

### **Abstract**

The educational mission of Catholic schools in Ireland aims to reflect an idiosyncratic vision of life and a corresponding philosophy of education which is based on the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In our current climate, however, the role of the Catholic Church in education has come under intense scrutiny, presenting challenges to principals who wish to promote a Catholic ethos.

This study examines the perceptions of principals and teachers in three recognised Catholic schools in Cork, regarding the most important elements of effective leadership in a Catholic school. The study also considers whether these perceptions align with the educational mission of the Church and with literature on leadership in general. A combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods was used.

Findings from this research suggest that views of principals and teachers who took part in this study, regarding effective leadership in Catholic schools, are, on the whole, reflective of literature discussed in Chapter Two, on general school leadership. However, data ascertained indicates that some views of respondents in this study conflict with the educational mission of the Catholic Church, suggesting that there may be a mismatch between the views of respondents and the views of the Catholic Church towards the importance of faith formation and the promotion of overt references to the Catholic nature of the school, as key elements of leadership in a Catholic school.

Evidence gathered during this study suggests that principals need to facilitate whole school discussions, reflection and review to establish their role in effectively leading their schools, so that Catholic schools do not “lose sight of the reasons they exist” (CCE, 2013:56).

Findings also suggest that the Catholic Church may need to engage in dialogue with principals and teachers in Catholic schools to ensure an alignment between the educational mission of the Church and the views of those attempting to uphold the “characteristic spirit” of Catholic schools, as directed by the Education Act, 1998 (Section 15, 2b).