

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate the relationship between the real and espoused Characteristic Spirit in four rural Catholic primary schools in County Cork. Through an exploration of literature on the Characteristic Spirit of Catholic Schools, in Ireland and further afield, the writer identified a commonality of features to compare the Catholicity of the schools in question. The prominent position of the Catholic school in the Irish Education system is being called into question in a more pluralist society. This dissertation also investigated some of the merits of Catholic Education on learner outcomes.

The recent framework for school self evaluation published by the Catholic Schools Partnership (2012) entitled *A Process for Understanding, Supporting and taking Ownership of the Characteristic Spirit in a Catholic School* outlined forty indicators to assist schools in evaluating themselves in terms of their Catholic Ethos. This formed the basis of the research questionnaire, completed by members of the board of managements, staff, parents and senior pupils. Principals in the four schools participated in semi-structured interviews.

The study found a strong link between the Real and Espoused Characteristic Spirit in Four Rural Catholic Primary Schools in County Cork. The schools operated as communities with a commonality of purpose between all stakeholders which reflects the ethos of Catholic Education underpinned by Gospel values and Christian tradition. Some divergence was present, particularly among the parent groups who were not as familiar with the internal working of the school. Very few respondents were aware of international studies on the effectiveness of Catholic schools. This suggests that there should be further discussion in earnest in Ireland on this issue.