

## Abstract

This work investigates the perceptions of the characteristic spirit in Irish Catholic post-primary education across different school types. The identity of a school is multifaceted and is influenced by some if not all of the following, *inter alia*: founding charism, Trustees, history and tradition, the State and parent/student understanding and expectation of how schools are run and what schools should deliver. This research focuses on the impact of characteristic spirit on the policies and on everyday life in the respective schools. It also interprets the fostering of a Christian community in the schools in the study. Similarities and or differences will be highlighted and discussed.

Questionnaires and interviews were chosen as the research tools. This allowed for triangulation, to reduce bias. Three schools were chosen for the study. Eighty four questionnaires were returned from the staff and six interviews were carried out with the principal and the chairperson of the Board of Management of each school. There was a 62% return rate.

The results demonstrated that the sample schools foster a Christian community, with a highly qualified staff working in a safe and caring environment. Also, the schools were found to be an agent of personal growth and social transformation. Some respondents felt they were not valued and cherished, showing that not all the respondents are experiencing the “caring community” inherent in the characteristic spirit. The characteristic spirit needs to be alive in the fabric and the functioning of a school and not simply to be aspirational. Recommendations included that research should be undertaken to understand how the mechanism that successfully transmits accurate awareness of characteristic spirit among staff could be used to help staff implement a “lived experience” of that spirit at day-to-day level.