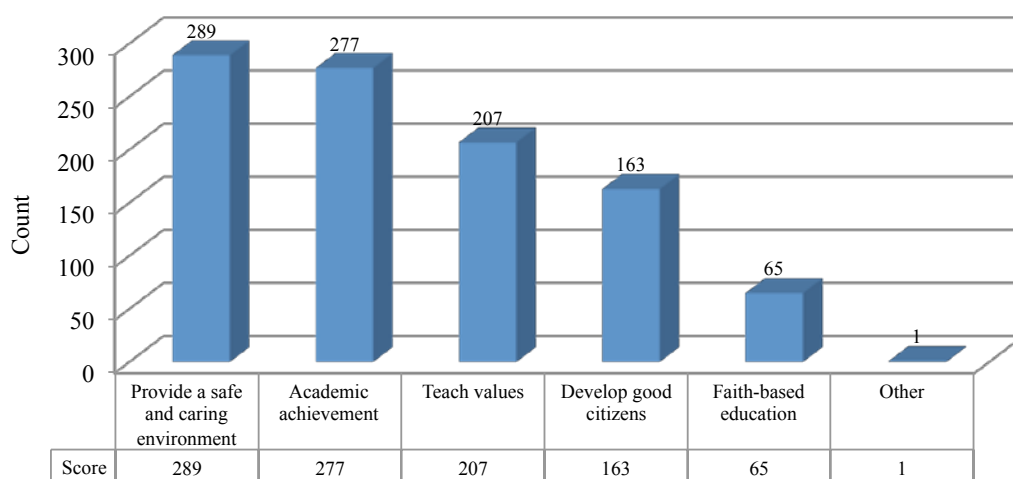
The top three reasons identified by students for attending a particular secondary school were 'convenient location' followed by 'reputation as a caring school' and 'reputation for academic excellence'. 'Religious grounds' scored lower than most of the other eight reasons provided. Catholic respondents and those who had attended Catholic schools had higher mean weighted

scores than others for 'religious grounds' and 'reputation for safe and caring environment' at levels that were statistically highly significant. Graduates of state schools gave higher ratings at highly significant levels to 'location' and 'friends were going there', while Independent school graduates ranked academic achievement and good discipline more highly than others and these differences were also highly statistically significant.

## Perceived purposes of schooling

Respondents were asked to rank the following purposes of schools in order of importance: academic achievement; development of good citizens; provide a faith-based education; provide a safe and caring environment. These responses were then weighted by giving three points for each item ranked first, two points for each item ranked second and one point for each item ranked third. The results of this exercise are presented in Chart 4.

Chart 4: Weighted School Purposes (N=168)



The most important perceived purposes were, 'safe and caring environment', 'academic achievement' and 'teach values'. The low score for faith-based education reflects the low level of importance attached to choice of school on religious grounds (see Chart 3).

Analyses of variance were computed for the mean weighted scores for each purpose using the independent variables of religion, religiosity, secondary school attended, age, gender, teacher education programme and entry pathway to university.

### Weighted school purposes by religion

The means for weighted school purposes by religion are presented in Table 12.

Table 12: Weighted means for school purposes by religion (N=157)

Perceived school purposes	Religion				Sig.
	Catholic (N=78)	Other Christian (N=47)	No Religion/ Atheist (N=32)	Overall (N=157)	
Academic Achievement	1.64	1.79	1.47	1.65	.51
Develop good citizens	.91	.83	1.28	.96	.16
Provide faith-based education	.49	.38	.03	.36	.02
Provide a safe & caring environment	1.81	1.64	1.75	1.75	.72
Teach values	1.13	1.30	1.41	1.24	.40

While the overall score for faith-based education was low, Catholic students had the highest mean score for this item ( $p=.02$ ). No other statistically significant differences emerged.

### Weighted school purposes by religiosity

Weighted means for perceived school purposes by religiosity (excluding those in the no religion/atheist category) are presented in Table 13.

Table 13: Weighted means for school purposes by religiosity (N=144)

Perceived school purposes	Religion				Sig.
	Very important (N=38)	Somewhat important (N=62)	Unimportant/ Very unimportant (N=44)	Total (N=144)	
Academic Achievement	1.50	1.79	1.64	1.67	.48
Develop good citizens	.68	.92	1.14	.92	.17
Provide faith-based education	.95	.29	.20	.44	.00
Provide a safe & caring environment	1.42	1.81	1.89	1.73	.15
Teach values	1.32	1.19	1.16	1.22	.78

Notwithstanding the low overall score for faith-based education, those for whom religion was important or very important gave it the highest mean score and the differences were statistically very significant ( $p=.00$ ).

### Weighted school purposes by teacher education programme

Weighted means scores for school purposes by teacher education programme are presented in Table 14.

Table 14: Weighted means for school purposes by teacher education programme (N=168)

Perceived school purposes	Programme			Sig.
	B.Ed. (Early Childhood/ Primary) (N=84)	B.Ed. (Primary) (N=84)	Total (N=168)	
Academic Achievement	1.44	1.86	1.65	.02
Develop good citizens	.85	1.10	.97	.14
Provide faith-based education	.39	.37	.38	.85
Provide a safe & caring environment	1.94	1.50	1.72	.01
Teach values	1.32	1.15	1.24	.31

Students on the Primary B. Ed. had higher mean scores for academic achievement ( $p=.02$ ) while students in the Early Childhood/ Primary B.Ed. had higher means for 'provide a safe and caring environment' ( $p=.01$ ).

### Weighted school purposes by type of secondary school attended

Weighted means for perceived school purposes by type of secondary school attended are presented in Table 15.

Table 15: Weighted means for school purposes by type of secondary school attended (N=168)

Perceived school purposes	Secondary school attended				Sig.
	Catholic school (N=99)	Independent school (N=25)	State School (N=44)	Total (N=168)	
Academic Achievement	1.63	1.68	1.68	1.65	.96
Develop good citizens	.84	1.32	1.07	.97	.11
Provide faith-based education	.46	.36	.20	.38	.20
Provide a safe & caring environment	1.73	1.68	1.73	1.72	.98
Teach values	1.32	.96	1.20	1.24	.31

While students who had attended Catholic schools gave a higher mean score to faith-based education, these differences were not statistically significant.

### Weighted school purposes by gender

Weighted means for school purposes by gender are presented in Table 16.

Table 16: Weighted means for school purposes by gender (N=168)

Perceived school purposes	Gender			Sig.
	Male (N=32)	Female (N=136)	Total (N=168)	
Academic Achievement	1.94	1.58	1.65	.12
Develop good citizens	.91	.99	.97	.71
Provide faith-based education	.41	.38	.38	.84
Provide a safe & caring environment	1.63	1.74	1.72	.60
Teach values	1.13	1.26	1.24	.51

No statistically significant differences were found.

## Weighted school purposes by age

Weighted means for perceived school purposes by age are presented in Table 17.

Table 17: Weighted means for school purposes by age (N=168)

Perceived school purposes	Age				Sig.
	< 18 years (N=54)	18 – 21 years (N=86)	22 + (N=28)	Total (N=168)	
Academic Achievement	1.50	1.67	1.86	1.65	.41
Develop good citizens	.94	.95	1.07	.97	.87
Provide faith-based education	.48	.37	.21	.38	.36
Provide a safe & caring environment	1.74	1.72	1.68	1.72	.97
Teach values	1.33	1.23	1.07	1.24	.58

No statistically significant differences were found.

## Weighted school purposes by entry pathway to university

Entry pathway was consolidated into three categories for statistical reasons: <15, >16 and non-OP routes. The means for perceived school purposes by pathway are presented in Table 18.

Table 18: Means: Entry pathway into university against perceived school purposes (N=168)

Perceived school purposes	Entry pathway to University				Sig.
	< 15 (N=77)	> 16 (N=33)	Other (N=58)	Total (N=168)	
Academic Achievement	1.42	1.94	1.79	1.65	.05
Develop good citizens	1.16	.58	.95	.97	.04
Provide faith-based education	.38	.39	.38	.38	.99
Provide a safe & caring environment	1.71	1.85	1.66	1.72	.73
Teach values	1.32	1.15	1.17	1.24	.63

Mean scores were generally similar for three of the purposes, including faith-based education, regardless of pathway. Citizenship got the highest mean score from higher OP students ( $p=.04$ ), while those with OP scores <15 had the lowest score for academic achievement ( $p=.05$ ).

## Student comments on school purposes

When asked to comment on school purposes 139 students responded and 29 students left this answer blank. Their earlier preference for a 'safe and caring environment' was reflected in respondents' comments with 87 students emphasising the high priority they place on being in a 'safe' environment or 'place' that encourages 'good education'.

Thirty students identified the importance of academic achievement in response to this question e.g.

*I believe as a student I should be provided with the best academic education possible to prepare me for life.*

*I went to school to learn and get an education therefore it's important that the school has a reputation for academic achievement.*

Twelve students made reference to the importance of values education e.g. *strong values will result in good citizens* and ten of these students referred to the values of the *new generation*.

## Achievement of school purposes

Students were asked to rate the effectiveness of their secondary school in achieving each of these given purposes on a five point scale from very well to very poorly. Weightings of 5 for very well, 4 for well etc. were applied and the outcomes are shown in Chart 5.

Chart 5: How students felt their school achieved given school purposes (N=168)

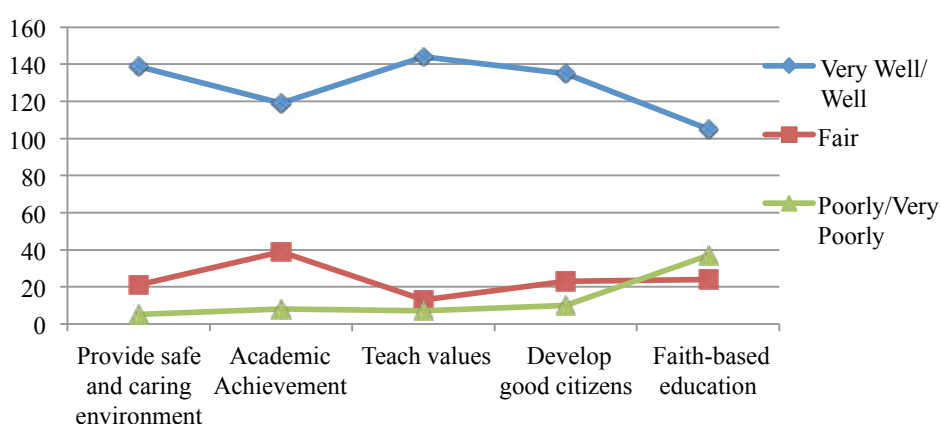


Table 19: Weighted mean scores for achievement of school purposes by secondary school attended (N = 168)

Secondary School attended	Type of secondary school attended				Sig.
	Catholic school (N=99)	Independent school (N=24)	State School (N=43)	Overall (N=168)	
Academic Achievement	3.99	4.17	3.67	3.93	.04
Develop good citizens	4.25	4.00	3.59	4.04	.00
Provide faith-based education	4.23	3.30	2.34	3.60	.00
Provide a safe & caring environment	4.52	4.42	3.86	4.33	.00
Teach values	4.48	4.04	3.81	4.24	.00

Catholic school attendees gave the highest mean satisfaction ratings for four of the given purposes and the mean differences were statistically very significant: 'develop good citizens' ( $p=.00$ ); 'faith-based education' ( $p=.00$ ); 'safe and caring environment' ( $p=.00$ ); 'teach values' ( $p=.00$ ). Students who attended Independent schools gave the highest mean rating to academic achievement ( $p=.04$ ).



## What students liked/disliked about their secondary school experiences

Almost all students (166) made comments about the things they liked most about their secondary schools. Their descriptive statements were entered into the word frequency query functionality of the NVivo 10 program resulting in the word cluster of most frequently used terms set out in Chart 6.

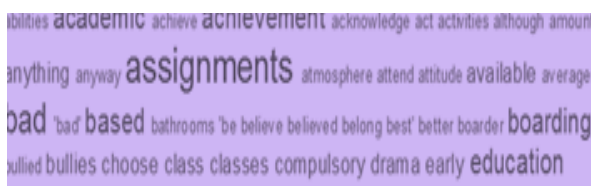
*Chart 6: Word cluster of what students most like about school experiences*



Four main themes emerged – being in a safe and caring environment; developing friendships; extra-curricular activities and learning lessons for life (see some exemplar quotes in Appendix 2).

When respondents were asked to identify aspects of school they disliked, 153 students offered comments. Relevant words, ideas, concepts and statements were inputted into word frequency queries in the NVivo10 functionality tools and the output is presented in Chart 7.

*Chart 7: Word cluster of what students least like about school experiences*



Students' responses fell under five main themes: pressure, strict rules, homework, assignments and bullying (see some exemplar quotes in Appendix 3).

## Summary

The most important perceived purposes of schools were, in order of importance, safe and caring environment, academic achievement and values education. The priority afforded faith-based education was low, reflecting the low level of importance attached to choice of school on religious grounds identified earlier. Catholic respondents and those who saw religion as very important to how they live their lives were more likely than other students to see the purpose of schools in terms of faith-based education and these differences were statistically significant. Students who had attended a Catholic secondary school were more likely than other students to see the purpose of schools in terms both of faith-based education and values education but these differences were not statistically significant. Other variables such as age, gender and entry pathway to university had little impact on respondents' perceptions of the purposes of schooling. While students were generally very positive about the effectiveness of their secondary schools in achieving most of the given purposes of schools, they were not as positive in the case of faith-based education, with more than one-third of respondents rating their school's effectiveness as poor or very poor in this regard. The ratings of Catholic school attendees were higher at a very statistically significant level for 'faith-based education' and also in the case of 'develop good citizens', 'safe and caring environment' and 'teach values'.

# Characteristics of Catholic schools

Students were presented with fifteen characteristics of the identity of a Catholic school, developed in consultation with representatives of the five Catholic Education offices in Queensland.

## Ratings of the importance of given characteristics of the identity of a Catholic school

They were invited to rate each characteristic as essential, very important, important or unimportant. The 'very important' and 'important' ratings and the 'unimportant' and 'no opinion' ratings were consolidated for statistical reasons and the results are presented in Table 20.

Table 20: Students' ratings (%) of characteristics of a Catholic school (N=167)

Characteristics	Essential %	Very important/ Important %	Unimportant/ No opinion %
Caring community	82.0	7.8	10.2
Annual age appropriate religious retreats available to students	71.7	23.7	4.8
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	69.5	14.0	16.5
School engages in outreach & social justice programmes	56.7	28.7	14.6
The school is a community of faith	55.4	22.3	22.3
RE programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	46.7	29.5	24.0
The school has strong links to wider Church	46.6	29.4	24.0
School community celebrates school liturgies frequently	40.0	29.1	30.9
Catholic symbols throughout the school	37.2	32.4	30.5
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life	37.1	32.3	30.5
The Principal is Catholic	29.1	22.4	48.5
The teachers of RE are Catholic	28.9	22.3	48.2
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	25.0	29.7	48.5
Vast majority of teachers are Catholic	21.8	21.3	53.7
Vast majority of students are Catholic	15.2	20.1	64.6

The characteristics with the highest essential ratings were, in order: caring community, provision of annual age appropriate religious retreats the accreditation of teachers of RE. The findings regarding caring community are consistent with the students' comments about what they most liked about their school experiences and environment. The planned integration of Catholic teachings was rated 13th. Weightings were allocated to the positive ratings (three points for essential, two points for very important, one point for important) and the resulting scores for each characteristic are presented in Table 21.

*Table 21: Students' weighted ratings of the characteristics of Catholic schools (N=167)*

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>SCORE</b>
Caring community	454
Annual age appropriate religious retreats available to students	443
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	415
School engages in outreach & social justice programmes	397
The school is a community of faith	387
RE programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	366
The school has strong links to wider Church	363
School community celebrates school liturgies frequently	345
Catholic symbols throughout the school	340
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life	339
The Principal is Catholic	298
The teachers of RE are Catholic	297
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	286
Vast majority of teachers are Catholic	281
Vast majority of students are Catholic	247

These results mirror the data presented in Table 20.

Analyses of variance were performed using the independent variables of religion, religiosity, type of secondary school attended, gender, age, teacher education programme and entry pathway to university. The low score for the planned 'integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas' is noteworthy.

## Weighted mean ratings of school characteristics by religion

Weighted means for ratings of the characteristics of a Catholic school by the three main religion categories are presented in Table 22.

Table 22: Weighted mean ratings of characteristics by religion (N = 156)

Characteristics	Religion				Sig.
	Catholic (N=78)	Other Christian (N=46)	No Religion & Atheist (N=32)	Total (N=156)	
Annual age appropriate religious retreats are available to students	1.15	1.02	.75	1.03	.16
Catholic symbols throughout the school	1.46	.98	.72	1.17	.00
Caring community	2.62	2.20	1.94	2.35	.00
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	1.41	1.20	.53	1.17	.00
Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	1.71	1.20	.69	1.35	.00
Teachers of religion are Catholic	1.21	.80	.41	.92	.00
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	.95	.67	.47	.77	.02
The principal is Catholic	1.13	1.07	.63	1.01	.11
The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	1.50	1.13	.63	1.21	.00
The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	1.95	1.67	1.34	1.74	.03
The school is a community of faith	1.82	1.52	.94	1.55	.00
The school has strong links to the wider Church	1.72	1.30	.81	1.41	.00
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	2.19	1.85	1.38	1.92	.00
The vast majority of students are Catholic	.72	.48	.28	.56	.04
The vast majority of teachers are Catholic	1.04	.78	.37	.83	.04

A clear and expected pattern emerges here with Catholic respondents having the highest mean scores for all given characteristics. Those in the 'No Religion/Atheist' group had the lowest mean scores. All of these differences were statistically highly significant, apart from the provision of 'annual age appropriate religious retreats' and 'the principal is Catholic'. Catholic respondents had a higher mean score for the planned 'integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas' than other respondents.

### Weighted mean ratings of school characteristics by religiosity

Weighted means for ratings of the characteristics of a Catholic school by religiosity (excluding those for whom religiosity was not relevant) are presented in Table 23.

Table 23: Weighted mean ratings for characteristics by religiosity (N = 143)

Characteristics	Religion				Sig.
	Very Important/ Important (N=37)	Somewhat Important (N=62)	Unimportant/ Very Unimportant (N=44)	Total (N=143)	
Annual age appropriate religious retreats are available to students	1.32	1.19	.77	1.10	.03
Catholic symbols throughout the school	1.43	1.35	.86	1.22	.02
Caring community	2.38	2.63	2.07	2.39	.01
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	1.84	1.29	.73	1.26	.00
Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	1.81	1.60	.89	1.43	.00
Teachers of religion are Catholic	1.16	1.11	.61	.97	.03
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	1.16	.74	.59	.80	.01
The principal is Catholic	1.43	.95	.61	.97	.00
The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	1.54	1.50	.68	1.26	.00
The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	2.05	1.85	1.39	1.76	.01
The school is a community of faith	2.03	1.71	1.25	1.65	.00
The school has strong links to the wider Church	1.84	1.58	.91	1.44	.00
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	2.30	2.06	1.66	2.00	.02
The vast majority of students are Catholic	.81	.58	.32	.56	.03
The vast majority of teachers are Catholic	1.13	.87	.52	.83	.02

Again there is a clearly discernible and expected pattern emerging here. Students with high levels of religiosity had the highest mean rating for each characteristic and all these differences were statistically significant at either the <.01 or <.05 levels. Students for whom religion was somewhat important had the second highest mean scores. Those with high levels of religiosity gave the highest mean rating to the 'integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas'.

### Weighted mean ratings of school characteristics by type of secondary school attended

Weighted means for ratings of the characteristics of a Catholic school by type of secondary school attended are presented in Table 24.

Table 24: Weighted mean ratings for characteristics by type of secondary school attended (N = 167)

Characteristics	Secondary school attended				Sig.
	Catholic school (N=99)	Independent school (N=25)	State school (N=43)	Total (N=167)	
Annual age appropriate religious retreats are available to students	1.21	.40	1.05	1.05	.00
Catholic symbols throughout the school	1.47	.60	.84	1.18	.00
Caring community	2.61	2.04	1.98	2.36	.00
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	1.42	.68	.88	1.17	.00
Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	1.60	.88	1.05	1.35	.00
Teachers of religion are Catholic	1.04	.72	.70	.90	.14
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	.89	.44	.70	.77	.07
The principal is Catholic	1.14	.48	.86	.97	.03
The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	1.59	.60	.72	1.22	.00
The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	2.10	1.08	1.28	1.74	.00
The school is a community of faith	1.91	.92	1.23	1.59	.00
The school has strong links to the wider Church	1.65	.96	1.05	1.39	.00
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	2.23	1.40	1.53	1.93	.00
The vast majority of students are Catholic	.64	.20	.49	.53	.06
The vast majority of teachers are Catholic	.98	.44	.53	.78	.01

Again there is a clearly discernible and expected pattern emerging. Catholic school attendees returned the highest mean scores for each characteristic and most of these differences are statistically significant with the exception of 'teachers of religion are Catholic' and 'the integration of Catholic teachings across all learning areas is intentionally planned'. Levels of statistical significance = or <.001 were returned for most characteristics. Those who had attended Catholic schools gave the highest mean rating to the 'integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas'.

## Weighted mean ratings of school characteristics by age

Weighted means for ratings of the characteristics of a Catholic school by age are presented in Table 25.

Table 25: Weighted mean ratings for characteristics by age (N = 167)

Characteristics	Age				Sig.
	<18 years (N=54)	18 – 21 years (N=86)	22 + (N=27)	Total (N=167)	
Annual age appropriate religious retreats are available to students	1.04	1.15	.74	1.05	.18
Catholic symbols throughout the school	1.24	1.24	.85	1.18	.20
Caring community	2.33	2.44	2.15	2.36	.40
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	1.15	1.27	.93	1.17	.31
Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	1.24	1.52	1.00	1.35	.04
Teachers of religion are Catholic	.94	.87	.93	.90	.92
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	.69	.88	.59	.77	.23
The principal is Catholic	.89	1.02	.96	.97	.79
The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	1.20	1.30	.96	1.22	.34
The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	1.83	1.80	1.33	1.74	.11
The school is a community of faith	1.63	1.67	1.22	1.59	.13
The school has strong links to the wider Church	1.43	1.45	1.11	1.39	.33
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	1.81	2.06	1.74	1.93	.30
The vast majority of students are Catholic	.44	.53	.70	.53	.42
The vast majority of teachers are Catholic	.78	.77	.85	.78	.93

Respondents in the 18-21 age range generally had the highest ratings and these differences were statistically significant in the case of 'Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church' ( $p = .04$ ). No other statistically significant differences emerged. Those in the 18-21 age band gave the highest mean rating to the 'integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas'.

## Weighted mean ratings of school characteristics by teacher education programme

Weighted means for ratings of the characteristics of a Catholic school by teacher education programme are presented in Table 26.

Table 26: Weighted mean ratings for characteristics by teacher education programme (N = 167)

Characteristics	Programme			
	B.Ed. (Early Childhood/Primary) (N=83)	B.Ed. (Primary) (N=84)	Overall (N=167)	Sig.
Annual age appropriate religious retreats are available to students	.89	1.20	1.05	.04
Catholic symbols throughout the school	1.13	1.23	1.18	.56
Caring community	2.41	2.31	2.36	.52
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	1.11	1.24	1.17	.41
Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	1.24	1.45	1.35	.18
Teachers of religion are Catholic	.89	.92	.90	.88
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	.72	.82	.77	.48
The principal is Catholic	.92	1.02	.97	.54
The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	1.18	1.25	1.22	.67
The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	1.76	1.71	1.74	.79
The school is a community of faith	1.58	1.60	1.59	.92
The school has strong links to the wider Church	1.37	1.40	1.39	.85
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	1.92	1.94	1.93	.89
The vast majority of students are Catholic	.52	.55	.53	.82
The vast majority of teachers are Catholic	.81	.76	.78	.77

While the mean rating scores for B.Ed. (Primary) were generally higher, only one of these differences was statistically significant, namely 'Annual-age appropriate retreats' ( $p = .04$ )



## Weighted mean ratings of school characteristics by gender

Weighted means for ratings of the characteristics of a Catholic school by gender are presented in Table 27.

Table 27 Weighted mean ratings for characteristics by gender (N = 167)

Characteristics	Gender			
	Male (N=32)	Female (N=135)	Total (N=167)	Sig.
Annual age appropriate religious retreats are available to students	1.25	1.00	1.05	.20
Catholic symbols throughout the school	1.25	1.16	1.18	.67
Caring community	2.16	2.41	2.36	.20
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	1.34	1.13	1.17	.29
Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	1.34	1.35	1.35	.98
Teachers of religion are Catholic	.81	.93	.90	.59
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	.94	.73	.77	.25
The principal is Catholic	1.03	.96	.97	.74
The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	1.47	1.16	1.22	.13
The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	1.72	1.74	1.74	.92
The school is a community of faith	1.31	1.65	1.59	.12
The school has strong links to the wider Church	1.31	1.41	1.39	.65
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	1.81	1.96	1.93	.52
The vast majority of students are Catholic	.69	.50	.53	.24
The vast majority of teachers are Catholic	.91	.75	.78	.44

No statistically significant differences were found in the case of gender. Male respondents gave a higher mean rating to the planned 'integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas'.

## Weighted mean ratings of school characteristics by entry pathway to university

Weighted means for ratings of the characteristics of a Catholic school by entry pathway to university are presented in Table 28.

Table 28: Weighted mean ratings for characteristics entry pathway to university (N = 167)

Characteristics	Entry pathway into University				
	< 15 (N=77)	> 16 (N=33)	Other (N=57)	Total (N=167)	Sig.
Annual age appropriate religious retreats are available to students	1.13	.97	.98	1.05	.62
Catholic symbols throughout the school	1.18	1.12	1.21	1.18	.93
Caring community	2.44	2.24	2.32	2.36	.59
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	1.21	1.06	1.19	1.17	.77
Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	1.43	1.36	1.23	1.35	.53
Teachers of religion are Catholic	.82	.73	1.12	.90	.15
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	.70	.76	.88	.77	.53
The principal is Catholic	.88	.79	1.19	.97	.18
The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	1.21	1.18	1.25	1.22	.96
The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	1.90	1.55	1.63	1.74	.21
The school is a community of faith	1.58	1.48	1.65	1.59	.80
The school has strong links to the wider Church	1.47	1.30	1.33	1.39	.68
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	2.00	1.76	1.93	1.93	.59
The vast majority of students are Catholic	.38	.58	.72	.53	.06
The vast majority of teachers are Catholic	.64	.76	1.00	.78	.11

Students who had entered by non-OP routes rated 'the vast majority of students are Catholic' higher at a level that was statistically significant ( $p = .06$ ). No other statistically significant differences were found. Those who had entered by non-OP routes gave the highest mean rating to the integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas'.

## Rankings of the importance of given characteristics of the identity of a Catholic school

Respondents were asked to use their ratings to rank the six most important characteristics of Catholic schools in order of importance from 1-6. Six points were awarded to the characteristic ranked first, five points to the characteristic ranked second, and so on. Overall scores were calculated and these are presented in Table 29, beginning with the highest overall score in Table 29 in order of popularity.

Table 29: Ranking of characteristics of a Catholic school (N=153)

Characteristics	1st most important	2nd most...	3rd most...	4th most...	5th most...	6th most...	Weighted score
Caring community	97	22	8	1	7	3	744
School engages in outreach and social justice programmes	10	35	16	21	6	8	382
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	7	19	12	25	10	7	287
The school is a community of faith	7	14	23	16	19	12	283
RE programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	3	9	19	7	11	14	196
School community celebrates school liturgies frequently	1	3	20	12	20	13	190
Annual age appropriate religious retreats are available to students	9	6	6	13	17	8	189
Catholic symbols throughout the school	7	9	6	12	12	16	187
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life	2	10	8	12	5	21	161
The school has strong links to wider Church	1	7	11	7	10	9	135
Teachers of RE are Catholic	3	4	8	10	8	6	122
The Principal is Catholic	2	6	6	6	6	12	108
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	1	4	5	3	1	5	62
Vast majority of teachers are Catholic	1	1	0	0	4	3	22
Vast majority of students are Catholic	0	2	0	2	1	3	21

'Caring community' received twice as many points as any other single item, followed by engagement in outreach and social justice activities, the accreditation of RE teachers, school as community of faith, RE programmes present the teaching of the Catholic Church, celebration of liturgies, school retreats, Catholic symbols and the integrity of prayer to the daily life of the school. It should be noted that the rank order has changed somewhat from the overall ratings in Table 21 with 'annual age appropriate religious retreats' dropping from 2nd to 7th place. The very low rank order score for the 'integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas' reflects the earlier ratings score.

An analysis of variance was conducted using the independent variables religion, religiosity, type of secondary school attended, age, gender, course and entry pathway to university and weighted means were calculated for student rankings of school characteristics.

## Weighted mean rankings of school characteristics by religion

Weighted means for the rankings of the characteristics of Catholic schools by religion are presented in Table 30.

Table 30: Weighted means for rankings of characteristics by religion (N = 156)

Characteristics	Religion				Sig.
	Catholic (N=78)	Other Christian (N=46)	No Religion & Atheist (N=32)	Total (N=156)	
Annual age appropriate religious retreats are available to students	1.14	.93	1.13	1.08	.82
Catholic symbols throughout the school	1.12	1.17	1.25	1.16	.94
Caring community	4.53	4.20	4.41	4.40	.75
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	1.05	1.22	.16	.92	.01
Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	1.44	1.17	.75	1.22	.19
Teachers of religion are Catholic	.97	.57	.44	.74	.15
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	.35	.57	.34	.41	.56
The principal is Catholic	.79	.52	.59	.67	.57
The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	1.36	.96	.78	1.12	.15
The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	2.24	2.26	2.13	2.22	.96
The school is a community of faith	1.81	2.28	1.41	1.87	.15
The school has strong links to the wider Church	.97	.57	.72	.80	.33
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	1.96	1.61	1.47	1.76	.44
The vast majority of students are Catholic	.24	.33	.19	.26	.74
The vast majority of teachers are Catholic	.53	.41	.03	.39	.13

Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students was rated highest by Other Christians and very lowly by those in the No Religion/Atheist category ( $p = .007$ ). No other statistically significant differences were found. Other Christians had the highest weighted mean score for the 'integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas'.

## Weighted mean rankings of school characteristics by religiosity

Weighted means for the rankings of the characteristics of Catholic schools by religiosity are presented in Table 31.

Table 31: Weighted means for the rankings of the characteristics of Catholic schools by religiosity (N = 143)

Characteristics	Religiosity				Sig.
	Very Important/ Important (N=37)	Somewhat Important (N=62)	Unimportant/ Very Unimportant (N=32)	Total (N=143)	
Annual age appropriate religious retreats are available to students	1.03	1.31	1.11	1.17	.74
Catholic symbols throughout the school	.92	.97	1.41	1.09	.35
Caring community	3.73	4.82	4.41	4.41	.07
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	1.84	.84	.80	1.08	.01
Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	1.08	1.63	.73	1.21	.04
Teachers of religion are Catholic	.86	.82	.73	.80	.92
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	.49	.40	.39	.42	.92
The principal is Catholic	.76	.76	.27	.61	.15
The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	1.14	1.50	1.02	1.26	.30
The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	2.03	2.40	2.23	2.25	.72
The school is a community of faith	1.78	1.97	1.73	1.85	.82
The school has strong links to the wider Church	1.05	.90	.64	.86	.48
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	1.46	1.73	1.77	1.67	.76
The vast majority of students are Catholic	.30	.26	.23	.26	.93
The vast majority of teachers are Catholic	.62	.32	.36	.41	.48

Those for whom religion is important/very important gave the highest mean rating to 'prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students' and these differences are statistically significant ( $p=.007$ ). Respondents for whom religion is 'somewhat important' gave the highest ratings to caring community ( $p=.07$ ) and 'Religious Education programs present the teachings of the Catholic Church' ( $p=.04$ ). Those with the highest levels of religiosity had the highest weighted mean score for the 'integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas'.

### Weighted mean rankings of school characteristics by type of secondary school attended

Weighted means for the rankings of the characteristics of Catholic schools by type of secondary school attended are presented in Table 32.

Table 32: Weighted means for the rankings of the characteristics of Catholic schools by type of secondary school attended (N = 167)

Characteristics	Secondary school attended				Sig.
	Catholic school (N=99)	Independent school (N=25)	State school (N=43)	Total (N=167)	
Annual age appropriate religious retreats are available to students	1.20	1.04	1.02	1.13	.84
Catholic symbols throughout the school	1.43	.52	.74	1.12	.02
Caring community	4.65	3.96	4.16	4.42	.30
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	1.24	.76	.44	.96	.02
Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	1.20	1.24	1.07	1.17	.90
Teachers of religion are Catholic	.76	.64	.72	.73	.94
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	.47	.40	.53	.48	.91
The principal is Catholic	.58	.56	.86	.65	.52
The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	1.43	.68	.72	1.14	.01
The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	2.61	1.84	1.79	2.28	.08
The school is a community of faith	1.93	1.64	1.63	1.81	.64
The school has strong links to the wider Church	.66	.68	1.23	.81	.11
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	1.89	1.44	1.49	1.72	.43
The vast majority of students are Catholic	.21	.00	.44	.24	.07
The vast majority of teachers are Catholic	.36	.52	.28	.37	.70

Those who had attended Catholic schools had the highest mean scores for seven characteristics and five of these differences were statistically significant: Catholic symbols throughout the school ( $p=.02$ ); prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students ( $p=.02$ ); the school community celebrates school liturgies frequently ( $p=.01$ ); the school engages in outreach and social justice programmes ( $p=.08$ ); and 'the vast majority of students are Catholic' ( $p=.07$ ). Those who had attended state schools had the highest weighted mean score for the 'integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas'.

## Weighted mean rankings of school characteristics by age

Weighted means for the rankings of the characteristics of Catholic schools by age are presented in Table 33.

Table 33: Weighted means for rankings of characteristics by age (N = 167)

Characteristics	Age				Sig.
	<18 years (N=54)	18 – 21 years (N=86)	22 + (N=27)	Total (N=167)	
Annual age appropriate religious retreats are available to students	1.28	1.03	1.15	1.13	.79
Catholic symbols throughout the school	1.31	1.06	.93	1.12	.59
Caring community	4.59	4.36	4.26	4.42	.79
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	.94	1.12	.52	.96	.25
Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	.98	1.37	.93	1.17	.33
Teachers of religion are Catholic	.81	.55	1.15	.73	.17
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	.43	.57	.30	.48	.57
The principal is Catholic	.44	.57	1.30	.65	.03
The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	.87	1.41	.81	1.14	.07
The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	2.61	2.30	1.56	2.28	.13
The school is a community of faith	1.91	1.81	1.59	1.81	.80
The school has strong links to the wider Church	1.06	.72	.59	.81	.33
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	1.57	1.81	1.70	1.72	.80
The vast majority of students are Catholic	.17	.19	.56	.24	.07
The vast majority of teachers are Catholic	.06	.51	.52	.37	.051

While no clear pattern emerges for age, the more mature students had the highest mean scores for 'principal is Catholic' ( $p = .03$ ), 'the vast majority of students are Catholics' ( $p = .07$ ) and 'the vast majority of teachers are Catholic' ( $p = .05$ ). Students <18 gave the highest rating to engagement in social justice and outreach. Respondents in the 18-21 age bracket had the highest weighted mean score for the 'integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas'.

### Weighted mean rankings of school characteristics by gender

Weighted means for the rankings of the characteristics of Catholic schools by gender are presented in Table 34.

Table 34: Weighted means for rankings of characteristics by gender (N = 167)

Characteristics	Gender			
	Male (N=32)	Female (N=135)	Total (N=167)	Sig.
Annual age appropriate religious retreats are available to students	1.56	1.03	1.13	.14
Catholic symbols throughout the school	1.97	.92	1.12	.00
Caring community	3.66	4.60	4.42	.04
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	1.22	.90	.96	.33
Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	1.22	1.16	1.17	.87
Teachers of religion are Catholic	.72	.73	.73	.96
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	.56	.46	.48	.68
The principal is Catholic	.75	.62	.65	.65
The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	1.31	1.10	1.14	.49
The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	1.47	2.47	2.28	.02
The school is a community of faith	1.31	1.93	1.81	.12
The school has strong links to the wider Church	.75	.82	.81	.81
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	1.56	1.76	1.72	.63
The vast majority of students are Catholic	.31	.22	.24	.56
The vast majority of teachers are Catholic	.50	.33	.37	.46

Male respondents gave higher rankings to 'Catholic symbols throughout the school' ( $p = .003$ ), while female respondents gave higher rankings to 'caring community' ( $p = .04$ ) and engagement in outreach and social justice ( $p = .02$ ).



### Weighted mean rankings of school characteristics by entry pathway to university

Weighted means for the rankings of the characteristics of Catholic schools by entry pathway to university are presented in Table 35.

Table 35: Weighted means for rankings of characteristics by entry pathway to university (N = 167)

Characteristics	Entry pathway into University				
	< 15 (N=77)	> 16 (N=33)	Other (N=57)	Total (N=167)	Sig.
Annual age appropriate religious retreats are available to students	1.26	.97	1.05	1.13	.69
Catholic symbols throughout the school	1.06	1.12	1.19	1.12	.92
Caring community	4.56	4.82	4.00	4.42	.22
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	.74	1.09	1.19	.96	.25
Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	1.19	1.21	1.12	1.17	.96
Teachers of religion are Catholic	.57	.58	1.04	.73	.17
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	.44	.58	.47	.48	.88
The principal is Catholic	.68	.33	.79	.65	.34
The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	1.27	1.30	.86	1.14	.26
The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	2.82	1.85	1.81	2.28	.02
The school is a community of faith	1.65	1.79	2.04	1.81	.54
The school has strong links to the wider Church	.90	.88	.65	.81	.63
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	1.64	1.94	1.70	1.72	.78
The vast majority of students are Catholic	.19	.18	.33	.24	.53
The vast majority of teachers are Catholic	.26	.42	.47	.37	.53

Those who had OP scores <15 gave the highest ratings to engagement in outreach and social justice activities ( $p = .02$ ). No other statistical differences emerged for this variable.

## Weighted mean rankings of school characteristics by teacher education programme

Weighted means for the rankings of the characteristics of Catholic schools by teacher education programme are presented in Table 36.

Table 36: Weighted means for rankings of characteristics by teacher education programme (N = 167)

Characteristics	Course			Sig.
	B.Ed. (Early Childhood/Primary) (N=83)	B.Ed. (Primary) (N=84)	Overall (N=167)	
Annual age appropriate religious retreats are available to students	1.00	1.26	1.13	.35
Catholic symbols throughout the school	1.08	1.15	1.12	.80
Caring community	4.64	4.20	4.42	.23
Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	.99	.94	.96	.85
Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	1.29	1.06	1.17	.41
Teachers of religion are Catholic	.69	.77	.73	.71
The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	.36	.60	.48	.23
The principal is Catholic	.51	.79	.65	.21
The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	1.05	1.23	1.14	.47
The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	2.29	2.27	2.28	.96
The school is a community of faith	1.82	1.80	1.81	.94
The school has strong links to the wider Church	.76	.86	.81	.68
The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	1.55	1.88	1.72	.30
The vast majority of students are Catholic	.28	.20	.24	.54
The vast majority of teachers are Catholic	.33	.40	.37	.65

No clear pattern or statistical significance emerged. B.Ed. (Primary) students gave the highest weighted mean score to the planned 'integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas'.

## Summary

From a given list of fifteen characteristics of Catholic schools, drawn up in consultation with Catholic Education Office representatives, the three most highly rated characteristics were, in order of popularity: caring community, provision of annual age appropriate religious retreats and the accreditation of teachers of RE. Ratings for the integration of Catholic teachings across all learning areas were particularly low.

Catholic respondents had the highest weighted mean scores for all given characteristics, while those who identified themselves as 'No Religion' or 'Atheist' had the lowest scores and most of these differences were statistically highly significant. Catholic school attendees also returned the highest weighted mean scores for each characteristic and most of these differences were statistically highly significant. Students with high levels of religiosity also had the highest weighted mean score for each characteristic and these differences were also statistically very significant. No statistically significant differences emerged for age, gender, or, with one exception, entry pathway to university.

Respondents were also asked to rank the same set of characteristics in order of importance and weighted mean scores were computed for each item. 'Caring community' received twice as many points as the next most popular item, engagement in outreach and social justice activities. This was followed by the accreditation of RE teachers, school as community of faith, RE 'programmes present the teaching of the Catholic Church', celebration of liturgies, school retreats, Catholic symbols and 'prayer is integral to school's daily life'. While instances of highly significant statistical differences were fewer for the rankings of characteristics, the following interesting cases did emerge.

- Students from the 'Other Christian' category attached greatest importance to the integration of prayer into the daily life of the school while those in the 'No Religion/atheist' category gave this a very low ranking.
- Those for whom religion is important/very important also gave the highest mean ranking to the integration of prayer into the daily life of the school. Those for whom religion is somewhat important gave the highest mean rankings to 'caring community' and 'RE programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church'
- Those who had attended Catholic schools had the highest mean rankings for the following five characteristics: Catholic symbols throughout the school; prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students; the school community celebrates school liturgies frequently; the school engages in outreach and social justice programmes; the vast majority of students are Catholic.
- Mature-age students had the highest mean scores for principal is Catholic, the vast majority of students are Catholic and the vast majority of teachers are Catholic.
- Male respondents gave higher rankings to 'Catholic symbols throughout the school' while female respondents gave higher rankings to 'caring community' and engagement in outreach and social justice.
- Those with OP scores <15 had the highest weighted mean ranking scores for engagement in outreach and social justice activities.

# Educational beliefs and values

Respondents were asked to indicate their beliefs about the aims of education and about teaching and learning by rating bipolar statements on a continuum ranging from positions that were holistic and progressive to positions that were instrumental and traditional.

## Beliefs and values about the fundamental aims of education

Students were asked to indicate their beliefs about the aims of education by rating bipolar statements on a continuum ranging from totally holistic to totally instrumental at a time when market values are exerting growing influence over education policy and practice in developed countries including Australia (Perry and Southwell, 2014; Ball, 2012; Ditchburn, 2012; Lingard, 2010). For statistical reasons their responses are coded as holistic, instrumental or equally important in Table 37.

Table 37: Respondents' views regarding the aims of education (N=168)

Beliefs about the aims of education	Holistic %	Equally important %	Instrumental %
A. The primary purpose of schools is to educate the whole child (holistic): The primary purpose of schools is to help students get high grades and good jobs (instrumental)	61.9	28	10.1
B. The primary purpose of education is to facilitate personal wellbeing and promote active citizenship (holistic): The primary purpose of education is to promote economic growth (instrumental)	69.7	26.1	4.2
C. The main purpose of education is promote critical and independent thought (holistic): The main purpose of education is to transmit knowledge, beliefs and values to future generations (instrumental)	22	57.7	20.2

Over 60% of respondents chose holistic options in the case of statements A and B, with over one quarter regarding both as equally important and relatively few opting for the more instrumental statements. The majority of respondents felt that 'the promotion of critical and independent thought' and the transmission of 'knowledge, beliefs and values to future generations' were equally important, a view that does not appear to support the focus on skills and capabilities in the proposed Australian national curriculum.

## Beliefs and values about student learning

Students were also asked to identify their beliefs and values about student learning by rating bipolar statements on a scale from extremely progressive to traditional. Based on Sergiovanni's (1996) distinction, this scale might also be classified as going from 'life-liberating' to 'life-limiting' educational beliefs on each of the four statements set out in Table 38.

Table 38: Beliefs about student learning (N=168)

Beliefs about student learning	'Liberating' %	Equally important %	'Limiting' %
A. Students learn best by collaborating with each other (liberating): Competition is necessary to bring out the best in students (limiting)	59.0	35.0	6.0
B. All students are capable of high academic achievement (liberating): Only a few students are capable of high academic achievement (limiting)	74.7	17.5	7.8
C. Students are best served by mixed ability grouping (liberating): Students are best served by streaming according to ability (limiting)	48.8	42.8	8.4
D. The role of the teacher facilitating students own inquiry (liberating): Good teachers demonstrate correct ways to solve problems (limiting)	12.0	47.0	41.0

Three quarters of respondents were positive about the capability of all students to reach high standards of academic achievement and over 59% favoured collaboration over competition. Almost half the respondents felt that the liberating and limiting options were equally important in the case of both streaming/mixed-ability grouping and expository/student-centred learning. Almost half the respondents favoured mixed ability grouping, with 41% opting for demonstration-type pedagogy.

## Summary of respondents' educational values

While respondents were generally holistic rather than instrumental in their views regarding the aims of education, the majority regarded the promotion of critical and independent thought and the transmission of knowledge, beliefs and values

as equally important. Respondents held a mixture of 'liberating' and 'limiting' views of teaching and learning. On the one hand they believed that 'students learn best by collaborating rather than competing with each other' and that all rather than a few students are capable of high academic achievement. On the other hand, half the respondents were undecided on the merits of mixed ability grouping and they generally favoured expository teaching over discovery learning.

# Main issues facing Catholic/faith-based education today

When given the opportunity to 'voice' their views about the main issues facing Catholic Education today 140 students made comments and 28 did not respond. The main issues raised were as follows:

- Most students mentioned their sense of confusion between faith and societal opinions e.g. *it's ok to love God but also to have your own opinions.*
- 23 respondents mentioned the increasing numbers of 'non-religious' students attending Catholic schools e.g. some children are not religious but are attending the school because of their parents.
- A significant number of students expressed concern about the fact that the study of religion is mandatory at school, saying that this was 'too strict' with twenty students objecting to 'forcing religion on kids'.
- Some students expressed concern about a lack of education in religion and five students felt their knowledge and understanding of religion, particularly scripture texts, was insufficient.

- Others identified secularisation as a problem e.g. *society is becoming more anti-religious (secular); teachers who may not be committed to their faith.*
- Some respondents highlighted the growing diversity of cultures and faith.
- Interestingly, 19 students said they either did not know and/or had no idea of the main issues facing Catholic education today e.g. *I'm not so sure. I don't think it's important, I'd rather my students believe in whatever they feel is natural, than force anything down their throats.*

In summary then, some 28% of students either did not respond to this open-ended question or said they had 'no idea'. Those who did respond saw the main issues facing Catholic/faith-based education in terms of the loss and/or lack of faith and religion on the part of today's youth and the growing numbers of 'non-religious' students attending Catholic schools.

# General Conclusion

The perceived importance of the caring school emerges as a key theme from the data. 'Reputation as a safe and caring environment' came second only to 'convenient location' as the reason for choice of school and was particularly popular with Catholic students and Catholic school attendees.

When students were asked about the purposes of schooling, a similar pattern emerged with 'safe and caring environment' receiving most support regardless of religious affiliation, religiosity or school attended. While 'academic achievement' came second in terms of purpose, the combined score for 'teach values' and 'develop good citizens' was considerably greater than the scores for 'safe and caring environment' and 'academic achievement'. By comparison, levels of support for faith-based items were relatively low both for school choice and purposes of schooling (see Tables 12-18).

Students' ratings and rankings of the characteristics of Catholic schools reflect a similar pattern. 'Caring community' was almost twice as popular as the second ranked item, 'engagement in outreach and social justice programmes' with its obvious values and citizenship dimensions. It should be pointed out that, while these two characteristics are relevant to all school types and religious orientations, the remaining thirteen characteristics (see Table 20) were faith-based.

These clear patterns reflect what Rymarz and Graham (2006, 80) call 'the disassociation of most students with the faith tradition' and the findings of Flynn and Mok (2002) that students in Catholic schools and their parents afford a higher priority to personal and social development, academic achievement and preparation for employment than to religious goals. They are also consistent with the findings of Dowling et al. (2009) and the conclusion of Mason et al. (2007, 227) that 'many young people in Australia are following an avowedly secular path'. Dorman (1999, 38) found that 'for many students [in Catholic schools in New South Wales], the Church as an institution has simply lost its relevance... many students in Catholic schools remain undecided about their attitude on most

aspects of Christianity'. He also reported a strong concern with values and citizenship matters insofar as students were 'profoundly concerned about social justice issues but they are not disposed favourably towards traditional Catholic practice' (ibid).

Regardless of religion or school attended, respondents generally supported holistic over utilitarian educational aims. This reflects the findings of Meehan (2002), Feldman (2005) and Widdowson et al. (2014) and suggests students are not persuaded by the incursion of market values to education.

From a Catholic perspective it is encouraging to note that membership of the Catholic Church, levels of religiosity, and attendance at a Catholic school, were all positively related to respondents' ratings of the characteristics of Catholic schools, while attendance at a Catholic school was positively related to respondents' rankings of certain faith-related characteristics.

Although respondents rated 'faith-based-education' quite lowly as a school purpose, those who are Catholic or 'Other Christian', high on religiosity, and/or Catholic school attendees, gave it higher mean ratings than others. Analysis of variance found that these differences were highly statistically significant in the case of religious affiliation and religiosity.

Students who had attended Catholic schools (Table 19) rated their schools as being more effective than graduates of independent or state schools in achieving the various given purposes apart from academic achievement and they were particularly positive about faith-based education ( $p=.000$ ).

What emerges then is that respondents clearly distinguished between the purpose of schools in general and the characteristics of Catholic schools in particular. While they did not regard faith-based education as important compared to other purposes of schooling, those who are Catholic, more religious, or have attended Catholic schools, appear to have a deeper appreciation of faith-based identity than other respondents.

# References

- ACER. (2005). Longitudinal Report on first year students into Australian Universities. Sydney: Australian Universities.
- ACU. (2012). *Initial Teacher Education at ACU: Report from Office of Planning and Strategic Management*. 10 Aug 2012: ACU. ACU Office of Planning and Strategic Management: Brisbane.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2012). Census Data 2012- Australian Religions, Canberra: Australian Government.
- Ball, S. J. 2012. Global Education Inc. New Policy Networks and the Neo-Liberal Imaginary. London: Routledge
- Department of Education. (2014): *Mapping Australia Higher Education: Undergraduate offers and applications*. Retrieved Feb 2014, from <http://docs.education.gov.au/node/35819>. p.52. Canberra: Australian Government.
- Ditchburn, G. M. 2012. The Australian curriculum: finding the hidden narrative? *Critical Studies in Education*, 53:3, 347-360
- Dorman, J. (1999). Assessment of Students' attitudes to Christianity in Catholic secondary schools. *Journal of Religious Education*, Vol 47, Issue 4, pp. 33-39.
- Dowling, A., Beavis, A., Underwood, C., Sadeghi, R., O'Malley, K. (2009). *Who's coming to school today? Final Report*. Brisbane: ACER, Brisbane Catholic Education.
- Feldman, D. (2005). Why do we send children to school? *Educational Research Quarterly*, 28, 10-16.
- Flynn, M., Mok, M. (2002). *Catholic Schools 2000: a Longitudinal Study of Year 12 Students in Catholic Schools, 1972-1982-1990-1998*. Sydney: Catholic Education Commission.
- Ingvarson, L., Reid, K., Buckley, S., Kleinhenz, E., Masters, G., Rowley, G. (2014). Best Practice Teacher Education Programs and Australia's Own Programs. Report Submitted to Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group. ACER.
- Lingard, B. 2010. Policy borrowing, policy learning: testing times in Australian schooling. *Critical Studies in Education*, 51:2, 129-147.
- Lloyd, M. (2013). *Troubled times in Australian teacher education: 2012-2013 Final Report 2013 of the OLT National Teaching Fellowship Finding the balance: Managing synergies and tensions in whole-of course design*. Sydney: Office for Learning and Teaching, Australian Government Department of Education.
- Mason, M., Singleton, A., Webber, R. (2007). *The Spirit of Generation Y. Young People's Spirituality in a Changing Australia*. Victoria: John Garratt Publishing.
- Meehan, C. (2002). Catholic Sixth Form Colleges and the Distinctive Aims of Catholic Education, *British Journal of Religious Education*, 24:2, 123-139, DOI: 10.1080/0141620020240206
- Perry, L. B., Southwell, L. (2014). Access to academic curriculum in Australian secondary schools: a case study of a highly marketised education system, *Journal of Education Policy*, 29:4, 467-485, DOI: 10.1080/02680939.2013.846414
- Rymarz, R., Graham, J. (2006). Australian core Catholic youth, Catholic schools and religious education. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 28:1, 79-89, DOI: 10.1080/01416200500273745
- Queensland Teachers College. (2012). Registration data 2006 to 2012. Brisbane: QTC.
- Sergiovanni, T. (1996). *Leadership for the Schoolhouse: How is it Different? Why is it Important?* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Widdowson, D. A., Dixon, R. S., Peterson, E.R., Rubie-Davies, C. M., Irving, S.E. (2014). Why go to school? Student, parent and teacher beliefs about the purposes of schooling. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, DOI: 10.1080/02188791.2013.876973



# Appendices

## Appendix 1

### Survey of student teachers' opinions and attitudes

#### Ethics Approval Number: 2013 307Q

The study has been reviewed by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University.

It is a longitudinal study that aims to establish student teachers' opinions regarding religious faith and identity over the duration of their undergraduate programme. The survey administered to first year students also includes questions regarding the experiences of those who attended Catholic secondary schools.

Please note that participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are not under any obligation to participate and you can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences. Submission of the survey is taken as an expression of consent.

All individual responses are confidential and will only be seen by the Principal Investigator, Professor Jim Gleeson, and the members of the research team. No individual respondent will be identified in any reports arising from the study.

We want to establish student teachers' honest opinions on a range of issues. There are no right or wrong answers. Respondents are asked to answer all questions as truthfully as possible.

You are invited to volunteer for follow-up interviews by sending an email to Professor Gleeson. When the surveys have been analysed a random sample of volunteers will be asked to complete a Consent Form agreeing to give an audio-taped interview of no more than thirty minutes duration at a mutually suitable time and location. The purpose of these interviews is to illuminate the general findings from the survey data and not to interrogate the interviewee in relation to her/his survey responses (which in any case will not be known to the research team).

If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may email [res.ethics@acu.edu.au](mailto:res.ethics@acu.edu.au). Other contact details for such complaints are provided on the Information Letter. Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

- 
1. What are the last four digits of your student number? \_\_\_\_\_
  2. What is your gender?  Male  Female
  3. Age  < 18 years  18- 21 years  22 +
  4. What course are you taking?  B.Ed. (Early Childhood/Primary)  
 B.Ed. (Primary)
  5. What was your entry pathway into university?  OP  IB  Rank Entry Score  Other  
**If it was an OP**, what was your score? \_\_\_\_\_
  6. What is your religion? (Please tick one only)  
 Anglican  Buddhism  Roman Catholic  Hinduism  Islam  
 Judaism  Other Christian  No religion  Other
  7. How important is your religion to the way you live your life?  
 Very Important  
 Important  
 Somewhat Important  
 Unimportant  
 Very Unimportant  
 Not Applicable

8. If you chose **Roman Catholic at Question**, please indicate your response to each of the following statements.  
If not, **go to Question 9**.

My **knowledge** of **Catholic teaching** is:

Very Good    Good    Fair    Poor    Very Poor

My **knowledge** of **Catholic social** teaching is:

Very Good    Good    Fair    Poor    Very Poor

My **knowledge** of **Catholic moral** teaching is:

Very Good    Good    Fair    Poor    Very Poor

My **knowledge** of **Scripture** texts is:

Very Good    Good    Fair    Poor    Very Poor

9. What type of secondary school did you attend?

- State school  
 Independent school  
 Catholic school  
 Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**if you ticked Catholic school**, did the school belong to?

- A Religious Institute  
 Local diocese  
 Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Don't know

10. From the following list identify **at least three** reasons why you attended that particular school  
(Please rank these reasons in order of importance by placing 1 beside the first reason, 2 beside the second reason, 3 beside the third reason and so on).

Reason	Ranking
Convenient location	
Financial grounds	
Friends were going there	
Only option available	
Quality of the facilities	
Religious grounds	
Reputation as a caring school	
Reputation for academic excellence	
Reputation for good discipline	
Other (please specify)	

11. **Purposes of schools:** please rank **at least three** of the following **purposes of schools** in order of importance (Place 1 in front of your first preference, 2 in front of your second preference, 3 in front of your third preference, etc.)

- Academic achievement
- Develop good citizens
- Provide a faith-based education
- Provide a safe and caring environment
- Teach values
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Why did you choose this ranking?**

12. How well did **your** secondary school achieve each of these purposes? (Please put a tick in each row)

	Very Well	Well	Fairly well	Poorly	Very Poorly	Not Applicable
Academic achievement						
Develop good citizens						
Provide a faith-based education						
Provide a safe and caring environment						
Teach values						
Other						

13. What did you like **most** about your secondary school experience?

---



---



---



---

14. What did you like **least** about your secondary school experience?

---



---



---



---

15. **Identity of Catholic schools:** In your opinion how **important** is each of the following characteristics to the identity of a Catholic school? (Please fill one circle **only** for each column, i.e. one per item).

Essential component	Annual age-appropriate religious retreats are available to students	Catholic symbols throughout the school	Caring Community	Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	Teachers of religion are Catholic	The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	The principal is Catholic	The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	The school is a community of faith	The school has strong links with the wider Church	The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	The vast majority of students are Catholic	The vast majority of teachers are Catholic
	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Very important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Important	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Unimportant	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
No opinion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

If you answered 'no opinion' to all items, please go to Question 17

16. Using your ratings from the previous question, please rank the six most important characteristics of a Catholic school in order of importance. Please place one tick **only** in each row.

**Note:** You should have a **total of 6 ticks** when you have finished.

**Hint:** Go back and look at the items you rated in the previous question as Essential, Very Important.

Annual age-appropriate religious retreats are available to students	Catholic symbols throughout the school	Caring Community	Prayer is integral to the school's daily life for staff and students	Religious Education programmes present the teachings of the Catholic Church	Teachers of religion are Catholic	The integration of Catholic teachings across ALL learning areas is intentionally planned	The principal is Catholic	The school community celebrates school liturgies frequently	The school engages in outreach and social justice programmes	The school is a community of faith	The school has strong links with the wider Church	The teachers of RE are accredited to teach RE	The vast majority of students are Catholic	The vast majority of teachers are Catholic
Most important item														
Second most important item														
Third most important item														
Fourth most important item														
Fifth most important item														
Sixth most important item														

17. What type of school would you ideally like to teach in after you qualify? (Please tick one only).

- State school
- Independent School
- Catholic School
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- Don't know

18. In your opinion, what are the **main issues** facing Catholic/faith-based Education today?

---



---



---



---

19. Please locate your **beliefs** and **values** about the fundamental aims of education by shading in the following radio buttons, where the mid-point (0) means that you regard both statements as equally important.

**Note:** You should shade 1 bold button on each line.

	<b>3</b>		<b>0</b>		<b>3</b>		
The primary purpose of schools is to educate the whole child	○	○	○	○	○	○	The primary purpose of schools is to help students get high grades and good jobs
The primary purpose of education is to promote economic growth	○	○	○	○	○	○	The primary purpose of education is to facilitate personal wellbeing and promote active citizenship
The main purpose of education is to hand on beliefs and values to future generations	○	○	○	○	○	○	The main purpose of education is to promote critical and independent thought

20. Please locate your beliefs about **student learning** by shading in the following radio buttons, where the mid-point (0) means that you regard both statements as equally valid.

**Note:** You should shade 1 bold button on each line.

	<b>3</b>			<b>0</b>			<b>3</b>	
Students learn best by collaborating with each other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Competition is necessary to bring out the best in students
Only a few students are capable of high academic achievement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	All students are capable of high academic achievement
Students are best served by Streaming according to ability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Students are best served by mixed ability grouping
The role of the teacher is to facilitate students' own Inquiry	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Good teachers demonstrate correct ways to solve problems

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your assistance is greatly appreciated and will be of considerable value to the Catholic Identity and Curriculum in Catholic Education Project team.*

If you are willing to give an interview of no more than 30 minutes duration about 'Identity and Curriculum in Catholic Education' please email Professor Jim Gleeson at [jim.gleeson@acu.edu.au](mailto:jim.gleeson@acu.edu.au)

## Appendix 2

### What students liked most about the secondary school they attended

A number of students (28) commented favourably on the caring, safe, friendly and enjoyable environment of their secondary schools, e.g. *it was not too strict... teachers were friendly, always making you achieve the very best. They were very helpful and it was an overall good environment.* Teachers were the main reason mentioned for such a good environment. For example, five students remarked that the teachers really made the experience 'worthwhile' as there was a good 'bond' between teachers and students. Twelve students mentioned 'sense of community' e.g. *I cherished the sense of community that my secondary school had, it was an extremely caring and nurturing environment.*

It emerged that friendships were students' most common good memories of their school experiences with 38 students speaking of friendships in terms of 'mate ships'. Other related concepts mentioned by students included their 'social groups' and 'peer groups' with some referring to the long lasting nature of the 'friendships' they made. Some students referred to the valuable lessons they had learned for life e.g. *it taught good ethics and*

*had lessons for life.* Words such as 'discipline', 'leadership' and 'friendship' were mentioned by 15 students. Twelve other students spoke of the wonderful opportunities to 'excel' and the 'future pathways' provided by their schools

A significant number of students (34) focussed on extra-curricular activities e.g. *I was offered a whole range of different co-curricular activities which I enjoyed immensely.* Descriptions used most frequently by such students in relation to extra-curricular activities included: 'enjoyment', 'fun' and 'beneficial'. One student put it like this: *extracurricular activities at my school gave me the scaffold to grow in life.*

Others (18) saw 'the journey of self-discovery' as the best outcome with words such as 'realisation' and 'discovery' framing many of their comments e.g. *school made me realise my strengths and weaknesses, it pushed me and most importantly I enjoyed my successes.*

## Appendix 3

### Things students liked least about the secondary school they attended

Many students (47) spoke of 'expectations' and 'stress' experienced in completing homework and maintaining high grades. Students felt pressure to maintain good marks as reflected in their references to 'anxiousness' and 'anxiety'. As one student remarked

*I disliked the amount of pressure that the school put on the students to 'be the best'. I believe that a lot of unnecessary work and pressure was put on us to maintain a reputation and over succeed.*

Stress and high expectations were associated with the strict rules imposed by schools and 19 students suggested that the strict daily routines and regulations were very difficult to cope with. Ten students referred to various aspects of the daily routine and seven students who had attended Catholic secondary schools described the strictness of the rules and their particular difficulties with RE, e.g. *it was so strict, I had to do religion; it was so unfair [and] strict and had unnecessary measures ... I just so hated the compulsory religion classes as they weren't very enjoyable.*

A significant number of students (33) said that the things they disliked were doing homework and assignments. Most respondents felt that a lot of set homework was unnecessary and remarked that the demands of completing tasks and the unreasonable time limits imposed for such tasks encroached on their social time on weekends. One student put it like this: *I just hated doing it [homework]...it just never stopped!*

A considerable number of students (32), particularly girls, used 'bad' to describe their experiences of bullying while at school. One student summarized this unacceptable behavior as:

*Simply put it comes down to the bad way that some students treat others. Teachers also can be bullies as some treat students quite badly. It all comes back to the bullies' lack of pride in themselves and their school.*



Identity and Curriculum in Catholic Education Project  
Australian Catholic University  
McAuley Campus, Brisbane  
Queensland 4014

**Phone:** +61 7 3623 7786

**Email:** [jim.gleeson@acu.edu.au](mailto:jim.gleeson@acu.edu.au)

**<http://www.acu.edu.au/625144>**

978-1-922097-31-6