



From the *what* to the *how* of change.
***A study on the effectiveness of boys' secondary Catholic schools in Malta
and their improvement***

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Abstract

This study starts out from the ideas of School Effectiveness Research, which analyses the impact of schools on students. Although these ideas have been contested, this school of thought provides the necessary background to see if boys' secondary Catholic schools in Malta are effective and how this effectiveness can be improved.

Adopting an interpretivist and constructivist paradigm, and a mainly qualitative method, this study carried out interviews with all ten headteachers of boys' secondary Catholic schools in Malta and Gozo, sent questionnaires to students, parents and teachers, and lastly, carried out a personal reflection, while also analysing official Church documents with the aim of highlighting the main themes which make a boys' Catholic secondary school effective. Notwithstanding the fact that the general perception of people is that Catholic schools in the Maltese islands are effective, which is also attested by the main stakeholders in this study, some key areas for improvement within the same schools are also underlined.

The main conclusions of this study point towards a new discourse in Catholic school effectiveness, where such effectiveness is not measured primarily by tangible results, but more in terms of a vision, mission, and values, concepts which, although found in all types of schools, may yet provide the measurement against which Catholic school effectiveness can be determined. This points towards the potential for improvement, with suggestions for improvement in Catholic schools being made.

As a result of this research, a number of recommendations are made, including those relating to spiritual formation for families, for educators and staff, and also for persons in key roles in schools, together with the challenge of striving each day to be authentic in the everyday life of the school.

Dedication

*To my family,
especially my parents David and Marlene
who are my first educators,
and to my nephew Gianluca,
who is still reaping the benefits
of Catholic education.*

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Declaration

I, the author, confirm that this Thesis is my own work. I am aware of the University's Guidance on the Use of Unfair Means (www.sheffield.ac.uk/ssid/unfair-means). This work has not been previously presented for an award at this, or any other, university.

Jürgen Cucciardi

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Motivation of this Study – My Journey

Being a member of a religious order and a priest, my main academic background was Theology. In my years of formation for the priesthood, between 1996 and 2002, I read for a Bachelor's degree in Sacred Theology at the University of Malta. Then, back in the year 2004, after finishing my Licentiate in Pastoral Theology at the same university, my superiors asked me to carry on with my studies and focus on education, since they wanted me to be prepared academically, so that when the right time came, I would be able to assume the role of headteacher at the school of the Carmelite friars in Malta. In fact, after looking for some courses abroad, I enrolled for the Master of Arts in School Effectiveness and School Improvement, at the Institute of Education, which at the time was affiliated with the University of London in the United Kingdom.

During the course, which lasted for one year, I became acquainted with the concept of school effectiveness, and was always wondering how these notions could be applied to Catholic schools, and specifically to the ones in Malta. I took the opportunity to become familiar with existing literature on Catholic education and Catholic schools' effectiveness, and how the notion of effectiveness was applied to various educational systems worldwide. However, during the course of my research, I realised that while there exist studies on Catholic education in different countries, there were no specific studies on the effectiveness of Catholic schools in the Maltese islands. Existent studies range from analyses of Catholic education in general, such as that by Groome (1996), to investigations on Catholic school

effectiveness in some countries, with authors like Grace (2002, 2002a) analysing schools in the United Kingdom.

Even though the years passed, and for a quite long period of time I was away from research due to my first years as a headteacher, at the back of my mind there was always the idea of pursuing a study on this notion. By this time, while still being interested in this kind of literature, I had become more acquainted with Catholic schools, having been working in a Catholic school myself, six years as a teacher, including two in the role of school chaplain, and from 2011 onwards as head of school. Throughout these last years I also started to question myself on what is needed in the school and what could be done. During these years, I always pondered on the questions: Are we doing enough for our school to be effective? Are we maintaining the particular characteristics of a Catholic school? What can we do to improve all aspects of our educational programme?

This led me to start thinking of resuming my studies, with my focus on Catholic school effectiveness in the Maltese islands. My initial idea was to analyse the effectiveness of Catholic schools in Malta. Even though in general people speak of Catholic schools as being effective, this study will investigate different elements of effectiveness in order to have an understanding of the broader concept (of effectiveness). Yet, since improvement is very much linked to effectiveness, I thought that the idea of effectiveness could lead me as a researcher to see in which areas Catholic schools need improvement. Since, as we shall see in this study, Catholic school effectiveness does not necessarily strictly follow the rules of school effectiveness research in general, we have to speak more about the ethos and the values which make up Catholic schools. School effectiveness and school improvement, in our times and with reference to Catholic schools, may be linked to the fact that the presence of religious persons in schools is dwindling. If Catholic school effectiveness can be seen in a school's ethos and values, when there are fewer religious persons present, how can a Catholic ethos

and values still permeate Catholic schools? As Sultmann and Brown (2014), with reference to Catholic schools' identity in Australia, explain, Catholic schools' staff profiles have changed considerably, something which surely needs consideration in the light of formation in the faith. Moreover, the Bishops of the United States (2005) insist that since only a small minority of clerical or religious persons are present in schools, formation of lay people in Catholic schools is crucial if we want to maintain the identity of all aspects of life in a Catholic school. Mifsud (2010, p. 59), states that, from his research with headteachers, some fear emerged: "Seeing that many Catholic schools are no longer run by religious headteachers, there is the fear that the schools will lose their Catholic ethos to accommodate the market ideals." To consider this issue, recently, the Secretariat for Catholic Education in Malta (2020), together with the Church Schools Association, initiated a study in which these questions are asked: How and to what extent are religious orders planning for the sustained continuation of their charism at their respective school as part of the wider Church schools' mission? Which strategies are deemed to be most effective in sustaining the Church schools' different charisms and ethos, as well as common mission? These questions are answered to a certain extent in my study.

1.2 The Aim of this Research

From this motivation follows the aim of this study. There are two main components: School effectiveness and Catholic education. This research asks: To what extent can we say that Catholic schools are effective? This study does not aim to apply Catholicity to school effectiveness literature or vice versa. Rather, this analysis endeavours to see how Catholic schools can be effective, practically by means of a new discourse of Catholic effectiveness. This means that, as we shall see, we cannot stick to the specific elements of the School Effectiveness Movement in analysing the effectiveness of Catholic schools, but we have to

look much deeper into non-quantifiable aspects which will lead us to speak of effective Catholic schools which realise their true mission in the formation of students. It is interesting to note what Kolvenbach (2000) states in relation to Jesuit universities (even though this can be applied to Catholic education in general):

The real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become. We must therefore raise our Jesuit educational standard to “educate the whole person of solidarity for the real world.” ... When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change. Personal involvement with innocent suffering, with the injustice others suffer, is the catalyst for solidarity which then gives rise to intellectual inquiry and moral reflection.

As Cook and Ostrowski (n.d., p. 3) say, “for Catholic schools, measuring academic achievement represents only part of the equation for assessing mission effectiveness.” This relates to some important questions that this thesis asks: What do we understand by Catholic school effectiveness? What are the elements which make up effectiveness in Catholic schools? What is the distinctiveness of Catholic schools? How can Catholic school effectiveness persevere in times when religious values are declining and in a situation where Church attendance is decreasing? These questions, in practice, were merged into the main research question of this thesis: How can the effectiveness of Catholic schools in Malta be improved?

The title of this research, *From the What to the How of Change*, stems from the ideas of School Effectiveness and School Improvement, where *what* relates to effectiveness, while *how* refers to improvement, as Stoll and Fink (2003, pp. xii-xiii) assert. With reference to this study, the *what* refers to what is being done in Catholic schools in Malta in relation to effectiveness and what difference schools are making to the lives of their students and communities, while the *how* speaks of how improvement is or should be taking place. In the

main part of this research, when discussing the data collected, I speak firstly of effectiveness, and how different stakeholders envisage effectiveness in a Catholic school, after which I will discuss improvement.

Through answering the research question, this study aims at providing a detailed study of: (i) *what* we mean by Catholic school effectiveness; (ii) *how* this effectiveness is realised in boys' Catholic secondary schools in Malta; and (iii) *how* improvement can make its impact felt on the same schools. The answer will be given through analysing and discussing the data which was collected throughout the course of this project (interviews with Catholic school headteachers, including a personal reflection; questionnaires sent to parents, students, and teachers; and documents relating to education produced by the Catholic Church) in the light of existent secondary literature.

1.3 Catholic Education: Context and Defining Key Terms

1.3.1 The Identity of Catholic Schools

The most recent Vatican-issued document on Catholic education (2022) insists once again on the unique identity of Catholic schools. This insistence might be due to the various realities around the globe which affect the situation of Catholic schools, where some schools might be losing some aspects of their Catholicity. To a certain extent, this document puts together all the ideas which appear in previous Church documents, especially from the document *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) onwards. From this 2022 document, it seems that the issue of Catholic schools which might be losing their identity and Catholicity is of great concern in the universal discussion on Catholic education. It highlights some “fundamental principles”, which include the responsibility of parents to make the right choice in their children's education; the Church's call to educate; ongoing development of educators; support and collaboration between

parents and educators; and the community aspect of the school. Moreover, the document (2022, par. 17) speaks of the responsibility of the Congregation for Catholic Education which, from time to time,

has dedicated a number of documents to deepening important aspects of education in particular, the permanent profile of Catholic identity in a changing world; the responsibility of the witness of lay and consecrated teachers and school leaders; the dialogical approach to a multicultural and multi-religious world.

As we shall see throughout this work, many of the points raised in this new document relate closely to the themes which came out of the data collected in this study.

One aspect which will not be discussed in any detail in this thesis, since it was not mentioned in the data collected, is the approach of Catholic schools in Malta to the multicultural and multi-religious world. Pope Francis (*L'Osservatore Romano*, 2022), in a conference on education of migrants and refugees, insisted that “every educational institution is called to be a place of welcome, protection or accompaniment, promotion and integration for all, to the exclusion of none.” This area might not have been chosen as a prominent theme in the research, since, although there are aspects of multiculturalism in Malta, especially with the growing number of refugees coming to Malta, and with mixed marriages, it does not seem to be a great issue in Catholic schools. Although no statistical data for non-Maltese students in Catholic schools is at hand, there might only be a handful of students from different cultural or religious backgrounds (rather than Maltese) in Catholic schools. However, this aspect should still be taken into consideration, since as the Congregation for Catholic Education (2022, par. 30) states: “because of its ecclesial nature, the Catholic school shares this element as constitutive of its identity.” Even though this aspect is not that visible in all schools, I am aware that in one particular school, a programme was launched so that students from different faiths can meet, share experiences, and discuss ideas. It is not intended as a

way to convince other students to join the same faith, rather it is a space where students can live together despite their different backgrounds. Unfortunately, in the last months, this programme was stopped due to divergences between the friars on the school board and the school leadership. Following this, in a meeting with the school's educators, the Archbishop of Malta noted that he desired that Catholic schools would realise such programmes of inclusivity (Archdiocese of Malta, 9 August 2022). In the future, due to the increasing number of people from different faiths and backgrounds coming to Malta, the issue of Catholic schools in the Maltese islands and their relation to multiculturalism might merit a study on its own.

For a Catholic school to maintain its identity and progress in it, there needs to be mutual cooperation between all the personnel that form part of the school. In fact, the same Vatican document (2022, par. 38) states that “the whole school community is responsible for implementing the school's Catholic educational project as an expression of its ecclesiality and its being a part of the community of the Church.” This means that the administration, educators, workers, students, and their parents are to contribute to the schools' mission. Moreover, this will lead us to reflect on a new reality in Catholic schools, where religious persons are relinquishing their management roles in schools, leaving such roles in the hands of the laity, although the religious persons' presence in schools will remain vital. In the current circumstances, where the number of lay persons running Catholic schools is on the rise, while the school remains the property of the religious orders or the diocese, religious persons should be able to maintain the ethos and charism of the school by way of making significant contributions to the mission of the same school. On the other hand, lay persons should do their best to preserve the same ethos and mission, in collaboration with the religious persons responsible for the school. Moreover, schools should have the roles of governing, administrative, and leadership persons clearly defined.

In Catholic education, very often one hears repeatedly of mission, vision and values; these are words which, although they also are heard in relation to every educational institution, are perceived by the general public in such a way that they seem to be more peculiar to Catholic schools. In fact, during the interviews, the majority of headteachers spoke about this idea. In schools, a mission statement highlights the purpose of the institution; a vision statement speaks of what the school aims to realise or what it wants to develop into; while a values statement reflects the particular values and beliefs of the school which emerge from the mission and the vision statement. All schools, not only faith schools, highlight their own mission, vision and values since they provide the foundation for their effectiveness. Frequently, throughout this study, I insist that unlike school effectiveness research in general, elements of effectiveness in Catholic schooling cannot be measured in a statistical sense. In fact, in their work on Catholic schools, Cook and Ostrowski (n.d., p. 6) emphasise that:

Many school communities struggle with concretely defining what is being measured in terms of religious mission and identifying the best ways to do so. What is meant by such nebulous and potentially ambiguous terms as “mission”, “spirituality”, “Catholicity”? These characteristics are harder to measure than academic outcomes. Does the academic framework fit? Are we imposing something that does not fit? What data will best measure a school’s efforts in promoting these attributes? Who should be involved in this process? Students? Faculty? Staff? Parents? Alumni? Answers to these questions are essential from the onset, and they provide the foundation and framework for any study of mission effectiveness.

However, looking at the mission, the vision, and the values which are promoted in Catholic schools, one can still speak of the effectiveness and improvement of these schools if the definition of effectiveness is adjusted, as will be examined later in this thesis.

Throughout this study, Catholic education is seen as an expression of the same mission of Jesus Christ. It can be understood in a two-fold manner: (i) a way of evangelisation and formation; and (ii) a preferential option for the poor.

1.3.2 A Way of Evangelisation and Formation

Stemming from the words of Christ to proclaim the Gospels to all nations (Mt 28:18-20), the Church uses various means for evangelisation. The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977, par. 7) says that “evangelisation is, therefore, the mission of the Church; that is, she must proclaim the good news of salvation to all, generate new creatures in Christ through Baptism, and train them to live knowingly as children of God.” While there are traditional forms of proclaiming the Good News, such as preaching and catechesis, Catholic schools are places where evangelisation and human and religious formation can take place. Referring to the same document (1977, par. 26), Morris (1998, p. 96) says that Catholic schools

are based on a philosophy in which faith, culture and contemporary life are brought in harmony, the Catholic Church describes their fundamental purpose as being: a place of integral formation by means of a systematic and critical assimilation of culture ... a privileged place in which, through a living encounter with a cultural inheritance, integral formation occurs.

In this way, Catholic schools provide for an experience which connects a number of different aims, which point to the holistic formation of students.

These ideas lead us to speak of a Catholic school as a physical space where encounters occur. These encounters happen firstly with one’s own self, since there is formation of the whole human person. As an example, I can mention the mission statement of my own school which states that:

The aim of School M is to form a learning community where each individual is considered a child of God. Within a family framework, each individual has a unique value, irrespective of one's capabilities and achievements. In this manner, each individual can attain full growth through experiences, which are academic, athletic, religious, creative, cultural and social.

Moreover, students meet other colleagues who contribute to the wellbeing of each other.

Schools are also a place of encounter with God, where students are encouraged to enter into a relationship with him.

1.3.3 A Preferential Option for the Poor

Looking at the early stages of Catholic education, it is clearly noted that various religious congregations were set up to educate poor people who could not afford any other type of education. Referring to the US, Grace (2002, p. 87) states that:

religious orders in inner-city schooling have represented a 'strategic subsidy' in the 'option for the poor' educational mission. Religious orders and teaching orders have provided spiritual, cultural and economic capital for poor communities and a supply of school personnel at both leadership and classroom levels.

This is also reflected in other denominations' contributions to education and to the role of religious orders in education worldwide.

Although the way we understand the notion of 'the poor' has changed, and there have been other arrangements made by local authorities for those who are in need of education, unfortunately, due to the way students are enrolled in a Catholic school, this preferential option does not seem to remain so much in force. In Malta, the government provides free education in state schools, including various educational provisions, such as books, while providing free school transport to all students in all schools. Catholic schools, on the other

hand, still provide students from poorer backgrounds with the various necessities they need for education, while keeping an eye open for students with disadvantaged backgrounds to be able to join the same schools.

An important point is made by the Congregation for Catholic Education (2022, par. 10): “the educational action pursued by the Church through schools cannot be reduced to mere philanthropic work aimed at responding to a social need, but represents an essential part of her identity and mission,” with the Church having a specific function in education, as we shall see in the discussion of official Church documents on education.

Some important questions which one can think about here are: Who are the poor today? Do we still have to think of the poor as those persons who are deprived of food and education? Today, various non-governmental organisations speak of new forms of poverty. These include persons with difficult social backgrounds, children who are neglected by their parents, students who go home after school and have no one available for them, and students whose parents have different priorities in the upbringing of their children. Besides these cases, in the Covid-19 aftermath, we can speak of families who have lost their work and income, and persons left mentally devastated, together with a number of students who were left behind due to school closures. At this point, we can reflect on the questions: What is the Catholic Church doing for these persons? In particular, how are Catholic schools catering for these children? A popular discourse, which is not written anywhere but is repeated among Catholic school leaders' circles, is the fact that such students, who can be considered as the new poor of today, might find at school the family which they do not have and the home they feel comfortable in for a number of hours in the day.

1.4 Catholic School Effectiveness

It follows then that the main theme of this study is Catholic School Effectiveness. When one hears of the idea of school effectiveness, one immediately makes a link to a set of ideas which were discussed from the 1960s onwards, as long-held beliefs about the positive effect of schools on children were put into doubt. These ideas tend to belong to a neo-liberal philosophy which influenced the principles of school effectiveness (Carney, 2003). There have been studies around the globe which examine the effectiveness of Catholic schools in relation to this kind of effectiveness. For example, a study by Vella (1999, p. 208) refers to the impact of Catholic schools in the United States, since “recent empirical investigations of students in the United States education system have revealed that attendance at Catholic schools has a positive and substantial impact effect on academic achievement,” and asks whether the same evidence exists in Australia. In their study, Altonji, Elder and Taber (2005, p. 151), “measure the effect of Catholic high school attendance on educational attainment and test scores.” However, as my own study will suggest, Catholic school effectiveness does not necessarily need to be strongly linked to this school of thought which calculates academic achievements. In general, school effectiveness research takes into account tangible, measurable things about schools. We can mention academic results as a good example. Academic results are something which can be measured. Day et al. (2016, p. 223) acknowledge “that measurable outcomes of students’ academic progress and achievement are key indicators in identifying school ‘effectiveness’.” On the other hand, when we speak of Catholic schools and their effectiveness, there are things which cannot be quantified, even though the majority of people, seeing things from outside, put much value on what appears to be good, such as academic results and the way students grow up in a disciplined manner. However, in reality, this does not constitute the effectiveness of Catholic schools. When asked, interviewees in this study put more emphasis on other things, such as mission, ethos

and values, things which cannot be scientifically measured, but are still felt in Catholic schools. In fact, Morris (1998, p. 90) says that:

the following areas would seem to be fundamental in seeking to understand the functioning and effectiveness of schools in a Catholic context:

- the nature of the school community and of the communities that they serve
- the nature of Catholic culture and its interaction with the culture of the schools
- the nature and forms of social control that are exercised within the schools.

In such a way, throughout this project, looking closely at Catholic boys' secondary schools in the Maltese islands, I have tried to elicit what in fact constitutes the character of the Catholic school and how it is lived.

This study, then, will enable us to have a clearer idea of Catholic School Effectiveness. Throughout this work, as the Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools (2021, p. 6) affirm,

Effective Catholic schools draw on a range of evidence to measure the learning growth, progress, and improvement of every student and to determine where to go next. School effectiveness, however, moves beyond a sole consideration of academic outcomes. Enacting the vision for Catholic education to equip our young people with the knowledge, skills, hope and optimism to live meaningful lives and shape and enrich the world around them provides the focus for school improvement and the relative processes. The integration of faith, intellect and human development is an ambitious hope-filled goal, based on the experience of God's love and care for us all.

1.5 The Approach to this Study

This study took a four-fold approach in the collection of data: interviews; questionnaires; documentary analysis; and a personal reflection. This research took into consideration Catholic secondary schools of boys only.

The first stage of data collection was to interview the ten headteachers of Catholic boys' secondary schools in the Maltese islands, all of whom accepted the invitation to participate in this study. For the purpose of anonymity, during the study, the participating schools were randomly given a number from 1 to 10. After the interviews, for the second stage, I asked the same headteachers to distribute hard copies of a questionnaire to students and teachers, while asking them to send an email to parents with a link for an online questionnaire. The third phase came about after realising that since my own school was not represented in the interviews, and to have a complete picture of all boys' secondary Catholic schools, there was the need for my input, thus putting it in the form of a personal reflection. For analysis, I chose thematic analysis, which themes I derived firstly from the interviews with headteachers and from the official documents of the Catholic Church, which serve as primary literature.

During these phases, ethical issues were also addressed, which included a guarantee of anonymity, and no access by any other person to the data collected.

1.6 The Structure of this Thesis

This thesis is divided into eight chapters, including the Introduction (chapter 1) and the Conclusion (chapter 8). The chapters in between move from giving the context, to a literature review to the methodology, and to the main part of this study which is the discussion and analysis of the data collected.

Chapter 2 provides the context by speaking of the education system in the Maltese islands. It gives an historical overview of education in Malta, starting before the arrival of the Knights of Saint John in the islands, until recent developments in education in Malta. This section also highlights the development and establishment of Catholic schools in the islands. Then, Chapter 3 delves into existing literature on the subject of study. The literature review is split into two main sections: (i) School Effectiveness and School Improvement; and (ii) Catholic School Ethos, Mission and Effectiveness. The first section speaks of School Effectiveness and School Improvement in general. Although this section provides a background to this research, one should state from the beginning that while this study seeks to answer how Catholic schools in Malta can be improved, yet, for Catholic schools to be effective or successful, they should not stick to the ideology of school effectiveness only, but should look for other aspects which make a Catholic school successful. The second section attempts to define effectiveness and specifically how it relates to Catholic schools. In particular, this section deals with the role of religion in education, since religion has played a powerful role in education throughout the world. It also discusses the role of religious orders, their charism, and the ethos which members of religious congregations pass on to their schools. An important aspect of Catholic education, that of the preferential option of the poor, is discussed in more detail, while also seeing how Catholic schools could be distinctive.

The fourth chapter focuses on the methodology used in this research. This chapter seeks to justify the way this study was developed, discussing in detail my own perspectives and my own position, while also relating the context of this study, the method, the procedure and the tools used in the collection of data, the approach taken in the analysis, and finally the ethical issues raised in this research.

Chapter 5 will present, analyse, and discuss the data collected. This chapter can be seen as the major part of this study, since it focuses on the answers collected from the

interviews with Catholic school headteachers and from questionnaires distributed to students, parents, and educators. In large part, it was through analysing the interviews that I was able to bring to the fore the main themes of the research. The various themes which I believed were the main ideas from the data collected provide the basis for the whole discussion which takes place in this study.

Chapter 6 is closely linked to the previous chapter, since, as a personal reflection, it speaks of my own experiences as a head of school. Answering the same questions as the interviewees did, in this section I tried to construct my own experiences into a discussion to provide further insight into the research question, thus providing a fully rounded view of all headteachers of secondary Catholic schools for boys in the Maltese islands.

The next chapter provides a discussion of the teaching of the Catholic Church on education. At first, this might look like part of the literature review; however, since the main focus of the chapter is an analysis of documents produced by the Church Magisterium or other groups, it is closely linked to the data analysis chapters since, in itself, this chapter speaks of the same themes which I gave weight to when analysing the data collected.

The last chapter will provide a summary and conclusions as derived from the whole study. While looking at the main conclusions, this chapter will consider some of the limitations of this study and recommendations for further research, while emphasising that this project does not end with this thesis, and suggests the way forward.

Chapter 2

THE CONTEXT

2.1 The Education System in the Maltese Islands

2.1.1 An Historical Overview of Education in Malta

While it is not the aim of this study to give a detailed history of education in Malta, it is worth noting the historical background since there exists a link between the beginning of education in Malta and religion in general. Moreover, as we can see, the Catholic Church proved to be a key role player in education. The same history provided a solid foundation for the establishment of Catholic schools as we know them today.

Although the history of education in Malta goes back many hundreds of years, for much of this period, the majority of the people of the islands had little or no access to education. While education was not seen as a priority, the main focus of attention for people was feeding and bringing up their families. Furthermore, many thought that children, who eventually would lead a life of manual work, did not need to learn in an academic way (Xerri, 2016). With reference to the relative lack of importance placed upon education in these times, Xerri, referring to Manuel Dimech, states that people in general did not aspire to hold any particular rights, among which is education, while accepting unquestioningly their inferior state in life and looking at educated people with fear.

If, worldwide, religion had a central role in the beginning and establishing of education, the same holds true for Malta. In fact, Calleja (1994) states that while the history of education in Malta can be traced back to the Arab rule (870-1091), when religious orders came to Malta, it was predominantly a religious type of education that was taught. Being subject to foreign rulers, different policies in education were developed over the succeeding

centuries. However, these policies were made clearer after Malta obtained independence in 1964, and especially after the publication of the first Education Act in 1988, various measures were discussed and put into practice by persons responsible for education, in particular, the Directors of Education. The main education policies in existence today were issued in the last 25 years, as will be discussed later on in this chapter.

The historical aspect of education in the Maltese islands will be discussed in four parts:

- i. Unstructured early education (before the arrival of the Knights in Malta in 1530).
- ii. The start of a structured education (from the arrival of the Knights of Malta until the beginning of British rule).
- iii. Education in colonial Malta (from 1800 until Malta was granted independence in 1964).
- iv. Education after independence (from 1964 to the present).

2.1.1.1 Unstructured Early Education (Pre-Knights before 1530)

Dalli (2001) states that, while the Byzantine rule in Malta between the sixth and ninth centuries is practically undocumented and no clear reference is made to education or to culture, there is some evidence from the Norman times (from 1091 onwards) that education was valued. This can be seen from some poetry and items made by skilled craftsmen. On the other hand, Islam seems to have been rooted in the life of the Maltese islands. However, little is known about the education of the general public in this period. The author goes on to say that education in the fifteenth century was linked to a certain class of people in whose hands the control of local administration lay. For Dalli 'formal', but not 'structured', education was associated with the Municipal Grammar School, the Cathedral Church Music School, and

private schools. On the other hand, 'informal' education referred to the skills of a trade or craft transferred from father to son.

The Municipal Grammar School (1461-1560), the first record of which dates back to 1461, was the only educational institution which was publicly funded, and attended by both clerical and lay students. It seems that this school was founded by the rulers of the time, where the schoolmaster was to be paid from municipal funds, that is, the town council, while some students were provided a sort of scholarship from the Cathedral Church.

The Cathedral Church Music School, as its name suggests, was founded by the Cathedral church. The first reference to it dates back to 1515, and its main activity was teaching organ-playing and choir music to young members of the clergy. It seems that this school employed professional scribes to copy liturgical books.

Private schoolmasters were local teachers who ran some sort of school, teaching little children how to read and write. Since these schoolmasters were private and unsalaried, little information about them can be found, and there is no idea as to how many schoolmasters took upon themselves the role of education in this period. According to Dalli (2001), there are no records of private schoolmasters, except for some papers relating to a dispute between a grammar schoolmaster and the Cathedral treasurer and choirmaster in 1527.

2.1.1.2 The Start of Structured Education (Knights and French periods)

When the Knights arrived in Malta in 1530 there was only one grammar school in Mdina. According to Cassar (2001), when the Apostolic Visitor Monsignor Dusina visited the island in 1575, there were some schools under the direction of the Church. These schools, besides teaching the necessary subjects, such as grammar, also served as catechism classes. In such a way, the bishop became more involved in granting licences to these schools.

With the encouragement of Bishops Cubelles and Gargallo, the late sixteenth century saw the establishment of the Jesuit College in Valletta. Run by the Society of Jesus, commonly known as the Jesuits, this was the place where the higher social class was educated. Other people had no formal education at all, except for some catechism lessons, yet, some poor and illiterate people managed to run some simple classes, which was far from a system of formal schooling. Cassar (2001) states that, by the seventeenth century, boarding schools for girls were founded, details of which are not available. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) had instructed dioceses to erect seminaries for the diocesan clergy. However, in Malta, this took a long time to happen, as the seminary was not set up until 1703. It seems that, before this date, the Jesuit College successfully fulfilled the requirements for a diocesan seminary.

Although Malta was under the control of the French for only two years (1798-1800), Napoleon Bonaparte had a vision for educating the Maltese people. In fact, before leaving the island, according to Testa (2001, p. 59), Bonaparte issued two orders: "There shall be established in the islands of Malta and Gozo 15 primary schools. There shall be established in Malta a Central school which shall replace the University and the other Faculties." Besides these orders, Bonaparte ordered the suppression of two convents of each religious order, and applied the funds from these convents to pay teachers in primary schools. Even the funds allocated to the University and other Faculties were to be used by the Central School. At this point, one should mention Mikiel Anton Vassalli (1764-1829), who is called the father of the Maltese language. He himself had envisaged a plan for the establishment of a number of schools in Malta. After ending up in France, he returned to Malta with the French, hoping that his fellow countrymen would be well-educated. Vassalli, who had no formal role under the French rule and did not work directly with Napoleon, was a person who hoped for the Maltese people to be formally educated.

2.1.1.3 Education in Colonial Malta

Malta came under British rule in the year 1800. Colonial and post-colonial Malta offers a different perspective on the history of education in the islands. To start with, the British idea of education was very different from the French one. In the first years of British rule in Malta, the British preferred to leave education in the hands of private entities or the Church, unlike Napoleon who wanted schooling for everyone. For the purposes of this study, this sheds more light on how Catholic schools in Malta came into effect. In fact, Chircop (2001, p. 124) speaks of the years 1800 to 1870 as a period “distinguished by a Colonial State which took a *laissez faire* disposition towards public instruction.” According to Cassar (2022), in the first years of the British rule in Malta, the British saw no need to intervene in the education of the Maltese citizens. In Britain itself, it was only in 1870, through the Education Act approved by the British Parliament, that a national system of elementary education was provided by the State. This same education policy was used by the British in Malta after 1870. While abandoning the policies decreed by the French, between the years 1800 and 1840, thirty-nine private schools were opened. However, these were not free and not everyone could be educated in these schools. In reality, as Chircop (2001) attests, the rulers were reluctant to extend education to rural areas.

Xerri (2016) states that an important development during the history of colonial Malta was the foundation of *La Società delle Scuole Normale della Valletta* in 1819, with the aim of opening primary schools. This was supported by the Governor, but at first, not by the ecclesiastical authorities who feared that these schools would be used to convert students to Protestantism. However, the Royal Commission sent to Malta between 1836 and 1838, found a rather low level of education in the islands, where only 2.5 per cent knew how to read and write. Chircop (2001, p. 124) states that this Commission

confirmed that, in order to keep the inhabitants of this strategic island quiet, the colonial authorities had to conserve the prevalent culture and the customary social relations. It was also affirmed that the *status quo* in the domestic social terrain could only be kept with the support of the Catholic Church.

A report by the same Commission highlights some recommendations, which were considered important for the development of education in Malta. One important proposal was the opening of more primary schools which would be free for everyone so that there would be nothing which hinders parents from sending their children to schools. Although the proposals by Napoleon were discarded when the British started to rule the island, this important proposal seems to be quite in line with what the French ruler ordered regarding the opening of primary schools.

Camilleri (2001, p. 101) states that one of the foremost figures in the development of education in Malta during the colonial period was Canon Dr Paolo Pullicino, who was “responsible for laying the foundations of the administrative structure of the school system, for expanding the curriculum, and for introducing several important innovations.” Pullicino was appointed by the Governor as Chief Director of Primary Schools in 1850. After reporting to the Governor about the state of education in Malta, he began the reform of the education then provided in schools. This reform led to schools having one *maestro/maestra* (headteacher), and students started to be grouped in classes, each class having its own teacher. These teachers had to attend lessons by the *maestro/maestra* themselves. Before implementing this reform, Pullicino led a course for all male teachers about methodology and teaching practice. During Pullicino’s tenure as Director for Education, the number of schools increased. While in 1850 there were only 28 schools, in 1879 there were 75 schools, one in almost every town or village in Malta. This number excludes schools for infants, evening classes, Sunday schools, and secondary schools. Besides this, Pullicino insisted on the

importance of the curriculum which he expanded. In the same curriculum for primary schools, Pullicino included the learning of trades, such as carpentry. It should be noted that Catholic schools were starting to be founded during this period, as we shall see in a later section.

According to Chircop (2001, p. 129), after the year 1870, since the Maltese islands were a strategic point in the Mediterranean,

the Colonial State abandoned its policy of non-intervention and adopted a fresh strategy of cultural colonisation through public schooling. This new policy would enable the Colonial State to extend its control and influence over larger sectors of the population, in order to further secure and facilitate Malta's latest imperial functions.

This change of policy helped to promote the education of the middle class, which was seen as a good idea to help keep public order, in the sense that through education, the middle class could understand more what the ruler wants, and increase the good conduct of middle-class citizens, thus becoming more loyal to the colonial state. The idea of learning the English language was seen as an advantage both for those who wished to find a secure job with the government and for those who wished to emigrate.

In 1878, the British government sent Joseph Patrick Keenan to Malta to investigate the state of education in the islands. This led to the Keenan Report which was published in 1879 and called for a radical change in the schooling structure. As Camilleri (2001) and Xerri (2016) suggest, the recommendations of the report laid the basis for a complete reform in the educational system in Malta. Some of these recommendations included:

- The establishment of a Department of Education with a Director of Education, under whose care falls the responsibility for the whole educational system, including the University.
- Training for teachers.

- The need to address the issue of attendance and absenteeism through persuasion. If attendance did not improve, then education should be made compulsory.
- Decentralisation of the educational system.
- Increase in salaries for teachers in government schools and for University professors.
- When a teacher is in charge of seventy students, there should be an assistant teacher.
- Each year new schools should be built.
- The building of town industrial or vocational schools, one for boys and one for girls.
- The Lyceum should be divided into three schools: a preparatory school, a commercial school, and a classic and mathematical school.

The first suggestion, that of establishing the role of Director of Education, meant that the role of Director for Primary Schools, held by Pullicino, would be abolished. In the midst of the language question, the post was given to pro-British Sigismondo Savano. This shows that, in a break with the past, strategic posts were no longer given to ecclesiastical figures.

At this point, I would like to say a few words on the language question in Malta, which started in the early nineteenth century and lasted until the mid-twentieth century. For Brincat (2001, p. 140), “The Language Question was essentially a battle for survival: administrative, religious, cultural and linguistic.” The issue was which language was to be deemed official, if it was to be Italian or English. The Maltese language was commonly used by the common people. On the other hand, Italian was used by the elite, or professionals. When Malta became a British colony, there was the attempt to introduce English as the main language, however, this found great opposition from the Maltese, since the Italian language was more a strong characteristic of the Catholic Church as opposed to Anglicanism and Protestantism. With the passing of time, however, the Maltese realised that the knowledge of the English language provided them with more opportunities, such as employment, in Malta as well with British institutions in the same island. By the mid-twentieth century, since the

Maltese people never adopted Italian as their primary language, in the 1930s English and Maltese were declared to be the official languages of the Maltese islands. Since English was never the everyday language spoken by the majority of the people of Malta, the Maltese language was eventually declared to be the national language, as one can find in the Constitution.

2.1.1.4 After Independence: Laws, Policies, and Documents

After Independence in 1964, Malta became a country and took upon itself the idea of being a nation. Later, in 1974, Malta became a Republic and appointed its first President, since until this date, the Queen of England was the head of the country. After this progress in Maltese political history, it was time for the establishment of laws and policies relating to the life of the Maltese people, and one of these important aspects was education.

The Education Act

An important milestone in education in the Maltese islands after independence was Chapter 327 of the laws of Malta which comprised the Education Act, approved by the Parliament of Malta in 1988, and amended throughout the years through various legal notices. These legal notices reflected the changes in society and education, and one should mention specifically the reform through which schools started to belong to a number of colleges. Because of such radical changes, in 2021, a new Education Act was put in force, now Chapter 605 of the laws of Malta (see <https://legislation.mt/eli/cap/605/20220301/eng>). Since many changes occurred in education between 1988 and 2021, the new Education Act not only brings together and makes sense of the various amendments to the education system which were made to the 1988 Education Act, but more than that, it provides instructions for how education should take place today in Malta.

Among other rights and duties, this Education Act speaks of the right of every person to receive education, with no discrimination whatsoever; and the duty of the State to provide education for the formation of the whole person. In this regard, the Act speaks of the duties and rights of parents, and the school's duties. The regulatory aspect of education is mentioned in a section which deals with the department responsible for the regulation of pre-compulsory and compulsory education. Apart from sections which deal with state schools (Part IV) and references to the Education Division within the Ministry for Education (Part II), the Act also refers to the granting of a licence for the establishment and operation of individual schools (par. 22). All Catholic schools in Malta, in fact, have this licence to be able to operate. Moreover, for the first time, this Act mentions the possibility of home schooling, if authorised by the Education Division (Part III). The Act also refers to the central role of the head of school and head of the college network (par. 37) and makes substantial reference to discipline in schools (par. 43). For the sake of this study, it is worth mentioning that the Act (par. 5) specifically states that "the State recognises the right of non-state schools to have their own character, identity, ethos, and autonomy."

Policies and Documents

A number of government policies and documents in relation to education have been issued in Malta, especially in the last thirty years. Mainly, these were the results of a number of reforms which happened in the Maltese educational system. It is not the aim of this research to give a list of all such policies and documents, but at this point I would like to mention a few aspects and themes which are of certain importance. Generally, these documents are not peculiar to one sector, such as Catholics schools, but they treat all schools together in one category. For example, *The National Curriculum Framework* mentioned below, speaks of a framework which is to be used by all schools in Malta.

Two important documents were without doubt *The National Minimum Curriculum: Creating the Future Together* (1999) and *The National Curriculum Framework* (2012). These documents laid down various principles and objectives for education in Malta. Other documents highlight educational policies; internal evaluation in schools; the College System in Malta; strategies for national literacy and early school leavers; beliefs in mutual respect and values; other optional subjects, such as vocational subjects (separate from the traditional subjects), thus providing students with opportunities to succeed through different paths; and a policy regarding homework. All these policies are meant to enable students to achieve their best during the educational journey at school. Looking at these documents, I became more aware that education is not a one-stop journey, however, it is a life-long endeavour in the search of truth.

2.1.1.5 Structured Catholic Schools in Malta

Scerri (2000, p. 14) states that “focusing on our island home, we find that education, no less than in European countries, was born and reared under the care of, and in, the Church.” This points to the fact that the first signs of education in the Maltese islands were bred under the auspices of the Church. One would acknowledge that there has been a long history of various sorts of schooling connected with the Catholic Church in Malta, even before the arrival of British troops in the islands at the start of the nineteenth century, when education was more formalised. At one point in time, around the mid-nineteenth century, Catholic schools started to be founded in a structured way. For Scerri (2000, p. 16), while the Catholic Church remained vigilant in bringing its educational systems up to date, “the opening of a good number of primary and secondary schools run by religious helped tremendously to enhance the Church’s contribution to education.” Moreover, Xerri (2016), says that since Napoleon closed all private schools in Malta, these schools, and among them,

Catholic schools, started to flourish during the British rule. Not forgetting the development of education by the Catholic Church since the time before the Knights' period in Malta, this section will provide a quick look at the development of Catholic schools as we know them in the Maltese islands.

In practical terms, it was the mid-nineteenth century that saw the foundation of structured Catholic schools as we know them today. The following religious congregations set up their own schools, which are still in operation today, starting from the mid-nineteenth century: Sisters of Saint Joseph of the Apparition, the Jesuits, the Augustinian Friars, the Sisters of Charity, the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart, the Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, the Ursuline Sisters of Saint Angela, the Society of the Sacred Heart, the Brothers of the Christian Schools of Saint John Baptist De La Salle, the Daughters of the Sacred Heart, the Sisters of Saint Dorothy, the Augustinian Sisters Servants of Jesus and Mary, the Carmelites Friars, the Society of Christian Doctrine – M.U.S.E.U.M., the Dominican Friars, the Missionary Society of Saint Paul, the Salesians of Don Bosco, the Salesian Sisters, and the Carmelite Missionary Sisters of Saint Therese of the Child Jesus, besides the schools founded by the Archdiocese of Malta and the Diocese of Gozo. With the passing of time, these religious congregations, either settled in the same locality where they were founded, or else sought out larger sites and some congregations also founded more schools.

It should be noted that Saint Augustine's College, the school founded by the Augustinian Friars in 1848, was the first school which was accessible to all in the Maltese islands. As Xerri (2016) attests, students were the children of poor parents. Moreover, while the school did not receive any remuneration from the Government, parents still did not pay for their children's education. The school was financed by the religious order itself, as were most of the Catholic schools which were to open later on.

Some Catholic schools, besides the fact that they were founded to provide suitable education for children, had in mind the vocational aspect. In fact, School M, the school run by my own religious congregation and founded in 1944, was not established as a normal school, rather, its main aim was to provide education to students who were inclined to join religious life. In fact, in the first years of the school, its curriculum was not like that of other schools; instead, it provided education in subjects which were not taught in other schools, such as Latin. However, after some years, in 1952, the school developed into a regular school, teaching the curriculum like other schools. Some other schools, such as the one run by the Capuchins for the same purpose, ceased to exist.

2.2 Catholic Schools Today and Enrolment

Today, Catholic schools in Malta are not specialised schools. This means that all Catholic schools adhere to the National Curriculum Framework. However, the right to keep the identity of a Catholic school and the identity of a particular religious congregation remains the responsibility not only of Catholic schools in general, but also of individual religious orders who own particular schools.

As I have seen in the interviews I carried out with headteachers, all Catholic schools strive to strike a balance between the academic aspect of the school and the school's ethos. In such a way, Catholic schools are doing their utmost not only to excel academically, but also to put into practice the virtues and values of a Catholic school, as outlined in various Church documents.

A large number of parents in Malta prefer to educate their children in a Catholic school. This percentage outnumbers the vacant places in schools. According to the latest statistics, as provided by the Secretariat for Catholic Education, the total number of applicants for enrolment in all Catholic schools (early years, primary, secondary and post-

secondary), is double the number of available places in the same schools. In fact, for the scholastic year 2022-2023, the total number of applicants for all Catholic schools was 3,917 in Malta and 324 in Gozo; however, only 1,725 applicants in Malta and 248 in Gozo were registered. If we look at applications in boys' Catholic secondary schools for the same year, there were 373 applicants in Malta, while there were 92 applicants in Gozo, with 260 students registered in Malta and 72 in Gozo.¹

So, how can students be enrolled in Catholic schools? Detailed regulations for entry into Church schools, published in 2022, can be found on the website of the Archdiocese of Malta (<https://church.mt/archdiocese/church-schools/>). However, at this point, I will speak briefly of the process.

Some people still believe that entry in a Catholic school in Malta is a kind of privilege. However, this is not the case since regulations are rigorously attended to, while they are updated yearly so that any lacuna will be solved. In primary schools, mainly, children are enrolled in a Catholic school through a ballot process. However, the system takes into consideration children with special educational needs, children with difficult backgrounds, and students coming from Church homes for children (children who live in a Church institution and not with their own families), thus putting into practice the preferential option for the poor. Moreover, siblings of students have a place in the same school, with the same option for teachers who are parents, in the sense that teachers may opt to enrol their children in a Catholic school, with a place being reserved for them. For secondary schools, children who are students in a Catholic primary school which does not have a secondary school have a place reserved in a Catholic secondary school.

¹ This data was given directly to me in an email by the officer in charge of the admissions office of the Secretariat for Catholic Education in Malta.

2.3 Agreement between the State of Malta and the Vatican State on Catholic Education

Catholic schools in Malta have in their memory the great turmoil that happened in the Maltese islands in the 1980s. This happened because of a disagreement between the civil authorities and the Catholic Church. The whole issue was finally solved through an agreement between the State of the Vatican and the State of Malta which was signed in 1991. This section, dealing with the dark chapter in the history of Catholic schools in Malta, will ask the questions: What had happened? Why did this happen? How was the issue solved? What does the 1991 agreement state? What good emerged from this situation?

From an external critical point of view, the story seems to be one about whether education by the Catholic Church is free or not; however, one can say that the government wanted to control education, even that given by the Catholic Church. In fact, for Vassallo and Mallia (1984, p. 563), “The issue is not one of having education in Malta on payment or not. The real, underlying issue is an onslaught on democracy where the basic freedoms are being threatened.”

The timeline of what led to this problem and eventually to the 1991 agreement is as follows. From the 1940s until 1971, training for teachers was provided by the nuns of the Society of the Sacred Heart for female future teachers, and by the Christian Brothers for male future teachers. Soon after the general election of 1971, these responsibilities were relinquished and the Government was to provide teacher training itself. Until 1977, the Government gave subsidies to Catholic schools; however, these were removed in 1977. Moreover, in 1978, schools were notified by the Director of Education that fees for the attendance of Maltese students were frozen, resulting in schools suffering financially. The capitation grant, which today is calculated at about seventy euro per student, was also frozen. In 1979, a student-worker scheme was introduced. This meant that students attending sixth

form in state schools received a preferential treatment for admission into university, receiving twenty bonus points, while students attending sixth forms run by the Catholic Church did not get these points, thus giving them less possibility to enter University. In 1981, the capitation grant mentioned above was suspended. This year happened to be the year of the general election in the Maltese islands, which saw a perverse result. According to the laws of Malta at the time, the party which wins a majority of seats in parliament will govern. However, there was an anomaly in the result because of gerrymandering in the electoral districts, thus giving the Nationalist Party a majority of votes, but giving the Malta Labour Party a majority of seats in parliament. The Malta Labour Party was kept in power; however, after the boycott of parliament by the Nationalist Party and other discussions, an agreement was made to give the party with the majority of votes a majority of seats in parliament, thus enabling them to govern the country, which agreement was to become effective as from the next general election.

Meanwhile, seeing the beginning of turmoil happening in Catholic schools, the Archbishop of Malta and the Bishop of Gozo stressed the teachings of the Catholic Church and stated that it is a fundamental right of parents to choose the education they wish for their children. Moreover, with this financial setback, as Scerri (2000) says, the school administration, made up largely of members of religious congregations, had to ask for help from the religious communities themselves and from other free donations.

Returning back to the political situation, Vassallo and Mallia (1984, p. 564) say that “the Government’s party electoral programme did not mention any of the current measures; it reiterated that Government had no intention to close down church schools and would proceed to ensure that church schools would be accessible to all.” However, after the general election, the Government seemed to launch a campaign against Catholic schools, and prohibited parents from giving free donations to schools.

Meanwhile, the Church in Malta, reiterating its position in terms of its right to run schools, informed the Government that, in its schools, there were already students who did not pay anything because of the financial situation of their family. During the same time, the Church entered into dialogue with the Government, seeking a consensus for the future vitality of its schools, while the Government was insisting on having free Catholic schools.

In the beginning of 1984, precisely on 17 February, the Archbishop of Malta Joseph Mercieca shouldered responsibility for the running of all Catholic schools in the island. This was done after agreeing to do so with the Bishop of Gozo and the Major Superiors of religious congregations.

Later in the same year, the issue of licences for schools came to the fore. In fact, in July, the requirements for obtaining a license were sent to eight Catholic secondary schools. According to Vassallo and Mallia (1984, p. 573),

The main condition laid down by the Minister of Education is that the schools would not charge fees. According to a law passed by Mintoff's Government in April, the word 'fees' refers to all kinds of remuneration or compensation connected with education or learning in a school, a donation or contribution. Other conditions stipulated that admissions, suspensions or dismissals will be made only after the approval of the Director of Education. The approval of the Director is also needed for teachers, syllabi, curricula, number of school days and teaching hours and school facilities.

These conditions were described as unacceptable by Catholic stakeholders in the discussion. However, some of these conditions were agreed upon later on and today there are conditions in place for Catholic schools which benefit students and staff. Catholic schools abide by some conditions, such as religious congregations providing the building to be used as a school. Another condition is that of not obliging parents to pay fees, but only asking for a donation.

On the other hand, there are conditions from which Catholic schools benefit, for example, students in Catholic schools benefit from psycho-social services pro-rata to the number of students in State schools. By psycho-social services we mean the presence of psychologists, psychotherapists, counsellors, social workers, inclusion coordinators, and youth workers in Catholic schools. Catholic schools are given human resources and other resources in the same way that State schools benefit from them.

As a reply to the question of licences, the Archbishop informed the Minister of Education that while he had shouldered responsibility for all Catholic schools, it was clear from his side that the Church was not financially able to administer its schools without fees, keeping in mind that the Church was willing, as it had been doing, to provide education for parents who could not pay tuition fees. As Vassallo and Mallia (1984, p. 573) put it, “the Church’s position was that its schools should retain their identity, character and autonomy.”

Since no agreement was reached, in September 1984, Catholic schools remained closed. Many students and parents resorted to home schooling. However, things started to move in a positive direction when, in 1985, there was a basic agreement between the Government and the Catholic Church, and a temporary financial agreement in 1986, which paved the way to an important agreement between the State of the Vatican and the Republic of Malta, which is still in force.

This Agreement (1991) states the following points, among others:

- The State acknowledges Catholic schools, which are identified as such by the local bishop, even though they belong to other persons, such as members of religious orders.
- The Church has the right to found Catholic schools, “while observing the general regulations envisaged by the State’s educational policy regarding the “National

Minimum Curriculum” and the “National Minimum Conditions” put into effect in State Schools” (article 2 par. 1).

- Ecclesiastical authorities are free to create admission criteria, keeping in mind that under-privileged persons can enrol into Catholic schools.
- Catholic schools should have complete cycles in primary and secondary school within a certain timeframe. This happened because some secondary schools had within them preparatory classes which usually form part of the primary cycle.
- Catholic schools should be free with financial aid provided by Church and State. The buildings owned by the Church (and where schools were set up) are to be made available. The Church should take care of any maintenance and any possible extension of buildings. The Church should take care of its financing through fundraising and free donations among others.
- Teaching and non-teaching staff are to be paid by the State, however, this staff should be approved by an appropriate department. Teaching staff and other non-teaching staff should meet the same requirements and be employed in similar numbers as staff in state schools. Schools should be paid an extra ten per cent from the total remuneration given to teaching and non-teaching staff.
- Moreover, teachers in Church schools are granted the same facilities as those in state schools. This includes professional development courses and scholarships, among others. Moreover, educators in Church schools are granted the same resources as in state schools, such as laptops. Since the agreement speaks of teachers, and not educators, in recent years a dispute arose about whether learning support educators were entitled to a laptop. Since this category of educators was not envisaged in the Agreement, a committee headed by the Apostolic Nuncio to Malta resolved the issue.

- Students in Catholic schools shall benefit from the same allowances and stipends students in State schools are entitled to.
- The State recognises qualifications acquired in Church schools on a par with those in state schools.

It should be noted that, together with this Agreement, another agreement was reached in 1991. The 1991 Immovable Properties Agreement between the Holy See and Malta refers to the transfer of properties owned by the Church but which are not used for pastoral work to the State. It is through the funds accrued by these properties that the State could give financial contributions to Catholic schools.

2.4 Conclusion

This section has provided an historical background of education in the Maltese islands and highlights, in particular, the educational work of the Catholic Church even before it established its own schools. After the turmoil of the 1980s, Catholic schools are nowadays greatly appreciated by the majority of the people in the Maltese islands. Moreover, there is mutual respect and understanding between the State and the Church leaders in relation to Catholic schools. In this chapter, the reader is given insights on how education, and moreover, Catholic schools in the Maltese islands passed through different experiences, which laid the foundations for what Catholic schools are today, and the way they excel in their mode of effectiveness.

Chapter 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Introduction

This section will review and analyse critically relevant secondary literature and research. It will focus on two important aspects: (i) the school of thought of School Effectiveness and School Improvement; and (ii) Catholic schools' ethos, mission, and effectiveness.

3.2 School Effectiveness and School Improvement

In an endeavour to answer the research question "How can the effectiveness of Catholic Schools in Malta be improved?" I will make reference in this chapter to the historical origins of the School Effectiveness and School Improvement movements. Then, I will highlight the key characteristics of the same movements, and after exploring the differences between the two, I will look at them from a critical perspective.

3.2.1 The Origins of the School Effectiveness and School Improvement Movements

The historical background for school effectiveness and improvement helps us better understand the chief characteristics of these schools of thought and why they insist on certain aspects of education.

The school effectiveness movement began to emerge in the 1960s as a reaction to some scholars' arguments and findings, such as Coleman et al. (1966), and Jencks et al. (1972). Their main idea was that the schools children attended made little difference to their lives when compared to their home background, which in fact had a greater impact. Carney

(2003, p. 88) says that “rather than providing US policy makers with systematic insights with which to shape schooling processes, these studies highlighted the influence of social class as the overwhelmingly dominant factor in educational achievement.” On the other hand, in 1963, in England, the Minister of Education commissioned a report about primary education. The result, known as the Plowden Report (1967), insisted on the child being at the centre of the whole educational process, while acknowledging that influences at home exceed those of the school.

Jencks et al. (1972), referring to the Plowden report in their book and focusing their study on schools in the United States of America, speak about what constituted some of the immediate effects on students. While outlining basic differences in the schools, Jencks et al. (1972, p.256) insist on the need for equality in education, and argue that without these differences, the quality of life for students and teachers would be much better:

Some schools are dull, depressing, even terrifying places, while others are lively, comfortable, and reassuring. If we think of school life as an end in itself rather than as a means to some other end, such differences become enormously important.

Eliminating these differences would not do much to make adults more equal, but it would do a great deal to make the quality of children’s (and teachers’) lives more equal.

In response to this idea, some scholars debated the view that schools have little effect on the lives of their students. These researchers include Brookover et al. (1979), Rutter et al. (1979), and later Mortimore (1988). In *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, Rutter et al. (1979, p. 1) asked the following questions: “Do a child’s experiences at school have any effect; does it matter *which* school he goes to; and which are the features of school that matter?” The school effectiveness researchers’ main objective was to show that, in fact, schools make a difference in the lives of children. It is no wonder then that Mortimore et al. (1988) name their study *School Matters* to

highlight the fact that schools have a direct influence on their pupils. In fact, to introduce their belief, in the very beginning of their book (p. 1), along the same line of thought as Rutter et al., the authors ask: “Does the particular school attended by a child make a difference? Will a child’s progress in reading or writing be similar wherever she or he is taught? Are some schools more effective than others?” Referring to the studies by Coleman et al. (1966), Jencks et al. (1972) and the Plowden Report (1967), the researchers go on to claim that these questions were not addressed by earlier studies.

Stoll and Fink (2003) state that the school effectiveness research, which argued that schools do make a difference to students’ lives, developed at the same time as the School Improvement Movement, which also emerged in the 1960s. The idea of school improvement centred its attention on school organisation, curriculum, and pupil-oriented outcomes. This idea is also backed by Reynolds et al. (1993) who show how the fact that teachers were not committed to implementing ‘top-down’ reforms introduced by the British government led to a new model for school improvement in the 1980s. This counter-model to the one presented by the same government advocated a ‘bottom-up’ approach, and the focus was shifted from the school in general to the educator. However, we should say that improvement as such was whole-school oriented. In this sense, the emphasis of this approach discussed by Reynolds et al. (1993) is on an internal review or self-evaluation of the school.

3.3 Definitions of School Effectiveness

Researchers have come up with various definitions of school effectiveness. These definitions include some typical characteristics of an effective school. Even though the number of characteristics varies among individuals and groups, the key aspects are very similar in their essence and merge with each other. It seems that the most popular definition is the one by Mortimore (1991, p. 9), where an effective school “is one in which students

progress further than might be expected from the consideration of its intake.” It is quite clear from this definition that since there is the idea of progress, the idea of improvement is fundamental. Moreover, Bollen (1996, p. 2) refers to a study by Georgopoulos and Tannenbaum (1957) and defines school effectiveness as “the extent to which any (educational) organisation as a social system, given certain resources and means, fulfils its objectives without incapacitating its means and resources and without placing undue strain upon its members.”

In the review *Key Characteristics of Effective Schools*, Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore (1995, p. 8) identify eleven factors contributing to an effective school. In my opinion, this review is like the *magna carta* of School Effectiveness research, with the authors bringing together all the relevant characteristics and offering the best definitions of what is expected from effective schools. All other definitions can be seen to be incorporated in these factors.

1. *Professional leadership*: For Gray (1990), leadership is the main characteristic of school effectiveness. There is no one-size-fits-all style of leadership, and the term ‘leadership’ is itself exposed to quite a large number of definitions. Moreover, different cultures lead to different styles of leadership. In general, however, leadership should be:
 - i. “Firm and purposeful”. In this sense, leaders should be proactive and attentive in the selection of teachers and staff; direct all members to the importance of general agreement and unity of purpose; be able to protect the school from outside uncalled-for agents; initiate and maintain the school improvement process from within the school.
 - ii. It should adopt “a participative approach”, where leaders are able to share their leadership responsibilities with other members of the team, and should also involve teachers in decision-making.

- iii. It should include the notion of “the leading professional”, which implies that the headteacher should not only know what is going on in school and in the classroom, but that there is the need to be directly involved in the curriculum, teaching strategies and monitoring of the progress of the students. This type of leader is one who visits the classrooms frequently and also has informal discussions in the staff room (Reynolds, 1995, p. 15).

For Fullan (2001), an effective school leader is one who has a moral purpose, understands change, is able to build relationships, is skilled in sharing knowledge and creativity, and ensures coherence. These notions which build up an effective school leader will lead to commitment on the part of all those involved in the school, which eventually will result in more good practices.

In this way, as Reynolds (1995, p. 15) states:

the effective school has a balance ... in its management between vertical push and horizontal pull, between laterality or diffusion, and centralisation. Indeed it possesses a balance between managerialism and collegiality that is ensured by having elements of both present at the same time.

2. *Shared vision and goals*: The report (Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore, 1995, p. 11) states that “schools are more effective when staff build consensus on the aims and values of the school, and where they put this into practice through consistent and collaborative ways of working and decision-making”. From this we can pinpoint three points:

- i. “Unity of purpose”, in order to share common goals and a shared vision. In line with the aim of this research, it is useful to note that the report (p. 11) makes an interesting reference to Catholic schools:

In their discussion of Catholic schools’ relatively greater effectiveness in promoting students’ academic and social outcomes (e.g. low drop out) in the US context, Lee,

Bryk and Smyth (1993, pp. 230-231) draw attention to the importance of strong institutional norms and shared beliefs producing an ‘educational philosophy that is well aligned with social equity aims’.

- ii. “Consistency of practice” refers to practices, approaches, and guidelines in schools which are agreed upon by everybody. Referring to Rutter et al. (1979), the report (1995) states that when guidelines are set as expectations by the school, students are more likely to abide by them, rather than when policies come from an individual educator.
 - iii. “Collegiality and collaboration”, where students’ success tends to be greater in schools where teachers sense that their ideas were represented and acknowledged. In such a way, teachers feel that they “own” the school, and play a greater role in decision-making.
3. *A learning environment* aims to have:
- i. “An orderly atmosphere”, rather than being utterly confused. Students are encouraged to help provide such a climate through their own self-control and support of good practices.
 - ii. “An attractive working environment” which has a positive effect on students’ behaviour and attainment. An appealing environment facilitates the improvement of a school, as against buildings in a poor state of repair, which can encourage vandalism.
4. *Concentration on teaching and learning*: It seems quite obvious that both teaching and learning are of central interest to schools. For this focus to take place, there needs to be:
- i. “Maximisation of learning time” that does not only refer to punctuality and disruption-free lessons but also to the time allocated to academic subjects, time dedicated to learning, and time devoted by teachers to discussing the content with their students.

- ii. “Academic emphasis” which is seen not only through what goes on in the classroom, such as lesson delivery, but also through homework, which should be appropriate and marked. Homework should also be subject to good quality feedback from the teacher. While it is expected that teachers are knowledgeable about their respective subject, it is also important for teachers to cover the whole curriculum.
 - iii. “Focus on achievement” – From learning, one acquires basic skills and other achievements, and a focus on these things has a positive impact on school effectiveness. For Scheerens (1992), there are four relevant ideas: time at school spent on learning, the amount of homework given, effective learning time even when there are institutional constraints, and learning time for different subjects.
5. *Purposeful teaching*: While many persons expect the best outcome from teachers, even the best teachers do not always perform to their full abilities. Teaching strategies play an important role in the progress of students. Purposeful teaching can be described in relation to a number of factors:
- i. “Efficient organisation” implies the teachers being well organised and very clear regarding their objectives. While Evertson et al. (1980) state that when teachers feel efficient, in control, organise the classroom, and plan proactively from day to day, there are positive effects on achievement, Rutter et al. (1979) say that when a teacher does not prepare beforehand, the risk is to lose the attention of the students with the result of the students not learning and misbehaving.
 - ii. “Clarity of purpose” – What is the use of teaching and learning if no one is aware of the learning objective? Effective learning takes place when, at the beginning of the lesson, the teacher states the aim of the particular lesson and refers to it during the time in class. A practical example could be that of writing down the objective in a

prominent place in class where the students can see it throughout the lesson to keep themselves focused.

- iii. “Structured lessons” – The NREL review (1990), says that in lessons, one effective way to keep the students’ attention on the main aspects of the lesson is to draw upon questioning techniques. Mortimore et al. (1988a) say that when teachers ask questions and communicate about what is being taught, there is a higher positive effect on progress. Being clear and offering manageable teaching material is an asset for effective lessons.
 - iv. “Adaptive practice” – Although sometimes teachers tend to go for a one-size-fits-all approach, being adaptive to the different learning styles and abilities of students enhances the progress made by students.
6. *High expectations:* In a positive way, schools tend to aim high. This happens through:
- i. “High expectations all around”, a statement which, as Levine and Lezotte (1990) state, is an essential feature of exceptionally effective schools. Such hopes enable teachers to have a more active role in helping their students to learn. Moreover, Murphy (1990) makes it clear that high expectations cannot stand alone for effectiveness, but they play an important role when they form part of a school culture which believes strongly in high expectations for everybody.
 - ii. “Communicating expectations” – Expectations can be fruitful for students if they are communicated effectively through their teachers. Even when things seem to be impossible, communicating that success can be achieved can have a positive effect.
 - iii. “Providing intellectual challenge”. Through high expectations, students can be challenged, especially students who can be intellectually stretched. In fact, Mortimore et al. (1988a) claim that there was greater progress achieved in groups of students who were more stimulated.

Reynolds (1995, p. 15) describes this idea as an

academic push ... involving high expectations of what pupils can achieve, utilising strategies that ensure large amounts of learning time ..., utilising homework to expand learning time and to involve parents, and entering a high proportion of pupils for public examinations to ensure they remain 'hooked' in their final years.

7. *Positive reinforcement*: While each and every school has its code of conduct, and aims at maintaining good order, it is quite clear that not all kinds of disciplinary actions have a positive impact. Positive reinforcement calls for:

- i. "Clear and fair discipline", meaning that if rules in a school are clear and well understood, and if the use of punishment is not that frequent, an orderly atmosphere is cultivated.
- ii. "Feedback", which can either be immediate or delayed. Immediate feedback can take the form of praise or appreciation. Delayed feedback refers to rewards and incentives which can be given to students later in the year. Immediate feedback is more fruitful since it affects more students and from that point onwards pupils might show more initiative.

8. *Monitoring progress*: In schools there are a number of monitoring mechanisms, such as teachers' reports, academic results, and school improvement programmes. In effective schools, this monitoring takes place by:

- i. "Monitoring pupil performance" – In their review of school effectiveness research carried out on behalf of the English inspectorate of schools, OFSTED, *Key Characteristics of Effective Schools*, Sammons et al. (1995, p. 20) say that this, first of all "is a mechanism for determining the extent to which the goals of the school are being realised. Second, it focuses the attention of staff, pupils, and parents on these

goals. Third, it informs planning, teaching methods, and assessment. Fourth, it gives a clear message to pupils that teachers are interested in their progress.”

- ii. “Evaluating school performance” – For Scheerens (1992), this evaluation is essential. By evaluating school performance, not only by discussing internally between staff but taking ideas from all stakeholders, including parents and students, the school can know where it stands and prepare for the future through action plans.
9. *Pupil rights and responsibilities*: Students whose self-esteem is encouraged, and who have responsibilities in the life of the school, contribute to school effectiveness. This happens through:
- i. “Raising pupil self-esteem”, especially when teachers communicate respect to students together with a sense of understanding, personal attention, enthusiasm, and interest.
 - ii. “Positions of responsibility”, which implies trusting the capabilities of students and treating pupils as mature.
 - iii. “Control of work”, where students have control of their work, independently of the teacher.
10. *Home-school partnership*: Co-operation between home and schools, and building on each other is thought to have a positive impact on students. For Mortimore et al. (1988a), parental involvement plays a vital role. In their studies, the authors found that some aspects of school life which contributed to positive outcomes involved the helping of parents both in classrooms and during school activities, during meetings with parents, having a room for parents, and an open-door policy. Moreover, Hallinger and Murphy (1986) state that parental involvement can contribute more to school effectiveness when the pupils come from poor or working-class families. Coleman et al. (1994) state that the kind of relationship that exists between teachers and parents is critical in rendering the students’ home as either an ally or an

enemy of what happens in the classroom. For Reynolds (1995, p. 15), parental involvement is important

to ensure the participation of significant others in children's lives in the rewarding of achievement and effort, and also to ensure that in cases of difficulty, the parents will, if it is appropriate to do so, support the school against the child.

11. *A learning organisation:* Forming part of a learning community, all grades of teachers should be open to being continuous learners. Very often, teachers attend staff development programmes because they have to. However, when there is school-based staff development, the situation is quite different. Mortimore et al. (1988a) state that these types of professional development only have a positive effect when persons attend for a justified reason. Stedman (1987) insists that training should be tailor-made for the specific needs of teachers and staff. Having an on-site staff development programme may provide teachers with the tools needed to improve their performance.

Stoll and Fink (2003, pp. 15-16) state that, previously, in 1986, the Effective Schools Task Force in England developed a model based on the works of Sackney (1986), which became the starting point for the Halton effective schools approach. While this model identifies twelve characteristics of an effective school, these distinctive features fall into three wider categories:

First, a common mission, embracing within it shared values and beliefs; clear goals and instructional leadership. Secondly, an emphasis on learning, which includes frequent monitoring of student progress; high expectations; teacher collegiality and development; and instructional and curriculum focus. Thirdly, a climate conducive to learning, where the focus is on student involvement and responsibility; physical environment; recognition and incentives; positive student behaviour; parental and community involvement and support.

It is clear that the Halton model is quite similar to the review of school effectiveness research carried out by Sammons et al. (1995) in terms of the various factors it identifies as contributing to an effective school. In Table 1 below, I set out these similarities together with ideas from other scholars.

Table 1:

Similarities in studies seeking to define effective schools

	A common mission	Emphasis on learning	Climate conducive to learning
<i>Halton approach (1986)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared values and beliefs • Clear goals • Instructional leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of student progress • High expectations • Teacher collegiality and development • Instructional and curriculum focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student involvement and responsibility • Physical environment • Recognition and incentives • Positive student behaviour • Parental and community involvement and support
<i>Sammons, Hillman and Mortimore (OFSTED 1995)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional leadership • Shared vision and goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentration on teaching and learning • Purposeful teaching • High expectations • Monitoring progress • Learning organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning environment • Pupils' rights and responsibilities • Home-school partnership
<i>Edmonds (1979)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong administrative leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A climate of expectation of achievement • The priority of acquisition of basic educational 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An orderly atmosphere

		skills <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention on fundamental objectives • Monitoring students' progress 	
<i>Levine and Lezotte (1990)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exceptional leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A school climate and culture which are productive • Student acquisition of key learning skills • Monitoring of students' progress • In-house and hands-on staff development • Effective instruction according to students' needs • High expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement of parents in an appropriate way

In my opinion, the characteristics set out in Table 1 confirm the definition of Stoll and Fink (2003, p. 28), who say that an effective school “promotes progress for all its pupils beyond what would be expected; ensures that each pupil achieves the highest standards possible; enhances all aspects of pupil achievement and development; continues to improve from year to year”.

From my own personal experience in my work, and also from discussions with teachers and other headteachers, I strongly believe that the characteristics mentioned above contribute strongly to an effective school. This does not mean that the school is perfect; indeed, that is where school improvement enters into the scenario. However, I think that since all these features in the report speak about the school, one cannot exclude the social background of students and families. The cultural assumptions which the students bring with

them to school should be given due importance since I am sure it has an impact on the life of the school, especially on the learning environment, the students' rights and responsibilities, and the home-school relationship.

3.3.1 How Can Effectiveness be measured?

This issue has been subject to considerable debate. There are scholars who insist that academic results can measure the effectiveness of a particular school, however, results cannot stand alone. In my opinion, the feel-good factor plays an important part together with the other indicators. Sammons and Elliot (2003, p. 511) say that

in essence, SER [School Effectiveness Research] seeks to disentangle the complex links between the pupils' 'dowry' (the mix of abilities, prior attainments and personal and family attributes), which any student brings to school, from those of their educational experiences at school and to explore the way these jointly influence their later attainment, progress and development. The main foci are: the impact of social institutions; characteristics that promote students' educational outcomes; the influence of context on outcomes.

In this context, some important indicators of the level of school effectiveness are: local, national or international examinations or studies, specific groups relating to gender, ethnicity or ability, and time frames. This means that the academic achievement of these various distinct groups can tell us something about *how* effective particular schools are, in the sense that students come to school with different experiences and backgrounds and, when placed together, may determine the effectiveness of a particular sense. For example, individuals belonging to a specific ethnic group placed in a particular school at a particular time may establish, even unofficially, certain prerequisites for school effectiveness.

3.4 Definitions of School Improvement

Van Velzen et al. (1985, p. 48) define school improvement as “a systematic, sustained effort aimed at change in learning conditions and other related internal conditions in one or more schools, with the ultimate aim of accomplishing educational goals more effectively”.

Hopkins et al. (1994, p. 3) describe school improvement as an “approach to educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school’s capacity for managing change”. For them, school improvement can be thought of:

- As a vehicle for planned educational change (but also realising that educational change is necessary for school improvement).
- As particularly appropriate during times of centralised initiatives and innovation overload when there are competing reforms to implement.
- As usually necessitating some form of external support.
- As having an emphasis on strategies for strengthening the school’s capacity for managing change; while
- Raising student achievement (broadly defined) through specifically focusing on the teaching-learning process.

Gray et al. (1999, p. 5) argue that “an ‘improving’ school ... may be defined as one which ‘increases its effectiveness’ over time, where ‘effectiveness’ is judged in value-added terms”. Moreover, Harris (2001) says that school improvement is mainly interested in constructing the capacity for change and growth within the institution.

While these ideas are true, I strongly believe that school improvement is an idea which is lived on a daily basis in schools. It is not something static and not done once in a while, but it is a process which enables the school to move forward. At the same time, the fruit of school improvement may be seen after a period of time. We can acknowledge that while a school strives to adapt to necessary change, it takes time to change mentalities and ways of thinking,

while at the same time trying to reach to all stakeholders, so that everyone is involved and owns the change for improvement.

It follows that there cannot be any kind of improvement if things remain the same. A phrase which is very popular in Catholic Church circles is “but we have been doing this for a long time”, and thus, resisting change. In fact, Stoll and Fink (2003, p. 43) define school improvement as a series of ongoing processes which take place within a school and which:

- Augments the outcomes of students.
- Directs the attention onto teaching and learning.
- Builds the capacity to take charge of change regardless of its source.
- Characterises its own path.
- Assesses its current culture and works to develop positive cultural norms.
- Has specific methods to achieve its aims.
- Addresses the internal conditions that improve change.
- Maintains momentum during periods of turbulence.
- Watches carefully and assesses its process, progress, achievement, and development.

Moreover, Stoll (2003, p. 95) insists that this definition implies that “successful school improvement is based on an ownership mentality, where schools define their own direction, irrespective of external demands”, and that school culture is an integral part of school improvement. This means that, since the context is different and unique for every school, it is important to note that school improvement is particular to each and every educational entity. It is also essential to state that school improvement does not come from any external force but comes from within. In fact, Stoll (2003, p. 106) asserts that the idea of change in school “requires an understanding of and respect for the different meanings and

interpretations people bring to educational initiatives, and the nurturing of the garden within which new ideas can bloom”.

Speaking of school development leads us also to speak of school culture, which is a complex idea. Very often, what is attributed to school culture is determined by the researchers’ own field of study and particular interest. MacGilchrist et al. (1995, pp. 35-36) argue that there are “four key conditions for successful school growth planning ... a shared vision; climate setting; the development of collegiality; and a sense of mission.” It is with the merging of these clauses that we can speak of a culture of change. Without any doubt, a central aspect of school culture is that of leadership. Described by Schein (1985) and Nias et al. (1989) as the culture founders, leaders are responsible for bringing about change in school culture by giving their input in setting up the values and convictions they believe in. Moreover, Schein (1985), maintains that there is only one important thing leaders should do, that is, to generate and administer culture.

In a few words, school improvement can be said to relate to change and to school development. In fact, Stoll and Fink (p. 44) insist that “although not all change is improvement, all improvement involves change”. Fullan (1992, p. 27) emphasises the sophisticated relationship between school improvement and change: “successful school improvement ... depends on an understanding of the problem of change at the level of practice and the development of corresponding strategies for bringing about beneficial reforms”.

One can say that there are three periods within a change process, the first of which is *initiation*. Fullan (1992), drawing on the works of Miles (1986) and others, argues that initiation depends on three Rs:

- *Relevance* of the improvement innovation in terms of need, quality, practicality, clarity, and complexity.

- *Readiness* of the staff to become implicated in action.
- *Resource*, which also includes the availability of support and time.

The second phase is that of *implementation*. It consists of early experiences of putting reforms into practice. Miles (1986) highlights the importance of: clear responsibility for orchestration; shared control over implementation; a blend of pressure and support; sustained staff development; and early rewards for teachers.

The third aspect is *institutionalisation*. It refers to the question whether or not new things are built into practices already in place. According to Fullan (1991), this is achieved through:

mobilization of broad support; principal commitment; embedding into classroom practice through structural changes and incorporation into policy; skill and commitment of a critical mass of staff; procedures for ongoing assistance, especially for newcomers; removal of competing priorities; inbuilt evaluation; assistance, networking and peer support.

If one has to add another phase, one can easily say that these periods are not complete without outcome, that is, results. Results can be of a variety of types, which refer either to pupils' results, or teachers' results, or even organisational results. However, all these outcomes point to improvement according to specified norms.

Hopkins and Lagerweij (1996) insist that School Improvement, in relation to educational change, rests on a number of hypotheses (van Velzen et al., 1995; Hopkins, 1987, 1990). These are that: first of all, it is important to assert that the school is at the centre of change. There might be various interventions and reforms coming from "outside" the school, but these should address the real needs of individual schools, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. While school improvement takes place inside the school, the classroom

cannot be ignored. Attention should be given not only to how children learn and how teachers teach, but also to the methods, roles and resources used in the school.

Secondly, there should be a systematic approach to change. This takes place by planning school improvement carefully, and the process it takes, while acknowledging that this can only come about over a number of years. In this sense, change cannot be implemented overnight.

Another point is that goals in education should reflect the particular mission of the school, and what the school itself wants to arrive at. In such a way, this goes further than academic results, even if these are good. Schools need to address the real needs of the students, of teachers, and of the community as such.

The next point to make is the fact that when a school aims at improvement, it does not act alone, but it is part of a larger educational system which insists that its aims are achieved. It follows then that all roles in a school – administrators, teachers, other staff, students, and parents – are really engaged in the whole process.

Without any doubt, there should be a link between top-down and bottom-up approaches, because while the former provides the framework, resources, and a menu of alternatives, the latter provides the energy and the school-based implementation.

The last point to note is that change is only successful when it has become part of the natural behaviour of teachers in the school; implementation by itself is not enough.

From these definitions, I can conclude that school improvement refers to the processes that lead to the necessary changes in a school in order to increase its effectiveness. It speaks of a development which enables the school to move forward, while making it very clear that improvement is not static, but is a process that takes time to be implemented.

What are the obstructions to improvement? Reynolds (1991, 1992) suggests the following observations:

- Teachers who project their own imperfections and inadequacies onto students or other persons.
- Teachers who are not innovative and want to do things as they have been done for decades.
- Defending the school against threats which come from outside the learning community.
- Teachers being afraid to fail in the job.
- Thinking that change should be done by someone else.
- A relationship between staff which is antagonistic.
- Feeling safe in numbers.

Contrary to these obstacles, Fink (1999, p. 27) highlights that:

change has to be built into the processes. Change identified with a particular person contains the roots of its own destruction. There has to be loyalty to broader issues. Life cycles of many 'lighthouse' schools have been shortened because people could not shift loyalties from the individual to broader concepts.

3.5 The Distinction between School Effectiveness and School Improvement

Although there might be some similarities and overlaps between the two movements, it is important to highlight the fact that while school effectiveness research and methodology highlights the *what* of change in a school – do schools make a difference? – school improvement policies focus on the *how* of change – how do we improve schools? In fact, school effectiveness is the goal of the process of school improvement, a relationship which assumes that higher student outcomes are the appropriate measure and definition of increased school effectiveness.

One cannot apply the same kinds of criteria for both effectiveness and improvement. Creemers (1996) states that when there is improvement in the effectiveness of different components, let us say in a particular teaching method, there still remains the question for school improvement if it has led to higher student achievements.

According to Stoll and Fink (2003, p. 26), one central question in the distinction between school effectiveness and school improvement is: “How do we know that what we are doing makes a difference to pupils?” Bollen (1996, p. 18) presents the questions asked by both research fields:

While effectiveness research is trying to get an answer to the question, ‘is the evidence for this specific correlation between a school characteristic and results valid?, school improvement is particularly interested in the question, ‘does this improvement strategy work, and is this intervention in these circumstances effective?’

This can be seen in Table 2 below by Reynolds et al. (1996, p. 101).

Table 2:

Differences between School Effectiveness and School Improvement

<i>School Effectiveness</i>	<i>School Improvement</i>
Focus on schools	Focus on individual teachers or groups of teachers
Focus on school organisation	Focus on school processes
Data-driven, with emphasis on outcomes	Rare empirical evaluation of effects of changes
Quantitative in orientation	Qualitative in orientation
Lack of knowledge about how to implement change strategies	Exclusively concerned with change in schools
More concerned with change in pupil	More concerned with journey of school

outcomes	improvement than its destination
More concerned with schools at a point in time	More concerned with schools as changing
Based on research knowledge	Focus on practitioner knowledge
Limited range of outcomes	Concerned with multiple outcomes
Concerned with schools that are effective	Concern with how schools <i>become</i> effective
Static orientation (school as it is)	Dynamic orientation (school as it has been or might be)

I find Bollen's work particularly useful here (1996, p. 1), since he provides his interpretation of the difference between the two approaches in a very practical way: "School effectiveness research ... is like taking a picture of a school and comparing that with pictures of other schools ... School improvement is like telling stories about development and change in schools."

3.6 A Consideration of the Limitations of School Effectiveness and School Improvement

After the emergence of the school effectiveness and school improvement movements, some scholars have tried to minimise their effect by making their critical voice heard. Like any other movement, it is true that neither school effectiveness nor school improvement present an ideal educational institution. However, in my opinion, being critical does not mean assuming that these theories are useless, but critical voices may minimise the lacunae which concepts of effectiveness and improvement do not address.

If one is to consider the limitations of school effectiveness, one has to say that, very often, school effectiveness research gives too much credit to academic performance and to

examination results, even though this performance might be hidden under the word “progress”.

Being critical of these movements, one can make a link to the context of schools. It is important to state that children experience schools differently. Participation and involvement of students is different because of various reasons: gender, ethnicity, ability, social class, and national and religious context among others. In such a way, school effectiveness can be seen as an unnecessary generalisation of ideas adapted to particular schools.

Hamilton (1997, pp. 125-126) is highly critical of school effectiveness research, saying that:

its efforts cloak school practices in a progressive, social-darwinist, eugenic rationale. It is progressive because it seeks more efficient and effective ways of steering social progress. It is social-darwinist because it accepts survival of the fittest. And it is eugenic because it endorses the desirable and consequently, depreciates the exceptional.

Moreover, the author (1997, pp. 125-126) insists that school effectiveness research has led to “a plague on all our schools. Teachers have been infected, school organization has been contaminated and classroom practices have become degenerative and dysfunctional.”

Thrupp (1999) has been critical of effectiveness research because it overlooks the significance of ‘social mix’ and we are limited when we refer to peer social interaction.

Harris (1998) strongly supports this idea. Her argument, supported by research, is that the child’s identity as a person, her capacity as a learner and her motivation as a student come from the way in which she defines herself within the immediate peer reference group.

Gender, race, ability, class, loving or hating school may only become noticeable characteristics of one’s identity when school structures and the nature of the school social mix push that feature into social prominence. As an example, when researching in a single-

sex school, gender is not an important feature to look at. This is confirmed by Macbeath and Mortimore (2001, p. 13) who say:

What becomes a salient feature of a pupil's self-definition arises from a complex social dynamic, constantly shifting as new friendships form and old ones disappear, as the social mix of the school and peer group changes or stabilizes. In Harris's thesis young people's most essential experience of schooling is one of defining and redefining themselves in relation to their peers.

Ouston (1996)²² is another critical voice of School Effectiveness and School Improvement.

For Ouston, critical views of the subject can be divided into three strands:

- i. To what extent is the research on differential school effectiveness valid? Ouston asks if the characteristics of effective schools relate to all schools and not only to those in the "inner city". Furthermore, she claims that researchers are of the view that when prior attainment and social factors are taken into account, the difference between schools is negligible. Moreover, researchers from the School Effectiveness and School Improvement movements go to schools and look for certain characteristics, and get their results by looking for similar features in similar schools. Another point is that the list of characteristics should not be 'what makes an effective school' but rather 'what describes an effective school'.
- ii. How far is the concept of School Improvement valid? For Ouston, the practice and research of improving schools should not be related to research on School Effectiveness. Moreover, for Ouston, there seems to be a lacuna at the centre of school improvement research, in the sense that there seems to be little help in answering the questions of what, how, and why will things be done to improve.

²² Article written in 1996, but the reference made is to a publication from 2017.

- iii. The impact on education more widely. At this point, Ouston asks how far the measurement of school effectiveness is itself effective. This is because the School Effectiveness and School Improvement movement has arguably overemphasised the role of the headteacher and the Senior Management team, and promotes top-down administration and control. I agree with Ouston here, who like many others questions the use of examination and test results in measuring effectiveness, and making them a major performance indicator, thus, if a school has good results, then it can be labelled as a good school. Last of all, Ouston asks about the amount of improvement that schools can expect in a reasonable way from their students.

Wrigley (2013, p. 36) speaks of three limitations in school effectiveness research:

- By privileging quantifiable outputs, it places overwhelming emphasis on exam results.
- It is unable to describe complex directionality; for example, good behaviour is positioned as an input without recognising that it can be the consequence of poor teaching, or even viewed as an output of schooling.
- Finally, despite the complex detail of mathematical calculations, their truth depends on the validity of the features being observed and quantified.

These limitations point to the fact that in observing the key characteristics for school effectiveness, there is too much mathematical calculation which seems to take away and detract from the whole school life, a holistic analysis of which may shed more light on the effectiveness of a particular school.

An interesting point is made by Wrigley (2004) who speaks of values being taken out of the equation when evaluating school effectiveness. He refers to Teddlie and Reynolds (2001) who speak of themselves as pragmatists, arguing that “pragmatism here appears to refer simply to a greater methodological variety rather than to a greater reflection on values.

They miss their critics' essential critique of value-blindness, and indeed continue by insisting on a pragmatic acquiescence with dominant political forces" (p. 238). It follows that the methodology used by those who advocate for school effectiveness research cannot see the wood for the trees, in the sense that the wider social and moral backgrounds of the situation are not looked into. This critical point is valuable for this study since, as we shall see, Catholic school effectiveness looks into the values and ethos of the school. In fact, Grace (1998, p. 120) says that "school effectiveness research must look more closely at the *cultural* features of schooling, e.g. the ethos and values climate of a school, the quality of interpersonal relations within it etc."

As a positive move, according to Reynolds et al. (2014, p. 199), school effectiveness research is today seen "as a dynamic, not static, set of relationships and moving away from seeing education in particular as an inherently stable set of arrangements towards one that sees the various 'levels' of the educational system interacting and achieving variable outcomes." The author insists that there are relationships between the components of education and what the student produces.

With reference to school improvement, although being distinct from school effectiveness, sometimes the former is absorbed by the latter. In fact, Wrigley (2004, p. 241) states that "school improvement in Britain has been read by government and by many headteachers in terms of processes for delivering greater 'effectiveness', as narrowly defined." This would result in great discomfort for teachers, who feel that there is a significant difference between what is officially said about school improvement, and the way it is put into practice, keeping in mind their own values which, in their opinion, should translate into better fulfilment of students' needs.

As we shall see in the course of this study, we need a new approach in the application of school effectiveness research to Catholic schools. Catholic schools effectiveness research

will take us in a new direction since it cannot be measured simply by what is achieved, such as academic grades, but we have to speak more about the values which make up a Catholic school. This is reflected in what Grace (1998, p. 124) said about “extending the important concept of ‘value-added’ research to include the equally important concept of ‘values-added’ inquiry – a more Catholic paradigm.”

3.7 Recent Trends in Literature

In what has been written until now, the literature visited seems to be relatively dated. I believe that such literature can provide us with the necessary background so that we can understand what we mean by school effectiveness and school improvement today and where this whole journey has led us. Recent literature on school effectiveness and school improvement, while claiming that the movements have succeeded by their diffusion in educational circles and in schools, highlight some important factors which may build on some of the flaws of the original ideas.

Hopkins et al. (2014, p. 257) speak of the school effectiveness and school improvement movements as spreading in different countries, striving “to help schools become increasingly effective learning environments for the full range of their students have been more or less successful.” For these authors, for effectiveness to take place, there must be systematic improvement research which takes place through five stages. During the first period, one should be able to understand the culture of the school. Secondly, there should be “action research and research initiatives at the school level,” and especially seeing the needs of disadvantaged pupils. During the third stage, there is the need to manage change and have broad styles for reform. Then, one should build professional learning communities while recognising the importance of leadership. Lastly, the school will advance towards identifying particular approaches to reform.

Valenzuela et al. (2016, p. 473), while highlighting the importance of improvement, admit that even though time has passed since the rise of the school effectiveness and school improvement movements, yet,

One of the most important challenges for an educational system is [still] how to trigger school improvement processes on a large scale, particularly in schools that educate the most disadvantaged children, and then to sustain these processes over time. Unfortunately, while studying how schools change their educational performance over a medium-long-term time period is relevant, it is a comparatively underdeveloped issue in the literature on school effectiveness and school improvement.

Moreover, there cannot be a multipurpose idea of school improvement for schools, since programmes of improvement should be tailor-made for particular schools, since all schools are distinct, and all members of the school community are different. The authors also criticise the fact that while school change is an ongoing process, few studies have yet focused on schools over a longer period of time. At the same time, such studies did not take into consideration what in fact enabled schools to develop effectively. At this point, my question is: How should we study school effectiveness and improvement today? It seems to be more appropriate that, while studying the effectiveness of schools, one should rather reflect on particular schools over time, something which I have tried to do in this study. Moreover, in such a reflection, one should strive to see what are the main factors that enable a school to be successful.

Metzger (2015, p. xi), speaking of creating effective schools for all students, asks: “How many more young people will this antiquated institution – school – imprison before we create a system that works *for* and *with* students rather than against them?” Speaking of effective schools should lead policy-makers to think of schools which enable students to

succeed in different strata of life. While making reference to school improvement, the author suggests that schools do not need reform, but a new form since, in her own words (p. 69), there is “so much reform, yet so little transformation”. This idea should lead policy makers to ask the right questions at the right time, keeping in mind not change for the sake of change, but the change for the benefit of the whole educational community.

Hajisoterou et al. (2018, p. 92) make an important assertion about what is essential to a successful school:

The active and meaningful involvement and contribution respectively of all key school actors in improvement efforts. By giving them the opportunity to share their ideas and values and treat them as reflective practitioners, we unveil their perceptions, what they believe, perceive, and think about different areas which could eventually assist in the improvement of the school setting.

This means that the role of all stakeholders is important in promoting the success of the school, and when accepting this success, they can move forward towards improvement, since improvement in itself leads to success.

Scherer and Nilsen (2019, p. 255), like many other academics, affirm what has been said about school effectiveness and improvement:

Research on school effectiveness and improvement is primarily concerned with the interactions between students’ learning outcomes, institutional settings, and classroom and school environments. Specifically, effects of the school learning environment, the classroom instruction, and teaching quality on student achievement have been evaluated extensively.

However, these authors (2019, p. 255) insist that there should be a differentiation in effectiveness, since “these effects may vary considerably across educational systems, countries, municipalities, schools, subjects, grade levels, cohorts, teachers, and groups of

students”. This idea can shed light on the purpose of this study, which despite studying Catholic school effectiveness, tries to move towards something new, since it is not studying a general idea, but a particular sector of education in the Maltese islands. Moreover, Schere and Nilson (p. 258) refer to the study by Hübner et al. (2019) who show that “measures of ‘effectiveness’ may not only include student achievement ... differential effectiveness may not necessarily be observed in achievement only but in affective constructs as well.” This last idea will lead us to the next section of this literature review, where I will speak of what constitutes a Catholic school, and its effectiveness.

3.8 Catholic School Ethos, Mission, and Effectiveness

Since this study explores Catholic school effectiveness, this section, while starting to attempt to define ‘effectiveness’ in relation to Catholic schools, strives to answer some important questions: What makes a school Catholic? Are there specific ingredients in the recipe to call a school Catholic? How has the Catholic Church established its footprint in education? Why did the Catholic Church take on the role of providing education? What makes Catholic school effectiveness distinct?

However, one should state from the outset that, as Cook and Ostrowski (n.d., p. 11) say,

A review of the literature reveals a lacuna of recent research related to measuring the religious mission effectiveness of Catholic schools. More research needs to be done at the national, network, diocesan, and institutional level. It would be particularly helpful to identify the characteristics and practices of schools that are effective in the religious dimension. Furthermore, instead of fearing potential negative research findings, we should consider these findings a road map for school improvement and mission actualization.

3.8.1 The Context: The Role of Religion in Education

Parker-Jenkins, Glenn and Janmaat (2014) say that, quite recently, there has been a shift from the terminology ‘religious schools’ to ‘faith schools’, or more correctly phrased ‘schools with a religious character’, with the aim of formation. This idea, of offering and not imposing a Christian and Catholic education, is found in post-Vatican II documents: “it becomes especially urgent to offer young people a course of scholastic formation which is not reduced to a simple individualistic and instrumental fruition of service with a view to obtaining a qualification” (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2007, par. 2) This offer finds its root in Jesus’ style of invitational leadership, encapsulated in the call of his first disciples: “Follow me!” (Mt 4, 19). Neidhart and Lamb (2016, p.55) say that

formation is a spiritual and religious activity that “begins with the heart” (O’Leary, 2008, p. 129) and provides knowledge, skill, and ritual to support heart experiences. The deeper consciousness that follows is ultimately expressed in discipleship and a particular vocation.”

Religion can be seen as having played a pivotal role in the history of education. Very often, throughout the Christian world, it is easy to link the early forms of education to cathedrals and monasteries; it was there that boys were educated in order to become monks or priests. However, as history attests, formal schooling is linked to religion as an expression of a preferential option for the poor. While this idea will be dealt with in more detail later on in this chapter, at this point, I would like to give two examples, linking this idea to the role of religion in education, while showing how faith groups founded educational institutions. The first one refers to England, where a group of Quakers established the Society for Promoting the Lancasterian System for the Education of the Poor in 1808 which set up schools to educate children from underprivileged families (see report on *Faith Schools, Pupil Performance and Social Selection*, 2016, p. 8). The second example takes us to South Africa.

According to Grace (2000, p. 9): “It may be said that Catholic educational agencies have historically played a crucial role in the first phase of transformation of South African society from apartheid to emancipation”. In fact, the Church has been at the forefront to reconstruct the continent in the post-apartheid period. For Manala (2002, p. 1050),

The church is therefore trusted with the important task of reconstruction of our society ... It seems the past record of the church’s performance in education remains an important reason for the present calls for church involvement in the provision of education.

One can also mention the establishment of educational institutions by two major religions: Judaism and Islam. Parker-Jenkins, Glenn and Janmaat (2014) say that Jewish education in England and Wales can be traced back to the time when the Jews were admitted again into England in the second half of the seventeenth century when, during this period, Jewish schools were founded along with synagogues. On the other hand, Muslim schools were established in an effort to be like other faith schools. Parker-Jenkins, Glenn and Janmaat (2014, p. 23) say that, today, in the west, Jewish and Muslim educational institutions follow Anglicans and Catholics “in establishing schools permeated by faith.” On the other hand, in the Middle East and Asia, for centuries, these denominations have established faith schools.

3.8.2 Religious Orders, their Charism, and the Ethos of a Catholic School

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994, par.799), “a charism is a gift given by the Holy Spirit to a person or group for a particular work in the world.” Each religious founder is endowed with a particular charism. A charism gives identity to the particular community, and as Paletta and Fiorin (2016, p. 138) put it, “mission comes from identity, it renders it concrete”. Although not all religious orders have the educational aspect clearly expressed in their charism, yet, these orders still founded schools and administer

them. As an example, I would like to refer to the religious order I belong to, the Carmelite Order, which has at the centre of its charism contemplation, expressed through prayer, fraternity, and service. The Carmelite Order has been administering schools for more than one hundred and sixty years, the first one being in Dublin (Terenure College), seeing schools as an expression where those who belong to a Carmelite school may be able to seek the face of God through the educational experience. It follows that the relationship between religious orders and Catholic education can be seen in the fact that, usually, the charism of a particular order is expressed in the ethos of a particular school. For Cook and Simonds (2011, p. 320), “religious order schools and networks often draw on the charism of their founding religious congregations to sharpen their focus and clarify their distinctive educational vision and qualities.” Moreover, the same authors (p. 321) go on to say that “because of their religious nature, all Catholic schools, not just religious orders schools, can and should claim a charism to educate in a special way that benefits the contemporary Church and society.”

Stock (2012, p. 18) defines ‘ethos’ as “a way of living, behaving and doing things by people who, though diverse, follow common values and are united by a shared vision of life”.

Referring to Catholic schools, the Maltese Episcopal Conference (2014, p. 8) says that

a Catholic school’s ‘ethos’ may be understood to be Christ’s way of life and teachings as the defining inspiration of a common way of life accepted and adopted by those who accept him as their Master and Lord. This way of life is expressed in the code of conduct, formal teaching, outward signs and the personal experiences of the school community in its daily life.

The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1988, par. 25) insists that the school environment should be seen by everyone as one derived from faith: “From the first moment that a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one illumined by the light of faith, and having its own unique

characteristics.” The ideas of educational climate and school culture are closely linked to the ethos of Catholic schools, which can be outwardly expressed through various means.

Although in Malta even state and independent schools have religious images in the school building, this does not mean that in Catholic schools these images are enough to build a Catholic environment. The spirit which animates the whole life at school should be one where there is no dichotomy between what happens at school and the life of faith.

A Catholic school ethos can be expressed in various ways. Stock (2012, pp. 19-21) lists a number of them:

the school’s legal governing documents; mission statement; governance; leadership and management; partnership and collaboration; religious education and the whole curriculum; liturgy and prayer; promotion of a culture of vocation; chaplaincy; pastoral care, support and guidance; charitable outreach; code of conduct; school buildings and physical signs.

At this point, I think it is important to note that, in the last few years, some Catholic schools in Malta have been employing a lay person to work as an Assistant Chaplain, something which is now taking place in most schools. This came about due to the fact that while the presence of religious persons in school is declining, there still needs to be a prepared person to coordinate and assist in the pastoral care of students, parents, and educators.

3.8.3 The Preferential Option for the Poor

An important aspect of Catholic schooling is the preferential option for the poor. In the document on Catholic Education of the Second Vatican Council (1965, par.9) the Council Fathers insist that, primarily, the Church provides Catholic schooling to “the poor or those who are deprived of family help and affection or those who are far from the faith.”

Since this theme did not come up explicitly during the interviews, and reflecting upon the issue myself, I can say that in Malta this idea is not much felt in Catholic education. I think that this is the result of the present way students are enrolled into Catholic schools, which is mainly by ballot and also owing to the fact that Catholic schools are financially assisted by the government. However, I am sure that all Catholic schools do all that they can when faced with students who come from financially or other disadvantaged background, and these students are treated with love and dignity as all other students. Notwithstanding this, the idea of care of concern, which I believe is strongly linked to the preferential option of the poor, came out as an important theme from the data collected.

Since students in Malta are enrolled in Catholic schools without taking any notice of their financial background, this may pose a difference from other Catholic schools around the world. Fisher (2006, p. 4) praises a study in Australia which calls attention

to the nature of the overall enrolment patterns within Catholic schools, specifically in terms of socio-economic status. They [Pascoe (2007), Fisher (2006) and Croke (2007)] conclude that within a tradition of providing a preferential option for the poor and primarily catering for students from Catholic families, the profile is now such that: ‘poorer Catholic children are increasingly attending State schools; wealthier Catholic children are increasingly attending non-Catholic private schools; and middle income other than Catholic children are increasingly attending Catholic schools’.

3.8.4 The Special Yeast of the Parable – the Distinctiveness of Catholic Schools

What does this discussion conclude on Catholic schooling and its effectiveness? What makes Catholic school effectiveness distinct?

One of the parables by Jesus in the New Testament speaks of yeast: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened” (Mt. 13:33). Being at first a separate ingredient, the yeast becomes one thing

with the whole dough. The same thing happens in Catholic schools. Catholicity is not an addition to the life of the school; rather, the life of the school is imbued with Catholicity. The characteristics of a Catholic school are interwoven in each and every aspect of the school life in a way that the school comes out as distinctive, and not a school with distinctive qualities. This is affirmed by Groome (1996, p. 107) who says “that the distinctiveness of Catholic education is prompted by the distinctive characteristics of Catholicism itself, and these characteristics should be reflected in the whole curriculum of Catholic schools”. Moreover, Mc Laughlin (1996, pp. 141) states that “the distinctiveness of Catholic education is not something which is merely added on to a pre-existing and independently determined education.” He quotes Walsh (1983, p. 4) who insists that this distinctiveness does not involve “... a Christian icing on the cake of a pre-baked education ... (but) ... a secret ingredient *in* that cake, the special yeast of the Gospel parable.”

Mc Laughlin (1996, pp. 140-145) mentions three related general features: “the embodiment of a view about the meaning of human persons and of human life”; “an aspiration to holistic influence”, and “religious and moral formation”. It follows, then, that Catholic schools exist to instil in their students the idea of being fully human, living with others and a true religious formation which abides by Catholic principles.

Grace (2002, p. 138) speaks of “the mission of school effectiveness and of academic success.” Since very often school effectiveness research takes place by looking into details of examination results and scoring, Grace (2002, p. 139) asks “to what extent had the discourse of school effectiveness and school improvement become a major part of the personal schooling mission of these Catholic headteachers?” He says that, in fact, according to his research, headteachers managed to integrate these aspects, that is, what makes a Catholic school distinctively Catholic, together with the general features of an effective school.

Topping et al. (2015, p. 39) speak of the three purposes of Catholic education: happiness, culture, and virtue, saying that a person “should study because it can contribute to his own everlasting happiness; second, it will improve his culture; third, it will perfect his virtue or skill.” Here we can see the idea of formation of the whole person, which is one of the aims of Catholic education. These three purposes identified by Topping remind me of Aristotle who says that “some identify happiness with ... With those who identify happiness with virtue or some one virtue our account is in harmony; for to virtue belongs virtues activity.”

All these ideas are confirmed by Pope Benedict XVI (2008) who, speaks of the essence of Catholic schooling, saying that:

Catholic identity is not dependent upon statistics. Neither can it be equated simply with orthodoxy of course content. It demands and inspires much more, namely that each and every aspect of your learning communities reverberated within the ecclesial life of faith.

The Maltese Episcopal Conference (2014) highlights four essential qualities of a Catholic school, so that a school can manifest its distinctiveness:

- i. Christ and his Good News should be at the heart and basis of a Catholic school, since at this institution students embark on a faith journey. At the same time, the values found in the Gospel are imbued with each aspect of the life of the school. The spirit of the Gospel requires the school to be inclusive especially towards the poor and the weak. At this point one should say that Gospel values, as they emerge from the Beatitudes (Mt 5,1-12) “need to be explicitly named, their meaning unpacked and pupils helped to understand how they relate to their lives both at school, at home and in society” (Stock, p. 17)

- ii. If a Catholic school is established on Christ, it follows that the school should be faithful to point towards a holistic formation, enabling the students to reach their full potential as human persons.
- iii. A Catholic school does not live on its own, but it should be in collaboration with the local Church and the families of children. In such a way, a Catholic school should be free to promote the Catholic faith and uphold its unique characteristics. An important aspect is that parents should be provided with active formation programmes and be able to be actively involved in the school life. Moreover, when possible, the Catholic school should form part of the community life in the local Church or parish.
- iv. A Catholic school should be at the service of Christ and of humanity. This would mean that a Catholic school should help students, staff, and parents to find meaningfulness in life in one's own life-giving relationship with God. The school should be a place where the Church is experienced as a true community, while being a witness to the secular world.

A good summary of Catholic schools is given by Richardson (2014, p. 69) who says that although a sense of belonging to a strong community is not peculiar to Catholic schools there is a dimension being articulated here that goes to the heart of the purpose of Catholic education. The education is holistic, it is based in a faith community, it endeavours to pass on the Catholic faith and it retains a preferential option for those in need.

In short, when it comes to Catholic education, it is about giving education to the whole person, putting the students into a setting that encourages the formation of the whole child with his beliefs, sentiments, emotions, intelligence, and academic abilities. It is a preparation to face the reality of the world. Catholic schooling is a commitment to a way of life. With

faith as a Catholic foundation, students and families can turn to God in difficult times, and can be grateful for the blessings in joyful times.

3.9 Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have tried to give the necessary information, background, and context about the school effectiveness and school improvement movements, and Catholic education.

After discussing the methodology and methods used in this research, the perspectives reviewed in this chapter will lead us to discuss the main focus of this study, that is, the effectiveness of Catholic schools in Malta and their improvement.

Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

Since research can be conducted in different ways, this chapter will speak of the methodology and the methods of this study. By methodology I refer to the particular rationales which are followed and how certain philosophical notions relate to this project. In this section, I will try to explain which assumptions about reality and knowledge I am working with. On the other hand, to speak of methods is to refer to the different tools and techniques for collecting, analysing, interpreting, and presenting data for a particular study. Besides discussing these issues, I will also explain how I addressed a variety of ethical issues that came up during the research as well as identifying what those issues were.

4.2 Philosophical Underpinnings

In research, one has to look at the philosophical underpinnings of the study. In this way, the philosophy of knowledge in relation to the particular research is highlighted. As a researcher, one needs to see where one stands in relation to fundamental philosophical assumptions concerning ontology, epistemology, and human agency. These assumptions have an influence on how the research proceeds in terms of the methodology and methods used as well as on the reliability and credibility of the findings produced. As Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, p. 21) write, “ontological assumptions will give rise to epistemological assumptions which have methodological implications for the choice of particular data collection techniques.”

4.2.1 Ontology

Since ontology is concerned with the nature of being, the fundamental questions at this point are: What is the ontology of my particular project? What are the assumptions I am working with? Is it a constructivist and an interpretivist study, or is it objectivist and positivist? I am more of a constructivist and an interpretivist, using qualitative methods to discover more about the truth, which comes from interpreting the meanings and experiences of participants. For Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 23),

In constructionism (also termed constructivism), in contrast to the argument that external objects and factors determine, shape, impress, print or fix themselves onto passive recipients, people actively and agentially seek out, select and construct their own views, worlds and learning, and these processes are rooted in socio-cultural contexts and interactions. In other words, cognition is generative and active rather than receptive and passive respectively.

This approach is linked to interpretivism which, unlike positivism, interprets social reality and makes meaning out of it.

In fact, in this research, individual experiences are valued when collecting and analysing the data collected. Subjectivity is also given a certain weight, since the ideas were collected from different persons and, to a certain extent, objectivity is hard to achieve. This means that in the analysis I tried to interpret the main themes which I thought were at the centre of the interviews and tried to construct my theory for Catholic school effectiveness and improvement. For the purpose of this study, I should say that qualitative methods start with ontology, since there are multiple realities one can delve into. As Bogna, Raineri and Dell (2020, p. 471) write with reference to their own research project (about the relationship between managers in small and medium enterprises and hazard detection), “the ontological standpoint allowed for the discovery of multiple realities and the construction of new

meanings to the worldviews of the research participants.” In the context of this thesis, these multiple realities refer to the realities as expressed by the different individuals or stakeholders of particular schools and the different situations which comprise the subject of this study. In fact, although the schools studied here are all labelled as “Catholic”, each one of them has its special characteristics, stemming mainly from its ethos which very often is derived from the charism of the particular religious order which runs the school.

From a negative point of view, it is possible that, as a result of my findings, a conflict might be discovered between the ideas expressed by the individual headteachers and the Catholic Church more broadly. It is possible that not all ideas expressed in the course of the data collection can be thought of as orthodox. If, for example, during a particular interview, a headteacher gave his thoughts about leading a Catholic school which are not in line with Catholicity in general, then this might raise eyebrows with the Church authorities.

4.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology asks some important questions about knowledge. From an interpretivist perspective, knowledge is constructed by individuals. It is a learning process. One knows what one is taught and what one experiences. As Duit (1996, p. 41) puts it, “The learner is not seen as a passive receiver but as an active constructor of knowledge.” What are the implications of these statements in relation to truth and my study? Do I believe in an objective truth? I believe that one can know more by searching for truth. However, this is not a scientific truth (in the narrow sense of the term) which comes out of an experiment. Rather, the notion of truth comes out of inquiry and corroborates the knowledge it asserts it does. This study is not a natural science research project which is based on experiment, but rather a social science enquiry which is not aiming at an objective truth in the way that experimental science does. A scientific truth can more easily come out of a quantitative study; however, in

this study, I am taking more the position of an interpretivist, using qualitative methods and constructivism to build my theory.

It follows, then, that the main difference between ontology and epistemology is that while “ontology” assumes that we know something, “epistemology” asks how we know what we know, and is more related to truth, something that a researcher aims to discover.

Answering the question “what is truth for me?”, I can say that it is something which exists, however, it can be seen differently from different perspectives. In such a way, truth becomes subjective, according to what is lived by different persons and in different social contexts.

While for me personally the statement “God is good as he provides” is true, this is not necessarily the same for persons coming from a poor social context. The same happens in the context of Catholic education. The truth about it is not the same in different social contexts, for example, if education is free or if it has to be paid for by the individuals.

By adopting an interpretivist position, my research takes place in such a way that, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 175) say, it “rests, in part, on a subjectivist, interactionist, socially constructed ontology and on an epistemology that recognizes multiple realities, agentic behaviours and the importance of understanding a situation through the eyes of the participants.” This means that the experiences are constructed by the individuals who took part in this research, and the same experiences and their implications have been understood by the same participants. It is important to note that this is the first level of construction involved here, that is, by the participants themselves. Then there is the second level, that is, construction by myself as the researcher, who is seeking to make sense of the experiences expressed by the participants. In this study, this construction also takes place through my reflection as a researcher-participant on my own experiences as a headteacher, as expressed in the personal reflection chapter (Chapter 6).

4.2.3 Human Agency

Do human beings have power over their actions? Are they able to commence a deed and decide, or do they just react to the situations around them, and just do what occurs to them? People might decide either to act in response to what occurs to them or not to act. As we all know from our experience, the more a person has power in society, the more he can determine what to do in life. For example, a teacher in a classroom has certain powers to decide; however, a headteacher has more jurisdiction to choose about things which happen at school.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 5) identify certain key assumptions that concern human nature. For them, it follows that

Two images of human beings emerge from such assumptions – the one portrays them as responding mechanically and deterministically to their environment, i.e. as products of the environment, controlled like puppets; the other, as initiators of their own actions with free will and creativity, producing their own environments.

Here one can make a distinction between two other aspects. The former, a mechanical response leads us to behaviourism, while the latter, allowing individuals a sense of initiative, leads us to constructionism. While acknowledging that some aspects of life are responded to in a mechanistic way, this study, taking an interpretivist and constructionist approach, takes into account the initiatives and choices taken by the participants. In fact, it can be seen as an active rather than a passive approach towards Catholic schooling. This is in contrast to positivism, as Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 16) attest: “The difficulty in which positivism finds itself is that it regards human behaviour as passive, essentially determined and controlled, thereby ignoring intention, individualism and freedom, i.e. as suffering from the same difficulties that inhere in behaviourism.”

Each human being is unique in his or her background, needs and experiences. Due to this complexity, we can assert that research that involves men and women is itself complex. In this study, which is carried out among human persons, the human aspect is very important since this whole research relates to this humanity. In fact, I can say that this aspect does not relate only to the persons who took part in this research, but it has a great impact on all persons who have some sort of link with the schools which are the focus of my research, not only in the present time but also in the future.

4.2.4 My Positionality

At this point, I would like to reflect on my own experiences in relation to schools, and, at the same time, I will consider how my own experience with all it entails may impact on the research design, data collection, and findings.

Being a head of school for twelve years myself, very often I reflect upon what is happening in the school I lead. While acknowledging that there are various positive aspects which lead to the ideal concepts of an effective school, I admit that in certain aspects there is room for improvement. For example, very often, we are reaching all students in some way or another; however, I strongly feel that we are not reaching their families as much as we should. Perhaps sometimes there are also students who are not getting as much attention as they deserve. This could be the effect of various circumstances, such as limitations in manpower and in time.

Due to these personal viewpoints, I feel compelled to do something in the area in which I work, something which I see not as a career but as a service towards families and towards the Church. This fact has given me energy to embark on this project so that my own values and beliefs, combined with my professional experience, will be shared with those of other school leaders and, in the future, we can embark on different projects together aimed at

catering for improvement in Catholic schools, keeping in mind that even if certain recommendations which come out of this study are implemented, there will still be still room for improvement since I strongly believe that improvement is always ongoing and needed. This same research, especially when hearing other colleagues speaking about their own school experience, has helped me to reflect more on the mission of the Church school.

At the stage of preparing for the data collection, I was very attentive to my own beliefs and values regarding Catholic education. In fact, especially in designing the interview questions, I was afraid that they would include my biases, which would result in some sort of impact upon the findings. However, since the interviews were semi-structured, there was a lot of space for the participants to express themselves, while I chose not to speak so as to limit any influence I might have upon the answers. I think that this succeeded, in the sense that the participants spoke about several themes which I had never thought about beforehand.

4.3 Methods and Procedure

4.3.1 The Research Question

This study starts from the basic research question: How can the effectiveness of boys' Catholic schools in Malta be improved? Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) state that the research question should identify the focus of the study and ask what the study is about. For Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 165), research questions “inform the direction of the research in substantive, contextual, theoretical and methodological terms; in other words, they indicate what the research is really about and what it must address.”

To generate a comprehensive and useful answer to the research question, this research aimed to delve into the ideas of stakeholders, that is, headteachers, teachers, parents and students. Albeit in a different manner, that is, interviews with headteachers and questionnaires for teachers, parents, and students, the data collected helped me to develop a

clear picture of the schools which were the focus of the study and, through the data analysis, I was able to achieve a clear idea of what the stakeholders believe about what constitutes an effective school, while at the same time, see what can be done for their improvement.

One might assume that since the notion of improvement is explicitly mentioned in the research question, there must be some sort of lack of effectiveness in schools. However, I strongly believe that improvement is tightly linked to effectiveness. Moreover, even if a school is ranked as highly effective by a competent educational authority, there is always room for improvement. Achieving improvement cannot be tackled with a one-size-fits-all approach, but is something which each school should decide upon. Understandings of improvement are also influenced by the social context, stakeholders, and the specific time when one analyses effectiveness and improvement.

In such a way, the aims and objectives of this research are, firstly, to study in what way Catholic schools in Malta are effective and how this effectiveness is conceptualised: What are the notions that constitute this effectiveness? (These notions will be examined later in the data analysis chapter as specific themes which I thought as standing out in the data collected); and secondly, to examine in which areas the schools need improvement in the view of the schools' stakeholders, how these matters can be approached, and the ways in which implementation should take place.

4.3.2 The Context

The wider context of this research is the education system in Malta. In the Maltese islands, education is catered for by the state, by the Catholic Church, and by other independent agencies. The only schools in Malta with a religious character and which are not Catholic, form part of the independent schools sector and fall under the responsibility of the Muslim community in Malta.

An important question which arises here is why this study is concerned only with boys' Catholic schools in Malta. The reason is that having a particular sector to study may produce a clearer vision of it. Working in a boys' school is also my personal professional experience. In this way, when designing my research, I was able to draw on more of my own experience. Moreover, as we have seen in the literature review, previously, no such detailed study has taken place in either a boys' or a girls' school, so, by means of this study, I am trying to fill the gaps which are present in this research area. A less detailed study was done by Borg (2018), where his research focused on a small sample of boys' and girls' Catholic secondary schools in Malta, analysing the impact of Catholic schools upon their students. I strongly believe that girls' Catholic schools deserve a study of their own. Additionally, I preferred to interview all headteachers in a particular sector rather than having a sample of headteachers from both boys' and girls' schools. On the other hand, trying to interview all headteachers from both boys' and girls' schools would not have been practical, due to the sheer numbers involved. Since I opted for boys' schools only, I managed to have a 100% view of all headteachers. In any case, I do not believe that I would have been able to reach out to all girls' Catholic schools headteachers as well. Moreover, I feel that leadership and management is quite similar in boys' Catholic schools, while there might be some divergences in the leadership of girls' Catholic schools.

It is interesting to note that some years back, in 2016, the University of Malta, through the Faculty of Theology, initiated the post-graduate degree in Catholic School Leadership. It could be very fruitful if persons who enrol for the course, as well as for similar courses in other academic institutions, and who are interested in taking leadership positions in Catholic schools, would select the area of girls' schools as their theme for research.

For the purpose of this study, I will provide some statistics of the schools run by the Catholic Church in Malta and Gozo. This data has been sourced from the Ecclesiastical Directory issued by the Archdiocese of Malta and the Diocese of Gozo in 2021.

There is a total of 55 Catholic schools in Malta, which cater for around 16,000 students, ranging from kindergarten to post-secondary. The majority of primary schools also have a secondary school. There are eleven secondary Catholic schools for boys and eleven secondary schools for girls. Of these eleven schools for boys, which are the subject of this research, seven of them are both primary and secondary schools. Two of the schools which have both a primary and a secondary school, also have a post-secondary educational institution. In this study, data was collected from ten boys' schools which have taken part in the research, since the school of which I am headteacher did not participate so that any bias will be minimised. Even though my school did not take part in the research, as a researcher, my own experiences and views of Catholic schooling were at the back of my mind when designing and carrying out the research of this study. Moreover, since without the experience of my school there seemed to be a missing piece to this study, I opted for a personal reflection chapter which will also analyse my experiences as a headteacher.

4.3.3 Qualitative vs Quantitative Methods

The predominant model in this research is the qualitative method, keeping in mind the interpretivist and constructivist position I have already discussed in this study. Since secondarily I also used questionnaires, there are also some elements of a quantitative method. Because of this, I would describe this research as a mixed methods study. I opted for this idea so that I can use a variety of data to better understand the situation of Catholic school effectiveness and their improvement. The questionnaires in this study may be considered

primarily as generating quantitative data as their questions were close-ended to facilitate basic statistical analysis.

For the primary focus of my data collection, the headteachers, I chose qualitative methods over other methods, since as Hitchcock and Hughes (1995, p. 26) argue, “a qualitative research orientation places individual actors at its centre, it will focus upon context, meaning, culture, history and biography.” Moreover, Rubin and Babbie (2011, pp. 446-447) defined qualitative research methods as “research methods that emphasize depth of understanding and the deeper meanings of human experience, and that aim to generate theoretically richer, albeit more tentative, observations.” It was precisely this depth of understanding and experience that I was hoping to gather from interviewing the headteachers. As with other research methods, qualitative methods have both strengths and weaknesses. As already seen in the above quotations, a particular strength of qualitative methods is the fact that they can be more open to observations and in-depth discourse, and from them one can elicit a greater sense of what participants’ experiences mean to them. All research is designed to explore unexplored facts, and qualitative methods do this by evaluating people’s experiences and views on different questions. When it comes to weaknesses, it can be said that qualitative methods can sometimes be generalised beyond what the data will support. It seems to be a flaw in applying a small case-study to a general situation. Thankfully, in my study, this was avoided, since all ten headteachers agreed to take part in the interviews. In such a way, my interviews were not a sample of schools whose findings were then applied to all schools; rather, the information gathered was indeed gathered from all schools in the chosen sector. It is worth noting that since this study is taking place in Malta, I am not intending to apply this study to Catholic schools worldwide or to draw conclusions about the situation in Catholic schools beyond Malta. Moreover, it can also be said that the researcher’s views and ideas can influence the study because he can interpret data according to his own

ideas. This will lead to the researcher's responsibility to avoid bias. Another bias which I also took note of was the fact that, perhaps, the interviewees did not give a clear picture of their own situation, but they could have tried to paint the best picture possible for their own school. However, I can say that this bias was limited in this study, since all interviewees were clear in their responses and were aware that, from this study, ideas for improvement could be adopted for their own educational institutions.

4.3.4 Participants

To have a clearer view of stakeholders, in this research I tried to include a wide range of perspectives. In this way, first of all, I identified the most important stakeholders in schools, that is, school leaders, teachers, students, and parents. School leaders were chosen for the interviews, while teachers, students, and parents were chosen for the questionnaires. I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with school leaders, since I believe that this method allows them to narrate their experiences of running a school and making choices which affect the lives of staff and students. They have gained these experiences over a number of years and, as such, interviews are more suited to capturing the richness and depth of knowledge accrued over time. I think that the quality of information that headteachers can provide is greater than that of any other source. On the other hand, such detailed information was not necessary from the other stakeholders since, from their sample, I wanted to capture a more general sense of their experience of Catholic education. Moreover, having a fairly large sample of teachers, students, and parents, will make it impossible to have interviews with them. It might be suggested that I could have included some focus groups within my research design; however, I believe that this would have proven very difficult to arrange because of different availability times for all the groups involved. Having received positive replies from all the headteachers contacted (which amounts to the total of all the headteachers of Catholic

boys' schools in Malta), I succeeded in having the greatest number of possible participants for the interviews (10), while for the questionnaires, I only have a sample of students, parents, and educators.

Participants for Interviews

The participants for the interviews were ten headteachers from boys' secondary Catholic schools in Malta. As stated above, in Malta and Gozo there are eleven boys' secondary Catholic schools and, in this research, all the headteachers of these schools took part apart from myself, with my experiences being analysed in the personal reflection chapter instead. All the headteachers of boys' secondary Catholic schools happen to be male, five of them being priests and five lay persons. This shows a shift which in recent years has seen such schools increasingly led by members of the laity. Until some years ago, nearly all school leaders were members of religious orders, however, due to the dwindling numbers of religious vocations, and since congregations cannot provide a prepared headteacher, lay people have been appointed to the role. One can assume that, in the near future, a large majority of Catholic schools in Malta will have lay members in the senior leadership teams. The populations of the secondary schools which took part in this study vary from relatively small schools of 240 students to large ones of 650 students. These numbers were taken from the Ecclesiastical Directory (2021). While there are young headteachers who are just over 30 years of age with a few years of experience in a school, there are also experienced school leaders of almost 60 years of age with nearly 30 years of experience. For the sake of information, it is important to note that for boys' schools there are no headteachers above the normal retirement age, something which contrasts with girls' Catholic schools where, until recently, some headteachers, belonging to a religious congregation, were well past retirement age. The profile of the participants is shown in Table 3 below. The numbers in the school

population section have been rounded up to the average number of students a particular school has in a calendar year.

Table 3:

Details of Participants for Interviews

Data Source: Ecclesiastical Directory, Malta, 2021

Participant Identification Number	Age of Participant	Years in Headship	Gender	Priest vs Lay	Level of School	School Population
1	31-35	0-5	Male	Priest	Secondary	240
2	56-60	26-30	Male	Lay	Secondary	360
3	56-60	16-20	Male	Lay	Secondary	650
4	36-40	0-5	Male	Priest	Secondary	240
5	51-55	16-20	Male	Lay	Secondary	240
6	36-40	0-5	Male	Lay	Secondary	500
7	36-40	5-10	Male	Priest	Secondary	350
8	51-55	5-10	Male	Priest	Secondary	500
9	41-45	0-5	Male	Lay	Secondary	350
10	51-55	16-20	Male	Priest	Secondary	350

Participants for Questionnaires

The intended participants for the questionnaires were divided into three groups:

- i. Twenty teachers from each school, bringing the total to two hundred; however, six of the questionnaires were returned empty, presumably because they were not distributed.
- ii. Ten students from each school, bringing the total to one hundred.
- iii. Around two thousand parents who were sent an email from the respective schools and who were asked to participate in the questionnaire.

The numbers of the questionnaires distributed and of the received replies can be seen in Table 4 below. Regarding the questionnaires for parents, I am aware that the rate of response is rather low. I only asked the headteachers to distribute the questionnaires once without sending other reminders. Personally, I had wished to receive around fifty percent of

responses. However, I was aware from the beginning that not everyone will take part in answering the questionnaires. I know this from my own previous experience, since whenever we distribute some form of online questionnaire at school, the rate of response ranges from ten to twenty per cent. Although it did not seem realistic, I hoped for a fifty percent rate (to have a clearer picture) since, this time, the questionnaire distributed to parents was not some form of internal evaluation of the school to which more parents might respond, but a questionnaire being forwarded by someone not known to them. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) say that one should be satisfied with a fifty percent response rate, acknowledging that, very often, in practice, the percentage responding is much lower. However, noticing that not everyone replied to the questionnaires, I thought that I had enough feedback at hand since, on the other hand, if the number of replies was greater, it would make the work of analysing them harder and less practical. Although the response rate was lowest among parents, the actual number of replies received was greatest in this category. Table 4 below shows in detail the collective response rate of participating schools.

Table 4:

Distribution and Participation in Questionnaires

Distributed Questionnaires	Participants	Returned Questionnaires	Rate of Response
194	Teachers	121	62.4%
100	Students	56	56%
1850	Parents	183	9.9%

At first, I thought to classify teachers into three categories:

- i. Teachers or Learning Support Educators (LSEs) who are employed in a Catholic school but previously spent some time teaching in a non-Catholic (state or independent) school.

- ii. Teachers or LSEs who have been employed in a Catholic school for less than five years.
- iii. Teachers or LSEs who have been employed in a Catholic school for more than 20 years.

However, after some thought, including the reflection that there might be some overlap in categories, and after the University of Sheffield Ethics Review Board suggested that by doing so the identity of participants might be compromised, I decided that that questionnaires could be sent to any teacher in the participating schools.

I can say that the primary focus for data collection was on headteachers. This does not mean that the other participants, that is, teachers, parents and students are not important in this study, but since by interviewing headteachers I could gather quite a lot of information and data, the other participants and their answers in the questionnaires can be seen as part of a wider context to understand more fully the subject of this study. Headteachers are the primary focus in this study since they have a clearer and unique overview of their schools, and they have influence and authority within the schools. Their perceptions are not gained from outside, but from a hands-on reality which they experience every day. I think that headteachers do not just have an opinion of what school experience entails, but they have first-hand involvement in the reality. In this way, the interviews were prioritised when carrying out the data analysis. In the end, the answers given in the questionnaires by parents, teachers and students reflected the points mentioned during the interviews with headteachers. The questionnaires were designed at the same stage as the interview questions. In fact, in designing the schedule for data collection, I placed the distribution of questionnaires after accomplishing the interviews, and in fact they were distributed after all interviews had been conducted.

4.4 Data-Generation Tools

4.4.1 Data Collection

First Stage of Data Collection: Interviews with Headteachers

Interviews are generally and very commonly used to collect data. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006, p. 314) state that “the purpose of the qualitative research interview is to contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviewees.” For Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018), interviews may be thought of as the generation of knowledge through conversations. Moreover, they declare that “the interview is a social, interpersonal encounter, not merely a data-collection exercise.” For the sake of this study, and because this was felt during the interviewing process, it is important to note that according to the same authors (2018, p. 506),

Interviews enable participants – interviewers and interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view. In these senses the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is life itself; its human embeddedness is inescapable.

Rubin and Rubin (1995, p. 43) make the following distinction between different types of qualitative interviews: “Qualitative interviewing design is flexible, iterative, and continuous, rather than prepared in advance and locked in stone.” This generally refers to a qualitative interview which contains a framework of questions without being necessarily tied down in terms of the specific questions being asked. In my study, even though there were a number of questions in the interviews, one could say that they were open-ended, in the sense that the respondents could not only answer that specific question but could also move forward and touch upon other important points which perhaps had not been in my mind when designing the interview questions.

For the primary data collection from headteachers, I chose semi-structured interviews over other possible methods, such as questionnaires or focus groups. For DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006, p. 315):

semi-structured interviews are often the sole data source for a qualitative research project and are usually scheduled in advance at a designated time and location outside of everyday events. They are generally organised around a set of predetermined open-ended questions, with other questions emerging from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee/s.

I took this decision because an interview with one particular person does not only touch the surface of any research, but it can delve more in depth. This can be confirmed by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006, p. 315) who draw a contrast between individual and group interviews:

The individual in-depth interview allows the interviewer to delve deeply into social and personal matters, whereas the group interview allows interviewers to get a wider range of experience but, because of the public nature of the process, prevents delving as deeply into the individual.

Johnson (2001, p. 103) writes of in-depth interviews as involving

one-on-one, face-to-face interaction between an interviewer and an informant, ... seek[ing] to build the kind of intimacy that is common for mutual self-disclosure.

They tend to involve a greater expression of the interviewer's self than do some other types of interviews, as well as a personal commitment on the part of participants.

In fact, during the interviews, the majority of the headteachers interviewed spoke at length when asked the different questions; there was however a minority who just answered in brief. In interviews, there is more interaction; in my case this was possible since all participants agreed to be interviewed face to face. Besides that, there was quite good communication

between the interviewees and I, and I could notice the different signs in body language that took place. I believe that when speaking, all headteachers spoke from their heart, showing that the project of Catholic schooling is a deeply felt matter for them and not just their job; that is to say, they are not just being paid for it, but it is rather related to their own being.

Kvale (1996, p. 88) speaks of seven stages which occur during the development of an interview: “thematising; designing; interviewing; transcribing; analysing; verifying and reporting.” More or less, it was the same itinerary which I followed. First of all, I tried to address what is behind my research, that is, the level of effectiveness of boys’ Catholic schools in Malta, how they can improve, and how I can attain this information and from whom. Then I moved on to design the questions for the interviews, which were to be held with ten headteachers. After finalising the questions, a pilot interview was held with a colleague. Finishing it, we both agreed that the questions were clear and required some thought from the interviewee. Generally, one question followed the other and they were rather linked in such a way that sometimes a particular question could be answered when responding to a different question. Following this pilot interview, I decided that there was no need to amend the questions. It should be said that when I was at the phase of analysing the data and choosing the main themes, I realised that some themes were spoken of during different questions, but since the data analysis was arranged by themes and not by questions, this did not pose any difficulty.

To start phase one of data collecting, that is, interviewing headteachers, I waited until the participants would have settled in the new scholastic year. From my experience of being a headteacher, I presumed that in the first weeks of a scholastic year, no headteacher will be in the mood to take part in an interview, and it follows that an email invitation for an interview might pass without the receiver giving it any attention. So, in the first week of December 2018, an email with an invitation to take part in the study was sent to the ten headteachers as

described earlier on. The email included the *participant information sheet* with all the details and the permission to conduct research issued by the Secretariat of Catholic Education in Malta. As soon as I sent the email, a number of replies were received, and appointments were immediately set. After fifteen days from the first email, a gentle reminder was sent to the headteachers who did not reply to the first email. Fortunately enough, their reply came soon after. There was only one headteacher to whom I sent the third reminder, to which he replied immediately. The ten interviews were held between 10 December 2018 and 9 February 2019. I went personally to the school of the respective headteachers, except for one who offered to come to my school instead. Having a positive reply from all participants, I did not have to focus on a sample but on a whole cohort of headteachers. This is in line with the advice of Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 512) who say that “one conducts interviews with as many people as necessary in order to gain the information sought” and insist that “the issue here is that the interviewer must ensure that the interviewees selected will be able to furnish the researcher with the requisite information, i.e., that participants actually possess the information.” Since the interviewees were headteachers who had first-hand experience in their schools, this was not an issue at all.

Although it was planned that each interview would take between fifteen and twenty minutes, thinking that headteachers are too busy to provide long answers, in effect, the shortest interview was of eleven minutes while the longest one took fifty-six minutes. Although I knew who these headteachers were, I was not very well acquainted with some of them. For a number of them, it was not the first time that we spoke; however, previously we had spoken on different subjects. For the majority of them, though, it was my first time speaking to them face to face and not in a group. During interviews, I followed the following procedure. First of all, I tried to put respondents at ease, keeping in mind that this is not some sort of review of a particular school or role, but rather a reflection to see how Catholic

schools in Malta are going and what might be done to improve them. This kind of situation is essential in establishing a rapport which “involves trust and a respect for the interviewee and the information he or she shares. It is also the means of establishing a safe and comfortable environment for sharing the interviewee’s personal experiences and attitudes as they actually occurred” (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006, p. 316). I asked them to sign the consent form and asked if they had any objection to recording the interview. Thankfully, all participants agreed to be recorded. In such a way, I relate to what Johnson (2001, p. 111) says, namely that “one of the main goals of qualitative research has always been to capture the words and perceptions of informants”. In this way, I did not have to focus on what notes I should jot down, but I could focus on the body language and visible communication on the part of interviewees. In general, one can say that there is a difference between what was said and what happened during an interview. Non-verbal communication during interviews, such as the tone of voice, emphases, and mood of the participant may shape the interpretation of the interviewer in particular ways. In fact, as Kvale (1996) says, the interviewer not only collects assertions, but he also co-authors them. During all the interviews, the behaviour of participants before, during, and after the interviews could be noted. Generally, there was no tension felt; however, I could notice that conversation was more flowing with headteachers who are nearer to my age. Reflecting on this, I realised that there was probably no power imbalance present, but some headteachers of my age happened to be appointed to their role approximately at the same time I was appointed head of school, and that we have practically journeyed the experience together, having been acquainted with each other for longer than with the older headteachers. Some researchers say that interesting points come out after the recorder is stopped, that is, after the interview. However, in my case, I can say that questions were generally answered in great detail, such that I do not think that something was left out. Even though the English language is an official language in Malta, Maltese people tend to

speak more in Maltese in their everyday life, and so, eight interviews were held in Maltese, while the other two were held in English.

During the interviews themselves, I let the interviewees speak and did not interrupt them. I kept in mind what Cohen, Manion and Morrison say (2018, p. 517), that is, “during the interview the biases and values of the interviewer should not be revealed, and the interviewer must be neutral and avoid being judgemental.” Being a headteacher myself, I was aware of what Johnson (2001, p. 106) says:

If the interviewer happens to be a current or former member or participant in this activity, he or she may use in-depth interviews to explore or check his or her understandings, to see if they are shared by other members or participants.

Sometimes I had to combine some questions or change the order of questions since the interview developed in a certain manner that required me to do so. Although all questions were answered by all headteachers, this does not mean that I asked all headteachers all of the questions, since sometimes some of the participants gave answers which I had expected to be given to other questions. This confirms the recommendation of DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) who say that the person conducting the interview should be ready to deviate from what was originally planned because these deviations can be very fruitful. I could notice that the interviewees gave weight to particular aspects of their school, or very often to their experience. Moreover, I could feel that a great emphasis was put on the aspects of the charism of the religious order which runs the school, the founder of the same religious order, or the school ethos, which I felt was derived from the charism and the founder.

When there was a gap of time between one interview and another, I started to translate and transcribe the whole interviews. At this point, I decided to translate and transcribe everything since I did not want to lose anything of the sense of the interview. It is already a bit worrying that, when we translate and transcribe, we may risk losing some data or the

interview (with all it includes, such as face gestures, body language) might not be interpreted in the right way. In fact, as DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006, p. 318) say, “transcribers often have difficulties capturing the spoken word in text form because of sentence structure, use of quotations, omissions and mistaking words or phrases for others.” Moreover, referring to all aspects of an interview, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 523) say that “the interview is a social encounter, not merely a data-collection exercise; the problem with much transcription is that it becomes solely a record of data rather than a record of a social encounter.” To ensure reliability, all transcriptions were sent to the interviewees who confirmed what was said during the interviews. It was only after this process and during the analysis of data that I started to choose the best quotes which related to the main themes I identified in the data collected. It was at this point that I proceeded to data analysis which I did by themes, that is, analysing the issues that I selected from the interviews. Regarding thematic analysis, Clarke and Braun (2017, p. 297) say that such analysis

provides accessible and systematic procedures for generating codes and themes from qualitative data ... Themes provide a framework for organizing and reporting the researcher’s analytic observations. The aim of TA is not simply to summarize the data content, but to identify, and interpret, key, but not necessarily all, features of the data, guided by the research question.

During this process, I tried to be open to seeing as many themes as possible, so that I would not leave any gap or bias in this study. Here, I should say that analysis was mainly based on the headteachers’ ideas and experiences. Reflecting on this, can I say that in fact these themes are actually realised in the school, or are they just wishful thinking? This cannot be confirmed with absolute certainty; however, from what can be seen and from the replies of the other participants in the questionnaires, there could be no doubt in the good intentions of headteachers.

According to Kvale (1996), the last stage of an interviewing process is that of reporting, which I am doing in this thesis.

Second Stage of Data Collection: Questionnaires Sent to Teachers, Students, and Parents

According to Boynton and Greenhalgh (2004, p. 1312), “Questionnaires offer an objective means of collecting information about people’s knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour.” The way I collected data from questionnaires after the first stage, that is, after the interviewing process, places the questionnaires in a position to further elaborate the information already collected during the first stage. Boynton and Greenhalgh (2004, p. 1313) say that “sometimes, a questionnaire will be appropriate only if used within a mixed methodology study – for example, to extend and quantify the findings of an initial exploratory phase.”

In designing and finalising the questionnaires, to a certain extent, I followed the method suggested by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018):

- i. Outlining the aims of the questionnaires.
- ii. Selecting a sample.
- iii. Seeing which notions the questionnaires will address.
- iv. Choosing how the questionnaires will be measured.
- v. Writing the questions for the questionnaires.
- vi. Seeing how long the questionnaire will be and which format it will have.
- vii. Ensuring that each theme/research question has been addressed.
- viii. Making a pilot questionnaire and then refine it.
- ix. Processing the questionnaire.

In fact, as soon as I decided that questionnaires would be part of the research, I thought of it as giving me a picture of the thoughts of students, parents, and teachers about the

effectiveness of the school. Regarding the sample, I have already spoken about this earlier in this chapter. The questions of the questionnaires are those related to school effectiveness and improvement. As I was looking for a general idea, that is, percentages of the thoughts of those who answered the questionnaires, I chose to use a structured questionnaire with closed questions. As Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018, p. 476) attest, “Highly structured, closed questions are useful in that they can generate frequencies of response amenable to statistical treatment and analysis. They also enable comparisons to be made across groups in the sample.” After reflecting on these ideas, the questions were drafted, keeping in mind that, since people are busy, it would be helpful if the questionnaire is less than a page, with the answers in the Likert scale (strongly agree – agree – neutral – disagree – strongly disagree) format. After checking that the notions I had in mind were all addressed, to check clarity and receive feedback, I piloted the questionnaires with three colleagues, who thought that the questions were clear enough to be answered by different categories of people. There was only one issue where, after discussing the questionnaire for teachers, I thought of reconsidering the order of the questions so that one could follow the other more fluidly. After that, the questionnaires were ready for distribution.

I am aware of some problems which can arise from these types of questionnaires. One could mention the fact that a person does not always see things objectively, and this depends on lots of things, such as the mood of the person, and thus this lack of objectivity might affect the answers provided in a questionnaire. Moreover, one is not able to see if the respondent is replying in a truthful way, or if he or she is just jotting down marks to finish the questionnaire. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) speak also of the layout effect, where usually, in a scale, one tends more to mark what is written on the left-hand side rather than on the other side. Another flaw is that questionnaires with closed questions do not let the respondents add more of their thoughts about what is being asked of them.

At the end of each interview with headteachers, I asked them to help me in distributing the questionnaires to the participants as explained before, to which they all assented wholeheartedly. The questionnaires were distributed in March 2019, and were returned after a few weeks. By the first week of May, no more questionnaires were received back. I chose to send the questionnaires after the interviews, since, firstly, I thought of interviews as being the primary source of data, and I also wanted to ask headteachers for their consent and for their help in the distribution. Besides that, I wanted to ensure that I would have the first part of my data collection at hand, while the second part was distributed so I could make progress with translating and transcribing the interviews while waiting for the questionnaires to be returned. While I provided a hard copy with the questions for teachers and students (they can be more easily be distributed at school), I provided a link with the questionnaire for parents to be sent electronically by the school, if possible to all parents. I thought that it is a method which is preferable to all parents. There was only one headteacher who, keeping in mind the social context of the school, was doubtful how many questionnaires from parents would be filled-in online and returned. Having opted for an online questionnaire for parents, since I hoped for a relatively large number of parents to take part, all generated data could be collated electronically and this could save me time.

Even though the questionnaires were sent out after all the interviews were conducted, the questionnaires were not based on the answers which came up in the interviews, but were made on the basis of statements related mainly to school ethos and culture. To this end, the questions for the questionnaire had already been prepared when the questions for the interviews were written down, since the questions themselves were needed for approval by the University of Sheffield Ethics Review Board and by the Secretariat for Catholic Education. However, I hoped that the results of the questionnaires would tally with the information gathered during the interviews.

All participants were provided with detailed information through the participant information sheet. Participants who were provided with a hard copy with questions were also given a consent form, which they signed and returned. Parents who answered electronically were also provided with the information sheet and gave their consent by ticking at the start of the questionnaire. Questionnaires were kept as short as possible; in fact, they were less than a full page.

At this second stage of the research, I chose questionnaires vis-à-vis other methods, because they can give an overall picture of a current situation. At this point, I did not want to delve much deeper in answers, but rather wanted a general yet clear overview of the thoughts of the participants.

All questionnaire results were collated and not differentiated according to the specific school that the answers related to. The reason behind this collation was that, in this research, I am not studying particular schools, but rather I want to have a general picture of the perceptions and opinions of teachers, parents, and students of boys' secondary Catholic schools in the Maltese islands.

Third Stage of Data Collection: A Personal Reflection

After looking at the data collected, especially the interviews, I soon realised that although my sample size for interviews of boys' schools' headteachers was 100%, there was still a missing piece, that is, my own answers to the interview questions. To fill in this missing piece, I realised that it was important to include my thoughts in the form of a personal reflection chapter. In this chapter, through adopting a constructivist lens, I aimed to explore how I have constructed my own experiences and interpret them in the light of this study. In fact, my own experiences helped me to answer the interview questions, thus

shedding more light on the issue of how Catholic schools in Malta can really be effective, and how they can be improved.

While there are positive aspects of a written personal reflection, some critics may argue that this kind of study lacks the fieldwork which can be done in other forms of data collection, such as interviews. However, based on my own experience in producing this chapter, reflecting on one's own experiences produces data which can be analysed.

When considering possible ways of proceeding with the personal reflection chapter, I thought it would be better if I just answered the questions in the same way the other interviewees did. In this way, while answering the questions, I was also making sense of different experiences throughout my headship. By doing so, I was choosing to discuss and analyse my experience not by themes but by question. I chose analysis by question rather than thematic analysis so as to minimise the impact of bias, in the sense that if analysis here took place by theme, I could have fallen into the temptation of simply choosing themes which already came out of the interviews. However, after analysing my experience, I can say that my own experience is very much similar to the experiences of the other headteachers.

Other Important Data Emerging from Literature

In this study, it is important to note that literature has a dual role. Primary sources include official documents of the Catholic Church, which constitute part of my data collection along with interviews conducted with headteachers, questionnaires sent to parents, students, and educators, and my own personal reflection. There is a link between the various parts of the data collection since all data points to the specific themes which come out from this research. On the other hand, I have referred to other secondary literature to corroborate my findings.

4.5 Approach to Data Analysis

To analyse data is to comprehend, clarify, describe, and interpret the data collected.

For Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 643),

Qualitative data analysis concerns how we move from the data to understanding, explaining and interpreting the phenomena in question. It includes, among other matters, organizing, describing, understanding, accounting for, and explaining data, making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation (of which the researcher is one), noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities, all of which are the task of the qualitative.

Qualitative data analysis focuses on in-depth, context-specific, rich, subjective data and meanings by the participants in the situation, with the researcher herself/himself as a principal research instrument. It involves: data reduction (in order to avoid the often serious issue of data overload, i.e. too much detail and too much material); data display; data analysis and interpretation; drawing and verifying conclusions; and reporting the analysis and findings.

When analysing interviews, there seems to be a tension between keeping the interview as a whole, which might have more weight, or else breaking the whole interview into pieces. I eventually opted for the latter approach and, although I tried to keep in mind the whole discussion, the interview was split up into different themes for the purpose of analysis.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 525) seem to prefer analysing the whole interview as it is:

The great tension in data analysis is between maintaining a sense of the holism of the interview and the tendency for analysis to atomize and fragment the data, to separate them into constituent elements, thereby losing the synergy of the whole, and in interviews often the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

4.5.1 Thematic Analysis

When analysing the data, there are different approaches. Among the different approaches for the interviews and the questionnaires, I chose thematic analysis since I wanted to bring out some particular themes from the data which I can discuss and analyse.

As expected, thematic analysis does not only have its positive aspects but also some weaknesses. One weakness refers to the fact that some themes do not really appear in the data collected, but rather come from the mind of the researcher. Another point is that an important theme is not one which appears often in the data, but is one which makes sense according to the analysis being done. This is confirmed by Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 10) who say that “the keyness of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures – but in terms of whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question.”

Regarding the interviews, for the analysis of the data collected, I followed the stages as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006):

- i. The first thing to do after data collection is to become more acquainted with the data. Something that helped me was that since the interviews were audio recorded, I had the task of translating (where necessary) and transcribing the interviews. Although this seemed like an annoying task at times, I felt that I was making myself more familiar with the interviews. After reading the transcriptions again, I started highlighting what to me at that moment seemed to be important quotations and themes. I then manually cut up the various answers in the questionnaire to be able to arrange them under different themes.
- ii. After that I started generating initial codes. I used a table with the questions on top and beneath each question I wrote what seemed to be the main ideas, after compiling

the cuttings under different headings. A code was given to the interesting features that I chose from the data.

- iii. The next step was to look for themes. Since the analysis was to be made by themes, I then started coding the main themes, by putting a number for each of the themes. If, for example, there was an overarching theme of the Catholic school as a parish, all ideas linked to it were given the same code.
- iv. Themes were then reviewed. In this evaluation, there were similar themes which were grouped together. In this way I tried to make sure that all themes were starting to make sense together. At this point, I also looked at what could be sub-themes to be included under each main idea.
- v. Even though I had an idea what the themes were going to be, at this point I tried to label and name the themes. Sub-themes were also clearly defined, and while I identified eight main themes, each main theme was divided into a number of sub-themes. For example, taking again the theme of the Catholic school as a parish, I looked for the ideas that linked to the overarching notion, and produced them as sub-divisions to the main theme. After producing a list comprising the main themes and sub-themes, and after discussing the list with my supervisor, I felt that the main themes could be clearly divided into two parts: the first part was dedicated to what builds the Catholic school, while the second part was devoted to the challenges felt and improvement needed in the same schools.
- vi. After having quite a clear picture of the themes to be discussed, I started writing my analysis of the data, referring to current literature, and providing examples by quoting directly from the interviews.

In finding and defining themes for the interviews, I did everything manually without resorting to any kind of software. I preferred it this way since by doing so I could easily link the themes to the various ideas which I could remember from the interviews themselves.

The main themes to be discussed in the analysis chapter can be seen in Figures 1 and 2 below. From each theme I also derived a number of other sub-themes.

Figure 1:

Themes for Catholic School Effectiveness

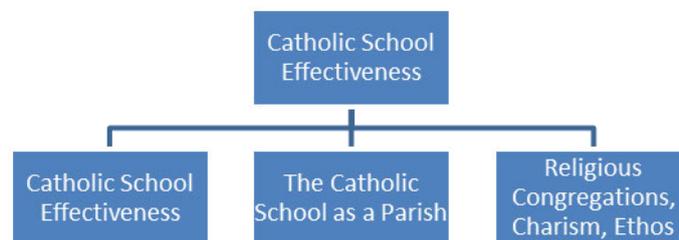
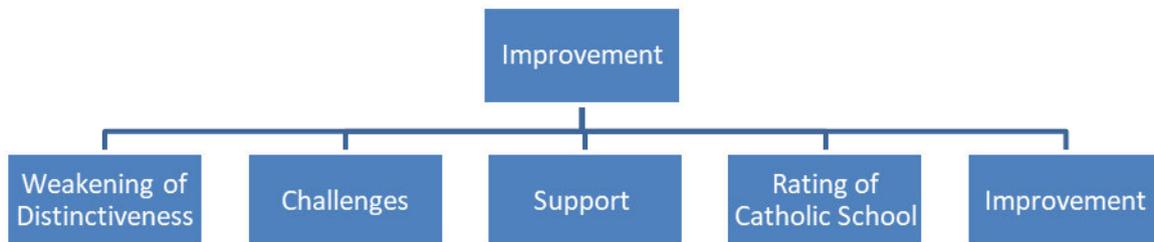


Figure 2:

Themes for Catholic School Improvement



Looking closely at the diagrams above, one can easily notice that, in both of them, one can find a theme with the same name as the main heading, that is, Catholic School Effectiveness and Improvement are both a heading and a theme under each heading. This happened since both Catholic School Effectiveness and Improvement are important keywords in this study. Moreover, the question first addressed the idea of effectiveness, and

subsequently improvement. As one can see in the analysis chapter below, both notions provided for a number of sub-themes which I selected from the data collected.

Thematic analysis was also used for reading analytically the official documents of the Catholic Church with reference to Catholic schooling. The documents were not read to produce information from them; instead, I took a similar approach to Braun and Clarke (2006) and tried to read the main themes in the documents in the same way that I analysed the data collected from the interviews. The outcome from this exercise was that, practically, in reading the official Church document, I could elicit the same themes which produced from the interviews. Reflecting upon this, for me this means that Catholic school leaders' ideas are in line with the teaching of the Church and, at the same time, school leaders keep themselves informed of the same teaching.

4.5.2 Adding Data from Questionnaires

Analysis of the questionnaires took place after the data analysis had been completed for the headteacher interviews. The first part of this analysis included forming the percentages of answers in the questionnaires, and then the data was considered in relation to the themes chosen from analysis of the interviews.

Secondly, from the questions in the questionnaires, I chose the important themes which, in the main, were also the ones selected from the interviews. Before writing the analysis and discussion chapter, I noticed clearly that the majority of statements in the questionnaires were closely linked to the themes or sub-themes I had identified. Because of this, in the analysis chapter I decided to include the references to the questionnaires in the same discussion. In such a way, I used the same codes which I was using for the themes from the data produced from the interviews.

As I have previously said, the interviews were the first stage and questionnaires the second stage of collecting data. To a certain extent, the questionnaires were related to the interviews, in the sense that themes that I thought of being significant in the interviews were also confirmed by the questionnaires. When headteachers spoke of an important theme, the same theme was given a positive rating by the participants of the questionnaires.

Analysis of the questionnaires took place in the following manner. First of all, after checking all returned filled-in questionnaires, I gave a code to different questions. The code given was related to the themes from the interviews. For example, if from the interview I extracted a theme which was about care, concern, and inclusion, and a question in the questionnaire asked about the care of the well-being of students at school, then, both the theme from the interview and the question in the questionnaire were allocated the same code. Since the questions for the questionnaires were written before the interviews took place, not all questions in the questionnaires related to a theme from the interviews. The next stage was to put a note next to the themes so that it could serve as an indicator that I have more data to give more weight to the themes. Lastly, the ratings from the questionnaires were presented together with the data which was collected from the interviews.

4.5.3 Trustworthiness and Validity

Questions of trustworthiness and validity should be addressed for all research. Guba (1981), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Shenton (2004) highlight four criteria in relation to this:

- i. Credibility, where researchers make sure that their research measures what is actually intended. Here, the notion of truth is of utmost importance. At this point, checking back is an important issue. In fact, all translations and transcriptions were sent to interviewees who agreed with them and did not recall any difficulty.

- ii. Transferability, where the findings from a particular study can be applied to different situations. In fact, we can speak of generalisability, where a theory generated in a certain situation can help us understand similar circumstances. A good question to ask here is: If the study is made in a different country, will the same issues come out? Since Catholicity is universal, and since all Catholic schools strive to maintain their ethos, it may be the case that some of the same themes will be discussed in a study in a different country. However, one should take into consideration significant national and cultural differences, which mean that the ethos of a particular school is lived differently in different places. Other notions may affect Catholic schooling in different countries. As an example, one can take the issue of state funding. If there is partial funding by the state for Catholic education in Malta, the notion of a preferential option for the poor will take on a different meaning from that prevailing in other countries with no direct state funding.
- iii. Dependability, when the same results emerge if the same questions are repeated in the same context and with the same people. In fact, we can speak of consistency. Dependability is to be found more consistently in quantitative research. It is more like a scientific experiment where, when repeated, it is hoped that results are always the same. For the sake of this study, dependability does not have so much weight, since I believe that schools evolve with time, and if the same study is held again in ten years' time, the answers given and therefore the findings resulting will be different, even with the same participants. For example, in such a time span, there will be other aspects of school life which will need improvement rather than those highlighted in the current study.
- iv. Confirmability, when other techniques, such as triangulation, are used to reduce any bias. It is akin to crosschecking, to avoid any distortion of data. In this study, answers

in the questionnaires have helped to confirm the results which was gathered from the interviews. While in quantitative research one tends to find a greater degree of objectivity, here one speaks of neutrality, where the findings in a research study are moulded as far as possible by the participants and not by any kind of bias or personal interest of the researcher.

Speaking of validity and credibility, in qualitative research, since one assumes that multiple realities exist, a question comes to mind: Whose views are credible and how do we know that?

Ary, Jacobs, and Razavieh (2002) suggest that validity is not only concerned with that which is measured by an instrument, but that the significance and understanding of the outcomes of the data collection are reliable. It should be said that in this kind of research, validity can be examined through the way that data was collected, including the honesty, credibility, and trustworthiness of the participants and the researcher.

In interviews, validity and reliability may be overshadowed by the researcher's bias, which, as Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) write, include: the expectations of the interviewer, seeking answers which support ideas the researcher has in mind; misunderstandings by the interviewer over what is being answered and vice versa, where the participant is not sure about what he or she is being asked. There are also other factors which may hinder the validity of an interview, such as: a poor relationship between the researcher and the participant; a poor use of time and a weak handling of the questions which may also lead to an inadequate interpretation of data.

Kvale (1996) proposes a set of guidance for the interviewers, setting out what they should do in order to attain data which is reliable and valid:

- Be knowledgeable about the subject, this will lead to a well-versed discussion.
- Organise the interview well, the interviewee should be clear about each step.

- Be clear about all language related to the material.
- Let interviewees speak at their own pace and give answers as they wish.
- Be thoughtful and sympathetic and listen actively to what is being said and to other bodily gestures.
- Be ready to know that some features of the interview are of no interest to the interviewee.
- Stick to the point and move the interview in any way necessary, even though it is somewhat harder to achieve in a semi-structured interview.
- Prove the reliability of what is being said by asking related questions.
- Be capable of remembering and speaking about ideas spoken about earlier.
- Be prepared to refine, confirm or otherwise the interviewee's statements with the participant.

Regarding questionnaires, the factors involved in achieving reliability and validity may seem to be more unclear than with interviews. Some participants may not understand the questions well, or perhaps just tick anything to complete the questionnaire. In my case, the questionnaires were more anonymous than the interviews, since while I met all interviewees face to face, I do not know the persons to whom the questionnaires were distributed. On the other hand, one can claim that since questionnaires are anonymous, people may feel more free to write or tick whatever they wish. Another doubt arises since in anonymous questionnaires, people cannot ask for any clarification (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2018).

In the third part of the data collection for this research project, that is, in the compiling of the personal reflection, issues of reliability and validity may cluster around the fact that since it is the author's experience which is being taken into account, then there is no one who can confirm or challenge the presentation of these experiences. Since a personal reflection is

rather an introspective exercise, then, it is difficult for others to see how reliable this account is.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

4.6.1 The Procedural, Institutional Process

As soon as I passed the confirmation review process, in July 2018 I started thinking about the ethical process. Besides the University of Sheffield research ethics application form, the following documents, which are listed as Appendix A to I at the end of this work, were prepared to be included in the application:

- i. Participant information sheet for headteachers.
- ii. Participant information sheet for parents of students taking part in the questionnaire.
- iii. Participant information sheet for parents.
- iv. Participant consent form for headteachers and parents.
- v. Participant consent form for parents of students.

The second part of the procedure was to obtain approval from the Secretariat for Catholic Education in Malta. After providing the Secretariat with all necessary documentation, including the list of participants, and the list of questions for the interviews and questionnaires, I was granted permission to conduct the research in the schools. The approvals from the University of Sheffield and from the Secretariat of Catholic Education in Malta are listed as Appendix J and K at the end of this study.

4.6.2 Moral Underpinnings of my Actions

In research, there should be due consideration paid to both the necessities of the researcher and the rights and values of the participants. For this to take place, there are a number of considerations that one should take into account. For Johnson (2001, p. 116), “the

most important ethical imperative is to tell the truth.” I believe that this was done by both the researcher and the participants in this research, especially during the interviews. The notion of truth is important since it brings with it all necessary things for data to be reliable and credible. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2018) mention a number of issues related to ethics in educational research, which they summarised from existent literature. For the sake of this study, I will only mention those which are related to this research:

- Informed consent: I was aware to inform participants about the nature of this study and their taking part in it. All participants signed their consent on the sheet provided.
- Confidentiality and anonymity: In this study, I made sure that participants will not be obliged to take part. Moreover, I tried my best to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity. Regarding confidentiality, according to Sapsford and Abbott (1996, in Briggs and Coleman [2007, p. 231]), “confidentiality is a promise that you will not be identified or presented in an identifiable form, while anonymity is a promise that even the researcher will not be able to tell which responses came from which respondent.”

Anonymisation could be guaranteed since, where possible, quotes with no information relating to the particular school were used. Moreover, this privacy could be ascertained since the identities of the persons taking part were encoded and numbered randomly from one to ten.

- Identification and non-traceability: Not only the identity of interviewees, but all information about each participant was kept strictly confidential. A small problem here was the fact that since all headteachers participated in this study, all headteachers are known to the public. However, I did my utmost to ensure that no response or respondent would be identifiable. In fact, in direct quotations from the interviews, I omitted the name of the school or that of the founder or that of the

congregation so that the responses will remain anonymised. In this study, there was no harm envisaged, however, I was attentive to minimise the risk of any harm that could emerge. This was done by keeping in mind an ethic of respect to all persons. Moreover, should there have been any form of harm, participants were free to withdraw at any time.

- Rights: Participants were informed from the outset that they can withdraw from the study at any time, something that did not happen. They were also given assurance that the replies will be analysed in a professional manner.
- Relationships in research: All interviewees, in one way or another, were known to the researcher. I made sure that they were able to feel comfortable during the interview. This was done by putting ourselves at ease before the interviews started, even by simple things such as asking how things are going in the respective schools. There was no imbalance of power felt from my side and, I felt likewise that during the interviews the participants did not feel any imbalance of power. I think that this was the case because of the geographical size of the Maltese islands, which makes it easy for headteachers to meet between themselves quite often, and treat each other as colleagues, seeking to know more how they could best lead their school.
- Access to data: All data was safely stored, with hard copies of information safely locked in a private room, and electronic data was encrypted, and password-protected. Since the interviews were recorded, I made it clear to the participants that it will be only used for analysis, and destroyed as soon as this research is concluded. The recorded interviews were not given to other persons for translation and transcription since these were done by me.

DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) highlight four ethical issues which one needs to be aware of during interviews, which related to the matters discussed above. These are:

- Decreasing the possibility of any harm which is not anticipated.
- Ensuring the participant's information is protected.
- Ensuring that the nature of the study is well spelt out to the participants
- Decreasing the risk of any manipulation.

For questionnaires, participation was also voluntary, anonymity was guaranteed, and they had the right to withdraw at any time. All questionnaires will be deleted as soon as this study is completed. This anonymity could be ensured since participants were not asked to put their name anywhere in the questionnaire, and while hard copies of questionnaires distributed to teachers and students were returned to me via the particular school's administration, and then put safely with the others, for the parents' questionnaire, given that it was online, I could not have any idea where the questionnaire came from.

4.7 Concluding Remarks

This chapter provided a detailed description of the methodology and the methods used to conduct this research, the data and findings of which will be discussed in the next chapters. It should be noted that great attention was given in order to address any ethical issues which came up during the collection of data and its analysis.

Chapter 5

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF DATA

5.1 Introduction

As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the first phase in the collection of data was a structured interview with the ten headteachers of boys' Catholic secondary schools in Malta. During the interviews, the interviewees touched on different points, sometimes answering questions which were still to be asked, or else mentioning different points which different interviewees answered in other questions. This led me to analyse the data collected by themes rather than by questions. From the outcome of this analysis I chose eight main themes, which were then divided in other sub-themes, according to what was spoken about in the interviews.

Analysing by themes is related to experience lived by the persons who provide raw data. For Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 81),

thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society.

In this study, headteachers spoke not only about the ideals of Catholic education and its effectiveness, but shared the experience they live every day in their work. This confirms what Clarke and Braun (2017, p. 297) say when speaking of thematic analysis as

a method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns of meaning (“themes”) within qualitative data ... [thematic analysis] can be used to identify patterns within and across data in relation to participants' lived experience, views and perspectives,

and behaviour and practices; ‘experiential’ research which seeks to understand what participants’ think, feel, and do.

The second phase of data collection included questionnaires distributed to a sample of teachers, students, and parents. After collecting the questionnaires, it transpired that most of the statements in the questionnaires could be related to the same themes of the interviews. Where answers from questionnaires could be linked, I am providing the results from the questionnaires under the related themes.

In this chapter I intend to describe, analyse, and discuss the data collected in the light of relevant literature according to the particular themes. Keeping in line with the title of this work and the research question, the themes to be analysed are separated into two sections: Section A deals with effectiveness: *what* particular headteachers and schools are experiencing, what is happening now in schools, and the values which Catholic schools are built on. This section speaks of the direct experience of headteachers, how schools are operating in an effective way, and how they are achieving their core mission aims. On the other hand, section B speaks of improvement: *how* things are changing and the challenges brought about by these changes and what headteachers believe is needed for improvement. In this chapter, one should keep in mind that school effectiveness and school improvement provide us with a temporal juxtaposition: effectiveness relates to the present, while improvement refers to the future.

5.2 Section A

Since the first question dealt with the understanding of Catholic School Effectiveness, the interviewed headteachers spoke at length about their consideration of it. In such a way, this question led the interviewees to regard this notion as the basis for the whole interview. In fact, a good number of answers for different questions related to this argument. The answers

were related to different themes which ranged from being like Christ and formation in Gospel values, to the school as the students' and their families' parish and the importance of the religious community which administers the school and sometimes is present in the school. Through these responses, which come from the direct lived experience of headteachers, I hope that Catholic school research will move on to speak of effectiveness in a new way which differs from school effectiveness in general. This new way will show that Catholic school effectiveness cannot rely only on measurable facts, such as academic results, but more on the ethos and values of the school, which permeate the lives of students. In such a way, this kind of effectiveness is much harder to identify.

5.2.1 Catholic School Effectiveness

At this point I think it is important to briefly mention some authors and literature on Catholic education in relation to this study and to school effectiveness. While Grace (2017, p. 1) says that “the international academic and research field of Catholic Education Studies is still in its early phase of development,” we can mention Morris who, writing extensively in a UK context, speaks of performance indicators and Catholic education (1994), Catholic school performance (2009a) and the distinctiveness and effectiveness of Catholic schools (2014).

For the purpose of this research, it is interesting to note that Morris (2009) concludes that

Catholic schools in England are popular with parents. ... they have been particularly effective in helping their pupils ... to achieve high levels of success on all the published measures of school performance favoured by the government since 1992.

The most recent contextualized value added measures seem to confirm that their success is probably, in some way, the result of a positive institutional influence on pupil performance. In other words, there may well be some beneficial “Catholic school effect.”

Pring (1996, p. 76), while speaking of the challenges to Catholic school distinctiveness, insists on the need of distinctive practices in schools:

The Christian tradition, as that has been articulated through the Catholic Church, portrays a distinctive view of human nature and, therefore, of the qualities and values, knowledge and understanding that are worth acquiring. To that extent one would expect a distinctive philosophy of education and distinctive educational practices.

In the light of the measurement of Catholic school effectiveness, it is interesting to note that Sullivan (2001, p. 205) speaks of the danger of ‘managerialism’ in Catholic schools, seeing it as a threat:

A weakness of ‘managerialism’ ... is an overemphasis on establishing mechanisms of control and measurement, accompanied by a failure to harness the techniques of management to an overarching and transformative ‘story’ that frames, inspires and directs educational and communal endeavour in the school context.

Lydon (2011) speaks of today’s Catholic teacher within the concept of teaching as a vocation. In this way, Christ becomes the ideal of teachers in their work, and they may become witnesses of the presence of Christ in their learning communities. This happens in a sacramental framework since each sacrament enables to recipient to become one with Christ:

In the context of the Catholic school the sacramental perspective is a dominant paradigm within the theological framework of the Second Vatican Council. By engaging in the ministry of teaching, the individual Christian is responding to his or her primary call to be a disciple of Jesus in a distinctive manner, reflecting the notion of charisms being a concrete realisation of the universal gift of God through Christ to all the baptized. (Lydon, 2018, p. 103)

After introducing this literature, we now turn to our subject of study, *Catholic School Effectiveness*, which represents the idea of what Catholic schools should be and what their

mission is. However, one should say from the start that this kind of effectiveness is not easy to measure, or perhaps is not measurable at all. This feeling was communicated in different parts of the interviews. Grace (1998) says that if in the idea of school effectiveness research in general, schools have to make a difference, what is this difference and to what does a Catholic school make a difference? Grace goes on to say that school mission statements can be thought of as the essential source for future research on the subject. In fact, during the interviews, a particular question, related to the distinctive character of a Catholic school, was asked to interviewees: “How does the mission statement of your school express this distinctiveness?” In this light, can Catholic school effectiveness be linked to the mission of the school? Albeit difficult, particular mission statements (in which are included the values of the Gospel and Catholicism) can be the ruler by which Catholic school effectiveness can be measured. It can be said that when a school realises its mission as expressed in its mission statement, then this is a Catholic response to school effectiveness research (Grace, 1998). From the interviews and from my own experience, it is clearly understood that Catholicity is not an add-on to the theory of an effective school which is then applied to a Catholic school. In such a way, while realising and fulfilling its mission, an effective Catholic school is one which in all it lives and does, it creates an atmosphere which builds and forms the person according to the values of Christ and his Gospel.

In relation to this important preamble, and to introduce the themes, Tuohy (2013, p. 122) argues, with reference to the Irish context, that

Catholic Education is person-centred. It goes beyond training in skills and the competition for qualifications. It helps individuals to seek wholeness, truth and hope in their lives ... [and] sees the person as essentially social, and therefore promotes a sense of community based on solidarity, the promotion of justice and making a difference.

For Tuohy, Catholic education is more than adhering to the academic aspect, but it serves the formation of the whole person in a holistic manner, basing this formation on values.

The points below focus on the various themes which I brought to light from the interviews, linked to existing literature and to the questionnaires. A full list of the themes chosen can be found in Appendix L.

Christ-like

As for the whole Christian and Catholic worlds, Jesus Christ is the fulcrum on which all related ideas stand. In fact, the first point that was discussed was the resemblance of a Catholic school to Christ, his message, and his mission. One headteacher, in particular, spoke of this in answer both to what he means by Catholic school effectiveness and also in the way his school's mission statement expresses this effectiveness.

“A Catholic school should be like Christ incarnate. It is not something outside of us, but being an incarnate presence in the situations of students and families today, today's reality. In the presence of today's human reality, what is the message of Christ and of the Gospel? What are the values of Christ? How can we, in a Catholic school, form people? Effectiveness is not about academic excellence ... The school is effective when it gives me the resources, possibilities, chances, activities, initiatives to develop as a whole person.”

(Headteacher 1)

Here, from the start, when the interviewee says that “effectiveness is not about academic excellence”, he is taking the keyword ‘effective’, and reinterprets it within the context and ethos of a Catholic school. This idea, as we shall see, will guide us throughout this study to enable us to interpret Catholic school effectiveness.

“The mission statement of the school speaks of forming holistic persons, that Christ may be formed in us, the communitarian aspect, individual attention, a sense of responsibility and developing potential.”

(Headteacher 1)

This confirms what Sultmann and Brown (2011, p. 75) state about what lies at the very centre of Catholic schools: “At the heart of the Catholic school is the story of Jesus, the message of His revelation of God and the values that He taught and lived.”

Forming in Christ and Christ being formed in us, in the context of a Catholic school means that the Catholic school should help persons to acquire and build upon the virtues and values lived and taught by Christ. These ideas can be easily linked to the official Church document *The Catholic School* (1977), which, among other points, states that “the Catholic school aims at forming in the Christian those particular virtues which will enable him to live a new life in Christ and help him to play faithfully his part in building up the Kingdom of God” (par. 36). Moreover, the same document (par. 60) speaks of the Catholic School as service to the person of Christ:

It is a genuine community bent on imparting, over and above an academic education, all the help it can to its members to adopt a Christian way of life. For the Catholic school mutual respect means service to the Person of Christ. Cooperation is between brothers and sisters in Christ.

Speaking of cooperation, at this point, one should mention the fact that from the interviews, one may hear a totally different discourse when speaking about Catholic school effectiveness from that emphasised in the existing literature which examines school effectiveness in general. In fact, as we can see, the focus here is on assistance, mutual help and solidarity, in contrast to the sense of competition and academic results that school effectiveness research

implies. In this light, some tension between the two might be detected, however, I emphasise that all schools in different sectors encourage students to instil in them the virtue of solidarity.

When one speaks of school effectiveness, it should be noted that the headteacher plays an important role. Although we will speak more about leadership later, at this point, it is important to say that the notion of leadership runs throughout the whole idea of Catholic school effectiveness, since the leader, headteacher, or principal can be seen as the guarantor of the effectiveness of both the academic system and the mission and vision of the school. The school leader also has an important role in forming a Christ-like image in Catholic schools. In fact, the American National Conference of Catholic Bishops (p. 173), as long ago as 1979, spoke of the principal of a Catholic school as the one who guides the spiritual formation of persons, which means “establishing and nurturing a real relationship to Jesus and the Father in the Holy Spirit, through a vigorous sacramental life, prayer, study, and serving others.”

Marriage between Gospel Values and the Academic System

The concept of marriage between the values of the Gospel and the academic system seems to be an important notion and, among others, may lead us to a new definition of Catholic school effectiveness. We can say that the image of marriage is a useful definition of Catholic school effectiveness as opposed to school effectiveness in general. In fact, one particular headteacher defined his understanding of Catholic school effectiveness by saying clearly that

“It is like a marriage between Christian values and a good academic system.”

(Headteacher 6)

In the biblical and Catholic spheres, by marriage one means two persons becoming one. Moreover, in the Old Testament, we find the metaphor of marriage to show the love between God and his chosen people, such as in Isaiah 62, 4-5:

You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

Using this allegory for schools, the Christian values and the academic system are not seen as two things moving in two separate binaries, but two notions which are intertwined together and there cannot be one without the other. Although not explicitly expressed, the idea of marriage is affirmed by Cook (2001, p. 95) who says that “Catholic school culture is a ‘Gospel Culture.’ A school is authentically Catholic when a Gospel culture animates everything that transpires in the school.” It is clearly understood that this ‘Gospel Culture’ is not an add-on to the curriculum and school life, but is something closely interwoven in the whole system. If we consider the three different models of Catholic schools proposed by Arthur (1995), we can say that this idea of marriage rejects the dualistic and pluralistic approaches, and maintains the holistic view of Catholic schools. This holistic paradigm pursues a fusion of belief and ethos and strives to support and improve the community of faith to communicate a particular concept of life. On the other hand, the dualistic approach speaks of Catholicity as additional to the school life, that is, academia and ethos walking their separate paths, while the pluralistic paradigm prefers an environment where different faiths can live together without promoting the faith the school professes. This last model may find the support of faith school critics who say that faith schools exist for indoctrination and proselytism.

Without referring directly to the idea of marriage, other headteachers used other expressions to explain this relationship and the importance of Christian values and those of the Gospel. Here, it is important to note the feeling of interviewees about how this effectiveness could be measured. In general, they all believe that this can be seen from the way students relate to each other, considering the values of respect, love and solidarity, which find their roots in the Gospel and the teachings of Christ.

“A Catholic school is a school which follows the Gospel, and its effectiveness is how much it in reality creates a climate in which its staff members and students live together and live the values of the Gospel, that is, the values of respect, love, solidarity, the value of a certain personal discipline.”

(Headteacher 1)

“A Catholic school is more of a model of how young people live in a mini society, having an experience of Christian values.”

(Headteacher 4)

“Inspired by the founder, being Catholic is the fact that the school lives the Gospel values. Catholic school effectiveness comprises the school that shares the Gospel values and principles, and at the same time it must be a good school in the sense that it addresses the needs of stakeholders or community.”

(Headteacher 3)

Different authors confirm and support these ideas about Catholic schooling being rooted in Gospel values. In fact, Ozar and Weitzel-O’Neill (2012, p. v) say that “Catholic Schools in collaboration with parents and guardians as the primary educators, seek to educate the whole child by providing an excellent education rooted in Gospel values.”

The Congregation for Catholic Education (1977, par. 9) builds upon some insights expressed in the Second Vatican Council and emphasises that: “It is precisely in the Gospel of Christ, taking root in the minds and lives of the faithful, that the Catholic school finds its definition as it comes to terms with the cultural conditions of the times.” The same Congregation, in another document (1988, §25) insists that “the Gospel spirit should be evident in a Christian way of thought and life which permeates all facets of the educational program.”

The notion of evangelisation has been an important mark of the Catholic Church throughout the ages. However, this idea was greatly promoted in the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and afterwards as compared to the sacramental approach that took place before. Evangelisation is thus reflected in Catholic schools. In fact, Sullivan (2000, p. 109) insists that “a Catholic school, as part of the mission of the Church, should always allow its policies and plans, its priorities and purposes to be illuminated, inspired, guided and challenged by the teaching of the gospel.” For Sullivan (2000), this can take place according to the following seven points, which could be seen as guidelines for measuring to a certain extent effectiveness in Catholic schools:

- i. All stakeholders at school are responsible for the ongoing task of evangelisation.
- ii. People need not only proclaim the gospel but also receive it.
- iii. The gospel should be part and parcel of all aspects of the existence of the school.
- iv. The gospel should be lived in humility and not by positions of power.
- v. Evangelisation should transform individuals and the school.
- vi. The gospel should not only be taught but witnessed and lived to the full in the school community.
- vii. The importance of adaptation during the process of evangelisation according to the different contexts and circumstances.

Very often, these ideas are seen as a struggle in the life of Catholic schools. As the headteachers themselves said, quite often, the energy of schools is put into different tasks which are important and which are asked for by higher authorities. This may lead to putting aside the basic notions of what makes a Catholic school and in such a way the level of what is expected from these schools decreases. Moreover, taking these seven points into consideration, once again, we can ask if evangelisation at school can be measured. Although one can see that evangelisation is taking place, even if it cannot be measured, I believe that this can be done by putting in practice the values of the Gospel in everyday life.

Promoting a Catholic Ethos

The school ethos is an important theme when one discusses school effectiveness and school improvement. It is even more important when discussing Catholic schools. Very often people get confused since, from the outset, all schools look similar to each other. First of all, what do we mean by ethos or climate? As the 1988 document (par. 24) says, it is “the sum total of the different components at work in the school which interact with one another in such a way as to create favourable conditions for a formation process.” The set-up of this climate rests upon all stakeholders at school, however, the Congregation for Catholic Education (1988, par. 26) says that:

Prime responsibility for creating this unique Christian school climate rests with the teachers, as individuals and as a community. The religious dimension of the school climate is expressed through the celebration of Christian values in Word and Sacrament, in individual behaviour, in friendly and harmonious interpersonal relationships, and in a ready availability. Through this daily witness, the students will come to appreciate the uniqueness of the environment to which their youth has been

entrusted. If it is not present, then there is little left which can make the school Catholic.

I believe that promoting a Catholic ethos in school is linked to the notion of marriage described in the section above. There is this link because this ethos does not exist separately from the school but is intrinsically infused in the whole school life. This idea is reflected in the responses by the headteachers:

“... promoting a Catholic ethos in all its diverse ways, in what we do and what we say, and it permeates every nook and cranny of whatever we do. It is overarching, depends on the individuals that have to make it work, relationships, what we do not do and what we do not choose to do.”

(Headteacher 5)

“It is our ethos with a specific charism which is different from State and Independent schools and it is the same charism which is passed on [to the students]. Having a mission and vision statement, having aims which are there and do not pass to teachers and are not transferred to students during lessons, that is not effective. It is having an ideal which is not reached. Effectiveness is when I see it lived in students.”

(Headteacher 7)

As this headteacher attests, a school has an ethos not just to be looked at, but it has to be lived and transmitted to all stakeholders at school.

In Figure 3 below, which shows the results from the questionnaires, we can see that all groups, that is, students, teachers and parents, gave a high rating for the difference that a Catholic school makes through its ethos. The students were asked to rate the statement “Through its ethos the school makes a difference in our lives.” 41.1% said that they strongly agree, 42.9% replied that they agree, while 14.3% were neutral. Teachers were asked to rate

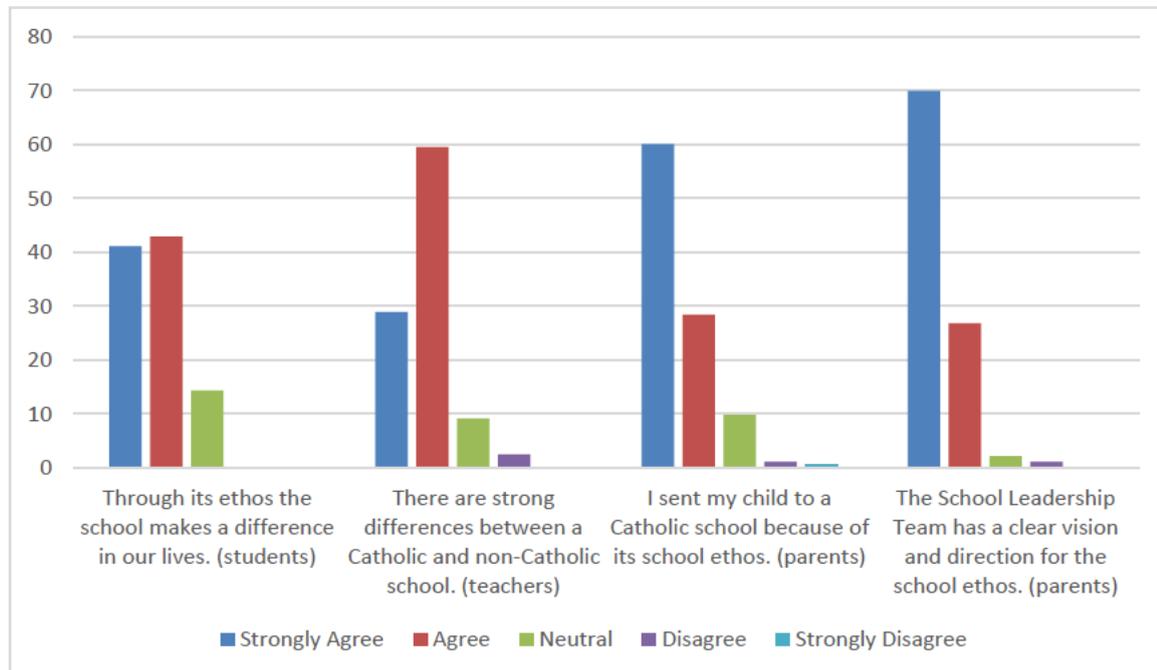
the statement: “There are strong differences between a Catholic and non-Catholic school”.

Their position was: 28.9% strongly agreed, 59.5% agreed, 9.1% were neutral, while 2.5% disagreed. Adding those who strongly agreed to those who agreed makes up an overwhelming majority who agreed that strong differences are present between schools in different sectors. This could be due to Catholic schools having less students, thus enabling students to have more attention rather than feeling lost as in large schools. Another factor could be the fact that data regarding national exams at the end of the secondary school is clear: students in Catholic schools fare very well in exams compared to other schools.

Another fact could be linked to what parents refer to as ‘discipline’. Catholic schools in Malta have a reputation of raising students well so as to be trained for life. To the statement “I sent my child to a Catholic school because of its Catholic ethos”, 60.1% of parents answered strongly agree, 28.4% agreed, 9.8% were neutral, while 1.1% disagreed, and 0.5% strongly disagreed. When parents were asked if “The School Leadership Team has a clear vision and direction for the school ethos”, 69.9% strongly agreed, 26.8% agreed, 2.2% were neutral while 1.1% disagreed. This shows that when one experiences Catholic schooling, the ethos is felt and makes a difference in the life of students and the whole community. Catholic schools feel that it is important for them to continue promoting their ethos, especially with the background of a society with dwindling religious values. One must also keep in mind the expectations of parents who send their children to a Catholic school. It is not always the ethos that makes the decision, but other human factors, such as the perception that in Catholic schools students are more cared for than in other schools.

Figure 3:

Questionnaire Results – Rating Catholic schools according to their ethos



Growth in the Life of Faith

A marriage between Gospel values and the academic system, and the promoting of a Catholic ethos, leads a school to enable its students, or its wider community, to grow in the life of faith. One of the headteachers expresses this idea as follows:

“An aspect of Catholic school effectiveness is when children who wish to grow in their life of faith find a place in a Catholic school where they can grow.”

(Headteacher 8)

Quite often, mission statements of Catholic schools speak of holistic formation. This holistic approach sees the human person as one who is growing through different experiences.

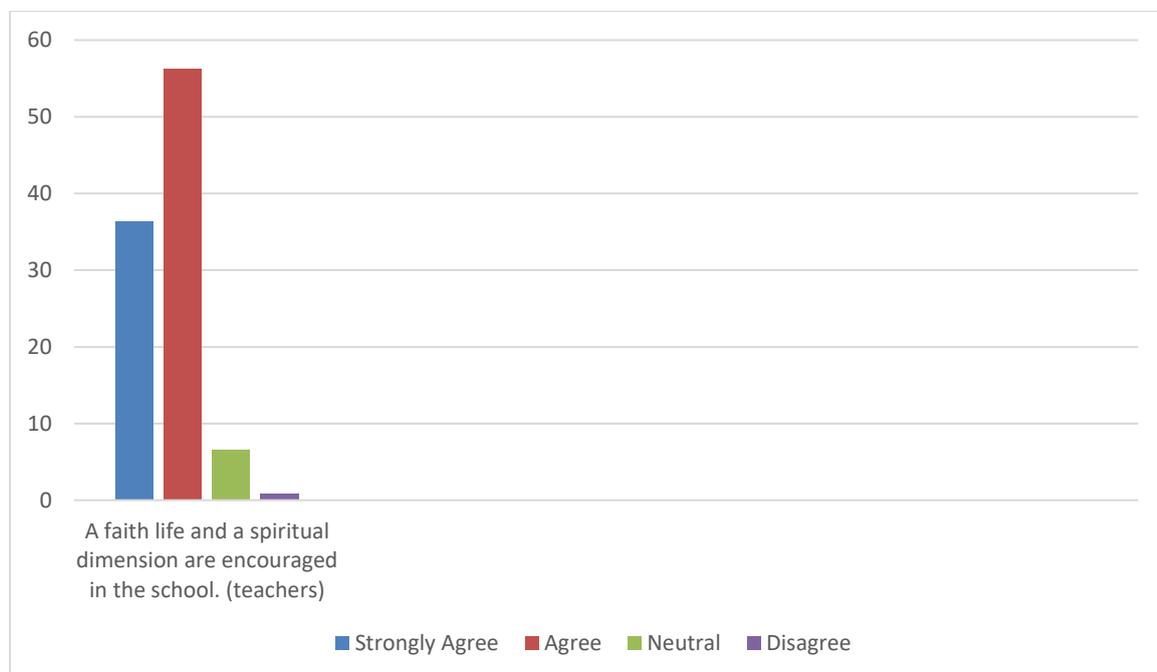
Although the main interests of all schools are learning and teaching, important aspects, such as sports, culture and creative activities are still given due importance. Furthermore, in Catholic schools, one is also invited to grow in the life of faith. Catholic schools should then be the places where this opportunity is given. However, as we are seeing in this study, growth

in the life of faith is not something added to the curriculum or the school life but is merged with the whole experience.

If there are persons who strongly believe that a Catholic school is the same as every other school, it is very satisfactory to note that, as we can see in Figure 4, in the teachers' questionnaire, the statement "A faith life and a spiritual dimension are encouraged in the school" was rated by teachers as follows: 36.4% strongly agree, 56.2% agree, 6.6% neutral, and 0.8% disagree. It is quite clear from the questionnaire results that a vast majority of teachers acknowledges that faith and spirituality are given due importance in the school. In my opinion, the fact that teachers recognise this dimension means that they are adhering to the mission of the school in helping students in this aspect of growth and are making theirs the mission of the school.

Figure 4:

Questionnaire Results – Teachers' rating about spiritual and faith dimensions in Catholic schools



Care, Concern, and Inclusion

Distinctive marks of a Catholic school are the care and concern shown towards each member, together with inclusion. These marks come from the very being of the Catholic Church. They are, after all, the attitudes of Christ towards persons who sought his help. In fact, “the Church has the God-given mission and the unique capacity to call people to live with integrity, compassion, responsibility, and concern for others” (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1998, section 5). However, this does not mean that care, concern, and inclusion are exclusive to Catholic schools and are not present in other types of schools. Clearly, one cannot imagine a school without having these notions. Nonetheless, one should say that Catholic schools, which were initially founded to educate the least fortunate in society, have had these notions since their inception. Just taking inclusion as an example, it is the fruit of Catholic schooling which has been inherited by all schools. By inclusion, we do not only mean accepting students as they are, but more than that, that they are cared for in a holistic way for their own wellbeing. Headteachers expressed the notions of care and concern as follows:

“If there is a student passing through a difficulty and another student cares for him, it is a value of care and concern. ... A student with great difficulties at home could come here for refuge ... students acknowledge that they have support in us.”

(Headteacher 7)

“We emphasise love, care and excellence in our mission statement.”

(Headteacher 9)

Regarding inclusion, in response to two separate questions, one headteacher remarked the following:

“We believe in inclusion – a value coming from the social teaching of the Church.”

(Headteacher 8)

“We are also effective on the inclusion level. There is a group who works on the social and emotional wellbeing of our students. This is the holistic programme which we offer, which is not only academic but aims at providing an integrated formation.”

(Headteacher 8)

Clearly, inclusion is not something peculiar to Catholic education, but it is nonetheless an interesting theme, common to both Catholic and non-Catholic schools. However, the idea of inclusion finds a particular place in studies in Catholic education. For Groome (2014, p. 118),

Catholic education should nurture in people an inclusive and universal consciousness, enabling them to welcome in and reach out to all, especially those in need. It should encourage a deep respect and appreciation – not just toleration – of every ‘other’.

Thus, it forges in people an openness of mind, heart and hands, to be ready to learn from, relate to and reach out to anyone and everyone of good will.

These ideas are generally reflected in the schools’ mission and vision statements, where care and concern for each and every student is emphasised. These statements also insist on the fact that each and every student, as a child of God, is loved and taken care of, irrespective of one’s own abilities.

Replies from the questionnaires support and endorse the same statements which the interviewees expressed. This can be seen in Figure 5 below. When asked to rate the statement “The school provides for every aspect of our well-being”, 53.6% of students replied strongly agree, 37.5% replied agree, while 8.9% replied by saying they are neutral on the issue. There were no responses either for disagree or for strongly disagree. To the statement “At school we learn how to respect others”, 75% of the students said that they strongly agree, while 17.9%

agreed, and 7.1% were neutral on the issue. The statement “We have an effective pastoral care team at school” received the following rating by students: 39.3% strongly agree, 48.2% agree, while 12.5% were neutral. A strong majority of students, then, are experiencing the care and concern shown towards themselves and towards others. Moreover, they acknowledge that pastoral teams in schools are working effectively to help students, and very often their parents too. However, I would like to point out that even though there is a strong majority that agrees, there are some students who feel neutral or do not agree with these statements. Some may argue that some students feel neutral because they do not feel that they personally need such attention to be shown towards them, however, I believe that Catholic schools should make an extra effort to reach these students, especially those students who are represented in those who answered that they do not agree with the statements in the questionnaires, or students who feel more like outsiders in school.

Teachers were asked: “Every student is looked after, even if he is not Catholic”. 73.6% strongly agreed, 23.1% agreed, 1.7% were neutral, while 0.8% disagreed. Here, I would like to point out that in Malta, not all secondary schools accept students that are not Catholic. In fact, there are some schools who accept students coming from any faith, there are schools who enrol students whose parents present a certificate of baptism in a Christian Church, and there are other schools who accept students coming from the Catholic Church only. In some cases, as some headteachers attested, there were a number of students in some Catholic schools, who got the experience of growing in the life of faith, and eventually got baptised. However, it is quite satisfactory to note that almost all teachers acknowledge the care and concern shown towards all students, irrespective of their faith.

Figure 5:

Questionnaire Results – Endorsement of the values of care and concern by students and teachers

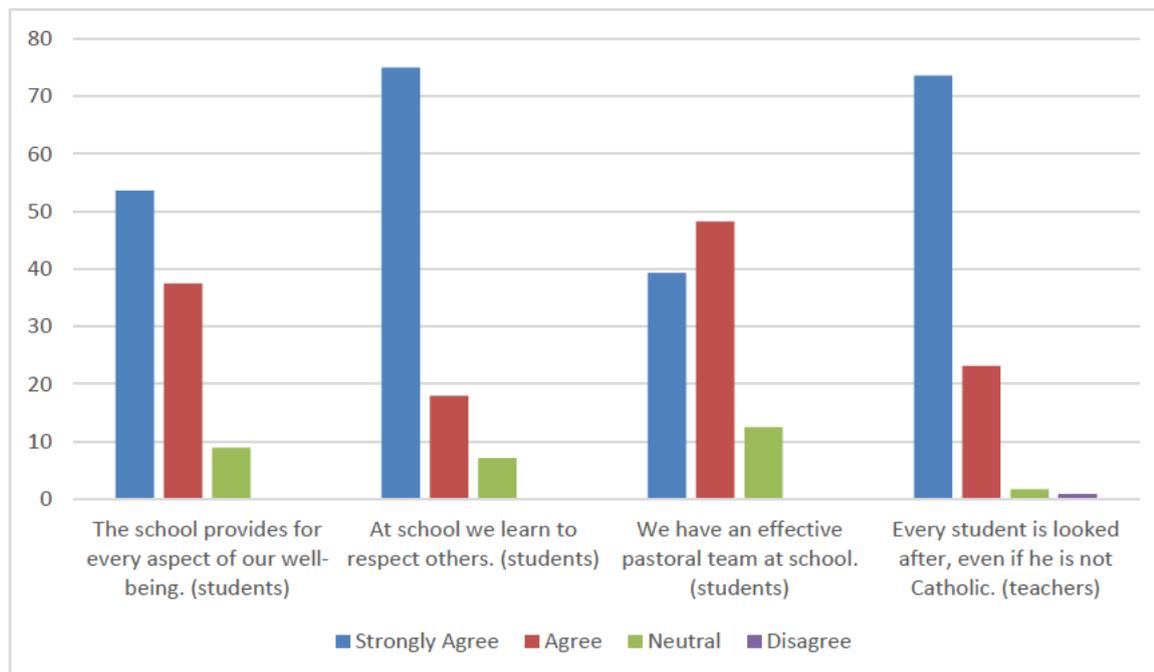
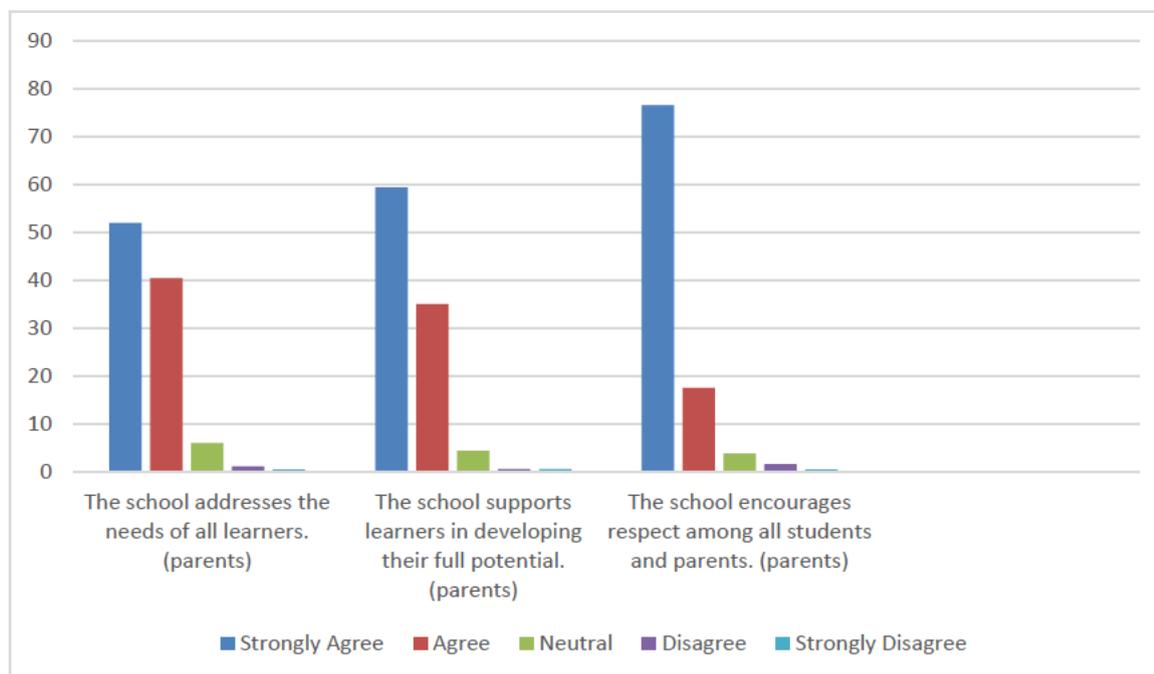


Figure 6 shows that to the statement “The school addresses the needs of all learners”, 51.9% of parents strongly agreed, 40.4% agreed, 6% were neutral, while 1.1% disagreed and 0.5% strongly disagreed. Parents were also asked to rate the statement: “The school supports learners in developing their full potential”. 59.4% strongly agreed, 35% agreed, 4.4% were neutral while 0.6% disagreed and another 0.6% strongly disagreed. Moreover, parents were asked if “The school encourages respect among all students and parents”, to which statement 76.5% strongly agreed, 17.5% agreed, 3.8% were neutral, while 1.6% disagreed and 0.5% strongly disagreed. Looking at these results, parents seem to be grateful for the care and concern shown towards each and every person in the school community. There is a very strong majority that confirms that schools look after the needs of every student and enable all students to develop their full potential irrespective of their individual abilities.

Figure 6:

Questionnaire Results – Views of parents on respect and inclusion



Speaking informally to parents, the greatest majority of them agree that Catholic schools are attentive towards the needs of each and every student, where they are cared for not only academically but in the formation of their whole being. This can be confirmed by the way parents responded to the questionnaire questions. Living during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to note that schools really made an impact since a good number of them showed this care and concern by maintaining regular contact with students, not only through online teaching and learning or by general assemblies, but by making personal contact with each and every family.

The Preferential Option for the Poor

One aspect of inclusion is to speak about the preferential option for the poor. This notion, as the declaration of the Second Vatican Council, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965, par. 9) asserts, is shown “in caring for the needs of those who are poor in the goods of this

world or who are deprived of the assistance and affection of a family or who are strangers to the gift of faith.”

In the interviews, only one headteacher made a small reference to this aspect which is of importance in the holistic idea of Catholic education, linking it to care and concern:

“What makes the school distinctively Catholic is the care and concern towards others. ... The attention of Christ towards the poor and marginalised.”

(Headteacher 1)

However, I do not consider the fact that since only one person spoke about this idea, this something which is not important, as it is a notion closely knit to the ideas of care, concern, and inclusion. Throughout the world, the majority of Catholic schools were first founded for the poor and marginalised. It is an echo from Jesus’s teaching, especially in the Gospel of Luke (4,18-20) who speaks of his mission to bring good news to the poor. Basically, in the mentality of the Bible, the poor are not only those deprived of work and economical structure, but those who are afflicted and excluded from society. McKinney and Hill (2010, p. 169), making reference to Scotland, speak of the commitment they are called to:

The Catholic schools in Scotland, as part of the international body of Catholic schools, are called to share the commitment to the biblically rooted preferential option for the poor, and, as state-funded schools that are integral to the national school system, they are expected to share and participate in the government commitment to address the effects of poverty ... The challenge for Catholic schools is the nature, articulation and manifestation of the response to this double mandate, and, in particular, to the gospel-based preferential option for the poor.

In the first document published by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977, par. 58), twelve years after the close of Vatican Council II, the Sacred Congregation speaks of this preferential option:

First and foremost, the Church offers its educational services to the poor, or those who are deprived of family help and affection or those who are far from the faith. Since education is an important means of improving the social and economic condition of the individual and of peoples, if the Catholic school was to turn attention exclusively or predominantly to those from wealthier social classes it could be contributing towards maintaining their privileged position and could thereby continue to favour a society which is unjust.

Grace (2009, p. 11) speaks of his fear that the diminishing number of religious persons in Catholic schools is leading to the poor being wiped out of the system: “This threat to the ‘preferential option for the poor’ in Catholic education exists wherever religious congregations are declining and where there is inadequate financial support from the state.” Moreover, Grace (2009, p. 12) goes on to say that since not all Catholic schools in the world are state-funded, there is another problem:

Those states which provide financial support to faith schools are recognising a principle of economic equity in access to such schooling and are recognising the contribution to the common good which Catholic schools achieve. Those states which deny such financial support restrict this option in practice mainly to those who can afford to pay the fees and thereby constitute these schools as being in the service of the wealthier social classes.

At this point I would like to mention that, in Malta, the State partially funds Catholic schools, and the salaries of all employees in Catholic schools as approved by the Department of Education are funded by the State. In such a way, although Catholic schools in Malta need financial support, there is no problem related to when schools face are not state-funded. It should be highlighted that the notion of a preferential option for the poor in Catholic schools in Malta is rather different from the same notion in other countries. Although

admission in Catholic schools in Malta is mainly by ballot, the system still leaves place for children with different learning abilities, refugees, and other special circumstances to be able to find a place in the same schools. Moreover, as previously stated, Catholic schools in Malta are partially state-funded. In such a way, children of families with financial restrictions can still have a Catholic education.

Disposition of the Heart

Interestingly, one headteacher acknowledged that any school can be effective.

However, in the case of Catholic schools, there is something more:

“To be a good or effective school, it does not have to be a Catholic school. But the disposition of the hearts of staff members makes a difference. Teachers who are under pressure, yet touch the hearts of the young, they make a difference.”

(Headteacher 6)

Saying that an effective school does not have to be Catholic implies once again the differences between discourses of effectiveness and Catholicism. When school effectiveness research in general analyses schools according to a set of criteria, a very good number of schools which are not Catholic pass the test. However, when we speak of an effective Catholic school, we speak of a school which makes a real difference in the lives of students not only because they obtain knowledge but, as this headteacher said, because the hearts of students are touched. This means that in Catholic schools, as in all schools, importance is given to knowledge and wisdom, however, it is more important to form the students holistically and to show care for them. When teachers and other members of staff are said to touch the heart of students, this means that a mark is left on students who will remember the real attention that was given to them. From my own experience as a headteacher, I can

acknowledge the fact that when we speak to a student when he is in a time of personal trouble, the student looks at us as persons who are concerned and take an interest in his life.

5.2.2 The Catholic School as a Parish

When we speak of the relationship between the Catholic school and the parish, it should be said at the outset that in Malta there is no direct link between a school and a parish. The parish is in no way responsible for Catholic schools present in its territory. Catholic schools, while being independent from parishes, are the responsibility of the diocese, religious orders, or a Catholic association.

During the interviews, it was quite surprising that three out of ten interviewees mentioned the relationship between the school and the parish. Rather than referring to some sort of tension between both entities, headteachers spoke in terms of the traditional parish which, demographically speaking, is becoming increasingly elderly and decreasing in numbers, while the school is providing children and young people and perhaps their families with an experience of faith. There seems to be a move from the parish which has traditionally provided spiritual care and formation to its parishioners, to a situation where the Catholic school is now providing for the spiritual wellbeing of its students. This is confirmed by Neidhart et al. (2016, p. 51) who say that “for an increasing number of students and their families, school is their major experience of Church.”

“We see the school as our parish which takes care not only of students but also teachers and families.”

(Headteacher 1)

“We are effective because we are becoming the parish for students. For a great number of students, the only weekly Mass they go for is at school, as it is the only input they have.”

(Headteacher 6)

“Are we acknowledging that the school provides an opportunity greater than the parish to reach these young people?”

(Headteacher 8)

These ideas, expressed by the headteachers, can be divided into other themes, which all contribute to the notion of the “new parish” as lived in Catholic schools. As in a “normal” parish, the school parish is also built on community, proclaiming and witnessing Christ, liturgy, and spiritual formation.

Building Community

The idea of community is also central to the Catholic Church. Furthermore, the parish itself is conceived as a community of believers. Sultmann and Brown (2011, p. 75) speak of the importance of people living together, and of the community in the Church and the Catholic school community:

It is through community, formed by and based on relationships, that people come to understand their fundamental identity; that is, in their relationship to God in and through self, others and the world ... The Catholic school, by virtue of its own community of students, families and staff, becomes an embryonic Christian faith community and shares in the responsibilities that all Christian communities have towards their members, towards the diocesan Church and the universal Church.

Paletta and Fiorin (2016, p. 138) argue that although how a community lives may change, the notion of community remains important in the experience of schools motivated by Gospel values and faith:

The way of being a community changes over time and from situation to situation, but the basic reasons for their educational work do not change: school communities that are inspired by the values of Catholic faith transpose their personalist vision – which is the hallmark of humanistic-Christian tradition – into their organization and syllabi, placing learners and their diversities at the centre, recognising a multidimensionality of outcomes in the school experience in which both what is learned and how it is learned are important, and are both necessary for fulfilling the educational task of ensuring full learning for the students.

The headteachers reflected on the idea of community, which is something that needs to be built, and at the same time the educational ministry is seen as a service to the community.

“We are not just a group of people living together, but slowly building a community.”

(Headteacher 1)

“We profess that our principles are built on the Gospel, and in everything we do, we do it as a service to community, as a service to others.”

(Headteacher 2)

“The school is effective in the creation of a community. Schools are the true communities from a Catholic perspective in Malta.”

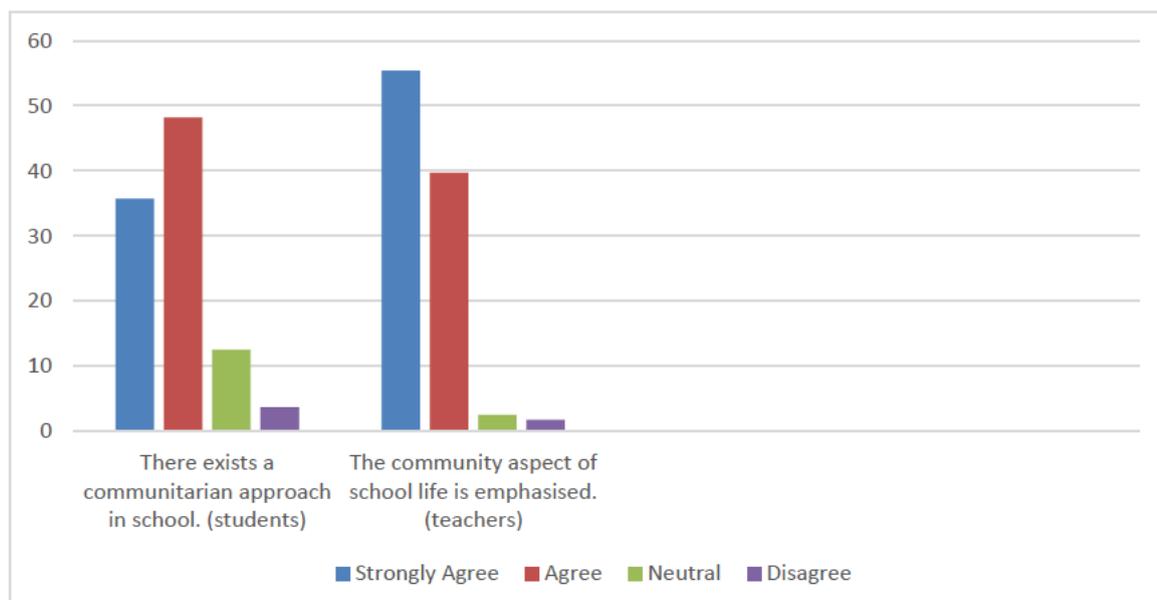
(Headteacher 9)

Students and teachers support the views of headteachers that there is a strong sense of community in Catholic schools, as shown in Figure 7. In fact, when asked to rate the

statement “There exists a communitarian approach in school”, 35.7% of students replied that they strongly agree, 48.2% answered that they agree, 12.5% were neutral, while 3.6% disagreed. Along the same lines, teachers were asked to scale the statement “The community aspect of school life is emphasised”. 55.4% replied that they strongly agree, 39.7% said that they agreed, 2.5% were neutral, while 1.7% disagreed. The communitarian approach in schools needs to be commented upon since, in wider society, we are all the time moving towards an individualistic lifestyle. Teachers are more positive than students in replying to these questions, since I think that younger generations are perhaps more inclined towards individualism than older ones. Even though there is this difference, it is very satisfactory that both teachers and students answered in the affirmative in such numbers, as I am afraid that the general public nowadays do not necessarily appreciate the community aspect. On the other hand, people may experience this characteristic in schools which is lacking in wider society.

Figure 7:

Questionnaire Results – the communitarian approach impact on students and teachers



This communitarian aspect, as seen from the data collected, is central in the experience of Catholic schools. This feature comes from different characteristics of the same schools. Firstly, in Malta, Catholic schools are smaller in number than state schools. Just to give an example, a middle school (Years 7 and 8) in the state sector has more students than a whole secondary (Years 7 to 11) Catholic school. As a general idea, according to the National Statistics Office, 57.6% of students attend State schools, followed by Catholic schools with 29.2%, while 13.2% of students attend Independent schools. The fact that Catholic schools are smaller enables not only the students to know each other better but helps the Senior Leadership Team and academic staff to be able to know their students one by one. Secondly, the majority of Catholic schools are run by religious orders for whom the notion of community is central. Even though the number of religious order members in schools has declined, the remaining members help to instil the notion of community in the schools they run. Furthermore, when a religious community is present on the school premises, this is a credible witness of the communitarian characteristic.

Proclaiming Christ and Bearing Witness

Something which makes the school distinctively Catholic is the fact of

“making Christ visible in our actions by following the Gospel and by practicing the virtue of forgiveness. I would say the way we interpret the small things and the way we go about the intuitive things we do everyday through our own interpretation of the message of Christ and make it visible to the people around us ... proclaiming Christ and his presence around us. Bearing witness.”

(Headteacher 5)

At this point, one might think that this notion has already been discussed under the heading “Christ-like”. Without a doubt, there is some overlapping, however, at this stage, I would like

to emphasise not just the concept of being “like” Christ, but the idea that being like Christ moves the person to proclaim Christ and bear witness. The same headteacher elaborated his understanding as follows:

“We try to bear witness and I would like to refer to the parable of the sower. We are in a profession of hope, doing our best to sow seeds in hearts and minds of students and ourselves. We want to grow as well, out of our experience in the school. We hope that whatever we sow, it grows. We try to work towards having fertile ground with things that make the person more ready to listen, to understand and to decide and be informed ...”

(Headteacher 5)

It follows then that the experience in Catholic schools instils in students the basic ideas of how to live as a Christian, hoping for fertile ground so that the whole person is formed and is able not only to receive by himself the Gospel values, but also to be able to share this experience with others.

Liturgy

In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994, par. 1069) one finds the following definition of liturgy: “The word ‘liturgy’ originally meant a ‘public work’ or a ‘service in the name of/on behalf of the people.’ In Christian tradition it means the participation of the People of God in the work of God.” In more popular discourse, we refer to liturgy as the celebration by the people of the worship of God through several symbols and acts.

Starratt (2000, p. 61) speaks of liturgies in school as expressions of faith. “School liturgies can become genuine expressions of student and teacher worship and at the same time, culminating expressions of disparate learnings developed in separate academic areas.”

Not all students might be aware of what liturgy is. However, with the passing of time, students become accustomed to the various liturgical activities which take place in school from time to time. Liturgies in schools vary from the celebration of the Eucharist for each class or for the whole school, to moments of prayer and worship organised by the school's chaplaincy teams. There are also moments throughout the scholastic year and the liturgical year where these moments of prayer or liturgy are further emphasised. These include the special times of Advent leading to Christmas, and Lent leading to Easter. However, even though schools do their utmost to improve liturgies and help students to participate, for some young people these liturgies mean nothing. This reflects the traditional notions of "parish": special liturgical times throughout the year and the decreasing number of people actively participating in liturgies and parish life. Nevertheless, headteachers see liturgy as an important aspect of Catholic education as follows:

"We try to live the liturgical life with the students. ... We have a number of initiatives which show that while the 'outside' culture is what it is, with the activities we do, we try to build a new culture."

(Headteacher 2)

"Together with the spiritual guide of the school, who is a priest, we offer support and organise activities with the pastoral team to create the environment in which students can be raised in the Catholic values. ... There are some strong periods during the year, such as Advent and Lent, when we organise spiritual talks and a recollection activity."

(Headteacher 10)

Students and teachers acknowledge liturgy as part of the school life. As we can see in Figure 8, to the statement "The school provides us with a strong prayer and liturgical life", students

answered as follows: 48.2% strongly agree, 41.1% agree, while 10.7% were neutral. No responses were registered for disagree or strongly disagree. The same comment was presented to teachers: 28.1% strongly agreed, 57.9% agreed, 9.9% were neutral, while 4.1% disagreed. One should note that students sound more positive than teachers in relation to the liturgical life at school. It seems that students and teachers appreciate this aspect, however, I feel that, sometimes, if liturgy is not properly animated and is not a genuine expression of faith, it can be something boring for which students attend because they cannot do otherwise.

Living a liturgical life at school relates to the fact that there should be spaces for it. Moreover, the physical atmosphere of the school should pronounce itself in being a Catholic environment. In fact, the Congregation for Catholic Education (1988, par. 27) says that “From the first moment that a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one illumined by the light of faith, and having its own unique characteristics.” In fact, one headteacher lamented that the proper structure of his school is limited, and there is need for space for prayer and liturgy:

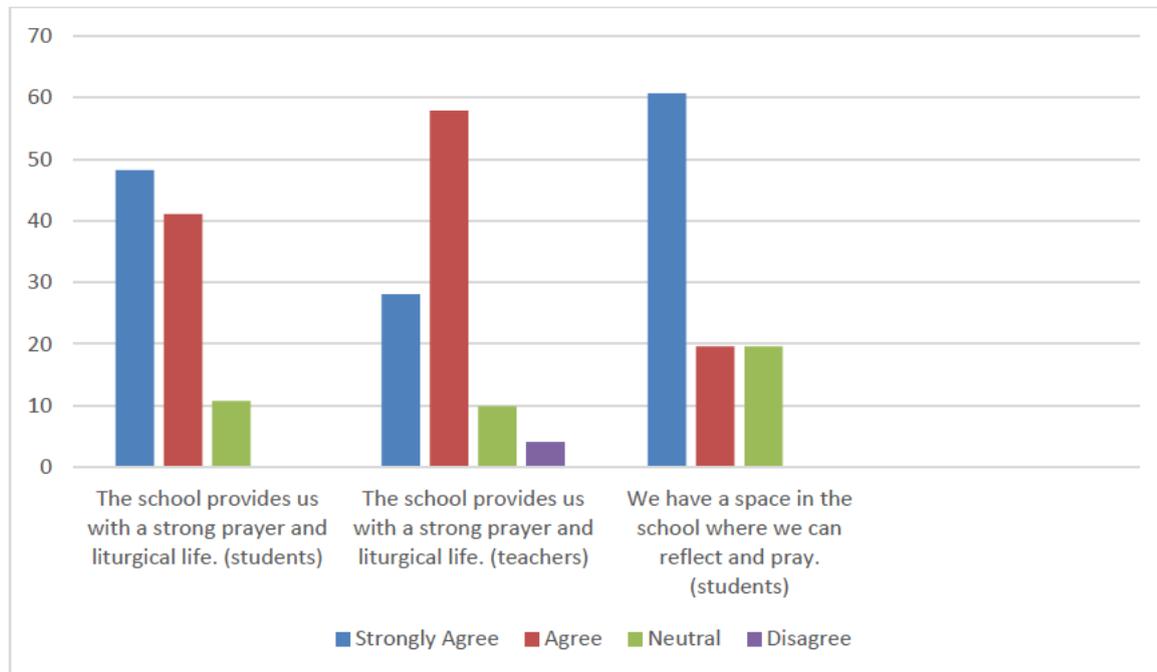
“One of the difficulties is that of resources – structure – we wish to have a prayer room or chapel.”

(Headteacher 10)

In the questionnaires, students were asked to state their position on the statement “We have a space in the school where we can reflect and pray”. 60.7% strongly agreed with the statement, 19.6% agreed, while another 19.6% were neutral. It is clear, as the headteacher mentioned above comments, that in some cases such a place is lacking. It is not enough that schools have just a room for prayer and reflection. It should be appropriately embellished according to the likes and interests of students who live today and not tens of years ago. This place can be used for both community liturgies and for personal prayer at available time slots during the day.

Figure 8:

Questionnaire Results – the relationship between the school and liturgical life



In fact, Starratt (2000, p. 61), while giving an example of a particular school with adequate liturgical space, speaks of the importance of this resource:

St. Grace is a Catholic high school blessed with some extraordinary teachers, many extraordinary students, a curriculum with sufficient breadth and flexibility, and a chapel that has been renovated for use as a theater as well as for liturgies of various sizes and shapes. If this school lacked any of these essential ingredients, it could not host what has been an exceptional series of student-designed liturgies.

Drawing from my own experience and from the experience of other colleagues, it is widely acknowledged that Catholic schools should work more on providing creative liturgies that attract students and help young people to participate actively not only at schools but also in their wider communities outside school.

Spiritual Formation Given Only in Schools

Keeping in mind what has been said about the Catholic school as a parish, Catholic schools can be envisaged as the only places where many students are given spiritual formation, especially from twelve years of age onwards, since up till then, students may attend some sort of catechism lessons until they receive the sacrament of Confirmation. This does not mean that there are no other opportunities besides those provided at school, but due to other commitments or lack of interest in spiritual formation, adolescents seem to abandon regular spiritual formation. At school we speak of religious education lessons, however, this is far from providing catechesis to students, since lessons are more syllabus-oriented with a view to taking an exam:

“Do you teach religion for spiritual development, or do you teach religion to learn dogma, principles and precepts of the Church to sit for an exam? On the one hand, you want them to develop spiritually, on the other hand as a Catholic school we have to sit for the religious education exam. The religious education syllabus is not conducive to spiritual development.”

(Headteacher 3)

Groome (2014, p. 118) speaks of the importance of cultivating the faith and spirituality of children and young people so that they can grow more holistically:

Surely a Catholic school exists to nurture the spirituality of its students, inculcating in them a ‘care of soul’ that becomes life-long and enables them to put their faith to work in the everyday of life. It must honour the spiritual nature of its students precisely so that they can live more humanly. So, the whole curriculum of a Catholic school must reflect and foster the spiritual nature of its students, and in particular its pedagogy.

It is interesting to note that although headteachers see spiritual formation as intrinsic to Catholic schooling, they did not mention a structure which is present at school during school hours, but rather, two headteachers spoke of formation given in after-school hours, which may result in the optional attendance of students.

“We offer spiritual formation, which is linked to experience rather than to books. Older students have some formation sessions after school hours. We need to give a good taste of spiritual and Christian life in a way that they remember it when they leave school. For some, spiritual formation is given only in school.”

(Headteacher 1)

“The spiritual opportunities students have even in after school hours... I have faith in these activities. Students come and seek spiritual guidance from the school even when they leave.”

(Headteacher 9)

As I shall be discussing later, giving spiritual formation in a more structured way can be seen as an important area of improvement for Catholic schools, keeping in mind that most probably it could be the only source of spirituality that they are having.

5.2.3 Religious Congregations, Charism, Catholic Schools, and Ethos

The majority of Catholic schools in Malta and throughout the world were founded by religious congregations. Moreover, some religious congregations were founded with the specific charism of education. The social circumstances then were quite different from today's. Free education was not provided for all by the State, and, as such, some congregations were founded to give education to the poor. Nowadays, with a totally different social background, religious congregations still provide education. While until some decades

ago one would find quite a significant number of religious persons in a school, the situation today has changed, and while religious congregations are connected with the school, many schools are run by lay persons. As one can see from the information about the headteachers listed (Table 3), presently there are five priests or religious headteachers and five lay persons. In the years to come, it is quite reasonable to assume that even this situation will change and there will be fewer priest headteachers in Catholic schools. From the interviews, it was also expressed quite clearly that the presence and ethos of particular religious communities still makes sense today and provides for a distinctive character of a Catholic school. During the interviews it was explicitly stated that while the decreasing number of vocations for religious life is a worrying factor for a community's presence in school, there are three schools where the community is really present and working in the school is an important pastoral work of the same community. In other schools, there is only the mere presence of individual religious members. One particular lay headteacher even lamented that for some time, the presence of a religious person from the school's congregation was hardly felt or seen.

Presence of Religious Community

For one particular headteacher, an aspect which makes the school distinctively Catholic is

“the presence of the religious community which is there for the service of Christ. The community lives in the same building of the school, and students know it. It makes the students feel that the school is their second home.”

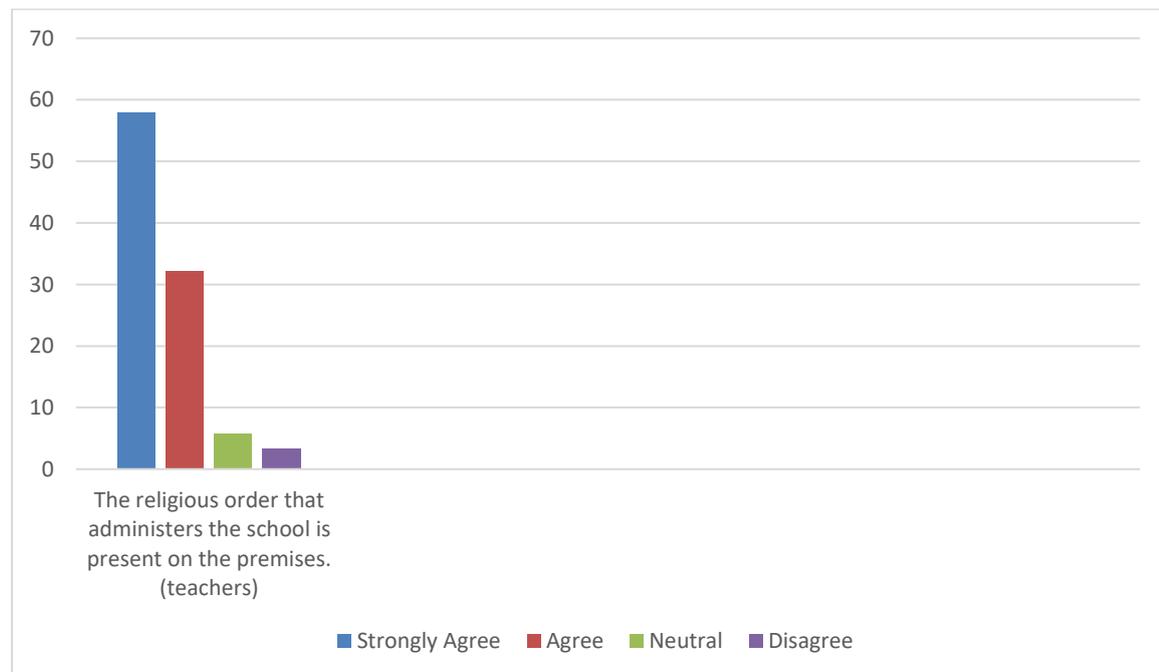
(Headteacher 4)

Figure 9 refers to the presence of members of the religious order in schools and how noticeable this is. In fact, when asked if “The religious order that administers the school is present on the premises”, 57.9% of teachers replied that they strongly agree, 32.2% answered

that they agreed, 5.8% were neutral, while 3.3% disagreed. I think that in their replies the majority of teachers did not refer only to a whole community living on the school premises, but to the presence of individual religious members. Teachers feel that there is a link with the religious community or religious persons. From my experience, teachers who have been working at school for quite some time, still ask after various friars who in previous years used to teach or had some role in the school. This shows the impact that the religious persons leave on teachers and without doubt also on students.

Figure 9:

Questionnaire Results – the presence of religious on the school premises



These ideas will induce us to say that when there is no presence of religious persons or of the religious community, there is something missing in the school. This presence is a distinctive character of Catholic schools which can give a stronger sense of identity. It is interesting to note that where a relatively large number of religious is present, and they can mingle with students, this leaves a positive effect on students who feel more the sense of being in a community or familiar atmosphere. It would be advisable then that where the

presence of religious persons is almost absent, the religious congregation should find a new mechanism to enable the students to see and maybe experience the charism of the religious congregation that runs the school. Moreover, since some Catholic schools in Malta were founded to attract new vocations, the presence of religious members will be a living witness of that particular way of life in the school.

The Ethos of Particular Religious Communities

Linked to the presence of religious communities in school is the ethos and charism of the same communities. Although Catholic schools share many features with other educational institutions, and although there exists a Catholic culture in Catholic schools, the ethos of each school, inspired by the particular religious communities, is different. The ethos gives the school a particular identity and mission. It is the climate which permeates the whole school life and culture. This is echoed by Cook and Simonds (2011, p. 321) who say that “we like the way religious order schools conceptualize their identity in terms of charism because charism has an outward orientation. In other words, charism adds to school identity the dimension of school giftedness and contribution to Church and society.”

Referring to ethos and charism, one headteacher said:

“Our ethos is clear – it is a [X]³ ethos. It is what makes us distinctive from other Catholic schools.”

(Headteacher 8)

However, another headteacher admitted that

“some members of staff are still not realising what the ethos or charism is.”

(Headteacher 1)

³ Here the interviewee referred specifically to his congregation and founder. The direct reference has been omitted to guarantee anonymity.

Another headteacher, whose school does not belong to a religious order but to the diocese, spoke of the particular ethos of the school which is more open:

“We are here for the needs of the diocese. This openness brings about the need to make students try different spiritualities and experiences which are not linked to a particular spirituality.”

(Headteacher 7)

Linked to the school ethos is the fact that religious and priestly vocations are declining, something which might have a negative effect on the school ethos:

“We need human resources; the number of priests is decreasing and so the religious counsellor cannot be present at school in all days.”

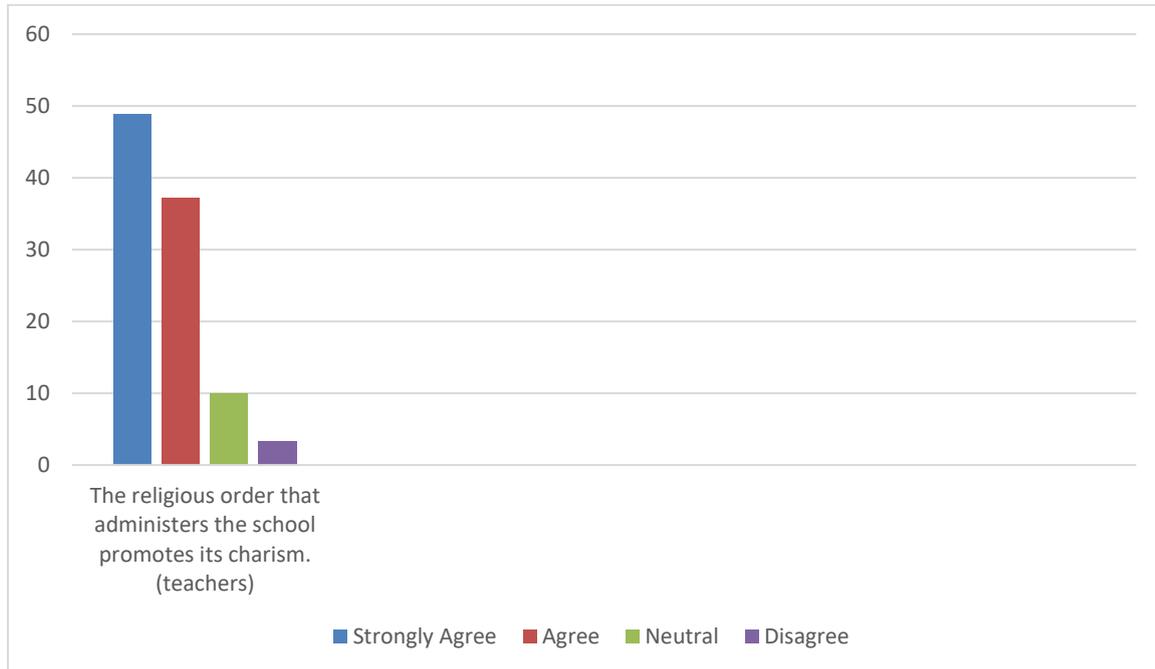
(Headteacher 10)

In recent years, schools have been solving the issue of the presence of the school’s chaplain by appointing prepared and formed lay people to the role. While this role is beneficial for the whole school, it may result in a financial burden for the school, since this role is not included among the members of staff who are paid for by the government, with this person’s salary having to be paid by the school itself.

Related to the notion of ethos and charism of the religious communities, in the questionnaire, teachers were asked: “The religious order that administers the school promotes its charism”. Figure 10 shows that the rating was as follows: 48.8% strongly agreed, 37.2% agreed, 9.9% were neutral, while 3.3% disagreed. At this point I believe that since a large number of teachers agreed with the statement, the responses referred to schools where the presence of religious members, both as community and as individuals, is highly visible.

Figure 10:

Questionnaire Results – Religious Orders' charism and its promotion in schools



Missionary Aspect

The Catholic Church is by its nature missionary, something which can be seen throughout the history of the Church. While in the past years in the Church the model of the shepherd was used, I believe that today we should use more the model of the fisherman. While both models are rooted in the New Testament, today, we cannot expect people to follow pastors blindly, but as fishermen, we need to get out of our comfort zones and meet people, as Pope Francis (2022) urges priests not to remain comfortable in sacristies. In the light of the missionary Church promoted by Pope Francis, Spesia (2016, p. 245) discusses the role of Catholic school principals not only in their managerial and leadership aspects but also as persons with the vision of New Evangelisation:

In order to help them move from “mere administration” to a permanent “state of mission,” the Church must encourage and accompany Catholic school principals throughout their own personal faith journeys. Those who provide initial and ongoing formation for these educational leaders must also help facilitate their ongoing

transformation as leaders of the New Evangelization. For Catholic educational leaders, the question thus becomes: What impact should such a missionary transformation have on Catholic schools in general, and how should it shape the work of Catholic school principals in particular? ... Moreover, Catholic schools leaders will need to reenvision themselves as missionary disciples whose primary work is to “make disciples...teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt. 28:19-20).

Being part of a missionary Church, the Vatican’s Congregation for Catholic Education (1997) emphasizes that:

the Catholic school has an ecclesial nature which is written into its very identity as a place of learning and which is directly tied to the evangelizing mission of the Church; the fostering of this ecclesial dimension should never be an afterthought but “should be the aim of all those who make up the educating community (par. 11).

This fact was also mentioned in one of the interviews:

“In our case we have the missionary element, there are missionary priests who actually work in the school, and missionaries who come and share their experience.”

(Headteacher 1)

For this headteacher, the missionary aspect in the school is not only linked to the missionary nature of the Church, but also to the charism of his religious congregation. In such a way, this missionary aspect is shown through the various experiences which happen in the school as part of the religious order sharing its charism with the school members. At this point, I recall a conversation I had with a former student of ours who has been appointed bishop, that one of the things that made him want to follow the priestly vocation was his frequent meetings with missionaries who used to visit the school and speak with students during the time when he was still a student.

Values of the Founder

Besides the values of the Gospel, Catholic schools also look at the values of the founder of the specific congregation. These values very often become part and parcel of the school ethos. As two headteachers said, trying to imitate the values of the founder, is part of promoting the charism by members of religious orders:

“We look a lot into the Gospel values and the values which make us [what we are according to our specific charism].”

(Headteacher 3)

“In our school, we promote the values of the founder, in particular there are two virtues: the virtue of humility and the virtue of meekness.”

(Headteacher 2)

This is confirmed by Cook and Simonds (2011, p. 320) who speak of the charism of the founding fathers or mothers as the source from which one can obtain the clarification of the charism:

Religious order schools and networks often draw on the charism of their founding religious congregations to sharpen their focus and clarify their distinctive educational vision and qualities. A charism is a gift given by the Holy Spirit to a person or group for a particular work in the world (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, n. 799).

To look at the values of the founder, one needs to know more about the person. This means that proper formation and training should take place by religious to staff who can then present the values and charism to the students.

Formation and Training in the Charism of the Founder and their Religious Congregation

As we discussed previously, it is clearly understood that for the charism to remain active and alive, one needs to give this identity in the school. Some schools acknowledge that while religious vocations are declining, charisms are still alive in the heart of lay people who are committed to live these charisms. However, there might be the challenge of suitable courses organised so that one may have formation and training, something which some religious congregations have been doing for some year for members in key roles in schools. Regarding this formation and training, the interviewed were of the following opinions:

“The school staff can have formation in the charism of the religious order that runs the school.”

(Headteacher 3)

“The vocation [in the specific charism] is increasing. There are a number of programmes for newly recruited teachers. ... We meet the new teachers and staff once a month to explain more the spirituality and values of our specific order.”

(Headteacher 6)

“The Order promotes the charism by offering training and formation possibilities for chaplains, rectors, those in charge of inclusion, those in charge of finance.”

(Headteacher 8)

“Another challenge is that if we do not give solid formation to lay people who have key-roles in our schools, then, the tendency will be that this distinctiveness weakens.”

(Headteacher 8)

“We respond to the challenges firstly in the selection of personnel. As a Church school, we choose our people, knowing who you are employing. Secondly we need a formation programme for teachers in the charism and distinctive pedagogy.”

(Headteacher 8)

The preoccupation with the fact there is fewer religious staff and the need for formation is quite clear. Paletta and Fiorin (2016, p. 148) say that:

The disappearance of religious staff is worrying, as these are considered to be guarantors of the identity, and in the case of the congregations, the charisma of the founder. The universally suggested road is that of involving lay staff who are invited to become aware of the Catholic identity of the institution and the charisma.

It follows that a new responsibility has to be placed on the administration of the school to form persons in key roles in the specific charism and ethos of the same religious orders.

Although giving formation and training to school leaders is not enough, however, this notion places a weight on leadership. In fact, Neidhart and Lamb (2016, p. 50) say that “research suggests that the success and sustainability of the Catholic school depends on capable faith leadership in the future.”

Speaking of leadership, one should say that it is one of the important notions for school effectiveness. It is an overlapping issue since in Catholic schools the leader is also indispensable. This is clearly expressed by Ozar and Weitzel-O’Neill (2012, p. 9) who say that “an excellent Catholic school has a qualified leader/leadership team empowered by the governing body to realize and implement the school’s mission and vision.”

For Earl (2005, p. 514), the Catholic school principal must find a balance in all roles of headship, in the sense that the leader is responsible not only for the academic aspect of the school, but he should be the spiritual leader who makes his own the spiritual development of the school:

Spiritual leadership is central to the identity of the Catholic school. The Catholic school principal must foster both the religious and academic mission of the Catholic school ... If Catholic schools are to continue to be distinguished by their strong faith communities and not become private schools characterized as schools of academic excellence and a religious memory, attention must be given to faith leadership and how it is being developed in school leadership.

For Catholic schools to remain based on a Catholic ethos, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2005, p. 10), noting the large number of lay persons who work in administration or teaching in Church schools, proposed programmes of formation for all:

Ninety-five percent of our current school administrators and teachers are members of the laity. The preparation and ongoing formation of new administrators and teachers is vital if our schools are to remain truly Catholic in all aspects of school life. Catholic school personnel should be grounded in a faith-based Catholic culture, have strong bonds to Christ and the Church, and be witnesses to the faith in both their words and actions. The formation of personnel will allow the Gospel message and the living presence of Jesus to permeate the entire life of the school community and thus be faithful to the school's evangelizing mission.

Although there is no official data on the number of religious persons who work in Catholic schools in Malta, from my own knowledge, the same percentage, that of 95%, also applies to the situation in Malta.

Leading a Catholic school can be seen as different from leading any other school. It can be seen as leading not only the school for its basic purposes, but more than that, leadership in Catholic schools puts extra weight on the leaders' shoulders since they are meant to lead the specific mission of the school. For Nuzzi et al. (2013, p. 2), there is more to the leader in Catholic education than there is generally:

A Catholic school principal has job expectations that go beyond what can be found in secular educational literature. Specifically, the Catholic school principal has responsibility for this religious purpose and mission and for the quality of the school's overall participation in the educational mission of the Catholic Church. This is no small responsibility and it is clearly an additional job requirement for the Catholic school principal that differentiates Catholic school leadership from other types of school leadership.

Once again, here we can notice an extra aspect of effectiveness for a Catholic school. From educational effectiveness in general, we can see that the leader is important for the school's vision, however, in Catholic school effectiveness, the educational leader is seen as the one who promotes the school's ethos.

For this additional requirement to take place, there is surely the need for formation, as Nuzzi et al. (2013, p. 57) state that "an ongoing program of professional growth and development, focused on the identified needs of principals, would be a major contribution to the field and to the health and successful functioning of principals", which programme should focus also on the spiritual formation, while tackling what is needed in school administration, keeping in mind the background of the Catholic Church.

Thompson (2011, p. 120) argues that the problem in Catholic schools is not that priests and religious members are becoming less present, but rather that leaders in Catholic schools may not be prepared for such a delicate role:

The issue in Catholic school leadership today is not necessarily the decline of religious and priests in administrative positions, but rather, whether or not those lay men and women who have accepted the call to leadership in Catholic schools are theologically literate in the Catholic faith and if those beliefs and perceptions are aligned with Church teaching.

At this point, it is important to note that formation and training in the charism cannot be done only through courses. The most important notion of this formation should be that of witnessing. While we have already noted the witness of the religious community on the schools' premises, modelling the charism by religious and lay people immersed in the charism is more significant than courses. In fact, Lydon (2009, p. 53), reflects on his research on the retrieval of the Salesian charism in Salesian-trusted schools and notes that:

programmes of formation were considered by the headteachers interviewed to be important in the context of maintaining the Salesian dimension. Two, however, were convinced that the presence in schools of teaching colleagues committed to living out the Salesian charism, particularly members of the religious order, gave far greater impetus insofar as they constituted an embodiment of the charism enabling it to be passed on in the lives of the teachers themselves.

To sum up, witness, formation and training for lay persons employed with a Catholic educational institution are essential, so that they will not only have knowledge of the founder and the charism, but more than that, they will be able to give their utmost to the mission and vision of a Catholic school.

5.3 Section B

Following what has been said in the previous section, I will now discuss the areas which have been seen as being capable of and needing improvement.

5.3.1 Weakening of Distinctiveness

Due to various facts, the general perception might be that the distinctiveness of Catholic schools has been weakening with the passing of time. The reasons for this may vary: family problems, exigencies from higher authorities, fewer religious persons, a trend towards

a more secularised society, and the decadence of values in society. Neidhart and Lamb (2016, p. 59) add to these reasons by saying that “Catholic school identity has been weakened by a diminution of shared meanings and commitment to religious beliefs and practices.”

Garcia-Huidobro (2017, p. 67) likewise states that “I believe that secularization and neoliberal socio-economic policies are slowly undermining Catholic schools’ distinctiveness, with far reaching consequences for both religious practice and social justice commitments.” This point is in line with the research question of this study, since some argue that the whole discourse of effectiveness is derived from such neoliberal policies. It should be said, then, that for Garcia-Huidobro, the mainstream discourse of school effectiveness does not do justice with regard to Catholic schools, but it is rather weakening their unique characteristics. In this way, once again, the notion of Catholic school effectiveness will move away from the general idea of school effectiveness research to a new discourse.

These facts were all acknowledged by the interviewed headteachers. However, it is interesting to note that while recognising this destabilisation, headteachers argued that this should not be seen as a failing in Catholic schools, but rather, it came about as a test to examine oneself to see how the distinctiveness of Catholic education can be renewed.

Living Distinctiveness in a Different Way – Being Authentic

It is interesting to note that while headteachers spoke of the difference in the distinctiveness of Catholic schools, they spoke of a revival of distinctiveness, mainly in providing an authentic experience throughout Catholic schooling. This shows that schools in Malta are adapting to the present circumstances and that they are not stuck in the manner that Catholic institutions used to be decades ago. In short, one has to find new ways of how to live this distinctiveness, practically by being more authentic. Being authentic in a Catholic school

practically means that the Gospel and the values of Christ are lived in a faithful way, they are truly part of the school culture so that the students can be formed in a holistic manner.

Asking if this distinctiveness is weakening with the passing of time, the headteachers were of the following opinions:

“This distinctiveness might have weakened, but to a certain point we are living it in a different way.”

(Headteacher 1)

“The distinctiveness is like when something becomes rare. When we live authentically, the distinctiveness brightens and Catholic schools will be wanted more and more.”

(Headteacher 4)

“Is it perhaps because it is becoming more authentic? ... If it is replaced by something more authentic, then it is a positive development ... We might be stuck in certain cultural beliefs. I feel we are moving towards a more authentic direction.”

(Headteacher 5)

“If we are a Catholic school and then we do not adhere to the Catholic values, then we are weak and not credible.”

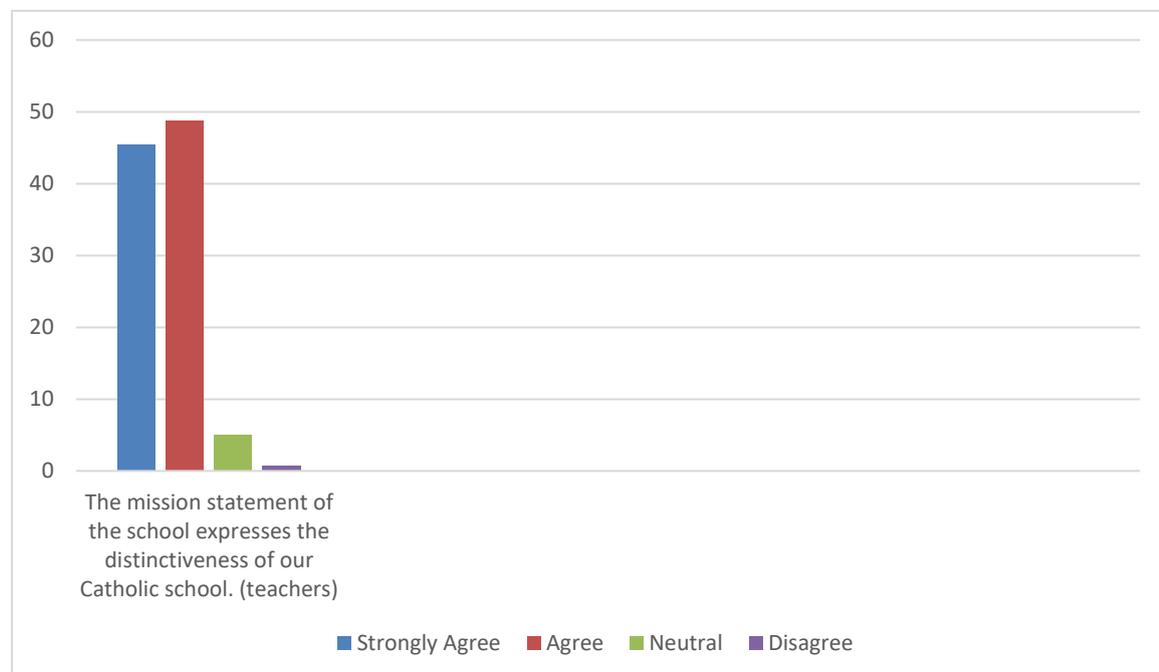
(Headteacher 6)

It could be said that despite everything, schools really struggle to keep alive this distinctiveness. This can be seen in Figure 11 below, which refers to the replies of teachers in the questionnaire to the question: “The mission statement of the school expresses the distinctiveness of our Catholic school”, to which 45.5% strongly agreed, 48.8% agreed, 5%

were neutral, while 0.8% disagreed. This shows that there is still the belief and the feeling among teachers that Catholic schools are distinct. This also shows that if teachers are active collaborators of the school's mission and vision, they can help in keeping alive the distinguishing characteristics of a Catholic school. Since the statement in the questionnaire refers to the mission statement, hopefully, what is written in the questionnaire is lived in the daily experience of the school.

Figure 11:

Questionnaire Results – Mission Statements and Distinctiveness



While Cook and Simonds (2011, p. 320) say that “There are a number of means Catholic educators can use to secure strong Catholic schools for the future; and one strategy is for each school to develop a distinctive identity that will set it apart from all other schools,” the headteachers seemed to agree that it is the notion of authenticity which enables Catholic schools to retain their distinctiveness. I must add, at this point, that this is a general feeling in the Church: the community is smaller, but strives to be more authentic.

Energy and Resources put into other Demands

In a small-scale study in England, Fincham (2010, p. 74) spoke of the demands and pressures placed upon Catholic schools by external educational forces:

While not detracting from their primary concern for the education and welfare of pupils in their schools, headteachers are encumbered by the demands of government policies and political pressures. There is a perception that a target setting culture is a significant source of anxiety.

Although Fincham spoke of the situation in England, however, I can say that this is a worldwide problem, including Malta, where much attention is given to syllabi, and very often the demands put on Catholic schools are those set for state schools or even more.

This idea was confirmed and brought into the discussion by one of the headteachers, who said that

“the distinctiveness is weakening not because it is not effective, but because the energy and resources are being put in other places due to other demands.”

(Headteacher 7)

Very often, the changes, demands and pressures are so great that they leave little energy to be put into living the authenticity of a Catholic school in a distinctive way. Since some requirements come from higher authorities and schools need to adhere to them, very often the first things to suffer are those issues which do not relate to academia but are peculiar to Catholic schools.

Fewer Religious Persons – the Need to Prepare Lay People with Key Roles in Schools

While I have already discussed the notion of fewer religious persons in schools, in this section I would like to highlight the fact that there is a need for persons to be prepared for key roles in schools. This idea is closely linked to the previous theme and was confirmed by

the same headteacher. Answering the question about how the school responds to challenges, he said:

“By paying people over and above to work in the areas which are dear to us. If we speak of care and concern for the individual, we pay the psychologist, the social worker, the counsellor over and above what we are entitled to from the Department so that we can go on working with the individual.”

(Headteacher 7)

In this way, the school invests in human resources so that all students can be reached in a professional way. Although the Secretariat for Catholic Education provides the services of psychologists, psychotherapists, counsellors, inclusion coordinators, social workers, and youth workers, for some schools, especially the larger ones, this service becomes limited, and so there is a need for the school to employ such professionals to provide their services in schools. The fact that there are fewer religious persons – who before might have been professionals in some areas – now the school needs to provide such persons while spending additional money. However, schools do their utmost to meet this challenge and provide professional services.

Paletta and Fiorin (2016, p. 147) confirm that formation in skills development is quite a challenge: “The challenge for Catholic schools and universities to preserve an authentic sense of community implies thought on the demands made by Catholic education today first and foremost on its staff in terms of skills development and Christian formation.”

5.3.2 The Challenges

It is clear that there are various challenges for Catholic schooling. Gleeson (2015, p. 145) lists a few: “Church/state relations, the relationship between faith and culture, the

meaning of Catholic identity, declining levels of religious observance and the aging profile of religious teaching communities”.

In their *International Handbook for Catholic Education*, Grace and O’Keefe (2007) provided a survey of challenges in Catholic education throughout the world. In a follow-up paper, Grace (2009, pp. 6-7) lists the ten major challenges which come out of this study:

- i. “The impact of secularisation upon the work of Catholic education.
- ii. The influence of global capitalism and its associated materialist values.
- iii. The authenticity of the mission integrity of Catholic schools that, ‘first and foremost the Church offers its educational services to the poor.’
- iv. Issues of faith formation for both teachers and students.
- v. Moral and social formation in changing cultural situations.
- vi. Maintaining the educational mission as religious congregations declined in numbers.
- vii. Problems of recruitment, formation and retention of school leaders and teachers in Catholic education.
- viii. Responding to changing expectations for the education of girls and women.
- ix. Understanding contemporary students’ attitudes towards, and experiences of, Catholic schooling.
- x. The finance, economics of schooling and politics of schooling (Church-state relations) in various societies.”

For the purpose of this research, I will not discuss each challenge, since the majority of them were not brought up in the interviews, or else they are not related to the Maltese educational system, and are not contested.

However, I would like to point out that Grace (2009, p. 10) speaks of secularization and globalisation as two of the major challenges of Catholic education. In fact, these challenges have brought with them considerable change in society and for some, have also

brought some sort of collapse in traditional values. Since secularization epitomizes the rejection of the strength of what is sacred and of the principles attached to it, he says that:

Catholic schools across the world continue the struggle to bring young people to a knowledge and experience of God, especially in the person of Jesus Christ, and seek to be counter-cultural to the powerful materialist forces of secularisation and globalization.

Giving students an authentic experience of faith

It is clear that one of the challenges in Catholic schools is that of providing students with an authentic experience of faith. This is confirmed by Pope Benedict XVI (2008), who in his *Address to Catholic Educators* gives a synthesis of the whole aim of Catholic education and its role in the mission of the Church: “First and foremost, every Catholic educational institution is a place to encounter the living God who in Jesus Christ reveals his transforming love and truth.” This experience comes out of the idea that a Catholic school does not exist to provide excellence in academia only, but does its utmost to provide students with an experience of faith. However, this is not an easy job. This stems from various factors, as headteachers noted:

“A challenge is the fact that we have a number of parents for whom God means nothing, the Gospel means nothing ...”

(Headteacher 2)

“The challenge might also be lack of identity. Sometimes our faith is watered down, and this brings a lack of authenticity and this is a challenge. Our challenge is to give students an authentic experience of faith.”

(Headteacher 4)

“We respond to challenges by providing the spaces for the encounter with Christ.”

(Headteacher 5)

From these statements, we can outline three difficulties which are encountered by schools:

- i. A lack of an experience of faith in families: here we can see once again that Catholic schools might be the only place where a faith experience can occur. This challenge, more than before, has been brought about by secularisation and a lack of faith experience by parents and families themselves. Sometimes, a value at school is not appreciated in the family, and in this way at home one cannot reinforce what is being built at school.
- ii. An absence of Catholic and faith identity in schools themselves: sometimes schools are seen as every other school, and so, there cannot be a transmission of faith to students and the wider community. This is the challenge that Catholic schools encounter when they try to be as effective as other schools, and calculate their effectiveness in terms of the success of the academic structures only.
- iii. The provision of physical and spiritual areas for this experience to take place. If students and young people do not find a welcoming environment and persons ready to listen to them, they will quickly move on to other experiences. In such a way, a formal structure and environment are needed to provide for this experience.

This should take place so that students are educated holistically. In fact, Groome (1996, p.

118) speaks of the Catholic school that educates

the very ‘being’ of its students, to inform, form, and transform their identity and agency ... with the meaning and ethic of Christian faith... [they become] just and compassionate disciples of Jesus [and are] personally influenced and enriched by Catholic faith.

Moreover, the same author (Groome, 2014, p. 114) goes on to insist that the mission of Catholic schools is to educate in this perspective of faith:

Catholic schools must continue to find and fulfil their warrant in their time-honoured purpose of educating both from a Catholic faith perspective and for the faith life of their students, however students choose to identify in faith. The Catholicism of our schools is essential if they are to both serve the common good and foster the spiritual development of students.

The Christian and Catholic ethos

From the 1950s onward, there seems to have been a trend of secularisation, which sees society having less space for God and for any spiritual needs. Wilson (1969, p. 14) describes secularisation as “the process whereby religious thinking, practices and institutions lose their social significance.” In a secular society, religion loses its power and influence. It also affects the way people express and practice their religions. Moreover, with secularisation, the strength of religious beliefs in society is questioned. Rosini (2023) laments a society where less authentic Christians are found and where there is a greater need to announce the Gospel. If society is becoming more secular, then upholding the Christian and the Catholic ethos of schools is becoming more of a challenge. It is interesting to note that while some headteachers spoke of the Catholic ethos as a strong point for Catholic school distinctiveness, as discussed in the previous section, another headteacher thought of this as a challenge:

“The challenge is the Christian and Catholic ethos – how we answer the students’ questions.”

(Headteacher 1)

This challenge can be seen in the light of a growing secularised culture. In fact, Grace and O’Keefe (2007, p. 3) say that “Catholic schools across the world continue to struggle to bring young people to a knowledge and experience of God in a world which seems increasingly indifferent to these questions.” It follows then that in this type of society, very often, Catholic schools very often cannot answer the questions students ask, since they have an opposing answer from secular society. This challenge puts an added burden on school leaders and their collaborators in their mission to identify their school with a Christian and Catholic ethos.

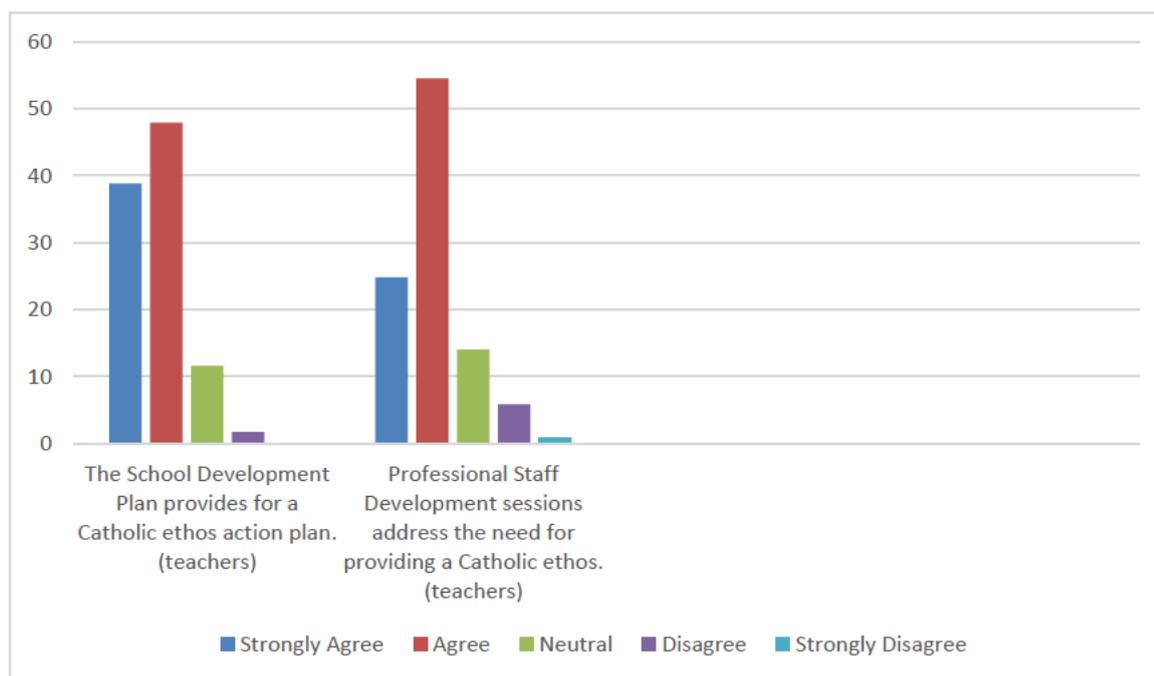
Figure 12 shows data from the questionnaire regarding school and staff development and the Catholic ethos. Teachers were asked to rate the following: “The School Development Plan provides for a Catholic ethos action plan,” to which 38.8% strongly agreed, 47.9% agreed, 11.6% were neutral, while 1.7% disagreed. Since schools need to improve, it is important for Catholic educational institutions to improve in their Catholic ethos aspect. In such a way, it is important for schools to focus on a characteristic of the Catholic ethos so that there will be a whole school approach in its implementation. It is clear from those who replied to the questionnaire that schools acknowledge the importance of developing this characteristic in their schools.

Without doubt, formation for staff in the Catholic ethos is an area of improvement. As one may find the problem of lack of faith or spirituality in families, this may also happen to teachers. As with students, schools may be the only place of formation for educators. At this point, one should note that even if someone practices his faith mainly by going to the celebration of the Eucharist every Sunday, in practice this is not formation. Professional Staff Development may help the teaching staff to overcome this lacuna in their life and, then, they can adhere more to the Catholic ethos of the school. In fact, teachers, when faced with the statement: To the statement “Professional Staff Development sessions address the need for providing a Catholic ethos”, 24.8% strongly agreed, 54.5% agreed, 14% were neutral, while

5.8% disagreed and 0.8% strongly disagreed. For me, these figures reveal that Catholic schools are doing their utmost to provide a Catholic ethos and distinctive ethos, while at the same time they are giving basic Catholic formation to staff, while also acknowledging that this is not enough.

Figure 12:

Questionnaire Results – School and Staff Development and the Catholic ethos



How to start Measuring Effectiveness?

For Morris (1994, p. 81), “the Catholic Church claims a distinctive view of education. In addition, it claims a particular understanding of school effectiveness that requires some form of measurement against the Catholic ideal.” However, in the interviews, headteachers made it clear that Catholic school effectiveness or the Catholic notion in schools is hard to measure or is not measurable at all, something which goes against the trend of school effectiveness research which measures effectiveness by looking at various specific factors. In fact, the headteachers said:

“We would not know how to start measuring the Catholic ethos ... At school we do as much as we can, but there is always room for improvement.”

(Headteacher 3)

“It is rather difficult to evaluate effectiveness. As an administration, we ask how much we are effective, when we see a student who does not fare well in exams or intellectually. When there are students with different family backgrounds ... Effectiveness is when we see a child who is on the journey of becoming a complete human being.”

(Headteacher 4)

“It depends on looking at effectiveness not generally in terms of percentages but looking at individual persons.”

(Headteacher 5)

This shows that, to some extent, there may be an interesting clash between the positivist assumption that all effectiveness can be measured – a characteristic of mainstream educational research – and the experience of Catholic educators that Catholicity and faith do not lend themselves that easily to measurement. This difference is expressed by Lauder and Khan (1988, p. 53) who say that

outcome measures like exam results ... lend themselves to quantification and it may be for this reason that the Effective Schools Movement (ESM) has placed such a heavy emphasis on exam results. In contrast, other educational aims and processes whose outcomes may be no less important ... are ignored.

This is so because speaking of effectiveness in Catholic schools (and arguably in all schools where the holistic development of students is valued) does not mean only to look at academic

results, but more than that. Many look at the culture and climate in schools to examine effectiveness. It follows that, Catholic schools, as stated by Morris (1994, pp. 84-85),

are regarded not simply as a place where lessons are taught, however successfully.

Their claim to distinctiveness derives from the attempt to generate a community climate that is permeated by the Gospel-based values of freedom and love, centred in the person of Christ. That distinctive purpose ... should ensure that whenever anyone sets foot inside a Catholic school they will experience the feeling of warmth of a community and environment that is created by Christian faith.

This can be confirmed by Grace (2002, p. 8) who, in relation to secularization and globalisation, says that “in a market economy for schooling, the imperatives of visible and measurable success, financial balance, and high-league table positions, all combine against commitment to “customers” who are lacking in both cultural and economic capital and the “right” attitudes to schooling.”

Moreover, Ozar et al. (2019, p. 158) speak of measuring effective outcomes in Catholic schools which go beyond academic attainment, even if it is difficult:

Since Catholic schools are tasked with educating the whole student, an effective Catholic school must achieve outcomes for its students that reach beyond academic achievement alone. Research surrounding non-academic measures of student success and standards in non-academic domains is indeed limited at the present, although there is growing support within the field of education for standards in non-academic domains such as social and emotional learning.

Although Ozar et al. (2019) are referring specifically to Catholic schools, they make the point that enthusiasm for measures of effectiveness which incorporate non-academic domains is growing within the whole field of education, and not just in faith schools.

For the same authors (Ozar et al., 2019, p. 159), the school culture plays an important part in measuring Catholic schools' identity:

The Catholic identity of Catholic schools ... must be measured not only by religious education, faith formation, and academic excellence, but also by the nature and quality of the school culture. This is a culture informed by the mission and shaped by practices manifested in its curriculum and instruction, board recruitment and formation, human resource policies, transparency of program and student evaluation, careful and competent stewardship of resources, financial planning, and collaboration across all sectors.

For Garcia-Huidobro (2017, p. 80), there is a dilemma in existing research since the emphasis of these studies is only on academic issues (keeping in mind that this is not the only criterion for Catholic school effectiveness), but at the same time acknowledges the fact that the mission of Catholic schools is hard to judge:

The fact that existing research on the outcomes of Catholic schools was almost entirely focused on academic achievement is also concerning because it is difficult to assess how Catholic schools are fulfilling their mission of educating the whole person without empirical research on their moral and spiritual outcomes.

Here we find an interesting blend of languages engaged: the 'moral' and 'spiritual' aspects which come directly from Catholic education, while 'outcomes' comes from a 'neoliberal' educational discourse from where school effectiveness research derives its terminology. Once again, here we find a move from traditional school effectiveness research to a more merged discourse.

As can be seen from the headteachers' opinions, although it is difficult to measure effectiveness, they still see their own school as effective and perceive this effectiveness embedded in individual students, who are formed holistically.

5.3.3 Support

When asked about support to handle the challenges, generally headteachers described two types of assistance: internal and external. Internal support ranged from the school structure, community, staff, and parents, while the external support referred to the help given from the dioceses or from the Secretariat for Catholic Education.

Internally – religious community, staff, parents, colleagues

One can notice various types of support. Basically, we can speak of four key forms. Firstly, the religious community, where it is present, since it is more of a witness to a community that can be built at school. Secondly, there is the school staff, when it is seen that they make the mission of the whole school theirs. School structure, which includes pastoral care teams and chaplaincy teams, play an important role in supporting the distinctiveness and challenges of schools. Thirdly, we find parents, who are important stakeholders, and the great majority of them give their support by contributing to anything that is needed, but more than that, their contribution lies in the fact that they continue to reinforce at home what is being built at school. Fourthly, headteachers also find support from other colleagues and headteachers who share between themselves good practices and challenges, and give a reassuring word that they are not alone in the various situations they find themselves in. The opinions of the headteachers shed more light on this:

“Support from the religious community who see the school as their ministry and suggest good practice. Support from staff, e.g. the Pastoral Care Team. Support from families, not only financial support, but also the presence of parents.”

(Headteacher 1)

“The greatest support comes from the religious community; from the way we live rather than from what we say. Students tend to switch off when listening, but not the same when seeing the witness of a community ... The school structure is also a support since it supports one’s vision. ... Teachers become a great support to pass to students the Catholic ethos ... Human resources are also a great support.”

(Headteacher 4)

“I find support from people who understand the ethos and culture ... Support from other Catholic school headteachers who share good practice.”

(Headteacher 7)

These ideas show that Catholic schools work in a network, not only an internal network in the school, but one involving other schools. Even though there are quite a number of challenges, internally, the schools find the support they need to carry on their duties in fulfilling their mission. At this point, it is recommendable that Catholic schools collaborate more between themselves so that the resources and good practices of each school can be shared with others, and school leaders can find more support from their colleagues.

Externally – from Diocese, Secretariat for Catholic Education

The second type of support comes from the Archdiocese of Malta and from the Diocese of Gozo, and from a specific structure set up within both dioceses, that of the Secretariat for Catholic Education. It can be said that the bishops in Malta and Gozo have always supported Catholic schools, especially when schools were in times of trouble with the government of the day a few decades ago.

“... there is also the support of the Secretariat for Catholic Education, where there is a number of professionals who give their services, especially, the counsellors, the social workers, the psychotherapist.”

(Headteacher 2)

“... when we ask the diocese to provide a religious counsellor, it helps. This is concrete support together with support from priests and religious who come regularly to offer their service in the school.”

(Headteacher 10)

Without this support, Catholic schools cannot provide authentic and distinct education to the students entrusted in their hands. The support is widely acknowledged by the schools.

5.3.4 Rating of Catholic Schools

In the interviews, headteachers were asked: “How do your students and parents rate their own experience of Catholic schooling? Do they think it is good, bad, successful, unsuccessful?” All the responses to this question verged on the positive side, however the reasons for this were various. This section will seek to answer the questions about why parents choose a Catholic school and what they mean when they describe the school as one which makes a difference.

The Choice of a Catholic school

A basic question is why do parents send their children to Catholic schools? Is there a clear-cut answer? There is not because parents have various opinions. Maney, King, and Kiely (2017, p. 36) express their views about the reasons behind giving children a Catholic education:

There are many reasons parents decide to send their children to a Catholic school. Some of these reasons include faith formation, academic excellence, discipline and values, and a safe environment. In a Catholic school context, the expectation is that the school aims to create a climate in which teachers assist students in their development as unique individuals, as well as to develop healthy moral attitudes. Moreover, the Brisbane report insists that “while parents provide numerous reasons for sending their children to non-government schools, the desire for a specifically religious education does not appear to be dominant, even amongst Catholic schools” (Dowling et al. (2019, p. 20). Situated in the Maltese context, I tend to agree with this opinion. Parents send their children to a Catholic school not necessarily because of Catholic education, but also because of the other reasons mentioned. To give another example, in Malta, Catholic schools are popular because their populations are smaller in number and, in these circumstances, they can care for each student individually. Having a look at the headteachers’ opinions, the reasons why parents choose Catholic education can be confirmed:

“Some parents are using Catholic schools for the simple reason that such schools have more discipline, they think they fare better academically than State schools, but more than that, the value of being a Catholic school is very much challenged.”

(Headteacher 2)

“Students and parents rate the school as successful ... because the school is good. I am afraid they rate it good because we are doing well academically. They tell us that because we give care to the individual and we are a family, but they tell us also that we have discipline and students fare well in exams ... When they rate the school as successful it does not always mean that we have Catholic principles.”

(Headteacher 7)

From this expression, there might be a potential mismatch in terms of how Catholic schools themselves would define their effectiveness and how parents would define it, since quite often, parents put emphasis on discipline and academic success. Although this aspect did not come through in the parents' responses to the questionnaire in the research for this thesis, yet it is a feeling that all headteachers share that there is this sentiment among parents. However, I am sure that all headteachers explain and communicate to parents what success in a Catholic school means.

“Parents know that Catholic schools give formation in values, and even if we have less resources than State schools, we are achieving better.”

(Headteacher 8)

From the words of the headteachers themselves, there seems to be a difference in terms of how Catholic schools' effectiveness is defined by headteachers and by parents. As expected, parents are more inclined towards academic success and imparting discipline (in a positive sense) to students, while the headteachers insist on the Catholic principles and values fused into the whole academic system.

It is clear that this trend does not happen only in Malta. Sultmann and Brown (2014, p. 3), basing their thoughts on previous studies, speak of the reasons why parents choose any type of school:

A survey of Catholic, state and independent school parents into factors influencing school selection yielded consistent priorities irrespective of the education sector.

Choice centered on: care of students, the quality of teaching, school discipline, parental consultation, moral development, vision, and values. For the group of parents who had elected Catholic schooling, the more traditional criteria were rated comparatively low in response to the question ‘what is absolutely essential?’: faith

development (46%), pastoral care and concern (47%), and religious education (39%).

This profile was reinforced in the report of Kennedy et al. (2010, p.iv) which confirmed the priority and satisfaction of parents as to ‘positive relationships within safe, caring, concerned school communities’.

Furthermore, Paletta and Fiorin (2016, p. 144) express very clearly the reasons why parents decide to give their children a Catholic education. Frequently, these reasons are quite different from what characterises a Catholic notion of effectiveness:

Many families send their children to Catholic school because they consider it to be more suitable due to the quality of education offered, with more comfortable facilities and spaces, the opportunities for achieving success, the security of a world perceived to be sheltered from social turbulence, and the fact that there are not too many immigrant students or children with disabilities.

The same authors (Paletta and Fiorin, 2016, p. 151) go on to ask some important questions in relation to the choice made by parents who do not lay a particular value on Catholic education per se:

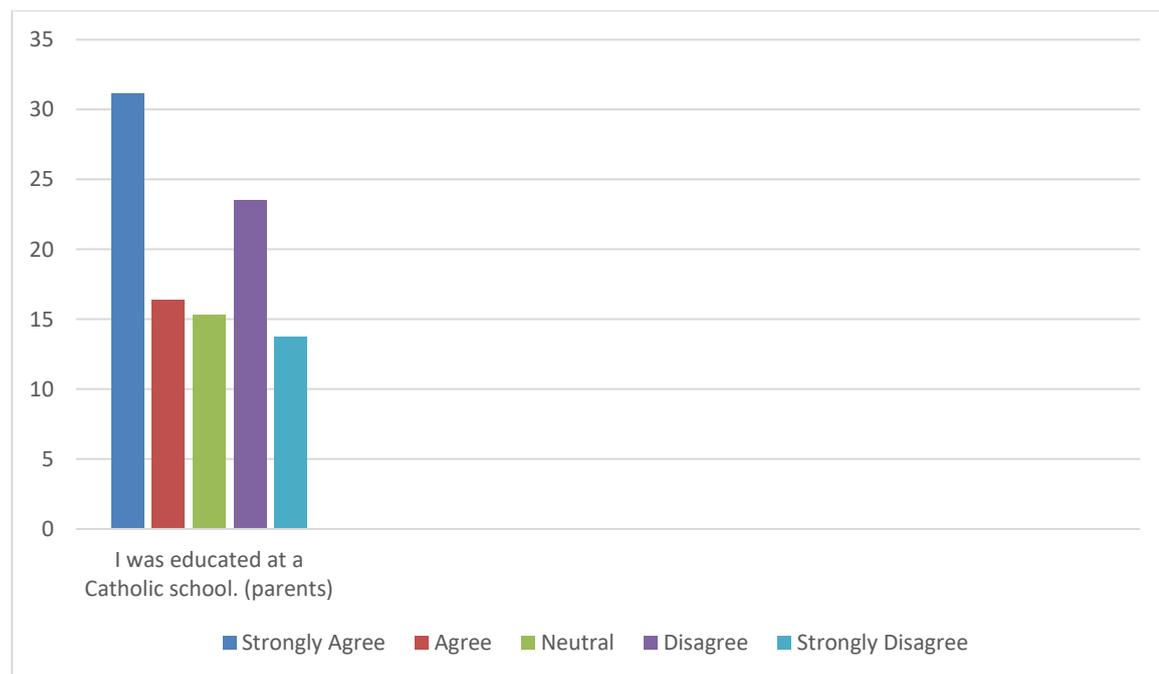
Can we truly be satisfied only because our institutions are popular, appreciated for the quality of teaching, the wealth of means and technologies, the beauty of the study and sports facilities? How can we respond to the disaffected or disinterested Catholic families who want a Catholic education for their children but who find that which constitutes its soul to be superfluous and do not feel the slightest bit involved and co-responsible?

To see if there is some link between the personal education of parents and their choice of Catholic schooling for their children, parents were asked if they were educated at a Catholic school. To this question, as we can see in Figure 13, the majority of parents showed that they were not educated at a Catholic school, with the rating of: 31.1% strongly agree, 16.4%

agree, 15.3% neutral, 23.5% disagree, and 13.7% strongly disagree. In my opinion, parents do not make this link, but choose a Catholic school for the reasons stated above. At this point, I should say that parents and society in general should be made more aware of what Catholic education is all about, since their cooperation with the school leadership team is essential for the success of a Catholic school. This lack of knowledge by parents may sometimes lead to a clash between what parents expect and what the school expects. In my opinion, the school should be very clear when speaking to parents about the nature of the school so that it is more likely that what is built at school can be safeguarded and reinforced at home.

Figure 13:

Questionnaire Results – Percentage of parents educated at a Catholic school



A School which Makes a Difference

The general perception among members of society seems to be that a Catholic school makes a difference. Most probably, this distinction is not noticeable on first impression; however, the tendency is to speak of this difference. In fact, Said Camilleri (2018) says that when parents come to choose a school for their children, they keep in mind the values offered

by the different schools. This was evidenced quite clearly in the interviews. One of the headteachers was of the opinion that:

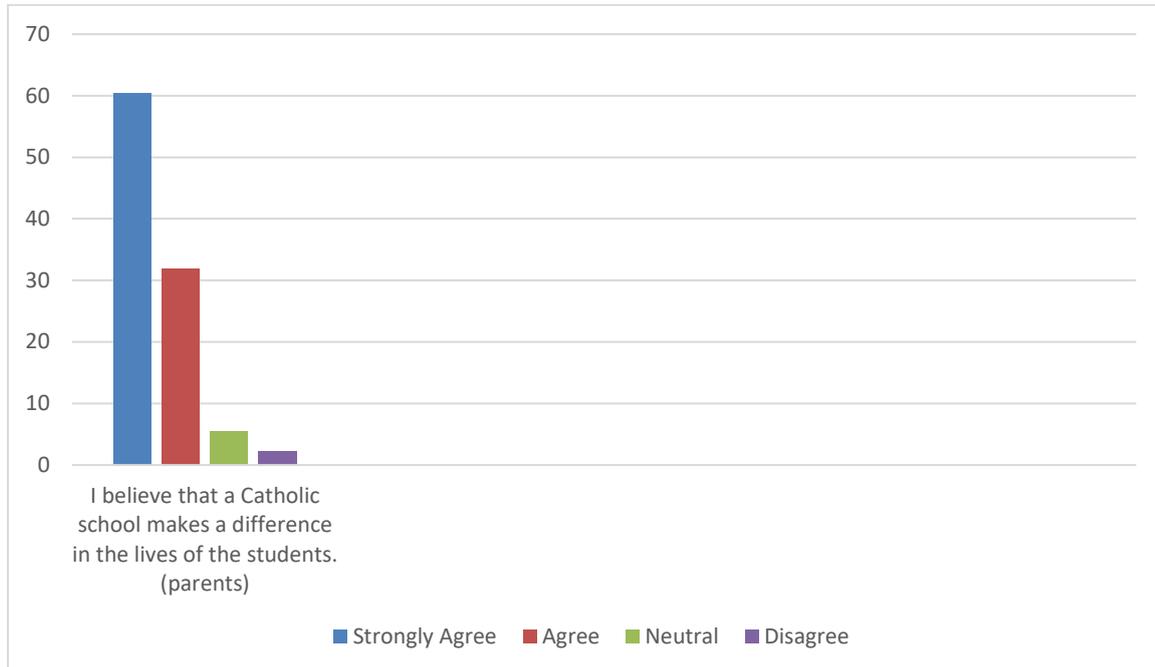
“Parents are making the choice for a Catholic school. However, sometimes, they interpret it as discipline – not military, but values lived on the Gospel. They see the school as making a difference.”

(Headteacher 10)

This can be confirmed in the results of the questionnaire sent to parents, as seen in Figure 14. To the statement “I believe that a Catholic school makes a difference in the lives of the students”, 60.4% of parents strongly agreed, 31.9% agreed, 5.5% were neutral, and 2.2% disagreed. Even though the questionnaire was sent to parents of students in a Catholic school, this is a good sample of society which shows that there is a strong feeling that this type of school makes a difference in the lives of the students. This is further evidenced by a recent study in a European Union Report (2022, p. 12), which says that “educational outcomes vary according to the type of schools attended”. Sultana (2022), analysing the report, puts it quite simply: “In Malta it makes a difference which school you choose for your children”.

Figure 14:

Questionnaire Results – A school which makes a difference – parents' perspectives



But what is the difference that the school makes? This is a question that school effectiveness research asks. I think that this difference comes out in what we have been discussing throughout this study, that is, a school as a community built upon the Gospel values, a school where there is an experience of faith and a school that cares for its students and includes everyone. In spite of this, this aspect seems to contradict what I and others have been saying before, that is, that parents, when choosing Catholic education, may only look at Catholic schools as successful in terms of examination results. Although the ideas seem to be conflicting, I believe that while it is true that parents find Catholic schools successful in various things, yet at the bottom of their heart they know that there is a difference in the values transmitted and in the lived experience.

5.3.5 Improvement

Not all change is improvement, but improvement is always change. Schools are always developing and changing over time. Schools themselves complete internal exercises

to see which aspects need to improve. When asked in which areas they think their school needs improvement, headteachers commented on various realities which can be grouped in the sections below. As we have seen, although headteachers spoke directly about improvement, or what they need for their school to improve, during the interviews several points were discussed where it was clearly felt that certain areas need improvement.

Promoting Charism and Giving Identity to the School

I am personally convinced that Catholic schools try to instil in their students the identity of the schools from the first day a new student sets foot on the school's premises. It is also very clear that some schools know to do this and succeed in infusing this sense of uniqueness more than others. Despite this, the view that ensuring schools possessed a clear Catholic identity constituted a particular challenge came out very clearly in the interviews. As we have already said, at a first glance, all schools seem to be the same, or at least similar, yet stakeholders feel that they make a difference and the majority of parents want a Catholic education for their children. As one headteacher points out:

“Very often we are the same as other schools ... the public still sees something different in us, people still trust us since we can offer something which is more holistic.”

(Headteacher 1)

Sultmann and Brown (2011, p. 74) speak of five perceptions related to the uniqueness of the Catholic school:

A positive anthropology of the person; the sacramentality of life; a communal emphasis; a commitment to the tradition of Catholicism as a source of its story and vision; and an appreciation of rationality and learning as epitomised in education. In

addition, three other ‘cardinal’ characteristics are nominated as defining Catholic school identity: commitment to individual personhood, social justice and inclusion.

These points about identity have already been discussed under various headings throughout this discussion.

Linked to the idea of identity is the concept of the charism. Headteachers, especially the lay and not the priests, want the school to identify more with the charism of the religious order:

“We need to work more on ... promoting the charism and giving an identity to the school.”

(Headteacher 9)

For headteachers, adhering to a specific charism is tantamount to giving more identity to a particular school. For school leaders, this idea is more essential today than before since the presence of the religious in schools is much less apparent than earlier decades.

What does Schooling in a Catholic School mean today?

It has already been said that some parents send their children to Catholic schools for different reasons, such as academic success, which is not considered the most important reason when speaking of Catholic school effectiveness. One headteacher explained this experience of parents and his response very clearly:

“As improvement, we need to explain the ethos in lay man’s terms ... We need the ethos to be understood clearly for what it is. I tell parents: Do not send students here because it is a good school or because we take care of children but send them here because you agree with our principles and you want your child to be raised in these principles.”

(Headteacher 7)

What does it mean to educate children in a Catholic school today? For sure, in Malta, it is not a question of money since parents do not give an established fee but rather a donation to the school. Neither is it a question of a school which happens to be nearer to home or because of a family being poor. Catholic schools in Malta have a good reputation for being “good” schools, schools that do better than the national average in national exams, and schools that form the character of the person. However, as we have seen throughout this discussion, Catholic schools are more than that because they seek to provide a holistic education, blending Catholic values with a good academic system. As this headteacher attests, it is important for parents to be educated and informed about Catholic education. Parents should note that Catholic schools are attentive to the main beliefs of Catholic schooling and should accept that their child be raised according to the same principles. Catholic schools today, then, have remained firm in the position that they always had, that they are the place where a student can have an experience of faith by living the values of the Gospel, be like Christ, and continue to grow in the life of faith.

Being innovative and open to new ideas

Since improvement denotes change, it is important, first of all, to see what is changing around us, and we should evaluate what we do and see how to improve. One headteacher expressed this in terms of innovation:

“The most important thing is that we should become more innovative and open to new ideas. We as Catholics and teachers [who belong to a specific vocation/charism] believe that we have a vocation, a call, which we have to hear every day, so that we may become innovative and say yes for today’s situation.”

(Headteacher 6)

Being innovative is truly a challenge. First of all, one may find resistance to change from other colleagues. Furthermore, quite often, there can be little space for creativity due to other important or bureaucratic demands.

This innovation was also expressed as being creative. The easiest thing to do is to do things as they always have been done. In an always changing society, renewing oneself and being creative in doing things is essential. One headteacher expressed his opinion about how to respond to the challenges of being distinctively Catholic in his school:

“We answer to the challenge by being creative and responding creatively – how we act with people who challenge us.”

(Headteacher 1)

Another headteacher spoke about creating opportunities for spiritual development:

“My role is to create opportunities and as a Catholic school we have to create opportunities for spiritual development.”

(Headteacher 3)

These ideas of creativeness are closely linked with the notions of providing something which is unique to students. As the headteacher above commented, there is the need to create opportunities for spiritual development. It is something which one truly needs to be creative about, since very often, other things are more interesting and attract the attention of students. Being creative leads one to look for mechanisms which provide students with opportunities that they do not find or look for elsewhere.

Basic Catechesis and Formation Programmes for Parents

Very often the idea of formation for parents is discussed. However, it seems such a big thing that for everyone it seems impossible to implement. Two headteachers expressed the view that an urgent area for improvement in their school is that they would like to see a

programme of formation for parents. I am sure that, through their statements, they were representing the wishes of all headteachers who would like to involve parents in the experience of faith of the school. For these two headteachers:

“The school needs improvement in basic catechesis and more formation for parents, which I see as linked with Catholic schools.”

(Headteacher 4)

“We need a programme of formation for parents. ... When it comes to the human and spiritual formation of parents, we have nothing. ... We want to reach parents who are on the margins.”

(Headteacher 8)

Just the same as for students, parents might have no spiritual or any type of formation outside school. If for children until twelve years of age there is basic catechesis, there is nothing for parents unless they wish to be part of some religious association. However, the number of parents who form part of such associations is a far cry from the total number of parents we have in Catholic schools. By giving formation to parents, would be involving them more so that they can really understand the experience of faith their children are having at school.

5.4 Conclusion

After presenting and analysing the data collected from interviews with headteachers and questionnaires distributed to students, parents and teachers, to conclude this chapter I would like to pinpoint some important notions which come out from this data which are necessary for the purpose of this research, that is, improvement.

5.4.1 Key findings

In this chapter, I have tried to bring to the fore the different aspects which can be said to characterise an effective Catholic school according to the ideas of headteachers of the same schools, as well as to the responses of students, parents, and teachers given in the questionnaires, and which have been confirmed by relevant literature.

This has led me to divide this chapter into two main sections. In Section A, I have tried to build on the ideas of headteachers of what makes a Catholic school and how it can be rendered effective. The first three sub-sections tried to deal with the important notions of Catholic School effectiveness, with its reference to how Catholic schools are effective, the idea of the Catholic school as a parish, with all that constructs a parish, and the importance of religious congregations and their charisms in relation to the school ethos. On the other hand, in section B, I spoke about the dilemmas which headteachers find themselves in, such as the weakening of the distinctiveness of Catholic schools, the challenges that the schools face, support in facing these challenges, why parents choose Catholic schools and what headteachers thought about improvement in their school. In such a way, I have moved all the way from what builds a Catholic school to the points of weaknesses where Catholic schools are taken to task to improve their effectiveness.

Moreover, in this study, I have highlighted the idea that was expressed in interviews, that there is a tension between school effectiveness research and its application to Catholic schools, because the interviewees acknowledged that what builds an effective Catholic school is not measurable, but that there are still factors which contribute to its effectiveness. However, at this point, it is important to mention the fact that in England and Wales, and the United States of America, there exists a 'Catholic Schools Inspectorate', which significance is acknowledged by both Church and government in the context of the distinctiveness of Catholic schools. The aim of this Inspectorate is clearly expressed in its document (2023, p.

3): “It is to secure such an education for all pupils who attend Catholic schools, that the bishops of England and Wales have always been committed to the inspection and oversight of their schools since their very inception.” I believe that it is important that the Church in Malta, in collaboration with the government and other stakeholders, develop a similar document which can help the Catholic Church leadership in Malta to evaluate in a professional way the distinctiveness of Catholic schools and secure the aims of Catholic education.

5.4.2 Concluding Remarks

This chapter is not only my contribution to the study of Catholic school effectiveness in Malta, but it is also the input of the headteachers who lead boys’ Catholic secondary schools. This effectiveness, as seen and felt by major stakeholders at present, strives for ongoing improvement, so that the Catholic school will be an ideal place of formation for students, extended to parents and educators. It is a mission which the Catholic Church has at its centre. By fulfilling its mission, each and every Catholic school can be truly a unique and distinct place of education, not only by celebrating the academic successes of its students but, more than that, by instilling in every student the light of faith so that he can grow up in the Gospel values, and through his own light he may also be a light for others. In this chapter, it has been stated very clearly that Catholic schools cannot rely only on the philosophy of school effectiveness research to determine their effectiveness. In practice, everyone acknowledges that it is quite difficult to measure effectiveness in Catholic schools. Yet, through an authentic way of life, Catholic schools can reach their potential and offer a faithful and trustworthy experience to all stakeholders.

Chapter 6

THE MISSING PIECE: A PERSONAL REFLECTION

6.1 Introduction

Since in the primary collection of data I managed to interview all headteachers of boys' Catholic secondary schools in the Maltese islands, it seems that the data collected for the purpose of this research is complete. However, there is one missing piece, that is me, since I was not included in the list of interviewees. By means of this chapter, I aim to reflect on my own experience as a headteacher of a Catholic school in Malta. I will be answering the same questions I asked my peers, telling my story while reflecting on what I went through in these twelve years. I will explore and try to understand the experiences that shaped my professional life in the last twelve years. Through this, I plan to have a more complete data set and interpretation for my subject of study.

I was appointed head of school in the year 2011, following the appointment of my predecessor to a role in the diocese. I was thirty-three years of age, with six years of teaching experience in the same school. I knew the school quite well and had already built a healthy relationship with educators and other staff members. Twelve years into the job, I can say that while I have got used to the life of a headteacher, there are still new challenges which pop up from time to time.

While in the analysis and discussion chapter I chose thematic analysis, thus analysing data corresponding to themes and not reflecting on data according to the questions asked, in this chapter I will be moving from one question to another, while linking this discussion to the themes which were selected from the wider data collection. I decided to structure this chapter differently, that is, question by question rather than according to theme, so that I will

avoid bias as much as possible, in the sense that if I structured my thoughts in this chapter by themes, I may be tempted to jump to conclusions before really answering the questions. The temptation would be to seek justification for the answers or themes which other headteachers highlighted in their answers to the interview questions. In such a way, I answered the questions from my own experience, in the same way that the ten headteachers interviewed for this thesis answered from their own experience and their own point of view.

6.2 Catholic School Effectiveness

Throughout the years, I have come to the conclusion that Catholic school effectiveness refers to a school that, while it is successful in its academic performance, has more to it than this. During the interviews gathered for this thesis, most of the assertions made by headteachers regarding this subject were very similar to my own perceptions. In fact, I believe that a Catholic school is effective when, through all it does, Gospel values are transmitted and lived. For me, effectiveness is present when all the school life is lived around the person of Jesus Christ, thus helping students in becoming Christ-like, so that Christ may be formed in them. In such a way, students will not only grow physically or psychologically, but more than that, students may grow in the life of faith. It follows that faith is not something alien to them, but an experience lived in life. At the start of each scholastic year, speaking primarily to new students and their parents, I always insist that we build our way of life on the Gospel values. This does not mean that we alone can handle this task. We need the help of parents and families, in the sense that if we insist on the value of forgiveness, a student cannot go home and his parents tell him not to speak to another student with whom he had some sort of argument.

How this effectiveness can be measured seems to be a never answered question; however, I believe that there is a way in which a Catholic school can be seen to be effective.

Every school has its own guidelines to which it can compare what it does. If a Catholic school has a set of values to which it ties its mission, then, consequently, it can turn to these values to see how they are being lived at school. Moreover, I think that effectiveness can also be measured in a more practical way. Each school, annually, performs an internal review through various means, such as questionnaires distributed to educators, students, and parents. If some statements regarding Catholic school effectiveness, as described above, are included in the questionnaires, then schools may have an idea of how effective they are in the Catholic sense. Such effectiveness may not be easy to measure in quantifiable terms, and here and now, as might be expected in school effectiveness research in general, but it may take time since values may take a while to settle in students and it may take longer to see results. As a concrete example, I can mention a particular student who comes to mind and during his stay at school he did not seem to care much regarding his behaviour and studying attitude. However, after some years, he sent me an email stating that he was about to start studying at university level, and if it were not for the school's leadership and educators who helped him during the five years at school, and the values which we instilled in him, he would not be about to start this new phase in his life. In this sense, values instilled in students may not be seen after one week, but only at a later time when students are able to take to heart these values and pass them on to others. In the last internal review of my own school, I can say that a great majority of educators, students, and parents are more than satisfied with the school performance and with school life in general. For example, one can note the care and concern given to individual students; educators who know most of their students; a good and healthy relationship between administration and educators; a great interest in students who may not feel well in the school system; and the positive vision that the school leadership team has for the school. However, there were some areas which were noted for improvement, such as the idea of inclusion, so that all students feel that they are included in all aspects of the school

life. Another important theme which was noted is the strengthening of the school ethos and pastoral care in the school. Since these aspects came out very clearly in the school's evaluation, during this scholastic year we have embarked on plans to improve these aspects.

At this point, I should add that from time to time, inspections by the Quality Assurance Department – called external reviews – are held in Maltese schools to see that learners are getting their entitlement. These reviews might be either of one day or of a whole week, and the reviewers examine the School Development Plan and look for good practices in the school. Some members of staff are also interviewed to give their view on what is going on in the school, while parents, learners, and educators give their views in questionnaires. After the external review, a report with suggestions for improvement is sent by the Director to the school.

Yet, regarding the measuring of Catholic school effectiveness, it is important to note that as Grace (2013, pp. 85-86) attests while reflecting on the 1977 Vatican document on education that at the time preceding the publication of the document, and with reference to the arising of the school effectiveness movement,

whereas in mainstream secular education internationally, the cult of educational measurement ... was becoming more influential, Catholic education was encouraged to take a more profound and holistic approach to the effectiveness of schooling. A Catholic conception of school effectiveness would be the extent to which a Catholic education helped to form good persons and good citizens, who had to accept that the gospel of Jesus Christ was the hope for the world.

Moreover, Grace refers to the Congregation for Catholic Education (1977, par. 84) which insists that “the validity of the educational results of a Catholic school cannot be measured by immediate efficiency.”

I further agree with O'Keefe and O'Keefe (1996, p. 302) who state that a key remaining question is, "the point at which a school ceases to be effective for the purposes for which it was founded". For me, this is crucial, in the sense that a Catholic school can no longer be said to be effective when it loses its distinctiveness, the distinctive characters which make up a Catholic school.

All this has to direct us to a new discourse about Catholic school effectiveness. Catholic schools cannot be measured by tangible results. If schools abide by their mission, mainly by focusing on the human person and striving to help each individual become increasingly formed in the likeness of Christ, supported by the values of Christ, the Gospel and the Church, then we can acknowledge the effectiveness of Catholic schools, which although cannot be measured in a short time, can be manifested in the long term.

6.3 Distinctively Catholic

Catholic schools should be distinctively Catholic. Writing down this statement, I acknowledge that it is easier said than done. However, in all Catholic schools, there are some aspects which make the school distinctively Catholic. Pope John Paul II (2003) insisted that "one of the greatest contributions our educational facilities, and all Catholic institutions, can offer society today is their uncompromising catholicity."

In the case of my school, I believe that we do this in taking care of each and every child at school. Being a relatively small school of around 240 students, this makes it easier for us to know every student and to care for his own needs. We do this since, as our mission statement attests, we see every student as a child of God.

To this, I would like to add the notion of the preferential option for the poor. The poorest in society are the ones that Christ is found in, as Jesus himself says: "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me"

(Mt. 25:40). In such a way, at school, we try to do our best to help students with difficulties, not only those with learning struggles, but also those persons with disadvantaged backgrounds and other types of poverty. In my experience, I can say that there have been occasions when students or their parents asked for some kind of assistance, such as helping families in buying textbooks or clothing for school. However, I believe that there is more than this. The fact that we care for individual students is not merely a case of money; rather, it is the care that some students find only at school and perhaps not at home, the family aspect of school which is not found in some students' families, it is the friendship offered at school and which may not be found outside school. While reflecting upon this, I should say that these views should be included in my own school's annual evaluation so that they may give us some form of indication for the school's effectiveness and if we need to improve on it.

Being distinctively Catholic, I affirm once again that the notions of Catholicity are not things added on to the life of a normal school as an afterthought, but, as the Congregation for Catholic Education (1997, par. 11) says,

This ecclesial dimension is not a mere adjunct, but is a proper and specific attribute, a distinctive characteristic which penetrates and informs every moment of its educational activity, a fundamental part of its very identity and the focus of its mission.

6.4 Vision and Mission Statements

For Grace (1998, p. 120), "mission statements have many Catholic virtues. They constitute a principled and comprehensive articulation of what a school claims to be its distinctive educational, social and moral purposes." In Catholic schools, mission statements pronounce the Catholicity of the respective schools, thus they need to be clear enough to show this distinctiveness.

In the early years of my school headship, I thought it would be a good idea to craft again the school's mission statement. Do not get me wrong: there was nothing wrong in the previous statement; however, I wished to have one which expresses what for me and for the educators means to live and to work in a Catholic school. Thus, we agreed on some points which the mission statement should include: forming a learning community; everyone is seen as a child of God; a family-like environment; every person is important; and the formation of the whole person. Through these ideas, we are striking a balance between having a school where its main function is teaching and learning, yet insisting upon the values which make a Catholic school, which values are not something added on to the school, but fully permeate its whole life. It is the care and concern that we have for each student that enables us to live our mission as a Catholic school. This is in line with the ethos of Carmelite schools in general, as one can find on the website of the Carmelite Order:

Carmelite schools are marked by their sharing of the values of the Carmelite tradition through attention to the spiritual life of students, attention to liturgy, devotion to Mary, knowledge of the Scriptures and a solid education in the area of social engagement in favour of peace and justice. Students are encouraged to become seekers of God: able to listen to the still small voice of God amidst the thunder of this age. Carmelite schools tend to be marked by a family and welcoming atmosphere reflecting the Carmelite approach to community. In partnership with parents, Carmelite schools facilitate a holistic development (spiritual, academic, social, physical, aesthetic and emotional) of all students ... Carmelite schools are centres of learning and communities of faith, founded on Jesus Christ.

I have already mentioned elsewhere that Grace (1998) refers to mission statements as those foundations upon which schools are built, and against which people can judge school effectiveness. For the same author, school effectiveness is equal to "realising the mission" (p.

120-121), and since a Catholic school would have a Catholic mission, then, when examining mission statements, one would see what outcomes could come out of such mission statements.

In the last few weeks, after much thinking and brainstorming, as a Senior Leadership team together with the educators, we have managed to propose to our educational community a vision statement together with a list of values on which we build our daily life. We have expressed our vision in these few words: In Christ, together, we live and dream, we grow and succeed.

From our vision and mission statements, we were able to compile this list of values, which stems from the basic notion that at the centre of our educational experience we find the person of Jesus Christ:

- We embrace the values of Christ and of his Gospel.
- We welcome everyone, notwithstanding any difference.
- We build an educational and faith community.
- We want everyone to succeed according to one's own abilities.
- We are of service to each other.
- We prepare tomorrow's citizens and leaders.
- We respect ourselves and others.
- We create a space to grow together.
- Spiritual and faith experiences are linked to academic life.
- We search for God in ourselves, in others and around us.

6.5 Charism

I think that a religious order promoting its charism in a school is one of the most challenging experiences. There are various reasons, such as students who are only enrolled in

a Catholic school because their parents wanted them to (even if they may know nothing about Catholic education), students may not be willing to participate in the charism, and because of the dwindling number of religious persons in a school. In my school, there is the physical presence of friars from the Carmelite Order, but it is rather limited, such as a presence for the celebration of the Eucharist, the administration of the sacrament of confession, and maybe on other special occasions which may arise from time to time. Moreover, having a charism which sounds strange for students and even perhaps for adults is more difficult (the Carmelite charism revolves around contemplation which is derived through prayer, fraternity, and service).

The Carmelite friars, to whom the school belongs, have throughout the years promoted its charism in different ways and according to the different circumstances of the times. One should take into account the same aim in founding the school: to help young people in their discernment to become Carmelite friars themselves. However, after some time, when the school was more formalised and open to everyone, the friars had to take a different approach, mainly by being present in the school and teaching the various subjects. With the passing of time, this was not tenable anymore, and lay persons were employed in the school. However, the friars remained present in the school, mainly by teaching religious education and by the presence of a school chaplain. Nowadays, the presence is more limited, where friars are present on the school premises for a short time. It is only me, as headteacher, who is always present at school. So, what is my personal role in the school in relation to being a Carmelite friar? I believe that my position has some differences from that of a lay headteacher in a non-Catholic school. I am saying this not in terms of power or feeling superior to others but, as a friar and headteacher, I might be seen as the animator of Catholicity in school, and as the transmitter of the Carmelite charism in the school. While I do the tasks which any other headteacher does, I have that little more to do in terms of

ensuring a Catholic environment where the Carmelite charism can be disseminated among learners and educators.

The question remains: How does the Carmelite Order promote its charism in school? Although this is a rather hard question, there are some points one could ponder upon. First of all, I insisted from the very first days at school that we are a Carmelite school, that is, a school run by the Carmelite friars. To emphasise this aspect, from time to time, Carmelite friars speak to students about their way of life. Moreover, the values of the charism (contemplation, prayer, fraternity, and service) are highlighted in a comprehensible way to students. Another important aspect is that of speaking of the charism with educators so that they themselves may be transmitters of the Carmelite message. Yet, there is more to be done. I would like the whole school to experience the heart of the Carmelite charism, that is, as a school community and also as individuals, all students may be able to search for the face of God in their life. This requires a more formal programme for all students. Moreover, I also believe in a programme that is prepared for smaller groups of students who might be more interested in sharing the charism. In our school, in fact, the Chaplaincy Team has created after-school hours sessions for students, starting from helping students to enter into a relationship with Christ, and then intended to promote more religious life, the Carmelite aspect of the school and also the Carmelite charism and way of life. At school we are more than grateful for the number of students (around 60 from 240) who decided to start attending these sessions.

6.6 Effectiveness in Practice

While acknowledging once again that Catholic school effectiveness is hard to measure precisely, and that there is always room for improvement, there are important signs of school effectiveness. I believe that one of these is the fact that students feel happy and safe

at school. During school-days, when I meet students informally, such as during break times, I very often ask them how they are doing and how they feel at school. For me, this sheds light on school effectiveness. By means of this I can gauge the feeling of students at school, something which is then corroborated in the annual school evaluation mentioned earlier on.

Another sign of an effective Catholic school is the existence of a good relationship between all stakeholders, that is leadership, educators, other staff, students, and parents. This does not mean that these relationships are always excellent, but I believe that when there are good relationships, a school is moving in the right direction. Good relationships include the sharing of ideas which may further enhance school life.

Discipline is perceived by parents as an aspect of effectiveness. In fact, when parents speak, they often say that they prefer Catholic schools because one finds discipline there. I often remember one student who at first had some difficulties in his behaviour. However, after he was disciplined in a strict manner (besides being admonished, after communicating with his parents, the student was excluded for a few days from school, asking him to write a reflection on his behaviour and how he can improve it), with our help and with that of his parents, his behaviour changed totally and, to date, he still visits the school and recounts to us that he had changed attitude when disciplinary action was taken. In this way, I believe that effectiveness is shown when students are disciplined with love.

At this point I would like to return to the school mission statement. It is when the various points which form the mission statement are fulfilled that we can speak of effectiveness in practice. By this, a school's mission is realised, and it is important to note that as school leaders we should not be pleased with a general realisation of the mission, but that individual students succeed.

6.7 Spiritual, Moral, and Social Development of Students

Our school's mission statement focuses directly on the full development of students. For us, the school is a place where a student can grow up spiritually, morally, and socially, thus being able to become a good Christian citizen in society. What effects does the school have on these aspects?

At first glance, I think that we are not doing enough on the spiritual and moral aspect, and we are doing more on the social development of students. However, delving deeper, I can say that for most students, the only spiritual and moral development they have is coming from schools. I personally know that this happens in my own school, since most of the students say this specifically. Even recounting to their peers what they did during weekdays or weekends, it is clear from what they say that most students do not look for such development outside the school. When I ask students if they go to any kind of spiritual and formation meetings, very often the answer is in the negative. This was also confirmed by other headteachers during the interviews, where it was stressed that schools are the only place of formation for students (Headteacher 1). I am aware that, for most students, the celebration of the Eucharist at school is the only celebration they attend, and the only formation that they have in the spiritual realm takes place in the religious education lessons and other sessions which take place at school. In this way, schools are having an impact on the spiritual and moral development of students.

On the other hand, students are gaining more social development from schools, because at school, among other things, students learn to be able to live together, notwithstanding the differences between themselves. Yet, during the Covid-19 experience, there has been a setback in this aspect, especially when schools were closed and when physical contact between persons could not take place. In a world which became even more virtual during the pandemic, students lacked their being together, thus losing something

which strengthens their social formation. This can be seen from the students' yearning to be together at the reopening of schools after two lockdowns, and also after the summer recess in the year 2021. Parents also held the same view, telling us that some academic performance might have been lost; however, children mostly lost their interaction skills and the need to build community.

6.8 Weakening of Distinctiveness

At face value, all schools – State, Catholic and Independent – in Malta might look the same. Even simply looking at schools' names, Catholic schools are not the only ones bearing a saint's name! Most independent schools are also named after a saint and, besides that, with the introduction of the system of Colleges in Malta, these Colleges were named again after a saint, even though the individual schools forming part of the College retained the name of the village they are in.

A clear difficulty which may lead to the weakening of Catholic schools' distinctiveness is the fact that school leaders are requested by higher authorities to do many things, some of them bureaucratic, and which leave less time for the school leadership team to invest in other areas to promote the Catholic distinctiveness of the schools. There are days where I am totally absorbed by emails and work to do and which is needed in a short time, such that I cannot do more than this work.

Throughout this study, I have insisted that Catholic values are not adjuncts to school but rather something integral to its life. It follows then that, if we look at Catholic and Gospel values which make the Catholic school distinct in terms of offering something extra to school life, then it is clear that the distinctiveness is weakening. Very often it is a big temptation to go ahead with curriculum and assessment in a way that helps students to excel, and forget the values which should permeate what the school does and lives. I believe that we are already

living in a society which cares less about values, and so, Catholic schools should promote these values so that they may remain distinctive. It is when we forget our vision and mission that Catholic education weakens.

For this mission integrity, Grace (2002b, pp. 428-431) speaks of five basic principles for authentic Catholic schools which are derived from the document *The Catholic School* (1977): “education in the faith; preferential option for the poor; education as solidarity and community; education and the common good; academic education as a means and not an end.” I am aware that when any of these assumptions is missing, then I need to see what is going on to be on the right track again.

6.9 Challenges of Being Distinctively Catholic

As always, and as in all Catholic schools, education brings with it some challenges, and I believe that being distinctively Catholic is quite a challenge, especially at a time when the religious community is less visible in schools. In fact, for Smith and Nuzzi (2007, p. 109), “the religious community provided a continuity of human resources in the persons of teachers and principals, assured the Catholicity of the school by their presence and witness, and for the most part operated, if not owned, the school.”

With the lack of religious persons and their witness, being distinctively Catholic brings to the fore the preparation of distinctively Catholic educators. According to Smith and Nuzzi (2007, p. 119):

Being a Catholic educator is more than a list of functional tasks; it is a disposition of the soul and fruition of the interior life ... Being a Catholic educator is to care for souls and help for them to one day meet the beatific vision.

Earl (2007, p. 37), speaking of challenges in Catholic schools in the USA, says that the shift from schools being run and operated by priests and religious to ones manned by laypeople,

“has inevitably altered, to one degree or another, the essential religious character and culture of Catholic schools.” As happened in the USA, this shift also took place in most Catholic schools around the globe. Since this is inevitable, educators in Catholic schools need to be responsible for the Catholic ethos of schools. I am aware, from my own experience in my school, that while our educators are aware of this, many of them do not feel that they are able to transmit the school’s Catholic ethos. However, despite this, they feel that whenever they cannot do something, they know that they can refer students to the right persons. Besides this, when I informed educators of the leadership team’s intention to employ a lay chaplain to our school, whose task, among others, is to promote and instil more the Catholic ethos, they accepted this idea wholeheartedly, and were eager to suggest what could be done and give their help when it is possible. Around one fifth of the school educators volunteered themselves to me members of the Chaplaincy Team. We should make sure that educators are well aware of the teachings of the Church and that they also comprehend the aim and identity of a Catholic educational institution. In fact, Earl (2007, p. 40) insists that “if the laity comprise 95% of the faculty and staff in the Catholic schools, then they will need to assume the responsibility for the continued spiritual development of the Catholic identity of these schools.”

Another challenge which comes up in relation to being distinctively Catholic is the fact that society is becoming more and more secular with the passing of time. Our culture is placing its emphasis on materialism and consumerism. Sometimes I ask the question: Is there still a place for God in our society? Earl (2007, p. 39) asks a very fundamental question: “How can we teach our youth to counter the culture with choices inspired by the life and teachings of Christ and the Church?” It is clear that Christ and his Gospel go against the trends of today’s culture. As such, we must help students to instil in them the values they need to be able to choose what is good for them. To do this, in our school we strive to inform

them of values even through the curriculum, by identifying cross-curricular themes and various educators can explain these values to students during different lessons. If we take the value of life as an example, it could be merged in lessons of Religious Education and that of Personal, Social and Career Development. Other values can be blended with different subjects, such as sciences and environmental geography. On my part, I urge educators to work together in different groups so that students can have a clearer perspective of the values that we would like to inspire them with.

To help students live together, that is, the community aspect, is another challenge, especially in the Covid-19 aftermath. The community aspect is part of the Catholic distinctiveness, as Jesus himself founded a community of disciples, that today is referred to as the Church. A Catholic school, then, can be seen as the Church in miniature. In today's world, where technology prevails, it is more of a challenge to urge students to build communities which are founded on values. To mention one example, quite recently, at school we had the experience of a particular student who preferred to befriend a person unknown to him on an online platform rather than looking for real friends elsewhere. This case led to this particular student being bullied, leading him to say to his peers what this unknown friend wanted him to say, which ultimately led this student into trouble. This case helped us realise how it is more difficult today than in previous times to insist on the importance not of virtual communities but of ones which enable students to learn to live together despite all the differences between them.

6.10 Support

I believe that there is support for us as school leaders which helps us to keep our identity. Most parents support our vision and our mission, while educators support all that happens in the school. Moreover, Catholic schools also have support from the Secretariat for

Catholic Education. This support includes programmes of professional development, support for particular teachers, and also support for school leaders. Here I can mention that during a particular year, earlier in my headship, our school asked the Secretariat to help us in learning more about Assessment for Learning. Soon, two other schools joined us. A programme was drawn up, and it was conducted in two ways: in seminars and discussions specific to our school, and other seminars which were held for the three schools together. This helped educators not only to be informed about the subject, but also by sharing good practices between teachers of different schools.

Support from the Secretariat for Catholic Education also comes in the form of psycho-social services which are available to schools. This includes a team made up of professionals: a counsellor, a psychologist, a youth worker, a social worker, an inclusion coordinator and specialists for difficult behaviour. This team, which does not work specifically in one school but is present weekly at a particular school, meets the senior leadership team every now and then and offers professional services to students who need their advice.

Another type of support is the one that comes from other schools' headteachers. Being a small country, we have the opportunity to meet quite often, either face to face or online, which is an initiative of the Secretariat for Catholic Education. Speaking to other colleagues about challenges is a good opportunity to find support and help which enables me in continuing the mission of the school.

However, for me, the greatest kind of support comes from educators and all the other staff at school, who support the vision and the mission of the school and do their utmost, even if they need to go out of their way. Very often, during break time, teachers can be seen in open areas of the school helping students who are either absent from class or else need some extra effort to understand what was taught in class. Moreover, when educators notice a student who is in need of a professional service, such as counselling, they inform the school

leadership team so that this particular student would benefit from the psycho-social services available at school.

6.11 Staff Collaboration

In general, I can say that educators and other employees in our school collaborate in the mission and vision of the school. One thing that helps in this collaboration is the fact that all major decisions are taken after consultation with the staff. There might be circumstances when a decision has to be taken by me and the Senior Leadership Team without consultation, but in general, everyone is consulted.

Moreover, I find staff collaboration is vital in meeting the needs of every student. Educators, in particular, take note of the needs of students and come to me and the senior leadership team so that these needs can be catered for. Such students are not only in need of a push in academic areas, but may also require, for example, a meeting with professionals so that some psychological or other problems may be tackled.

Once again, I want to highlight the fact that my school is relatively small. In this sense, knowing each other at school is a great benefit. This enables greater connection not only with students, but educators and staff between themselves, and also with parents. In our annual school evaluation, parents, students, and educators usually point out this positive outcome, especially the fact that we know our students and that there is a professional bond between educators and students and their families.

For the staff, being a Catholic school is important. The staff help in this mission by suggesting the way forward. I can say that, if not all, the great majority of the staff is on board in safeguarding our distinctiveness as a Catholic and a Carmelite school. I should also point out that when staff development on our charism took place, they were all eager to know more about it. This staff development took the form of a half-day seminar, including time for

socialising with coffee and lunch. First, I gave an outline of the history of the Carmelite Order, while highlighting the main aspects of the charism as developed to this day. Then, another friar spoke about the Carmelite Order today, with its presences in the world and where it is growing, with the Order currently having more vocations flourishing in Asia rather than in Europe or the United States.

6.12 Rating of Students' Experience of Catholic Schooling

I see the rating of Catholic schooling by students and parents as being very much in line with the measuring of school effectiveness, that is, it takes some time to get noticed. In general, I can say that the rating which students and their parents give to the school is a positive and successful one. I can bring into my mind the story of a student whose behaviour was not that good. During his stay at school, we had clashed a number of times due to his behaviour. However, after he left school, one day he came to school for a visit and to interview me for a project he had, telling me that he realised that all that we had proposed to him was to build good values in him, and this led him to realise that his time at school was beneficial for his formation, and he even urged his brother to attend the same school.

Moreover, parents still want to enrol their children in Catholic schools. In fact, they try their luck in ballots to choose students to be enrolled in Catholic schools. This can be an answer for the success of Catholic schooling in Malta.

More than that, in the case of my own school, when meeting students some time after they left school, they are all a bit nostalgic about their school. Even posts on social media are seen and commented on by former students who express their positive assessment of the school. Former students and their families value the whole time spent at school, the dedication of their educators, the discipline and values instilled in them, the friendships they built, and their academic performance.

Here, I would like to point out again that a positive and successful rating for the school is not only due to its academic success. There are other schools which are not Catholic and are successful in this. Positive ratings are also due to the lived experience at school, the values which are enshrined in the whole life, and the way which students are formed holistically. Here, the emphasis lies on the way we treat our students, where the care of and concern for each student is of utmost importance. We do not just care for students. We care for the student who today might have come to school after having a bad experience at home. The student does not come to school to excel academically only, but he comes to school for the support and help we can give him, together with the normal aspects of the school life.

6.13 Improvement

Speaking from my own experience, and reflecting after the interviews with headteachers were held, I can say that there is room for improvement in my own school and in all Catholic schools in Malta. Very often, when we speak of improvement in schools, we look at two things: the physical improvement of the premises and improvement in assessment and the curriculum areas. These are two important aspects of improvement, although there is more to it.

Improvement of premises enables students to feel safer and at home. I truly believe that a clean and adequately refurbished school has a strong impact on the lives and behaviour of students. As soon as I became headteacher, I embarked on various projects of embellishing new areas and refurbishing other areas of the school. Through this, I have noticed that, throughout the years, students appreciate more and more what is done for them at school, and less acts of vandalism take place, even though there are still a minority of students who do not care for the fabric of the school.

Improvement of curriculum areas is an important aspect of schooling. We cannot expect to have an effective school, Catholic or not, if it does not have a strong position on curriculum and assessment. When we receive statistics regarding examinations at the end of secondary schooling, we are proud to note that our students do very well in exams and, compared to students in other schools, they are on the same level. Speaking about MATSEC (the name for the ordinary level standard), we can compare these results since we obtain the marks for our students and at the same time we are communicated the national averages. Up until 2017, as schools we used to receive a *tracer study*, which includes data about what students chose to do after they finished secondary school. It is good to note that, for our school, most of our students continue to study in a post-secondary institution or follow tertiary education. The fact that students continue to study, as most students in Catholic schools in Malta do, is a sign that our students excel in academic areas. This statistical information is generally shared with prospective families and their families when they are about to choose the school. However, I believe that, quite often, parents tend to turn a blind eye to these statistics since Catholic schools in Malta are famed for being schools with excellent academic performance.

The two types of improvement mentioned above are things that all schools strive to do. However, there are other areas which may sound more difficult to perform, since they require more thinking and more resources. At this point I would like to highlight these areas in which I feel improvement should take place:

Formation for educators and staff members in the history and the charism of the religious order which leads the school.

Very often I meet candidates who apply for a job in our school and make a deliberate decision to try to find a teaching job in a Catholic school. I think that those who apply to

work with us simply to find a job belong to a very small minority. However, even though most candidates are willing to work in a Catholic school, there is still a long way to go in their formation as Catholics and their instruction in the charism and history of a particular religious order. These candidates do not have to be Catholic, however, I believe that we cannot accept candidates to work in a Catholic school who do not see eye to eye with the Catholic Church and its teachings, in light of the fact that educators are in fact the transmitters of the Catholic message and Catholic ethos of the school. I know of a few Catholic schools in Malta who form in the best way possible their new recruits, or organise a staff development day on this subject. Some schools with a strong international network, also hold international courses for their educators. However, I believe that this should be an ongoing aspect of the formation and development of staff in Catholic schools. Knowing that some schools are well ahead with having the Congregation's charism at heart, with reference to my school, I would like to plan more occasions and opportunities where staff members can feel that they belong more to the Carmelite Order.

For, as Grace (2002, p. 238) writes,

'transmission of the charism' is one way of speaking about and implementing the processes which are needed in Catholic education. A number of religious orders ... have organised programmes for the spiritual formation of their lay successors as headteachers and teachers. However, there is also considerable scope for what may be called the *transmission of the lay charism* to a new generation of educators.

Programmes using experienced or recently retired Catholic headteachers as mentors for new Catholic educators have much potential ... Such charism transmission now seems essential for the future of Catholic education.

In fact, there are some schools who use the experience of retired headteachers to help the school in passing on the charism of the school. I believe it is something to consider since it is something from which new educators can benefit.

For Lydon, (2009, p. 54) the transmission of the charism from religious to lay persons is no more than an imitation of the way in which the apostolic tradition was handed on in the early Church. The principal way in which Jesus taught people was by his own life, reflected in his call to the first disciples to 'follow me', an expression that conveys a strong sense of imitation in the rabbinic language of discipleship.

It is important to say once again, that the religious persons and lay persons who live the charism themselves are the best way of transmitting the charism through their witness.

Programmes of formation in the faith for parents.

Sometimes I am afraid that what is built in schools is not supported at home. While the relationship between parents and schools has clearly changed, very often parents are not fully aware of what values should be passed on to their children. This should happen not only in general, but it should be more specific in the context of Catholic schools. Both the school and the Church insist on values, and so, there needs to be communication with parents about these values. Quite a lot of parents attend meetings of any sort, such as those which help them in raising their children; however, we are not forming parents in the faith as we do with our students. Parents seem to have abdicated from their role of passing on the faith to their children, because they themselves are not prepared. In such a way, I believe that a specific programme for parents regarding formation in the faith is more than necessary. There are only a few schools which offer such programmes, which in my opinion are still limited. These are restricted to some meetings here and there, and which lack the idea of a whole programme. Schools may not provide these programmes alone, but they can liaise with other

schools to offer formation to parents together. Sometimes, as a school, I am afraid that most parents will not turn up for such meetings. As such, having schools organising courses together may enable them to have an adequate number of attendees. Moreover, parents should themselves be able to build relationships, which are essential in society. As Smith and Nuzzi (2007, p. 121) say, “relationships experienced in the home are the first lessons for relating to communities found at school, the workplace, and the Church itself.”

A closely knit network between Catholic schools of the Carmelite Order.

There are particular schools which are very well ahead in this. However, my reflection on this is that, as a Carmelite Order, two Congresses for Carmelite Schools were held, one in the year 2010, and the other in the year 2017, even though Carmelite schools existed long before 2010. Even though there was the sharing of experiences during the meetings, there has been no follow-up. The ideal network helps schools in identifying more clearly the role of a particular congregation in education. Since our school is the only Carmelite school in Malta, we cannot take any steps to develop such a network, however, I do believe in a network with Carmelite schools around the globe, especially in Europe where a similar school system exists. In this network, schools may learn from each other how they can respond to the challenges that arise. One may also think of a direction which is given to schools in forming staff in the history and charism of the religious order, as mentioned above. To start with, and to do our part, I have recently asked Carmelite schools in Europe if they wish to cooperate with us through the Erasmus+ programmes. Two schools from Spain have accepted.

Strong chaplaincies and pastoral care teams.

Up until a few years ago, pastoral care was tackled by religious members of religious orders. I remember myself being a full-time teacher and spiritual chaplain in school (as a

member of the Carmelite Order) before taking the role of headteacher. I acknowledge that today this is barely possible because of an ageing province of friars and fewer religious vocations. It should be noted that if pastoral care is not given its due attention, there will be a gap in the life of schools. However, certain schools have tried to find solutions by employing lay chaplains. Some schools have been doing this for quite a long time. For other schools, this experience is very recent, including my own school. The lay chaplain's role is not to replace the friars or only to assist them, but more than that, the lay chaplain takes upon himself the pastoral care of the school by organising sessions for students, being available for them, nurturing the faith formation, and taking care of the animation of the school liturgy. This should take place in the context that, for most students, the only place of encountering God or a place of worship is the school. As two headteachers who were interviewed said (Headteachers 1 and 6), the school can be referred to as the new parish for students and their families.

6.14 My Leadership

At this point, before concluding, I would like to say some words about my leadership and how I perceive it to have made an impact on school improvement. Duncan (1990, p. 96) reflects on an ideal or effective Catholic school leader by saying that “shared decision-making (leadership) is most effective when the tasks to be performed are creative, non-routine and subject to change. Such leadership reflects the ideal style for Catholic education leaders, who should be opportunity-takers.” For me, this means that leadership in a Catholic school should not be a top-down approach but one where the leader accompanies all stakeholders in their endeavours.

First of all, being Catholic, and moreover a Carmelite friar, I strongly believe that my style of leadership should imitate that of Christ. As Nuzzi (2000, p. 269) suggests:

In following the example of Jesus, Catholic educators have a special responsibility to lead as Jesus led ... Leading as Jesus led not only entails leaders using their power as he did, it also means establishing communities that clearly reflect this common life in and under Christ.

It follows that leading like Christ implies that a community should be built. From my own experience, I have tried this from my very first day of my headship, especially with educators, seeing them as my collaborators in the building of the school community. I strongly believe that the Catholic school is a microcosm of the whole Christian community. Leading a Catholic school or a Catholic community is not a position of superiority, but an attitude of service, since this is the type of leadership that Jesus himself commends:

Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mt 20, 26b-28)

Through this idea, I feel that while leading the school, in fact, I am walking the life of faith with all stakeholders. It is the idea of “servant leadership”; this term, which has its roots in the Bible, was greatly discussed by Robert K. Greenleaf who created the term in 1970 (see Greenleaf [2015]).

From my experience, I recall the decisions which we had to take and for which I asked for counsel from the educators, from a simple decision for a change in the school uniform, to a more difficult one in how to proceed during the Covid-19 pandemic when, owing to social distancing, we could not accommodate all students at school. Everyone’s voice is heard, and at the end a decision should be taken, even if it is not agreed to by everyone. However, I believe that this is an important aspect in building community at school.

As to what regards students, my leadership takes me to another level. There are occasions when I have to be somewhat hard with students, however, students know that I and the other leadership members are available for them whenever needed. I feel it is my duty not to wait for students to come to me, that I myself go to them and ask them if they are doing well and if they need anything from the school.

Through this, I believe that this kind of leadership mirrors the type of leadership mentioned in the Gospel, a leadership which is similar to that of Christ who builds a community around him and serves the poor and those in need.

6.15 Concluding Remarks

Reflecting on the school I lead, I can say that while we try to do our best in investing in the school as far as values are concerned, we should keep an open eye so that the distinctiveness of a Catholic school will continue to be present, this while aiming for improvement so that we can present a meaningful experience of schooling to the students we meet in our school. Moreover, I do believe that, as a headteacher, there are my own professional needs, such as mentoring and supervision, so that I can continue transmitting the ethos of a Catholic school in my own specific situation.

Chapter 7

THE TEACHING OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH ON CATHOLIC EDUCATION

7.1 Introduction

Throughout the years, the Catholic Church has published several documents regarding Catholic education. These documents include writings or addresses of Popes, official documents from the Vatican's Dicastery for Culture and Education (formerly the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education and then the Congregation for Catholic Education) and other Congregations, and other documents from local bishops and synods, or national conferences of bishops. It is quite interesting to note that while Conferences of Bishops throughout the world have contributed their share in providing documents for their local areas, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has been at the forefront in issuing documents about Catholic Education.

Miller (2006, p. 17) speaks of five fundamental characteristics of Catholic schools which are derived from the documents of the Church on Catholic schools: "a Catholic school should be inspired by a supernatural vision, founded on Christian anthropology, animated by communion and community, imbued with a Catholic worldview throughout its curriculum, and sustained by gospel witness." The Center for Catholic School Effectiveness in Chicago (2012, p. vi), discussing Miller as to compile its own report, says that the essential qualities flow directly from Miller's bringing together of these characteristics, and they "define the deep Catholic identity of Catholic schools and serve as the platform on which the standards and benchmarks rest."

On the other hand, Cook and Simonds (2011, p. 321) say that particular themes may be pinpointed in different Church documents; however, there is no organisation between them which can give us a snapshot of the spirit of Catholic schooling: “Church documents provide inspiration and guidance, but they do not provide a framework that is consistent throughout the documents and easy for practitioners to apply.” The authors go on to say that the main charism of Catholic schools in the twenty-first century is that of building a culture of relationships. This idea of relationships will be discussed in detail as a theme chosen from the documents of the Catholic Church.

While keeping in mind Miller’s principles (2006) and the thoughts of Cook and Simonds (2011), for the sake of this study, I will not list the documents and explain what they say, but I will extract from them important themes which relate to the research question, as seen in Table 5 below. Speaking generally, I can say that most of these points came out during the interviews with the headteachers, as discussed earlier on in this study. As one can see, there appears to be a link between the themes I will discuss hereunder and what features in Miller’s thinking.

Table 5:

List of themes emerging from official Catholic Church documents

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Mission and Aim of Catholic Education 2. A Christian school built on Christ – being Christ-like 3. Faith integrated with life 4. The message of a Catholic school and religious instruction 5. Formation of the human person 6. Relationships and building community 7. Service |
|--|

8. Care and concern
9. Role of teachers
10. Giving witness
11. Formation of staff
12. Shared mission between lay and consecrated persons
13. Concerns and challenges

7.2 The Mission and Aim of Catholic Education

As in every other institution, Catholic schools have a mission and an aim. Catholic education can be seen as an essential part of the missionary nature of the Church, where through the educational ministry, the Church strives to announce the Gospel, and translate it into action. Catholic education can be thought of as being derived from the same words of Jesus to the apostles. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops in the United States (1972 par. 7) describes it as “an expression of the mission entrusted by Jesus to the Church He founded.” This notion is confirmed by Pope Pius XI (1929, par. 16) who says that the duty and the power of the Church to teach were given by Jesus himself as one finds in the Gospel: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt.28:18-20). This idea is also confirmed through other documents, such as *The Catholic School* issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education (1977, par. 9), which says that “the Catholic school forms part of the saving mission of the Church, especially for education in the faith”.

Pope Pius XI, in his encyclical *Divini Illius Magistri* (1929), expresses himself about the mission and aim of Catholic schools, saying that Christian education is ideal since it

prepares persons to reach their purpose, that of being fully human as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. This idea is confirmed in the *Code of Canon Law* (1983, can. 794 §1): “The duty and right of educating belongs in a special way to the Church, to which has been divinely entrusted the mission of assisting persons so that they are able to reach the fullness of the Christian life.”

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops from the United States (1972, par. 118) speaks about three purposes of Catholic schooling: “Catholic schools which realize the threefold purpose of Christian education—to teach doctrine, to build community, and to serve—are the most effective means available to the Church for the education of children and young people.” These three principles will be discussed in different points under their appropriate heading. With reference to the ‘teaching doctrine’ point, one can assume that there might be some tension between ‘teaching doctrine’ and teaching the broader academic curriculum. However, I should highlight that the Church documents speak of a Catholic school as one where academic instruction is linked to the teachings of the Church.

Some years later, the bishops from the United States (2005, p. 1) insisted on four purposes for Catholic schools: “to provide an atmosphere in which the Gospel message is proclaimed, community in Christ is experienced, service to our sisters and brothers is the norm, and thanksgiving and worship of God is cultivated.” These principles are in line with what the bishops said in 1972, thus underlining the importance of doctrine, community, and service in the life of the Catholic school.

Back in 2014, the Maltese Episcopal Conference was preparing a document which never materialised in official form. It drew on the document by Stock and the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales (2012) as its main source. In it, the purpose and aim of Catholic schools are highlighted:

1. To realise the mission of the Church, in announcing the Gospel to all nations, placing Christ and his principles at the heart of the people's lives, so that a school can truly be the right space where persons can make a personal encounter with Jesus.
2. To support parents in the formation of their children. In such a way the Church considers, as part of its mission, to assist parents who ask for Catholic education for their children, while the Catholic school becomes "a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole person" (*The Catholic School*, 1977, par. 8). The formation of the whole person is very dear to Catholic schools in Malta, something which comes out clearly in the schools' mission statements. It is a mission which does not only limit itself to academic education, but refers to a broader education.
3. To serve the local Church, aiding it in becoming a true community in Christ, since a Catholic school is to nurture in its students a sense of belonging to one community in Christ.
4. To serve by facilitating a more just and truly human society, in the sense that Catholic education helps a student not only to find a place in society, but also by supporting the student to contribute to a more just and human society.

7.3 A Christian School Built on Christ – Being Christ-like

An important theme that one can see in Church documents and a concurrent theme that was discussed during the interviews with headteachers is the fact that a Catholic school should be built on Christ. This is derived from the fact of being Catholic in itself. All that is Catholic should be formed on the image of Christ. Catholic schools should be the place where Christ can be formed in the person. According to the Congregation for Catholic Education (1977, par. 34), education in a Catholic school cannot be separated from Christ, who is the basis of all that exists in a Catholic school:

His revelation gives new meaning to life and helps man to direct his thought, action and will according to the Gospel, making the beatitudes his norm of life. The fact that in their own individual ways all members of the school community share this Christian vision, makes the school “Catholic”; principles of the Gospel in this manner become the educational norms since the school then has them as its internal motivation and final goal.

The same Congregation (2013, par. 57) confirms that Christ is the foundation of a Catholic school by stressing that he is “the basis of their anthropological and pedagogical paradigm.” Thus, all life at a Catholic school is built on the way of life and the teachings of Jesus Christ.

At this point, one needs to answer an important question: What about the presence of non-Catholics or non-Christians in a Catholic school? What effect can Christ have on them? Throughout the world, most Catholic schools accept every person to be enrolled in the school. In Malta, there are some Catholic schools who follow the same idea, however, there are a number of Catholic schools who accept only Christian or Catholic students. The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1988, par. 6), taking into consideration the fact that some students, or even the majority of students, may not be Christians or Catholic, sheds light on the presence of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools and the duty of the Church to freely announce the Gospel, while maintaining the basic principle of religious freedom and freedom of conscience:

A Catholic school cannot relinquish its own freedom to proclaim the Gospel and to offer a formation based on the values to be found in a Christian education; this is its right and its duty. To proclaim or to offer is not to impose, however; the latter suggests a moral violence which is strictly forbidden, both by the Gospel and by Church law.

Ryan (2008) suggests that there can be three approaches for inclusion in a Catholic school: schools exclusively for Catholics, where “the school is conceptualised as a place for teaching the Catholic tradition and for preserving and conserving Catholic culture” (p. 34); schools that include religious diversity, where critics “claim that the Catholic identity is dissolved in the midst of a generalised Christian environment” (p. 36); and a pluralist approach which tends to find a balance between the other two approaches, “between exclusivist demands for particularity, concreteness and cultural continuity, and inclusivist claims for openness, commonality and diversity” (p. 37). While acknowledging that very often we tend to go for an exclusive idea of a Catholic school, I would prefer a system which accepts non-Catholic students and which is open for different experiences. Such an approach was referenced during a particular interview, when one headteacher (Headteacher number 10) spoke of a foreign non-Christian student who eventually joined the Catholic Church and still maintains a good relationship with the school after he returned to his country.

7.4 Faith Integrated with Life

Directly linked to the idea of Catholic schools built on Christ is the notion of faith integrated with life. In fact, according to the Congregation for Catholic Education (1977, par. 37), the Catholic school’s task “is fundamentally a synthesis of culture and faith, and a synthesis of faith and life.” Here one can suggest a similarity with the notion which is usually connected with liturgy: *lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi*, where the rule of prayer becomes the rule of faith, which becomes the rule of life. This assimilation of faith with life distinguishes a Catholic school from other educational institutions, and practically goes against the tendency of isolating religious issues from the various aspects of a person’s life. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops from the United States (1972, par. 105) insists that “a Catholic for whom religious commitment is the central, integrative reality of his life

will find in the Catholic school a perception and valuation of the role of religion which matches his own.”

Even if today it is really felt, already back in 1977 (par. 45), the Congregation was aware that formation in the faith in schools is important since the family and society do not always give this notion as much consideration as in previous generations:

The Catholic school has as its specific duty the complete Christian formation of its pupils, and this task is of special significance today because of the inadequacy of the family and society. It knows that this integration of faith and life is part of a life-long process of conversion until the pupil becomes what God wishes him to be.

This confirms the idea which comes through from my own experience, and from the experiences of headteachers as expressed during the interviews, namely that Catholic schools, especially secondary schools, are very often the only place where Catholic formation is given to adolescents and youths. Scerri (2004, p. 154) affirms this by saying that “Catholic schools are the cathedrals of today where our young generation are introduced not only to knowledge but also to a way of life permeated with those values that make a profound difference in our way of living.”

In Malta, younger students are still bound to attend catechism lessons until they receive the sacrament of confirmation, that is, until twelve years of age. Sultana (2020, p. 158), while affirming that many see the parish as the main space where children are educated in the faith, affirms that, until some years ago, families took upon themselves the duty to educate their children in the faith, while practicing their faith. On the other hand,

today, with the process of secularisation, the process of religious socialisation has changed drastically. Families are now delegating this task to specialised teachers and catechists who are seen as the sole responsible persons for the education of the faith

of children, while they themselves feel free not to be witnesses to the faith or to live it in practice at home.

This confirms what Lombaerts and Osweska (2004, p. 59) say about the role of the family and the difference between some time ago and now: “Young children were adopting the Christian faith by participating in the Christian life of the extended family ... In modern society ... parents often feel that they are not prepared for taking care of the Christian upbringing of their offspring.”

This leads us to note that Catholic schools offer to parents what parents feel unable to do, that is, providing help to parents in the moral, religious, and spiritual nurturing of their children. This is, in fact, the public thought about Catholic schools in Malta, that is, schools do not provide only for academic excellence but for values lived in daily life, as the research by Said Camilleri (2018) suggests.

7.5 The Message of a Catholic School and Religious Instruction

The Bishops from the United States (1972, par. 118) speak of teaching doctrine as one of the purposes of Catholic education. In fact, the *Code of Canon Law* (1983, can. 803 §2) says that “instruction and education in a Catholic school must be based on the principles of Catholic doctrine, and the teachers must be outstanding in true doctrine and uprightness of life.” It is important to note that this kind of instruction and education is not limited to religious education lessons, but should be seen as a line of thought throughout the whole curriculum and any other activities in the school.

Nevertheless, religious instruction remains of fundamental importance in the curriculum of a Catholic school. Even though it is not a core subject, or if it is not perceived as an important subject by students, the Congregation for the Clergy (1997 par. 73) says that religious education

must present the Christian message and the Christian event with the same seriousness and the same depth with which other disciplines present their knowledge. It should not be an accessory alongside of these disciplines, but rather it should engage in a necessary inter-disciplinary dialogue ... Through inter-disciplinary dialogue religious instruction in schools underpins, activates, develops and completes the educational activity of the school.

An important point to make is that in Malta, all schools, including State and Independent schools (except for other faith schools), provide Catholic religious education. This comes out of the Constitution of the Republic of Malta, which states that the religion of the Republic is the Roman Catholic Religion. However, in the last few years, students in State schools are being given an option, either to choose religious education or ethics. According to Sultana (2020, p. 154-155), there are two main aims of Catholic religious instruction which takes place in schools in Malta, which are:

1. To educate students in the spiritual and religious dimensions, thus giving them a balanced holistic education together with all the other academic and human subjects which are studied; and 2. to encourage a healthy relationship of connectedness with the self, with others, with God and with the rest of created reality.

Very recently, the issue of religious instruction in primary schools was debated in Ireland, with the Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Farrell defending the place of religious education in the curriculum. Reacting to a proposal that religious education might be excluded from primary schools' curriculum, Farrell was quoted by *The Tablet* (14 May 2021) as saying that:

in the plural reality of society today we need to build up respect for others rather than diminish it by mistakenly downplaying significant questions, such as the fundamental importance of religious education in schools provided in ways that are wholesome and open to difference.

7.6 Formation of the Human Person

An important aspect that comes out of the Church documents is the idea that a Catholic school should give importance to the formation of the whole person. During the interviewing process with headteachers, I noticed that in most mission statements, the idea of formation of the whole human person is well expressed. Quite a number of Church documents also speak of this formation, starting from the decree of the Second Vatican Council *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965, par. 1): “a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end.”

The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977, par. 8) says that the Church establishes her own schools because she considers them as a privileged means of promoting the formation of the whole man, since the school is a centre in which a specific concept of the world, of man, and of history is developed and conveyed. The same Congregation speaks of the Catholic school as the advantaged setting for the all-inclusive development of the students. This kind of formation can happen “since in Christ, the Perfect Man, all human values find their fulfilment and unity (par. 35).”

Even the Code of Canon Law (1983, can. 795) makes reference to this formation: Education must pay regard to the formation of the whole person ... physical, moral and intellectual talents may develop in a harmonious manner, so that they may attain a greater sense of responsibility and a right use of freedom, and be formed to take an active part in social life.

Thus, this kind of development enables persons to be responsible for when they arrive to maturity and need to make important decisions in life.

The Congregation for Catholic Education (1997, par. 14) speaks of learning and development as being intertwined, since “the various school subjects do not present only knowledge to be attained, but also values to be acquired and truths to be discovered.” It

follows that the educator, in being a protagonist of this formation, “does not write on inanimate material, but on the very spirits of human beings” (par. 19).

7.7 Relationships and Building Community

The notions of relationships and community have always been seen as important aspects of Catholic schooling. In fact, the United States Bishops (1972, par. 13) list community as one of the distinctive characters of Catholic education, together with teaching doctrine and serving. In fact, they state that

education is one of the most important ways by which the Church fulfils its commitment to the dignity of the person and the building of community ... The educational efforts of the Church must therefore be directed to forming persons-in-community.

The same bishops suggest various ideas about this notion of building community, among which we can mention that learning what community means is by living it, and that involvement in the liturgy and similar activities may enhance the notion of community among the students.

The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1988, par. 1) speaks of nurturing a sense of community in a school as that which makes a Catholic school unique: “What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love”. This idea is followed by different authors. According to Cook and Simonds (2011, p. 319), Catholic schools are called to “embody an identity and charism that make a unique and meaningful contribution to our Church and society” and should “set a new course for the future by making Catholic schools have a unique religious charism that provides a purifying and balancing of human relationships” (p. 322). For schools to become places where lives are changed, Cook and

Simonds argue that human relationships must be the “keystone to constructing Catholic schools” (p. 324). For the same authors, these relationships should be built with self, with God, with others, with the local and the world community, and with creation. Here, one should refer to the document by Pope Francis *Laudato Si'* (2015), which discusses the care of our common home and stresses the importance of educating in humanity and the environment. This means that while a variety of charisms construct the ethos of different schools, the notion of relationships should be clearly visible in all schools. Today we are living in a fragmented society, where the individual alone is exalted and individualism has taken over much of our lives. By highlighting the notion of relationships and building communities in schools, Catholic schools become a witness for society and show that it is possible to live in harmony with others.

It seems that people became more aware of relationships during the Covid-19 pandemic, where most school lessons and activities were shifted online, and with it a resulting impact on relationships. Fussell (2020, p. 150) insists that “remotely or in person, the essence of community in Catholic education remains. Community is central to the mission of Catholic education, and Catholic schools are settings where students are to be formed as ‘persons-in-community’.” In fact, research by Mayhill Strategies LLC (2018) in the USA suggests that the sense of community of Catholic schools is one of the main factors which drives parents to choose Catholic schools. Moreover, Fussell (2020, p. 152) goes on to say that “if Catholic school teachers adopt a constructivist approach that prioritizes learner experiences over the delivery of content, then relationships between students and teachers can be strengthened, and students will more likely feel connected to a vibrant learning community.” The same author (2020, p. 153) suggests that because of the pandemic, “as Catholic schools continue to navigate the uncharted terrain of long-term remote instruction, a

renewed examination of this framework of relationships can help to ensure that Catholic schools remain true to their mission.”

However, as Sultana (2020, p. 149) points out, it is important that the sense of community is fostered and not taken for granted: “Education for community life includes making the children conscious that the community is not a spontaneous reality, but we need to invest in it for it to be fruitful.” Moreover, as Cook and Simonds (2011, p. 322) suggest, “building on their strength as uniquely religious educational institutions, Catholic schools should set a new course for the future by making relationship building the distinctive purpose of all their school programs.” This can be seen as the way forward for Catholic schools to become beacons in fragmented societies.

7.8 Service

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (1972, par. 28), besides listing service as one of the main characteristics of a Catholic school, highlights the notion of service in the Church by saying that

the experience of Christian community leads naturally to service ... Each must serve the other for the good of all. The Church is a servant community in which those who hunger are to be filled; the ignorant are to be taught; the homeless to receive shelter; the sick cared for; the distressed consoled; the oppressed set free—all so that men may more fully realize their human potential and more readily enjoy life with God now and eternally.

It is interesting to note that the concept of service comes out of the idea of community. Since community implies within it the idea of building relationships, the same relationships enable service to take place. It is the care of each member of the community that empowers each person to be of service to others. This idea, especially in a society which cries for harmony

among its members, is also expressed by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977, par. 62):

The Catholic school community ... is an irreplaceable source of service, not only to the pupils and its other members, but also to society ... Society can take note from the Catholic school that it is possible to create true communities out of a common effort for the common good ... Above all, it is called to render a humble loving service to the Church by ensuring that she is present in the scholastic field for the benefit of the human family.

Leadership in the Church is seen as service to the community. In fact, in the Gospels, Jesus himself highlights the idea of being placed in a position of responsibility above others as service to the community. Besides that, Jesus speaks of this service at the washing of the feet of his disciples, saying that “if I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (John 13,15). Since the school is a form of community, a leader in a Catholic school should exercise his ministry not through being superior to others, but as a servant. This is why, as Grace (2008, p. 10) puts it, “The chief guardian of mission integrity is the school headteacher, which is why headteachers are leaders first and managers second”. In this way, a school leader is seen as the one who puts forward the message of the school rather than just the person who manages the school life.

7.9 Care and Concern

Care and concern for each and every individual should be highlighted in Catholic schools. Very often, Catholic schools in Malta are smaller in terms of student population, thus enabling the school community to know each member of the school. This knowing of individuals leads persons to give care and attention to those who need it most, and respect for

the individual is of utmost importance. This respect for the individual takes place in the context of the community. The Congregation for Catholic Education (2014, par. II, 1), insists that Catholic schools must safeguard the “respect for individual dignity and uniqueness (hence the rejection of mass education and teaching, which make human beings easier to manipulate by reducing them to a number).”

This care and concern can be seen in the everyday commitments of Catholic schools. Caring with concern for others leads students’ behaviour to reflect positivity. It is the development of good basic values which leads to the holistic formation of students. This does not relate to Catholic schools only, as Burn (2001, p. 38) says with regard to the UK: “Many Church of England schools are oversubscribed and popular with parents because of their commitment to good discipline and moral values,” not to mention the popular perception of excellent academic results.

7.10 Role of Teachers

Teachers and educators play an important part in the running of the school and in educating young people. They are the transmitters of the message of the school. This importance has been highlighted since the early mentioning of Catholic education in school documents. In fact, Pope Pius XI (1929, par. 88) says that good schools owe their integrity to teachers who are thoroughly prepared and well-grounded in the matter they have to teach; who possess the intellectual and moral qualifications required by their important office; who cherish a pure and holy love for the youths confided to them ... and who have therefore sincerely at heart the true good of family and country.

The Second Vatican Council (1965, par. 8) insists that Catholic schools depend on teachers for their success. For this to happen, educators need to be fully prepared, and moreover:

may teachers by their life as much as by their instruction bear witness to Christ, the unique Teacher ... The work of these teachers ... is in the real sense of the word an apostolate most suited to and necessary for our times and at once a true service offered to society.

This sounds like an idealised image of the Catholic teacher. The reality of teachers is more complex. However, it is important to point out that the degree to which teachers can live up to these ideals will have a significant role to play in determining the effectiveness of schools.

For the Bishops of the United States (1972, par. 104), teachers bring about the assimilation of truths and values with life, thus, giving witness of their faith and way of life which will influence the students entrusted to them. Moreover, the same Bishops (1976, p. 7) say that “teachers’ lifestyle and character are as important as their professional credentials.” This is confirmed by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977, par. 40) which says that “the teacher can form the mind and heart of his pupils and guide them to develop a total commitment to Christ, with their whole personality enriched by human culture.” The same Congregation (par. 73) goes on to say that teachers have an important responsibility “in safeguarding and developing the distinctive mission of the Catholic school, particularly with regard to the Christian atmosphere which should characterise its life and teaching.”

7.11 Giving Witness

I have already suggested that educators in Catholic schools are witnesses to all the educational community and so enable the whole scholastic community to be a witness to others. This needs to happen today since the greatest majority of educators in a Catholic school, if not all them, are lay people. The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1982, par. 32), in a document which speaks about the importance of lay Catholics in schools and their witness, says that:

students should see in their teachers the Christian attitude and behaviour that is often so conspicuously absent from the secular atmosphere in which they live. Without this witness, living in such an atmosphere, they may begin to regard Christian behaviour as an impossible ideal.

Moreover, teachers convey a distinctive atmosphere to Catholic schools by giving witness of their way of life and faith. This witness will result in a professional relationship between members of the school community. This happens because a school is made up of persons first and foremost. The Congregation for Catholic Education (2014, II, par. 3) speaks of this relationship as one which “must be nourished by mutual esteem, trust, respect and friendliness.” In this way, persons feel that they are in the right place to be, and this goes against the current trend of individualism and resentment. This can also serve to be a witness to people living emotionless in a divided world.

7.12 Formation of Staff

An important aspect which I have already discussed, and which I see discussed in Church documents and in the interviews held with headteachers, is the ongoing formation of staff. This need comes from the important role of teachers and their involvement in giving witness. Educators in a Catholic school have an extra mission. They not only teach subjects, but they should be formed in a particular way that they may be able to be a living witness to those who they meet in their workplace. In such a way, this kind of formation is a value added to the development each teacher in any school participates in. Very often, this kind of formation is very limited; however, this kind of development is more than needed. Educators cannot be witnesses and cannot give their utmost if first and foremost they are not convinced and formed. The Congregation for Catholic Education (1977, par. 78) says that for teachers to be witnesses, it is crucial to guarantee their ongoing development:

This must aim to animate them as witnesses of Christ in the classroom and tackle the problems of their particular apostolate, especially regarding a Christian vision of the world and of education, problems also connected with the art of teaching in accordance with the principles of the Gospel.

The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1982, par. 60) insists that “the need for an adequate formation is often felt most acutely in religious and spiritual areas; all too frequently, lay Catholics have not had a religious formation that is equal to their general, cultural, and, most especially, professional formation.”

The same Congregation (1988) speaks of the need of founding appropriate centres for such formation. Already existing institutions, such as faculties, can do their part by developing suitable programmes so that teachers can be formed holistically, since they also need to enable students to be formed completely.

This formation should not be external to educators, but as the Congregation for Catholic Education (2007, par. 25) says,

Catholic educators need “a ‘formation of the heart’ ... It is only in this way that they can make their teaching a school of faith ... a transmission of the Gospel, as required by the educational project of the Catholic school.

Formation of members of staff, apart from development in professional ways, is vital when one considers the essentials that compose the identity of a Catholic school. In fact, the Congregation for Catholic Education (2013, par. 77) insists that “the time spent in formation must be used for reinforcing the idea of Catholic schools as being communities of fraternal relationships and places of research, dedicated to deepening and communicating truth in the various scholarly disciplines.” It is the moral obligation of school leaders that all personnel in a Catholic school can have enough opportunities to function effectively in a Catholic school. This should happen so that they can “know how to bear authentic witness to the school’s

values, as well as to their own continuing efforts to live out ever more deeply, in thought and deed, the ideals that are stated publicly in words” (par. 80).

7.13 Shared Mission between Lay and Consecrated Persons

Documents of the Catholic Church have been pondering on the crisis of lack of vocations for quite a long time. Although the fact that religious persons do not hold key roles in Catholic schools may be seen as a weakening side of what is happening in Catholic schools, we should look at its beneficial side, where we can see a greater collaboration between lay persons and consecrated persons. In a conference on Carmelite schools I attended in 2010, Chandler (2010) started his conference by confessing that when he was asked by a Carmelite school principal to give a talk to senior staff members so that they will be prepared when no Carmelite friar will be present at school, he thought that if there are no friars, the school should not remain Carmelite at all, so that no ghost of the past will continue to haunt the school. However, the principal asked him to first listen to the experiences of staff members about how they experienced a Carmelite quality in the school.

When lay persons who work in a school share the charism and ethos of the religious order, then there is a much more fruitful relationship and sharing of the charism by lay people. The Congregation for Catholic Education (2007) has a specific document on this shared mission, entitled *Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission Between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful*. In this document (par. 15) we read:

Just as a consecrated person is called to testify his or her specific vocation to a life of communion in love so as to be in the scholastic community a sign, a memorial and a prophecy of the values of the Gospel, so too a lay educator is required to exercise ‘a specific mission within the Church by living, in faith, a secular vocation in the communitarian structure of the school’.

This means that the lay educator does not only choose to work in a Catholic school, but more than that, he should feel that he has a particular calling or vocation. A call always entails with it mission. Therefore, the lay educator received his calling for a mission within the Catholic school community.

The Bishops from the United States (1972, par. 147) say that the phenomenon of having fewer consecrated persons and more lay persons in a Catholic school will undoubtedly increase. This will lead us to note that the presence of lay persons in Catholic schools is not temporary. The Bishops note that we should acknowledge that lay educators

are full partners in the Catholic educational enterprise ... As with religious, so with lay teachers and administrators, the Catholic community invites not only their continued service but also their increased participation in planning and decision making and their continued emergence in leadership roles.

7.14 Concerns and Challenges

As expected, Catholic educational institutions encounter their own concerns and challenges. It is important to note that these challenges vary from one country to another and perhaps from one school to another. Just to mention an example, not all Catholic schools worldwide are financed in the same way, thus, this challenge might differ in different countries.

For Paletta and Fiorin (2016, p. 144), there are three main issues which appear to challenge the character of Catholic schools in contemporary society: “the integral relationship with students and families; the option for poor families without means or resources; and the processes of secularisation affecting teachers and leadership.” I believe that all other concerns are linked in some way or another to these three challenges, while acknowledging that very

often these are not only challenges encountered by Catholic schools, but more broadly by the Church and society.

According to the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1977), one of the challenges appears to be that throughout the history of Catholic education, some schools seem to be like any other school and have no distinctive characteristic of Catholic schools, and do not accomplish the obligations expected from them by the Church and society.

The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1988) highlights a number of issues which present a challenge to Catholic education. Some of these include a poor definition of educational aims, lack of training for leadership and staff, extreme worry for academic accomplishment, poor relationships, lack of discipline, lack of help from families and an adverse witness.

In the document *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, the Congregation for Catholic Education (1997) speaks of the crisis of values which comes to the fore through a change in society. Moreover, there is also the fact that the Church and its message are no longer at the centre of people's lives and the Church is no longer a reference point for them.

The Congregation for Catholic Education (2013) speaks of another concern which is that of relationships between cultures; however, this could also be seen as providing an opportunity so that intercultural dialogue can take place. I believe that through the passing of time, since borders nowadays are more open and more cultures exist in different countries, even in Malta, this could pose an issue in the coming years. However, this may open up a culture of pluralism which can be open for differences between cultures and peoples.

An important challenge which one should take care to note is that which is described by the Congregation for Catholic Education (2014, III), which is "to make young people realize the beauty of faith in Jesus Christ and of religious freedom in a multireligious

universe.” This concern, difficult as it can be, should instil in Catholic educators the need of being trustworthy witnesses in each environment.

At this point, speaking of concerns and challenges, one should ask: are Catholic schools still needed when States provide education to their people? The Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education (1997, par. 20) says that

in fact, as the State increasingly takes control of education and establishes its own so-called neutral and monolithic system, the survival of those natural communities, based on a shared concept of life, is threatened. Faced with this situation, the Catholic school offers an alternative which is in conformity with the wishes of the members of the community of the Church.

In the face of the challenges which education offers, Pope Francis (2013) asks educators not to be discouraged:

in order to educate it is necessary to step out of ourselves and be among young people, to accompany them in the stages of their growth and to set ourselves beside them. Give them hope and optimism for their journey in the world. Teach them to see the beauty and goodness of creation and of man who always retains the Creator’s hallmark. But above all with your life be witnesses of what you communicate.

7.15 Concluding Remarks

While providing an analysis of official Church documents on Catholic education, in this chapter I have endeavoured to link these documents to the themes which were chosen from my data collection, mainly through interviews, questionnaires and a personal reflection. While acknowledging the foundation elements of Catholic education, these documents provide us with some reflection on how Catholic schools can improve in order to better fulfil their mission.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

This final chapter will serve to give a summary of this research and draw conclusions from this project. While reflecting on this doctoral journey, this section, besides considering what this research could not cover, the limitations of this study as well as possible areas for future research, will also strive to indicate the way forward with practical suggestions for the effectiveness of Catholic schools to be improved.

8.1 This Journey

Even though some years back I was very willing to start this research project, I remember myself starting this doctoral journey without knowing exactly what it entails. At the back of my mind, I had various ideas of how this work would be accomplished; however, reflecting upon this research, I can easily say that, in the beginning, I had quite a lot of misconceptions about the subject of study, which were cleared throughout the years. The basic misconception was that of just adapting the elements of school effectiveness to Catholic schools, without considering the fact that Catholicity is not something added to education. Moreover, the way in which initially I perceived this study has eventually changed. Notions were at first compartmentalised; however, with the passing of time, ideas started to make sense when brought together. Today, after this long journey, I feel extremely enriched by the experiences which I had during this time and I am absolutely grateful to the persons who were keen to share their experiences so that this research could take place.

I believe that, at the end of this study, I should ask an important question to myself: Is this really the end of the journey? While this project finishes here, apart from further research which takes off from where this study ends, there is surely much work to start from now

onwards. I am sure that leaders in Catholic schools in Malta give their all to improve each Catholic educational institution. However, unfortunately, various needs arise which one cannot discard. These needs vary from the day-to-day running of the school, to infrastructural necessities and to bureaucratic requisites which come from higher institutions. Moreover, although salaries are provided by the government for personnel approved by the Education Human Resources Department, some schools may still struggle to finance various projects in Catholic schools. Very often, these may lead schools to not being able to provide the necessary tools for school improvement in a stricter sense. It would be useful if someone were to initiate a discussion and study how these needs could be best met, so that such demands will not impede Catholic schools in fulfilling their mission.

8.2 Revisiting the Research Question

Concluding this research, it is vital to revisit the research question as the aim of this study was to answer the core research question: How can the effectiveness of Catholic boys' schools in Malta be improved? This was tackled mainly by analysing the perceptions of boys' Catholic schools headteachers through a series of semi-structured interviews, by having a snapshot of the thoughts of students, parents, and educators through a questionnaire, and also through a personal reflection which reflects upon my own experiences in the school I lead based on the same questions asked to the other headteachers in the interviews. Apart from this, official Catholic Church documents served as primary literature from which, when analysed, important themes relating to this study were selected.

As I have stated in the introduction, I came up with this research question after combining a series of other questions. To arrive at the core of this study, mainly through secondary literature and also from my own experience and the experience of other headteachers, I have tried to give an understanding of Catholic school effectiveness, the

elements which make up this effectiveness, the distinctiveness of Catholic education, and the effectiveness of Catholic schools in a society where values are changing.

The outcomes of this study show that Catholic schools in Malta are in fact effective, in the sense that while nationally, together with other private schools, they seem to be academically ahead of other schools (see Borg, 2022), at the same time, in the results of the interviews and the questionnaires, those who took part in this study affirmed that Catholic schools are effective because all schools claim that they do their best in realising their educational mission. This is so because they are still in demand among parents. Although there are various conceptions and misconceptions of why parents enrol students in a Catholic school, it is very clear from the data collected that Catholic schools in Malta still offer something different to students. Perhaps for parents it is difficult to express in common terms, however, the main observations of this research suggest that Catholic schools in the Maltese islands still have their unique characteristics which help students to develop holistically. These distinctive features include the small-size school population, which enables educators to personally know the students, a vision inspired by faith, a spirit of communion and community building, integral formation of the whole person and passing on Gospel values to students. Moreover, as with any other institution, there is always the need for improvement, which is important for schools to be able to carry on with their mission.

After revisiting the research question, at this point, I am now able to summarise this investigation and highlight the main conclusions from this study and make recommendations.

8.3 Summary and Conclusions from this Study

After providing the context about the education system in the Maltese islands, I critically discussed some of the secondary literature about school effectiveness and school improvement as well as Catholic education more broadly. After a discussion on methods and

methodology, this thesis discussed the main findings in chapters 5, 6 and 7. Throughout these chapters, I sought to bring out the main themes which constitute Catholic School Effectiveness, and the main themes which need to be addressed in order to secure Catholic School Improvement.

8.3.1 Towards a New Discourse

Although this research speaks of effectiveness and improvement in boys' Catholic secondary schools in the Maltese islands, this study tried to move away from the discourse of school effectiveness research in general towards a new way of speaking about Catholic school effectiveness, in the sense that the traditional discourse on school effectiveness cannot just be applied to Catholic schools.

As this research suggests, corroborated from the data collected during the course of this study, especially through the interviews with headteachers, it is very clear that effectiveness in Catholic schools cannot be measured just by looking at quantifiable measures. The main reason behind this thinking is the fact that while School Effectiveness Research determines the effectiveness of things that can be quantified, such as academic results, Catholic school effectiveness cannot rely only on the judgement of these purely quantifiable criteria. At this point, it is important to note that this is a weakness in School Effectiveness Research in general, and not only in Catholic education. Speaking of school effectiveness, even in secular and non-Catholic schools, one should look also for values and culture which are valued for their role in forming the students. In such research, it is important to look holistically at the totality of each individual. I am sure that when authorities look for effectiveness in any school, they do not rely only on exam results, but rather look closely at the whole life of the school which is not only made up of academic subjects which are to be statistically assessed. It follows that the vision, mission, and values of a school are

not stand-alone concepts; they are there to permeate the lives of students, parents and educators. Although these ideas are hard to quantify, when asked about Catholic school effectiveness, in this research, headteachers identified the concept with ideas such as being Christ-like, communicating the Gospel message and values, promoting a distinctive Catholic ethos and growing into a life of faith. There was only one instance where a headteacher mentioned academic results and this was brought up in the context of intertwining the Gospel values with a good academic system, describing the link between the two as a marriage.

As such, if we are to present Catholic school effectiveness in a new way, I can say that Catholic school effectiveness can be measured through the whole life of the school. However, the person of Jesus Christ should be the measurement against which we can measure this effectiveness. Jesus is seen by his followers as the perfect person. We all strive to be perfect, and in a Catholic school we do our best to help students be formed holistically in the person of Jesus Christ.

8.3.2 The *What* of Catholic School Effectiveness

In this study, concepts underpinning Catholic School Effectiveness for participants, in particular the headteachers, were identified. I believe that these notions should be what we, as Catholic school leaders together with the different stakeholders, should build upon going forward. Throughout the years, Catholic schools have developed in different ways, thus, what we see today is the fruit of much work done before us. We can say that in the same schools, much good is being done, however, there is always room for improvement.

Stoll and Fink (2003, p. xiii) state that “by focusing on best practices of schools, school effectiveness contributes direction for the *what* of change.” At this point, we can summarise the *what* of Catholic School Effectiveness as follows, which notions were pinpointed from the data collected, particularly the interviews with headteachers (who, when

speaking, had the various good practices at the back of their minds), as well as from relevant literature.

Three points in particular were discussed in this research to help us understand *what* is Catholic School Effectiveness:

- i. Catholic School Effectiveness can be thought of when a Catholic school can be identified to be Christ-like. The whole Church is intended to be Christ-like and the Catholic school is a microcosm of the Church. Since Christ is at the centre of the Catholic school, Gospel values are intimately linked to this notion. In fact, the idea of a marriage between Gospel values and a good academic system was highlighted. As discussed, Catholic School Effectiveness can be achieved by promoting a Catholic ethos, helping students to grow in the life of faith, giving attention to care, concern, and inclusion, while paying attention to the disposition of the heart of staff members which can make a difference in the lives of students and their families.
- ii. The understanding of Catholic School Effectiveness elicited the concept of the Catholic school as a parish, where the notions of building community and proclaiming Christ and bearing witness are important concepts. Here, liturgy in schools plays an important part. All this can be comprehended in the light of spiritual formation given only in schools, and so, Catholic schools are becoming the new parishes for students. The traditional parish seems not to be as relevant to people as before. Attendance for liturgies in churches is dwindling, fewer children are attending catechism classes with the development of a more secular society, people seem to care less for their spiritual lives. Besides secularism and apathy, there might be other factors which influence this, such as scandals involving Church personnel. Thus, the authenticity of Catholic schools can still enable people to have a solid spiritual formation in schools.

iii. The third point in understanding Catholic school effectiveness is the role of religious congregations and their charisms in relation to Catholic schools and their ethos. This aspect was discussed in the light of declining numbers of people entering religious life, and where the presence of religious persons and communities is becoming less felt in schools. Notwithstanding this new reality, the ethos of particular religious communities and the values of their founders can still be transmitted in schools, not only by religious persons, but also through lay people. I remember clearly that, during one interview, one headteacher whose school belongs to a religious order which has had no vocations for a long time, spoke of the charism as something lay people, especially lay personnel in schools, are able to share. This leads us to the importance of formation and training in the charism of the founder and religious congregations, something which some congregations and schools are doing, and which others need to follow.

8.3.3 Improvement: The *How* and *Why*

As already stated, while acknowledging the substantial good which takes place in Catholic schools, and while recognising that these schools can be seen as effective, one has to also realise that they cannot move forward without improvement. To promote improvement, yearly, schools draw up a school development plan, and its purpose is to identify areas of development, which plan can be done in a particular scholastic year. Although this is necessary, the *how* of change in this study related more to improvement in the long term, analysing aspects which may be faulty or missing from particular Catholic schools, and tries to plan for the future, while implementing the necessary changes.

Why is improvement needed? Improvement is intimately linked to change. We live in a changing society, people have changed their way of thinking, and perhaps even their way of

behaving. There are always new demands in various sectors of society. Schools in general experience different changes from time to time, while various exigencies are asked for from higher authorities. Improvement enables schools to read the signs of the times and move forward.

From this study, five points in particular can help us understand what improvement in the context of Catholic schools might mean:

- i. The first idea might be that, in certain aspects, the distinctiveness and identity of Catholic schools may be seen as weakening because of the reasons given above. However, it is important to note that the distinctiveness and identity of Catholic schools may be lived today in a different way. The best way to live distinctiveness is to be authentic to the vision, mission, and values of the school, which are rooted in the person of Christ and his message in the Gospel. As discussed, another aspect which may lead to the feeling that the distinctiveness of Catholic schools is weakening is that of fewer religious persons in schools; to counter this, there is the need to prepare lay people with key roles in schools. I am sure that lay people who administer and lead Catholic schools do their utmost in maintaining the identity of a Catholic school. At this point, I would like to mention the fact that there needs to be mutual cooperation between lay headteachers (and lay staff) and the religious congregation to whom the school belongs. Recently, in Malta, lack of communication in one particular school developed into a huge problem (leading to the sacking of the lay headteacher by the school board made up of friars) and this may tarnish the whole sector of Catholic schools because of the way people have perceived this dismissal (see “Church School Headmaster Fired for ‘insubordination,’” 2022).
- ii. Speaking of improvement is also to speak of the challenges in a Catholic school. This research has identified the following challenges: Firstly, to give students an authentic

experience of faith. Candidly speaking, this is a huge task. Everyone is aware of the troubling times in the Church, especially in what regards abuse and scandals by members of the clergy which leads to people losing trust in the Church. In this regard, persons responsible for all aspects of the school should do their utmost in giving an authentic experience of faith to students, keeping in mind that the same Church is made up of sinners, while the whole Church strives towards sanctity. Another challenge is the Christian and Catholic ethos. It seems that Catholic schools are very often moving against the grain, in the sense that while society dictates one way, the authenticity of Catholic schools demands that one lives the values of the Gospel. The third challenge is one of the main themes of this study: how can we start to measure effectiveness? As we have seen throughout this work, and also as summarised in this conclusion, I have attempted to move towards a new discourse of school effectiveness, where the importance when conceptualising effectiveness in Catholic schools is given to the values, mission, and vision of the same schools.

- iii. To improve, schools need support. It is very important for people to find time for others. From this study, it transpired that each and every Catholic school finds its support in its own structure, that is, from the religious community, from educators and staff, from parents, and from other colleagues. On the other hand, collectively, schools also find support from the diocese, especially from the Secretariat for Catholic Education, which provides assistance to schools on various levels, not only to the leadership but also to students and their families.
- iv. The rating of Catholic schools was given due importance by headteachers. While all headteachers, as expected, rated their own school as good, they stated that these schools are good because when parents come for a choice of school for their children, a great majority of parents try their luck to enrol their youngsters in a Catholic school.

This shows that Catholic schools in Malta are still wanted because they are schools which make a difference. Very often, the reasons given for the choice of Catholic schools are various, which include academic excellence as well as the way Catholic schools enable the holistic development of students. As a general perception, people know that Catholic schools make a difference in the lives of students and their families, because they strive to give integral formation based on values which find their roots in Christ and in the Gospel.

- v. Which areas have been identified for improvement? The main themes that have been discussed are the following. Firstly, to promote the charism and give identity to the school. This aspect is reflected in various documents of the Catholic Church. Formation of staff and school personnel in the faith and in the charism and ethos of the school is included here. This leads to the second point, that is, giving a meaningful definition of what schooling in a Catholic school means today. The third aspect is that of being innovative and open to new ideas, so that Catholic schools do not only do what they have always been doing, but remain attentive to the needs of a changing world, and provide what is really needed for students. Lastly, schools feel the need of programmes for parents to provide basic catechesis and formation in the faith. It is very clear from the data collected that if for students the only place of spiritual formation is in Catholic schools, parents and families are still lacking formation in the faith.

8.3.4 Implications and Recommendations for Improvement

The research question of this study presupposes that there is always room for improvement in Catholic school effectiveness. From this study, through the interviews and questionnaires, as enhanced by literature, I have been able to compile the following list.

Formation for Persons in Key Roles

While up until some years ago all key roles in Catholic school administration were held by religious persons, today this is no longer the case. To keep alive the distinctive marks of a Catholic school, such schools should invest in human beings. As we have already noticed, Catholic schools are provided with several professional services: psychologist, counsellor, social worker, youth worker, inclusion coordinator, social, emotional and behavioural difficulties team, which are all deployed by the Secretariat for Catholic Education. These experts exercise their work heartily and schools are more than grateful for their service. However, due to the restricted number of professionals employed for all schools, very often, these specialists are needed more on a frequent basis than the present circumstances dictate where they can attend to a particular school once a week, ultimately providing a rather a limited service. Schools should invest in the formation and presence of these persons because they are an important aspect in giving a face to Catholic schools and provide for their effectiveness in the care and concern shown towards students and their families.

At this point, one should say a word on the role of the spiritual director or the school chaplain. While the presence of religious members or priests is important, some schools have brought to the fore the idea of having school lay chaplains who work closely with religious members or priests. Lay chaplains are given formation in the charism and ethos of the religious congregation of the school and are truly of benefit for students. Schools should consider this idea not only in the light of the diminishing number of religious members and priests, but also because lay people can give valuable contribution to schools.

Continuous Professional Development to Aid the Formation of Staff

It is quite clear and of utmost importance that members of staff need to be trained in the charism of the proper congregation. During the interviews, one thing that struck me was a comment about keeping alive the charism, where although the number of religious members is dwindling and religious members will be absent from school in a couple of years because of old age, yet, the headteacher commented that the charism has not died but is living in the members of all staff who are educators in all schools of the same congregation around the world. However, for this to take place, a proper, structured programme for each and every school led by the members of the religious congregation should take place. Moreover, since almost all schools in Malta still have the presence of religious persons on the school premises, religious persons should be the witnesses of their proper charism and transmit it through all they live and all they do.

Although formation for persons in key roles is important, it is also essential that staff should have continuous professional development in the charism and ethos of the school so that, as important stakeholders, together with the leadership of the school, they can carry out the whole project of the Catholic school. Besides this formation, training for formation in the faith is also necessary for all staff. For this reason, two possible things can be done:

- i. Schools can come together to give formation to staff not only about the identity, mission, and vision of a Catholic school but also faith formation. Just as joining forces between schools happens for various professional development sessions, this could be done for this kind of formation. This could be done either on the initiative of particular schools or more collegially by the Secretariat for Catholic Education.
- ii. Individual schools, or schools teamed up according to the same congregation or charism, should give formation to staff about the proper charism, history, and mission of the respective religious congregation. This can also be done internationally,

through the network of schools of a religious congregation. In fact, particular headteachers, mentioned that their staff can have formation in the charism abroad.

Members of religious congregations should provide material, both printed and online, so that it can be disseminated among members of staff.

In both cases, the courses should be suitable and well prepared so that they can truly be of benefit to staff members. These sessions of formation should not be one-off events, but given from time to time, with new members of staff having such sessions prepared for them each year. The best investment that Catholic schools can make is to invest in human persons. Educators in Catholic schools, and more specifically, persons in key roles in schools, are the guarantors of the experience of faith lived in a Catholic school and to be able to hold such a responsible position, their formation is of utmost importance. Linked to this formation is the need for mutual collaboration between lay administrators and the religious persons to whom the school belongs, so that Catholic schools can remain faithful not only to Christ and to his Gospel message, but also to the charism of the particular religious order.

Improved Liturgies

Once I heard someone saying that young people do not go to Sunday Mass because of the surfeit of liturgies they used to have at a Catholic school. He meant that we cannot go from one extreme to the other, that is, from having no liturgy to having too many celebrations. By improved liturgies I mean that school liturgies should be more meaningful for students. A proper environment and appropriate music are more than necessary. Students should be helped to encounter Jesus in the liturgy, so that liturgies should not be seen as a free time apart from normal lessons.

I would suggest that a member of a religious order accompanies students not only at the celebration of the Eucharist, but also through other initiatives, such as the sacrament of

reconciliation and be available for students who need to ask important questions. School Chaplaincy Teams may facilitate this process.

Spiritual Formation

It is clear that, albeit limited, there are schools that provide spiritual formation for their students. It is an important aspect of a Catholic school. However, since some schools offer this formation after school hours, there should be a more structured programme in all schools to offer spiritual formation to as many students as possible. Once again, this could be an initiative which does not involve only one school, but various schools who come together. Doing so, students may acknowledge and appreciate the variety of Catholic schools and charisms. At this point I acknowledge that students, after school hours, may be inundated with other activities, some of them linked to the school life. In such a way, this can be more of a challenge for schools to come up with new ideas in trying to provide spiritual formation to students, especially those on the margins, that is, those who are the least formed in their spiritual life.

Formation Programmes for Parents

It is clear that while a large number of parents try their luck in admitting their children in a Catholic school in Malta, this does not always depend on the ethos of the school or for any Catholic reason. In this light, since sometimes parents are not fully aware of what being a Catholic means, it is important for schools to introduce programmes for parents which include basic catechesis and also human and spiritual formation. However, since nowadays parents seem to be much busier than before, it is quite clear that not all parents will show up for this formation. The problem seems to be greater when schools attempt to reach parents who are on the peripheries, rather than preaching to the converted. This must lead schools to

look at how it is best for them to provide such formation for parents. Following the strategy of online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, one could facilitate this process by using online platforms and social media so that parents can be more easily reached. Mentioning online platforms and social media, I would like to point out that Catholic schools should be more present on these platforms, in the sense that they should not only post about what is happening in schools such as the various activities, but more than that, show activities and experiences which highlight the school ethos and distinctive character. Schools may even come together with the possibility of providing parents a meaningful opportunity to help them on their faith journey.

The Pastoral Formation Institute of the Archdiocese of Malta can be of great help in this regard by organising related accredited courses for staff and parents, something which is being done in various other fields of knowledge at the moment. At present, programmes by the Institute, include those in Pastoral Care/Chaplaincy in schools, modules in spirituality, and a course in Adolescent and Youth Ministry among others. This notwithstanding, Catholic schools should leave their comfort zones and move beyond so that they can reach out to parents and not wait until parents come to school to receive formation.

Adequate Structure

Although the majority of schools have been built as proper educational institutions, some schools use a building which is not one hundred per cent adequate to provide excellent education in all its components. Some schools, for example, are part of another structure which was built for another purpose, such as convents, and in such a way they lack in some important areas, and headteachers are quite preoccupied by the consequences of not having a suitable space. Although this does not fully depend on headteachers, but also on the religious members who are the owners of the schools, it is necessary for students to find a second

home at school where they can relate with others and be formed holistically. I believe that having a chapel at school which is welcoming and suitably arranged as a place where students can reflect and pray is a necessary space in a Catholic school.

8.4 Originality

Cooksey and McDonald (2019, p. 1153) say that originality can be thought of as “studying a new phenomenon that hasn’t been studied before or using novel patterns of guiding assumptions, techniques, approaches and context to study a known issue, or coming up with a unique explanation for what has been observed.” Thus, originality aims at making a distinctive contribution to knowledge either by in-depth research on a particular subject which has not been studied before, or by offering a new way of explaining a particular phenomenon.

This research, while exploring perceptions of key stakeholders in understanding Catholic school effectiveness and their unique character, claims its originality in the following ways. First of all, this study can be conceived as innovative in the sense that no such detailed research on the effectiveness of Catholic schools in Malta has been carried out previously. There have been attempts to research aspects of Catholic schools in Malta, however, these have not focused in detail on an exploration of all boys’ Catholic secondary schools. Moreover, as we can see throughout this whole study, this research has started from the ideas of school effectiveness research, however, it has tried to develop a new way of analysing Catholic school effectiveness, not through traditional, quantifiable school effectiveness characteristics which are seen to be unsatisfactory in relation to Catholic schools, but through the values and visions of the Catholic Church. Lastly, this study is original in offering a number of suggestions, based on detailed research, which should enable Catholic schools to improve in key areas.

8.5 My Contribution to Knowledge

Linked to originality, as in every other academic research, this project aims at contributing to knowledge. This study of Catholic schools in Malta has added to other research in Catholic schools throughout the world. Although there have been different studies on various aspects of Catholic education in Malta, I hope that by this research I am able to provide a more holistic picture of boys' secondary Catholic schools in the Maltese islands, which until now has been lacking.

Another aspect of my contribution to knowledge is by identifying the aspects of an effective Catholic school. Catholic schools do not have a specific curriculum, but they have any curriculum where the school life is entirely infused in the Gospel values, the community aspect, and the formation of the whole person. The aspects discussed in this chapter are not simply taken from theory or from existing literature but come from the direct experiences of headteachers who lead Catholic schools in Malta. The majority of these aspects can, however, find confirmation in the secondary literature quoted and in official Church documents.

Taking the starting point from the research question, one should highlight the need for improvement in the Catholic schools in Malta. I do not believe that there is a single perfect school, even though sometimes each headteacher may present his school in this way. The areas for improvement presented in this study highlight the need for schools to invest more in human resources, which are the necessary tools for the implementation of the Catholic values and spiritual formation in schools.

Lastly, in the analysis and discussion of data, I have commented about the tension between school effectiveness research and Catholic schools. Shall we still refer to school effectiveness in Catholic schools, or shall we seek a new discourse by combining the language of school effectiveness and Catholicity? Given that there are elements from school effectiveness research that can be related to Catholic schools, I tend to believe that we should

combine the language of school effectiveness with that of the values of Catholicism. Rather than speaking of “Catholic School Effectiveness”, I believe that it is more suitable to speak of “Catholic School Mission Effectiveness”, since one can see if a school is effective or not if it is fulfilling its vocation and mission which are the roadmap for an effective Catholic school.

8.6 Limitations of this Study

This research sought to obtain as much information as possible directly from all Catholic school stakeholders, that is, headteachers, teachers, students, and parents. The most successful part was that all headteachers accepted to be interviewed and thus contributed widely to this study. In terms of numbers, this study would have to be thought of as a relatively small-scale study, but the results can still be considered significant. On the other hand, only a sample of teachers, students, and parents could express their views through the questionnaires and, despite giving a clear picture of their opinions, only a percentage of them replied.

As seen from the responses to the interviews, one drawback is that while school effectiveness in general can be measured when looking at results and league tables, the same cannot be said for Catholic school effectiveness. In such a way, headteachers, while admitting that they cannot measure effectiveness in the Catholic way, they still acknowledged that their school is effective.

The main challenge in this research was to answer the question about how we should measure effectiveness in Catholic schools. Even though this might seem to be a bit vague, because here we are not mainly speaking about quantifiable elements, we can say that when Catholic schools realise their mission in the light of Christ and his Gospel, this can be the ruler against which Catholic school effectiveness can be measured.

8.7 Recommendations for Further Research

Without doubt, this study is not the final word, neither on Catholic school effectiveness in boys' secondary schools in Malta nor on Catholic school effectiveness in general. In fact, from the process of analysing and interpreting data, some further questions come to the fore: What questions remain unanswered? What would I like to see researched now? How might this research be extended if I could bring this about?

As I have already said, this research involves Catholic boys' secondary schools only. Thus, it leaves other sectors ripe for further study. There should, for instance, be further research on Catholic girls' secondary schools, and perhaps a study which does not only delve into these schools but which would also compare and contrast boys' and girls' secondary schools. A study on Catholic primary schools is also recommended; however, I believe that it has to be one study which caters for boys and girls since the majority of primary Catholic schools in Malta are co-educational. An extension to this research would be a study comparing and contrasting school effectiveness between Catholic schools and other types of schools, both faith-based and secular, although this might prove to be more difficult because of the different language of school effectiveness used in Catholic schools (and perhaps other faith schools), as we have been saying throughout this study.

Another aspect which should be studied is the fact that, as I have already alluded to various times in this research, in a few years' time, the presence of religious persons in Catholic schools will be negligible. Friars and nuns are reducing their presences in the islands. Hopefully, among various forms of pastoral work, Catholic schools run by religious orders will survive for years to come. Further research would analyse how the ethos of particular Catholic schools would still be alive according to religious orders' charisms but without the physical presence of members of religious orders.

With the passing of time, the development of multiculturalism will likely increase at a faster pace than at the present moment. I believe that while at present there is a small number of non-Catholic students in Catholic schools, in the coming years, more students from different cultural backgrounds will be enrolled in Catholic educational institutions, since a number of Catholic schools in Malta accept students without being Catholic or without being baptised. This will foster a culture of dialogue in schools and might lead to grounds for a further research project which would study the impact of multiculturalism on Catholic schools and how students from different backgrounds may contribute to the effectiveness of Catholic schools in Malta.

Another interesting question which could be studied is: Are Catholic schools worldwide projecting the same discourse relating to school effectiveness as we have discussed in this study? Such research would allow for a collection of vocabulary which could be used to determine Catholic school effectiveness globally.

Provided that research in Catholic school mission effectiveness is rather limited, as Grace (2009) suggests, answers to these questions and further research along the lines suggested would give a more holistic picture to Catholic education and its effectiveness, from which Catholic schools may benefit in order to improve, thus giving the Church and society a clearer vision as to the aim and mission of the same schools.

8.8 The Way Forward

I believe that from now on starts the hardest part of this doctoral journey. In an ever-changing society, Catholic schools should be at the forefront and proactive in implementing the necessary changes which can lead to improvement in Catholic schools. As Catholic school leaders, together with all our stakeholders, we should look at the reality around us, analyse what is working in a good way, and embark on projects from which students and

stakeholders will benefit in order to keep alive the flame of Catholic education. While at the present moment no one envisages the disappearance of Catholic schools from the Maltese islands, it would be futile to keep these schools open without embarking on a serious voyage of faith, inviting all those who wish to come onboard with us so that Catholic schools can continue to be the places where true encounters can happen, the space where a student can be formed holistically, entering into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and formed in his likeness.

As a final point, in the light of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality which is taking place in the Catholic Church, I believe that we can say that a Catholic school is a microcosm of the Church. The *Instrumentum Laboris* (2023) of the 16th General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops highlights three interwoven areas which are given priority: “communion, mission, participation”. This document (2023, par. 43) insists that “these are challenges with which the whole Church must measure itself in order to take a step forward and grow in its own synodal being.” These issues find expression in the liturgy and the prayer of the Church; living a Catholic life in the sense that while being different, everyone tries to live in unity with others and build community; seeing what each person can offer in the mission of the Church, while living authority as service. Finally, this document (2023) asks for a holistic and ongoing formation for all members of the Church. As we can see, all these aspects have been covered in this research, with the same attributes being given to Catholic schools. We can conclude by saying that the Catholic school is a microcosm of the Church, because in its expression, it can be a truly Gospel community, enabling its members to live a life of faith integrated with all the characteristics of an educational institution.

8.9 Concluding Remarks

By means of this study, I have tried to make my contribution to answer questions relating to Catholic schools in Malta and their effectiveness. Notwithstanding the fact that this research focuses on boys' secondary schools only, I hope that it provides a more detailed and accurate perception of the current state of Catholic schools in the Maltese islands, not only to the direct stakeholders, but also to Maltese society in general. Hopefully, this exploration of what constitutes the effectiveness of Catholic schools in Malta and how this can be improved will lead to tangible improvements in the same schools so that, faithful to their mission, they can continue to contribute to the integral formation of children and youths in our society.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Research Information Sheet for Headteachers (1st December 2018)

Research Project Title

From the *what* to the *how* of change.

How can the effectiveness of Catholic Schools in Malta be improved?

Invitation Paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do not hesitate to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

This study forms part of a PhD study in Education at the University of Sheffield. The aim is to analyse and examine the effectiveness of Catholic schools in Malta and to see how this effectiveness can be improved. The initial phases of this study started two years ago and is presumed to finish in two years time.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen together with nine (9) other participants as one of the headteachers of Catholic schools in Malta who cater for male students at secondary level.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep, and be asked to sign a consent form. You can still decide to withdraw at any time without the need to give any reason. If you decide to withdraw at some point in time, all data relating to you will be destroyed.

What do I have to do?

If you decide to take part, all you have to do is to sit for an interview of not more than fifteen minutes on one occasion.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will shed more light on the Catholic schools in the Maltese islands and will help all leaders in Catholic schools to address any improvement that needs to be done.

What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?

If this is the case, all collected data will be destroyed.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Privacy and anonymity are guaranteed and the identities of persons taking part will be encoded. All data will be safely stored. Electronic data will be encrypted and password protected, while hard copies of any data will be safely locked. Not even the supervisor will be having any access to participants' names, etc.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results will form part of the thesis for the PhD study, which is presumed to be handed in in October 2020. You will not be identified in any report or publication. In case of publication, I will ask you again to give consent for the information given to be published in anonymised form.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is self-funded.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

The project has been ethically reviewed and approved by The School of Education Ethics Review Panel.

Will I be recorded?

Yes, you will be audio recorded. The audio recording of your interview made during this research will be used only for analysis and for illustration in conference presentations and lectures and only in anonymised form. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings. Once the research is finished, the recordings will be destroyed.

Contact for further information

For further information, you can contact me, Jürgen Cucciardi on (+356) 79092111 or jcucciardi1@sheffield.ac.uk or my research supervisor Dr Heather

L.W. Ellis on (+44) (0)114 222 3627 or h.l.ellis@sheffield.ac.uk.

Finally ...

While thanking you for reading this information sheet, if you decide to take part in the research, you will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

Appendix B- Research Information Sheet for Parents (1st December 2018)

Research Project Title

From the *what* to the *how* of change.

How can the effectiveness of Catholic Schools in Malta be improved?

Invitation Paragraph

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do not hesitate to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

This study forms part of a PhD study in Education at the University of Sheffield. The aim is to analyse and examine the effectiveness of Catholic schools in Malta and to see how this effectiveness can be improved. The initial phase of this study started two years ago and it is expected to finish in two years time.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen together with other parents of sons attending Catholic schools in Malta who cater for male students at secondary level.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep, and be asked to sign a consent form. You can still decide to withdraw at any time without the need to give any reason. If you decide to withdraw at some point in time, all data relating to you will be destroyed.

What do I have to do?

If you decide to take part, all you have to do is to fill in a brief questionnaire on one occasion.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will shed more light on the Catholic schools in the Maltese islands and will help all leaders in Catholic schools to address any improvement that needs to be done.

What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?

If this is the case, all collected data will be destroyed.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Privacy and anonymity are guaranteed and the identity of persons taking part will be encoded. All data will be safely stored. Electronic data will be encrypted and password protected, while hard copies of any data will be safely locked. Not even the supervisor will have any access to the names and other details about participants.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results will form part of my PhD thesis, which I expect to hand in in October 2020. You will not be identified in any report or publication. In case of publication, I will ask you again to give consent for the information given to be published in anonymised form.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is self-funded.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

The project has been ethically reviewed and approved by The School of Education Ethics Review Panel.

Will I be recorded?

No, there will be no recorded sessions.

Contact for further information

For further information, you can contact me, Jürgen Cucciardi on (+356) 79092111 or jcucciardi1@sheffield.ac.uk or my research supervisor Dr Heather L.W. Ellis on (+44) (0)114 222 3627 or h.l.ellis@sheffield.ac.uk.

Finally ...

While thanking you for reading this information sheet, if you decide to take part in the research, you will be given a copy of this information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

Appendix C - Research Information Sheet for Parents of Students (1st December 2018)

Research Project Title

From the *what* to the *how* of change.

How can the effectiveness of Catholic Schools in Malta be improved?

Invitation Paragraph

Your son is being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Do not hesitate to ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you would like your son to take part. Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

This study forms part of a PhD study in Education at the University of Sheffield. The aim is to analyse and examine the effectiveness of Catholic schools in Malta and to see how this effectiveness can be improved. The initial phase of this study started two years ago and it is expected to finish in two years time.

Why has my child been chosen?

Your son has been chosen together with other students of Catholic schools in Malta who cater for male students at secondary level and who form part of the students councils.

Does my son have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not your son takes part. If you do decide that your son takes part you will be given this information sheet to keep, and be asked to sign a consent form. You can still decide to withdraw at any time without the need to give any reason. If you decide to withdraw at some point in time, all data relating to you will be destroyed.

What do I have to do?

If you decide to take part, all your son has to do is to fill in a brief questionnaire on one occasion.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will shed more light on the Catholic schools in the Maltese islands and will help all leaders in Catholic schools to address any improvement that needs to be done.

What happens if the research study stops earlier than expected?

If this is the case, all collected data will be destroyed.

Will my son's taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All the information that we collect about your son during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. Your son will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Privacy and anonymity are guaranteed and the identity of persons taking part will be encoded. All data will be safely stored. Electronic data will be encrypted and password protected, while hard copies of any data will be safely locked. Not even the supervisor will be having any access to participants' names, etc.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results will form part of my PhD thesis which I expect to hand in in October 2020. Your son will not be identified in any report or publication. In case of publication, I will ask you again to give consent for the information given to be published in anonymised form.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is self-funded.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

The project has been ethically reviewed and approved by The School of Education Ethics Review Panel.

Will I be recorded?

No, there are no recorded sessions.

Contact for further information

For further information, you can contact me, Jürgen Cucciardi on (+356) 79092111 or jcucciardi1@sheffield.ac.uk or my research supervisor Dr Heather L.W. Ellis on (+44) (0)114 222 3627 or h.l.ellis@sheffield.ac.uk.

Finally ...

While thanking you for reading this information sheet, if you decide that your son takes part in the research, you will be given a copy of this information sheet and assigned consent form to keep.

Appendix D - Participant Consent Form (Headteachers and Parents)

Title of Project: From the *what* to the *how* of change.
How can the effectiveness of Catholic Schools in Malta be improved?

Name of Researcher: Jürgen Cucciardi

Participant Identification Number for this Project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 1st December 2018 for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission to the researcher to have access to my anonymised responses.
4. I agree to take part in the above research project.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature

Name of Researcher

Date

Signature

(to be signed and dated in the presence of the participant)

Researcher: Jürgen Cucciardi
jcucciardi1@sheffield.ac.uk
+356 79092111

Researcher's supervisor: Dr Heather L.W. Ellis
h.l.ellis@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix E - Participant Consent Form (Parents of Students)

Title of Project: From the *what* to the *how* of change.
How can the effectiveness of Catholic Schools in Malta be improved?

Name of Researcher: Jürgen Cucciardi

Participant Identification Number for this Project:

Please initial box

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 1st December 2018 for the above project and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my son's participation is voluntary and that he is free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.
3. I understand that my responses will be anonymised before analysis. I give permission to the researcher to have access to my son's anonymised responses.
4. I agree that my son takes part in the above research project.

Name of Parent *Date* *Signature*

Parent of: _____

Name of Researcher *Date* *Signature*

Signature (to be signed and dated in the presence of the participant)

Researcher: Jürgen Cucciardi
jcucciardi1@sheffield.ac.uk
+356 79092111

Researcher's supervisor: Dr Heather L.W. Ellis
h.l.ellis@sheffield.ac.uk

Appendix F – Questions: Interview with Headteachers

1. What do you understand by Catholic school effectiveness?
2. In your opinion, which aspects make your school distinctively Catholic?
3. How does the mission statement of your school express this distinctiveness?
4. Does the religious order who administers the school promote its charism? In what ways?
5. To what extent do you think that your school is effective?
6. What effects do you think your school has upon the spiritual, moral and social development of your pupils?
7. Do you think that this distinctiveness is weakening with the passing of time?
8. What, if any, do you think the challenges are of being distinctively Catholic in your school?
9. How do you respond to the challenges of being distinctively Catholic in your school?
10. What kind of support do you have?
11. Do your staff collaborate in building this effectiveness?
12. How do your students and parents rate their own experience of Catholic schooling?
Do they think it is good, bad, successful, unsuccessful?
13. In which areas do you think your school needs improvement?

Any other comments the headteacher would like to make.

Appendix G - Teachers' Questionnaire

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly
1. There are strong differences between a Catholic and non-Catholic school.					
2. The school provides for a strong liturgical and prayer life.					
3. A faith life and a spiritual dimension are encouraged in the school.					
4. The community aspect of school life is emphasised.					
5. Every student is looked after, even if he is not Catholic.					
6. The religious order that administers the school is present on the premises.					
7. The religious order that administers the school promotes its charism.					
8. The physical atmosphere of the school is appropriate for a Catholic school.					
9. The SMT promotes the school as Catholic.					
10. The School Development Plan provides for a Catholic Ethos action plan.					
11. Professional Staff Development sessions address the need for providing a Catholic ethos.					
12. Our school seems to be Catholic only from its outset.					
13. The mission statement of the school expresses the distinctiveness of our Catholic school.					
14. The mission statement of the school is lived daily.					

Appendix H - Parents' Questionnaire

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly
1. I sent my child to a Catholic school because of its Catholic ethos.					
2. I was educated at a Catholic school.					
3. I believe that a Catholic school makes a difference in the lives of the students.					
4. The school addresses the needs of all learners.					
5. I am satisfied with the way the school educates our children.					
6. The School Leadership Team has a clear vision and direction for the school ethos.					
7. The school supports learners in developing their full potential.					
8. The school encourages respect among all students and parents.					
9. The mission statement of the school is lived daily.					
10. I would recommend the school to other parents.					

Appendix I - Students' Questionnaire

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The school provides for every aspect of our well-being.					
2. The school provides us with a strong prayer and liturgical life.					
3. There exists a communitarian approach in the school.					
4. At school we learn how to respect others.					
5. Through its ethos the school makes a difference in our lives.					
6. We know each other at school.					
7. We have an effective pastoral care team at school.					
8. The mission statement of the school is lived daily.					
9. We have a space in the school where we can reflect and pray.					
10. I feel happy at school.					

Appendix J – Ethics Approval from the University of Sheffield



Downloaded: 10/09/2022
Approved: 06/08/2018

Jurgen Cucciardi
Registration number: 160137259
School of Education
Programme: EDU - EDUR33 PhD/ Education (Malta)

Dear Jurgen

PROJECT TITLE: From the what to the how of change. How can the effectiveness of Catholic schools in Malta be improved?
APPLICATION: Reference Number 022329

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 06/08/2018 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 022329 (form submission date: 14/07/2018); (expected project end date: 01/10/2020).
- Participant information sheet 1049685 version 1 (14/07/2018).
- Participant information sheet 1049684 version 1 (14/07/2018).
- Participant information sheet 1049683 version 1 (14/07/2018).
- Participant consent form 1049687 version 1 (14/07/2018).
- Participant consent form 1049686 version 1 (14/07/2018).

The following optional amendments were suggested:

Please address those comments in this review

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

ED6ETH Edu
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure>
 - The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.671066/file/GRIPPolicy.pdf
 - The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
 - The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
 - The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.
-

Appendix K – Approval from the Secretariat for Catholic Education (Malta)

Segretarjat għall-Edukazzjoni
Nisranija
16, Il-Mall, Furjana FRN 1472
Num. ta' Tel. 27790060
Num. Tal-Fax 27790078



Secretariat for Catholic Education,
16, The Mall, Floriana FRN 1472
Tel. No. 27790060
Fax No. 27790078

The Head
Archbishop's Seminary (Sr)
Sacred Heart Seminary
St Albert the Great College (Sr)
De La Salle College (Sr)
Stella Maris College (Sr)
St Augustine College (Sr)
St Michael School
St Aloysius College (Sr)
Savio College
St Paul's Missionary College (Sr)

20th November, 2018

Fr Jurgen Cucciardi, currently reading for a PhD at the University of Sheffield, requests permission to conduct interviews with the Heads of Schools. Furthermore, Fr Cucciardi will be distributing a questionnaire to all senior teachers, students and their parents at the above mentioned schools.

The Secretariat for Catholic Education finds no objection for Fr Jurgen Cucciardi, to carry out the stated exercises subject to adhering to the policies and directives of the schools concerned.


Rev Dr. Charles Mallia
Delegate for Catholic Education

Secretariat for Catholic Education, 16, The Mall, Floriana, FRN 1472. Tel: 27790060

E-mail: charles.mallia@maltadiocese.org

Appendix L – Table of Themes emerging from Interviews with Headteachers

1. What do you understand by Catholic school effectiveness?	2. In your opinion, which aspects make your school distinctively Catholic?	3. How does the mission statement of your school express this distinctiveness?	4. Does the religious order who administers the school promote its charism? In what ways?	5. To what extent do you think your school is effective?	6. What effects do you think your school has upon the spiritual, moral and social development of your pupils?	7. Do you think that this distinctiveness is weakening with the passing of time?	8. What, if any, do you think the challenges are of being distinctively Catholic in your school?	9. How do you respond to the challenges of being distinctively Catholic in your school?	10. What kind of support do you have?	11. Do your staff collaborate in building this distinctiveness?	12. How do your students and parents rate their own experience of Catholic schooling? Do they think it is good, bad, successful, unsuccessful?	13. In which areas do you think your school needs improvement?	14. Any other comments
Like Christ	Care and concern / attention of Christ towards poor and marginalised / reaching every student	Forming holistic persons, forming them Christ-like	Missionaries who work in the school and share their experiences	Not effective enough / we would like to be more effective	Spiritual formation given only in schools	Very often we are like other schools, but yet, people see something different in us	The Christian and Catholic ethos	Giving students an authentic experience of faith	From religious community, its witness x5	Yes, but not everyone is on board	Most would think positively of Catholic schooling	Seeing what activities are good for today's circumstances	Catholic schools offer a choice of different charisms
Message and values of the Gospel	Building community	Communitarian aspect / Building Community	Through the values of the founder, which are humility and meekness	Translating the charism in terms people can understand	Students pass through a moment of maturity as long as they are with us at school	Living the distinctiveness in a different way	Sense of building community	Being creative and responding creatively	From pastoral care team	With a struggle, not automatic	Very successful	Having more time for religious activities and seminars	Good results not only academic, but also an personal level (formation and character)
Experience of Christian values	School as a parish	Service to community / to others	School staff having formation in the charism of the founder and of the Order	We would not know how to start measuring the Catholic ethos	We are not doing enough on the spiritual level	Yes, because of the decadence of society and of the family	Having a number of parents for whom God and the Gospel mean nothing	Liturgical life	From families		I am afraid they rate it good because of doing well academically	Improving the spiritual side	Formation in values
Promoting a Catholic ethos	Dedication of members of staff	To produce good Catholic citizens	Through various activities beyond formal schooling	Difficult to evaluate effectiveness	Values, discipline, pastoral work are what attracts	When we live authentically, the distinctiveness brightens	Choosing Catholic schools because of discipline or because they fare academically better than other schools	Participating in voluntary work and social projects	Internally, from staff x6		When they rate school as successful it does not always mean that we have Catholic principles	Basic catechesis	Need to be on the alert not to become Ghetto schools where we reach a limited number of families

A marriage between Christian values and a good academic system	Gospel values and values of particular religious order	We care, we read and change the world, we see, fulfillment	Openness to make students taste different spiritualities	When we see a student on the journey of becoming a complete human being	We try to bear witness	If we do not adhere to Catholic values, then we are weak and not credible	Not being able of making sense with reasoning	Creating opportunities for spiritual development; providing the spaces for an encounter with Christ	From Secretariat for Catholic Education		Parents are still making the choice for a Catholic school	More formation for parents	Funding from Government (as per agreement) important so that we can still have human resources (e.g. Chaplains) which make us distinctive
Our ethos with a specific charism	Presence of religious community	Care and concern	Offering training and formation to various sectors	Good relationship between SMT, teachers, LSEs	Organise spiritual activities even after hours	Weakening because the energy and resources are being put in other places due to other demands	Some people interpret being Catholic in the cultural way	Employing people over and above to work in areas dear for us re care and concern	From the school structure			Finding better links between our Christian ethos and what we do	
Grow in life of faith	Making Christ visible in our actions, proclaiming Christ and bearing witness	Helping students to discern what God wants from them	We need to work more on this – promoting the charism and giving identity to the school	It depends on looking at effectiveness not generally in terms of percentages but individually	Students (past-pupils) who return to school after the end of secondary schooling	Need to prepare lay people with key roles in schools	Being afraid to explain questions students ask	Selection of personnel and formation programme for teachers in charism and distinctive pedagogy	Human resources			Finding more spaces for us to discuss and discern	
	Disposition of the heart	Love, care and excellence	Opportunities to meet students informally	We are becoming the parish for students – here they have the only spiritual input	Opportunity for students to grow in faith and values		Time	Continuous support	Chaplaincy team			Relationship with students of other faiths – identity and inclusion	
	Clear ethos of particular religious order			Care and concern	When Gospel values are transmitted during lessons, this is not enough		Training programmes for lay staff		From the Diocese			Being more innovative and open to new ideas	

