

O'Sullivan, JG, 2006, *Perceptions of Catholic Education in the Local Authority School in Ireland: A Comparative Case Study.*

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

This study is concerned with ascertaining the perceptions of the stakeholders of two local authority schools in Ireland as to the extent to which they perceive that their school conforms to the characteristics of the Catholic school. This concern is in the context of continuing change in Irish education and society, including the effect on the voluntary school sector of falling vocations to the Catholic religious life and the implications *for* trusteeship and the *maintenance of* a distinctively Catholic ethos. An introductory chapter reflects on these issues, including the emergence of both Catholic and state schools in Ireland.

The study focuses on the perceptions of three sets of people in each of the two schools, both of which are in the vocational sector; namely, teachers, parents and Board of Management members. These respondents are asked to gauge their perceptions of the reality of Catholic education in their schools by considering a range of characteristics deemed by the author to be particularly central to the distinctive nature of Catholic education as determined by an extensive literature review, presented in this study, incorporating various Church pronouncements. These characteristics relate to four central themes or scales: Holistic Development, Community, Distinctive Ideology and Social Awareness. The methodology of the research and the presentation and discussion of the results are presented.

Among the main conclusions reached are that the characteristics relating to the promotion of a Distinctive Ideology are not deemed to be as strongly in evidence as the other three scales according to respondents' perceptions, thus emphasising the main difference between voluntary and state schools. But perceptions vary among the three sets of respondents, with representatives of parents and Board of Management more likely to be in agreement with statements posited than teachers. High levels of a lack of awareness among the groups of respondents as to aspects of school life not directly related to their own specific roles were also noted, indicating a lack of coherence or effective communication among the members of the school community about the overall nature of the school.

Yet, in its regard for the holistic development of the student, the cultivation of a sense of community and a concern for fostering social awareness, the study concludes that the local authority school conforms very strongly to Catholic educational principles.