The role of principals in creating inclusive school environments: insights from community national schools in Ireland

Faas, D., Smith, A., & Darmody, M. (2018). The role of principals in creating inclusive school environments: insights from community national schools in Ireland. *School Leadership & Management*, 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1430688

Published in:
School Leadership & Management

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor and Francis in *School Leadership and Management* on 28/01/2018, available online: http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/13632434.2018.1430688

The role of principals in creating inclusive school environments: Insights from community national schools in Ireland

Abstract

This article seeks to provide an insight into the role of school principals dealing with newly multicultural and multi-faith student populations by drawing on a mixed-methods study on state-funded multi-denominational community national schools in Ireland. The study explores the extent to which school principals address the increasing social and cultural diversity in their schools by helping to establish inclusive and supportive school environments. The study identifies the main agents in shaping the school culture, and how the multi-denominational ethos is experienced by students. The article endeavours to provide academics and practitioners with a better understanding of the importance of leadership in shaping school climate that promotes a sense of belonging for all the students.

Key words: school leadership; multidenominational primary schools; diversity; Republic of Ireland

Introduction

It is generally agreed in international academic literature that students who attend schools with a culturally diverse population may be better positioned in developing an understanding of the perspectives of peers from cultures and beliefs different from themselves (Henze et al. 2002; Perso 2012; Wells, Fox and Cordova-Cobo 2016). At the same time, increasing cultural and religious diversity can be seen as a challenge for schools, especially in newly immigrant-receiving countries such as

Ireland. Previously largely homogenous in cultural terms, teachers and school principals in Ireland are increasingly faced with the challenge of addressing the needs of all students, acknowledging that schools should strive to create an environment where all children feel valued, and views and learning of all students is supported. It has been found that school leadership, provided by principals, teachers and school boards amongst others, play an important role in establishing culturally inclusive environments (Johnson and Fuller 2014; Devine 2013).

Internationally, much debate centres on the provision of religious education (RE) in schools, and how schools accommodate the needs of children from different faith groups. Authors generally agree that religious faith is subject to the influence of various social factors including parents and schools (Morris 2010; Schwartz 2006). Ireland, like many European countries with recent large-scale immigration patterns, is experiencing a debate on how best to provide for the educational needs of immigrant children (Darmody et al. 2011; Triandafyllidou and Gropas 2014; Stevens and Dworkin 2014; Author 1 et al. 2015).

There are a number of reasons why research on the Irish context is likely to yield specific insights into these processes. Since the 1990s the Irish population has become culturally and ethnically more diverse, mostly due to inward migration. The increase in the number of newcomers was particularly striking between 2002 and 2006 with the number of migrants nearly doubling during these years (CSO 2012). In April 2016, the number of Irish residents born outside Ireland increased to 810,406 comprising 11% of the total population (CSO 2017). Inward migration of non-Irish nationals in the year totalled 54,203 with the main countries of origin being the UK, Brazil and Poland. Those who spoke a foreign language at home increased 19% from 2011 to 612,018, with Polish being the most common language. In this increasingly diverse context, and to ensure harmonious relationships irrespective of cultural, linguistic and religious differences, the field of education is crucial. School as an important site for learning tolerance has been recognised by previous research (see Weisse 2010; Smyth et al.

2013). This has been acknowledged in Ireland by introducing the intercultural education concept, and teaching about religion rather than promoting one faith system over others (NCCA 2005). It is important to accept the fact that others may believe and live differently within a particular society although they may share some values.

Within educational research there is now a growing literature on school sector variation, often focussing on cognitive outcomes (Carbonaro and Covay 2010; Darmody et al. 2012). Much of the research comes from the US and the UK, and focuses on denominational (faith) schools. Societal changes across Europe , such as secularisation and religious revival, have brought to centre stage the issue of denominational schools, and parents' right to choose education for their children that is in accordance with their belief systems (Dronkers and Avram 2015; Merry 2015; Patrikios and Curtice 2014; Henkel and Kippenberg 2005). Historically, the majority of the Irish population has been Roman Catholic, with a minority Protestant group and a small Jewish community. While Catholics still present the majority of the population in Ireland (78.3% in 2016), those identifying themselves as having 'no religion' in April 2016 comprised 9.8% of the population, an increase of 73.6% from 2011. The 'no religion' group has increased steadily since 2002, with highest concentrations around urban areas, comprising both Irish and migrant populations (CSO 2017). The largest-growing minority faiths are Orthodox and Apostolic/Pentecostal (CSO 2012).

Despite significant social change, primary schooling in Ireland is highly denominational and is overwhelmingly Catholic in nature with a small number of minority faith schools. Multi-denominational schools accounted for just 3.4% of primary schools in 2015-16. The denominational nature of the primary school system means that many Catholic schools have students from minority faith or secular groups. To date, relatively little is known in Ireland about the role of principals in creating a culturally inclusive school environment. The article aims to address this gap by exploring the role of school principals in creating a 'culturally supportive' school climate in new multi-

denominational community national schools (CNS). In particular, the article aims to address how school principals perceive their role in supporting cultural diversity and what they do in practice.

Considering the international literature, it is expected that school principals have a key role to play in creating a school climate that supports students from all faiths and none. We now turn to the conceptual framework of school leadership, particularly culturally responsive school leadership, as well as existing research on these topics. After this an overview of the Irish primary school sector is presented, followed by a brief overview of RE in Irish primary schools and the methodology used in the study. Key findings from the fieldwork are then presented and the final section concludes the article.

Conceptualising and researching school leadership

School leadership has become an important concept internationally in addressing increasing migration-related diversity (see Author 1 2016, Smyth et al. 2013, Triandafyllidou et al. 2011; Pont, Nusche and Moorman 2008; Goddart and Hart 2007). Some principals have been found to be unaware of culturally and religiously relevant instructional practices, as well as varied in terms of holding high expectations or deficit perspectives of their students (Gardiner and Enomoto 2006). Nevertheless, individuals in leadership roles can do a great deal to create positive change in interethnic relations (Devine 2013; Gardiner and Enomoto 2006; Henze et al. 2002; Riehl 2000). Santamaria (2013) highlights important elements for leadership in contemporary multicultural classrooms. These are the importance of engaging in critical conversations, assuming a 'critical race theory' lens, consensus building as decision-making strategy, consciousness of stereotype threat, leading by example and building trust.

Devine (2013) notes tensions that exist in leadership practice between social change, such as increasing diversity, and preservation of school ethos. In her research in three Irish primary schools,

some principals engaged in reflexive practicing relating to the development of school-wide inclusive practices, while one faith school sought continuity and preservation of their ethos, supporting only those individual children who became visible through their needs rather than a systematic focus on the needs of immigrant children and their parents as a group. In a case study of one school in Sweden, Johannsson et al. (2007) observed while the school had an official vision for providing an 'equivalent education', there were contradictions in the school's rhetoric and practice. Problems in the school were constructed in deficit terms such as a lack of resources, parents lacking the language or coming from different backgrounds, rather than posing solutions to deal with increasing diversity. As a result, the school displayed assimilation rhetoric. Well-intentioned notions of equality can also result in assimilation. Goddard and Hart (2007)'s small study of Canadian schools found principals resisted recognising diversity and difference, instead suggesting that all students were treated the same. Through the implementation of policies and practice that viewed children as the same, the study schools overlooked the nuances of individual learning styles and further promoted an assimilation approach. In contrast to these approaches, schools that employ more integrative approaches, such as including student's experiences, foster positive relationships with society (Author 1 2007; Author 1 2010).

Culturally responsive school leadership

A central concept used in this study is culturally responsive leadership. The term is derived from the theory of 'culturally responsive pedagogy' (Khalifa et al. 2016; Johnson 2014; Johnson and Fuller 2014; Gay 1994) which suggests culture plays an important part in the learning process, as it shapes the way individuals think (Ladson-Billings 1994). As students who fail to relate to the material taught or approaches taken to teaching may disengage (Wlodkowski and Ginsberg 1995), teachers need to be able to make the curriculum accessible to all students in order to transmit knowledge to a diverse student body (Olneck 2004). Culturally responsive school leadership has become increasingly

important to research on culturally responsive education (Khalifa, Gooden and Davis 2016). The focus is on creating inclusive school environments that support students from ethnically and culturally different backgrounds by acknowledging differences, reflecting ethnic and cultural difference in the school curriculum, supporting the development of critical thinking and supporting actions that empower both students and their parents (Riehl 2000).

While Gay (2010) advocates for whole school reform (an approach also highlighted in EU recommendations, see van Driel, Darmody and Kerzil 2016) various authors suggest ways principals themselves can be culturally responsive and promote a culturally responsive school climate. In a synthesis of literature on school principals, Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) highlight four main behaviours of culturally responsive school leaders: principals critically self-reflect on their leadership behaviours; they develop culturally responsive teachers and curricula; promote culturally responsive and inclusive school environments; and engage students and parents. Being culturally responsive involves understanding cultural differences within diverse student populations, understanding the norms and values of these diverse populations, being sensitive to the transitions of students between home and school, and adapting the communication with parents to be responsive to cultural norms (Bazron, Osher and Fleischman 2005). For example, Mughisa (2013) highlights motivations of principals in New Zealand in implementing culturally responsive practices, including their own interests in education, their school experience in a colonial education system and interest and exposure to indigenous culture. Magno and Schiff (2010) highlight best practice; one principal identified in their research as an exemplary school leader undertook both institutional adjustments in administrative procedures as well as encouraging academic enhancement by assisting teachers in integrating immigrant experiences into their classes. In some schools teachers from minority backgrounds were used to help accommodate children (see Mughisa 2013).

Overview of the Irish primary school sector

In Ireland, primary schools have remained predominantly denominational, mostly Catholic, in ownership and management, despite significant demographic changes in recent decades. The majority of primary schools in Ireland are privately owned and supported by different patrons while the state pays the bulk of the building and running costs. Increased cultural and religious diversity in Irish society reflects a rise in the proportion of people with no religion as well as an increase in the number of migrant groups representing different cultural and religious backgrounds. At present, only a small minority of schools are inter-denominational or multi-denominational (see Table 1 for different types of primary schools).

[Insert Table 1 here]

Community national schools (CNS) were established in 2008 as a state response to increasing diversity, and are currently under the patronage of Education and Training Boards (ETBs). They follow the multi-belief Goodness Me, Goodness You! (GMGY) RE programme. The distinctive characteristic of this is 'belief-nurturing' whereby children are encouraged to share their own experiences of their home beliefs with class. The programme has evolved since the schools were established; the original junior programme for infants to second class (age 4-9) included two elements: core and 'belief-specific' teaching (BST). The core element accounted for the majority of the school year (approximately 80%) and was taught in class groups, inclusive of all children from diverse backgrounds. The remaining 20% of the year was dedicated to BST; this involved separating children into four belief groups ('Catholic', 'Other Christian', 'Muslim' and 'Other') for three to four weeks of the year. Teaching in these groups provided specific education in children's own faith backgrounds. This aspect of the GMGY programme attracted negative press attention which likened the practice to 'segregation' of children by religious group (RTE news 2015). BST has now been suspended in nine out of 11 schools as of August 2017, with the junior programme currently under review. Teaching of the senior curriculum for third to sixth class

(age 9-12) started in September 2016 in most schools, with one school starting the teaching after Easter 2017 (after our period of fieldwork). This curriculum includes four strands: 'Story', 'Thinking Time', 'What is a Community National School' and 'Beliefs and Religions'. The 'Beliefs and Religions' strand does not include separating children into faith groups, but instead encourages 'family projects' where knowledge of specific belief traditions come from home rather than school.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods approach. At the time of fieldwork, there were 11 CNS in Ireland. One more has since been established (September 2017) which was not part of this study. A questionnaire was sent to all 11 principals exploring the schools' approach to RE, diversity and the school ethos. This was supplemented by in-depth semi-structured interviews with principals (n=11) and teachers (n=22). Using an interview guide, interviews covered school ethos, RE and integration. In six out of the 11 schools (who had a fifth class [ages 10-11] or higher) 17 student focus groups were conducted to gain the perspectives of children. Fifth class students were selected as they have more experience of the school, including the 'belief-specific' element in junior classes. Themes discussed with students centred on the school day, RE and friendships. An interview guide was also used for these groups. This article is based primarily on anonymised interview data from principals due to their role as leaders. While school leadership is not solely down to the principal but also Boards of Management, this article focuses on the role of the principal in establishing and maintaining an inclusive school environment. The article also examines trends and patterns throughout the CNS, and does not focus in on any particular school. There were differences in leadership between all 11 schools in the study; some schools were established for a few years while others had opened more recently. The purpose of this article therefore is to report on the commonalities between schools acting under the same ethos.

Key findings

School policy and values

Out of the 11 schools, six principals had been present at the school since it started. These principals were inspired to join the new model as a chance to build a school from scratch, and implement their vision while working within the principles of inclusion and equality. Organising themes and values can connect vision to concrete approaches (Henze et al. 2002), and in CNS these themes are related to school ethos or values, such as 'multi-denominational', 'inclusive' or 'equal'. For many of the principals and teachers these themes helped guide the practice in the school.

One way that schools ensure equality and inclusion is through admissions policies. From the principal questionnaire the most common criteria for admitting students is the 'sibling rule' (72.7%) admitting a child who has an older sibling in the school. After this, residency in the local area and date of application are the next most common, both with 45.5% schools stating this is often or always considered upon application. One school also stated they enforced an 'oldest first' rule, while another required parental acceptance of their 'equality policy'. The admission policies throughout the schools do not require acceptance of a particular religious philosophy. This goes some way to ensuring the inclusivity of all children in the local community to the schools. It is not unusual for Irish primary schools, including Catholic denominational schools, to also cater for an increasingly diverse number of students (Smyth et al. 2009). CNS however emphasise they are schools for the local community and as such all children in the community are welcome.

> A community national school - I think - is embedded in the community, it's about what is in this community, what's this community made up of and let's reflect that in our school (P6)

Principals saw the school model as one for the community, emphasising the community part of their name. As such it became one of the values of the school model, that no child in the community should be excluded from attending the school on the basis of religion or background.

All CNS support the 'celebration of diversity' approach, and this occurs throughout the everyday life of their school, to varying degrees. There can be problems with this approach however, especially when relying on tokenistic gestures of diversity rather than dialogue (Bryan and Bracken 2011). Many of the CNS, during GMGY in particular, defer to the experience and knowledge provided by the children in their classroom and their families in relation to events or certain beliefs. Rather than transmitting knowledge from resources, teachers facilitate discussion among their students. This is embedded in the GMGY programme and curriculum, however principals are proactive in encouraging and assisting this dialogue.

> We have a significant Muslim population in the school, so Eid would be a regular [event], and maybe you might have one or two in other faiths, we have one or two Jehovah Witnesses or one or two Hindu, and therefore that might be [celebrated] on a more class level. Some teachers might say to me well this child is celebrating, can I talk about this at assembly on Friday – [I would say] absolutely! (P9)

Schools include various religious festivals into the school calendar especially those relating to the pupil population. In our research, we found rural schools, with more homogeneous Catholic populations, did not celebrate as many events or learn as much about cultures and religions as the more diverse urban schools. As the GMGY programme encourages children to share these experiences with their classmates and learn from one another, this difference can be attributed to the lack of children from certain backgrounds in the school.

Another way principal's deal with the diversity in their schools is through anti-bullying policies. Information provided in the questionnaires showed that all 11 schools have written policies on religious and cultural discrimination. Overt approaches to tackling racism and bullying were more apparent in some schools than others with displays, messages and posters throughout the school and strong stances taken by principals. In one school in particular, children talked about attending events on tackling racism. In this school, one student commented that their 'principal is on the ground' with regards racism and bullying. When interviewed, the principal explained her approach, which aimed to understand the reasoning behind children's actions or words, and give the child space to discuss the issue.

> It's my way of dealing with conflict, I question them, I try to give everybody the view that, I have a process I use, I follow the code of behaviour, I follow a series of questioning to get to the core of what the problem is, so nobody is judged here until we find out what the real issue is. And through that process of questioning I can peel back the layers like an onion (P5)

Principals accepted that racism and bullying occurred in their schools, however they expressed these were infrequent events. Some principals noted that problems could often be caused by parents rather than children themselves, and related some incidents relating to parental attitudes.

> Not every parent in the school is very happy about [celebrating all cultural events], and we would say as a school we celebrate for each other, we feel happy for each other, it's part of who we are as a school community (P8)

Tying the school's approach to cultural diversity back to the CNS as a model and emphasising diversity as part of the school community (as the principal has stated in the above quote) was a common way to deal with rare parental disagreements. This may be easier for a school established as multi-

denominational rather than denominational, where a particular culture or belief is perceived as taking precedence. This emphasises the importance of ethos to establishing a school culture (Monahan 2000), and shows how ethos, as well as well as having policies in place to uphold school values, can guide the leadership practice in a school.

Recognising cultural diversity

For migrant families, schools may be the first point of contact with the state (Devine 2013). Some schools found they acted as a mediator between families and social services. One principal explains that some families in her school may struggle with new authorities, in areas such as disability and child punishment, which may not be as a child protection issue in home countries. She explains this requires mutual respect between parents and school, with parents needing to 'comply with what the schools ask [of them]'.

> So I have had some difficult conversations with parents around that, and why referrals are made to social workers but nine times out of ten the families have remained in the school, they've remained in contact with us, they've remained engaged with the school because I approach it that manner, that it's the law and it's my duty, and I'm looking after the best needs of your child, and that we'll work with you. (P9)

To support the integration of newcomer children schools sometimes found themselves in the position of providing 'tools' for migrant families. For the child's integration, the school programme of multi-denominational education, and RE with its emphasis on peer learning and inter-belief dialogue, goes some way to increasing the integration of migrant children and Irish children, however the support provided to parents is also important.

Principals also highlight the multi-denominational character of the schools as a driving force for practice. The GMGY programme was the main and most obvious way that this multi-denominational character and inclusive ethos was practiced. In our focus groups we found students demonstrated a good level of knowledge of other religions and cultures as well as strong inter-ethnic and inter-religious friendships. The character of the school however was also found in resources used and wall displays. Many schools have a multi-belief space which incorporates the different beliefs in the school. Maps displaying countries children are from are also displayed in many schools. This is not just for migrant children, as some of the Irish children also had parents or grandparents from another country. One principal explicitly referenced the 'hidden curriculum' as part of creating an inclusive environment reflected in the use of classroom resources and wall displays that were also common throughout the other 11 schools. Inclusion was approached though a reflective process. Principals suggest this process is guided by the principles of respect, inclusion and equality, and we found it was adapted to suit the needs of each schools particular community.

Throughout the schools there was a respect for the multilingualism of children. Some schools provided support for parents in learning English, and most schools showed support for children in retaining their mother-tongue. One school in Dublin provides after-school classes for Polish children, and in many of the schools, home languages are displayed around the school. Another school were very open about their encouragement of children to speak their native tongue, not only for the individual but also as a learning opportunity for Irish children.

> [It's] an understanding and awareness that we're not all just the same – in every way. I find that with my kids, they're suddenly realising the child – because like you see, we don't ask them to speak in English in the class, they can speak whatever – and they suddenly realise that the person besides them speaks Polish and this is new for them. Not everybody goes

> home and speaks in English to their parents. This understanding of life that we're all different and we celebrate that is a really important part of the CNS model. (P10)

The CNS model aims to provide a primary education that is reflective of the diversity of modern Ireland. The support for multilingualism as well as accommodating multi-beliefs was seen by school staff as an important part of living out their ethos of inclusion and respect for diversity. In one school, the principal (P3) has encouraged her entire school to learn Mandarin Chinese. She explains this is due to young children having a better grasp of languages. Having contacts in her last school (a Catholic school), she thought it would be advantageous to her pupils to encourage of love of language learning at an early age.

The recognition of children's multilingualism in CNS is unusual in Ireland, with a general discouraging of native language use in the classroom (McDaid 2011; Author 3 2011), with the exception of Gaelscoileanna (Irish-medium schools) where education is received through Irish. This encouragement is in line with EU recommendations, that the learning of a host language is a way of creating social cohesion, alongside the promotion of the mother-tongue as a way of respecting diversity (Commission of the European Communities 2008).

A strong sense of social cohesion in school is described as the 'quality of relationships' between actors in the school, such as the way 'pupils and teachers treat each other' (Department of Education 2006). The evidence from the CNS model illustrates efforts made by principals and teachers in accommodating needs of their diverse population, and being sensitive to and recognising differences. This has been found through supporting parents in adapting to new circumstances, using the 'hidden curriculum' to build a climate of inclusion in the school and not discouraging children from speaking home languages during the school day.

Leading community national schools forward: challenges and opportunities

In this article we focus on school principals, however they are closely linked with the Boards of Management. There is also regular contact between principals, school managers and the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) through meetings and training sessions. Since its inception the model has evolved as a result of these meetings where issues are brought forward. Principals are largely at the forefront of this change. At the time of research, two schools remained in-keeping with the original junior programme where children are separated for belief-specific teaching (BST) while the majority have suspended this practice. The principals in the schools that have continued with this suggest BST works in their school, and is important to ground children in the 'narrative' of their belief. Other principals however suggest that inter-belief dialogue is difficult to undertake in separate classes. They also expressed concerns that the practice was not equitable as it overlooked the variation and nuances within the religious groupings, and for many they felt the negative press attention received with regards to perceived 'segregation' in RE overlooked the positive impacts the schools were having.

The programme of RE was developed specifically for the CNS model and principals are at the forefront of identifying challenges with the programme and rectifying these. The decision to suspend BST in nine schools was taken by principals, who saw the separation of children into the four belief groups as problematic and ultimately privileging Catholic students. The other groups attempted to accommodate extremely heterogeneous groups: 'Other Christian' included Church of Ireland, Pentecostal and Orthodox, and the 'Other' group included Humanist and no belief students as well as Hindu and Buddhist. Their decision to suspend this teaching is culturally responsive recognising the heterogeneity of non-Catholic groups. It is also an attempt to increase inclusion by teaching children together.

These decisions have resulted in the programme being reviewed with the view to establish a new junior-cycle programme in 2018. One school in particular had a strong resistance to the GMGY junior programme; the principal took the decision to suspend it at an early stage in the model's development. Her school had not begun teaching in the senior curriculum at the time of interviewing, but was due to begin after the Easter break. She has been in consultation with parents to ensure that the issues they had originally were rectified before implementing the senior curriculum. She described the original programme of BST as 'ambitious' but ultimately 'naïve' (P8) in its attempt to provide an equitable RE to multiple faith groups.

To overcome the issues raised by separating children, principals came up with alternative solutions that achieve dialogue in their junior classes. In two schools, there was a pilot approach of mirroring the 'family projects' of the senior curriculum within the junior classes, where children received the belief-specific part of the GMGY programme from their parents rather than school. This ensures children remained together in class. The GMGY programme is a distinctive part of the CNS model, and a standardised approach to teaching children about other faiths and cultures and engaging in inter-faith dialogue would be useful for moving forward with a consistent identity throughout all schools.

Principals acknowledged that teaching of GMGY was delivered in slightly different ways throughout the schools, but the approach was likely to be standardised following review of the junior programme. One area of school practice that was consistently brought up as a challenge to the ethos, and where there were significant differences between schools, was in sacramental preparation for Catholic children. While CNS do not seek to provide religious instruction, they do facilitate communion and confirmation preparation for children from Catholic backgrounds, with the majority of schools facilitating this preparation within the school day to differing degrees. This is part of a stipulation in the early development of the model that required them to provide this preparation for their Catholic children. The majority of principals, however, felt that it led to an unequal provision within their

schools and a privileging of Catholic children (see Authors 1, 2 and 3 forthcoming). The different approaches taken to sacramental preparation was also largely influenced by the relationship with the school's local parish. One school has arranged for sacramental preparation to take place outside the school day, similar to the approach taken by other multi-denominational Educate Together schools. While this was held up as an ideal standard by some schools there were difficulties in arranging similar approaches, which often required significant negotiation with parishes to establish the amount of work required form schools in preparing their Catholic children for the sacraments. In one of the newer schools with only infant classes, which had not started communion preparation at the time of research, the principal would ideally like to provide preparation outside of school hours however he recognises the role the parish will play.

> I've heard [the parish priest] is quite young so I'm hoping he'll be reasonable, but I have heard horror stories from other CNS [sic] schools – [the parish] can be quite dictatorial; they want this, this is how it is, or [the children are] not getting their communion - and I'm really hoping to avoid something like that (P1)

Despite this, principals insist that the level their schools provide are much less than in Catholic schools. Principals also acknowledge however that this is largely an inequitable practice and can present a challenge to the inclusive and equal ethos of their schools by its perception of privileging Catholic students. Their leadership practice in maintaining a culturally inclusive environment is challenged by the external relationship with the parishes and a traditional expectation in Ireland for primary schools to provide for sacramental preparation. At the time of writing however ETBs are considering the removal of sacramental preparation from the school day and establishing a standardised approach throughout the school model.

Discussion and conclusion

This study is the first empirical exploration of leadership in the emerging community national schools (CNS) in Ireland. As part of a wider study that focused on the ways CNS accommodate a diverse student body, this article reports on the role principals, in particular, play in creating and maintaining an inclusive school environment. This is considered through the framework of culturally responsive leadership which highlights important practices leaders can undertake to create inclusive school environments that accommodate students from diverse backgrounds. These practices revolve around recognising and acknowledging differences between students, reflecting diversity in the school curriculum, materials and climate, developing cultural awareness in staff and empowering students and parents (Riehl 2000; Khalifa, Gooden and Davis 2016).

The article highlights the role of principals by presenting data in three main sections that outline school policy and values, how schools recognise and accommodate cultural difference and principals roles in leading the CNS model forward. The extent to which culturally responsive leadership is practiced by principals differs across schools, however this is largely due to the evolving nature of the school model. Nevertheless, schools are driven by an equal and inclusive ethos which goes some way to ensuring the needs of diverse school populations are met. This was found in the creation and implementation of school policies such as admissions criteria, equality policies and bullying/racism policies.

Part of a culturally responsive leader is to recognise differences (Riehl 2000) and promote a culturally responsive and inclusive school environment (Khalifa, Gooden and Davis 2016). Differences in cultural practice, religion and language formed part of the everyday life in the schools. The majority of principals in CNS are reflective of the needs of their students and families. The CNS model places an emphasis on being multi-denominational, however we also found that principals encouraged a multilingualism in their schools which contributes to the inclusion of children from non-English language speaking backgrounds. Cultural responsiveness is also present in materials used in teaching and throughout the school such as through beliefs walls and classroom resources.

The final data section highlighted the challenges and opportunities for the CNS model going forward. The model is evolving and as such this study can provide only a snapshot of where an emerging model of education is at the present moment. Principals have a strong role to play in ensuring their schools are inclusive and integrative, however the supportive infrastructure provided by the ETBs and Boards of Management also assists in upholding the schools' overall ethos. The degree to which principals can practise cultural responsiveness is also challenged by external requirements. The obligation to provide sacramental preparation challenges the ethos of equality and inclusivity by privileging Catholic children and this highlights the bounded agency of principals. While principals negotiate the degree to which their school facilitates this preparation, the practice is not even throughout the 11 schools in our study and requires a leadership approach beyond principals alone.

A well-defined school ethos has been shown to guide leadership practice. The focus on principals in this study may overlook other important aspects of leadership so further research taking into account the role of the management boards as well as the ETBs may be useful for more in-depth exploration of leadership in CNS.

School leaders need to be fully aware of the implications and challenges of managing a culturally and religiously diverse educational establishment. They also need to engage more with their staff to promote the values of a culturally responsive pedagogy with a view of including all minority ethnic children. Such an approach is valued and important in both urban and rural areas, as shown in our study. The fact that some schools are proportionally less diverse than others should not deter school leaders from advocating inclusive and culturally responsive approaches, because they are educating the next generation of youth who will work and operate on the global stage in diverse work environments where they need to display intercultural awareness and understanding.

References

Agosto, V., L. Dias, N. Kaiza, P. A. McHatton and D. Elam. 2013. "Culture-based leadership and preparation: A qualitative meta-synthesis of the literature." In *Handbook of Research on Educational Leadership for Equity and Diversity* edited by Linda C. Tillman and James Joseph Scheurich, 625–650. New York: Routledge.

Bazron, B., D. Osher and S. Fleischman. 2005. "Research Matters/Creating Culturally Responsive Schools." *Educational Leadership* 63 (1): 83-84.

Bryan, A. and M. Bracken. 2011. "'They think the book is right and I am wrong': Intercultural education and the positioning of ethnic minority pupils in the formal and informal curriculum." In *The Changing Faces of Ireland: Exploring Lives of Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Children,* edited by Merike Darmody, Naomi Tyrrell and Steve Song, 105-124 Rotterdam: Sense.

Carbonaro, W. and E. Covay. 2010. "School sector and student achievement in the era of standards based reforms." *Sociology of Education* 83 (2): 160-182.

Central Statistics Office. 2012. "Population and Migration Estimates: April 2012." Dublin: Central Statistics Office.

Central Statistics Office. 2017. *Census 2016 Summary Results – Part 1*. Cork: Central Statistics Office.

Commission of the European Communities. 2008. Green paper of 3 July 2008 'Migration and mobility: challenges and opportunities for EU education systems', available at http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:ef0002.

Darmody, M., N. Tyrrell and S. Song Eds. 2011. *The Changing Faces of Ireland: Exploring Lives of Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Children.* Rotterdam: Sense.

Darmody, M., E. Smyth and S. McCoy 2012. *School Sector Variation among Primary Schools in Ireland*. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.

Department of Education. 2006. Guidelines towards a positive policy for school behaviour and discipline, circular M33/91. Available at http://www.asti.ie/pay-and-conditions/department-circulars/articles/circular-article/m3391-guidelines-towards-a-positive-policy-for-schools-behaviour-and-discipline/

Devine, D. 2013. "Practising leadership in newly multi-ethnic schools: tensions in the field?" *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 34 (3): 391–411.

Dronkers, J. and S. Avram 2015. "What can international comparisons teach us about school choice and non-governmental schools in Europe?" *Comparative Education* 51(1): 118-132.

Gardiner, M. E. and E. K. Enomoto. 2006. "Urban school principals and their role as multicultural leaders." *Urban Education* 41 (6): 560–584.

Gay, G. 1994. "Coming of age ethnically: Teaching young adolescents of color." *Theory into Practice* 33(3): 149–155.

Gay, G. 2010. *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*. New York: Teacher College Press.

Goddard, J. T. and A. C. Hart. 2007. "School leadership and equity: Canadian elements" School Leadership and Management 27 (1): 7-20.

Henze, R., A. M. Katz, E. Norte, S. Sather and E. Walker. 2002. *Leading for Diversity: A Study of How School Leaders Achieve Racial and Ethnic Harmony.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Henkel, R. and H. Knippenberg. 2005. "Secularisation and the rise of religious pluralism: main features of the changing religious landscape of Europe." In *The Changing Religious Landscape of Europe* edited by Hans Knippenberg, 1-13, Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.

Johansson, O., A. Davis and L. Geijer. 2007. "A perspective on diversity, equality and equity in Swedish schools" *School Leadership and Management* 27 (1): 21-33.

Johnson, L. 2014. "Culturally responsive leadership for community empowerment." *Multicultural Education Review* 6(2): 145–170.

Johnson, L. and C. Fuller. 2014. *Culturally Responsive Leadership*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Khalifa, M. A., M. A. Gooden and J. E. Davis. 2016. “Culturally responsive school leadership: a synthesis of the literature.” *Review of Educational Research* 86 (4): 1272-1311.

Ladson-Billings, G. 1994. *The Dreamkeepers*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishing Co.

Magno, C. and M. Schiff. 2010. “Culturally responsive leadership: best practice in integrating immigrant students.” *Intercultural Education* 21 (1): 87-91.

McDaid, R. 2011. “GŁOS, VOCE, VOICE: Minority language children reflect on the recognition of their first languages in Irish Primary Schools.” In *The Changing Faces of Ireland: Exploring Lives of Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Children* edited by Merike Darmody, Naomi Tyrrell and Steve Song, 17-34, Rotterdam: Sense.

Merry, M.S. 2015. “The conundrum of religious schools in twenty-first-century Europe.” *Comparative Education* 51(1): 133-156.

Monahan, L. 2000. “School Culture and Ethos-Partners for the New Millennium.” In *School Culture and Ethos: Cracking the Code* edited by Catherine Furlong and Luke Monahan, Marino Institute of Education.

Morris, A. 2010. “Leadership, management and pupils’ academic attainment: reviewing the association within the Catholic Sector 1993–2007.” *Education Management, Administration and Leadership* 38(6): 679–693.

Mugisha, V. M. 2013. “Culturally responsive instructional leadership: a conceptual exploration with principals of three New Zealand mainstream schools.” *International Journal of Multicultural Education* 15(2): 1-20.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment. 2005. “Intercultural Education in the Primary School: Guidelines for Schools.” Dublin: NCCA.

Olneck, M. R. 2004. “Immigrants and Education in the United States.” In Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education, edited by J. A. Banks and C. A. M. Banks, 381-403, New York: Macmillan.

Patrikios, S., and J. Curtice 2014. “Attitudes towards School Choice and Faith Schools in the UK: A Question of Individual Preference or Collective Interest?” *Journal of Social Policy* 43(3): 517-534.

Perso, T. 2012. “Cultural Responsiveness and School Education: With Particular Focus on Australia’s First Peoples”. Menzies School of Health Research, Centre for Child Development and Education, Darwin Northern Territory.

Pont, B., D. Nusche and H. Moorman. 2008. *Improving School Leadership. Volume 1: Policy and Practice.* Paris: OECD.

Riehl, C. J. 2000. “The principal’s role in creating inclusive schools for diverse students: A review of normative, empirical, and critical literature on the practice of educational administration.” *Review of Educational Research* 70 (1): 55–81.

RTE news. 2015. “State gave commitments to Catholic Church on education”, November 10. https://www.rte.ie/news/special-reports/2012/0328/315388-educationfoi/

Santamaria, L. J. 2013. “Critical change for the greater good: Multicultural perceptions in educational leadership toward social justice and equity.” *Educational Administration Quarterly* 50 (3): 347-391.

Schwartz, K. D. 2006. “Transformations in parent and friend faith support predicting adolescents’ religious faith.” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 16 (4): 311–326.

Smyth, E., M. Darmody, F. McGinnity and D. Byrne. 2009. Adapting to Diversity : Irish Schools and Newcomer Students. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.

Smyth, E., M. Lyons and M. Darmody Eds. 2013. *Religious Education in a Multicultural Europe*. Dublin: Palgrave.

Stevens, P. and G, Dworkin, G. Eds. 2014. *The Palgrave Handbook of Race and Ethnic Inequalities in Education*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Triandafyllidou, A. and R. Gropas, R. Eds. 2014. *European Immigration: A Sourcebook*. Farnham: Ashgate.

Triandafyllidou, A., T. Modood and N. Meer 2011. *European Multiculturalisms: Cultural, Religious and Ethnic Challenges*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Van Driel, B., M. Darmody and J. Kerzil. 2016. *Education Policies and Practices to Foster Tolerance, Respect for Diversity and Civic Responsibility in Children and Young People in the EU, NESET II report.* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.

Wells, A. S., L. Fox and D. Cordova-Cobo. 2016. "How racially diverse schools and classrooms can benefit all students." *The Education Review Digest* 82 (1): 17.

Weisse, W. 2010. "REDCo: A European research project on religion in education." *Religion & Education* 37 (3): 187-202.

Wlodkowski, R. J., and M. B. Ginsberg. 1995. *Diversity and Motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Table 1: Primary schools in Ireland in 2017

School type	Number	Percentage
Denominational	**3,004**	**96**
Catholic (including Gaelscoileanna)	2,808	89.8
Church of Ireland	175	5.6
Other Christian	17	0.5
Muslim	3	0.1
Jewish	1	0.03
Multi-denominational	**108**	**3.4**
Educate Together	81	2.6
Community National Schools	12	0.4
Irish medium (Gaelscoileanna)	10	0.3
Other	5	0.2
Inter-denominational (Gaelscoileanna)	**18**	**0.6**
Total	**3,130**	**100**

Source: Adapted from www.education.ie