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Parents' primary school selection: The Irish context

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Parents' Primary School Selection: The Irish Context

By

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Abstract

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By Michelle Starr

Parent 'choice', the recommendation of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector Report (2012) as to how best to reshape the primary school system, via divestment, in order to reflect Irish society's increased diversity was sanctioned in 2012. The aim of divestment was to transfer the patronage of Catholic schools, the predominant form of patronage in the primary school system to a patron of parents' choice. Subsequent National Parent Surveys (2012; 2013) in 43 areas identified 28 areas nationally with sufficient demand for patronage change: the Educate Together (ET) patron was preferred in all but one area. To date, only three existing schools have been divested. Catholic schools are opposing divestment with claims that their parents are satisfied, while the Minister for Education in 2016 pointed to legal and social complexities since the foundation of the Irish State as reasons for the almost negligible divestment

This study returns to three of the national survey sites to explore parents' experiences of their school selection. It draws on one-to-one interviews with 28 parents from contrasting rural and city patronage school systems and inquires into how patronage and religion feature in their selection processes, employing the lens of Bourdieu's interrelated concepts of habitus, capital and field to analyse parents' decision-making experiences in relation to their local contexts. Moreover, it seeks to address the dearth of scholarship on parent choice in the Irish context by extending the work of international and national scholars on how class, ethnicity and religion shape school 'choice' while also providing insights into contemporary debates around school patronage policy reform in Ireland.

The thesis further demonstrates that the primary patronage school system is the taken-for granted structure within which all parents make their school selection. The patronage system legitimises patrons and religion and in turn shapes the parents' perceptions and strategies in their school selection in different ways in rural and city settings. The parents in the rural sites value community belonging, however, this is imbued with the family parish way of life which holds historical, Catholic, national cultural contexts and classifications that constitute classed and ethnic differentiations within and between schools. In contrast, the city location's primary school system, which is made up of different patron types, is characterised by competitive access to sought-after, hierarchically positioned schools. The perceptions of the participating parents in the study that the city's school system's competitive admission process necessitates social networking strategies were seen to be a function of admission criteria that legitimise classed, ethnic and religious differences to maintain schools' hierarchical position. While the taken-for-granted primary school patronage system legitimises a diversity of patrons, the historical rule that gives parents the right for their children to opt-out of religious classes reproduces the dominant Catholic culture within the system and local society. As such, the patronage school system offers parents the legitimacy through which they can segregate their children's schooling as this is locally dependent on the conferred social calls to order. The contribution of this study consists in the insights gained about the operation of the patronage school system by bringing to light the social and cultural dynamics within the processes by which parents select primary schools in a number of rural and city contexts in Ireland.

Declaration

I, Michelle Starr, certify that this thesis, which I now submit for assessment on the programme leading to the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been fully acknowledged and cited. This work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed: Michelle Starr

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List of Abbreviations

ATCS	Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools
CERD	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CNS	Community National School
CORI	Conference of Religious of Ireland
CPSMA	Catholic Primary School Management Association
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DSP	Dalkey School Project
ET	Educate Together
EU	European Union
IHRC	Irish Human Rights Commission
IHREC	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
IIE	Investment in Education
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
NPC	National Parents Council
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council

Introduction

The denominational primary school system in Ireland is at the centre of a contemporary struggle over how its patronage structure should be reshaped to meet the needs of a more diverse Irish society. Ireland is unique in that almost 90% of the schools in the primary system are under Catholic patronage, with the remaining schools under Protestant (5%), Jewish (0.1%), Muslim Faith (0.1%), multi-denominational (4.5%) and inter-denominational patronage (0.5%). Thus, the cultural context of the Irish primary school system's peculiarly religious character and lack of non-denominational schools is distinctive in its constitution in an international context. The 'Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector' was established in 2011 against a backdrop of increased diversity in Irish society from the 1990s and the associated challenges faced by schools (Coolahan et al. 2012). Over a decade of lobbying by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), parents, the Humanist Association, Atheist Ireland, the Educate Together (ET) patron and international organisations such as the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN), alongside international media headlines in 2007 about the discriminatory nature of the denominational system for mainly minority ethnic children (Higgins Ni Chinneide 2007), put pressure on the Irish government to reshape the primary patronage school system. The remit of the Forum's Advisory Group was to produce a report for the government with recommendations on how best to proceed with divesting patronage. This idea of divestment was not new, however, as it had been suggested by Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, who affirmed the diversification of types of schools in the education system as far back as 2007 (Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference 2007). The Forum Report recommended parent choice as the process for determining how the patronage system was to be reshaped through the divestment of Catholic patron schools to the patron of parental preference.

On foot of the Forum's recommendation, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn, initiated surveys of parental preferences (a pilot in 2012 was followed by a national survey in 2013) regarding school patrons in 43 identified areas nationally. These surveys showed parental demand for patronage change in 28 of the 43 referred areas, in 27 of which parents' patron of preference was the Educate Together multi-denominational patron, with a Gaelscoil (Irish-medium school) in the remaining location. The divesting process of removing schools from Catholic patronage to create a greater diversity of patron types in the primary school system and thus enhance parent choice has, however, been very slow. To date, only

two schools have divested to ET patronage: a former Christian Brothers primary school building in Basin Lane, Dublin 8; and a Church of Ireland school in Ballina, Co. Mayo (DES 2014), and one Catholic school has divested to a Community National School (CNS)[1] in Killarney, Co. Kerry (in 2017). The survey response was also low at 19% (Kitching 2013a), and Catholic schools' patron bodies claimed their parents did not want change (Walshe 2014). Thus, the issue of divestment and reshaping of the patronage system has taken on a local perspective. The lack of divestment since the 2013 National Parent Survey of Catholic schools to the ET patron of parents' preference was suggested in 2016 by the then Minister for Education, Jan O'Sullivan, to be related to the legal and social complexities that stemmed from the foundation of the Free State (DES 2016). The importance of these historical social complexities and the local perspective of patron bodies that claimed their parents did not want change are the reasons this thesis has returned to three of the survey sites to explore parents' experiences of selecting a primary school and understand what parents themselves are saying about their primary school decision-making. Furthermore, this study explores parents' interactions with patrons and religion in the context of the local school system on each of the study sites.

The increasingly diverse society of 'modern Ireland' was the identified reason for the reshaping of the primary school system with 'appropriate forms' of school patronage (Coolahan et al. 2012, p.3). Ireland experienced substantial immigration for the first time in its history from the early 1990s to 2008 (Smyth et al. 2009). Although Ireland experienced an economic downturn in 2008 which resulted in net outward migration up to 2014, this outward migration consisted of mainly Irish nationals (Healy 2015). By 2016, approximately 12% of the national population were minority ethnic, a figure that has remained relatively stable since 2007 (Central Statistics Office 2016; Smyth et al. 2009). Moreover, Ireland has experienced many socio-cultural changes since the 1990s: a more educated population; increased economic growth, albeit not equally distributed among society; an increase in those parts of the

[1] CNS's are multi-national schools under the patronage of the Education and Training Boards (ETB) (discussed in Chapter 1). In 2018, the Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton announced the Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process to deliver on the government's target of 400 multi-denominational schools by 2030 (DES 2018; 2022). This process prioritises the transfer of existing denominational primary schools to Community National Schools (DES 2022). The Reconfiguration process is operating in parallel with patronage divestment in the areas identified from the National Parent Surveys (2012 and 2013). Since September 2018 and up to March 2021, 11 primary schools (6 Catholic patronage, 2 Church of Ireland, 3 Steiner schools (whose patron body is Lifeways Ireland CLG) have reconfigured to a Community National School (DES 2022, p.29). As of March 2022, there is an agreement between the Department for Education and the Council for Education of the Irish Episcopal Conference (representing the Catholic patrons) to pilot the reconfiguration of school patron where there is no multi-denominational schools (ibid.). The pilot areas are: Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Arklow, Athlone, Dundalk and Youghal (ibid.).

population declaring themselves non-religious (almost 5% in 2006, 6% in 2011 and 10% in the 2016 CSO censuses); the decline of the Catholic Church because of revelations[2] of child and single mother abuse in institutions; and changes in public opinion on social issues that reflect more liberal perspectives (Fahey et al. 2007). The socio-political landscape has changed, with divorce positively legislated after the 1995 referendum, same-sex marriage after the 2015 referendum and abortion after the 2018 referendum. The moral authority of the Catholic Church that was once taken for granted is now questioned, resisted and challenged (Inglis 2014). However, the structure of the Irish primary school patronage system did not keep up with the socio-cultural and political changes in Irish society, and teachers and schools were challenged by the increase in religious and ethnic diversity in their classrooms.

The Department of Education only began to take account of Ireland's diversity from the mid-2000s, the theme of whose documents that were published to support schools was the ideal of an 'inclusive society' that incorporated the notion of respect (Fischer 2016, p.68). Although the Department of Education recognised the power relations between majority and minority groups in relation to the majority group's religious traditions and cultural practices (DES 2002; NCCA 2005), the dominant Catholic majority and religious culture was never critically examined in the intercultural guidelines in education (Kitching 2014). Instead, these published guidelines initially encouraged a respect for and tolerance of diversity, while the cultural context of Irish primary schooling[3] in relation to children of minority beliefs and no religion[4] was left uncritiqued (NCCA 2005). Hence, the inevitable tension between the largely denominational school system and the above mentioned changes in Irish society created issues for schools because of the increased religious and ethnic diversity of their student population.

The government's response in 2011 to the mismatch between a more diverse society and a predominantly denominational patronage primary school system was framed around rights, divestment and a diversity of patrons (Coolahan et al. 2012). Parent choice policy was sanctioned to determine the shape of patronage change through the divestment of existing Catholic patron schools (ibid.). Bowe et al. (1994, p.38) suggest parent choice is deployed as a 'political project that employs a "language of choice" in which rights, duties, responsibility

[2] See the Ryan and Murphy Report (2009) and the Cloyne Report (2011).
[3] The NCCA's published guidelines 'Intercultural Education in the Primary School' (2005) asked teachers to enquire into the religious belief of children and reflect upon the implications of their practices for class organisation and course content, e.g. in Physical Education (see Fischer 2016, p.87).
[4] The term 'no religion' in this study refers to individuals/groups who do not belong to any religious domination (CSO 2017).

and choice are all wielded together to encourage parents to become active choosers'. Research on parent choice consistently shows that it is the middle-classes who are the active choosers (Reay et al. 2007; Darmody & Smyth 2018; Kitching 2020). Moreover, choice is consistently shown to increase school segregation around class and ethnicity (Boterman 2020; Bonal & Bellei 2019; Byrne & De Tona 2019; Bunar & Ambrose 2016). School choice-making is locally contextual and influenced by class and ethnic interrelations between parents, their social world and the local school system (Bunar 2009; Bunar & Ambrose 2016; Byrne & De Tona 2019). This localised approach to parents' school selection was factored into the development of this study to capture the dual contexts of rural and city school systems.

There is little research data on parents' experiences of primary school selection in Ireland, to which this study contributes. Irish scholarly studies find religion, class and ethnicity to overlap in Irish schooling and parents' school selection (e.g. Devine 2005, 2011; Fischer 2016; Darmody & Smyth 2018; Kitching 2020). Smyth et al. (2010) discern that religion is a factor for parents of minority beliefs and no religion in seeking multi-denominational and minority faith schools, while many parents do not explicitly mention religion in their school selection. Darmody & Smyth (2018) suggest the predominantly Catholic patronage of the school system could mean that religion is more implicit. Class intersects with religion and ethnicity in the differences between the composition of the various patronage schools: DEIS Catholic urban schools have higher concentrations of working-class and ethnic minority families (Darmody et al. 2012) in comparison to the multi-denominational and minority faith schools whose populations are mainly the middle-classes (Darmody & Smyth 2018). Other than Kitching's (2014; 2020) studies, the cultural workings of Catholicism and ethno-nationalism are under-researched within the context of parents' experiences of primary school selection. Kitching's (2020) study interacts with the interplay of religion, class and ethnicity in parents' and children's accounts of childhood, religion and schooling to critically engage with plurality (religion, class, ethnicity and gender). A section of this large study explored Catholic ethno-national culture and its intersection with parents' primary school selection, finding that the patronage school system structure favours the majoritarian white Irish Catholic parent groups' choice, particularly the active middle-class parent choosers, while providing 'racialised, classed and gendered freedoms for few' (Kitching 2020, location no. 3118). Ethnic minorities and minority religion/no-religion parents are compelled to align with the Catholic religious culture of the majority of schools, and the work they put into attempting to integrate was never recognised (Kitching 2020).

My review of the literature found that Bourdieu's theoretical framework has been widely applied to research on school choice and has proved useful in exploring the dialectic relationship between parents' choice-making and the school system within which they make their decisions (e.g. Ball 2003; Reay 1998; Reay et al. 2011; James 2015; Byrne & De Tona 2019). Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of 'habitus', 'capital', 'field' and 'practice' are thinking tools to probe the nature of how choice is practised, the knowledge parents bring to their selection and how local socio-cultural relations and collective group identities influence these practices. Since habitus and field function relationally (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992), when parents interact with the primary school system, their habitus, i.e. their schemes of classifications and perceptions of the world built-up through experiences to identify the familiar, is brought into play in their school decision-making. Bourdieu's concepts have thus provided a lens to obtain insights into the workings of culture by assembling the various parts of parents' school choice-making decisions: In a sense that reflect both social and local school system forces drawn on in parents narratives of how they represent themselves in relation to others, as well as their values and interests concerning their children's schooling. Bourdieu's attention to the patterning of shared ways of thinking and saying and how individuals perceive themselves against others have furnished an understanding of the dynamics of discourses around class and ethnic differences. By addressing how ways of knowing are generated, organised and unified, insights into the economic, social and cultural conditions that make actions possible within local contexts have been illuminated.

Religion prescribes particular values and has its own regulative norms which both (re)produce and are (re)produced by the process of religious rituals (Rey 2007). Pertinent to this study is how religious rituals can be embodied and shared at a level beneath awareness as the existential condition and ground of culture that is inscribed in the individual and group (Rey 2007). Bourdieu's emphasis on the analysis of power, i.e. the cultural forces that work to form parents' perceptions and decision-making in the field of the school system, focused my own analysis on the development of a cultural approach towards group classifications and their process of representation and reproduction (Swartz 1997). Cultural capital can be embodied as a disposition in regard to ways of knowing how to act, talk, behave etc. and therefore functions 'below the level of consciousness and language' and goes by unconsciously in everyday practices and social interactions (Bourdieu 1984a, p.466 cited in Swartz 1997, p.109). Schools and education in general (re)produce cultural capital, not only for the purpose of gaining educational qualifications, but schools are also where the acquisition

of what is perceived as the right dispositions and social relations are developed (Byrne & De Tona 2019). Cultural and social capital are also what make individuals feel at ease within their social stratum habitus (ibid.). Bourdieu's concepts helped me to illuminate how parents' habitus shaped their orientations towards specific class, ethnic and religious interests for their children in their school selection-making.

The research gap that this study fills concerns the dynamics of local socio-cultural relations between parents and the school system in their school selection. The purpose of the study is to explore parents' voices concerning their school selections and to produce in-depth accounts of their experiences in this domain to give insights into the nuances of family life locally that influence parents' decision-making. The central question guiding this research is: *What are parents' experiences of decision-making and selection of their children's primary school in Ireland?* In addressing this overall question, a sub-question helped to focus this inquiry: *How do parents negotiate their school selection process and children's schooling with regard to patronage and religion?* This study aims to provide understandings of parents' decision-making and gain insights into how patron and religion in the context of the different local school systems influence their school selection. The sites in this study are rural and city and were purposefully selected for their contrasting school systems in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how the participant parents navigated different systems. The two rural sites' school systems are predominantly Catholic, with one small Protestant school on each site, while in the city location there are six different patron types: seven Catholic patron schools, three of which are Gaelscoils and one of whose English-medium schools is private; five Protestant patronage schools, comprising three different faith patrons, of which one is private; one multi-denominational school; and one non-Christian religion school. This study finds that parents' decision-making regarding their children's schools is differently experienced because it is mediated through local socio-cultural and historical understandings pertinent to schooling and local family life.

This thesis is organised into eight chapters. Chapter 1 explores the historical dynamics between education, politics, religion, society and culture in shaping the primary school patronage system we have today. I argue that the historical minority/majority binary around religion in Ireland was not only intertwined with the transformation of the national school system into a denominational one by the end of the 19th century but was also intervolved with Ireland's national identity-building over four decades post the Irish Free State (1922) to constitute the patronage primary school system that is normative in contemporary Irish family

life. I further suggest that the politics of religious difference remain within a framework of contemporary primary education policy; however, socio-cultural factors (such as class, nationalism (the interrelations between Catholicism, Irish language, GAA and the parochial system) and diversity) also contribute to shaping schooling in Ireland.

Chapter 2 explores the emergence of school choice discourses in education policy internationally to give insights into its complex web of educational and economic outcomes. The concept of choice enabled the emergence of various organisational players in the market who have benefited exponentially in maintaining their importance in education and world economic affairs. I explore the international literature and the body of Irish research on school choice to identify those questions that inform this study and its contribution to the literature.

Chapter 3 outlines and discusses a number of key theoretical concepts related to culture, embodiment, doxa, positioning and position-taking, all of which are framed within Bourdieu's theoretical thinking tools of 'practice, 'field', 'habitus' and 'capital'. Bourdieu's conceptual framework further informs the findings in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach used in this study, beginning with its ontological and epistemological foundations. Methodologically, my focus on parents' experiences necessitated a qualitative approach as I needed data that would allow me to examine and understand how the different sites and their local school systems were mediated in and influenced parents' school decision-making. The approaches taken, methods used and decisions made are placed within the study's epistemological and theoretical frame. This chapter also details the ethical procedures undertaken, the research design and the methods deployed, detailing the study sites, sampling procedure and data analysis. Finally, I situate myself within the context of the study to reflect on my position as the researcher analysing and interpreting the interview data.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 outline and discuss the parents' accounts of their school selection experiences, which are the central focus of this study. The parents' distinctive selection processes in conjunction with the rural and city sites are discussed separately to illustrate how the local contexts shaped their decision-making differently. Focusing on the rural sites, Chapter 5 outlines the workings of community in informing the parents' school selection and describes how the parish system of school, Church and GAA are intertwined in the parents' decision-making. Chapter 6 focuses on the competitive city primary school system that produces parental anxieties, illustrating how parents draw on past experiences and accumulated capital as a way to navigate their choice and position themselves in the admission

process. Chapter 7 investigates parents' interactions with patron and religion and describes how the primary school patronage structure impacts their approaches to their school decision-making processes. It argues that the interrelations between Catholic cultural heritage and the primary school patronage structure provide various opportunities for Catholic parents to produce classed and ethnic segregation.

Finally, Chapter 8 presents a discussion of the overall findings and argues that the symbolic power of the patronage system's religious culture lies in its capacity to legitimate social arrangements by engaging parents to continuously position themselves within local school systems.

Chapter 1

Irish society and primary schooling: past and present

This chapter traces the historical backdrop of and outlines the contemporary socio-political and cultural contexts in which this study took place and is guided by the question: What is the socio-political and cultural context in which this study is situated? To answer this question, the chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is an overview of the historical, socio-political and cultural forces that constructed the primary school patronage system we know today, focusing on the interrelations between religion, society, politics and schooling from the early 1700s to the 1920s. It demonstrates that social, economic and cultural politics in Ireland have historically been intertwined with religious concepts that influenced educational and school structure formations. It argues that the historical construct of the minority/majority binary around religion in Ireland is inseparable from the construction of the primary school patronage system and the social ordering of society.

The second section explores the lead-up to the need for change to the schools' patronage structure and how discourses of parent choice were shaped in the Forum Report (2012) as the policy solution. First, it outlines the key social, cultural and economic changes in Ireland from the foundation of the Free State (1922) to the late 1950s, when education gradually began to shift from the top-down system to the multi-patronage, bottom-up system it has continued to use in recent decades. Next, contemporary changes in society from the 1990s are discussed around the politics of reshaping the patronage school system. This section further outlines the policy-making negotiations around pluralism, diversity and the interplay between the minority/majority binary around religion for the common good to illustrate the interwoven relations between state, Church and society (nation) and suggests that the principal driver behind primary education policy remains the politics of religious difference. I argue here that socio-cultural factors make the predominant contributions to the shaping of contemporary schooling in Ireland.

The formation of the Irish primary school system patronage structure

This section traces key moments from the 1700s to 1920 involving education, politics, religiosity and society. It argues that the Catholic majority that legitimised Church-state

relations in Irish education has been built upon a socialising process within which the denominational national school system was central.

The eighteenth century is a key starting point for political educational developments and social change in Ireland. The century opened with the implementation of the penal statutes[5] imposed on the religious majority by a religious minority (Akenson 1970). The Penal Laws supported the Protestant Ascendency (Anglo-Irish landowners, Anglican clerics and the governing class) to sustain its social, economic and political power, and its view that Ireland was a Protestant nation. The minority landowning Irish Protestant elite held power and status rather than the majority, who were mainly Irish Catholic peasantry.

The social and political interest in both manipulating and moralising about the large Catholic peasantry focused attention on educational affairs (Inglis 1987; Akenson 1970). Intervention in education was centred on religious interests to inculcate 'habits of industry and true godliness' into lower-class children (Milne 1974, p.8). However, the large Catholic population favoured the hedge schools because they were affiliated with Catholic religious teaching (Akenson 1970). Historians and sociologists have attributed this popularity to the maintenance of the common descent of this population (Akenson 1970; McManus 2014). Indeed, Inglis (1998, p.105) contends that the Penal Laws forged an alliance between the Catholic population and schooling as a means of preserving the former's culture and Irish identity. The Catholic Church advocated the hedge schools, as it needed their services to sustain Catholicism itself[6] (McManus 2014). Schooling in the hedge schools thus attained an importance for Irish Catholics in preserving their identity by means of resistance to the proselytising efforts of the charter schools established since the early 1700s (Atkinson 1970). In particular, the Catholic population's affinity for education was a significant factor in the setting-up of the national system, as will be discussed later.

Influenced by the political ideals of rights, liberty and nationalism emanating from the American and French Revolutions, the Catholic situation improved politically for different but converging reasons (Foster 1988). Power in the minority/majority binary shifted towards the majority Catholic population. Government fears of the peasant Catholic population rebelling

[5] Historians have proposed various purposes for the implementation of the penal codes: their destruction of the Catholic religion (Akenson 1988); the alleviation of the British Government's fear of its authority being undermined (Bartlett 1990 in Power & Whelan 1990); and the elimination of Catholics' property rights/ownership (Wall 1961 cited in Connolly 1983).

[6] Catholic education was banned and, additionally, there were not enough priests to serve the Irish population, which increased by 80% between 1730 and 1800 (McManus 2014).

brought about the Repeal Acts[7] to appease the peasantry (Atkinson 1973). However, this legislation did little to relieve the plight of the poor, in defence of whose impoverished situation secret societies[8] agitated against rent-racking, insecurity and tithes[9] (ibid.). Urging law and order, the Catholic hierarchy publicly denounced these societies and as a consequence initiated an alliance between them and the state to control the masses (Inglis 1987). From the early 1800s, this alliance was strengthened against hedge schools, which they viewed as mediums of revolutionary education (O'Riordan 1983, p.52). In this way, the Catholic Church gained political power in social affairs for the first time in Ireland by aligning with colonial powers in the suppression of agrarian resistance.

The Evangelical reformation of Bible Societies that spread across Ireland from 1791 was a contentious political issue for the Catholic Church. The various Bible Societies under Protestant clergymen were schooling the poor with government funding,[10] and the Catholic Church sought the same arrangement (Akenson 1970). Catholic religious order[11] schools were also increasing in number around this period (Dukelow & Considine 2009). Tensions increased between the Catholic hierarchy and the state over the funding of Catholic order schools, and the Church hierarchy joined the Catholic Association, a popular mass movement that politically agitated for Catholic issues (Fleming & Harford 2016; Akenson 1970). Together, they became a force in petitioning for Catholic schools' funding (ibid.). The political issue of Government grants for Catholic schools instigated a response to Catholic demands with the 1824 Investigation Commission in regard to Irish education (Akenson 1970). This brought about the emergence of Catholic opinion within an educational consensus[12] (ibid.). Once again, the numerical superiority of the Catholic population which threatened 'the safety

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[7] The Repeal Acts granted the right of Catholics to hold longer leases (1778) and purchase land, incorporating recognition of the Catholic Church (1782). From 1792–3, Catholics could vote and hold most civil and military offices.

[8] Secret societies, which were mainly agrarian and non-sectarian, fought against tithes and injustices over land speculation and evictions (Connolly 1982 cited in Inglis 1987).

[9] A tithe was a payment made to local landlords and clergy, whose rate was determined by acreage of land and produce and varied from place to place (Bric 1986).

[10] The Bible Societies received educational funding after the Act of Union in 1801 to support the civilising process of the Irish peasant masses (Akenson 1970).The Act of Union was the political union of Great Britain (England and Scotland) and Ireland under the name of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, which resulted in Ireland being ruled directly from Westminster. The aim of the Union was to offer reassurance to Irish Protestants, who were the minority in an Ireland where political rights were now extended to the Catholic majority, by granting them allegiance to an overwhelmingly Protestant British population (Hill 2001).

[11] The Ursulines, Presentation Sisters and Christian Brothers (Lyons 2014).

[12] Consensus was a major mode of decision-making in relation to educational issues in the Irish parliament after the Catholic Relief Acts in the late 1700s because Protestants had never held a majority in Ireland. Thus, rather than deploying an authoritarian approach as before, the Catholic Church was represented in negotiations by their middle-class members and associations in parliament, and only in the early 1800s did the Catholic hierarchy achieve direct inclusion (Akenson 1970).

of the state' caused a shift of influence in educational issues in favour of the Catholic Church (Akenson 1970, p.107). The Catholic hierarchy favoured the non-denominational system of state-provided education proposed by the Chief Secretary for Ireland, Lord Stanley (Akenson 1970, pp.134–136). The following section examines the politicising role of the Churches in the newly established national school system (1831) through the nineteenth century.

The national school system's transformation up to the Irish Free State (1922)

The national school system established in 1831 was an non-denominational religious partnership applied to schools' patronage to ensure their religious mix. A struggle between the Protestant and Catholic Churches over the religion of schools ensued over the first four decades after its foundation. Catholic legitimacy in the school system was a point of agitation for the Anglican and Presbyterian Churches. The Church of Ireland felt it was their ecclesiastical right to control education and refused to join the national school system until 1869 (Akenson 1970; Fleming & Harford 2016). While the Presbyterians did join, they disagreed with the rules[13] that banned the promotion of Bible study in schools (Akenson 1970). However, the education commissioners granted them non-vested[14] distinction in 1840 for fear that they would leave the system, as this would have meant its collapse since the Anglican Church had not joined (ibid.). Non-vested distinction meant there was only Presbyterian religious instruction in Presbyterian schools, as long as the Presbyterian schools allowed parents to withdraw children from religious instruction. Hence, this opened the door for 'denominational schools with a conscience clause' (ibid., p.201).

The Anglican Church clergy established its own elementary school system, the Church Education Society, with funding by diocesan and private benefactors (Coolahan 1983). However, it experienced a funding crisis after the Church was disestablished in 1869 and negotiated conditions to join the national system (ibid.). Again, the focus turned to the rules governing religious teaching. The exclusion rule was a thorn in the side of the Church of Ireland because it was a safeguard against proselytising (ibid.). In vested schools, the exclusion rule laid responsibility on the school to obtain permission from parents for their children to partake in religious instruction, which was removed for vested schools, and so the Anglican

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[13] These rules specified that (1) separate religious education be provided on a set day each week using books permitted only by the commissioners and (2) responsibility be devolved to the school to seek permission from parents for their children's inclusion in religious instruction (Akenson 1970).

[14] Non-vested categorisation was a distinction agreed by Lord Stanley in 1832 to enable Catholic religious order schools to join the national school system (Akenson 1970; Coolahan 1983).

Church officially joined the system in 1869 (Akenson 1970). However, the consequence of joining the system 38 years after its establishment meant that, by this stage, the national system was primarily Catholic due to its population's majority. The national school system being essentially left to the Catholics meant that the established Church of Ireland lost its access to educational and social control in Ireland. Furthermore, the consequence of the removal of the exclusion rule almost obliterated religious mixing in schools (ibid.).

The Catholic Church joined the national school system from the outset, because it was the first time it had received state funding in education. This empowered it to educate the rural[15] poor, who mainly attended the hedge schools (ibid.). Catholic clergy applied in large numbers for national school buildings to take over the local hedge schools (Fernández-Suárez 2006). The increasing number of religious order (convent and monastic) schools established from the late 1700s catered for town children, as they were mainly located in urban areas. The convent schools joined the national school system as non-vested schools, while the Christian Brothers did not join until the 1890s, when they were granted full denominational status (Akenson 1970). Archbishop Cullen entered educational debates from the 1850s, demanding changes to the system's rules and opposing mixed education (ibid.). The Catholic Church's priority turned to the vesting of schools, and in 1866 the commissioners capitulated, allowing the vesting title[16] to be transferred to local trustees,[17] namely the established Churches, on the condition that they repay all funding received (Akenson 1970). This condition was ultimately discarded after much protest by all Church representatives and resulted in the Churches holding the title of their national schools (ibid.).

By 1860, the national school system was in effect a Catholic denominational system due to the majority of the population being Catholic, the Anglican Church having refused to join and the Presbyterians focusing on their own non-vested schools (Akenson 1970, pp.212–213). The national school system also 'reflected community sentiments' and animosity

[15] According to Newby (1980), although an acceptable sociological definition of 'rural' is futile, the term is used in this study as a geographical expression to indicates those regions outside city and high populated urban locations (cited in Hillyard 2007).

[16] Legal ownership of a school property.

[17] '[The term] Trustee was usually used in legal sections of the code: the Commissioners spoke of the title of the schools being vested in trustees […] Trustees usually turned out to be a landlord or clergyman who brought the school into being' (Akenson 1970, pp.165–166). The patron of the schools and the trustee was typically one and the same person. The patronage of almost all Roman Catholic and Protestant schools were transferred to the bishop of their diocese after the death of the original patron while the local priest or vicar usually served as manager of their school. It was the prerogative of the patron to appoint the school manager and teachers, and he oversaw the general functioning of the school and maintained all dealings with the commissioners and their representatives. However, the vicar or member of the clergy could also act as the school patron representative and recommend himself as manager (Akenson 1970, pp.165–166).

between Catholics and Protestants (Lee 1973, p.28). Furthermore, the removal of schools' responsibility to obtain parents' consent for their children to attend religious instruction and subsequent introduction of the opt-out clause enabled the Churches to restrict religious education to their own religion in their own schools (Akenson 1970). This reduced the mixing of children of different faiths in schools and further guaranteed Catholic exclusivity as the majority in the system (Akenson (1970). By 1860, 84% of school-going children in the system were Catholic (Atkinson 1973 p.99). Of the 5,632 schools in operation, 72% were non-vested schools that tended to attract only children of a single denomination (Akenson 1970, p.231). In 1869, Cardinal Cullen wrote that 'In the greater part of the country the schools are in the hands of the Catholics, under Catholic managers, under Catholic teachers and conducted in such a way that they cannot do much positive evil' (cited in Inglis 1987, p.157). Hence, the Catholic Church now 'controlled the civil and moral education of Irish Catholics' (ibid., p.157).

Social organisation

Despite the penal codes, the small middle-class Catholic population grew[18] throughout the 18th century (Cullen 1990; Dickson 1990; Wall 1958) and formed the mainstay of the Church, providing it with money and priests (Inglis 1987). The Great Famine (1845–1850) had the greatest impact on transforming the classed structure of Catholics nationally[19] (Lee 1973). The labourer and cottier class was reduced by 40% and small tenancy farmers (holding less than 15 acres) by 20% (ibid.). At the other end of the classed spectrum, the number of the Protestant landed class declined due to bankruptcy (Foster 1988). At the centre of the class spectrum, a farming middle-class of larger tenancy farmers (over 15 acres) increased from 18% to 51% (Inglis 1987). Scholars agree that the vast majority of larger farmers were Catholic simply because the ratio of Catholics and Protestants was approximately 80:20 (Larkin 1975; Inglis 1987; Lee 1973). The rural class balance swung towards the Catholic farming lower-middle-classes, who had the ability to acquire more land, a trend that continued for the rest of the

[18] The Irish Protestant elite, considering itself gentry, held merchandising and trading in contempt and thus created opportunities for Catholics to move into this commercial sector (Cullen 1990; Wall 1958). Furthermore, a small class of substantial Catholic tenant farmers comprised one seventh of the total agricultural force (Inglis 1987, p.193). The Catholic middle-class grew in wealth and numbers after the enactment of the Relief Acts and Catholic Emancipation in 1829, which granted long leases and property rights that enabled Catholic expansion in trade, landownership and tenancy (Wall 1958; Inglis 1987; Akenson 1970).

[19] Although the Irish population was declining well before the Famine, it eliminated or displaced up to two million people through death or emigration, and the population was reduced by 19% between 1841 and 1851 (Lee 1973).

century (Lee 1973; Foster 1988). This social change shifted power from the upper- to middle-classes and from Protestants to Catholics because of the growth of farmers who had qualified to vote when their valuations exceeded the 'twelve-pounds-and-over'[20] limit (Foster 1988 pp.343–4). During the same period, an urban Catholic middle-class was rising to the upper rungs of society as a consequence of educating its children into the professions[21] (Lee 1973). By the beginning of the 20th century, the classed structure in Ireland consisted of labourers; lower-tenancy farmers and small shopkeepers; middling-tenancy larger farmers and large shopkeepers, businesses and merchants; and upper-professionals and large industrialists (Inglis 1987). I now turn to the parish system, which began to be constructed in earnest from the mid-1800s, and to its effects on Catholic socialisation.

Parochial pastoral system of socialisation

During the 1700s, the small but increasing Catholic urban bourgeoisie gained legitimate social status through its affiliation with Church morality and civility (Inglis 1987). Christian civility and morality was embedded in Maynooth Seminary's[22] training and became a symbol of status and piety for priests in society (ibid.). This became the 'social model[23] for the tenant farmers of the nineteenth century' (ibid., p.116). Maynooth Seminary's growth in clergy numbers was supported by the new middle-class Catholic tenant farmers who saw a priest in the family as prestigious, if only available to those who could afford it (Inglis 1987). The construction of pastoral parishes was supported by the increased numbers of priests, the decrease in population, changed social class demographics and the building of Catholic churches[24] (Inglis 1987; O'Carroll 2011). The structuring of the parish parochial system was led by Archbishop Cullen from the 1850s, who later became the first Irish Cardinal in 1866 and whose objective was to inculcate Catholicism in all aspects of Irish society. Crucial to his pastoral plan was the

[20] The 1850 Franchise Act overhauled the registration system of the electorate based on systematic Poor Law valuations of 'twelve-pounds-and-over' in the counties and 'eight-pounds-and-over' in the boroughs. This excluded many of the poor and marginal from voting, whereas prosperous farmers were sure of inclusion (Foster 1988).
[21] The number of Catholics who entered law and medicine increased by almost 50% during the second half of the 1800s (Lee 1973).
[22] Maynooth Seminary was founded in 1795 with state funding to stop priests returning from their training in France with rebellious ideals (Inglis 1987).
[23] The Victorian model of behaviour and self-control was the 'modern civilising process' practised across Europe and the Western world from the 16th century to distinguish the upper-classes and was subsequently replicated by those seeking middle-class status (Inglis 1987, p.132). The notion of 'civilisation came into Ireland on the back of Catholic morality' via France, where morality was implicit in education and was brought back by the numerous priests and orders who trained and originated there (see Inglis 1987, p.135).
[24] After the Catholic Relief Acts, the construction of churches increased from 1800, with 1,805 churches built in the period up to 1863 (Inglis 1987).

role of primary school education at parish level (O'Carroll 2011, p.124). Parish catechetics became *de rigeur* in the local national school, with weekly visits by the clergy providing a deepening of the Catholic faith at parish level (ibid.). In this way, national schools gradually became embedded in the local parochial systems alongside the Catholic Church.

The growing farming middle-classes were receptive to Catholicism as it conferred social respectability and legitimate social status (Whelan 1998). According to Lee (1973), Catholicism 'merely reflected the dominant economic values of post-famine rural society' (ibid., p.5), who claims 'a very intense "this worldly" concern with social status characterised Catholic society' in Ireland (ibid., p.16). Farming families were receptive to Catholic socialisation because its distinctive values in regard to family and fertility ended the subdivision of land and maintained their holdings and social status (Inglis 1987). Delayed marriages until the inheritance of land, marrying only within one's social stratum, the match/dowry system, enforced celibacy and clerical authoritarianism were all features of rural life (Inglis 1987). A natural symbiosis between the moral teachings of the Church and the economic interests of the farmer followed. Schooling played an important role to instil morality and put the family at the centre of a Catholic moral society (ibid.). According to Inglis (1987), the school became 'the essence of mass civilisation' that brought the family under a system of rules and regulations (ibid., pp.159–160). The parish parochial system became the focus for socialising the Catholic family into a strong religious, practical and moral order that continued into the 20th century (Inglis 1987).

Schooling as mirror of social order

By the mid-1850s, there were two distinct schooling types: the national system's schools, which focused on civil and moral education of the masses; and privately funded endowed[25] schools, which provided a classical[26] education for the middle- and upper-middle-classes (Titley 1983). A number of the urban Catholic middle-classes sent their children either to convent or monastic national schools, to Model schools, which were fee-paying, or to an

[25] Endowed schools were usually of Protestant denomination and financially supported by private estates, benefactors and Parliamentary grants (Titley 1983). They included Royal, Grammar, Erasmus Smith and private foundation schools (McCormack 2014). There were also fee-paying Catholic schools which did not receive Parliamentary grants, e.g. Kilkenny College, Carlow College and Clongowes (founded in 1814), which at this period admitted boys at seven years of age (Titley 1983).

[26] That is to say, including Latin or Greek as a prerequisite for university. Humanities, rhetoric and philosophy were also part of the curriculum, while logic, geometry and algebra were included with mathematical studies (Titley 1983).

endowed grammar school (ibid.; Ridden 2007). The Model schools[27] were a haven for lower-middle-class Catholics,[28] which was a source of contention for the Catholic hierarchy in the 1850s because they were inter-denominational and outside its control (Coldrey 1990). Indeed, Archbishop Cullen banned Catholics from attending them, on pain of excommunication (ibid.). According to Doyle (2011, p.197), the logic was that parental rights for Catholics meant that parents adhered to their children having a Catholic education or else faced public humiliation by excommunication. It was not until the Intermediate Act (1878), which granted funding based on results to all existing endowed Protestant and Catholic order schools, that a middle-class school system structure was formulated (ibid.). The Act stimulated affordable access to schooling for more families (ibid.). The endowed classical education approach that had once been accessible only to Protestants expanded to more of the Catholic middle-classes.[29] All of the Churches were of the firm belief in a classed and hierarchical school system. In 1869, Archbishop Cullen held the view that not only should there be different schools for different denominations but 'each class ought to be educated for the sphere of life in which they have to move' (Doyle 2011, p.196). Accessing schooling beyond primary level was still an obstacle for those in poverty and was harder for rural families because secondary schools were located mainly in towns or were boarding schools (Lee 1973). Tensions surrounding class, religion and the 'urban/rural divide' were therefore exposed (McCormack 2014, p.33). Nonetheless, the expansion of secondary education benefited and improved the position of middle- and lower-middle-class farming Catholics (Lee 1973). According to Cullen (1990, p.71), it was these groups that were 'the real patrons of education in Ireland', because educating sons and daughters was necessary to ensure a family's upward mobility. In this way, the education system reflected the demands of growing Catholic middle-class Irish society in the second half of the 19th century.

By the beginning of the 20th century, the education system aligned children's schooling to their social class. The national school system catered for basic education, at which point the poor finished their education; secondary (non-exclusive, fee-paying) schools catered for the middle-classes, while the few exclusive, fee-paying secondary schools catered for the

[27] Established in 1849, the Model schools were located throughout the country for practical teacher training (in conjunction with the central Model school for training on Marlborough Street, Dublin), with up to 100 elementary students in attendance at each (Coldrey 1990).
[28] Up to one third of students attending Model schools were Catholic and the remainder Protestant (Coldrey 1990).
[29] As a consequence of the Intermediate Act, the number of Catholics receiving intermediate education increased from 12,064 in 1881 to 31,742 in 1911 (Titley 1983, p.23).

professionals and gentry class (Akenson 1975). Technical schools, free of Church supervision, were established in 1898 and mainly served the lower classes (Titley 1983). Religious, political and social power structures determined a hierarchical school system that reflected the social ordering of society. The next section discusses the intersection of cultural nationalism and the parochial system to set the scene for the pro-Free State national school system.

Cultural nationalism and the parochial system

The end of the 19th century saw a cultural nationalist movement that strengthened the alliance of a Catholic Irish national identity that would later become a political social project (Fahey 1992). Cultural nationalists 'reinvented Irish traditions, language, and identity – Irish and Catholic' (Penet 2008, p.144). Catholicism was employed for the cause of Irish nationalism, and the Church was a willing participant in directing the movement (White 2010). Nationalism was driven by the growing middle-classes, who gained prominence in the civil service[30] and were discontented that their progression to higher levels was restricted to Protestants to safeguard the loyalty of the British administration (Hutchinson 1987). Educated Catholics were critical of a state that refused them the central role in public life to which they believed their qualifications entitled them (ibid.). Consequently, they allied themselves with the Gaelic League, founded in 1893, and the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), founded in 1884, to locate themselves, as a rising, educated stratum, as community leaders and gain legitimation as a social group (ibid.). Together, the Gaelic League, GAA, Catholic Church and joining Catholics promoted traditional games, language and culture that reflected Ireland's Celtic past (McElligott 2016). The location of GAA clubs within parish boundaries rooted the games and a sense of parish belonging in the parochial system (Cronin et al. 2009). The Catholic Church[31] was pivotal to the GAA's growth by popularising the games at a local level in a way that led to the eventual formulation of a 'one parish, one team' rule (Whelan 1983, p.10; Cronin et al. 2009). The GAA was brought into the school system by Gaelic game contests between national schools (Hutchinson 1987). The territoriality of the parish was strengthened through GAA competitions and became intrinsic to the parish system as a social unit (Whelan 1983). During the same period, calls for the Irish language to be made a compulsory subject at

[30] This was due to the combination of it being opened to competitive entry from 1855 and the expansion of affordable Catholic secondary education after the Intermediate Act (1878) (Hutchinson 1987).
[31] The Church's close links to the GAA were evident through such practices as bishops being granted the honour of throwing in the ball on All-Ireland Sundays (Cronin et al. 2009).

matriculation went up from political activists[32] and resulted in the University Act of 1908,[33] which gave the Catholic Church more power in third-level education (Walsh 2014). The Irish barrier to entry for professional academic courses and subsequently public service jobs advantaged the educated Catholic middle-classes, members of the cultural nationalist movement who were disgruntled because of the barriers placed on their professional progress.

Having examined the historical socio-political and cultural forces that shaped the primary school patronage system and how these were intertwined with religion, class and nationalism in establishing the social ordering of society and the parochial system in cultural socialisation, I now turn to the period after the foundation of the Free State (1922) to gain an understanding of how the national school patronage structure became even more strongly embedded in parish life for Irish Catholic families.

The 20th century school system, society and religiosity

This section examines the relations between society, religiosity and schooling alongside the politics of nationalism in education from the foundation of the Irish Free State (1922) to contemporary calls for change in primary schooling in the 2000s and the establishment of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector (2012).

The establishment of the Irish Free State consolidated the Catholic Church's position in Irish society. The new state's alliance with the Church in social affairs reinforced its legitimation and cohesion[34] (Akenson 1975; Fuller 2005; Nic Ghiolla Phadraig 1986; Keogh 2005; Larkin 1975). The principles of Catholic social policy as expressed in Papal Encyclicals[35] were reflected in the Constitution in relation to property rights, the family and

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[32] For example, Pearse, MacNeill, Gaelic League members and the Catholic Church (Walsh 2014).

[33] The University Act (1908) created a new university college in Dublin, officially non-denominational but with a predominantly Catholic teaching body, that was linked with the Queen's Colleges in Cork and Galway as part of the National University, leaving Trinity College to its English inheritance (Lee 1973).

[34] The Catholic majority (93%) was deeply affiliated with the Church while politicians themselves had a high level of religious devotion, having received a Catholic education. State-church relations helped relieve governmental expenditures (the driving concern of the state), and the Catholic Church supported the new state, condemned any opposition and thus was seen as the means through which social order could be organised and maintained (Akenson 1975).

[35] Pope Leo XIII's *Encyclical Rerum Novarum* (1891) was the first Catholic social teaching to be based on the dignity of the human being and the premise that the sum of social conditions is the common good which allows individuals/groups to reach their fulfilment more fully. A further principle was that of subsidiarity, which returned the power of decision-making to families, local councils, schools and parishes etc. Further Encyclicals included Pope Pius XI's *Divinii Illius Magistri* (1929), which, addressing itself to the centrality of Christian education for young people and the right of the Catholic Church to be involved in education and schools using a rights-based argument informed by Natural Law principles, argued for the inalienable right of parents to educate their children in a religion of their choice and that the state recognise the rights of the Church in education and

the rights of parents in the education of Catholic children. In the last case, parents were obliged to direct the task of their children's education to the Church, as to do otherwise would risk community disapproval (O'Connor 1986; Doyle 2011). A symbiotic relationship between Church and state was thus formally established and 'provided the foundation for the conservative society that prevailed from 1922' (Breen et al. 1990, p.101). Indeed, '1922 to 1966' has been described as a 'triumphalist' period for the Catholic Church in education in Ireland (O'Donoghue & Harford 2011, p.323).

Church, state and culture

Gaelic nationalism, constituted as a reaction to the historical dominance of the British, was subsumed in the Free State's education policy according to the ideology of reviving Irish heritage, identity and language (Akenson 1975). 'Revival' rhetoric was exploited to emotionally attach the patriotic Irish to their own native language on the basis that the British had suppressed the Irish language (Akenson 1975), though in reality, by the beginning of the 19th century, the English language was the preferred tongue of the people due to its economic benefits for emigration and work[36] (Ó'Riagáin 1997). The primary school system became an instrument for political and nationalistic ends, making the nation state secure (Akenson 1975). The effects of Irish Gaelic Catholic nationalism on the Protestant community meant the latter were tolerated as a religious minority (ibid.). Protestant religious minority rights were affirmed in the principles of denominational education, with special rules[37] allowing their schools to operate with small student numbers, but the Protestant culture, which was English, was not recognised, whose community objected to Irish being a compulsory subject on the curriculum (ibid.). While the INTO teachers' union objected to the dominance of the Irish language during the school day, however, Catholic parents did not on the basis that it formed part of their cultural heritage (ibid.).

After 1925, the Irish language became an essential requirement for entry into grade positions in the Civil Service[38] (Ó'Riagáin, 1997). Irish was made compulsory on the

contribute financially to support Catholic schools. Later, Pope Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) called for the reestablishment of a social order. These and other Encyclicals were influential in facilitating the inclusion of Catholic social principles in the Irish Constitution (1937) (Broderick 2017).

[36] The Irish language ceased to be the working language of the majority of the population by 1831 (Akenson 1970). The 1891 Census indicated Irish speakers represented 19.2% of the population, most of whom were located on the western seaboard in what is now known as the Gaeltacht areas (O'Riagain 1997, p.5).

[37] This included a transport scheme to cover long distances to schools (Akenson 1975).

[38] This was discontinued from the early 1970s (O'Riagain 1997).

Intermediate (1927) and Leaving Certificate (1933/4) examinations (ibid.). The necessity of an Irish language qualification to enter primary teaching and employment in the Department of Education ensured that the teaching profession and educational policy-makers were primarily Catholic Gaelic speakers, which in turn led to the setting-up of a system of social reproduction through education (see Akenson 1975, pp.109–134). Protestants were left with no legitimacy for their culture outside the Irish nation culture-building that accorded with Catholic convention, tradition and conservatism (Akenson 1975).

The family

The Irish Catholic family was the focus of the social order in the new Free State. Gaining respect from others and being regarded as a decent moral person in society required being a good Catholic and conforming to the Church's practices (Inglis 1987, p.93). The Catholic Church's influence in Irish society and political life rested on its moral power (Penet 2008). With the Church-state alliance, a morally based family culture was enshrined in the Constitution.[39] The definition of the Irish family as 'the natural, primary and fundamental unit of society' had its 'rights' rooted in Catholic doctrine and natural law theory (Government of Ireland 1937; Larkin 1975). Catholic principles inscribed a Catholic moral code around all of Irish life, and censorship policies (enacted in 1923 and 1929), legislated to maintain the socialisation of the Catholic family around moral teaching, deepened conservatism in society (Inglis 1987, p.91). For the first 40 years after the formation of the Free State, the parish school and Church were the centres of socialisation, where authoritarian control enforced ideals of nationalism, religion, morality and language (Brown 2004).

An urban/rural distinction between family immorality/morality

The cultural nationalism movement invigorated an ideal rural image of Irish life, whose ideology aligned with Catholic teachings that idealised the traditional morality and 'communalism' of rural family parochial life (Horgan 2004, p.44; O'Dowd 1987). By 1921, a large farming population had attained security of tenure[40] and held political voting power, was

[39] 'The state recognises the family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law' (Article 41 Bunreacht na hÉireann (1937).

[40] A series of Land Act reforms between 1905 and 1922 had established most farming tenants as owner-occupiers. The Land Acts distributed land, which continued into independent Ireland under the Land Commission, and were a contentious issue in politics for the first two to three decades of the Free State (Breen et al. 1990).

influential in Irish policy-making and the Catholic way of life and, according to Breen et al. (1990, p.3), 'made rural Ireland deeply conservative'. Farmers with holdings of over 30 acres were the nation-forming class that made up the Irish Church, via their financial support, supply of sons and daughters to the religious orders and devotional practice (Larkin 1975).

The idealised family and community of this imagined Ireland in reality was very poor (Maguire 2009). The structural dimensions of poverty that families had to endure were particularly apparent in urban[41] areas: bad living/over-crowded housing conditions; and unemployment (Maguire 2009). The myth of the rural family with traditional ties to the community envisioned by the cultural nationalist movement reflected an absence of public discussion around class (Ferriter 2010; Maguire 2009). Moreover, it represented the image of the immoral family as primarily an urban perception (Maguire 2009). O'Dowd (1987, p.48) suggests that 'the Irish version of the Catholic social movement' reveals an 'unrelieved anti-urbanism' that believed 'urban life symbolise[d] all that was essentially non-Irish and threatening to the ideal Catholic social order'. Morality laws defined the family and the good parent necessary for the common good concept of the nationalist ideal society (ibid.). The Constitution granted the state guardianship of children for 'the common good' should their 'parents for physical or moral reasons fail in their duty' (Government of Ireland 1937). The poor's welfare was provided for by the Church with funds from the state and the support of the Gardaí, the Department of Education and district court justices, who oversaw a concept of the appropriate and respectable Irish parent to maintain social order (Maguire 2009, p.41). According to Maguire (2009, p.19), poor children ended up in industrial schools run by religious orders 'for no other reason than poverty'. More telling was the protectionist orientation of the state, Church and nation that viewed industrial schools as the effective route for socialising children labelled as social risks by the courts (ibid.).

Protecting the social order for the common good justified the state's intervention in family surveillance through primary schooling by the legal implementation of the compulsory school attendance statute (O'Sullivan 2005). The implication of compulsory schooling was that parents had to send their children to school from age six to 14, with an exceptional provision[42] for smallholder farming families who required assistance in agricultural work (Akenson 1975). Punishment for non-compliance included fines and the threat of being sent

[41] Poverty was highest in heavily populated urban areas such as Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Waterford (Maguire 2009).

[42] Children of 12 years and older from smallholder farming families could take time out of school to help on the farm (Akenson 1975).

to an industrial school.[43] Families, especially the urban poor, were surveilled through national school attendance to uphold the perceived social formation of order based around the concept of the good moral family (Fahey 1992). Meanwhile, social class inequalities were continuously elided, even by the poor themselves, as the social order was an accepted truth in the intersection of religion, schooling and class (ibid.). Poverty was individualised to differentiate between the poor whose circumstances, such as their disabilities, were beyond their control and those who were unemployed due to their 'laziness or sin' (Ferriter 2010, location no. 8605). These distinctions between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor were made in the adjudication of their welfare (Ferriter 2010, location no. 7789). The rural/urban dichotomy carried moral, cultural and political associations whereby the urban poor was perceived as a threat to the Catholic social programme and its concern with the community because of unemployment and labour unrest (after 1910) and hence redefined as a moral problem (O'Dowd 1987). Against this, the rural Catholic social order projected 'a high moral ideal' (O'Dowd 1987, p.47). The social-class divide in rural life was narrower than that within the urban poor because of the common bond in farming life between the farmer and labourer in agricultural work (Cronin 2007, p.31; Devereux 1991). Although social class difference and poverty did exist, work was perceived as an attribute of respectability that gave the labourer a standing in the community (Cronin 2007). In these ways, social attitudes and class consciousness around definitions of 'respectability', in conjunction with the Catholic social movement's anti-urbanism, shaped families' identities and the urban/rural distinction in Ireland (O'Dowd 1987 in Horgan 2004, p.43).

It has been shown thus far that the Gaelic revival movement and the nationalist school project facilitated Catholic social reproduction in Irish society. The inculcation of an Irish Catholic Gaelic culture and the rural ideal aligned against immoral urban associations with unemployment maintained the Catholic social order and normalised an ideal parochial community and family way of life imbued with Catholic culture that elided classed distinctions in society. The denominational primary school system was during this period deeply entrenched and normative, reproducing Catholic socialisation in the parochial way of family life.

Education and the making of a modernised Ireland

[43] Fahey (1992, p.382) notes that between 1928–29, 68 children were committed to industrial schools for non-attendance at school.

The political shifts in education and related social and cultural changes in Ireland from the late 1950s to contemporary debates around reshaping the primary school patronage system and the Forum Report (2012) are now examined. On the back of a period of deep economic depression, the 1950s saw a counter-culture that moved against conservative protectionist policy-making and a questioning of Church-state relations in educational and social issues (Ferriter 2010; Keogh 2005). In response to grants and loans from the Marshall Aid programme[44] (Ireland had received £150,000,000 by 1950), the state had to open itself up to scrutiny of its insular protectionist policy approach (Foster 1988). These grants and loans fostered an Irish-European market outlook (which was the programme's objective), meaning that the state's economic planning and policy-making was influenced by Europe and beyond (ibid.). Meanwhile, the role of the Catholic Church in society began to be questioned from the 1960s due to a culmination of factors: the Vatican II Council's (1962–1965) community approaches to social life[45]; emigrants returning on holiday with stories of life outside Ireland; and public service media such as Teilifís Éireann, which began broadcasting in 1961 (Inglis 1987).

In education, the benchmark for change was the Investment in Education (IIE) survey, carried out in co-operation with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1962[46] (Clancy 1986) and called the 'foundation document' of modern Irish education (Clancy 1996 cited in O'Sullivan 2005, p.129). The IIE[47] report was structured within a frame of human capital/mercantile objectives, i.e. the need for more professional and technical workers for Ireland's economic development[48] (O'Sullivan 2005).

[44] Marshall Aid (1948) was a post-war recovery programme in/for Western Europe (Foster 1988).

[45] The Second Vatican Council saw community as intrinsic to man's relationship to society and introduced the concept of religious freedom with dialogue that recognised other religions, e.g. the pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* in relation to 'The Life of the Political Community' (VATICAN COUNCIL 1998, Chapter IV); 'Fostering of Peace and the Promotion of a Community of Nations' (VATICAN COUNCIL 1965, Chapter V); and 'Nostra Aetate: The Declaration on the Church's Relations with non-Christian Religions' (VATICAN COUNTCIL 1965, Par.1).

[46] The IIE report was published in 1966.

[47] The IIE survey team, with the exception of Dr. Newman, were all lay members, with backgrounds in economics, statistics and mathematics and, according to O'Sullivan (2005) were critical to the consent of the Catholic Church to the IIE report because these economists' and mathematicians' empirical findings would be viewed as a supplement to the Catholic outlook in education (ibid., pp.140–1). This is not to say that there were no objections, but opposition was uncoordinated and individualistic.

[48] The expansion of educational provision to wider society in order to increase the talent pool was one of the main outcomes of the IIE report (O'Sullivan 2005). Employment opportunities from the 1950s required an expansion of formal education, and small-farming families in particular sought greater access to post-primary schooling for the career development it was thought to offer (O'Sullivan 2005).

The outcome of the IIE report was the introduction of free[49] post-primary schooling and transport in 1966, of which the Church was not in favour, which demonstrated a significant shift in Church-state and nation relations in education. However, free post-primary education did not eliminate classed differences in schooling as the well-established prestigious schools associated with the upper-middle-class remained outside the free scheme (Courtois 2018). The mutual relationship between parents' aspirations to second-level schooling for their children's future success and the employment objective of education formed the basis of the state's decision-making in relation to education policy. This was also the first time education policy was separated from the sole input of the Church. Nonetheless, a consequence of this mercantile education approach was the Catholic Church's shift from authoritarianism to a research/statistical orientation, with a particular focus on inequalities/the disadvantaged (Tuohy 2007). Church support by lay partners such as CORI[50] and Mater Dei led to the development of a social welfare paradigm alongside the mercantile in national education policy (OECD 1991; Tuohy 2007). This shift maintained the Church's influence in mercantile approaches in educational development, which will be discussed next.

Social welfare and equality: market values rhetoric

Although the IIE report deplored the exclusion of the working-class from education, equality was never defined, and so the blatant inequalities it highlighted failed to provoke public outrage (OECD 1965, p.92). Instead, the meaning of equality was asserted as the inclusion of unrealised talent in society into education for the benefit of the economy (O'Sullivan 2005). This was a far cry from the previous thesis of educational ability/equality, which, up to the 1960s, was framed around nature rather than nurture, i.e. educability only applied to the upper social classes, with a few exceptions. With the introduction of free second-level schooling (1966), education was now viewed according to meritocratic principles whereby everyone had the opportunity to achieve. Thus, early school leavers/low achievers became a distinguishable problem group set apart from those students who fitted with the meritocratic principles of

[49] Most secondary schools (92%) entered the free school scheme except for the few well-established prestigious schools associated with the upper middle-class. Status differences between elite and ordinary secondary schools meant the latter were attended by the greater proportion of the population (Courtois 2018).

[50] CORI, the Conference of Religious of Ireland (formerly CMRS), is a formal Catholic organisation with a dedicated Education Commission (known as the CSP (Catholic Schools Partnership) since 2011) that advances proposals in educational matters related to state policy and defines and interprets educational inequalities from a Christian perspective. In 2017, CORI amalgamated with the IMU (Irish Missionary Union) to form the Association of Missionaries and Religious of Ireland (AMRI).

achievement (ibid.). This group was classified as difficult to teach, motivate and control, and was categorised as the educationally 'disadvantaged' (ibid.). Meanings attributed to the disadvantaged in education ranged from ideas of personal and cultural 'deficit'[51] to communitarianism (O'Sullivan, pp.313–332). These shifting perspectives, according to O'Sullivan, disperse 'the meaning of the disadvantaged even further as additional sets of explanatory texts become implicated' (O'Sullivan 2005, p.322).

Communitarianism was presented by CORI to textualise interventions[52] for dealing with the disadvantaged and orientated inclusivity within Christian rhetoric – the 'sacred and the secular' – to increase social cohesion (O'Sullivan 2005, pp.363–6). It also aligned with EU rhetoric and kept Catholic social teaching within education discourses while eliding class conflicts (ibid.; Fischer 2016). Communitarianism was a readily accepted discourse in education about the disadvantaged that was expanded from the 1990s, however, it was loosely framed in national policy meaning-making around equality (ibid.). CORI was the Church's 'rear-guard mechanism' to influence and maintain Catholic thinking in education and continues to play an active role in shaping public policy today (Fahey 1998, p.158). Its Justice group was included in the community and the voluntary pillar of the national partnership process (1996), as discussed later (ibid.). Thus, the unfolding mercantile approach to educational policies to support economic aims did not threaten the Catholic Church in regard to education, social issues or indeed the classed social order. A focus on the disadvantaged and on inequalities maintained the Church's role in educational matters. Most important for this study are the various constructions of disadvantaged students/families as distinguishable bounded identities that are maintained in educational discourses. I now turn to pluralism in education policy and how its shaping implicated the future restructuring proposals of the primary school patronage system.

Plurality of patrons: the Irish as a religious people

How the historical, patronage-structured school system was advocated as pluralist requires a return to the 1937 Constitution to understand the legal interpretations of educational rights,

[51] The failure of the individual to benefit from schooling was universally considered to be an effect of personal 'deficit', primarily 'due to the pupil's abilities, values, beliefs and attitudes caused by deficiencies, i.e. poverty and family background, which represented them as disadvantaged' (O'Sullivan 2005, p.313). The 'individual deficits' counter-arguments were that the middle-class environment of schools constituted a cultural deficit for mainly lower-class families and contributed to them feeling excluded (O'Sullivan 2005).

[52] CORI's Education Commission dedicated many publications to the communitarianism theme, e.g. CMRS 1988, 1989a, 1992c; and CORI 1998b, 1999 (cited in O'Sullivan 2005).

religious rights and the right of equality (O'Connell 1999). According to O'Connell (1999), legal interpretations of the Constitution's position in education 'reflects a firm conviction that we [the Irish] are a religious people' and 'endorses the concepts of pluralism and the separation of sacred and secular powers' (ibid., p.436). The concept of pluralism is manifested as an accommodating approach to the securing of parents' rights by providing different types (denominations) of schooling (Article 44) (O'Connell 1999). Thus, parents' rights are facilitated by the notion of the provision of a plurality of school patrons (Honohan & Rougier 2013).

Furthermore, parents' rights justify the state's subsidiary role in the provision of schooling (O'Connell 1999). To unpack this concept, first, it is the Constitution that gives primacy to parents for the responsibility of 'the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children' (Article 42.1). Thereby, religion is asserted as a parental right in their children's educational development (O'Connell 1999, p.440). The religious development of children has been historically entrusted to religious institutions; hence, the latter are the providers of education. Since the state does not interfere in religious matters, its role is to provide for education via funding (ibid.). Because the state protects parents' rights and freedoms in their children's schooling, moreover, parents' rights legitimate the state's provision of funding to denominational schools, as this funding is delivered on a 'non-discriminatory basis' (as opposed to endowment of religion) (O'Connell 1999: Garcimartin & Cahill 2015; Article 42.3.1). State funding to denominational schools involves a peculiarly Irish understanding of the separation of state and religion and asserts the state's legitimacy in education, the rights of parents and children, and denominational rights, interpreting each in very different ways (O'Connell 1999, p.442). O'Connell claims that if the state did not fund denominational education, it would be ignoring rights and religion and moreover reject 'the principles that the Irish are a devout people' (ibid., p.442). Article 44.4 protects religious freedom, whereby the state's funding 'shall not discriminate between schools under different religious denominations' (Irish Constitution 1937). Therefore, a plurality of denominations protects religious freedom and means that the state is not providing education but instead funds the provision of primary education; thus, it is not interfering in religious matters.

A plurality of denominations endorses the concept of denominational 'ethos' and the right to protect it (O'Connell 1999, p.442). 'Ethos' assures the 'maintenance of a constitutional democracy' because it is the means through which the generational continuity of different religions is transmitted. Therefore, patrons' ethos is protected and is regarded as prioritised

over parents' rights, because the latter is not an absolute guaranteed right (ibid.). Parents' rights are fundamental rights because they are not enshrined in Article 42 and can therefore be limited or restricted by the Oireachtas for certain reasons, e.g. the common good (Citizen Information 2020). However, parents' rights are protected under Article 44's conscious clause of religious freedom that gives parents the right to withdraw ('opt-out') their children from religious instruction in schools that receive public funding (ibid.; Government of Ireland 1937). Thus, education in a denominational school is pluralist because it is non-discriminatory due to the religious opt-out clause. Overall, the accommodation interpretation of rights gives importance to religion in a pluralist sense in education. The constitutional understanding that religious institutions are providers of schooling was an unquestioned assumption until the 1970s, when a group of parents asserted their rights to set up a new primary school type, which is discussed next.

Disruption of religious institutions' patronage system structure

Since the foundation of the Free State, the primary schools' primarily Catholic and Protestant Church patronage (which also included Jewish patronage from the 1930s) was the accepted normative structure and never publicly questioned or disrupted until 1978, when a group of parents in South County Dublin launched the Dalkey School Project (DSP) (O'Sullivan 2005). These parents' aim was to establish a primary school that was multi-denominational (ibid.). Although the DSP multi-denominational school challenged denominational Church-led schooling, its establishment within the school system was within the terms of the 'cultural coordinate of religious belief' (O'Sullivan 2005, p.201) and therefore maintained the concept of plurality without disrupting the system's patronage structure. Nonetheless, it did disturb the religious, institution-led denominational structure, and its establishment was contested by the Catholic and Protestant Churches in a way that was not unlike the disputes that ensued after the establishment of the national school system in 1831. The concern raised around the DSP was centred on the form of religious education that would be pursued in the new school (Hyland 2020). The Department of Education and Skills (DES) requested a list of the religious beliefs of the 92 children who were pre-enrolled in the DSP to authenticate its multi-denominational status in the system (ibid.). The Catholic Church and Church of Ireland publicly questioned via media outlets[53] the implications of the DSP for denominational

[53] The *Sunday Independent*, *The Irish Times* and RTÉ radio and television (Hyland 2020).

parochial schooling (Hyland 2020). Church leaders contested the existence of a school that had no Church/religious institutional affiliation, and debates became visceral in pamphlets edited and published by 'The Vera Verba'[54], a group associated to the Knights of St. Columbanus (ibid., location no. 1239). The pamphlets alerted readers to the divisiveness of a non-/multi-denominational school in the system and the dangers of 'Atheistic interest' that were seen as contravening the Constitutional guarantee of denominational education (Hyland 2020, location no. 2653). Humanists came under direct criticism when an assumed member was pointed to (but not identified) as holding 'a sensitive post in the Department of Education' in a claim that asserted this person's knowledge was of value in the planning process of the DSP (ibid., location no. 1947). However, that one member of the DES was targeted for not being religiously aligned arguably says more about Catholic social reproduction in education and the political classes. Not only was denominational education assumed to serve the interests of all children but a school that was not run by the local Church or religious organisation representative was deemed to be 'undermining the structure of society' (Hyland 1996 cited in O'Sullivan 2005, p.200). After many challenges and the obligation to provide a policy document on religious education acceptable to the DES, the DSP pilot school opened in September 1978, whose success in getting established was primarily due to the middle-class parent group's persistence, educational level and access to finances. Although the opening of the first multi-denominational school, later named Educate Together (ET), disrupted religious institutions' patronage of schools, it maintained the culturally religious patronage structure of the primary school system (O'Sullivan 2005).

A plurality of schools was now asserted within the modernised primary school system and led the way for further types to emerge in the construction of pluralism (ibid.). In the 1980s, Gaelscoileanna[55] claimed minority rights for those parents who wanted their children taught in schools through the medium of the Irish language. So began the establishment of more Irish-medium schools across the country under three separate patron ethos (religious) types, viz, Catholic, multi-denominational and inter-denominational,[56] subscribing to the

[54]The 'Vera Verba' was a group of Catholic parents associated with 'The Council of Social Concern', located in the headquarters of the Knights of St. Columbanus. The Vera Verba published three pamphlets titled 'Have the Snakes Come Back or Education and the Irish Child'; 'Is Integrated Schooling the Answer? Education and the Irish Child'; and 'The Dalkey School Saga: Has the Government surrendered to the Multi-Denominational Pressure Groups?' (Hyland 2020, location nos. 1239, 1925 & 2609).

[55] The National Organisation for Irish-medium schools. This is not to say that Gaelscoils were not in existence prior to this point, but their numbers were very small.

[56] The multi-denominational Gaelscoil patron and the inter-denominational Gaelscoil patron are both under the An Foras Pátrúnachta patronage body.

ideology of a system that responds to parents' asserted right to educate their children in their school of preference (O'Sullivan 2005). A Muslim school was successfully established in 1990, led mainly by medical professionals (islamicfoundation.ie). However, similar success cannot be attributed to those Traveller community parents who attempted to set up their own school in the mid-1960s only for it to be demolished by Dublin Corporation for breaching planning laws (Lynch 2008, p.5 cited in Kitching 2014, pp.61–62). Moreover, the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) were against the establishment of such a school, claiming that 'itinerant children [...] have no tradition of school going' and as such believed that they could not 'be introduced to it in such a haphazard way' (ibid., p.79). While patronage is the frame within which schools can be set up, establishing a school is invariably the project of the educated middle-class in a way that shows the complex interplay of religion and class in the provision of school types and parents' rights. Religious control in the school system remained central in further contestations, especially over provisions in the Education Act 1998, and is discussed next.

Contestation of the Education Act 1998 provisions

The lead-up to the 1998 Education Act caused a cultural conflict reminiscent of 19th-century Church struggles over control of schooling. Proposed provisions for the planned Education Act (1998) were presented as part of the Education Bill (1997). This Bill proposed a de-centralisation of the school system to regional educational boards (REBs) and created contestation between representatives of almost every faith involved in education[57] and the state, during which the different faith representatives came together to defend against what they called a 'statutory takeover of our schools' (O'Sullivan 2005, p.215). Government members, with the exception of Labour who were in power at the time, defended faith institutions' control of schools (Dáil Éireann Debates 1997, Vol. 475(7)). The traditional attitude that the Irish people did not trust the state in educational matters[58] and the assumption that patron management was in the interests of the people and the public good were

[57] 'Representatives of almost every religious faith involved in Irish education, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Methodist, Quaker and Muslim, and claiming the support of the Jewish community, gathered to oppose what they regarded as a threat to the denominational character of their schools' (O'Sullivan 2005, p.215).
[58] The state's constitutional obligation to 'provide for' primary education (Article 42.4) was argued in 1980 by Kenny J. in *Crowley v Minister for Education (I.R. 102 (1980))* to originate from the historical context that state monopoly of education was to be distrusted. However, little attention was given as to why the state, which was then the British government, was distrusted and why this historical perspective is an appropriate reason for not trusting the state (O'Connell 1999).

promulgated (ibid.). The REBs were believed to break down the traditional parochial structure of 'community'[59] schooling around Church patronage that reflected not only parents' 'rights' but a 'diversity of school types' (see Dáil Éireann Debates 1997, Vol. 475(7)). The influence of CORI and the Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA), both Catholic organisations, on the decision[60] to reject the Bill (Dáil Éireann Debates1997, Vol. 475(7)) was especially interesting at this time when there was much media attention and outrage over child abuses[61] by the Catholic Church and religious orders in the field of education. Justification for opposing the Bill was rationalised against more gainful alternative uses of government funding, such as technology education and the needs of the disadvantaged/socially excluded, in regard to which corroborating arguments were made by CORI (ibid.). Mercantile rhetoric in education policy fully integrated Catholic organisations' influences and maintained the Catholic institutions' stance in direct education provision.

The Education Act of 1998 legislated the patronage structure with statutory recognition in the system. Schools' boards of management were broadened to include lay members, and responsibility for the running/organisation of schools was placed on the patrons, the boards of management, principals and teachers, thus minimising state interference in their day-to-day operation. Overall, the provisions in the Education Act 1998 reflected a unique combination of the historical legacy of denominational education and the mercantile approach that elevated local management. The various school patron types in the primary system recognised under the Education Act 1998 to date are:

(i) The Bishop of the Diocese and other religious denominational authorities (Catholic, Church of Ireland, Islamic, Jewish, Quaker and Methodist patronage);
(ii) Gaelscoileanna, Irish-medium schools under the Bishop of the Diocese (Catholic) and Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoineanna Lán-Ghaeilge (inter-denominational and multi-denominational) patronage;

[59] Minister Martin advocated a community approach for the common good to protect rights and a pluralism of school types (Dail Éireann Debates 1997, Vol 475(7)).
[60] As Minister Martin stated in a Daíl debate, 'Fianna Fáil accepts the fundamental point made by CORI that the education system is failing to meet the needs of the poor. Consequently, the Bill needs to promote equality of access to, participation in and benefit from education and should be weighted in favour of the disadvantaged [...]' (Dáil Éireann Debates 1997, Vol. 475(7))
[61] For example, TV programmes such as *Dear Daughter* (1996), about the abuse of children at the Goldenbridge Orphanage, Dublin, run by the Sisters of Mercy; and *Suffer Little Children* (1996), about the Norbertine priest Fr. Brendan Smyth abuse case of 1994 that led directly to the fall of the Fianna Fáil government.

(iii) Multi-denominational, English-medium schools, under the Educate Together patronage;

(iv) Multi-denominational, Community National Schools (CNSs) established in 2008 and under the Education and Training Boards (ETB) patronage; and

(v) Model Schools (Christian ethos) under the State.

I want to point out that in line with the 'Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector' (Coolahan et al. 2012), the meaning of the term 'patron' used in this study is the institution/trustee/body that sets up the school, defines and promotes the school's ethos (discussed next), and appoints and/or supports the board of management, finances and legal matters, the upkeep of assets and the supervision of staff appointments in accordance with departmental regulations (NCCA 2015). The patron's legal duties are set out in the Constitution of Ireland (1937) and The Education Act (1998). Furthermore, the patron provides religious education to its school according to the traditions, practices and beliefs of its religious community (NCCA 2015).

The vast majority of primary schools are parish, state-aided Church schools, historically established under diocesan patronage and whose denominational character is explicitly recognised. The Education Act 1998 and the Constitution provide a legislative framework to set up a school if there is demand. As of 2020, the composition of the primary school system patronage structure is as follows:

Table 1.1: Patronage of primary school in Ireland (2020–2021) (education.ie)

Patronage of Primary Schools*	**Per centage**
Roman Catholic	88.0
Protestant	5.5
Multi-denominational	4.5
Presbyterian	0.5
Inter-denominational	0.5
Methodist	0.1
Jewish	0.1
Muslim	0.1
Other	0.1

* Children attend primary school for eight years (from infants to 6th class), usually from the age of four/five to 12/13 years.

The majority of primary schools in the system are Catholic, with a disproportionate number of multi-denominational ET schools, CNSs and Gaelscoileanna located in urban areas

(Darmody & Smyth 2018). The dominant position of Catholic patronage in the primary school system means that many minority beliefs and no-religion families have no option but to attend a Catholic school.

Patrons' school ethos

The various patrons of schools are differentiated by their ethos. The paradox of the concept of ethos is that it was never defined in law, yet it has a legal effect in the Education Act 1998 to protect patrons. Instead of the term 'ethos', however, the collocation 'characteristic spirit' is used to define each school, which is in turn

> determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school [...] (Education Act 1998, 15(2b)).

This provision (15(2b)) was adopted from the White Paper (1995),[62] which retained the *a priori* assumption of 'values' that were never defined but still 'traditionally accorded respect in society' (DES 1995, p.10). The vagueness of 'values' in relation to the school's 'characteristic spirit' constitutes a pre-determined understanding that schooling only exists within religion. The Constitution protects patrons' institutional ethos. Since 2018, schools' admission policies cannot prioritise students based on their patrons' religion (Admission Policy, DES 2018). However, minority faith schools are exempted and can prioritise a student of their religion to maintain their ethos (DES 2018). Furthermore, 'if a school aims to promote certain religious values, it can refuse to admit a student who is not of that religious denomination' on the grounds that it can prove that refusal is essential to maintain their school ethos (Citizens Information 2022). If a school is oversubscribed, it must follow the rules of its pre-determined admission policy, which it is obliged to publish under section 15(d) of the Education Act 1998 (DES 2018). The Equal Status Act 2000 7(3) paragraph (c) in relation to school admission was also amended in 2018;[63] however, a school can still refuse a student

[62] The White Paper states 'The maintenance and promotion of a distinctive ethos and set of values for individual schools is supported by a strong societal consensus. This is a central concern for the majority of parents and for those whom parents have entrusted [sic] the education of their children. In this regard, governance structures will be put in place in a manner which protects the rights, values and beliefs of parents, while promoting pluralism, partnership and accountability at the same time' (DES 1995, p.156).

[63] In 2018, the Equal Status Act 200 7(3) paragraph (c) was amended to 'where the establishment is a school (other than a recognised primary school) providing primary or post-primary education to students and the

who is not of a particular religious denomination admission if it can prove the refusal is essential to maintain its ethos (Equal Status Act 2000). Simultaneously, schools are required by the state (Education Act (1998) 30(2)(d)) to ensure that time is set aside during each school day for 'subjects relating to or arising from the characteristic spirit of the school' (NCCA 2015). Therefore, irrespective of the changes in admission policies around religious belief, many children of minority beliefs and no religion who have no option but to attend a Catholic school must endure the patron's religious ethos or opt-out, which brings its own implications for children's identities.

School ethos was central to the NCCA's vision in 2015 for a new Education about Religious Beliefs (ERB) and Ethics curriculum, as recommended by the Forum Report (2012), to contribute to and support inclusive school communities that reflect linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious diversity (NCCA 2015). Ethos is intertwined with pluralism and, as pointed to earlier, plurality of the patronage system advocates rights for parents in the system. Patronage was kept at the centre of issues related to diversity, which is discussed next.

Diversity: the need to reshape the primary school patronage structure

This sub-section explores how diversity is acknowledged and situated in policy decision-making and the primary school system. The challenges that the education system faced due to increasing immigration from the mid-1990s brought the issue of the patronage structure to the fore with debates essentially focused on ethno-religious diversity. The way in which the Irish state governs diversity in education policy suggests that religious/cultural identity pre-existed the knowledge and procedures that produced the patronage school structure. The need for policy change in the primary school patronage system in the run-up to the policy-making period that contributed to the Forum Report (2012) is discussed first. This is followed by an

objective of the school is to provide education in an environment which promotes certain religious values, it admits persons of a particular religious denomination in preference to others'. Inserted after paragraph 7(3) (c) are:
'(ca) where the establishment is a school providing primary or post-primary education to students and the objective of the school is to provide education in an environment which promotes certain religious values, it refuses to admit as a student a person who is not of a particular religious denomination and it is proved that the refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school' and,
'(cb) where the establishment is a recognised primary school and it admits as a student a person in accordance with section 7A (inserted by section 11(b) of the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018)' (Equal Status Act 2000).

overview of the Irish context of parent choice and how it was framed as a policy initiative to meet the needs of a diverse society (Coolahan et al. 2012).

The emergence of a more diverse society

Following global competitive trends, the Irish state recognised the need to reduce expenditure and high taxation in the late 1980s to compete internationally (Dorgan 2006). Ireland adopted a social partnership[64] process, distinguishable from the UK's neoliberal approach (as discussed in the next chapter), that aimed to establish a centralised wage-bargaining partnership to promote business investment and attract foreign companies (McAleese 2000). The prospect of a single European market, in conjunction with growth in multinational and financial institutions attracted by low corporation taxation and light-touch regulation, created a high demand for workers from the mid-1990s (McCann 2013). Better job opportunities were produced for those with higher educational qualifications, which were taken up by the mainly majority ethnic[65] workforce (ibid.). Meanwhile, lower-paid employment sectors vacated by mainly majority ethnic workers were now open to minority ethnic workers to fill the gaps in the market (McCann 2013). Immigration increased from 8,000 in 1996 to a peak of almost 72,000 in 2006 (Smyth et al. 2009), while the minority ethnic population has remained in and around 12% since 2007 up to the latest census of 11.6% (CSO 2016). Many minority ethnic workers have a high level of educational attainment, though this is not necessarily reflected in their occupations, who typically earn 19% less than their majority ethnic counterparts (Smyth et al 2009). Many minority ethnic groups experience more negative outcomes in employment opportunities particularly persons racialised as Black[66] in comparison to White Irish individuals (McGinnity et al. 2018, p.70).

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[64] The corporatist social partnership was transacted between the government and all public sector unions to agree wage restraint, tax cuts and on-going participation in economic decision-making (McAleese 2000). The unions included the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), the CIF (Construction Industry Federation) and the Irish Business and Employers' Confederation (IBEC). The ICTU is an umbrella body for over 40 trade unions that represents numerous public service sectors, e.g. the various teachers unions (TUI, INTO, ASTI) and other sectors such as healthcare, civil service administrations, gardai etc. (McAleese 2000). CORI's Justice sector joined in 1996 (O'Sullivan 2005).

[65] Supported by the implementation of free university fees from the mid-1990s.

[66] 'Black' is one of the racialisation categories (along with 'White', 'Asian' and 'Other, including mixed background') inserted in the Census since 2006 under the heading 'What is your ethnic or cultural background?' - thereby blending race, ethnicity and culture (see King-O'Riain 2007). This ethnic/racial category was implemented into the Census (2006) following the 2004 citizenship referendum in Ireland which increased restrictions to accessing Irish citizenship on the basis of *jus sanguinis* (blood right), or descent, rather than citizenship on the basis of *jus soli* (birth right) which was in existence since the Free State. King-O'Riain (2007, p.535) suggests that 'The ethnic (racial) categories in the Republic of Ireland were developed within a context of

In political circles, discourses around ethnic minorities coagulate around the promotion of Christian values, protection from discrimination and undertones of assimilation into Irish society (Fischer 2016). In 2008, Bertie Ahern, the then Taoiseach, declared recognition for citizens of no-religion but denounced 'aggressive secularism', defending 'faith and religious belief in the public space'[67] (Fischer 2016, p.43). In 2007, Enda Kenny, the Fine Gael leader and later Taoiseach, referred to the Irish people as 'us' and as 'a Celtic and Christian people', going on to say that while ethnic minorities 'have the right to be free of discrimination', they also had 'the responsibility to integrate into our community' (Fischer 2016, p.44; The Irish Times 2007). Such governmental positioning of national and religious identities influenced wider public and political debates. 'Diversity management' became the objective[68] of the state towards ethnic minorities, and, in the context of wider integration measures in Europe,[69] the education system in Ireland was identified as an arena in which such integration could occur (Bryan 2010).

The denominational school system was under administrative and teaching strain owing to the increased numbers of children of ethnic minority because schools had little experience of dealing with cultural, linguistic and religious diversity (Smyth et al. 2009; Smyth & Darmody 2011). This saw a movement in educational policy towards inter-culturalism, which focused on the accommodation of cultural differences. An initial information leaflet (2001) on diversity advocated inclusion, tolerance, respect and understanding of 'cultural, ethnic, social and religious diversity as part of an intercultural ethos', although the term 'intercultural ethos' was never defined (DES 2001, p.9 cited in Fischer 2016). The NCCA[70] followed up with guidelines encouraging the celebration of cultural diversity ('Intercultural Education in the Primary School' (2005)) (DES 2005). However, the power dynamics of schools' religious practices and Irish culture were never critically examined (Kitching 2014; Fischer 2016). Tension between intercultural education principles and religion within the primary denominational system was inevitable. The INTO was the first group to call for a forum to

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increasing legal and political efforts to control immigration *and* to extend racial/ethnic rights and equality at the same time'.

[67] Bertie Ahern, Taoiseach address, at a Reception for Churches and Faith Communities in the Structured Dialogue, April 22, 2008 (Fischer 2016, p.53).

[68] A Minister for Integration was appointed in 2007 (Devine 2011).

[69] e.g. 'Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe' (2004) and 'Migration and Mobility: Challenges and Opportunities for EU Education Systems' (2008).

[70] The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is a statutory body with responsibility for advising the Minister for Education and Skills on curriculum and assessment issues. Its guidelines define intercultural education as 'education that respects, celebrates, and recognises the normality of diversity in all aspects of human life, promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination, and provides the values upon which equality is built' (NCCA 2005, p.169).

address issues related to increased diversity[71] as far back as 2002 (Coolahan et al. 2012). I now turn to an examination of the diversity of religions in schools and outline the run-up to the need to reshape the patronage system at policy level.

Increased religious diversity

The net inflow of migration, together with a greater number of majority ethnic citizens no longer affiliated with any religion (Röder 2017), impacted the composition of the Irish population's religious beliefs (see Table 1.2). The Roman Catholic population decreased from 91.6% in 1991 to 78.3% in 2016, with rural areas having a higher percentage of Catholics (85.9%) than urban areas (73.8%) (CSO 2016). The sector of the population with no religion at 10% (CSO 2016), was the fastest-growing sector since records began in 1971 (0.3%): declarations of no religion increased by 73.6% between 2011 and 2016 (CSO 2017). Relevant to this study is the statistic that over 53% of people with no religion live in cities, of whom 77.2% are majority ethnic nationals (CSO 2017).

Table 1.2: Population by religion, 2011 and 2016 (CSO 2017)

Religion	**2011**	**2016**	**Percentage change**
	000s	**000s**	
Roman Catholic	3,861.3	3,729.1	-3.4
Church of Ireland	129.0	126.4	- 2.0
Muslim (Islamic)	49.2	63.4	28.9
Orthodox	45.2	62.2	37.5
Christian	41.2	37.4	- 9.1
Presbyterian	24.6	24.2	-1.6
Hindu	10.7	14.3	34.1
Apostolic or Pentecostal	14.0	13.4	- 4.9
No-religion (including other & not stated)	412.9	691.4	67.5
Total	**4,588.3**	**4,761.9**	**3.8**

[71] This is not to say that schools were homogenous places up to then, as the Traveller community, who only received formal recognition of their ethnicity in 2017, were also members of the school population but were mostly segregated up to the mid-1990s (itmtrav.ie 2019). When their segregation was deemed inegalitarian, rather than this being seen as an opportunity for the celebration of Traveller children's ethnicity, they were instead expected to assimilate into the education system (Lynch & Lodge 2002; O'Sullivan 2005). This was not the fault of schools but was due to a lack of resources and recognition of this group's cultural distinctiveness (O'Sullivan 2005).

The demographic increase in no religion and decrease in the Catholic religion led other groups such as the Irish Human Rights Commission (IHRC),[72] Atheist Ireland, the National Parents Council (NPC)[73] and individual parents, alongside the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racism and Discrimination (CERD) and United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), to join the INTO in calls for changes to the denominational school system (Fischer 2016). In response to CERD,[74] the Irish Government defended the patronage structure, claiming that schools had a right to protect their ethos and religious education (ibid.).

It was not until September 2007, when Ireland hit the international media headlines[75] about the discriminatory nature of the denominational primary school structure for minority ethnic children, that the government began to engage with the issue (Boland 2007; Healy 2007). This crisis saw mainly Black minority ethnic children deprived of school places in Balbriggan, County Dublin, a high immigrant[76] population area (ibid.). The Catholic Church defended its schools, declaring the fault lay with the government's lack of school planning (ibid.; Flynn 2007a). Educate Together argued that school patrons were not racist but acknowledged religious discrimination and pointed to the state as responsible for the lack of school places and not religious bodies (ETEN 2007 cited in Kieran 2008). Patrons were united in defending the patronage structure because it gave them legal protection in the system. Moreover, the lack of school places for children was identified by the Church[77] as a problem in 20% of schools due to the lack of forward planning by the DES and not the patronage system structure (Irish Catholic Bishop's Conference 2012). Thereby, the problem was directed to specific urban areas with high immigrant populations.

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[72] The Irish Human Rights Commission merged with the Equality Authority in 2014 under the umbrella of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC).

[73] The National Parents Council (NPC) was set up in 1985 as the national representative organisation for parents of children attending primary school.

[74] The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racism and Discrimination (CERD) stated 'The Committee, noting that almost all primary schools are run by Catholic groups and that non-denominational or multi-denominational schools represent less than 1 per cent of the total number of primary education facilities, is concerned that existing laws and practice would favour Catholic pupils in the admission to Catholic schools in case of shortage of places, particularly in the light of the limited alternatives available' (art. 5 (d) (vii) and 5 (e) (v)).

[75] A news story on CBS News (September 5, 2007, cited in Kieran 2008, p.8), titled 'Black Children left out of Irish Schools' reported on the lack of school places in Balbriggan, County Dublin for over ninety mainly minority ethnic children who could not get places locally.

[76] 'Immigrant' is a terms generally used in sociology studies (e.g. Devine 2011; Bryan 2010; Bunar 2010) to identify the parents and children who have moved to a country, in this case Ireland, to take up residency but is not the country of his/her nationality (International Organisation for Migration (IOM) 2019, p.103).

[77] In June 2011, the Department of Education and Skills published a 'Discussion Paper on a Regulatory Framework for School Enrolment'. In response, Fr. Michael Drumm, Chair of the Catholic Schools Partnership until 2016, noted that 'just 20% of schools are oversubscribed and therefore must use their enrolment policy to allocate places to new applicants. Thus the vast majority of schools have the capacity to offer places to all applicants' (Drumm 2012, p.189).

In 2008, the UN Human Rights Committee (UNHRC) requested the state increase the availability of multi-/non-denominational primary education places. The government's response[78] in 2009 stated that the newly established CNSs were religiously inclusive (CCPR.C.IRL.CO.3.Add.1.para 50). However, Atheist Ireland was not satisfied, as the CNSs' associations with Christianity did not cater for those seeking a secular education (Teach Don't Preach 2011). Indeed, Emma O'Kelly, RTÉ's Education Correspondent (2012), discovered by means of DES documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act that agreements between the state and the Catholic Church incorporated the latter into the codes for the CNSs (O'Kelly 2012). Faith formation became a bone of contention once again when it was revealed that the state was committed to providing Catholic religious education and sacramental preparations within CNSs' hours, separately from children of minority beliefs and none (O'Kelly 2012). The Church of Ireland and the Methodist Church claimed this ran counter to an inclusive education, while the VEC (now ETB), under whose aegis the CNSs were placed, believed it to amount to religious and ethnic segregation[79] (ibid.). Indeed, in the first CNS that was opened[80] in 2008, it was claimed that 80% of its pupils were minority religious, with the majority of children of ethnic minority (O'Kelly 2012). Ethnic and religious minority segregation in the local school system was indicated. Looking forward, the state plans to establish 400 CNSs by 2030 through the transfer of school patronage (cns.ie). The Catholic hierarchy's advocacy of these schools reflects similarities to the setting-up of the comprehensive schools[81] in the late 1960s. State-Church alignment in the CNSs blurs the boundary between denominational and multi-denominational schooling and the impact on those of minority belief/no religion. Furthermore, it reveals the Catholic Church's adaptability in future-proofing its power in the school system in light of the popularity of the multi-denominational ET schools.

In the meantime, Archbishop Diarmuid Martin has acknowledged the Catholic monopoly of school management (2009), suggesting it was a 'historical hangover' that did not

[78] At the UN's International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (2009).
[79] VEC officials were worried that the message conveyed by the position of the Catholic Church was likely to be one of 'the state affording special treatment to Catholic children'. Given the make-up of the school populations, it was felt this was likely to be seen as 'the segregation of native white Catholic children from non-white newcomers' (O'Kelly 2012).
[80] In Balbriggan, County Dublin, subsequent to the lack of school places for minority ethnic children (2008).
[81] 'Comprehensive' did not mean that the new schools would come under some new form of comprehensive national control. Before publicly promoting the plan for comprehensive schools, the Minister for Education, Patrick Hillery, consulted with the Catholic hierarchy and came to an agreement with the bishops that each school would have a management committee constituted to suit all interested parties. The comprehensive schools framed under the Hillery plan were managed by the local VEC, the Department of Education and the local Catholic religious authorities. The first three schools opened in 1966 (Akenson 1975, p.150).

reflect current realities (Carbery 2009). In 2011, immediately after Labour/Fine Gael had entered government, the Minister for Education, Ruari Quinn, established an Advisory Group to convene a 'Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector', 'so that all stakeholders could contribute to the debate and possible solutions' (Coolahan et al. 2012, p.3). The Forum debate was constructed as involving a 'change of patronage in communities where it is appropriate and necessary' (ibid.). It was agreed by the state and patrons that the denominational issue only applied to 20% of schools. Consequently, from the outset, an overhaul of the system's structure was never within the narratives of change. Indeed, John Coolahan, Chair of the Forum's Advisory Group, contended in the INTO's education magazine *Intouch* that the terms of the forum 'were not to engage in a fundamental appraisal of the patronage system' (Coolahan 2015, p.46). Finances[82] dictated the Forum's terms of reference: to adapt the existing system for greater inclusivity and diversity (Coolahan et al. 2012). Instead, the Forum's objective was to reach high-level consensus amongst stakeholders by gathering advice on divesting, a suggestion made in 2008 by Archbishop Martin during his plenary talk at a DES National Conference[83] (Coolahan et al. 2012, p.24). This 2008 'think tank' conference connected policymakers and functioned to gather evidence in support of an incentive policy of divestment for primary school needs, thus maintaining the patronage structure (ibid., p.24). How diversity was debated in forum debates is discussed next.

The shape of diversity in Forum debates

The Forum's challenge was to re-shape the structure of primary school provision so that it reflected the 'changed character of the population' (Coolahan et al. 2012, p.1). The Forum Report referenced data from various surveys (see Appendix G), most of which were conducted on behalf of Catholic organisations alongside CSO data and *Irish Times* IPSOS/MRBI polls on inward migration, to identify the 'changed character of the population' and define diversity as those outside the 'largely homogeneous population' (ibid., p.40). Diversity was understood as the composition of varied belief systems, including 'a significant minority of non-believers' alongside ethnic minorities (ibid., pp.33–8). Working from a baseline of assumptions,

[82] Ireland was in a recession during this period (2011–2012).
[83] The Department of Education and Science National Conference, 'Governance Challenge for Future Primary School Needs', June 27, 2008, at which Archbishop Martin stated 'I believe that ways can be found to expand the role of other patronage models, where such demand exists, through a form of structured divestment by the Catholic patron, which recognises the rights and interests of all parties. It would flow, as I see it, from a gradual movement of children and teachers towards differing schools in an area, each of which would evolve towards the ethos of a particular patron' (Coolahan et al. 2012, p.24).

including the existence of majoritarian Catholicism, affirmation of religious pluralism in education and pre-existent Catholic/Protestant/other beliefs/non-religious identities, meant that ethnic minorities and those holding other beliefs or of no religion were positioned as the objects for whom the traditional patronage structure needed reshaping. In this way, these families were grouped as minority families to make them identifiable and different from the largely homogenous majority population. Thus, the issue of the primary school patronage system and the need to reshape it was due to the minority group.

Directing the focus of the patronage issue to the minority gave counter-recognition to the majority and created a hierarchy in the change process. The 2011 ATCS[84] submission to the Forum consultancy process specified recognition of the majority, stating changes 'will potentially have very significant implications for thousands of families across the country' (ATCS 2011, p.5). In this context, appeals to the rights of all citizens and educational rights formed the basis for balancing the minority/majority binary in the Forum Report, yet it was made clear that it was not easy 'to secure a balancing of rights for all' (Coolahan et al. 2012, p.6). Akenson's (1975, p.155) study concluded that 'if the churches are able to guarantee the perpetuation of "transferors rights" in the control of institutions which are formed from pre-existing schools, then their power will be guaranteed for at least another generation'. In point of fact, rights are consistently perpetuated in current debates around patronage change. The challenge of reshaping the structure of primary school provision was firmly placed around balancing 'the needs and rights of current and future citizens' – meaning minority ethnic and minority belief/ no-religion families – with 'the needs and rights of the majority', meaning Catholics (ibid., pp.3–8). Rather than looking at the historical process that transformed the non-denominational national school system into a denominational one by the majority, however, the Forum's process of reshaping the primary school patronage structure focused on balancing the minority/ majority binary for the common good. The focus shifted towards the balancing of minority and majority rights to constitute parents' exercise of their freedom of choice of religion (Daly 2011). Diversity not only constructed minority ethnic, and minority belief/no-religion identities and counter-majority identities but simultaneously constituted the reshaping of the primary school system around a diversity of patron provision. Thus, the central concern for the forum was how to determine reshaping, which is discussed next.

[84] The Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS) was established in 2009 to address the concerns of trustees/patrons and to promote best operational practice in the exercise of trusteeship/patronage on behalf of the Catholic Church (www.catholicschools.ie/acts/).

Parent choice policy: the Irish context

Church/state discourses in education have traditionally claimed that the provision of Church-patronage schools supported parents' rights and choice (Articles 42 and 44, Irish Constitution 1937). Choice devolved from historic religious tensions in the school system and was implemented on denominational grounds within a 'discourse of religious and parental freedom' (Lynch & Moran 2006, p.224). As pointed to earlier, the Constitution defines parents as the 'primary and natural educators' of their children in a school of their choice (Article 42, Irish Constitution 1937). Under Canon Law (793), Catholic parents have a duty to educate their children as Catholics in order to hold a pre-determined understanding that Catholic parents' choice will be a Catholic school (Canon Law 793 §2). Thus, the Church considers itself the primary authority in Catholic children's education.

I propose that 'common good' rhetoric in the advancement of parent choice in policy should be interpreted from the firm conviction that the Irish are a religious people in order to avoid any notion of a common school outside Church/religion patronage. In comparison to western countries that applied marketisation discourses of choice in education from the 1980s (as discussed in Chapter 2), Irish education stakeholders never used such market narratives because choice had existed in Ireland's education system since the foundation of the Irish State (Lynch & Moran 2006, p.222). International educational policy discourses advocate that parent choice is an equitable process (Scott 2013) as well as a responsive democratic means to revise the needs of a socially diverse society (Wilkins 2012). The needs of a more diverse Irish society were exactly the reason for the reshaping of patronage. The Forum's first term of reference was to 'provide a diverse [...] range of primary schools' (Coolahan et al. 2012, p.3). With divestment already determined by the Catholic Church as early as 2007/2008, the Forum's task was to identify a process for advancing divestment (ibid.). Education policy requirements that the Forum recognised for a democratic society included the rights of citizens in a pluralist society, the traditional links between the primary school and its local community, and the common good, which together justified parent choice as the mechanism for determining divestment (ibid., pp.53–57). Linking individual freedom in choice and the common good in justifying parent choice, however, is hard to comprehend. Dunne (2002) describes such a link as a tension between liberal democratic rights and the social responsibility of republican citizenship. Maynor (2003) explains the rhetoric of choice as tailoring the notion of a republican state and its central principle – the common good – while

channelling individual interests. Daly (2009) points to the right to choose a school as one bestowed only on the dominant group to create a school of patron preference (ibid.). Thus, he contends, choice is a 'partial denial of liberty for those who cannot attract such support for their beliefs' and is counter to the common good (ibid., p.14). The Forum Report was resolute that 'the wishes of parents as individuals need to be balanced against the common good' (Coolahan et al. 2012).

To return to the Forum's terms of reference, parent choice was deemed the solution for how to proceed with divestment to 'provide a diverse range of primary schools' (Coolahan et al. 2012). Thus, parent choice in this context was transferred to a consumer demand-side (diversity) perspective of school patrons (Coolahan et al. 2012). By re-orientating the nature of diversity to a commodity of patron provision for the newly emergent diverse society consumer, parent choice makes a bridge between demand by a diverse society and the supply of school patrons (Lubienski 2006; Kitching 2013a). Lubienski (2006) contends that choice utilised as the basis for organising a demand-driven system elevates 'private-ism'. Such a concept befitted Ireland's patronage system of private, state-funded primary schools in which choice and diversity are promoted as the responsive narratives to modern Ireland, thus aligning mercantile and Church rhetoric. Government policy was updated to reflect the alignment between the state and the patronage school structure when parent choice was officially sanctioned in education policy in 2012.

A survey of parental preferences on primary school patronage was undertaken in 2013 (following a pilot survey in 2012) in 43 identified areas to indicate the 'level of parental demand' for patron change (DES 2012; 2013, p.3). The 43 locations were identified by the Department of Education in 2010 in response to a request by the Catholic Church to identify schools with the potential to divest their patrons (DES 2010). However, no divestment subsequently came about because the decision on the divestment of schools in the identified areas was left with the Bishop as patron and the Catholic community in the parish concerned (DES 2010). In 2012, the 43 areas[85] were once again put forward as the locations for the National Parent Survey (2012/2013), which established 28 of these areas as having parental preference for mostly Educate Together multi-denominational schools (in 27 areas) (DES 2012, 2013). The survey response was low at 19% (Kitching 2013a) and is discussed later.

[85] The 43 areas were identified by their population size being greater than 5,000 and lower than 20,000 as per the 2006 census and re-analysed using the 2011 census as having less than 20% population growth since the previous census (2011); having at least three primary schools within a two km range of the CSO Town boundary; and having a predominantly Catholic or limited diversity of provision of schools (DES 2010).

Subsequently, only one official statement on record from the Department of Education has stated that two schools divested to ET patron: one closed-down Catholic patron school (a former Christian Brothers primary school building in Basin Lane, Dublin 8); and one Protestant patron school (a Church of Ireland school in Ballina, Co. Mayo) (DES 2014), while one existing Catholic school divested (in 2017) to a Community National School (CNS) in Killarney, Co. Kerry. Ministers have never made specific claims about divestment numbers; instead, they have spoken of increased numbers of diverse patrons in the context of 'new schools opened' (DES 2021). Indeed, in 2016, the Minister for Education, Jan O'Sullivan, claimed that the intervening years have 'engendered passionate and intense debates about patronage and diversity' in the school system, the reasons for which she referred to as legal and/or social complexities[86] from the foundation of the Irish State (DES 2016). This contrasts with earlier claims by Archbishop Martin, who favoured divestment (Irish Catholic Bishops Conference 2007; 2008). In reality, there are problems with the transfer of titles of schools, and there are socio-cultural complexities within Catholic schooling in Irish family life. These problems are not being discussed publicly, however. The most recent statement on school patronage by Minister Foley reaffirmed the lack of support for divestment but contended that political and Church support for CNSs was the alternative (DES 2021; Dáil Éireann Debates 2021). This could suggest that divestment was a waiting game in regard to official clarity of the Irish State's commitment to the Church's role in the CNS model. While the Church hierarchy recognised the need for more multi-denominational schools, local Catholic Church leaders have been reluctant to divest their schools to Educate Together, the patron of preference for parents in the 2013 survey, which is discussed next.

Local contestation over divestment

The low number of parents (19%) who engaged in the National Parent Survey (2012/2013) could indicate a lack of concern on the part of a large proportion of the population about the patronage school structure. The Catholic hierarchy claimed the low response affirmed parents' preference for Catholic patronage (Kitching 2013a); indeed, local Church clergy and schools claimed that 'our parents are happy' with the patron (Walshe 2014, p.89). Such claims raise a

[86] However, the then Minister for Education, Jan O'Sullivan, stated that 'passionate debate does not always reflect the legal, constitutional or societal complexity of the issues to be addressed. This is more than esoteric debate on the development of our education system since the foundation of the State – it is a very real issue for parents of school-going children' (DES 2016).

question about the patron and how it factors in parents' primary school selection. Were there alternative motives in the Catholic hierarchy's agreement with parent choice as the mechanism for divesting schools? Neary (2014) quoting Pellegrini (2007) suggests that the complexities of religiosity in Irish schools should not be ignored, citing how 'the very places where politics comes to matter most [are] at the deepest levels of the unconscious, in our bodies, through faith, and in relation to the emotions' (Pellegrini 2007, p.933 cited in Neary 2014, p.167). Indeed, instances in the media of push-back from parents against their Catholic schools' divesting were connected to emotional factors (e.g. O'Brien 2019; McGuire 2019). For example, controversy over the potential divestment of a Catholic school in the Portmarnock/Swords area to ET patronage hit the headlines in 2019 after parents were sent letters[87] from the school's Board of Management that warned them about the 'huge implication' for and 'assault' on the 'school community' (O'Brien 2019). First Penance, First Holy Communion, Confirmation and the celebration of Christmas would end alongside other changes, it was predicted, should the Catholic patronage change (O'Brien 2019). To avoid a 'Brexit-type disaster', parents were implored to attend meetings at their schools, with the agenda of objecting to divestment (ibid.). Such targeted information against divestment by the school's board, as representative of the patron, the Archdiocese of Dublin, played on parents' emotions around familial traditional rituals/festivities to coerce objections. Since the Forum was well aware of the emotional implications that religion raises in Irish society, it called for a conciliatory approach in seeking 'the solution for the common good', with advice against 'plebiscites or large town hall gatherings' that would be 'divisive and upsetting for communities' (Coolahan et al. 2012, p.57). This shows the Forum was aware of the emotions that religion holds in the culture of Irish life for the majority of families yet the report was resolute about balancing the minority/ majority binary for the common good. One cannot help but feel a sense of *déjà-vu* with the majority in religious issues in the primary school system.

Concluding remarks

[87] At a Dáil debate on the issue, the Minister for Education, Joe McHugh stated that 'My Department understands that a representative of the Archdiocese of Dublin wrote to schools in the Portmarnock, Malahide, Kinsealy and Yellow Walls areas [on 5 April (2019)] [...] Prior to the letter issuing on the 5 April, I understand that representatives of the Dublin Archdiocese had been holding meetings with a number of primary schools under their patronage [...] to provide information to them on the Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity process. Letters/leaflets received by parents were not based on information provided by my Department. These letters and leaflets contained incorrect information which led to unnecessary confusion' (Dáil Eireann Debates 2019).

This chapter has outlined the complex historical entanglement between Irish education, socio-political struggles, religion and society as the formative contexts of my study. Schooling was historically enmeshed in Irish society to maintain its common Catholic descent, in which education was a vehicle of social control. The non-denominational national school system established in 1831 was transformed into a predominantly Catholic denominational one due to the struggle between the Churches over the control of religious education control in their schools and the Irish population's numerical Catholic majority. The Catholic Church, state and Catholic nationalist movement cooperated in the reproduction of a parochial Catholic cultural society after the foundation of the Free State. The national school and Catholic Church were the centre of the parochial system for instilling morality, influencing the centrality of the family and reproducing Catholic socialisation. The Gaelic cultural movement and the Catholic Church's idealisation of rural family life against the 'immoral' urban poor maintained social order and reproduced the parochial system. The education system reinforced existing class differences and the introduction of free secondary education, although enabling the majority of the population to access second-level schooling for economic advancement meant that class distinctions in the system were maintained as upper-middle-class elite schools were sustained. The Catholic Church succeeded in holding its position in the unfolding mercantile shift in educational policies from the 1960s through its associated organisations such as CORI and Mater Dei, which were influential in the creation of policy discourses in relation to inequality and provisions for the disadvantaged in education. Meanwhile, the term 'disadvantaged' continues as a distinguishable group in education policies, not availing of the opportunities that the 'meritocratic' school system offers.

From the late 1970s, the introduction of multi-denominational schools and their increased popularity, alongside the demand for more Gaelscoils, brought further complexity into the system. Although the Churches were critical of the establishment of the parent-led (ET) school, the fact that it had a multi-denominational patron meant that the patronage system was claimed as pluralist. When the school system experienced increased diversity from the mid-1990s, intercultural education was introduced that advocated respect and tolerance (NCCA 2005), while religious education and the opt-out clause were outside the remit of investigation for its effects on minority belief/no-religion children, particularly in Catholic schools. Pluralism was shaped through religious rhetoric, and the Catholic hierarchy positioned religion as the facilitator of 'openness, tolerance, respect and trust between people of different belief' (Flannery 2014). Therefore, when diversity became problematised because

of the challenges faced by schools, religion was well-positioned via a diversity of patronages to be the means through which reshaping the primary school system was to be achieved. Furthermore, parent choice was easily transferred to the mercantile paradigm for reconciling diverse socio-cultural changes in society as parent choice has existed in Ireland's education system since the foundation of the state. Its ease of transfer thereby enabled the notion of balancing 'rights' while commodifying difference as an object of consumption (Coolahan et al. 2012, p.7; Wilkins 2012, p.123). Moreover, the Catholic Church's ability to adapt to education policy changes has been consistent since the 1960s shift to educational market objectives. Since the National Parent Survey (2012/2013), the Catholic patron has been resisting divestment of its schools to parents' preferred ET patron, claiming parents are happy (Walshe 2014). Meanwhile, social complexities from the foundation of the Free State were indicated by the then Minister for Education in 2016 for the lack of patron divestment (DES 2016).

My study seeks to provide insights into parents' experiences of school decision-making in the two distinct site types, viz, rural and city, that were historically differentiated through the lens of Catholic nationalist cultural ideology. Key questions this chapter has raised for my study concern Catholic nationalist culture, if/how it intersects with parents' school decision-making experiences and the local, socio-cultural differences between city and rural locations in parents' selection processes. The next chapter provides a summary of the emergence of choice in education internationally and makes an examination of international and national scholarly debates and perspectives brought to the topic of parent/school choice in order to identify further questions for my study.

Chapter 2

'Parent choice' of schools, markets and the Irish context

As identified in the previous chapter, socio-cultural changes in Ireland from the mid-1990s and a patronage school system that has not kept up with these changes led to the sanctioning of a supply-led, pluralistic choice policy in education in 2012 (DES 2012; 2013; Hirsch 1994). 'Parent choice' is identified as a process to 'determine the "ideal" range and distribution of patronage categories (concerning religious denomination and language)' (DES 2012, p.56). This chapter presents a review of the international and national scholarly literature and findings pertinent to my research question: *What are parents' experiences of making their primary school decision and selection in Ireland?* My review of studies on choice discourses in education is a process that develops my understanding of the complexities within parent choice of schools and builds my research focus.

First, a brief overview of the emergence of choice discourses in education policy-making is discussed to contextualise the marketisation of education. This provides a foundation that informs the following two sections. The first of these is a review of the relevant international literature on school choice to explore the factors that influence parents' school decision-making and selection processes and the impacts on school systems and families. The second section is a review of the Irish research in order to build an understanding of what studies are finding about parents' choice of primary school and the school system. The chapter ends with key takeaway points that guide my study's approach.

The emergence of choice in education policy discourses

From the late 1970s, parent choice discourses in educational policy-making were initially advanced to influence public sector policy in Britain and the USA (Whitty 1997). The general rhetoric around the economic recession[88] during this period focused attention on the adequacy of education systems, social issues and economic demands (ibid.). The OECD pointed to England's policy-making in education as 'secretive, conservative, committed to maintaining

[88] This was mainly due to the oil crisis (Whitty 1997). The middle-classes were adversely affected during this period by big corporations' hiring freezes and the offshoring of manufacturing jobs from the US and UK. Intensified personal debt resulted in individuals' status anxiety (Bartlett et al., 2002).

the status quo and disconnected from policy concerns' around 'employment/ skills/economy' (Bell 2020, p.59). Right think tank[89] publications in the US and Britain drew attention to declining school standards and became the dominant discourse that shaped the context within which policy was framed and enacted (ibid.). Policy was and still is defined as an attempt to 'solve a problem'; in this instance, it was perceived that education did not serve nations' global needs to be economically competitive (Ball et al. 2012). The decentralisation of education was argued for in order to replace anti-competitive and anti-entrepreneurial welfare practices to meet globalised economic demands (Rose 1996). At the same time, central government's control of the national curriculum was asserted by claims that liberal educators/establishments threatened educational standards and traditional values[90] (Whitty & Power 1997, p.2).

Right think-tanks were instrumental in the campaign to put school standards at the top of the educational agenda (Ball et al. 2012). They widely circulated and blamed schools for the 'rising tide of mediocrity' and America's slipping global competitiveness (Bartlett et al. 2002, p.5). Criticisms of state schooling appealed to 'middle- and working-class white males' who were angered by their economic erosion (ibid., p.5). Furthermore, with higher numbers of lower-class and ethnic minority families entering secondary education after the war, places in grammar schools, lycées and gymnasiums became scarcer for the expanding white middle-class group who had to make do with comprehensive/state schooling (van Zanten 2009). Anxieties about academic standards in schools were deployed in campaigns to introduce the concept and necessity of schools being accountable for their academic outcomes via performance indicators (Bartlett et al. 2002). The underlying message communicated was that the education system acted for the 'requirements of the producers – LEAs and teachers', while 'ignoring the demands of the consumers – parents and children' (The Hillgate Group 1986, p.3 cited in Tesseyman 1999, p.195). Right think tanks were coherent in their message and

[89] The 'New Right' consists of both liberal and conservative ideologies, personified by politicians, capitalists and intellectuals whose thinking is used to forge policy (Tesseyman 1999). In the UK, New Right think tanks include the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA), the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS), the British Hillgate Group and the Adam Smith Institute (ASI); in the US, they include the Hudson Institute, the Manhattan Institute, the Pacific Research Institute for Public Policy, the Heritage Foundation and the Christian Coalition. These groups sought to influence policy by several means, including publishing and promoting articles, research, operating as special advisers to ministers and through an influential media profile (Whitty & Edwards 1998; Walford 1996; Tesseyman 1999; Ball et al. 2012).

[90] The then UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher gained political traction in the decentralisation of education by criticising comprehensive schooling by means of claims that children were learning 'anti-racist mathematics' and 'political slogans' instead of being 'able to express themselves in clear English'; and being taught about their 'inalienable right to be gay' rather than 'respect traditional moral values' (Tesseyman 1999, p.194). The emphasis on traditional academic virtues was a strategy to resonate emotionally with the public and undermine teachers/principals so that curriculum control was relinquished to the state (Whitty & Edwards1998)

influential in setting an agenda based upon the decentralisation of education and embedding market-led choice and competition discourses in reform debates (Tesseyman 1999). Such discourses, revolving around producer-consumer and supply-demand dichotomies, shaped education reforms and policy-making (Tesseyman 1999), while the benefits of choice were rationalised by the autonomous freedom it ('choice') would give parents in their children's schooling (Rose 1996). Choice discourses in education market reforms were political acts receptive to the public concerned with social changes (van Zanten 2009).

Decentralisation and marketisation are elements of the neoliberal consensus, which were high on political reform agendas at this period (Whitty & Edwards 1978). In its simplest understanding, neoliberalism advocates the application of market principles – choice, deregulation, competition and accountability – to public institutions and their services (Bartlett et al. 2002). According to Angus (2015), 'choice' is the 'key element of the neoliberal policy complex' in creating an education system that is governed indirectly. Choice is advocated for the sake of encouraging competition which, in turn, is assumed to foster accountability processes (Whitty 1997; Machin & Vignoles 2006) that promote educational quality and academic outcomes (Adler 1997; Moe 1994), because schools' funding resources are dependent on enrolments (Adler 1997).

Public opinion resulted in teacher unions, local authorities and Inspectorates' decreased power in educational agendas (Whitty 1997). Central governments gained control of their national curricula, systems of testing and schools' performance/accountability standards (Whitty 1997; Bell 2020). The reduction of educational bureaucracy meant the devolution of responsibility went to schools for their academic performance, management, finance and accountability, and to parents for monitoring their performance via choice and competition (Bell 2020). Parents' concern for their children's education being a pretext to legislate the former's choice of schools (Bell 2020) opened the door for removing strict catchment areas with open enrolment – a concept deployed to give parents more choice and increase competition (Whitty & Power 1997).

Choice discourses were also mediated in arguments for widening school provision to privately owned schools with public funding (Whitty & Edwards 1994). The inclusion of private schools with state funding was advocated for 'equity' in providing a fair allocation of choice of school places for more able poorer children (Whitty & Edwards 1994, pp.19–24). Parent choice shaped opinion in favour of extra state funding to grammar schools and selective private schools (Whitty & Edwards 1998). Choice discourses were co-opted by religious

institutions, linguistic minorities, charities and other private institutions[91] to fit their specific interests (Stambach 2003). Catholic groups alongside Evangelical Christian groups[92] and Orthodox Jews argued for public subsidies for private religiously/culturally specialised schools (ibid., p.222; Ball 1997). Choice, rights and greater diversity of school provision were mediated in arguments for state-assisted funding to private schools (Whitty 1997). According to Walford (1996), governments generated diversity in choice discourses but never defined it. Instead, diversity resonated with global discourses, e.g. the UN's Universal Declaration and European Convention on Human Rights, in arguments for choice (ibid.). However, choice and diversity did not result in differences between schools in what is taught (ibid.). Central governments held 'authority over educational systems whilst promoting a theoretical and superficial movement towards consumer sovereignty' (McKensie 1993, p.17 cited in Whitty & Power 1997, p.223).

Significant in the growth of market choice policy discourses globally are the ongoing international rankings of schools' performance, e.g. OECD's PISA tests[93] (Cheng 2020). These rankings not only increase performance concerns and propel market-led policy debates in education into the 21st century but have also enlarged the number of actors networking with the OECD, e.g. the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), the World Bank and the European Commission, in the creation of global education knowledge (TIMSS,[94] PIRLS[95]), standards and agendas (Grek 2020b). Niches were created for private corporations/consultants, e.g. Pearson and McKinsey, to translate education data into best practices (Grek 2020b). As producers of global education metrics, knowledge and action-planning, these organisations are empowered in an ever-evolving game of influencing what are deemed problems, solutions and international policy agendas (ibid., pp.322–4). The utility of education, along with the influence of corporates' interests, in producing an 'educated and skilled workforce' has become the 'common-sense' policy-making agenda framed by choice discourses and economic competitiveness that cut across

[91] By the end of 2004, there were 17 operating academies (state-funded, privately managed schools) and 42 in the process of being set up with sponsors including Bristol City Football Club, the venture capital company SGO Ltd., Dixons, HSBC Education Trust, Saga Holidays, InterCity Companies and a variety of religious organisations and foundations in the UK (Ball 2006, p.118).
[92] The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights (Stravinskas 2020) and Evangelical Christian groups with links to the British Hillgate Group (Whitty & Edwards 1994).
[93] PISA assesses the competencies of 15-year-olds in reading, mathematics and science (with a focus on mathematics) in 65 OECD countries and economies.
[94] Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).
[95] Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

national boundaries (Bell 2020, p.40, Bartlett et al. 2002). Thus, choice and the education market are sustained as normative in an international context.

Socio-economic and demographic changes in nations and ideological discourses of choice in the rhetoric around economic growth and competition have shaped the global marketisation of education (Bartlett et al. 2002). Choice is continually rationalised in arguments for the creation of better schools through competition, the provision of diversity and the generation of equality in response to parents' needs in the school market (Wilson 2012). Choice also resonates with the ambitions of mainly, though not exclusively, middle-class groups for higher educational and economic advancement (van Zanten 2009). School choice, competition and performance discourses have legitimised and naturalised a market approach to education policy worldwide (Bartlett et al. 2002). To understand how choice practices play out in everyday school life for families, I now turn to the international sociological education studies on school choice.

International studies on school choice

This section provides an overview of the key international literature on school choice to better understand parents' choice-making processes. This review includes studies from a range of countries - England, Wales, USA, Sweden, Netherlands, France, Australia and Chile at primary and second level schooling but predominantly the latter only because there is a larger number of studies focused at this level. Overall, four key factors are highlighted from the literature to understand the workings of school choice in what follows. The first is the geographic dimensions of school choice that shape local school markets and conditions. This is followed by a discussion of admission policies concerning school choice, the role of religious ethos and, finally, the discourse of parents as rational choosers.

The geography of school choice

Although choice is adopted in education policies globally, choice-based policy is implemented differently across nations, regions and school systems (Wilson & Bridge 2019). The numerous types of school choice systems, broadly understood as the range and type of schools from which parents are eligible to choose, fit within two categories: (1) an open enrolment system where parents can choose from state-funded and state-assisted private schools without geographic restrictions; and (2) choice restricted to geographic zones (Burgess 2016; Wilson

& Bridge 2019). Geography is thus the common factor in structuring school choice systems (Taylor 2009) and is conceptualised as a space where schools and homes are located (Bell 2009). It is also a space that is assigned meanings, derived from different views, purposes, physical features and histories (ibid.). In this way, the meanings associated with schools converge with their locations to shape local school markets and school choice.

Geographic school organisation and choice

The number and different types of schools within a geographic location form a baseline for understanding competition and choice (Taylor 2009). Taylor's (2001, p.206) UK study of secondary school choice finds hierarchical 'local' markets of competition in parallel within school districts. Instead of schools in a district competing 'on one level playing field', he finds patterns of school choice that reflect three hierarchical systems of competition and demand (ibid., p.211). Each hierarchical system reflects the school's status, whether private, state-assisted, grant-maintained or state, and correlates with families' social class and ethnic background (ibid.). The higher a school is positioned in the hierarchical competition rankings determined by its perceived status, the lower its intake of low-income students, to the point that schools lowest in the tier are 'becoming more ghettoized' (Taylor 2009, p.565). The different hierarchical competition tiers are significant for the sets of schools from which parents make their choice (Bell 2009). Middle-class families have a wider set of school options to select from, including more high-achieving schools (ibid.). The 'better' schools tend to be located in middle-class areas; therefore, choice holds socio-geographical contexts that give the middle-class a greater chance of getting their first choice (Burgess et al. 2019).

Studies have linked publications on schools' academic performance data with the housing market of their locations to understand how some schools are perceived as 'better' and the effects on choice outcomes for families. In the U.S. (Florida), Figlio and Lucas (2004) examined the effects of school grading performance data[96] on local housing markets, finding that schools with an 'A' grade contribute to increased house prices in their districts/localities. Their study concluded that high-achieving families make location choices based on schools' grades (ibid.). Districts with better-performing schools are pricing out families who cannot afford to buy in these areas, thus eliminating/disadvantaging lower-income families in relation

[96] This study investigated Florida's state-administered school grades accountability system, introduced in 2002, as part of a national trend towards increased school accountability by examining school grading effects on local housing markets (Figlio & Lucas 2004).

to such schools and reinforcing school and district segregation. The link between the 'better' higher-performance schools and their higher-income populations thus cannot be ignored.

A further critical geographic feature of the education market concerns the distribution of private subsidised schools with public funding in local school systems. Choice-based policy reforms have reshaped school systems globally with the addition of private subsidised schools alongside state schools in the education market of choice (Wilson & Bridge 2019). Studies show that choice-based policy has increased segregation between private subsidised schools and public schools (Bellei et al. 2019; Bunar & Ambrose 2016). After the introduction of choice-based policies in the early 1980s in Chile, the number of students enrolled in private subsidised schools rose from 15% in 1980 to 60% in 2017 in a way that has increased class and ethnic segregation between schools (Bellei et al. 2019). Similarly, Bunar and Ambrose's (2016) study finds that choice-based policies in Sweden's education reforms since the early 1990s have increased the number of independent schools[97] (private subsidised schools) in the system. Private subsidised schools tend to be located in middle-class areas, thereby increasing school and neighbourhood segregation (Bunar & Ambrose 2016; Bellei et al. 2019). A recurring theme is that schools' reputations are linked to their neighbourhoods' class and ethnicity structure (Bunar & Ambrose 2016; Bellei et al. 2019; Gabay-Egozi 2016; Taylor 2007; Reay & Lucey 2004). Bunar and Ambrose (2016) find Swedish parents' narratives about 'good' and 'no-go-schools' are discursively understood around 'Swedes' and 'minority ethnicities[98]' group identifications (ibid., p.47). Although the resulting 'white flight' from disadvantaged neighbourhood schools was a pattern in Sweden before these choice-based education reforms, school segregation has increased significantly since (ibid., p.47).

A further consequence of choice-based policy reforms is segregation within schools. Minority ethnic students in Stockholm who move from low-achieving, stigmatised schools to high-status, middle-class schools experience little integration with the mainly white indigenous students (Bunar & Kallstenius 2007 cited in Bunar 2010). Furthermore, the more minority ethnic children from deprived locations who move to middle-class schools, the more

[97]As part of a decentralisation initiative introduced during the 1980s, Sweden's educational policy was reformed from the early 1990s to widen parents' choice by including independent (private) schools alongside publicly funded schools (Bunar & Ambrose 2016). There are no restrictions in Sweden on who can set up private schools, which may therefore be undertaken by private companies, cooperatives, faith-based organisations or foundations etc. The key requirements are that these schools cannot charge fees and are prohibited from using selective admission policies (Astrand 2016). Two private independent school companies are listed on the country's stock exchange (Bunar and Ambrose 2016; Butrymowicz 2018).

[98] The term 'minority ethnic' in reference to international studies refers to individuals/group who have different national/cultural traditions from the main population of the country the study is located.

Swedish children tend to move out and go to another school (Bunar 2010). A tolerated limit of minority ethnic composition on the part of white, middle-class parents is identified in schools, beyond which white flight is typically imminent (ibid.). This aligns with McCarthy's (2016) study of second-level school selection in Australia, which finds parents have a 'tipping point' ratio of non-indigenous to indigenous (terms used in this study) students in schools. As such, middle-class schools' principals prioritise 'racial balance' in their admission policies to maintain and protect their schools' 'quality', to the detriment of minority ethnic families (ibid., pp.38–40). Choice is mediated in schools' selection processes on white, middle-class families' terms and conditions concerning what constitutes a good or bad school.

The workings of choice in increasing school segregation beyond neighbourhood segregation are shown to be complexly centred around mobility, i.e. families' movement to the schools their children attend across and within neighbourhoods. For example, Boterman's (2020) study in the Hague and Amsterdam finds that highly educated Western parents who move into newly gentrifying areas not populated by mainly middle-class families tend to send their children to high-performing schools outside these neighbourhoods (ibid.), while the children of less-educated, ethnic minority parents living in middle-class areas with high-scoring schools attend lower-performing schools outside their neighbourhoods (ibid.). This shows the power of the middle-classes in mediating the classed and ethnic composition of schools and segregation levels between schools and neighbourhoods. When middle-class Dutch families are the majority residents in gentrifying neighbourhoods, it is expected that the local schools will also become more homogeneously populated with this group (ibid.). Similar findings are evidenced in the U.S., which supplies the largest source of research[99] on racial segregation globally (Bonal & Bellei 2019; Saporito 2003; 2009). White families living in ethnically diverse neighbourhoods tend to send their children to schools that have higher concentrations of white students outside of their residential locality (Saporito 2003). Conversely, ethnic minorities tend to be excluded from their local school once it becomes popular and oversubscribed with white middle-class families (Boterman 2020; Woodfield & Gunby 2003). Choice is shown to exacerbate school segregation at higher levels than their residential ethnicity and social class demographics (Boterman 2020; Ladd et al. 2009; Woodfield & Gunby 2003; Valenzuela et al. 2014; Saporito 2009). These complex

[99] Racial segregation was first identified there in the mid-1950s when the Brown vs Board of Education court case (1954) prohibited legally segregated schools in the USA (Pratt 2002) and initiated calls (only implemented three decades later) for a broader provision of schools to allow parents to choose schooling from beyond their locality (Orfield and Lee 2005; Saporito 2003).

mechanisms in school choice contribute to schools' perceived status in local school markets of choice, ranging from stigmatised to privileged (Buck 2001), and to the (re)production of school segregation and inequalities.

Studies are consistent in their findings that schools increasingly reflect their neighbourhoods' residential patterns in the U.S (Frankenberg 2013; Logan et al. 2004; Bell 2007; Lubienski 2007), the UK (Burgess et al. 2006, 2011, 2015; Hamnett et al. 2013; Gorard et al. 2001), Europe (Boterman 2018; Kristen 2008; Bunar & Ambrose 2016), Australia (Rowe & Lubienski 2016) and Chile (Bellei et al. 2019; Valenzuela et al. 2013, 2014). The mobility dynamics of school choice also contribute to increased school segregation beyond neighbourhood segregation (Saporito 2009; Boterman 2020). Schools with the highest disadvantaged poor and ethnic populations have little possibility of shaking off their negative reputations because of their association to their location (Bunar & Ambrose 2016). While the complexity within the geographic contexts of local school systems explains one part of segregation, admission policies and procedures also play a role in school choice mechanisms to reinforce school segregation and are discussed next.

School admission policies in school choice

School admission policies influence school segregation possibilities depending on how much autonomy schools have to set their admission criteria (Boterman 2019). State schools' admission policies are governed by local or central authorities, but, when oversubscribed, these schools can prioritise specific criteria for allocating places (Wilson & Bridge 2019). As pointed to previously, oversubscribed schools can restrict their allocation of places to smaller catchment areas, increasing property prices and reinforcing neighbourhood segregation (Gibbons & Machin 2003; Butler & Robson 2003; Taylor 2009). The difficulty in gaining access to high-demand schools is in itself a sort of 'surrogate guarantee of quality' for parents and a 'mechanism of social exclusion' (Ball et al. 1995, p.67).

Other selection practices administered in schools' admissions' processes are found to include higher levels of parental commitment, complicated application procedures that only certain families can navigate, interviewing and ability/aptitude scores (Robertson 2015; Jennings 2010; Campbell et al. 2009; West et al. 2004). Such practices in admission criteria feed into parents' strategising processes (as discussed later) directed to accessing schools perceived as the best (Campbell et al., 2009). Private subsidised schools have greater

autonomy in setting their enrolment criteria, as they are their own admission authorities (Wilson and Bridge 2019). These schools have the autonomy to engage in selection, and findings show their students are usually from the highest social groups (Robertson 2010; van Zanten 2009). In this way, schools that select their student intake maintain their hierarchical position in the education market (Waslander et al. 2010; van Zanten 2009; Bellei 2007; Lacireno-Paquet et al. 2002). Faith schools that receive subsidised public funding[100] also have autonomy in setting their admission criteria and usually specify religious affiliation to attract specific religious belief applicants (Avram & Dronkers 2012). However, as discussed next, studies show that faith schools' admission selection processes do not only reflect their religious ethos.

Religious schools and segregation

Studies of voluntary-aided (i.e. receiving reduced state funding) faith schools in England find their allocation of school places is centred around social class, academic ability and religious belief (e.g. Allen & West 2009). A number of religious schools identified as 'elite' by parents administer admission criteria that require interviews and supplementary information such as parents' occupations and whether they have refugee status (Allen & West 2009; Pennell et al. 2006). Although Allen and West (2009) document no evidence that religious schools act covertly to exclude low income and minority ethnic families, their analysis reveals there are fewer lower-income families and larger numbers of higher-performing students in religious schools than local community schools. They further question whether secularisation would eliminate segregation, given the support for the most desired elite schools from select groups of middle-class parents (ibid.). Butler and Hamnett's (2012) study of faith-based[101] schools in East London finds that middle-class families of White, Asian and Black ethnic backgrounds increasingly choose faith schools to avoid working-class-populated state comprehensives. Faith schools are the schools of choice when middle-class parents find themselves unable to access 'better' oversubscribed schools because of strict catchment criteria (ibid.). The authors conclude that social class is more relevant than ethnicity and religion to parents' choice of faith schools.

[100] It should be noted that in England, faith schools can 'either have increased state funding and control by local education authorities and be categorised as "voluntary-controlled" schools or have reduced state support and more independence (including control over student admissions) and categorised as "voluntary-aided" schools' (Allen & West 2019, p. 474).

[101] These are Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland schools (Butler & Hamnett 2012).

The examination of faith schools and school choice in the Netherlands is particularly interesting for this study because religious, government-funded schools are historically part of the school system in a similar way to Ireland (Denessen et al. 2005). 70% of primary schools in the Netherlands are religious, primarily Catholic and Protestant, alongside 46 Islamic schools (since the 1980s) (ibid.). Historically, the different faith schools produced segregation around religion, particularly Catholic and Protestants, and to an extent social class (Boterman 2019, p.3079). Thus, families' religious background is a factor in school choice (Denessen et al., 2005). Denessen et al. (2005) found that the social class milieu of schools is less relevant to parents' school choice. Instead, they discerned that the 'group-specific reasons for school choice' were related to religious and ethnic groups (ibid., p.364). Muslim and Protestant parents, especially Orthodox Protestants, select schools for religious reasons, with the former actively seeking 'Black' schools (Denessen et al. 2005, p. 364). Ladd et al. (2009), on the other hand, find that segregation along ethnic lines is as high as that in the US and point to the increase of ethnic minorities to the Netherlands and their low socio-economic status alongside residential segregation as factors in Dutch families' tendency to avoid high ethnic minority schools. Faith schools are found to intersect with both ethnicity and class and thus enhance not only religious but also ethnic segregation (ibid; Karsten et al. 2006). The 1917 Dutch Constitutional guarantee of freedom of education, which gives citizens the right to establish publicly funded schools provided there is a sufficient number of students, is similar to Ireland (Ladd et al. 2009). Ladd et al. (2009) argue that Dutch parents' valuation of longstanding freedom of education, which provides parents with the right to choose their children's school alongside the autonomy that permits schools in the Netherlands to manage their affairs, makes it difficult to tackle the high levels of segregation.

Through the examples taken from various studies thus far, we see how choice shapes local school systems by the circulatory effects of the spatial organisation of schools, the number and types of schools (state and state-funded private schools), schools' admission processes and the choice of religious ethos. School choice encourages and legitimates strategic mechanisms that work in the interest of mainly white, middle-class families and schools. Advocates of school choice assume parents are rational choosers, coercing schools to respond with better performance output (Bosetti 2004). I now turn to how parents make their school choice decisions.

Choice narratives assume rational choosers

Choice narratives assume parents are rational choosers who utilise information to weigh the costs and benefits of the choices available in order to select the best school (Berends & Zottola 2009). It is assumed that parents will choose high-performing schools, in which context the hypothesis is that competition will drive schools to improve (Hoxby 2003 cited in Berends & Zottola 2009). Studies on parents' choice processes are mainly approached from a social enquiry view of the practical operation of parents' school choice (e.g. Bowe et al. 1994; Gewirtz et al. 1995; Butler & Hamnett 2007; Byrne & De Tona 2019; Bellei et al. 2019). From this perspective, parents are understood as drawing on a range of resources related to their social, cultural and economic capital in their engagement with school choice. Parents' values in their school choice for their children are formulated through their social position; therefore, parents from all social/ethnic backgrounds impact the shape of school systems and school segregation (Bellei et al. 2019; Bowe et al. 1994; Ball & Vincent 2007; 1998; Bagley & Hillyard 2015; Bunar 2009; 2010).

Instead of a narrow rationalistic understanding of choice, Ben-Porath (2009, p.531) suggests parents' 'process of choosing', which includes the resources, i.e. social, economic and cultural capital, available to families, should be considered in choice selections. Thus, 'the limitations and challenges parents and families' face in their negotiation of choice gives a greater understanding of the different dynamics within school choice (ibid., p.538). Otherwise, choice discourses negatively conceive parents who select their local schools in working-class, ethnic minority neighbourhoods as passive, less-skilled and lacking in ambition for their children's education (Reay and Lucey 2004, p.40; Reay & Ball 1997). For Skeggs (2004), such labelling is the result of viewing working-class parents' school selection through a middle-class lens. Many scholars argue against criticisms of working-class parents' selection of their local schools (Reay & Lucey 2004; Schneider et al. 2000; Wilkins 2010; 2011; Bunar 2010; Ball & Vincent 2007). Vincent et al.'s (2010) English study finds that working-class parents' local school choices are bound by constraints, particularly the need for extended family support in childcare (ibid., p.294). Therefore, school choice does not hold the same meaning for parents and must be viewed from the perspectives of parents' social class and ethnic background.

Parents' values for their preferred schools may be similar, e.g. avoiding schools in neighbourhoods with reputations of behaviour considered undesirable; however, depending on parents' economic, social and cultural capital, their selected school outcomes will differ

(Bellei et al. 2019). For example, Bellei et al.'s (2019) study in Chile finds lower-income families avoid schools associated with drug-dealing and impoverished families' vulgar language. Their distinction within their social stratum is based not on economic but moral and cultural differences (ibid.). Their selected school is still within their social class stratum and is not populated by middle-class families showing inter- and intra-class differentiations. Conversely, Bunar's (2010) study finds Swedish students chose their local stigmatised 'bad' schools, located in poor immigrant neighbourhoods, for security reasons (ibid.). Their local schools are safe spaces populated by people like themselves as opposed to exposing them to the fear of isolation and prejudice if they moved to Swedish-populated schools (Bunar 2010, p.154). Social relationships with people 'like us' are not the preserve of the white middle-classes, however. Byrne & De Tona (2019) find ethnic minority parents select second-level schools with a 'sufficient ethnic mix' to protect their children against the impact of being the only Black and/or Muslim child in the school (ibid.). Thus, the local school selection for people 'like us' is differently produced, depending on the social relations between the family and the school system from which families are making their selection. Indeed, Byrne & De Tona (2019, p.158) conclude that school choice is a local affair shaped by a combination of factors, including the realistic prospect of getting a school place, travel costs, parents' social relations and how they perceive themselves within the locality in which they are operating.

Parents' value for community in their school selection are specific to individuals and groups: they are constructed, influenced or inflected within families' social relations with places that hold different local contexts and meanings. Studies on rural schooling, although few, exemplify the integral part of the community for families in school selection (Bagley & Hillyard 2015; Walker & Clark 2010). Rural families' intergenerational links to place in their local school selection are about supporting the school's sustainability and by implication their socialising circuit: a sense of shared identity with familial groups and a village/community way of life (Bagley & Hillyard 2015). School choice decisions across all classes, ethnicities and locations hold collective social relations, values and meanings through which parents make their selection (Bellei et al. 2019; Byrne & De Tona 2019). Parents' social relations within their locality/neighbourhood are relevant to my study to understand the different dynamics between school selection processes and rural and city locations' contexts.

Studies consistently find that middle-class parents who are better-educated benefit most by school choice (Alegre & Benito 2012; Ball 2003; van Zanten 2003; Bellei et al. 2019). Middle-class families tend to be skilled consumers with the capital resources (social,

educational and economic) to activate their decision-making processes (e.g. Gewirtz et al.1995; Ball 2003; Butler & Hamnett 2007; Raveaud & van Zanten 2007; Reay et al. 2007; Byrne & De Tona 2019). Social networks heavily inform choice-making decisions in order to assure children are with similar peer groups (Ball 2003; Reay et al. 2007; Cucchiara & Horvat 2014; Vincent et al. 2010). Parents with access to 'hot knowledge', i.e. information about local school systems, are the most persistent structuring forces of school markets (Ball & Vincent 1998). Rowe & Lubienski's (2016) study in Australia finds that social networks with specific knowledge are key to accessing places in high-demand, oversubscribed schools (Rowe & Lubienski 2016). Middle-class parents tend to avoid schools that have high numbers of children from working-class, economically disadvantaged and ethnic minority backgrounds (ibid.; Rowe & Windle 2012; Ball 2003; Byrne 2009; Byrne & De Tona 2019). Bruegel (2006) contends that choice enables parents to act upon their prejudices and create ethnic boundaries between schools in their decisions (cited in Byrne 2009, p.20). Working-class and ethnic minority populated schools foster anxieties in middle-class parents over discipline, social problems, and time taken from teaching and learning in the classroom (van Zanten 2005, Gewirtz et al. 1995).

Whereas upper-middle-class families prefer socio-culturally homogeneous elite schools that are predominantly fee-paying (Bellei et al. 2019), van Zanten (2005) argues that school choice and the marketisation of education has not changed the upper-classes' school choices because they have always used elite private schools and/or have access to the best-reputed public schools. Thus, the struggle for places in the best-reputed state schools/state-funded private schools is primarily an intra-middle-class one, where positional advantage is reliant on the right social networks (Bell 2009). Studies on intra-middle-class struggles for places in the perceived best schools are specific to the white middle-class. Byrne (2009) contends that the intersections between race and class in making up the middle-class need to be recognised (ibid.). The majority of studies that examine race in education focus on ethnic minorities, with only a few studies on white students that are mainly concentrated on the working classes, in particular boys who refuse to be educated and whom the middle-classes tend to present as 'anti-social' and avoid (Raveaud & Van Zanten 2007, p.117; Byrne 2009). According to Byrne (2009), quoting Ball (2003), 'white' middle-classness, like all identities, has to be 'sought in the subtleties of the everyday, in the uncertainties of status, in fine distinctions as well as gross ones' (Ball 2003 cited in Byrne 2009, p.15). The normalcy of middle-class whiteness within the idea of 'people like us' is suggested to maintain the

racialised nature of social reproduction and social capital in the form of the 'right' networks (Byrne 2009, p.438). As Byrne (2009) highlights, the privilege of the white middle-classes is left 'unexamined' and 'outside the operations of racism' (ibid., p.23).

The fragmentation of whiteness along classed lines of white working-class students who are associated with low educational attainment and aspirations ignores the advantaged positions of white middle-class parents in school choice discourses. White middle-class families are able to position themselves advantageously within the school choice process. Studies of middle-class parents who choose culturally diverse urban public schools find they value such schooling because it resources their middle-class children's future trajectory in a multicultural global economy (e.g. Reay et al.'s (2007) study in England; Cucchiara & Horvat's (2014) study in the US). These parents position themselves as the 'other' to what they perceive as normative, white middle-classness, viewing themselves as in possession of such characteristics as 'integrity, authenticity and openness' (Cucchiara & Horvat 2014, p.504). Thus, they differentiate themselves from parents who avoid diverse (in terms of class and ethnicity) school environments and send their children to private schools, even though they may not be able to afford the fees (ibid., p.500). Parents in these studies produce an alternative white middle-class self-identity, one that is 'globally knowledgeable, tolerant, inclusive, better prepared for a global economy' (Reay et al. 2007, p.1052). At the same time, they are not cognisant of their privileged position 'within the play of power and exclusion' (Hall 1996 cited in Reay et al. 2007, p.1054). Especially when their 'inclusivity' of the 'acceptable ethnic "other"' simultaneously produces the 'too-black working classes and the too-white working classes as unacceptable "others"' (ibid., p.1054). Their white middle-classness enables them to opt in and out of diversity according to their values (ibid.). As such, parents' choice-making processes hold subjective meanings entangled in their social relations, sense of selves and connection to geographic locations and/or groups/communities. Hence, these processes are emotional practices.

Overall, studies indicate that parent choice of school advantages middle-class parents and increases segregation. Choice produces anxieties, particularly regarding middle-class social reproduction (Ball 2003). Parents' strategies in their school choice process are highly linked with local contexts, i.e. local school system structures, families' socio-cultural position and social networks. Choice is a social process that reflects parents' identities and social relations and is therefore differently interpreted and enacted across all classes and ethnicities (Cucchiara & Horvat 2014; Bagley & Hillyard 2015, p.280; Raveaud & van Zanten 2007;

Reay et al. 2007). Rather than exhibiting an underlying rationality, parents' choices are motivated by perceptions/perspectives, actions and constraints which are bound by social relations and cultural and economic capital. The middle-classes are compelled to participate in choice-making that strategises social class networks to access the right school and maintain their social reproduction (Ball 2006). The relationship between the structure of school systems and social class reproduction has intensified with parent choice discourses, processes and practices in a way that has increased schools' classed and ethnic segregation. The next section turns to the Irish literature to build an understanding of what is known about parents' school choice practice in Ireland.

Irish literature on parents' school choices

This section looks at the academic literature on school choice in Ireland's education system at both primary and second level. The four key themes identified from the literature that are significant for this study serve as the themes for this section, as follows: choice and the classed school system structure; choice and the Irish language; the implications of school choice for ethnic minorities; and choice policy, religious ethos and diversity. The overall objective is to understand what is known about Irish parents' choice practice, particularly in the primary school system. Finally, I present a brief overview of the key points from this chapter's literature review that are important considerations for my study.

Choice and the classed school system structure

Early education studies use choice discourses in a strictly operational sense to represent the schools that children attend (Kellaghan & Greaney 1970). Choice is understood as involving the symbiotic relationship between schools and their student cohorts, i.e. their social class composition (Hannan et al. 1996). Hannan & Boyle (1987) point to choice as relating to the 'acquired social functions of schools' to select students (sex and classed) through their different educational 'missions' (see pp.xii, 166). Their study[102] finds that the different secondary schools, viz, voluntary (faith) schools, vocational schools and comprehensive schools, undertook local selectivity, determined primarily around social class differentiation and ability selection (ibid., pp.166–7). Choice in early education studies did not represent

[102] This study investigated second level schools' educational outcomes from various perspectives, e.g. ability grouping and gender mix (Hannan et al. 1996).

parents' choice but rather reflected schools' selection of students in alignment with the social class ordering of society.

Later studies find active second-level school choice by parents in their investigation of the schools' educational outcomes (Smyth et al. 2004). Up to half of the secondary schools chosen by the parents in Smyth et al's. (2004) study were not their nearest school. Middle-class parents are identified as the prominent group of active choosers, impacting certain schools, which are left with greater concentrations of students with literacy, numeracy and behavioural difficulties (Byrne & Smyth 2010, p.186; Byrne et al. 2010). The classed nature of parental social networks emerges as a factor in the construction of schools' reputational differences and selection, similarly to findings in international studies (Byrne & Smyth 2010).

Lynch and Moran (2006, pp.4–5) highlight the role schools play in determining the parameters of choice that reinforce educational outcomes and inequalities (ibid.; Lynch & Baker 2005). They argue that the concept of school choice should be disaggregated into its 'operation at policy, at school and at individual level' to differentiate between the ways that choice is practised by parents and used in political discourses (ibid., p.223). They point to the existence of school choice in Irish education since the foundation and evolution of the State , which lay in religious differences and not market ideology (ibid.). At the same time, choice has historically manifested patterns of class reproduction (Lynch & Moran 2006, p.7). They highlight the classed operations of schools' organisational bodies such as school owners, trustees, boards of management and parent associations, which are mainly made up of the middle-class, and suggest schools' management and principals use choice at a 'subtle unofficial level' comparable to commercial market intent to attract the middle-class enrolment historically associated with their school (ibid., p. 226). In this way, religious ownership and management of schools works as a 'brand name' that denotes classed identity, e.g. most Protestant schools are of high prestige because of their historic association with the Anglo-Irish ascendancy (ibid.). Within the Catholic religious orders, there are status distinctions, e.g. Jesuits and Benedictine orders, which are of higher prestige for boys' schooling because of their historical association with educating the political and professional class (O'Neill 2019), while the Sisters of Loreto, Ursuline and St. Louis orders have traditionally educated girls from professional, business and large farming communities (Courtois 2018). Schools actively exploit their classed identities to maintain their advantage and hierarchy of desirability in a way that raises the question for my study about the historical contexts of schools' identities in parents' values for their preferred school.

Cahill and Hall's (2014) study focuses on working-class parents' selection of secondary schools and highlights how rhetoric about choice legitimises the classed structure of the school system. They find that although working-class parents are aware of school choice, they are limited by financial constraints such as travel expenses (ibid.). Meanwhile, underprivileged parents do not engage with choice as the local school is the norm (ibid.). Parents justify their local school selection by the belief that there is no difference between schools because all of them undertake the same Leaving Certificate examination (ibid.). By obfuscating sameness with equality, such beliefs inadvertently legitimate choice and the classed, stratified school system. However, it cannot be overlooked that these parents are making the best of the constraints that they experience in their school selection.

Overall, the classed stratification in the second-level school system in Ireland is a well-established historical pattern with consumer-/producer-like practices, even when markets were never officially associated with choice (Lynch & Moran 2006). Religion is historically intertwined with class in choice discourses' symbiotic relationship with schools' patron identity and families' classed position in society. With the increasing popularity of and demand for Irish-medium schools from the 1980s, I now turn to studies on Gaelscoileanna.

Choice and the Irish language

Since Irish-medium[103] schools are part of the primary school system from which parents can select, they are included in this study. There is a small body of research about Irish parents' school choice, only a sparse amount of which is specifically orientated to parent choice and Irish-medium schools. Parent groups are central in the setting-up of Irish-medium schools because of their rights to have their children educated in the Irish language. Studies identify Gaelscoileanna schools (as opposed to those in Gaeltacht areas) as 'bastions of middle-class privilege' (Borooah et al. 2009 cited in Watson & NicGhiolla Phádraig 2011, p. 442; Ó Riagáin 1997;). Ó'Riagáin (1997, p. 226) argues that 'there is a strong relationship between parents' social class and language reproduction through the education system'. That may be the case, but other studies find that parents' preferences for Irish-medium schools are related to the latter's smaller class sizes, more committed teachers and/or the advantage they offer in

[103] Irish-medium schools cater for students for whom Irish is not their first language and therefore are distinct from those in the Gaeltacht region. Irish-medium schools are either under Catholic Bishop patronage or An Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán Ghaelige Teo (a limited company) which includes multi-denominational and inter-denominational ethos schools (Kavanagh 2013).

developing their children's bilingualism (Mas-Moury Mack 2013). Kavanagh's (2013) overarching finding concerns parents' belief that selecting Irish-medium schools advantages their children in comparison to English-medium schools. A consistent finding in the small volume of literature is that parents with Irish language proficiency have higher levels of education in comparison to parents who do not speak the language (Watson & NicGhiolla Phadraig 2011). However, Watson and NicGhiolla Phadraig (2011) conclude that, rather than Irish speakers having an advantage, it is those with a cultural capital advantage who have the ability to accumulate more capital through Irish-language schools. They suggest that the Irish language itself is a cultural capital and a further means through which elites can exploit the resources of the educational system to reproduce their own advantages (ibid.).

Few studies explore the ethnic compositions of Irish-medium schools. Darmody et al. (2012) find that the majority of such schools in their study have no ethnic minority students. Ethnicity is important for this study since diversity is central in the discourse of current choice policy. Findings from one research report identify that 63% of Irish-medium schools prioritise pupils whose families speak Irish regularly in their admission criteria, and 42% of Irish-medium schools refused entry due to oversubscription in 2012 (Ó'Duibhir et al. 2017). This would indicate that the admission criterion of Irish language proficiency in oversubscribed Gaelscoileannas eliminates a large section of society and in particular ethnic minorities. It is mainly the newspapers that assert parents' Gaelscoil selection is motivated by social selectiveness, elite status, and class and ethnic segregation (Carey 2008). Refuting such statements, Mac Murchaidh (2008, p.218) points to the Gaelscoileanna movement as rooted in every social class. Indeed, Ní Chearúil (2022) challenges the preconceived notion that Gaelscoileanna are exclusively middle-class schools and exclude children from minority ethnic groups. According to Ní Chearúil, more than half of Gaelscoileanna in Dublin and Belfast are in working class areas and furthermore, some Gaelscoileanna provide Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support for children whose mother tongue is neither English nor Irish (Ní Chearúil 2022). Thus, as found in the international literature local contexts and location are significant for understanding schools social class and ethnic composition. This study keeps in mind Irish language proficiency, social class and ethnicity and geographic contexts as among many contributing factors that can intersect to create a complex picture of parents' choice of school, especially if it is a gaelscoil.

The implications of school choice for ethnic minorities

From the early 2000s, schools experienced increased challenges due to the impact of increased immigration into Ireland that began in the mid-1990s, as pointed to in Chapter 1. Earlier studies focused on the challenges that ethnic minorities faced in the school system (Devine 2005; Smyth et al. 2009; Bryan & Bracken 2011; Darmody et al. 2012). As discussed in Chapter 1, policy response to the increased diversity in schooling was and still is directed to inter-cultural education, which 'is concerned with ethnicity and culture' and the inclusion of all children in schools (NCCA 2005, p.4). Critics of inter-culturalism claim it reinforces the privileged status of the culturally dominant majority (white Catholic Irish), 'positioning them as the "embracer" or "tolerator' of the different 'other'' (Bryan & Bracken 2011, p.107; Bryan 2010; Kitching 2010; Fischer 2016). They suggest 'otherness' is produced against the dominant Irish ethnic group through the Christian 'best practice' of welcoming the 'other' ethnic minority students (Bryan & Bracken 2011, p.119). Furthermore, ethnic minority families' lack of knowledge of schools' admission criteria, language barriers and cultural difference are identified as affecting their school choice and segregation in the system (Smyth & Darmody 2011).

The body of literature on ethnic minorities is applicable to my study since the need to reshape the primary patronage structure is framed around discourses of 'diversity' (Coolahan et al. 2012). Devine's (2005) study in primary and post-primary schools shows teachers' view of ethnic minority students corroborates the Irish State's distinction between legal and asylum-seeking ethnic minorities that had the effect of labelling them 'normal or other' (Devine 2005, p. 56). Teachers' unawareness of their use of language in distinctions between 'them' and 'our own' tended to assume children's ethnic difference from the 'Irish norm' (ibid., pp.57, 63). Findings show that minority children's cultural and social capital is often misrecognised and under-valued in the classroom (Devine 2005; Kitching 2011; 2010). Instead, schools focus on ethnic minority children's assimilation in the classroom and by so doing are not recognising minority ethnic identities (Devine 2005; 2011, Lynch & Lodge 2002). Meanwhile, tensions increase for teachers due to their contradictory obligation to protect the Catholic patron's religious ethos while at the same time respecting diversity and the religious identities of children of minority beliefs and none (Devine 2005).The large media attention in 2007 to the discriminatory nature of the patronage primary school system for mainly minority ethnic students accessing school places in Balbriggan, County Dublin (Higgins Ni Chinneide; 2007:

Boland 2007), initiated an increase in research at primary level that focused on schools' diversity and admission policies.

'Adapting to Diversity' (Smyth et al. 2009) is one such study undertaken by the ESRI that explores the diversity of schools' populations across the primary and second-level systems. Although parent choice is not explicitly examined, the study connects school choice, competition and schools' allocation of places with admission policies (ibid.). It finds that admission policies in oversubscribed schools favour Catholic majority ethnic children with older siblings in the school and/or parents who attended the school (ibid.). Over 40% of Catholic primary schools are found to have no ethnic minority children, leaving those that do with a more significant proportion (ibid.; Byrne et al. 2010; Smyth & Darmody 2011; Darmody et al. 2012). It is suggested that since primary schools primarily draw from their local areas, residential segregation is the influencing factor for schools that do not have ethnic minority students (Byrne et al. 2010). These findings are consistent across studies, showing that the larger primary schools with DEIS status in urban areas have the highest proportion of newcomer[104] students (Byrne et al. 2010; Smyth et al. 2009; Smyth & Darmody 2011; Darmody et al. 2012). Such findings raise questions about the workings of Irish-national culture, religion and class within schools' admission processes and, moreover, the classification of DEIS to schools in education policy.

The EU and the Council of Europe have increasingly focused attention on religious education and issues of religious diversity from the mid-2000s (Jackson & O'Grady 2018; Pépin 2009). With funding granted by the EU Seventh Framework, the REMC study (2010) explored religious/secular beliefs in the school system and family across five EU countries, including Ireland (Smyth et al. 2010). One section of the project looked at the importance of religious affiliation in parents' primary school choice and found school proximity to home rather than religious affiliation was a significant factor in school decisions in Ireland (ibid.). Although most Irish parents in their study described themselves as 'not very religious', they tended to associate themselves with Catholicism and bring up their children in the faith (ibid., p.36). This shows the complexity of the lived aspect of religion and its entanglement within individuals' perception of themselves. On the other hand, religion was a particular issue for minority beliefs and non-religious parents in their school choice, which they suggested was related to their not having the choice of a minority faith or multi-denominational school (ibid.).

[104] Newcomer students are students and young people both of whose parents originally come from outside Ireland (Byrne et al. 2010, p.xiv).

Tensions between the denominational nature of the school system that contains 90% Catholic schools and the diversity of students in these schools are consistent across studies (Smyth & Darmody 2011, p.150). Catholic religious education is pointed to as reinforcing minority religious children's differences in the classroom especially when they opt-out (ibid.).

Choice policy, religious ethos and diversity

Parent choice was sanctioned in policy in Ireland in 2012 to reshape the primary school patronage structure to meet the needs of a more diverse society (Coolahan et al. 2012). Choice is not framed by better academic performance as it is internationally but instead is a policy organised around diversity of provision of patron types (ibid.). Diversity was central to the implementation of parent choice policy in 2012 (see Chapter 1), and this final sub-section looks at studies from this education policy period.

A section of studies from this period focuses on the legislative perspective of freedom and rights in parent choice policy. Rougier & Honohan (2015) claim minority religious groups do not have freedom of choice because their rights are infringed by the legislative[105] protection of denominational schools' ethos. As Daly (2016, p.121) contends, 'Parental choice is described as a "right", yet the justification of patronage within an educational marketplace paradigm sits uneasily with "fundamental rights"'. Choice 'navigates between a "liberal" understanding of religious freedom as an individual right and a more communitarian understanding in which religion is an integral part of the common good' (ibid., p.112). Daly (2016) claims that the individualist utilitarian justification for choice rationalises the patronage model while obscuring disparities of religious power in choice discourses (ibid.). The use of parent choice of patron to reshape the patronage school structure is dependent on aggregate numbers. Therefore, according to Daly, choice is biased against minority religious/no-belief parents who make up approximately 22% of the population (ibid.). Fischer (2016, p.208) suggests parent choice is a 'policy of limited diversification adopted by the Irish government' and 'maintains communal hierarchies', pointing to the historical structural legacy of the system and its cultural power relations as a stumbling block for citizenship. A recurrent theme from studies on the legislative perspective of parent choice policy is that religious needs are recognised under the guise of diversity alongside tradition (Daly 2012; Fischer 2016;

[105] Irish Constitution 1937; Education Act 1998; Equal Status Act 2000.

Mawhinney 2012). As such, this creates tension between the republican heritage concerned with the common good and liberal democracy's valuation of individual choice.

To turn to sociological educational studies, Kitching and Curtin (2012) suggest that the 'traditional' culture of the majoritarian Catholic population should be the focus of parent choice studies instead of minority beliefs. The privileged position of the 'majority ethnic group' in the culture of the Irish educational system as well as 'the intergenerational nature of educational exclusion' (ibid., pp.23–26) are significant factors for consideration in parents' school choice processes. Kitching's (2013; 2020) studies focus on religion in primary schooling, with particular attention on the cultural tradition of Communion (ibid.). These findings show cultural traditional practices are important to most Catholic families, no matter their level of faith, and therefore remain influential in their schooling decisions (Kitching 2020). Furthermore, adults' past experiences and 'future childhood imaginaries were significant in forming [their] worldviews and orientations towards education' and were far from the 'reductionist notions' of school choice (ibid., location no. 3207). Kitching's (2020) study, located in rural and urban areas, finds that religion intersects with class and race across the school system. Catholic schools' propensity for their students to assimilate with their culture, which is that of the majority white settled Irish Catholic, is a dilemma for minority belief/no-religion and minority ethnic families who have to work at fitting in (Kitching 2020, location no. 1430). The Educate Together patron is deployed by white, middle-class Irish families with the social networks to access school places (ibid.). Kitching contends that plurality goes beyond religious and ethnic differences; it cuts across 'classed in/authenticity of Catholic ritual' (ibid., location no. 1935). Judgements of materialistic sacramental celebrations are 'implicitly classed, racialised and gendered' (ibid., location no. 2776). Kitching further concludes that 'active parent choice' in policy provides 'racialised, classed and gendered freedoms for the few' (Kitching 2020, location no. 3117). According to the Church's hierarchy, Catholic schools are plural spaces, but ethnic minorities are experiencing isolation in those spaces (Kitching 2020; Smyth & Darmody 2011). The culture of schools is the medium through which children's inclusion is produced.

A further useful approach to the study of religion and school choice involves the comparison of Catholic, multi-denominational and minority faith school populations' social class, ethnic and religious backgrounds. The 'School Sector Variation Among Primary

Schools in Ireland' study (Darmody et al. 2012) and Darmody & Smyth's (2018) research [106] reveal a higher proportion of middle-class families in multi-denominational ET and minority faith schools compared to Catholic schools in the same locality (Darmody et al. 2012). Moreover, multi-denominational schools' populations comprise over 40% Catholic children (ibid.). Findings show that mothers' religious beliefs and educational level influence school selection (ibid.). Parents' cultural capital in multi-denominational and minority faith schools is significant: 'children whose mothers have a postgraduate qualification are 19.5 times more likely to be in a multi-denominational school' and '4.6 times more likely to be in a minority faith school' than a Catholic school (Darmody & Smyth 2018, p.11). ET schools are more likely to have high numbers of minority beliefs and no-religion students. Along with minority faith schools, they are also less likely to enrol 'immigrant children' in comparison to DEIS-status Catholic schools that have almost three times more such children (Darmody & Smyth 2018, p.11; Darmody et al. 2012, p.38). Social class is the prominent indicator for minority faith and multi-denominational ET schools' higher demand and 'may act' as a signifier that parents want to secure their children's socialisation (Darmody & Smyth 2018, p.12). It would be wrong to suggest that Catholic schools are socially and ethnically diverse in their composition compared to minority faith and multi-denominational schools. Byrne and Devine's (2018) study of Catholic schools identifies differences in their level of visible faith (Catholicism) and social class. Their findings show that distinctly Catholic secondary schools, i.e. those that identify and generate a distinct Catholic spirituality, are mostly fee-paying and attended by mainly majority ethnic students from middle-/upper-middle-class backgrounds (ibid.). In comparison, the majority of Catholic secondary schools are classified as moderately Catholic, i.e. as having some distinctiveness in terms of their Catholic voice and identity, such as a religious order name (ibid.). These schools are predominantly working-class and significantly more likely to have greater numbers of ethnic minority students attending. As such, it can be said that religion and faith schooling in the secondary sector reinforces wider patterns of social class and ethnic stratification and segregation in society. This study takes on board how parents reflect on their preferred schools' patron and how social class, ethnicity and religion intersect in their children's primary school selection.

Concluding remarks and key considerations identified for this study

[106]An ESRI longitudinal study funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs that used data from the 'Growing Up in Ireland' project (Darmody & Smyth 2018).

This chapter has outlined how choice discourses in market policy-making processes in education are globally reshaping school systems. Market discourses of choice in education are predominant in policies at times of socio-cultural and economic changes in nations (Wilson 2012). Choice policy fostered in response to social/economic structural changes has increased educational privatisation in school systems internationally. Since primary schools in Ireland are historically state-funded and privately owned under patronage, the inscribed state-religious education partnership fosters choice to expand patron diversity under a divestment process to meet the needs of the increased diversity of Irish society (see Chapter 1). The literature shows that private subsidised schools with public funding in local school systems exacerbate school segregation. Choice is a reciprocal practice made by parents and schools and impacts on class and ethnic differentiation between different schools. The chapter has further outlined the strength of white middle-class culture in school choice in producing classed and ethnic school segregation in school systems. Research identifies 'the unacknowledged normality' of white middle-classness from which identities are produced and schools are judged (Reay et al. 2007, p.1042; Byrne 2009; Byrne & De Tona 2019). Schools' reputations are proven to be persistent structuring forces in local school markets and mediated by middle-class white families' terms and conditions (Bunar 2009; Bunar & Ambrose 2016; Byrne & De Tona 2019). Studies highlight the importance of relations between local school systems, school choice and parents' perceptions of these relations, and their subsequent positioning in the local system (Bunar & Ambrose 2016). Why some schools are labelled 'good' while others are considered 'bad' is locally and historically contextual, and such perceptions are usually formed around the schools' classed and ethnic neighbourhoods (Bunar & Ambrose 2016). Building on these studies, the importance of exploring contrasting geographic rural and city locations will give greater insights into how local school systems condition parents' school choice and selection processes.

Choice discourses in earlier Irish education studies denoted the historic social class ordering within the school system. With the increased numbers of minority ethnic families in the school system from the mid-1990s, studies focused on schools' admission policies and how they disadvantaged ethnic minority families in their accessing many schools (e.g. Byrne et al. 2010). Ethnic minority students are found in higher numbers in the larger urban DEIS Catholic schools (ibid.). To take international studies on faith schools, religion is shown to be complexly intertwined with class and ethnic selection by schools of their student intake under the umbrella of religious ethos and by parents in their choice decision (Allen & West 2009;

Ladd et al. 2009; Boterman 2019). There are few studies in Ireland on parents' experiences of their primary school selection and how patron and religion interact with their decision-making. Kitching & Curtin (2012) point to the need for insight into the cultural workings of the white, settled, Irish, Catholic majoritarian parent groups' school selection. Furthermore, they emphasise the importance of historically situating the school system in the analysis; otherwise, such analysis will be reduced to a 'neutral or benevolent space' rather than considering history's impact on contemporary schooling (Kitching & Curtin 2012, p.15). Whereas Kitching's (2020) study explored parents' interactions with religion and patron in their children's schooling and school selection and finds minority ethnic and minority non/religious parents are compelled to align with the Catholic religious culture of the school (Kitching 2020). Kitching concludes that white, settled, Irish, Catholic majoritarianism and the patronage school system structure that underpins schooling should be continually challenged to build an equitable and plural school system that recognises everyone equally.

A key aspect from the literature for my study concerns the importance of studying the geographic contexts between local school systems and parents' local socio-cultural relations in their school decision-making processes (Ball 2003; Bunar 2009). There is a dearth of research that focuses on parents' voices and lived experiences of their primary school decision-making within the historical and cultural contexts of rural and city school systems in Ireland. My research contributes to Kitching's (2020) study of class, race, religion and the white, settled, Irish, Catholic majoritarianism of the school system culture. It further contributes to Darmody & Smyth's (2018) study of religion and its entanglement with differences between the classed and ethnic populations of the various patronage schools. My study addresses the relational dimensions of class and culture (Irish-national Catholic) between the historically inherited patronage school system structure and its local rural and city contexts in parents' school selection processes. Little is known about parents' school selection experiences in rural local school systems where there are mainly Catholic schools and contrasting city school systems with varied patron types. The study explores parents' experiences, observations and evaluations of the local social environment of their school selection and school system to understand how class, ethnicity and culture (Irish-national Catholic), as reflected in broader social-cultural and historical understandings pertinent to schooling and local family life, mediate their decision-making. Given that the Irish context of parent choice policy is the school patron and the inertia of divestment of the Catholic patron to ET patronage since the National Parent Survey in 2013 (as pointed to in Chapter 1), it is

timely to explore parents' voices from three of the survey sites with very different primary school patronage systems. Understanding the interplay of ethnicity, social class and religion in parents' selection process will give greater insights into the dynamics of living in a more local diverse society. Accordingly, the next chapter introduces and discusses key theoretical concepts put to work in opening up and providing insight into the socio-cultural domains in this study.

Chapter 3

Theorising parents' primary school choice processes and religiosity in schooling

The previous chapter reviewed the international and Irish literature on school choice. It showed the complexities in parents' school decision-making processes and how they are embedded in varying forms and inter-play of capital (economic, social and cultural). The consistent finding is that school choice is locally contextual, advantages white middle-class parents and exacerbates classed and ethnic school segregation. School choice studies have variously employed Bourdieu's concepts to theorise and interpret the social foundations of individual action (Ball, Bowe & Gewirtz 1995; Reay 2004; Byrne & De Tona 2019; Darmody & Smyth 2018; Van Zanten 2013). These studies integrate parents' dispositions, local and institutional structural contexts and social relations in school choice. Bowe, Gewirtz and Ball were among the first scholars to suggest that Bourdieu's thought sheds critical light on parents as social agents whose school choices should be analysed and understood in their social contexts (Bowe et al. 1994; Ball et al 1995 cited in Yoon 2020). Bourdieu's approach to school choice studies illuminates the relationships between class, ethnicity, locality and choice practice, and how they are encoded and decoded through culture (Ball,et al.1996; Reay 2004; Byrne & De Tona 2019). Bourdieu's theory of practice connects action to culture, structure and power, all of which are underpinned by his concepts of habitus, capital and field (Swartz 1997). His theoretical approach offers a critical analysis and explanation of social influences in regard to 'what people do and why they do what they do, and how what they do contributes to the reproduction of these very social influences' (Rey 2007, p.40). Thus, it enables an understanding of the dynamics between culture and social relations, and parents' capital and interactions with their local school system in their decision-making (Ball 2003; 2006; Byrne & De Tona 2019). Other than Kitching (2020) and Devine (2011), the cultural workings of religion and Catholic associations with Irishness are under-studied within parents' experiences of primary school selection. This chapter aims to develop Bourdieu's key theoretical concepts in order to open up and shed light on the various and overlapping domains of class, ethnicity, culture, local structural contexts, patron, religiosity and schooling central to this study, guided by my research question: *What are parents' experiences of decision-making and selection of their children's primary school in Ireland?*

First, this chapter outlines the key concepts, viz, habitus, capital and field, that frame Bourdieu's theory of practice. This sets the foundation for how habitus works as a generative dynamic structure in relation to broader socio-cultural and geographic structures that form individuals'/groups' realities/worldviews in specific ways. Second, it focuses on the theory of practice – pre-reflexivity and reflexivity, the production of norms (doxa) and their interrelations to structure – in a way that shows that practices are never static and can lead to various forms of transformation. How culture works as symbolic power in the mediation of social practices in fields, and particularly how it performs symbolic violence, is discussed. Finally, this chapter outlines the structuring force of neoliberalism's 'choice' policy in education. It focuses on the intersection of class, ethnicity, religion and 'choice' discourses and policy that position families in local school systems and shape practices. This chapter aims to develop Bourdieu's key concepts of practice as 'thinking tools' in my analysis to produce a lens through which parents' accounts of their school selection can be understood in a way that inform the empirically orientated Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Habitus

Habitus is described by Bourdieu (1977) as a socialised body that constitutes sedimentations of social structure, history and experiences (Reay 2004). In this way, he argues against the separation of 'agency-structure' and 'subjective-objective' in actions (Reay 2004). It is worth noting briefly here what is meant by both these terms, as they are central to Bourdieu's theory. Agency is understood as individuals' capacity and resources in producing their actions, whilst structures are distinct, specialised spaces into which society is divided, e.g. economic, educational, legal, religious, etc. that are regulated by their own internal rules (Lacroix 2012). Bourdieu wanted to avoid both structural-determinist theories that view actions as determined by the social world (structure) by imposing themselves onto the passive body (Reay 2004, p.432) and agency/voluntarist theories that view actions and choices as guided by individuals' design (Grenfell 2008). Instead, Bourdieu's concept of habitus unifies structure and agency by the dialectic interplay of relations between objective structures of society, viz, the influences of social, economic, institutional and power structures, and the subjective role of agents, viz, individuals' understanding of and adaptiveness to the surrounding world by experiences and living contexts (Corsa et al. 2015; Swartz 1997; 2002). As he posits, 'not only

is the body in the social world but the social world is also in the body' (Bourdieu 1977 cited in Reay 2004, p.432).

Habitus is the 'system of dispositions' that inheres 'in the form of mental and corporeal schemas and forms of know-how and competence' to generate perceptions, thought and action (Wacquant 1992, p.16 cited in Swartz 2002, p.625). Dispositional schemas are evolving ways of thinking, feeling, acting and understanding that govern how individuals act and react (Asimaki & Koustourakis 2020). Although habitus is a learned process, dispositions acquired during childhood socialisation in the family create a longer-lasting residue in habitus for orientating perceptions, thoughts, evaluation, gestures, etc. (Swartz 2002, p.635). As individuals move in and out of different social structures, e.g. the family, community, school, church, sports, workplaces etc., different dispositions are generated, internalised and layered onto earlier socialisations (Reay 2004). Thus, habitus produces social practices 'patterned after the social structures that spawned them because each of its layers operate as a prism through which later experiences are filtered and subsequent strata of dispositions overlaid' (Wacquant 2005, p.317 cited in Navarro 2006, p.16).

For Bourdieu, one of the significant elements of habitus is that it is embodied. Habitus is 'a socialised body' of embodied dispositions that predisposes individuals' beliefs about the natural and obvious way to act, do and behave (Maton 2008). An 'embodied knowing' is 'a visceral gut feeling of fitting in and feeling right' in the familiar social world that is shaped by habitus (Hill & Lai 2016, p.1288). It is an intuitive practical logic, 'a feel for the game' manifested through dispositional schemas of classifications built up and generated for 'perceptions of what is un/familiar, un/acceptable, un/comfortable' (Archer et al. 2007 cited in Hill & Lai 2016, p.1288). An embodied knowing about the right school is drawn upon by parents in school choice studies through their feelings and sense of being with people like us (Ball 2003; Byrne & De Tona 2019). Thereby, individual and collective habitus work in tandem to shape practice.

Individual and collective habitus

Since individuals belong to many groups, e.g. familial, class, religious and sporting, the collective history of the group permeates habitus (Reay 2010). Relational thinking is central to habitus for the production of individuals' sense of place (Swartz 1997). At the collective level, habitus is mediated through early socialisation, first in the family and then continually

transformed through rules of behaviour and tastes etc. in schools, work and wider social relations (ibid.). Habitus is both an agent of tradition (e.g. intergenerational, familial perceptions/thoughts) and continuity at a practical, informal and tacit level, as well as a force of change when one is faced with new situations (Swartz 2002; Costa et al. 2015). Although the social position of habitus favours stability over change, habitus is not static; it can respond to changing experiences/circumstances. New experiences are always 'perceived through categories already constructed by prior experiences' in habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p.133). Thus, habitus can 'demarcate the extent of choices' available in actions, depending on individuals' familiarity and position in the social structure where the practice is processed (Reay 2004, p.435). To recognise individuals' embodied history, it is necessary to understand the collective habitus, past and present position, self-identities and constructed boundaries of possibilities in social structures in common with others (Bourdieu 1990b cited in Reay 2004, p.434). Reay (2004, p.440) emphasises the duality in habitus analysis in moving from the individual consciousness/unconsciousness to the collective production/products of knowledge and back again. Byrne & De Tona (2019) find that parents' mobilisation of narratives around schools' academic differences in their selection is primarily related to their classed habitus to separate their children from undesired others. Individuals' internalised understandings of success/failure are transformed into aspirations or expectations that in turn produce actions that 'tend to reproduce the objective structure of life chances' (Swartz 1997, p.107). In this way, the concept of habitus is a useful analytical tool that facilitates an exploration of the ways in which collective knowing in perceptions of schools enables parents to act without having to think of or reflect on the impact such knowledge has on reproducing inequalities in the school system. Habitus mediates the field (structure) and capital in the generation of practices, and the latter is discussed next.

Capital

Capital is any resource of value in a structure (field); it informs habitus and is the medium of communication between habitus and field in practice production (Grenfell 2009). Bourdieu identifies four types of capital: economic (material wealth); cultural (the ability to navigate the systems of knowledge deemed valid by a society); social (networks); and symbolic (that which is legitimate within a field) (Bagnall & Hillyard 2017, p. 281). Each capital is interactive at varying levels within the functioning of structures (fields) and the social world (Bourdieu

1986). As discussed next, capital can only be analysed in terms of the structure (field) in which capital plays a part, is valued and thereby influences the workings of practices (Swartz 1997). A brief overview of capital concepts, viz, economic, cultural, social and symbolic, is discussed to lay the foundation for their workings within practices, in which particular emphasis will be placed on cultural capital because of its relevance to this study.

Economic capital

The well-known form of capital is economic, which refers to material goods that have a convertible monetary value (Crossley 2001). Bourdieu sees economic capital as 'the root of all the other types of capital' (Swartz 1997, p.84). As the literature showed in the previous chapter, economic capital influences the possibility of accessing highly desired schools in expensive residential areas (Gibbons & Machin 2003; Butler & Robson 2003; Taylor & Gorard 2001). Attending such schools produces/enhances both cultural capital and social capital and implicates the symbolic meanings ascribed to these schools. Thus, the distribution of economic capital defines one's social position, structural advantage/disadvantage and shapes habitus and life experiences (Crossley 2001).

Cultural capital

Cultural capital is an intangible term that encompasses individuals' and groups' ways of life. It is embodied in one's thoughts and actions and embedded in how individuals respond to their surroundings (Grenfell 2009; Swartz 1997). Unlike economic capital, cultural capital does not have specific laws of exercise , instead cultural capital is a 'practical tool for getting along in the social world' (Swartz 1997, p. 118). Hence, it appears natural to individuals in their established order of life: the family; group; locality; nation; and social class.

Bourdieu's cultural capital concept exists in three forms: (1) the embodied state of cultivated dispositions that make up cultural competence (Edgerton & Roberts 2014). Embodied cultural capital begins from early childhood in sensitising the individual to cultural distinctions which in time become intuitively understood (Swartz 1997). This type of cultural capital is historically and geographically specific: one's social origins, associated life chances and the local nation-state in which a person is raised/socialised influence their perceptual and behavioural dispositions and practices (ibid.), which in turn constitute the competence (or not) in a particular structure (field) to evaluate perceptions and actions intuitively (ibid.); (2) the

objectified state, which refers to goods that require cultural ability to engage with them, such as art, music, books, etc.; and (3) the institutional state such as schools and universities in the form of qualifications and credentials (Swartz 1997, p.81). Bourdieu recognises the importance of this form of cultural capital for acquiring desirable positions in the job market (Swartz 1997). Education is how social position is maintained (Swartz 1997). This is the stake in the educational field: it is the end desire moulded within this field and agreed by players, as Bourdieu argues, who 'grant recognition to the stakes' (Bourdieu 1998a, p.78 cited in Crossley 2001, p.103).

Cultural capital covers a wide range of resources that include verbal articulation, aesthetic preferences, knowledge, educational credentials, cultural awareness, morality and religious beliefs (Swartz 1997, p.78). Many studies use the concept of cultural capital as an analytical tool to interpret the dominant culture along the lines of high-brow culture (Lareau & Weininger 2003). However, the aforecited authors argue that this misrepresents Bourdieu's interpretation of dominant culture. Their investigation shows that his use of cultural capital reflects the French context's peculiarities under analysis and assert that any given competence functions as cultural capital when it is legitimate within society and distributed unequally (ibid.). Thus, the dominant culture which is a valued resource and specific to the structure must be identified within the context of the data being analysed (ibid.). Bourdieu sees a resource as capital only when it has an exchange value. Therefore, the dominant culture can become a power resource appropriated to mean 'the cultural heritage of a society' that can engender advantages, especially when unequally distributed amongst its members (Bourdieu 1986, p.245 cited in Lareau & Weininger 2003, p. 579; Swartz 1996). This interpretation of 'dominant culture' is more analytically useful for my study because high-brow culture is of less relevance and value in the Irish primary school system today. Religion differentiates the patrons in the primary school system, and Catholic religion, as pointed to in Chapter 1, was linked with the Irish national cultural revival that was inculcated in society primarily through schooling after the Free State. Inglis (2014, pp.205–6) study found that, although religion was not part of the cultural repertoires of the everyday lives of his participants, nor was culture a unified system used in a logical and consistent manner; instead, 'being Catholic' was a 'cultural ingredient' used to facilitate and create meaning, 'to mark life transitions, to celebrate, and to mourn'. This raises the question for my study of the historical Irish Catholic nationalism on shaping parents' perceptions in their school decision-making.

To understand the working of cultural capital in education, Reay (2004c, p.75) emphasises the importance of focusing on both school systems and parents' actions and dispositions in relation to their child's schooling. Reay (2004c, pp.73–75) argues that 'different conceptions of cultural capital' are at work in education. Another form of cultural capital pointed to is parents' 'micro-interactional processes', such as the strategic use of knowledge, skills and competence for evaluating schools and their expectations for their children's schooling (ibid.). Reay (2004a) and Skeggs (2004) argue that affective aspects of cultural capital for individuals, such as levels of confidence, empowerment and aspirations, must be recognised to understand their interactions within practices and school systems (ibid.). These are the product of parents' dispositions as developed through their socialisation, academic attainment and social position. My review of the school choice literature in the previous chapter shows how cultural capital determines parents' ability to strategise in their school selection (e.g. Rowe & Windle 2012; Byrne & DeTona 2019; Kitching 2020). Mainly white middle-class parents are found to have the know-how, confidence, competence, language and skills to interpret what counts as contextually specific in a given school system (ibid.). Their dispositions align with the given school system and in turn function as a cultural capital.

Edgerton and Roberts (2014, p.15) contend that the 'accumulation of embodied cultural capital and the formation of habitus are two sides of the same socialisation process: the situated internalisation of cultural schemas'. Scholars emphasise that different resources and practices in relation to local and national contexts operate as cultural capital (Yoon 2020; Bell 2009). The relationship between culture, class position and economic capital is the focus of Bourdieu's analysis of stratification in society (Swartz 1997). Cultural differences such as social class, religious belief and ethnicity are among the distinctions made by parents in school choice studies (Byrne & De Tona 2019; Kitching 2020; Byrne 2009, Reay et al. 2007). Cultural practices valued in the local context of a school system, e.g. the avoidance of disadvantaged schools (Ball 2003; 2006), the desire for a specific religious framework (Bellei et al. 2019; Denessen et al. 2005) and/or having the right school mix (Byrne & De Tona 2019) transmit the logic of practice of that local school system. This logic lies in the recognition of established ways to differentiate and reproduce hierarchies (Swartz 1997). The cultural capital of 'whiteness' in association with social class is shown to enable parents' ability to opt-in or -out of diversely mixed schools according to their desires (Reay et al. 2007; Byrne 2009). Cultural capital intertwined with other capital includes 'resources distributed throughout the

social body, which have an exchange value in one or more of the various "markets" or "fields" which [...] comprise the social world' (Crossley 2001, p.96 cited in Rey 2007, p.51). Parent choice makes the complex workings of cultural capital in relation to local education systems more visible.

Bourdieu sees education systems as central to cultural reproduction and the accumulation of further cultural capital valued by the dominant culture. Parents' cultural capital and position within their local social structure are their 'tool kit' from which they can construct their 'strategies of action' in their school selection process (Ball 2003; Bunar & Ambrose 2016). Scholars use Bourdieu's theory to illuminate ethnic minority and working-class parents' cultural and social disadvantaged positions in the market of school choice in comparison to middle-class white families (e.g. Ball et al. 1994; 1995;1996; Reay 2004; Bunar & Ambrose 2016; Rowe & Windle 2012). Reay (2010) specifically shows how working-class parents' lack of dominant cultural capital in the education field is related to their negative experiences of schools, their feelings of inadequacy surrounding their educational competencies and knowledge, and a corresponding lack of confidence about tackling educational work in the home. They do not feel equipped to engage in education, which is further complicated by their lack of economic capital (ibid.). Economic capital has always defined access to schooling, but the power of cultural capital in relation to parental choice is an equally forceful defining influence (Reay 2004).

Religion and ethnicity intersect with the classed structure of local school systems in Ireland (Kitching 2020; Darmody & Smyth 2018). Kitching (2020) highlights the connections to past and future childhoods in parents' negotiations of school types and knowledge of schools and their localities. Culture perpetuated through historical Catholic traditions were drawn through parents' experiences of commonality in narratives that accommodated diversity and at times commodified it for the majority (ibid.). According to Billig (1995), national culture exists not just in the conscious waving of the 'flag' but in the 'routines of life' that 'operate mindlessly, rather than mindfully' (pp.38, 60 cited in Bottero 2010, p.7). Nash (1990) suggests that it is the practices (that realise the encoded culture) of parents who are the embodiments of the culture that illuminate the dominant form of culture in a field. By using Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, the workings of culture within local school systems will be better understood in relation to class, ethnic and religious differentiations/commonalities performed in accordance with parents' habitus. Culture intersects with other forms of capital, such as social capital, which is discussed next.

Social capital

Social capital forms part of a system of economic and cultural capital that generates social processes between individuals, the family and the wider community and society (Reay 2007). Social capital refers to one's valued influential networks and connections that are conducive to opportunities, benefits and further enhancement of other capital stocks (Edgerton & Roberts 2016; Crossley 2001). Bourdieu defines social capital as 'the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term' (Bourdieu 1986b, p.249 cited in Ball 2003, p.79). The previous chapter's review of the literature showed that socially advantaged families are found to use their social networks or 'hot knowledge' to access timely information, 'a key dynamic in the workings of all markets', especially in competitive school markets (Ball 2003, p.100). According to Lareau et al. (2016), social capital is increasingly important today for securing a school place in competitive markets where specific knowledge/know-how are essential criteria for access. Having a network to obtain knowledge not readily available to all gives parents an advantage (ibid.; Rowe & Windle 2012). Moreover, the concept of social capital enables an understanding of the geographic contexts of school systems because localities embody spatial histories and meanings associated with social and racial divisions and inequality (Bell 2009; Reay 2007). Parents' network-strategising to access their preferred school is driven by the need to reproduce the family's social class position locally. Thereby, parents' narratives around social relationships are a lens through which classed, ethnic and religious identities (and other identities) can be understood within practices.

Individuals' sense of fit within social relations and practice relate to implicit dispositional processes in collective behaviour rather than conscious claims (Brubaker 2004 cited in Bottero 2010). Identities are 'rooted in practical social relations' (McNay, 1998). Social relations are the explicit reflective activities shaped by the collective habitus and its underlying implicit dispositional subjectivities: 'the reflexive is the dispositional made manifest' (Bottero 2010, p.9). Therefore, the question arises: In what ways do people identify themselves and perceive others in their narratives and actions? (Bottero 2010). Crossley (2001a, p.112 cited in Bottero, 2010, p.12) contends that reflexive thoughts/practices emerge from the 'incorporation of the role or perspective of the other within our own habitus'. Social

capital enables an examination of how differences unfold within the culture of the school system and how they manifest in school environments. For example, Devine (2009; 2011) finds that ethnic minority children in Ireland have to cope with their difference and negotiate recognition from others because they lack social and cultural (majority ethnic and Catholic) capital in schools. Hence, ethnic minority children intensify either their efforts at sociability to integrate themselves into existing social networks or create minority ethnic groups, in which social class, ethnic status and gender influence their social relations and positions with peer groups (Devine 2009, p.532). The type of schools that ethnic minority children attend, and the diversity of their populations impact their integration. The concept of social capital in school choice studies shows how parents classify themselves spatially in local contexts according to group affinity, differences, similarities, integration and belonging, all of which are reflective of parents' self-identity (Lubienski & Dougherty 2009; Bell, 2009; Butler & Robson, 2003; Gabay-Egozi, 2016; Reay, 2007). The concept of social capital and identity-making within parents' narratives around group relations will generate a better understanding of the workings of class, ethnicity and religion in their school selection-making. The types of social capital used for accessing specific schools illuminate structural inequalities particular to the school system. To understand how specific types of capital are valued, I turn to a discussion of symbolic capital.

Symbolic capital

Symbolic capital arises from other forms of capital (cultural, social, economic) that become a symbol of status or success, are perceived as valuable and/or confer honour and prestige (Crossley 2001; Atkinson 2020). Capital is only symbolic when it is recognised as legitimate by individuals/groups within fields (ibid.). For example, the educational system is modelled on middle-class communication and behaviour, confers legitimacy and value upon middle-class culture and hence is a symbolic capital within the system (Reay 2010; Ball 2003). The symbolic power of middle-class cultural capital in the educational field is the basis on which individuals' and groups' identities are constructed, defined and classified, e.g. those that are not educationally motivated (Atkinson 2020). As such, the culture of education and schools privilege the middle-classes, and in particular the white middle-classes, while at the same time the workings of class within the different categorisations that identify individuals/groups are elided.

The prestige and status of schools that are nationally recognised as elite are accepted and legitimised, and hence given a symbolic hierarchical position in the school system (Courtois 2018). As discussed in Chapter 2, the inherited prestige status of Protestant schools, high-status Catholic religious order schools (e.g. Jesuit, Benedictine, Loreto) and Gaelscoils in Ireland maintains their high social class profile (ibid.; Lynch & Moran 2006). The types of habitus and capital that individuals and groups require for entry to such elite schools are in turn symbolic of identity. Thus, attending an elite school is a means of defining oneself against others who do not attend (Courtois 2018; Swartz 1997). Such 'material forms' of cultural and social capital are disguised as symbolic to conceal underlying interests and represent a 'means for ordering and understanding the social world' (Swartz 1997, p.86). Swartz (1997) explains this ubiquitous concept of symbolic in the form of systems that 'exercise a cognitive function' for 'ordering and understanding the social world' (Swartz 1997, p.86). Symbolic systems are the mental structure of categories, both conscious and unconscious, shared by all members of a culture to function as 'instruments of communication and [...] knowledge' (Bourdieu 1971b in Swartz 1997, p.87). Practice in whatever form is a symbolic capital when it functions as an 'authoritative embodiment of cultural value' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.x). Symbolic systems establish and naturalise differences and distinctions in the form of classifications that group items/individuals into opposing classes (Swartz 1997, p.87). These classification groupings are the lens through which the social world is viewed in the context of the social structure and give meaning and understandings to fields (Swartz 1997, p. 90). Furthermore, symbolic classification processes give legitimacy to 'the social world and its divisions', such as the hierarchical status of schools (Swartz 1997, p.92). Symbolic capital also raises questions about the role of patron and religion in the context of the historical patronage school system and how class and ethnicity intersect.

The messiness of symbolic capital lies in the principle that it is a social construct that holds local contexts because it is 'a product of historical forces, and unequal distribution of power in a society' (Bunar & Ambrose 2016, p.38). Symbolic capital is the basis on which practices are predicated, whose powers lie in its relations between cultural and societal stratification (social order) that are refracted through symbolic classifications (Swartz 1997). Its power is in defining groups and categories of value that are given legitimacy that might otherwise be forgotten or, at best, taken for granted (Atkinson 2020). The symbolic capital of the field/s create(s) exclusion/inclusion by means of a power that goes by naturally. The status of specific schools cannot be valued unless it is agreed by a habitus of embodied knowledge

that recognises and perceives it as desirable (Bunar & Ambrose 2016). Symbolic capital is relevant to an exploration of commonly mis/recognised values for schools and their patron within the contexts of local school systems. To relate Bourdieu's concepts of capital and habitus, however, these must be considered in conjunction with field and practice.

Field

Operating within individuals'/groups' habitus are fields: the structures of social rules, practices and power where habitus interacts (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.105). Fields are structured systems, e.g. schools, law, religious institutions, the state etc., that mediate the relationship between social structure and cultural practice (Swartz 1997). The positions that individuals, groups and institutions occupy in a field are organised around dynamic relations between the field's rules, individuals'/groups' habitus and the volume and structure of capital mediated through the field (ibid.). What is emphasised by Bourdieu is that a field's specific logic determines the dominant and subordinate positions of individuals/groups within the field's structure (Wacquant 1989). In turn, the field constitutes individuals'/groups' position-takings (practices) in relation to the unequal distribution of their resources (capital) (ibid.). A field is socially instituted within a history of development that holds legitimacy and value, viz, forms of capital (education, religion etc.) specific to the field (Grenfell 2019). Agents recognise and refer to its value in the objectives, justifications and implications of their practices (Grenfell 2019).

Bourdieu designates fields as arenas of struggle for control over valued resources, such as educational attainment in the education field or scientific expertise in the field of science (Swartz 1997). The field dynamics arise through individuals and groups consciously or unconsciously pursuing interests linked to their positions (Hilgers & Mangez 2015). The field operates like a game played by individuals who bring with them their capital and competence (habitus) in the drive to obtain the stake (i.e. objective/gains/outcomes) (Crossley 2001). Unlike a game, however, the field of struggle does not involve 'a deliberate act of creation' but is a shared acceptance in its value as a goal (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 98). Although fields 'follow the rules or regularities', they are not always 'explicit or codified' (ibid., p. 98). Instead, individuals understand how, in Bourdieu's analogy, to play the game in fields because practices are patterned, regular and predictable. Since fields determine the positions of individuals and institutions, the different strategies deployed by individuals are shaped by

capital and, in particular, the valued capital/s of the various positions in the field. The concept of field raises questions about the patronage primary school system structure, how it positions parents and schools within local contexts and how and what capital intersect with the different local school systems. To understand the dynamics in practices between field and habitus, I now turn to Bourdieu's pre-reflexive and reflexive concepts in practices.

Practices: pre-reflexive/reflexive

The relationship between field and habitus is central for understanding practices (Maton 2008). Schools shape parents' judgements/evaluations/actions depending on parents' dispositions and social position when entering the field of choice to give either a sense of familiarity or not (Allen 2002). When individuals are in a field in which they are socialised, they are predisposed towards unconscious ways of behaving and thinking that are grounded in an embodied knowing, manifested through a sense of familiarity (Reay 2004b). In such instances, individuals' practices are pre-reflexive, second-nature, embodied actions that are intuitive (ErglerWood 2018). Pre-reflexive actions are the practical rather than discursive perceptions/actions that result in tacit practices (Reay 2010). Bourdieu rejects the concept that choices are rational practices; instead, they are enacted through individuals' 'practical' and 'instinctive' engagement with the world (Hill & Lai 2016, p.1289). In this sense, individuals have a feel for the appropriate collective practice, i.e. the socially agreed normative for their social position in the field (Creswell 2002, p.381; Bottero 2010). Therefore, mediated by capital and position, when habitus is compatible with the field, the individual has a feel for the game and is a 'fish in water' (Bourdieu 1990a in Reay 2010). Pre-reflexive practices in schooling are constituted through classed, ethnic and/or religious cultural conditions that reproduce the field and the social order (Reay 2010).

Walker and Clark's (2010) English study finds parents' habitus for those with intergenerational links in the locality is embodied in their rural location to shape their local school choice. However, a pre-reflexive, self-evident local school selection, although a familiar tacit response, is differently constituted, depending on parents' social class and ethnicity (Byrne & De Tony 2019). For many working-class families, the local school selection is a limited possibility (Reay 2004c). Working-class parents' relationship to the dominant culture of education is not an embodied habitus and, as such, their local school

selection is a constrained, improbable and/or unthinkable choice practice (Yoon & Lubienski 2017; Reay & Ball 1998).

On the other hand, a reflexive conscious practice is the result of a disjuncture between a field and an individual's habitus. Individuals who encounter unfamiliar fields generate habitus transformations when they decide to engage and practice within the field (Reay 2004b). During this transformation process, habitus operates at the level of consciousness and constitutes a reflexive practice (Reay 2010); for example, working-class and ethnic minority parents have to fit into the white middle-class culture of schooling (Bunar & Kallstenius (2007). However, habitus sets limits to transformations depending on the culture of fields. Individuals are 'circumscribed by an internalised framework that makes some possibilities inconceivable, others improbable and a limited range acceptable' (ibid., p.435). For example, Hill and Lai (2016) found that working-class parents who had achieved upward economic mobility struggled to feel at ease in their children's fee-paying schools because of their lack of cultural competencies, whose lack of embodied know-how with regard to the arbitrary 'rules of the game' – in this case, middle-class linguistic expressions – made them feel inferior (ibid.). However, these parents worked against their working-class habitus by pursuing private schooling for their children to ensure their middle-class cultural and social capital and secure their future economic capital (ibid., p.1296). The power of white middle-class culture in school systems means that working-classes/ethnic minorities have to work at conforming (Bourdieu 2005, p.47 cited in Reay 2010). Reay (2010) highlights the need to see the terms of which fields represent dominant and dominated spaces in relation to who is privileged/not privileged and how individuals' interact and understand themselves within the field in order to understand habitus' ruptures. Identifying parents' aspirations, preferences and the capital at work in their perceptions and feelings about schools and themselves in relation to specific schools is essential for understanding reflexivity and the possibility of inter-class movement within a school system (Nash 1990; Hill & Lai 2016).

In contrast, when the middle-classes are in unfamiliar situations, they can usually operationalise their class advantages across fields. Studies show that white middle-class parents choosing multi-ethnic and working-class, diverse, inner-city schools continue reinforcing their middle-class habitus (e.g. Reay et al. 2007). The school's diversity can be a commodity for their children's multi-cultural competence while they can simultaneously mobilise their middle-classness and white race privilege to place their children in classes for higher-achieving students (Reay et al. 2007; Vincent 2016). To make sense of the inter- and

intra-class differences in choice practices, Reay (2010, p.77) argues that the 'notion of familial habitus – the deeply ingrained system of perspectives, experiences and predispositions family members share' helps to illuminate the workings within values, attitudes (e.g. of schools and others) which are constructed through the knowledge base that families possess in relation to the school system they are making their selection.

Reflexive transformations are due to the dominant culture and social order that constitute worldviews and divisions that appear natural within fields (Reay 2010). Rather than seeing individuals' habitus as deficient in the context of the education field, however, it is educational institutions' social structures, schools' selection practices and the production of schools' meanings and values at a local level that should be the focus. This will provide a better understanding of the privileges and counter deficiencies in positions into which individuals/families/groups are placed by the school system (Ferrare & Apple 2015). Symbolic systems operate as a power in practices within a field and are discussed next.

Symbolic power of fields on practices

Bourdieu understands power as a relational concept that shapes practices and social life. Power is a product of symbolic processes of classification that constitute common opinions, sense-making and established beliefs that all agents bring to every practice and interaction (Swartz 1997). Important to the concept of power is status distinctions which are mobilised to produce practices, thoughts, interactions etc. and are constructed from agents' habitus in relation to group classifications within the social order of fields (ibid.). Status distinctions are, according to Bourdieu, 'social classes in disguise' (ibid., p.188). Symbolic processes of classification are representations and definitions agreed upon by members of a culture, nation, local region, educational system, social class, ethnicity etc. to form the underlying logic of the stratification order of the surrounding world; therefore, 'symbolic distinctions are simultaneously conceptual and social' (ibid., p.189). It is within the classification system that power struggles occur. Class struggles involve the use of classifications to describe a 'sense of place' in the social order of the field and function as principles of differentiation (ibid., p.188). This is Bourdieu's approach to understanding class as involving cultural practices constituted through groups' social relations in fields (Byrne & De Tona 2019, p.21). The symbolic classification processes are the invisible power of the culture of a field to reproduce socially embedded norms, values and practices (Swartz 1997). The long-established boundary between the

middle- and working-classes is inadequate for understanding classed practices as neither are homogenous groups (Savage 2015; Vincent 2016). This opens up questions about culture and how it is refracted in parents' narratives about their sense of place, as well as the use of categories in representations to others and schools.

Power requires legitimacy and, for Bourdieu, religion is the archetype of authority that consecrates legitimacy (Rey 2007). Religions 'impose' worldviews upon people by 'inculcating' perception and thought into their habitus (ibid., p.79). Bourdieu understands the power of religion to lie in its cultural symbolism, which is experienced as natural by individuals/groups embedded in the culture (Rey 2007). Religion's cultural symbolism produces individuals'/groups' meaning-making: explanations of the world around; classifying groups; and understandings of ways of acting (Rey 2007). Inglis' (2014) study of the ways in which people in contemporary Ireland spin webs of meaning finds their meaning-making are different to previous generations. The Catholic Church and religion are not part of the cultural repertoire of the participants in his study; however, being Catholic, albeit vaguely, facilitates and implicates their creation of meaning with others and understandings of milestones in life (ibid., p.206). Thus, being Catholic provides a general guideline for making sense of and being in the world (ibid.). In this way, for Bourdieu, religion's ultimate social function is to produce social order by providing the means through which individuals/groups can make sense of their respective positions (ibid.).

Power is processed through cultural mechanisms such as rituals, obligations and moral behaviour, and is not an overt force (Rey 2007). Social relations in a particular culture within local and national society make the meaning of inclusion and hence exclusion within and between groups, which are symbolically efficient for knowing, recognising and responding to socially constituted 'collective expectations' and beliefs (ibid., p.102). Meanings are therefore produced by shared meaning learnt for the purpose of identifying and classifying the world in the same way as others (Inglis 2014). This is also the understanding of meaning-making which is adopted in this study.

Religion can only play a social function when it has a societal habitus (Rey 2007). Chapter 1 outlined the historical, socio-political and cultural conditions that enabled the Catholic Church to establish itself as 'autonomous' in Irish society. The Catholic religion functioned as a means through which the Irish people sustained their traditions when under threat during colonialism. After the establishment of the Free State, however, the Church held the political function of granting legitimacy to the new state and maintaining social order. The

Catholic religion and Irish national culture worked in harmony to provide the ground to inculcate Catholic socialisation and morality into generations of Irish people through schooling and the parochial system. The Irish studies reviewed in Chapter 2 showed that class, ethnicity and religion operate in the structural conditions and culture of Ireland's patronage school systems through a series of strategies by schools' admissions and subsequently parents' processes/strategies to access schools (Lynch & Moran 2006). These operations hold historically inherited, classed identities, autonomous in themselves, to discourage/encourage specific groups to/from attend(ing) specific schools (Lynch & Moran 2006; Lynch & Lodge 2002; Byrne et al. 2010). The symbolic power of the school system lies in the misrecognition of the historical social struggles involved in shaping the patronage school system that assume the cultural schema of the social order is natural (Swartz 2013, p.80). Religion is the producer of the misrecognition that inequalities in the world are 'God's will' or are established through other euphemistic constructs that legitimise and naturalise the social order (Rey 2007). Such misrecognition is due to the arbitrary character of the terms and conditions that govern fields and the action of players who take them as unquestionable doxa (Swartz 2013). The doxa is the undiscussed set of values/beliefs viewed as the self-evident truth of a field which in turn, shapes individuals/groups '"natural" response' (ibid., location no.730). For example, engagement with schools and, in particular, schools conferred with value and status strongly depend on class-based tastes, lifestyle indicators, etc., i.e. families' 'class habitus' associated with the schools' status (Bourdieu 1984a cited in Swartz 1997, p.151). The norm of schools with hierarchical status and subsequent class-boundary (and how that boundary is defined) 'depend on the relative symbolic power of particular groups [and schools/school systems] to impose as legitimate their vision of the social divisions in society' (Swartz 1997, p.152). Indeed, the symbolic power of education, schooling and choice 'performs the service of disguising and legitimating power' that naturalises social order (Moore 2001, p.448). The reshaping of the patronage structure is a point of transition where religious differentiation and cultural resources are brought into play by deploying parents and bringing them into policy as patron consumers (Ball 2003). At this point, parents' dispositions and cultural, social and economic capital engage with both patron and the discourses of choice policy and increase my awareness of how they engage with the historical patronage school system.

The operation of power lies in the interest, i.e. the reason, that people have for undertaking a practice. Education has the capacity to engage individuals' interests, whether for upward social mobility or social reproduction. Schools provide education but are also

places of socialisation and the development of dispositions of particular ways of cultural thinking and acting that fit in with the groups' classed, ethnic and religious habitus (Byrne & De Tona 2019). The growing value and demand of educational credentials for giving access to the labour market also means that the education field can 'impose its own specific ideology' (Swartz 1997, pp.131–132). High-demand, sought-after schools' symbolic distinctions primarily concern the maintenance of children's social and cultural capital in the stratified order of society (Gewirtz et al.1995; Ball 2003; Butler et al. 2007; Raveaud & van Zanten 2007; Reay et al. 2007; Byrne & De Tona 2019). Bourdieu emphasises the analysis of power in a field through the development of an understanding of how groups are produced in narratives, their historical contexts and what group meanings are representing and doing when put into practice (Swartz 1997, p.189). For Bourdieu, the ultimate source of power resides with the state, which has the 'capacity to appropriate and impose as official and legitimate' categorisations and group names (Swartz 1997, pp.189–191). The capacity to define/make social groups is an expression of symbolic power that constitutes 'symbolic violence' when 'exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' (Wacquant and Bourdieu 1992, p.167). Symbolic violence arises from ideology in practices and the acceptance of their pursuit (Swartz 1997). School choice ideology lies in discourses around its equity in regard to giving everyone the opportunity to access the type of school they desire for their children. Such ideology of practice is not cognisant of exploitative or oppressive mechanisms because we are all caught up within the reproduction of 'latent social relationships' (Eder 1993, p.167 cited in Ball 2003, p.11). Parents enter the field of school choice with predispositions constituted through their socialisation and school experiences.

The concept of symbolic power heightens my awareness in this study of diversity in parents' unconscious/conscious values for their children's schooling and social reproduction that the school system provides. Finally, I turn to the state and the production of the education market to establish the foundation of macro-level power in shaping school systems.

Neoliberalism's structuring force in parental choice discourses

The power of the free market of choice, as discussed in Chapter 2, 'changed the structural relations' in education and of 'schools to parents, parents to schools, schools in relation to each other, schools to [...] the state' (Grenfell 2010, p.90). School choice is an expression of 'the logic of neo-liberal economics' applied to education (Grenfell 2010, p.90). Discourses of choice focus attention on schools' performance, the competition between schools and thus the

differentiation between schools in terms of 'success/failure' and 'good/bad' (ibid.). The aim of neoliberalism is to eliminate bureaucracy through the withdrawal of the state from welfare/social provision (Hill & Lai 2016). On this basis, neoliberal policies shift responsibility towards schools for performance, accountability and management, while the state controls the national curriculum, examination systems and inspection standards (Grenfell 2010). Control over the curriculum preserves the social order and sustains the existing 'politics of domination': the ideology of the dominant classes (Apple 2019, p.x1iii). Bourdieu (1971c) reminds us that one of the main functions of an education system is 'conserving, inculcating and consecrating a cultural heritage' (ibid., p.184 cited in Swartz 1997). Schooling provides the means through which knowledge, skills and socialisation into a particular cultural tradition are transmitted (ibid.).

According to Bourdieu and Boltanski (1978), neoliberal economic restructuring from the 1970s changed the mode of operation of capital from the traditional power of economics passed from father to son in the family to educational credentials. Holders of economic capital require education's cultural capital to maintain their status in the labour market (Bourdieu & Boltanski 1978). At the same time, those who do not have economic capital can attain it through educational cultural capital (ibid.). Market-led principles of choice in education are claimed around parents' freedom to choose their schools. Choice compels parents to be responsible and partake in the competition of accessing better schooling to advance their children's trajectory in life (Ball 2003). The hidden power of school choice lies in its iterative work that presents the parenting role as responsible and involved in school consumption and production (ibid.). The discourses of 'choice' censure those who do not conform to dominant cultural practices as 'irresponsible' (Bauman 1997 in Hill & Lai 2016, p.1287). Choice is modelled on the dominant middle-class cultural norm of education pointed to earlier and engenders a culture of blame that 'pathologises' the working-class as 'bad choosers' (Reay & Ball 1997 cited in Hill & Lai 2016, p.1287). Discourses of 'choice' augment middle-class culture in education (ibid.). The capacity of discourses of 'choice' lies in its power to define parents as responsible/irresponsible and constitute the symbolic violence that elides inequalities between parents' available resources (Reay et al. 2008). School choice rationalises the legitimacy of the state and the dominant culturally classed and ethnic power in schooling.

Education is placed at the centre of state reform agendas when cultural circumstances and economic conditions change in countries (Wilson 2012). Global market choice models for education are the legitimised solution to social problems (Ball & Exley 2014). The increasing

diversity of Irish society lent legitimacy to the political discourses of parent choice to reshape the primary school patronage system. Global choice policy discourses are locally interpreted and enacted within Ireland's 'cultural co-optation' in education with religion (Ball & Exley 2014; O'Sullivan 2005, p.490). Historically, all Church stakeholders shared a common interest in preserving the patronage structure, as discussed in Chapter 1. Demerath III (1991) contends that religion is difficult to withdraw once it is introduced into politics. Religion is also an emotional subject, wielding considerable cultural power in terms of its moral authority and cultural meaning (Demerath III 1991). Furthermore, religion is accompanied by experts readily available to challenge its legitimacy in socio-political issues (ibid.). Discourses of parent choice are mechanisms that re-legitimate state and patrons' power in modern Ireland: the latter as service providers through the accountability of their schools' ethos in catering for diversity (Kitching 2013a). While discourses of choice protect patrons in the school system by the circulation of freedom and diversity, they elide the lived dynamics through which class, ethnicity and religion are situated and produced in schooling (Kitching 2013a). Furthermore, parent choice policy discourses evade a focus on culture and the framing of families'/groups' identities, as discussed next.

The formation of ethno-religious identities through policy

The notion that the Irish people are religious (discussed in Chapter 1) essentialises a diversity of school patron types and parent choice to reshape the school system in order to meet the needs of a more diverse Irish society. Similar to the implementation of intercultural policy (Bryan 2010; Devine 2011; Kitching 2014), the framing of diversity in parent choice policy constructs minority ethnic and minority beliefs/no-religion identities and subsumes them under diversity against the assumed normalcy of the majoritarian white, settled, Irish Catholic. Kitching (2020, location numbers 398) contends that neoliberal market led processes which seek to shape parents as consumer-citizens in the education of their children 'maintain or exacerbate class, race and gender-related advantages and injustices'. Market led policies ignores religious attachments to tradition and middle-class white, settled, Irish Catholic parents' capacity to maintain/mobilise their 'ethno-religious classed, racialised and gendered interests regarding their children's education' in the selection of schools (ibid., location nos. 398 & 401). In the Irish context of neoliberal parent choice policy, the issue of meeting the needs of a more diverse society is transposed upon the pre-existing primary school system structure and logics of practice (e.g. patron) and as such accommodates ethno-religious

diversity with 'existing 'knowns' and norms' (Devine 2011, p. 55). Kitching's (2020, location number 1107) analysis of parents negotiation of school choice finds 'diversity' is a commodity for the majoritarian white, settled, Irish Catholic and mainly middle-class rather than being 'an intrinsic feature of Irish society in itself'.

Devine's (2011, p.165) use of Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital in her study of immigration and schooling shows the power dynamics of the deep embeddedness of whiteness in Irish society that assumes diversity is about ''them' and not 'us''. 'Tolerant' discourses in policies (e.g. intercultural, parent choice) are found to presume an Irish group that gifts acceptance of ethnic and religious diversity (e.g. Bryan 2010; Kitching 2010; 2014). Devine's (2011, pp.161 & 165) study finds that discourses of 'welcoming' diversity in schools elide the structural effects of the school system and the embedded social class, gender, and race patterns in society that position ethnic minority parents differently depending on their capital resources, race and immigrant status (political constructs of legal immigrants and asylum-seekers (see Devine 2005)). Parent choice policy discourses around diversity are formed through global, national and local power dynamics and construct secular and religious ethnic identities (Kitching 2020). 'Neoliberalism policy logics of the acceptable and unacceptable forms of diversity' which are key features of the global socio-political landscape (Kitching 2020, location number 3104) are utilised at national level to ensure the 'well-being of Irish society' (DES/OMI 2010 cited in Devine 2011, p.158; Bryan 2010). All the time, unnamed white-Irishness in policy discourses is neither problematised or recognised as diverse in itself and as such, maintains white, settled, Irish, Catholic and mainly middle-class dominance (Bryan 2010, p.16; Kitching 2020; 2014; 2013a; Devine 2011). Devine (2011, p.53) demonstrates the circulatory dynamics of power relations that operate top down through 'dominant discourses and policies, as well as structurally embedded patterns related to social class and ethnicity (bottom up) to position ethnic minority parents (as well as all parents) in schools/school system. This sets the context of parents/families school practices and the tensions ethnic minority parents/children experience in schools. Individuals may make choices but they do not choose the principle of these choices as habitus, field and capital (discussed previously) are all intertwined (Wacquant 1989, p.45; Devine 2011). Kitching (2020) demonstrates how local dynamics in parents' school selection such as convenience, local social relations which are in themselves classed and racialised, and attachments to tradition sustain majoritarianism. That is, Catholic schools and the continued assumption that 'Catholics are white, settled, Irish and vice versa' (ibid., location no. 1416). In neoliberalism

marketised and individualised terms, Kitching (2020, location no. 1416) finds that Catholic schools are places where parents are encouraged to secure their children's belonging through participation in traditional religious rituals such as first communion which compel minority ethnic and minority religious parents/children to conform. Hence, using Bourdieu's concept of capital, Catholicism is a form of cultural capital for Catholic white, settled, Irish families in the majoritarian Catholic primary school system. But, access to/possession of Catholic cultural capital is contingent on class, race and gender. An intensified focus on parents'/children's rights and school choice has at times led to classed, racialised and gendered critiques of certain families 'inauthentic' religiosity (Kitching 2020, location no. 1112). For example, the materialistic excessiveness of working-class and Traveller Community girls and their families in relation to first communion are regarded as inauthentic forms of Catholic participation; and the surveillance, in particular, of Nigerian families Catholic authenticity (ibid., location nos. 2780 & 1371). Ethnicity, social class and non/religious identities are intertwined in the field of school choice that parents/families find themselves and results in patterns of segregation/marginalisation by class, ethnicity, and migrant status (Devine 2011; Kitching 2014; 2020). The majority/minority binary of ethno-religious groups constructed through local, national and global neoliberal policies such as choice, as studies show, elide the intersection of class and gender with ethnicity and religion in positioning families in local school systems and shaping their choice options and practices. The circulatory power dynamics of dominant and political discourses and social class and ethnicity patterns draw attention to the complex workings of school spaces in ways that position parents/families in local school systems and society. This raises particular questions around parents 'choice' decision-making processes: In what ways do discourses of diversity play out in local school systems? To what extent do the interconnections between class, religion and ethnicity shape parents negotiations of their school selection and their children's socialisation? The questions raised throughout this chapter are centred around the role of culture, religiosity, patron, ethnicity and social class in parents' selection-making decisions about primary school.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has outlined Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of habitus, capital and fields, and their complex interrelations in the positional distribution of social practices. It has elaborated how his key concepts shed light on the interrelations between family, schooling, local contexts, religion and patron in my study and provide a frame for analysing and discussing parents'

choice-making accounts. Bourdieu's tools provide a lens for understanding the complex interplay of embodiment, doxa, pre-reflective/reflective practices, social relations, capital and symbolic violence within the symbolic power of culture through which the social world is given meaning and understood in shaping practices. Questions have been raised that provide levers for inquiring into parents' accounts of their school choice decision-making processes in relation to their local contexts.

Chapter 4
Methodology

The previous chapter outlined and drew on theoretical concepts related to Bourdieu's habitus, capital, field and practice to open up the various domains in which this study is situated and raise questions that provide levers for examining parents decision-making and selection of primary school choice in Ireland. This chapter outlines the approach of the research study. First, the research question that focused the inquiry and its related philosophical considerations are outlined to determine the ontological and epistemological foundations of the research process. Second, it lays out the ethical procedures, the research sites and sample population, it details the data collection design which involves one-to-one in-depth interviews with 28 parents, the process of data analysis and finally my account of being reflexive in this research.

Research focus

The central question guiding this sociological research is: *What are parents' experiences of decision-making and selecting their children's primary school in Ireland?* In addressing this overall question, a sub-question helped to focus this inquiry: *How do parents negotiate their school selection process and children's schooling with regard to patronage and religion?* The principle aim of this research is to gain a greater understanding of parents' primary school decision-making processes in the context of their local primary school system.

Ontological and epistemological foundations

A researcher's methodological approach is underpinned by their ontological and epistemological positionality. First I outline the ontological foundation of this study. Subsequently, I explain how I understand the construction and status of knowledge produced in the thesis, thus teasing out the epistemological foundation of the work.

The ontological foundations in this study are consistent with Bourdieusian thinking that proposes we come to know the world relationally (Grenfell 2014). Social reality is not an ontological monism[107] generated by either subjectivism or objectivism, agency or structure

[107] Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) use the term monism to make explicit beyond doubt that Bourdieu's understanding of the social world is 'Against all forms of methodological monism that purport to assert the

(ibid.). Bourdieu saw the objectivist mode as too rigid because it prioritises structure over individuals and the subjectivist view, i.e. in which agents construct social reality, as too idealistic (Grenfell 2010). He saw both models as detaching individuals from their social and historical contexts of reality (Swartz 1997). Instead, in his view both subjective and objective views are mutually intervolved to produce a state of 'ontological correspondence' (Bourdieu 1996a, p.38 in Lizardo 2010, p.678). This concept theorises social reality as embodied and discursively constituted of structures and 'bundles' of social relations, all working in relation to each other (Wacquant & Deyanov 2002, p.182). Reality in this study is what parents construct it to be; it is the way they negotiate social relations informed by broad cultural understandings and make sense of the world around them (King 2000). This does not take the individual as the ultimate ontological reference of social reality, which is a multitude of constructions and understandings mutually negotiated in networks of social interactions between individuals/ groups and the external world (ibid.). The social context of reality ensures individuals'/groups' practices are always derived from shared understandings. Shared interpretations and understandings allow for meaningful action that produces and reproduces social life.

Bourdieu's social reality is best described, according to Wacquant (1989b, p.173), as 'constructivist realism'. This concept recognises both 'the reality of unperceived social structures' and 'schemes of perception' people form in relation to experience but also how they mutually condition each other (Atkinson 2020, p.30). Relationships are both visible and invisible. Invisible relations are 'obscured by the realities of ordinary sense-experience' (Swartz 1997, p.65). Individuals' social reality exists both inside in the mind and outside in things, and is constructed relationally to others (ibid., p.100). Bourdieu uses the concept of a 'structuralist' mode of thinking as fundamental to understanding the concept of relational social reality (ibid., p.65). In this sense, reality, according to the social consensus of society, is not always reduced to its social function in a society but is 'expressed in a cultural, ideational sense' (Grenfell & James 1998, p.17). Representations of and within group-making that stem from underlying dispositions are used to construct individuals' vision of the social world (Swartz 1997). A structuralist approach to social life 'identifies the real not with substances but with relationships' that are differentially and hierarchically ordered by the structure (Bourdieu 1984 in Swartz 1997, p.65). Taken together, the structural constructivist approach

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ontological priority of structure *or* agent, system *or* actor, the collective *or* the individual, Bourdieu affirms the *primacy of relations'* (ibid., p.15–16).

to understanding reality in this study engages a twofold social structural genesis between the schemes of thought, perception and action that is constitutive of parents' habitus on the one hand, and rules and norms in local social structures constructed by social consensus on the other hand (Grenfell & James 1998, p.157). In the interactions between habitus and structures, habitus 'implies a practical reference to the future implied in the past of which it is the product' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.138). Arising from this double historicity over time, habitus actualises socially acquired categories of perception to produce 'given discourses or practices' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.135) in relation to structures. This study is rooted in the idea that reality is constructed in relations between parents and the social world and incorporates generative shared interpretations of sufficient reason that produce and reproduce practices that make sense of regularities and tendencies (ibid).

On the basis of this ontological understanding of reality, relational structural constructivism also underpins Bourdieu's understanding of the formation of knowledge and is the epistemological foundation of this study. The epistemological stance of structural constructivism is that knowledge of the world is historically contingent, constructed within social groups in relation to the structure in which they find themselves, and is a way of understanding the world. Structural constructivism does not judge whether knowledge is truth, only what is real to the individual. Key factors pointed to by Bourdieu in guiding an understanding of knowledge are language in the form of words and discourses and culture intrinsically linked by symbols and signs in relational thinking (Atkinson 2020). An epistemological starting point is discourse itself, where knowledge is activated. Knowledge is constructed by being 'built against previous conceptualisations' (Swartz 1997, p.38). Influenced by Bachelard, Bourdieu saw knowledge as discursively produced, and thus there is a need to break with common sense in discourses that go unproblematised and instead to take language/words as objects that must be analysed (Atkinson 2020). This approach throws up the diversionary effects of common sense rather than taking its constructs within the realm of individuals'/groups'/institutions' reality (Grenfell & James 1998, p.160). One has to comprehend the origin of any common sense which has become so familiar that individuals/groups are 'oblivious to the arbitrary nature of its rules and regulations' (Deer 2008 p.120). Rethinking words as objects 'avoids treating (them) as an instrument of knowledge' and breaks with the orthodoxy of common sense (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992a cited in Grenfell & James 1998, p.161).

Bourdieu ascribes a critical role to the understanding of doxa within such fields of cultural production as education and religion (Deer 2008). This means identifying the 'implicit in social relations, structures and unquestioned doxic classifications' (ibid., p.124), especially those prior cultural and structural features of a society that constrain individuals' and groups' social action but yet do not determine them (King 2000). To explain this further, Bourdieu introduces the concept of intersubjectivity, within which specific meanings and interrelation of classifications are 'anchored in the organisation of social life' (Atkinson 2020, p.46). Intersubjectivity involves individuals' interactions with one other for the purpose of recognition, which is a fundamental feature of the organisation of social life (Atkinson 2020). Intersubjective relations are where individuals construct their knowledge and where meanings, classifications and the organisation of social life and order are determined (Atkinson 2020; King 2000). We know ourselves through others, which in turn gives meaning to our world (Atkinson 2020). Therefore, individuals'/groups' practices are not determined by an 'a priori rule' alone but also by recognition from others and wider public understanding which determines what is/is not 'socially appropriate (and) in line with communal notions of social order and legitimacy' (King 2000, p.430). It is on this understanding of intersubjectivity that I now focus to explain how wider social reality is implicated in shaping knowledge/practices.

Since all social fields are spaces of objective differences, i.e. made up of agents and institutions endowed with different properties, it is here that symbols and signs are operated in relational thinking to communicate and construct the world (Atkinson 2020). Symbols and signs mediate individuals' intersubjectivity from birth when parents are recognised as like us, and, as one matures, perceptions of others become continuously layered with symbolism (Atkinson 2020). Signs mediate intersubjectivity, whereby one's 'sense of self and others are bound in narratives, conversations and constructions of the world [...] when we use language to think of ourselves and those around us' (ibid.). Intersubjectivity is inherently relational: the 'I' and the 'me' experiences exist and are known through the opposite 'other' and vice versa (ibid.). As such, others are located as either 'like me' or 'not like me' in accordance with sets of conventionally defined oppositions (ibid.).

It is within intersubjectivity that individuals play the games of life for recognition from others (Atkinson 2020). Recognition holds social significance for one's existence and gives meaning and worth to our lives (ibid.). This is where Bourdieu understands society (structure) as having 'the power to justify you' (Atkinson 2020, p.52). It is in individuals' justifications for recognition in society that they struggle and strive for the symbols of worth within fields

to obtain or maintain that which society deems worthy (ibid.). Everyone stands in structural relations to one another within the field, and what they do depends on their experiences and relative positions. What is important in the identification of symbols and signs in fields is that they arise from a worth valued in the field. The authority of symbols in a field that categorises individuals against each other is always arbitrary. Fundamental for Bourdieu is that individuals' preferences in their practices are not an intrinsic feature of class; instead, they obtain significance only in relation to and by way of contrast with each other (Swartz 1997, p.67). Individuals' meanings in their practices are determined by recognition of their appropriateness from others, in line with structural/communal notions of social order (King 2000).

Following Bourdieu's relational social reality, the parents' accounts are understood as a variety of viewpoints that have epistemological power in terms of how they have been 'made' in particular social and cultural contexts. Parents' social relations that situate them in their local contexts and the way they connect with the dominant structures of thinking hold different forces in constructing their decision-making. As Bourdieu suggests, the truth of the world is differently presented and never one truth (Bourdieu 1987). In following a relational ontology of reality and epistemological understanding of knowledge-making in which the world resides within the realm of objective structures and subjective internalisation of such structures, I am, as the researcher, also socially situated in this knowledge-making. Accordingly, Bourdieu's reflexive approach of turning the gaze of analysis back on oneself is applied and discussed later in the chapter to avoid projecting my reality onto the parents' narratives.

My ontological and epistemological foundations raise a particular kind of research question that inquires into human experiences in relation to their holistic contexts. They necessitate particular kinds of methods illustrative of my qualitative research-based methodological approach, which is driven by the theoretical concepts of habitus, capital, field and practice in line with the relational thinking in which this study is grounded. Accordingly, the data collection and analysis methods are shaped through circuits between epistemology, methodology and theory.

Methods

This section presents a brief overview of my research approach and choice of methods. This includes a discussion of my ethical process, the research sites selected, the participants in the study, semi-structured interviews, data analysis approaches and finally my reflexive practices.

A qualitative research strategy was used in this study. Qualitative research seeks to understand and gain insight into a social phenomenon through the views of participants in their social and cultural contexts (Creswell 2009). A qualitative approach is suitable for the structural constructivism paradigm of this study. Creswell (1994) describes a qualitative study as 'an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting' (ibid., p.24). In contrast, quantitative research requires the identification of a problem and then seeks measurable data using instruments considered impartial to ensure that there is no influence by the researcher's biases and values (Creswell 2012). This approach fits with a positivist paradigm, i.e. a worldview that believes that knowledge can be defined by testing an a priori hypothesis or theory explored through careful measurement of the research phenomenon of concern (Creswell 2009; Patton 1990). Since my research question is focused on the parents' experiences of their primary school selection, an interpretative approach is used to examine and understand their decision-making processes. This study preserves the individuality of each parent in my analyses in order to gain insights into how the meanings of their school selection are shaped by their socio-cultural relations and the local contexts in which they are made. A qualitative approach allows an exploratory inquiry into the parents' natural settings, both rural and city, with what they say positioned at the centre of an interpretive investigation (Ravitch & Riggan 2017). Next, I outline my ethical process.

Ethics

Since this research involved human participants over 18 years of age, ethical approval was sought and granted from the Arts Humanities and Social Science Ethics Committee at the University of Limerick (Ethics application reference: 2017-09-11-AHSS). The ethics application included a detailed description of the research, detailed information sheets (see Appendices B, C and D) about the research disseminated to potential principals, crèche managers and parent participants, and a consent form (see Appendix E) for the participants' signature before their participation began. These ethical considerations were not considered

completed when I obtained ethical approval from the University as ethics was an ongoing part of my research process. I also kept a fieldwork journal of thoughts during the research process, which enabled me to reflect on decisions around ethical issues that caused mental conflicts.

Respect for the participants in the study and concern for their dignity and welfare was central and ongoing in the research study (Flick 2009). The participants were fully informed about the research study, its purpose/aim, details of the process and their participation by means of an information letter (see Appendices B, C, D) (Creswell 2009). A pre-arranged meeting was organised with the principals of schools and crèche managers for a complete discussion of the study, which explained the process and answered their questions. They were further informed that their role in the study which was to help gain access to the parents. This formal meeting established trust and confidence between the principals, crèche managers and the researcher. All the aforementioned participants were made aware of their rights and the voluntary nature of their participation. They were informed that they could change their mind at any stage and withdraw from the study without giving a reason. They were also told that they were free not to answer any question with which they were uncomfortable (Cohen et al. 2007) and assured of confidentiality and anonymity in regard to all identifiable information regarding their names, school, crèche and locality. The researcher's ethical responsibility was assured to all the participants to safeguard this confidentiality. I further assured them that pseudonyms would be used in all the transcriptions and reported findings to anonymise the data as per the Data Protection Acts 1998–2018 and the GDPR (Cohen et al. 2007; Creswell 2009). The participants were also informed about the procedures in place for safeguarding all confidential documents and audio recordings. In accordance with the commitment of the University of Limerick to protect the rights and privacy of individuals, good data handling practices were put in place. It was explained that all research data would be stored for seven years in a secure, password-protected file in the researcher's University of Limerick computer and securely deleted at the end of this period. The researcher is aware that under the Data Protection Acts 1998–2018 and the GDPR, research participants are entitled to request their personal data held by the University. The University sets out its procedures and the form for Subject Access Requests at www.ul.ie/dataprotection. Where an access request is received, it is immediately directed to the University's Data Protection Officer so that it can be processed as efficiently as possible. The overall process ensured that the participants' decisions were made with full knowledge of the research. Confidence was thereby established before they commenced participation and signed the consent form (see Appendix E). Before the parents

commenced the interview and signed the consent form, they were once again made aware of their entitlement to full confidentiality and their role in the study.

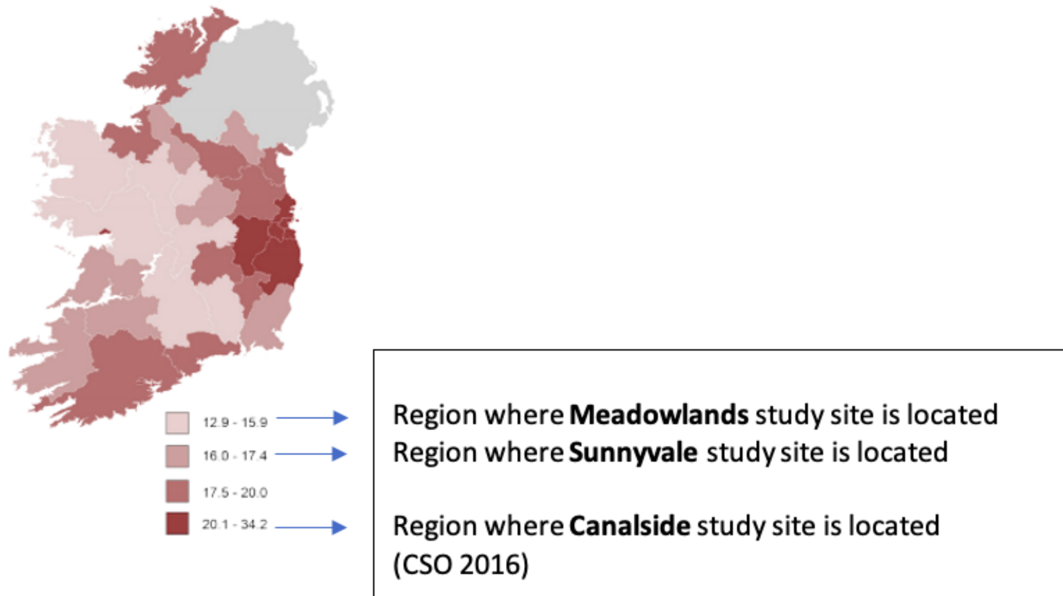
Research sites

This study returned to three study sites from the National Parent Survey (2013): Sunnyvale; Meadowlands; and Canalside (pseudonyms). Returning to sites in the survey enabled a deeper exploration of the parents' experiences of their children's schooling, given that the survey was carried out in their schools. Members of the Catholic hierarchy claimed that the low turn-out in the National Parent Survey was because 'parents did not want change', while schools in the survey areas claimed that 'our parents are happy' (Walshe 2014, pp.87–88; Daly 2016). Therefore, my objective was to concentrate on these sites to hear from the parents and gain insights into their 'on the ground' school decision-making experiences.

Study site demographics

The starting point for understanding the study sites is to place them within the context of religious beliefs of the Irish population. The reason for this is the patron was the objective of the National Parent Survey to determine how the denominational school system would be reshaped. Given that the majority of belief in the Irish population is Catholic (78%), I use the population statistics from the last CSO (2016) concerning minority religious beliefs to give an overall picture of the diversity of religions across Ireland. The following map of Ireland in figure 4.1 indicates the region in which the three study sites are located within the overall minority religious population as a percentage of the total population by county (CSO 2016).

Figure 4.1: Minority religious as a per centage of total Irish population, by county, CSO 2016



This map gives a visual insight into Meadowlands' situation within the lower, minority religious population statistical region, whilst Sunnyvale has a higher population of minority religious, and Canalside is in the region with the highest percentile of minority religious beliefs and is thus more religiously diverse in comparison. Table 4.1 presents an overview of the sites' schools, population demographics, educational level, social class, religion and nationality (Irish/other Nationality)[108] compared to the national average.

Table 4.1: Comparison of study sites' primary schools and demographics

	Sunnyvale (Rural site)	**Meadowlands (Rural site)**	**Canalside (City site)**	**National (approx.)**
* **Number of primary schools and patron**	7 Catholic English-medium schools 1 Catholic Gaelscoils 1 Church of Ireland school	5 Catholic English-medium schools 1 Catholic Gaelscoils 1 Church of Ireland school	4 Catholic English-medium schools 3 Catholic Gaelscoils 5 Protestant schools	2,546 Catholic English-medium 214 Catholic Gaelscoils 17 Inter-denominational Gaelscoils 19 Multi-denominational Gaelscoils 190 Protestant (Church of Ireland, Quaker, Presbyterian) 117 Multi-denominational

[108] Terminology taken from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to describe nationality.

			1 Multi-denominational school 1 non-Christian religion school	(ET schools, Community National Schools, Project schools) 3 non-Christian religion schools
****Population education level** Ordinary degree and higher level	% 25	% 15	% 62	% 28
****Population by social class** Professional, Managerial and Technical level	% 33	% 22	% 37	% 36
****Population Religion** Catholic Other religion No religion	% 80 8 9	% 86 7 5	% 58 14 24	% 78 9 10
****Population Nationality** Ireland Other national	% 87 13	% 84 16	% 80 20	% 87 13

** Department of Education 2019/2020 primary school data*

*** Source CSO 2016 sapmap*

The following is a brief discussion of each of the sites separately.

Sunnyvale

Sunnyvale comprises two parishes. There is a larger town in one parish with a population of 10,000, including the catchment area. The other parish has a village with a population of approximately 1,800. There are six schools in the town, four Catholic schools, one Gaelscoil (Catholic) and one Church of Ireland school. While two of the remaining Catholic schools are located in the countryside, the last, a DEIS school, is in the village. The outcome of the National Parent Survey in 2013 in Sunnyvale showed sufficient demand for patronage change, with parents' preference for an Educate Together school. Sunnyvale's religious and ethnic diversity (80% Catholic belief and 17% minority religious; 87% Irish nationality and 13%

minority ethnic nationality) is on a par with the national average. It is just below the national average for tertiary degree level education at 25% compared to 28%. and at the professional, managerial and technical levels that CSO 2016 used to indicate social class (33% compared to 36%), indicating a broad middle- and working-class population.

Meadowlands

Meadowlands comprises three parishes and has a population of approximately 7,000. It has one main country town with three Catholic schools and one small Church of Ireland school. The remaining three Catholic schools are in the countryside, one of which is a Gaelscoil. Its population is lower than the national averages across all the demographic categories: lower third-level education at 15% in comparison to the national average of 28%; and lower professional, managerial and technical level occupation at 22% in comparison to 36%, indicating a more working-class to middle-class population overall. The Catholic belief declared by the population is higher at 86% than the national average of 78% and slightly lower for other religions at 7% compared to the national average of 9%. At the same time, it is at half the national average for no religion at 5%. There is 6% more Catholic belief in Meadowlands and 5% less minority religious belief than in Sunnyvale, but Meadowlands shows a higher minority ethnic national population at 16% than both the national average (13%) and Sunnyvale (13%). This could indicate that the minority ethnic group is predominantly Catholic, accounting for Meadowlands' higher level of Catholic belief and lower number of Irish nationality than Sunnyvale and the national average. The outcome of the National Parent Survey in 2013 in Meadowlands showed insufficient demand for patronage change.

Canalside

The city site, Canalside, comprises two parishes with a total population of approximately 49,700. It has 14 primary schools comprised of six patron types. This is in contrast to the rural locations' school systems, all of which are Catholic patron schools except for the one small Protestant patron school in each. The Canalside primary school system comprises seven Catholic patron primary schools, of which four are English-medium[109] and three Gaelscoils,

[109] Two of the English-medium schools are under the same religious order, with a separate infant school and senior primary school.

five Protestant schools comprising three different Protestant denominations, one multi-denominational school and one non-Christian religion patron school. Of the 14 primary schools, two are fee-paying schools (one Protestant school and one Catholic English-medium school). Canalside is distinct from the two rural locations in that it is a prosperous area, whose population is largely middle-class, with 62% having third-level education, although its professional, managerial and technical level social class indicator is only slightly higher at 37% than the national average of 36%. It is also more religiously and ethnically diverse than the national population averages, with a 58% Catholic population in comparison to the national average of 78% and 24% no religion at over twice the national average of 10%. Of interest is the much higher percentage of its minority religious (38%) and minority ethnic nationality (20%) population than the national averages (22% minority religious and 13% minority ethnic nationality). This indicates that up to at least half of the population in Canalside who declared other religions and no religion are more than likely Irish nationality. Canalside also showed sufficient demand for patronage change in the National Parent Survey, with the ET patron parents' preference (DES 2013).

To date, no Catholic school has divested its patron to an ET patron in Sunnyvale and Canalside. Taken together, the diverse demographic differences between the three sites provide for rich, in-depth data concerning the parents' primary school decision-making processes in the context of the varying localities.

Access and participants

Accessing primary school parents was key to the focus of this study to generate data that reflected their experiences in their school decision-making. My initial strategy for accessing the parents in each of three sites was via school principals and crèche managers. The first task was to negotiate entry to the schools on the three sites. The principals of the primary schools were formally approached by email, followed by phone calls to request a face-to-face meeting. The reason for requesting a meeting with the principals was to discuss my study and develop trust in my request for their support to access parents in their schools. I found it difficult to access principals by phone as I could usually only get to talk to their administrators, who requested me to ring back on most occasions. My follow-up calls, however, received the same response. The two principals I did manage to speak to by phone immediately said that they

were too busy to get involved in research, as a result of which I decided to drive to the schools on each of the three sites.

The principals from six schools across the three sites agreed to participate in the study. My initial request was to obtain permission to meet with parents at the school gate when they were waiting for their children at the end of the school day. Only one principal granted this after gaining permission from the school's Board of Management. Although this process took five weeks to complete, this provided an opportunity to meet a diversity of parents, inform them about my study, supply them with information leaflets and invite them to participate. This was an interesting process. As the time frame was short, I had to make contact with as many parents as possible, introduce the study and request their contact details to enable follow-up before the school bell rang and their children came outside. Nine parents gave me their email details, but only two participated in the study. Interestingly, I approached two fathers, but each shied away, saying that it was up to their partners. I supplied the parents with an information letter so they could make an informed decision whether to take part in the study when I made follow-up calls. The other five principals preferred different approaches to access parents: through their parent council members; through the school's Liaison Officer; and, on one occasion, one principal invited me to attend their newcomer parents' evening event. The last of these was particularly interesting, in that parents with children already in the school were more confident to speak with me in comparison to parents who were starting the schooling experience for their children. Between these different processes of access, 20 parents were recruited.

I also contacted crèche and community childcare centres in each of the sites to introduce the study and ask the managers' permission to place recruitment flyers on their premises (see Appendix F). Follow-up phone calls were made, as well as cold calls to the premises in the rural locations. The city location crèches and childcare premises were harder to access due to intercom security which prevented me from meeting with staff face-to-face. Cold calling to community centres in the rural locations was fruitful, as I had the opportunity to meet parents as a result of this process. Altogether, five parents across three crèches (one in each study site) and two community centres agreed to participate, while a further three parents were recruited through snowballing from parents I interviewed. A total of 28 parents participated in the study.

All the parents were assured that the interview would take no more than one hour in duration. Face-to-face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the parent participants at a day, time and location that was convenient to them. The majority of the

interviews took place in hotels near where the parents resided, in cafes they suggested after they had dropped their children at school or at their place of work. Across the three sites, 12 parents were from Sunnyvale, eight parents from Meadowlands, and eight parents from Canalside (see Table 4.2 below). In all, the study included 11 schools (10 Catholic-patronage schools of which two were Gaelscoils, and one Protestant school) across the three sites where the parents' children were attending. The process was slow and involved a lot of travel across the country to access and interview parents. I had hoped to conduct more interviews, particularly on the city site, but the 11-month time span of my fieldwork gave me the time to become very familiar with and analyse the data, which led me to conclude that I was not discovering anything new that added to the stories emerging, since I had achieved theoretical saturation arising from the homogeneity among the participants' data (Guest et al. 2006, p.17). The fieldwork was concluded in early December 2018 and took almost a year, my having first made contact with the schools at the end of January 2018.

A note on the terminology used in this thesis. 'Majority ethnic' refers to those racialised as White, settled, Irish, and 'minority ethnic' refers to diverse people of migrant and minority ethnic background often racialised, for example, as Black, Traveller, Asian, or White other. The racialised backgrounds (Black, White) of the minority ethnic parents are not noted to minimise the risk of them being identified given that the study locations are drawn from the National Parent survey sites. The term minority religious refers to parents/families of religious beliefs/none other than Catholic, the predominant religion of the Irish population. Although, such categorises homogenise individuals' heterogeneous experiences within either majority/minority ethnic group terminology, these terms are used in this study as necessary descriptions because of the need for brevity. However, their use does not detract from parents' individual experiences as discussed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7. Details of the parent participants are outlined in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Table of the parent participants' characteristics

No.	**Name**	**Age**	**Religion/ majority ethnic/ minority ethnic**[110]	**Highest level of education**	**Occupation**	**Where family lives**	**Type of school selected**
1	Emily	37	Catholic, majority ethnic	Postgraduate	Teacher/ Lecturer	Sunnyvale	Town, Catholic Gaelscoil

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2	Emma	37	Catholic, minority ethnic	Second-level	Accounts Clerk	Meadowlands	Town, Catholic school
3	Olivia	43	Catholic, majority ethnic	Third-level	Childminder	Sunnyvale	Town, Catholic school
4	Ashley	39	Catholic, majority ethnic	Second-level and further courses	Waitress	Sunnyvale	Village, Catholic school
5	Sarah	43	Catholic, majority ethnic	Third-level	Housewife	Sunnyvale	Town, Catholic school
6	Grace	40	No religion, majority ethnic	Postgraduate	Civil Servant	Canalside	City, Catholic school
7	Oliver	45	No religion, majority ethnic	Third-level degree	Technology Manager	Canalside	City, Catholic school
8	Anna	36	Evangelical religion, minority ethnic	Postgraduate	Instructional Designer	Sunnyvale	Town, Catholic school
9	Julie	40	Catholic, minority ethnic	Second-level	Occupational Therapist	Canalside	City, Catholic school
10	Jenny	37	Catholic, majority ethnic	Third-level	Disability Service Co-ordinator	Canalside	City, Catholic school
11	Nicola	44	Catholic, majority ethnic	Second-level	Office Manager	Sunnyvale	Town, Catholic school
12	Lily	52	Catholic, majority ethnic	Third-level	Nurse	Sunnyvale	Village, Catholic school
13	Kim	42	Catholic, majority ethnic	Third-level	Creche Manager	Canalside	City, Catholic school
14	Laura	37	Evangelical religion, minority ethnic	Third-level	Retail Staff	Sunnyvale	Town, Catholic school
15	Molly	34	Catholic, majority ethnic	Postgraduate	Financial Services Team Leader	Sunnyvale	Village, Catholic school
16	Liz	42	Catholic, majority ethnic	Third-level	Stay-at-home mum	Sunnyvale	Village, Catholic school
17	Hazel	42	No religion, majority ethnic	Third-level	Nurse	Sunnyvale	Town, Catholic school,
18	Bella	39	Catholic, majority ethnic	Further course after second level	Accounts	Sunnyvale	Village, Catholic school
19	Alice	44	Catholic, majority ethnic	Third-level	Book-keeper (part-time)	Meadowlands	Town, Catholic school
20	Clara	37	Catholic, majority ethnic	Third-level	Chartered Accountant	Meadowlands	Country, Catholic school

21	Cathy	41	Catholic, majority ethnic	Third-level	Social Worker	Meadowlands	Country, Catholic School
22	Isabelle	48	Catholic, majority ethnic	Secretarial College	Manager of GP Practice	Meadowlands	Country, Catholic school,
23	Harry	55	Catholic, majority ethnic	Postgraduate	Financial Director	Meadowlands	Country, Catholic school
24	Iris	40	Catholic, majority ethnic	Third-level	Special Needs Assistant	Meadowlands	Country, Catholic school
25	Violet	38 approx.	Catholic-born/lapsed, majority ethnic	Postgraduate	Lecturer	Canalside	City, Catholic Gaelscoil
26	Daisy	40 approx.	Catholic, majority ethnic	Third-level	Teacher	Canalside	City, Protestant school
27	Amy	42	Catholic, majority ethnic	Third-level	Chartered Accountant	Canalside	City, Catholic school followed by private city Catholic school
28	Rachel	40s	Catholic majority ethnic	Third-level	Teacher	Meadowlands	Country, Catholic school

Data collection and analysis

This section outlines the methods of inquiry of my study, beginning with the interview design and followed by the process of analysis and coding frame that was developed. Finally, I discuss the importance of reflexivity for my research and the impact of my values and the potential biases, in addition to the implications for the knowledge I generated.

In-depth interviews

Qualitative interviewing was my choice of method for data collection because it intervenes in the social world of participants as a means of getting closer to the authenticity of practices (Grenfell and James 1998). I wanted to study the parents' perspectives, experiences, explanations and judgements in regard to their school decision-making. It is parents who make their meanings in school choice-making, and so their voices are critical data sources (Creswell 2007). Therefore, one-to-one interviews allowed for an in-depth study of the parents' own words about their decision-making processes in a way that was open to emerging information. I used a semi-structured interview approach with a series of general questions (see Appendix

A) as a frame of reference to guide me during the interviews (Creswell 2009), during which I concentrated on the parents' responses rather than following a linear process of questioning. While allowing for flexibility, the semi-structured interviews also provided a valuable structure when conducting interviews across three different research sites to ensure comparability. As such, my interviews were conducted with a loose collection of themes on the topics I wanted to cover while also allowing interviewees to speak freely in order to generate depth and rich data in their accounts (Creswell 2009).

The interviews ranged over a series of topics with questions that were open-ended to allow the parents to form their own answers, while others were more specific: where they grew up; how they came to where they are living now; and about living in their locality. I asked them about their experiences of approaching their school decisions, the age of their child, influences from friends, family or others, what they were looking for in a school for their children and how they came to the final decision. I also asked them reflective questions about why other schools were not considered, whether the school met their expectations, their thoughts on the diversity of the school and their experiences of the 2013 National Parent Survey. I did not explicitly ask about the patron at the outset; if the parents did not bring it up when talking about how they came to the decision of the school, I purposefully asked them about the patron and religion in their selection-making. The reason for this was that I wanted to understand if patron and religion were explicit/implicit/non-factors in their decision-making and why, and not to obscure their actual experiences. This structure scaffolded the conversation to keep it focused, but at the same time the course of the interview was allowed to be directed by what emerged from the interviewee's responses (Kvale 2007).

The format of the interviews took a 'conversation with a purpose' approach, so that the parents were at ease and the course of the interview was directed by what emerged from their narratives (Lincoln & Guba 1985, p. 268). I was acutely aware of hearing everything they were saying while using probes and prompts where there were significant replies in the course of the conversation that I needed to understand from their perspectives (Bryman 2008). The responses frequently moved between their past and present experiences and encompassed emotions during their reflections about selecting a school. The parents wanted to talk about incidents they experienced with explanations and justifications while also giving descriptions of daily routines; hence, the interviews were moments in time where experiences and histories mediated what they said and felt. The interviews also allowed the parents to speak at length and freely as these interactions were negotiated to create meaning for parents and myself.

Knowledge in the form of parental narratives and responses is not held by the interviewee or interviewer alone but created between the two (Kvale & Brinkmann 2015), in which context I recognised that the researcher is mediated in the construction of knowledge in this study (Tripp 1983). The interviews are thus relational constructions of knowledge, during which I respectfully steered the conversation, when it wandered, to my research interest, viz, the parents' school decision-making. At the same time, their frame of orientation, which they brought 'from outside' into the interview, shaped the knowledge constructed in their narratives (Philipps & Mrowczynski 2021). Therefore, I also questioned the parents' reasons for what they said in their stories to help interpret what they meant.

I purposefully did not take notes during the interviews as I wanted to put the parents at ease by creating an informal conversational approach. Recording the interviews with the parents' consent allowed me to concentrate on what they said and the tone they used in saying it. I was worried before the interviewing started that the audio-recorder would interfere with the nature of the process and the parents would not relax. However, I was surprised at how they were not at all conscious of it during our conversations. I recognised from the outset that rapport was essential for the interview flow and is shaped by me as researcher in leading the process and determining the quality of the data collected. This rapport was established from the moment I made contact with the parents, emailing them and following up with phone conversations to organise our meeting. I wanted them to feel at ease both with me and the interview, as some of them were anxious during our initial phone conversation that they would not have anything of interest to say. I established trust with parents, letting them know that I was interested in their experiences of deciding their primary school selection. Most of the parents were mothers (except two fathers), though this was not an active objective but reflected the nature of parenting where childcare and schooling are usually led by the mother (Reay 2002). When meeting the parents, I always started with small talk about the weather, traffic, children and them asking me about my family and what I was doing. They were always surprised that I was studying at my older age of life but quickly came to feel relaxed as I felt that there was a sort of shared experience between us as parents.

I was awkward and rambling in the first interview and noted in my fieldwork journal that I did not sufficiently question such topics as 'class' that the parent mentioned during the course of the conversation. Looking through my fieldwork reflection, I saw again at a later date that I wrote how 'I was amazed' at my awkwardness in talking about class, stating that my fear was that parents would think I might be judging them. At the same time, I think my

feelings of awkwardness arose from my consciousness of the need to keep the conversation going and not put emphasis on ‘class’ (Brinkmann 2012), which could otherwise have interfered with the parents speaking freely in my attempt to be polite. As Brinkmann (2012, p.23) contends, there is no ‘method’ for how to conduct conversational interviews, but researchers should be alert to their details. Accordingly, I listened to the parents’ narratives for how they mobilised and represented themselves and others, e.g., in relation to group belonging/or not and classifications of groups/individuals. I noted and reflected on the times I felt unease during the interviews. For example, a dominant narrative in parents’ decision-making was around the disadvantaged families and at such times, parents usually sought acknowledgement from me, using the exclamation ‘you know what I mean?’ My awareness of being aligned in a shared and implicit framework that positioned the disadvantaged at the margins of educational discourses made me uncomfortable. However, wanting the conversation to proceed, I would simply nod. My complicity in doing so was related to my researcher’s role in obtaining authentic data. In reflexive consideration, I could not challenge their perception, only accept it, listen to what they had to say and question further if needed. I knew this discourse to be common-sense thinking around children’s schooling; however, in my role as researcher, I took a sociological view, seeing it as a part of a collective practice situated within the educational environment in which knowledge is produced and formed (Grenfell & Pahl 2019, p.194). Thus, such common-sense knowledge is not a reflection of parents. I, too, failed to recognise the highly violating classed and ethnic gaze that framed such perceptions. As a parent seeking to get the best for my children’s schooling, I too drew on co-constructed beliefs linked to a collective misrecognition about the disadvantaged in education. However, with the increased awareness fostered by my sociology studies and subsequent work as researcher in the field, I have a sense of unease with such narratives, though not in a way that generated judgement of parents. My tension was not with what the parents said but emerged from my insider recognition of local realities that parents do what they perceive as best for their children’s schooling. At the same time, my outsider researcher position recognised the violence in such practices. I know that parents’ narratives about the disadvantaged, like my own, are deeply embedded in education and the structures in society that created and framed families/groups as disadvantaged. As such, how the idea of the disadvantaged was constituted in the education field and how it continues to be transformed in the school system required scientific examination, as discussed in Chapter 1. Understanding

its historical implications is essential for grasping the subsequent contemporary relations between parents and their school selection in the context of their locale.

I probed assumptions for elaboration on familiarity; for example, when parents talked about a school 'mix' or diversity, I asked them to explain what they meant. This often resulted in contradictions which were mostly not acknowledged and reflected the complexities of how experiences are constructed and interpreted. Listening was critical to the flow of the interview to identify cues for the right questions to emerge and when to read silences. Data analysis begins during the interview, and listening was the key to collecting data for a better understanding of parents' narratives (Kvale 2007). Most of the interviews were between 50–60 minutes in duration; however, our meetings did not finish when the interview was terminated, and the recorder stopped. There were always follow-up conversations, especially with those parents who would tell me about their grievances with the school system, which invariably concerned their children's welfare and needs. Overall, the interviews were short periods during which the parents' stories created lived experiences that stayed with me and of which I was conscious of throughout my analysis.

Data analysis

As outlined earlier, this research is grounded within the epistemology of structural constructivism and the theoretical tools deployed in Bourdieu's concept of practice. The data analysis conducted for this study was guided by a thematic framework approach 'to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes)' across my interview data (Braun & Clarke 2006, p.76). This approach is a flexible and useful research method for purposes of analysis and enabled me to interpret and unravel the ways the parents made meanings in their experiences and, in turn, how broader social contexts impinge on those meanings in relation to their school decision-making (Braun & Clarke 2006; Swartz 1997). The parents' experiences were the primary objective of my analysis in order to gain an understanding of their school selection decisions and are the focus of my research question. Moreover, thematic analysis provided me with clear guidelines for my analytical approach. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps guided my analysis across my dataset for all 28 interviews, which were fully transcribed verbatim by me. My field journal of personal thoughts incorporated reflective notes written before and after the interviews of accounts like those pointed to previously. My feelings, experiences, problems, impressions, mistakes and prejudices were also included in the data to help the

interpretative work in my analysis (Creswell 2009). This provided precious information for my analysis process, as my impressions and observations furnished potential codes and were continually added to and adjusted throughout the analytical process. The six thematic analysis steps I followed were (1) familiarising myself with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing themes; (5) defining and naming themes; and (6) producing the story of my data (Braun & Clarke 2006).

The coding process involved a repeated back-and-forth process to identify patterns across the dataset, in order to become very familiar with the data and stay close to what parents said about their school decision-making (ibid.). I completed four rounds of iterative analysis across the 28 interviews looking for ideas and concepts that address my research question while also ensuring I was not omitting any key aspects (Braun et al. 2016, p.8). I initially developed preliminary descriptive codes that appeared interesting in relation to the parents' school decision-making. Full extracts of data were coded at this initial stage so that the context of what the parents were saying would not be lost. The codes provided a broad sense of was going on within parents' narratives of their school decision-making, as exemplified in an extract of my coding at this stage in figure 4.2.

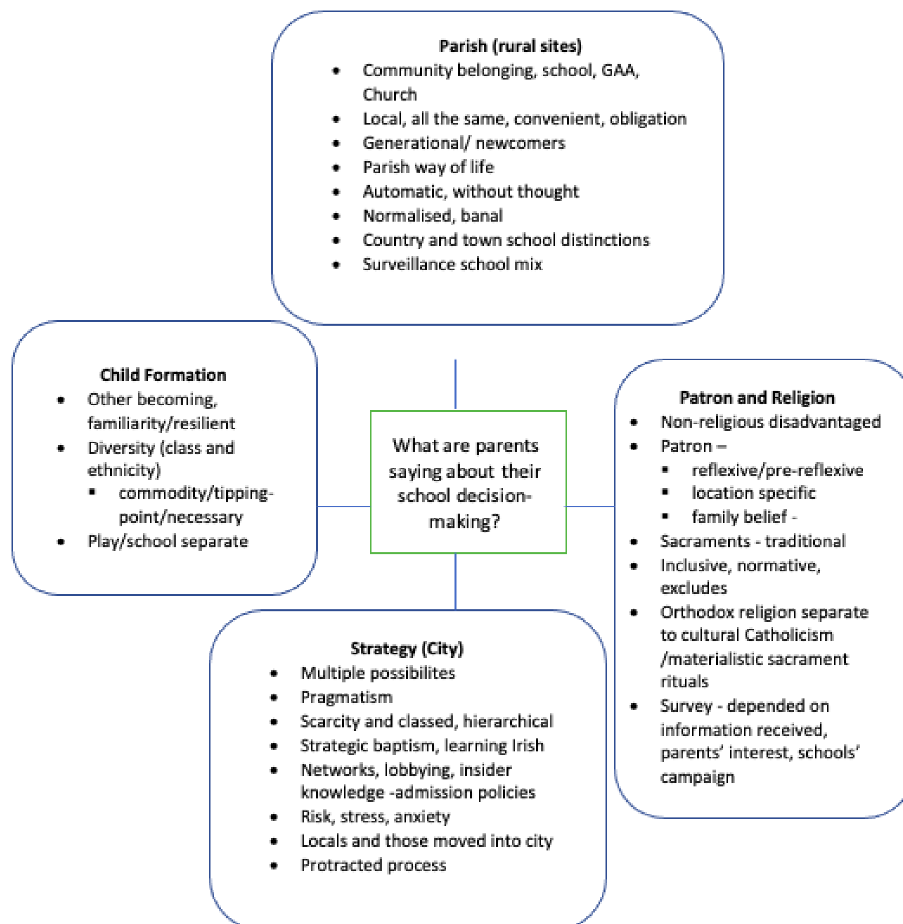
Figure 4.2: Generating initial descriptive codes (extract example)

Data extract	**Coded for**
Oh yeah we were reared a Catholic, and every school in the village is Catholic – there is no outside – if your child isn't religious I don't think they would have pushed it, they don't discriminate say (Ashley, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).	1. Parent's own experience 2. Catholicism is the religion of the village 3. Perceives school as inclusive

Further iterative reading across the data was carried out to determine relationships between the other narratives in the data and within the coded data to ensure I was not omitting any key aspects (Tuckett 2005, p.82). Subsequently, I looked for relationships between the codes to collate into potential themes. The codes placed within the themes subsequently helped to develop the sub-themes (Braun & Clarke 2006). At all stages, both themes and sub-themes were data-driven, and the organisation and naming of the initial themes were influenced by parents' own words from which I identified features that supplied the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations for shaping and informing their narratives (ibid.).

I then moved to the following stages, i.e. towards a focused coding, defining and naming themes, which involved reading all the collated extracts in each theme to identify a coherent pattern. Subsequently I went back to the dataset to check the initial codes and make sure I was not omitting anything (Braun & Clarke 2006). My analysis at this stage was conducted by thematic mind-maps; for example, Figure 4.3 shows a mind map of my themes and sub-themes developed at the fourth stage around my central question: *What are parents saying about their school decision-making?*. Four broad themes developed at this stage were (i) parish, (ii) strategy, (iii) child formation and (iv) patron and religion.

Figure 4.3: Mind map - developing themes



Further analysis involved the reduction of narratives with the same meaning by bundling/integrating and layering coded sub-themes under a similar theme to capture nuances within the data. This involved returning to the data extracts and putting them together to refine and form the '"essence" of what each theme was about' (ibid., p.92). Supplementing my

research question which had guided the coding up to this point, I included at this stage the theory and academic literature to refine my themes/sub-themes. Bourdieu's theoretical concepts of habitus, capital, field and practice, as discussed in Chapter 3, guided me in determining which aspects of the data to focus on and which were less relevant in response to the research question. Interpretation involved the construction of implicit knowledge that shaped how parents talked about their school selection, in addition to the language, symbols, cultural material and broader social structures that served as an orientation in their practices (Braun & Clarke 2006). The literature relevant to school choice was employed to help my interpretative work by sensitising me to subtle features of the data, identifying/clarifying possible relationships between themes and sub-themes and helping me to check the validity of the initial themes (Tuckett 2005). Although the literature review was an ongoing process from the commencement of my study, I did not integrate it into the analysis until the fourth stage, viz, reviewing the themes, because I wanted the parents' voices to dictate the initial development of the themes. It is inevitable in qualitative research that managing the data in accordance with the research question requires guidance in certain aspects by the academic literature and theory (see Braun & Clarke 2006, p.80). Fine (2002, p.218) argues that 'giving voice […] involves carving out unacknowledged pieces of narrative evidence that we select, edit and deploy to border our arguments' (cited in Braun & Clarke 2006, p.80). Furthermore, Braun reminds qualitative researchers that their analysis is not telling 'an isolated story' but instead is one 'that sits in relation to other scholarship', and as such the researcher is 'engaging in interpretative processes that are embedded in the fields of scholarship that your work is located in' (Braun et al. 2019, p.435).

It must be reiterated that the parents' narratives throughout the iterative back-and-forth process with the data drove the consultation with theory and the academic literature, which in turn helped my interpretations of the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions. By comparing the sub-thematic data extracts within and across the themes, accompanied by a simultaneous reading of the literature and use of theory, the four themes above were refined to three: community belonging; strategising in a competitive school system; and perceptions of religion and patron (ibid.). I then developed a story around each theme to make an argument in relation to the data (Braun et al. 2019). After a thorough analysis, these themed patterns in the parents' school selection processes informed the structure of my findings in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. However, this was not a straightforward right-fit with an end result during my write-up of each of these chapters. I found the process of trying to tell a complicated story about the

data required me to revisit the parents' narratives in the verbatim interview transcripts time and time again, and to go back through my thematic analysis and question specific interpretations to be assured that my story illustrated what the parents had said.

The knowledge I generated from my analysis was interpreted in relation to the parents' social and cultural context and was therefore a socio-cultural interpretation. Thus, my analysis was not undertaken at the semantic level of the parents narratives but instead is a discursive understanding of primary school selection built from their experiences. What the parents said was considered and interpreted in respect to their social world in which they practised/acted and interacted (Sayer 2017). The socio-cultural and socio-political histories of Ireland as discussed in Chapter 1 were also taken into account in interpreting parents' communicated experiences, because language can operate partly below the level of consciousness (ibid.). Therefore, I generated knowledge by a construction of meaning 'behind' the subjective, socially relational and socially located experiences of parents' school selection-making (Braun & Clarke 2013, p.39). Although the various discourses and systems of meaning (Burr 2003 cited in Braun & Clarke 2013) in the parents' individual accounts were differently constructed, commonalities and differences were identified and explored to give a complex view of the primary school decision-making process. This study acknowledges that there is no one 'truth' in this domain. Instead, primary school selection in Ireland is understood and represented within the context-bound nature of reality. Furthermore, the construct of knowledge generated, although qualitative and generally to be considered not generalisable, is flexible (Goodman 2008a cited in Braun & Clarke 2013) in the sense that parents' school decision-making was shaped by underlying factors consistent with national and international research on school choice. Finally, I recognise that the knowledge I developed from the dataset is a subjective process where I too bear upon the knowledge produced. I now turn to my position as researcher within the process.

Reflexivity

Drawing on Bourdieu's reflexive sociology, I situated myself, as the researcher in the field of the primary school selection process, to understand my practice within the context of the research and the parents' narratives. Maton (2003 cited in McLean 2019, p.171) views reflexivity as a process whereby 'authors explicitly position themselves in relation to their objects of study so that one may assess researchers' knowledge claims in terms of situated

aspects of their social selves and reveal their (often hidden) doxic values and assumptions'. In other words, I examined my participation in practice and subjective interpretation, i.e. the a priori knowledge I brought to my analysis. The need for reflexivity in sociological research is well documented to deter personal bias from skewing one's findings (Grenfell & Pahl 2019; Gray 2008). No social scientist can claim they are objective and that their social locations and positionality do not affect the research they produce. Bourdieu (2003) argues that researchers must reflect continuously upon their experiences while avoiding producing 'narcissistic confessions' (cited in Grenfell & Pahl 2019, p.287) and offers an approach to this: the 'objectification of the knowing subject' for reflexivity (Grenfell & Pahl 2019, pp.268–269). My reflexivity throughout the research study allowed me to interrogate my analytical methods and situate myself critically within this process. This involved seeing myself in the subject and objectifying my researcher self as an object, but not seeing myself through the eyes of the parent participants but rather taking 'up all possible points of view' as if 'faced with the same conditions' (ibid., p.299). This is what Bourdieu means when he 'calls on all of us to see ourselves in society but also society in ourselves' (ibid., p.304). Each parent was at the forefront of my mind during my analysis; I was always mindful of them throughout my writing as I did not want to misrepresent their stories. In these ways, I was reflexive about my everyday self through my notes in my fieldwork journal and the academic emergent texts in the literature that influenced my way of thinking (Grenfell 2019, p.303).

I draw on Bourdieu's reflexivity in the following extracts about myself in an attempt to show, first, my position in the research field and how I came to this study and, second, how the object of my study created tensions for me at times. I use Bourdieu's reflexivity because it helps me to make sense of and articulate how the world in which I exist has both shaped me and the study with which I have engaged. I endeavoured to tease out, mobilise and examine my own past experiences within and during the research stages. With the advice of my supervisors, I kept a reflective journal, albeit not a daily diary but one that I wrote during my fieldwork and at times during the study process when I felt uncomfortable. I now have more clarity and understanding of how research position-taking is central to the interpretation and analysis of the research process and product. This reflexivity shows my enmeshment in my study, not to gain objectivity but to highlight the layers of my involvement and reactions during the research process.

I acknowledge that the social world which formed my researcher self and study was influenced by others' voices through academic articles and theories in order to make sense of

my research. As McLean (2019, p. 215) points out, 'constructing knowledge through drawing on frameworks, i.e. citation practices as a way of displaying researcher's theoretical position in a text, is never a neutral act'. Therefore, pre-existing concepts from the literature and Bourdieu's theory provided forms for my understanding within the educational field of school choice. I used the literature and theory to structure my research process, understand the complexities within the data and make sense of the parents' school decision-making. The sociological work I read and my disciplinary allegiances with educational sociologists, as discussed in Chapter 2, have a common orientation that endorses critical reflection on inequalities in education. I acknowledge that the scholarly field and analytical tools upon which I drew are embedded in the field of educational sociology to which I now contribute.

A further major factor central to Bourdieu's understanding of reflexivity is the researcher's location within a social space. Thus, I must acknowledge how I came to my initial interest in this study, as this impacts upon the research process and analysis. My previous experience as a project coordinator on scientific and mathematical research projects involved me in seeking schools' participation and negotiating agreed timelines and access arrangements for the researchers. This work gave me an understanding of the subtleties and conventions in school spaces. Going in and out of different schools, I noticed differences in the way these subjects were approached. Schools differed in their provision of the level of mathematics and science, viz, honours, pass and foundation levels, which I believed to have an impact on students' future trajectories. I was interested in understanding why are there differences between schools, which brought me to study applied research at UL at Master's level to gain the knowledge and skills to explore this phenomenon. This opened up a world that allowed me to integrate my scientific qualification with sociology and provided a way of thinking about inequalities across the school system. I became interested in and questioned the historical foundations of the relationship between schools' social class populations and the expectations of students' academic ability that schools assumed and were structured around.

Furthermore, I questioned my own background, during which half-century I had never noticed this before. I went through a convent primary and secondary schooling with the St. Joseph of Cluny order, the same school attended by my father's sisters, so it was the norm. The nuns maintained a broadly middle-class environment that involved a mixture of boarders from afar and locals like myself from perceived 'respectable' backgrounds. The vocational school, known as 'the tech', was where the 'other' children went and was never considered by my parents. Although 'class' was never mentioned, it was always implicitly known, even by

my young self, that ‘we’ did not go there. My parents would always self-identify as ‘ordinary’, which was the only way class was talked about. As a result, I was socialised within a particular social milieu only identifiable through the expectations and assumptions surrounding those whom my siblings and I befriended. This exemplifies how class is understood relationally. On this basis, I would describe my family background class position as broadly middle-class.

To move to my experiences of making school selections for my children, I never consciously thought about inequalities and the implications for students of a school system stratified by social class. This is not to say that I did not consciously select the ‘nice’ middle-class schools which were my objective. Furthermore, I never thought about patrons; rather, I was influenced by friends, family and networks in getting what was perceived as the right school at the time. My children attended Catholic, Protestant and non-denominational schools across Ireland, Singapore and the US during their schooling years. Therefore, I have varied experiences in selecting schools, both from the perspective of a native (in Ireland) and an outsider in the overseas assignments related to my husband’s work. Rather than this being a self-indulgent matter of divulging my private experiences, however, I have become aware they are linked to my understanding of social relations as an influencing factor in school decision-making, and I drew on these understandings in my study. The more diverse Irish population that opened up the state’s need to reshape the primary school system’s patronage within policy ‘choice’ discourses resonated with my desire to make sense of the differences between schools that are obfuscated by the busy and routine motions of schooling that families get on within their positions in the social world.

Reflexivity about my position in the social world brought me to the realisation during my fieldwork that I was embodied by the Catholic culture of schooling, although I would always have thought that I am not the same self today as my younger self, – not least because, for one, I do not identify as Catholic and instead refer to myself as non-religious. However, as Bourdieu contends, perceptions are formed through embedded dispositions that tend to correspond to the formative development of the habitus (Swartz 1997, p.107). To explain further, my fieldwork involved meeting principals to ask for their support in accessing parents. These meetings required careful planning and sensitive and reflective involvement with the principals. Through my exploration of policy and Forum Report documents, I came to these meetings with the realisation that my research question could be a controversial topic for some principals, which aims to understand parents’ primary school decision-making process, including if, where and how the patron influenced their decision. From my reading of Catholic

representatives' responses to the divestment of schools and particularly of submissions to the Advisory Group during the Forum enquiry, I had an awareness of the strong views held by some schools that did not want patron change. Indeed, one of the schools in my research was vehemently against any change, as indicated in their submission letter to the Advisory Group in June 2011 (DES 2011). Needless to say, the principal of that school did not participate.

I had decided when developing my research framework not to explicitly discuss patronage with the principals (or parents) during my meetings but instead to do so from the policy perspective of parent choice. I had good reason for not mentioning the patron in my research question as I did not want parents to have it foremost in their minds when I was interviewing them about their school decision-making, in case this would skew how they narrated their decision process. My caution about speaking overtly about the patron was because my goal of understanding parents' selection processes went beyond arguments of divestment that were ongoing in the background of the educational field. Nonetheless, I was conflicted, as shown in the following account I wrote in my reflection notebook about the tension I was feeling during the meeting:

> *Monday, March 12, 2018*
>
> *Meeting with the Home Community Liaison Officer in Meadowlands, who covers two of the primary schools in the town.*
>
> *When we went to the staff room to get coffee, I started to tell the Liaison Officer about my study on parent choice of primary school. He immediately came in with the connection to patronage and explained that all the schools in the town are religious, either Catholic Church or Protestant. I was slightly taken aback that patronage was brought up immediately before giving more details about my study.*
>
> *If I am honest, I felt cautious then, but now that I have just left the school, I feel guilty as if I am not truthful about my study. However, I did explain the reasons for my study – that parent choice has been used recently for reforming the primary school system. I am looking at the policy documents and want to speak with parents on the ground to see how they make their choice-decision. When I did get to this, once again, the Liaison Officer began to explain to me about the schools in the area. (We had moved our*

meeting to his office at this stage.) He explained that the schools in which he works are DEIS 2, and in this school (where we had the meeting), its enrolment has dropped from 300 to 150 now and that the majority of the children are from families where both parents are minority ethnic. Presently, they have only 7 Irish-parent families in the school. It is this, he thinks, is the reason why numbers have dropped: the increase in other nationalities has marginalised Irish parents.

My understanding of the tension I felt arose from the misalignment between my habitus and the primary school as my research field, which gave rise to my increased reflexive awareness (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Here, I am negotiating between my 'habitus and its ambivalences' and my sociological researcher role (Thorpe 2009, p.503 cited in Townsend & Cushion 2020). I do realise that this process of introspection, this 'acknowledging of split subjectivity', can be productive in fieldwork (Wacquant 2004, p.398). During these meetings, I was constantly aware of the impressions I created because of their effects on accessing parents. I knew the meetings were only an entry into the schools; accessing parents had other challenges that depended on the principal's and staff's perceptions of me, the researcher, in their domain (Ball 1990). I also felt a protectiveness by the principals of their parents, which is understandable; in this way, I held a submissive role in these meetings. Feelings of unease such as described in the journal note above arose from the tension between my tacit knowledge and experience of a Catholic majority primary schooling and being a good researcher exploring the primary school patronage structure that marginalises minority religious families. I was enmeshed in both social worlds. My background, schooling and experiences of growing-up influenced my feelings of unease at times about studying the patronage school system. According to Gray (2008, p.948), 'emotional (dis)identifications and attachments are central to the framing of the object study, to the interaction of feeling and thought in the research process and to why the production of particular knowledge matters'. My self-interest in pursuing this study to achieve my PhD conflicted with my idea of exploring Catholic Irish national culture in schooling. My reflexivity has illuminated the entanglement of my identities (self with past schooling and socialisation experiences, parent, present-day researcher) and the cultural significance of my fieldwork in the primary school space.

I have aimed to be honest, open and critical throughout my thesis process and endeavoured to present my findings with honesty and ethical integrity so that my writing reflects not 'the truth' but what parents said. I have presented my preliminary findings to

academic audiences at a number of seminars and conferences[111] and received feedback which helped to sharpen my methodological approach and analysis and contribute to the credibility of the research. My awareness of the relational nature of my research and my feelings about this sensitised me to my research participants and schools in my data interpretation. Moreover, these reflections have shown how enmeshed I have been in this study with the parents, principals, their experiences and stories, my past and ongoing experiences, the sociological literature I selected and Bourdieu's theoretical lens, as discussed in Chapter 3. At the same time, I am aware and acknowledge that they have determined the way I have chosen to analyse my empirical research and what I present in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has outlined the methodology adopted for this study. It has laid out the steps in my research and provided the rationales for the approaches that align with the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the research. The following three chapters present the findings generated from the process discussed.

[111] Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) PhD seminars at the University of Limerick (2017; 2019), the Sociological Association of Ireland (SAI) Postdoctoral Conference (2018; 2019) and the British Sociological Association (BSA) Annual Conference (2019).

Chapter 5

Rural school systems, community and culture

Having described the two types of research sites in Chapter 4, viz, rural and city, this chapter addresses the data relating to the rural site locations: Meadowlands and Sunnyvale. As outlined in the previous chapter, this study is located in three of the 43 DES[112] (2012; 2013) national survey sites, two rural and one city, the former being the focus of this chapter. I use the term 'rural' to denote their locations' large and less populated catchments, which include a town, village and country schools in each site, in comparison to the densely populated city site. The schools in the two rural sites are all of Catholic patronage, with the exception of one small Protestant school in each of the locations. It should also be noted that the two rural locations are not homogenous populated regions but are made up of various ethnic, class, occupational and religious backgrounds, and comprise families with intergenerational links alongside newcomer families, meaning families that moved into the area for work reasons.

Many of the parents at the centre of this chapter talked about their school selection in relation to the community and/or parish, both of which terms are used interchangeably. This chapter outlines how community/parish works through parents' school selection process, how it is intertwined in their aspirations for their children's future trajectory and how its cultural know-how facilitates their children's belonging. I adopt Crow & Allan's (1994) understanding of community/parish in my data analyses to engage how it is drawn on by parents to 'express both descriptively and evaluatively aspects of their social experience' in their school selection processes (ibid., p.193). Communities are active creations, 'socially constructed onto social collectivities', with fluid boundaries invariably influenced by social structural processes where individuals build/sustain their social relations locally (Warwick 1992 in Crow and Allan 1994, p.133). Parish is a key form of community in rural Ireland (Falardeau 1968) that links relational bonds between the family, Church, primary school and GAA, as discussed in Chapter 1, and formed an organised system of Catholic cultural socialisation (Fahey 1998). Parish boundaries are culturally and socially relational; where they begin and end are

[112] The areas for surveying parents' choice were identified 'based on population and primary school provision', i.e. where there is a cluster of denominational schools, with a stable population, identified for gathering evidence of parental preferences to determine the 'ideal' range and distribution of categories based on parental choice (Coolahan et al. 2012, pp.54–56).

individually and locally known, and never stable (O'Mahony & Murphy 2018). Parish is a 'vitally important way in which local identity in Ireland is connected with place' and is equally deployed as a 'discourse of national unity' (ibid., p.25). Taking the concept of parish/community as a source/resource of cultural meaning-making, I explore how community is drawn on by the parents, what it is doing and how it shapes their school selection. Although parish schools play an important role in parents' decisions, social contexts and other factors such as the engagement with local sporting activities and/or route into an 'Irish-speaking' community also impact their school's selection.

The chapter begins by outlining the parents' objective to anchor their child in the community in their school selection and argues that various levels of belonging are determined by socio-cultural factors. I demonstrate how parish life is an embedded known way of living for many parents that holds significance with the local school, but individual interests take priority when issues for their children arise. Second, I illustrate how locally coded forms of social class and majority/minority ethnic distinctions are worked through constructs of 'affinity and aversion', inherently known and routinely operated in the separation of children's socialisation spaces, in schooling and the community (Bourdieu 1987, p.7).

Anchoring the child in the community

The primary school is seen as the foundational support for the maintenance and development of families' social relationships in the community. It is the place of daily interactions, where relationships are reinforced and a sense of community is built/maintained. School selection is shaped by parents' values for their children's future trajectory, particularly for the development of their sense of belonging in the wider community. However, building/maintaining social relationships locally, crucial to a sense of belonging, is predicated on knowing the cultural workings of the parish way of life, i.e. social interrelations between the family, school, church and GAA, which in turn is the basis upon which levels of belonging are determined.

In this section, I illustrate how the local school is an embodied history of schemes of understanding shaped through social relationships for families with intergenerational connectedness to the community. I explore the extent to which parents experience tensions when their children's needs and the parents' ideal for their future trajectory conflict with community expectations about attending the local school. Second, I examine how newcomer parents, meaning families that moved into the area for work reasons, create their community

through their selected school and how socio-cultural processes define the extent and limits of their community belonging.

Circuit of default local practices, family heritage and belonging

For many of the parents, sending their children to the local school was a self-evident course of action influenced in nuanced ways by local contexts. Their local school selection was not just a matter of its proximity but how it promised deep social relationships in daily life in the parish. For example, Isabelle reflected on the school's prominent position for families in parish life as follows:

> Because it is the nearest school to us and it is in our parish, and that would be the one that would be the most likely school that your child in that area would be going to [...] Picking a primary school was never something that you sat down and talked about to friends and family and to all of that. It isn't the done thing in a local parish, it's not. It's not. You kind of need special reasons [...] It was an automatic assumption that he would go to that school (Isabelle, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Families like Isabelle's are embedded in the 'local parish' like fish in water (Bourdieu 1990). The local school is a valued ritual tradition – 'the done thing' – and to go elsewhere would have been incomprehensible, except for 'special reasons'. The local school is an internalised and embodied 'automatic assumption' because it is the way of family life in the 'local parish'.

The possibility of selecting a school other than the local school was incomprehensible for many of the parents like Ashley, who had lived in the village 'all my life'.

> Well, it is just an automatic choice because it was right beside us in the village. Yeah, it was just that was the school […] now it's, oh my God, you don't know – anyone and its even a small village, you don't know the people – you might know two of the kids or three of the kids, but they are coming out and we don't, it's really strange that it has changed so much over the years in a village […] Well it is not as localised and you don't know everybody, you don't know […] sometimes is it a good or a bad thing [...] I haven't really thought about it (Ashley, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

The logic of proximity channels the deep structural meaning of the local school to produce it as an 'automatic choice'. The local school is the way of schooling in the village, which is located within the wider nostalgia of tradition locally. Ashley's narrative around the loss of familiarity of the 'localised' way of life evokes memories of when the school reinforced identification with the 'small village' community and vice-versa (Bagley & Hillyard 2014).

Thus, the local school of Ashley's memories engendered social capital locally and a pre-existing knowledge of one's own and everyone's position within an established community which was presently in a process of transformation with newcomers, reshaping the socio-cultural patterns and disturbing the logic of embeddedness of village life (ibid.). The power shift in the local socio-relations with not 'know(ing) everybody' brings uncertainty, because social relations, according to Bourdieu, involve a struggle over resources and rewards in relation to other forms of capital, e.g. cultural and economic (ibid.). Furthermore, not 'know(ing) everybody' challenges the myth of the static rural village. Nonetheless, her past memories are accounts of her local socio-cultural capital which bring attention to her embeddedness in the village that structures the local school 'automatic choice'.

Parents with intergenerational links in the community have emotional attachments to the local school that govern its selection. Family relations with the local school and community hold a repository of memories, histories, infrastructures and traditions that reproduce particular patterns of belonging-to-place (Corcoran 2010). For example, Alice who initially described her selection of the local school as an 'automatic assumption', subsequently revealed her family's connections.

> I couldn't see why I would pass the convenient one, I never have […] my husband went to school there. Now he wasn't mad for school or anything, but at the time […] when my daughter went to school it wasn't as good a school as it is now. You know the teachers were older but I didn't really find that too much of a problem, I just went with the flow kind of thing, she is in school and she is happy (Alice, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

As well as being 'convenient', the local school is a source of intergenerational cohesion, an extension of the family boundary, and thus its academic performance is less important than the emotional support it gives, alongside the building of the children's local social capital. In the various quotations above, the family's sense of place in the school are rooted in the past with feelings of conformity that resonate with family-community identity.

Similarly, Molly, who is not from the locality, nonetheless attached a significance to her 'husband' having gone to the 'school'.

> You know, his cousins were going to the school outside the village, so we were torn initially. But we just heard great things and my husband went to the primary school and he felt if it was good enough for him it should be good enough for his children and keep the legacy kind of ongoing (Molly, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Intergenerational links create closure from thinking about other schools because families trust the school is 'good enough for' their 'children'. However, Molly had aspirations for her children's education and did not complacently go along with the decision, stating how

> [...] really the deciding factor for me, not being from the locality, was I had heard fantastic things about the Principal [...] I had heard that she was always involved in everything she could get her hands on, she worked the teachers, made sure they got involved in as much as they possibly could [...] so I was happy then [...] (Molly, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Molly's ambitions for her children's educational trajectory were reassured by the 'principal's' drive of innovative teaching activities in the school. The dynamics of family heritage in the school are not always a taken-for-granted justification for its selection as academics are important for parents like Molly.

Community dynamics within the local school selection are more complex with small country schools. Family loyalty is particularly relevant in rural country schools, especially when they are 'struggling for numbers' to stay open (Donnelly 2009). This was the scenario in which Clara found herself.

> You know, from when she was born we thought she would go to the primary school my husband went to. It's a small country school and I suppose they're probably struggling for numbers a bit, so he went to school there so it was just assumed she would go to school there. [ ] We didn't really think to look anywhere, it's a very good school, good academic, good sports [...] So, it was going to be the one (Clara, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

The social power of familial links in the 'country school' not only anchors their community relations but also contributes to a sense of obligation to do the right thing and ensure its survival. The local school is a shared space for local families, where community survival is 'contingent on the enduring presence of the local school as a site of integration and support' (Wilkins 2011, p.8). Thus, family loyalty and support is an investment in the community, but Clara also had aspirations for her children, and its 'good academics' and 'good sports' were factored into its selection.

Emotional ties with the local school

Thus far, we have seen how the local school selection is generated by parents historical familial connections and a sense of place with the community. Thus, breaking ties with the local school when faced with challenges that necessitated doing the best for their children was

an emotional process that was not easy for parents. For example, Isabelle describes the emotional conflict she experienced when it came to her attention that the 'local community school' did not meet her son's educational needs. Even when his needs necessitated her to change school, she felt a sense of betrayal/disloyalty.

> [It] was a really hard decision. It was not made lightly. We did not tell anybody, because we didn't want grandparents influence, we didn't want neighbours influence, we didn't want any influence from anybody. It was a parental decision, on our own […] just say […] they would be in local country community school. We'd all be a little unit, you go to Mass, you see the same people because of the local church, you go to the local GAA ground, you see the same parents, same kids […] (Isabelle, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

The struggle between the power of the collective community and commitment to the local school on the one hand, and individual needs on the other, was apparent in Isabelle's sensitivity about 'not tell[ing] anybody' about their 'decision' to move. Isabelle felt a tension between the local school normative in the community and wanting the best for her son's needs. Such is the power of the parish/community way of the family life that it was emotionally difficult to break the social norm. This was the moment when Isabelle's everyday taking for granted of the local school and way of living in the parish was disrupted (Reay 2015). The local school in the parish in the realm of normativity operated as part of her durable habitus (ibid.). She managed the incoherence of breaking with the local school by claiming 'good reasons'. However, the parish way of life shaped her habitus and was the frame through which personal meaning and community belonging was achieved. Isabelle's reflection on family life shows how embodied parish life is in everyday living, while her account of the 'unit' encapsulates parish/'community' relations between 'the same people' in the local school, the Church and the GAA. Together, these communal structures are the mechanisms of the traditional rural parish way of life where belonging is developed and embedded, reinforcing the family's 'community' identity. After moving to another school, Isabelle felt 'kind of' 'socially excluded', and her resigned conviction to not having daily interactions in the local school meant that she worked at her community relations through other means: 'I am in voluntary things, the local drama and my husband is involved at the GAA club' (Isabelle, Meadlowlands). This demonstrates the embodied sense of belonging produced by parish culture. Isabelle's intensifying of her social relations in other communal spaces manifests the power of parish culture to sustain belief in its 'obviousness' (Butler 1999 in Holt 2008, p.233).

Breaking ties with the local school was individually informed but always with the aim of the child's best interest. In contrast to Isabelle, Iris was very definite about bypassing her 'local school' because of her own experience.

> [...] the school where I would have gone to school, the local school where I would have passed by, I don't know how to say this, going to sound terrible but […] it would have been the people that I went to school with, their children would have been going there and I was just afraid that the same thing would happen to him. So I wanted him with different people, I wanted him in a different area […] (Iris, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Iris's own experience was motivation enough for her not to send her son to the local school with which, unlike previous parents, she did not have social relationships. This demonstrates how individuals' encounters with others in particular places constitute feelings of inclusion/exclusion and fitting in or not (Holt 2008). Iris did not fit in socially with the families associated with the 'local school'; instead, building relationships with families she identified with was critical in her consideration of her child's school.

The importance of social relationships was central in all the parents' narratives around their school selection and was always charged with emotions. Parents' individual aspirations for their children's socialisation, educational trajectory and/or needs took precedence over the family's intergenerational relations in the local school when issues arose. Such was the case for Clara, who had earlier talked about the local country school as the one that her child was always going to attend, changed her mind at the last moment because she believed it did not meet her daughter's best interests. The disparities between her values for her child's schooling and her in-laws' intergenerational ties to the school, however, created emotional conflict.

> I did feel that my husband and his parents – they're lovely – but, I felt that they thought I should just let her go to the original school. And that it didn't really matter. Now I say they see my side, but I say if I hadn't stood up and said, 'I actually don't want her going to be the only girl in the school' (Clara, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Although the family's identity was 'bound up' with the local school (May 2011, p.371), Clara's concern for her daughter's sense of self as potentially 'the only girl in the school' and subsequent socialisation took priority. The nuances in parents' decision-making about breaking the familial links with a school are dependent on their perceptions of the school in relation to the aspirations they have for their children's socialisation. For example, Hazel selected the local primary Catholic school instead of the Protestant school that her husband's

family attended. Anchoring her child in the local community was more important to her than her concerns around familial ties or religion.

> When my husband went to the Church of Ireland school it was much bigger than it is now […] his family wanted [...] the children going to the Church of Ireland school because his nephew went there and he had done very well in it. But really I think because it still didn't fit in with, we don't have a religion, it is still a religious option, possibly less religious than the other primary schools but I just felt that he wouldn't have any friends locally. So if it would have been an Educate Together, I would have brought him out of his local area to go to it but because it was just another religious school it really wasn't good enough to bring him out of his locality (Hazel, Sunnyvale, non-religious, majority ethnic).

Hazel's non-religiosity left her with no option other than a religious school because the locally available options were either Catholic schools or the Protestant school. The power of the community for building her son's 'friendships locally' meant that the local school was paramount. As with most rural school systems, building community relationships and belonging usually involved attending the local Catholic school.

Although the local school was inherent in many of the parents' way of community-based family life, their school decision-making and selection was differently imbued with values that were evaluated in relational terms as parents considered the schools' impact on their children's educational needs and social development. The tensions that parents felt in breaking intergenerational links with the school lie in the relationship between the collective habitus of community/parish and its cleavage for individual 'actions' (Bourdieu 1977, p.95). The individual needs of their children, however, superseded familial-school ties. However, the importance of the community's sense of belonging meant that parents intensified their relationship-building in other parish activities such as the GAA and Church. Belonging is a continuous active practice of social relationship-building in the school, GAA and Church where collective identity is recognised by others. Thus, illuminating how belonging in the community/parish is a socio-cultural system where social relationships are built up between the family, primary school, Church and GAA, as it is in these communal spaces that parents'/families' sense of identities in the collective group are constituted.

I now turn to the role of newcomers to explore how they navigated their school selection to build their sense of community and explore the dynamics of the community's culture for belonging.

The dynamics of school selection and community culture for newcomers

In contrast to those intergenerational families whose sense of belonging was constituted through their embodied parish way of life, newcomers had to build up their community belonging by way of their selected school. Newcomers brought their past experiences to their new locations. How the minority ethnic and majority ethnic newcomer parents went about their school selection for community-making is the focus of this section. I illustrate the factors that shape their selection decisions, how these influence the types of community such parents want to make and the level of belonging with which they are endowed.

One minority ethnic newcomer parent, Anna, originally came to Ireland from mainland Europe for an Erasmus year. Subsequently, she returned, married her majority ethnic, minority religious partner and now works and lives in Sunnyvale. When it came to the time to consider primary schooling for her children, Anna was uncertain about which school to select but was definite about situating them in the community.

> I wanted my kids to feel like they weren't different [...] I don't want them to live in a bubble, I want them to feel fully integrated in the community. I know they're reared in Catholic traditions and I want them to be strong enough not to go along with the crowd so [...] when I first saw this like I am not given a choice, my kids have to go there […] but you know 'quite ok', it makes my kids more open-minded and resilient […] there is actually a little Protestant school [...] [which] was supposedly good [...] well in one way I would feel they would be in this little bubble, I don't want my kids to grow up in a bubble different from everyone else, no, I want them to be fully integrated in the community [...] diversity for me was very important, I want them not to feel left out and yet I want them to be aware of it (Anna, Sunnyvale, minority religious, minority ethnic).

Anna's account shows the complexity of fitting-in compared with the 'obvious choice' narratives earlier. Her school selection and desire for community belonging is centred around her family being 'different'. She was juxta-positioned between the 'Protestant school', which would have been a better fit for the family's Evangelical belief, and the Catholic school, which would enable her children to be 'integrated' in the 'community'. The nuances of fitting-in in her decision-making stemmed from her not wanting her children to be 'different' in the 'community' yet wanting them to accept their 'difference'. Selecting the local 'Catholic' school would build their 'resilience', she believed, about being 'different' within 'Catholic traditions'. The defining feature of this school, however, is its 'diversity' in helping her children fit in and not be the only ones who are 'different'. This demonstrates the power of the community's culture to define the boundaries of belonging. In this respect, the community is a cultural instrument of majority ethnic domination. Anna's desire for community 'integration' was constituted by an awareness of the family's deviance from the Catholic

culture of ‘society’, which brought with it the ensuing reality of adapting to its way of life. Moreover, the symbolic value of community culture derives from its sense of integration/belonging that parents want for their children. The local Catholic school inculcates and mediates the symbolic capital of culture locally and positions families in the community. Therefore, the necessity imposes itself to conform to the codes of the school’s culture in order to gain a position, no matter how marginal, while its ‘diversity’ assists her children to not ‘feel left out’.

Similarly, Laura moved to Sunnyvale with her husband from Asia. She wanted the local school because it was the one the children in the neighbourhood attended, and she wanted the same for her children. However, her lack of knowledge of the cultural contexts that bind family life in an Irish community went against her getting a place, as she explained.

> He was born here, and when he started the playschool, the options are really like limited actually [...] at some stage I was thinking I was so scared, I was living in Angela Park [pseudonym] so I was thinking I go to St. Angela’s (primary school pseudonym) [...] also most of my neighbours kids go to it. Then when I went there, I was enquiring for my son, they said its full and there is no space for new applicants or something like that. So I was really frustrated that time. And then [...] one of my neighbours told me that the next nearest to my place is St. Cillian’s [pseudonym], so I went there and [...] the principal was so lovely, it is a bigger school compared to Angela’s and they are very accommodating so I decide, [...] I actually was thinking I made the right choice because some of the parents I spoke to were telling me that St. Angela’s school was more sporty, like if you are in sports then you will excel more and I asked why and it’s because I think the principal [...] I don’t know if it’s the GAA or whatever but it’s part of a club [...] most of the students there focus on sport, we’re not (Laura, Sunnyvale, minority religious, minority ethnic).

Laura’s priority was to anchor the family in the community through the local school. Her ‘frustration’ at not getting a place reflected her loss of solidarity that the local school represented in the community. The ‘neighbours’’ understanding of the school’s ‘GAA’ and ‘sport’ identity, of which Laura subsequently learnt, highlights the general acceptance of such dominant cultural links and their normalised code for terms of inclusion. Selective practices, such as connections to ‘GAA sports’ for accessing school places, are not reflected on by most majority ethnic parents. However, while this school’s affinity to GAA activities is a taken-for-granted practice, it impacts access for parents like Laura who are not majority ethnic and do not identify with the sport which she thought was ‘GAA’ and suggests ethnicity could be a factor in accessing a place in this school. However, the ethnic ‘mix’ was exactly the reason why Laura selected the other school.

> The mix, that is one of the reasons why I put my kids there [...] during that time there was loads of like small kids of our nationality, that's why they all went there, that's one of the reasons (Laura, Sunnyvale, minority religious, minority ethnic).

Both Anna's and Laura's children attend the same ethnically diverse large Catholic school, which could indicate segregation in the local school system. The school's 'mix' was important for both parents because it meant that their children were not the only ones who were ethnically and religiously different. Their valuation of the school's diversity attests to their social relationships within the community, which constitutes a marginal belonging. This illuminates how the community and school intersect with ethnicity in the production of social capital. As Holt (2008, p.240) contends ,'individual identities are not forged in isolation' but instead are relationally produced within wider socio-spatial processes that operate to produce inclusion/exclusion. Moreover, the cultural relations between school and community deflect attention from the inequalities that minority ethnic families experience by self-identifying as 'different' and thus, the need to conform to the dominant culture in order to gain a position of integration/belonging (Swartz 1997).

In contrast, newcomer majority ethnic Catholic parents brought their know-how about the family way of parish life from their upbringing to their new locality and school selection, in terms of the socio-cultural relations between the primary school, GAA and Church. In other words, they knew the cultural codes for building community relationships and acting accordingly in the local context. For example, Lily moved to the Sunnyvale area for work reasons and used her past experiences of parish life as a resource in negotiating information and navigating the local school system.

> [...] when we spoke to people, people said 'Oh this is the school in the parish, this is the one to put your children into […] this is a great school'[…] they were saying it is a very strong academic school and it was strong in hurling […] that was the alma mater for hurling […] like neither of us are from the area and that rang a bell straight away – Oh that's good (Lily, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

The school's affiliation with the traditional game of 'hurling' as well its 'strong academics' gave Lily and her husband a sense of familiarity that was natural to their habitus. Indeed, Creswell (2002, p.381 cited in Holt 2008, p.234) argues that 'the habitus represents the internalisation of social order, which in turn reproduces the social order'. The couple's 'practical knowledge' of 'the parish school' and its relational associations ('hurling' and 'academic') were highly valued (Holt 2008, pp.233–234). The recognition that the 'parish

school' could meet the family's aspirations reproduced a 'sense of their place' (Swartz 1997, p.106). Unlike Laura, their familiarity with parish interrelations between the local school and GAA activities facilitated the development of their social relationship-building and belonging in their new locality. Parents' socio-cultural know-how in parish activities is processed by practical reasoning and ways of seeing that are built from historical, cultural and social experiences, and this places minority ethnic, minority religious families at a disadvantage.

Selecting a school is always part of community-making for a family, and building a sense of community is a socially relational project. Having the cultural know-how and capital to operate the community system is significant for achieving the level of belonging conferred on families. Parents who have the cultural capital have a practical sense of the socio-cultural mechanisms, e.g. GAA activities and/or Church, through which social relations are recognised and belonging is built. Parents like Emily, who moved back to her home area after living overseas, had the social relations to bridge her selected school in a neighbouring parish to her sense of community by extending its boundary. Her meaning of community echoes the *Gemeinschaft*[113] concept of social relations based on close personal and family ties through communal activities.

> I was coming back to a community I knew very well, I liked the idea that my children would go to school with kids they would be growing up with, they would go to hurling training, play music with the same kids, […] so I like that idea of that sense of identity, I see it as being almost a gift. I think if a child has a sense of where they are from and so that was a big thing [...] the biggest deciding factor [...] was down to my old school which is in our parish and this one [Gaelscoil] – both are small [...] exposed to an Irish language environment just won over, it was the one thing I would not be able to develop in them. My mother spent her life trying to support us in speaking Irish – we have great Leaving Cert honours Irish but no spoken and my kids have gael-goer cousins in both sides, it's important when they go to grandparents, cousins that they will be able to communicate with them (Emily, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Emily wanted a sense of belonging linked to 'Irish language proficiency' for her children alongside the traditional communal activities, GAA 'hurling' and 'music', with 'the same' children around them. Again, participation in the GAA provides a means towards 'community' and 'identity' that, alongside the Irish language, reinforces a national 'identity' (MacPhail et

[113] Gemeinschaft, meaning a 'community' of personal social ties and interactions guided by traditional social rules (Crossman 2021) is used here to provide a general description of the type of community with family ties and interactions in Emily's narrative (Crowe and Allan 1994). This study recognises that community is an individual social construct, always open to fluctuation and change and furthermore is not a static territorial place (ibid.). Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesselschaft, meaning 'society' are 'ideal type constructs', i.e. common mental constructs derived from observable reality although not conforming to it in detail because of deliberate simplification and exaggeration (Britannica 2018), which were elaborated by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies and later Max Weber (Waters 2016).

al. 2009). Although the selected gaelscoil is outside the 'parish' where Emily's family live, it was instrumental in reproducing the sense of community for her children in a way that she recognised from her childhood and wider familial context. The overlapping of her experiences with that of her desire for her children's Irish language development in the gaelscoil define Emily's perception of community that extends across parishes. Since belonging is an intersubjective experience, i.e. socially relational, individual and cultural identities are bound up in relationships (Bottero 2009; May 2011). Emily's social and cultural capital gave her a sense of ease in constituting an expanded community. Her familial relationships, expanded family 'gael goers' and valuation of the Irish language alongside participation in traditional activities (GAA, music) constituted the family's expansive community boundary.

The difference between newcomer majority ethnic and minority ethnic families' belonging/integration in the community is intertwined with the historical, cultural and social contexts of the parish way of life between family, primary school, Church and GAA. Catholic majority ethnic families can transfer their cultural capital to their new location to develop their belonging via school selection, whereas ethnic minorities have to operate complex nuanced negotiations around their difference in the Irish Catholic national culture of school and community life to gain marginal integration. Minority ethnic, minority religious families recognised their 'difference' that the school-community cultural relations imposed on them without their choice. School-community socio-cultural relations in turn define the ways they are integrated and their need to build resilience to their ethnic difference in 'society'. The local school selection is important for their children's integration while simultaneously the school's ethnically/religiously diverse population supports their children's connectedness to overcome their difference. The reality of the Catholic Irish culture in 'society' is that it generates and determines community belonging through normative socio-cultural interrelations (via the school, family, GAA, Church) that endow ethnic minorities with unequal recognition. Parents' self- and other-positioning, and their self-and other-identification in their negotiations of their children's primary school selection and schooling, are explored further in the next section.

School selection and community's classed and ethnic dynamics

Research suggests that working-class parents predominantly select their local schools because they lack capital resources, while middle-class families are active choosers with knowledge and mobility in their school selection (Reay & Lucey 2004). The middle-classes' choice

practices are valorised in macro-level discourses and are the benchmark from which working-class parents' local school selection is depicted as lacking in initiative and educational ambition (Reay & Lucey 2004, p.40; Ball, 1993; Reay et al., 2008). The accounts of parents' selection of their local school thus far cannot be depicted as lacking capital, initiative or ambition, however. This section enquires into the notion of classed practices to provide nuanced detail on school selection in these rural locations in Ireland. Walker & Clark (2010) suggest the categorisation of working- and middle-class identities is not useful in understanding the 'complexity and diversity of rural family life' and school selection (ibid., p.242). Thus, it is the complexity and diversity of rural family life that is interrogated in this section by examining how the parents position themselves and others in their school selection processes and their children's schooling. First, I explore the parents' negotiation of their preferred school selection to unravel classed and ethnic dynamics within the social relations between school and community that influence and/or shape their decision-making. I show how the parents mobilise individual and group identities in their accounts of their decision-making process that constitute dichotomies of 'right/not right' schools. Finally, I explore how the parents perceive their selected local school's classed and ethnic diversity and how community dynamics are intertwined in their children's socialisation. Local schools, especially in rural environments, have always catered for the local catchments.

A school with people like us

This sub-section examines the parents' narratives around local social relationships in their school decision-making to interrogate the process and understand how their desires, needs and interests are formed. The parents, especially but not exclusively the newcomers, negotiated their school decision-making process by drawing on contacts locally. These decisions were constructed around specific ideals for their children's schooling. The parents were exercised to find a school they considered 'right' for their children and usually arrived at a consensus about their preferred primary school via its reputation.

> Through talking to parents [...] I would not have known schools, which is bad, which good [...] it was basically on whatever impression I got from people who were quite decent [...] if someone is of good nature, they are lovely people and if they think that that school or this is a good choice you would be inclined to make the decision then [...] people who I was friendly with [...] they were good people from good families, were decent and I would have discussed that with them [...] we sent application form first to that school [their local] and then we started hearing things, really negative stories coming out of it and I said 'listen there is no smoke

> without fire, there must be something going on', it was not just one person there were a few [...] There was, bullying and the Principal was not making any kind of decisions on that [...] the parents were left kind of fighting for themselves [...] you don't want to send your child into that [...] at least when they are small to give them some kind of a cushion to be safe (Emma, Meadowlands, Catholic, minority ethnic).

The influence of 'hot knowledge' is based on the 'direct experience' of those Emma identified as 'decent', 'good people, from good families' (Ball & Vincent 1998, p.380). This social group reflects the local class structure and welfare aspect of school life that Emma desired for positioning her family (Bunar & Ambrose 2016). 'Bullying' and 'fighting' are culturally constructed in the educational field with symbolic representations that are classed (O'Sullivan 2005). The terms of behaviour around what is desirable/undesirable legitimised distancing her family from the local school and reflect how reputations in a local context can disadvantage certain schools (Bottero & Prandy 2003). The symbolic meaning within information sought from parents like oneself is always socially embedded (Ball & Vincent 1998). Emma had the resources to look for a school further from her home that was deemed suitable for her child.

In contrast to Emma, who was a recent newcomer when selecting her school, Clara had an established network in the locality. She explicitly targeted the school where her middle-class friend's children attended:

> I was going, 'Right'. So [...] a lot of my friends kids were going to this other school [...] so we went and we saw it [...] I wanted my kid to go to the school that their kids, on the same wavelength […] there's about five or six of us mums and the girls are all in my daughter's class and we play tennis […] we've stayed friends [ ] And to know whose house your kids are going to [...] playdates and stuff […] the socially, the middle-class like, that would've been something that we would have considered [...] So, you know, like-minded people you want to have the kids in the school (Clara, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Clara's network of 'friends' 'on the same wavelength' provided reassurance about the 'other school'. The desire to place her daughter with a similar 'like-minded' social group meant that her future socialisation was more or less secure. Indeed, Ball et al. (1996) suggest such a 'process of child-matching' is based on specific future goal orientations' (cited in Ball & Vincent 1998, p.387). Hunter et al. (2012, p.451) refer to such like-minded social networks as 'closure relationships' where the sharing of information, e.g. 'knowing whose house your kids are going to', allows parents to effectively monitor their children's socialisation and ensures the family norms are reinforced when outside the home. Parents' narratives illustrate the work put into maintaining their middle-class positioning by deploying like-minded networks to gain information in navigating the school system. Their individualised focus on a particular primary

school is centred around the implications for their child's socialisation and the reproduction of their middle-class position.

Other indicators such as country and town schools involve local classification process to signify differences and distinctions in the form of binary opposites, i.e. 'good/bad', defined around behaviour. 'Country' and 'town' are euphemisms for grouping social classes and generating meanings through the logic of inclusion/exclusion that operates locally in selecting a school. However, the binary codes take on a different meaning for different parents depending on whether the country or town school is preferred. No matter their meaning, however, e.g. 'anti-social'/respectable', 'on a pedestal'/'grounded', the binary codes that parents use to construct their preference, point to the opposition between 'like us' and 'not like us' (Swartz 1997, p.89). For example, Clara was definite about not wanting a 'town' 'school'.

> A couple of the schools in town would be DEIS schools. So we didn't really want to go down that, [...] I think in an under-privileged, and just, anti-social behaviour might creep in [...] [I] hear some of the mums in some of the DEIS schools in town, in the playground, can get a bit, what's the word I'm looking for, diverse, I suppose [...] a bit of anti-social behaviour. And, on the girls side of things, more makeup [...] I know that's under-privileged. [...] as opposed to a country school middle-class (Clara, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

A boundary is here built around the 'DEIS schools in town', placing them within an undesirable space with 'anti-social behaviour' to represent the 'under-privileged' (Skeggs 2004). Moral boundary-making through the terms 'diverse' to represent 'anti-social' and 'girls' with 'more make-up' carries connotations of respectability or its deficit (Skeggs 2005). Such terms hold historical classed meanings in educational contexts around the disadvantaged (O'Sullivan 2005). Furthermore, 'DEIS schools' described as 'diverse' is a racialised expression as much as it is classed in relation to the schools' environments (McGinley & Keane 2021). The idea that the 'middle-class' 'country school' is morally superior acts as social orientation with symbolic meaning that reproduces a stratified classed structure defined by country and town/village locations (O'Dowd 1987).

In comparison to the more socio-economically and ethnically diverse populated larger town DEIS schools that Clara did not want, the 'small country school' represents its white, Catholic farming community. Cathy describes her local country school as follows:

> The small country school gets a lot of country children, they are typically Irish and typically from farms. It is very stereotypical but that was the case, and still is I think (Cathy, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

‘Country’ schools’ populations being ‘typically Irish’ likely means they are homogenous ‘White’ spaces with no ethnic and under-privileged mix because of their locations. This is the reason for Harry and his partner’s preference for a ‘small country school’.

> We thought a town school might be too tough for him […] Social, completely different [in the country school] because you have people from around that area which would be just regular enough people, and then you'd have doctors' kids that come out from town […] who would specifically go out of their way to bring kids to it. So it had a mix of everything (Harry, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Harry referred euphemistically to avoiding a ‘tough’ ‘town school’, evoking its classed connotations (Reay 2004a; Ball et al. 1996). The social environment he desired was objectively defined against unfavourable behaviour commonly related to the working-class and/or under-privileged (Reay 2004a). The school selection process was transmitted within the ‘terms of an implicit middle-class norm’, where Harry perceived the right population as ‘just regular enough people’ like himself (Reay & Ball 1997, p.90). Thus, the country school is socially ‘completely different’ from the ‘town school’ and acceptable. The social value of the country school for middle-class families like the ‘doctors’ who ‘come out from town’ is attainable because the Education Act (1998) recognises the right of parents to send their children to a school of their choice. In this instance, the right to choose marginalises ‘the material contexts’, which constrains those who do not have the economic mobility from selecting a school outside of town while enabling families with economic capital to self-segregate to the country school (Vincent 2017, p.543).

Classed strategies in parents’ school selection were narrated through an urban context that is perceived as socially undesirable. As discussed in Chapter 1, town and country schools are geographical locations with objectified historical associations to classed and majority/minority ethnic distinctions that have accumulated over time. The town-country divide is related to the urban-rural duality, which is an historical and socio-cultural dichotomy. For historical reasons, farming families were empowered with more upward social mobility[114] after the introduction of free-secondary education, compared with working-class, mainly urban families (Gray & O’Carroll 2012). Landless labourers and urban working-class children

[114] Farming families were able to ‘convert the cultural and economic capital accumulated during the period of rural fundamentalism [1930–1940] into upward social mobility through education, even as the Irish economy shifted away from agriculture’ (Gray & O’Carroll 2012, p.705).

left school early for economic reasons (ibid.). Thus, the country school is imbued with historical 'class related conditions' that are misrecognised in the normalised discourse of parent choice (Bennett et al. 2012 in Vincent 2017, p.544).

Moral values such as good behaviour and respectability are virtues associated with educational environments and attainment and are symbolic of the country school. These ideological values that conform to the orthodox discourses around behaviour (O'Sullivan 2005) governing success or failure are the socially agreed discourses in the parents' selection processes:

> Well, I knew that I wouldn't be sending her to town because I suppose reputation as well.
>
> *Michelle: What do you mean by reputation?*
>
> Well both academically and behaviour wise as well (Rachel, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

For Rachel, the 'town' schools' 'reputation' for bad 'behaviour' held associations with lower academics. Overall, the parents drew upon processes of identification and distinction influenced by widely held cultural beliefs circulated by historical education policy responses to the disadvantaged (O'Sullivan 2005). Such social differentiations are common-sense norms, as illustrated by Lily's account of her neighbours' view of the village school after she moved her children from the local country school.

> […] some of my neighbours and friends you know when you are going into an area you don't really know, there is a council estate in the village and it gets lots of negative press and lots of my friends were 'You are sending him to the village', and even after I moved them there were lots of 'and who are their friends, what are their surnames', that literally was going on and you know what, they all found their buddies and had nice buddies, kids do […] and the other thing is we have rules in this house, my kids have to stick by them and we use to just leave it at that (Lily, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

The country 'neighbours' define their social identity in comparison to those from the 'council estate in the village'. They perceive the 'council estate in the village' as a threat to Lily's children's social lives. Attending the 'village' school means that her children are outside the like-minded milieu the country school provided. The hierarchical positioning of the country location creates a social distancing from the village' schools. Lily's response that 'we have rules in this house' and her children 'found their buddies and had nice buddies' reinforces the operation of classed and racial distinctions within the 'village' school.

Conversely, the parents' preference for their local town/village school are narrated through aversions towards the perceived higher status of the country school. Alice explains why she values her local 'DEIS school',

> I don't want them to think they are on this pedestal. I found with one of the schools out the country […] that was the opposite and they came out with a kind of an air about them and I kind of said 'no I would rather my own children to be' [in the local town school] […] the children are in is a DEIS school, but the other school […] you definitely, even their voices change, you know it's different, now that's just my opinion on it (Alice, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Alice distinguished her selected 'DEIS school' through descriptions of the social exclusivity of the school 'out the country' to firmly position her family in the former. Her disapproval of the 'children' developing accents in this 'country' 'school' was a means through which social ordering and the positioning of the family was performed. Indeed, accents are a common-sense audible and hence, visible means of differentiating between groups (Skeggs & Sayer 2020). Alice identified with the town school's groundedness to claim solidarity with it in comparison to 'them' 'on a pedestal' in the 'country' school.

Emma was also definite about not wanting the same country school because it did not align with her moral standards explaining why its 'cleaner social' environment was not a good enough reason for her children to go there.

> [...] another school, it's a little bit outside the town and it would be more considered as you say higher social background and we could go there if we wanted to, I mean it would be kind of a cleaner social wise place that the child wouldn't be say socialising with maybe kids from social backgrounds that probably I would not exactly be inclined to go, but at the same time you cannot shelter them for that long and they have to know to talk to anybody and plus to be honest with you there is another kind of side of the stick that when kids come from really kind of wealthy backgrounds they have, sometimes they have no value for money, sometimes they could be quite arrogant […] they could be better social kind of higher standards but it would be kind of value, more values for me as a good place so I have kind of seen enough. I have seen parents who teach their kids, they correct, they stay quiet. Say wealthy, they give completely wrong ideas to their kids and those ideas would be pushed through the kids onto the other kids (Emma, Meadowlands, Catholic, minority ethnic).

Emma is unsure of her position, which lies between the 'higher social background' in the country school and those she 'would not exactly be inclined to' be associated with in her town school. She has class-based anxieties around her children's school mixing, recognising that while there are risks for her children attending the town school there are also advantages in that they can develop their social skills to relate with individuals from all 'backgrounds' (Ball

et al. 2011). However, she did not identify with the country's school's 'higher' social class, who were economically 'wealthy' as she was against their materialism, 'arrogant' mannerisms and parenting style. She was more comfortable aligning the family with the ordinary middle-classness she knows and selected the town school.

The messiness of class is seen in the lived process where classed discourses are never clear-cut because they express individualised differentiations between schools. The individualised processes of positioning the family within the community were worked through social relations. Country and town/village schools assert value boundaries around hierarchical oppositions depending on parents' perceptions for how they position their families' identities and thus set the schools apart. Such identity-making of town/village and country schools (tough/safe, bad behaviour/good behaviour, grounded/airs, accent/ normal, respect/arrogant) builds on the practical sense of difference and distance produced by the social relations between parents, families and groups locally (Atkinson 2020, p.115). The binary codes of the schools are paired with grouping labels so that parents assign themselves to a specific school. Labels are tactics to assert one's worth relative to others and are always underlined by class positioning (ibid.). The logic of the relational understanding of town/village and country school is that it maintains social order, because parents' sense of one's place for 'what is done' orientate their selection towards 'people like us' (Byrne 2009, p.429). The country schools remain white Irish and broadly middle-class spaces, while the town/village schools cater for the more 'grounded' middle-classes, the working-class, the disadvantaged and ethnic minorities. Moreover, social ordering is constituted through normative local coded markers for evaluating schools that are legitimate classed practices (Hill & Lai 2016, p.1292).

Having examined the classed and ethnic dynamics of parents' school decision-making and revealed segregation between the town/village and country schools. I shall finally explore the parents' experiences of their town/village school selection and its more social and ethnically diverse population.

'Mix' is valued once it is managed

The parents who selected town/village schools did not expect them to be populated by one homogenous group. In fact, they valued the sense of community belonging with which they were imbued because they represented the surrounding locality's mixed population. Parents never spoke specifically about ethnicity in their narratives around the schools' mix but instead

referred to it indirectly in terms of 'cultures' and articulated it in terms of accepting the 'other', as exemplified by Olivia.

> [...] my kids are mixing with all cultures, they are learning acceptance and tolerance [...] we all have our place [...] they are going to see it outside of school so it's just important for them I find (Olivia, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

The benefits accrued in a culturally (ethnically and religiously) diverse school environment were narrated through the egalitarian and Christian moral values of 'acceptance' and 'tolerance' (Rougier & Honohan 2012). Similar to inter-national studies on middle-class parents who send their children to diverse schools in order to gain real-world experiences, Olivia saw that 'mixing with all cultures' reflected contemporary reality (James et al. 2010; Reay et al. 2007).

Diversity is continually viewed as a source of cultural and social capital (Reay et al. 2007) for dealing with and relating to people of 'different backgrounds' in which 'different' is invariably constructed against a normative, white, broadly middle-class backdrop.

> I like them to be exposed to people from different backgrounds and not judge people based on - where you think they are from, what you think they have. Also, it allows my children appreciate how lucky they are, not just in a material sense but in every sense, they have security, all the advantages in terms of safety, shelter and all their needs being met before they even think of them, that is important, just that realistic exposure (Emily, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).
>
> I like the fact that they are being exposed to different people and different backgrounds, it is teaching them life skills, they are getting to know and are more confident in themselves (Nicola, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

'Different' was perceived as an object by many of the parents that enhances the development of their children's imagined future. 'Exposure' to 'different backgrounds' to build 'confidence' is akin to the big-fish-little-pond effect (Marsh et al. 2008), in that parents' middle-class, majority ethnic children can develop such 'confidence' from evaluating themselves against 'different people' or through their awareness of their privileged and 'secure' position. The majority ethnic parents' attitudes to diversity in the classroom were in contrast to those of minority ethnic parents like Anna and Laura, discussed above, who desired the school's diversity in support of their children's 'difference'. The power dimensions mediated through the play of diversity in daily school life are immediate: minority ethnic, minority religious families have to draw on diversity in their struggle to fit in and not be

‘different’, while ethnic majority ethnic families are ‘consumers’ who pick and mix according to what is valued (Byrne & De Tona 2019, p.138; Kitching 2020).

Diversity was valued as long as the dominant, white, middle-class cultural ways of ‘doing’ and ‘being’ in the classroom was accommodated (Devine 2009, p.526). Therefore, there was a caveat to diversity when parents perceived it as a risk to their children’s educational development. For example, Hazel liked that her children’s school was ‘diverse’ as long as everyone conformed to the expected norms.

> I like the idea of it being diverse […] I suppose if the local had been very socially disadvantaged I would have not chosen it […] if the overwhelming majority are struggling […] then I imagine […] the other children are just going to be left behind (Hazel, Sunnyvale, non-religious, majority ethnic).

Hazel valued academics but with no formal indicators for comparisons between primary schools in Ireland, she expressed that ‘the town is kind of a mixed catchment and there is no good and bad school, they’re all just the local schools’ (Hazel, Sunnyvale). At the same time, all schools more or less academically the same because they are populated by a local mixed catchment evidently have a boundary beyond which the ‘mix’ is not desirable. As Reay et al. (2007) argue, having and sharing what is deemed the normalised ‘right moral and educational values’ is the condition of value of a thing (ibid., p.1049). The ‘very socially disadvantaged’ were tolerated as long as there were not too many of them to disrupt the classroom and moreover, parents’ aspirations for their children’s education (Reay et al. 2007). In this way, the ‘doing’ of diversity in the school has parameters and caveats that attest to positions of cultural privilege, the preserve of the majority ethnic, broadly middle-classes.

A further caveat in the ‘doing of diversity’ concerns the preservation of the diverse mix within the school and its separation from home play-time. Children’s after-school activities were socially managed. Nicola kept school and home life separated and was delighted that the town school she selected was some distance from the village where they lived. Insofar as this ‘distance’ had the dual purpose of separating her children’s home-life from school and from her local ‘village’ ‘undesirables’.

> [...] there are some kids that are in our village that are very undesirable and I don’t want that mixing outside the school – I want the children to have separate lives. It’s discipline and just what groups my kids as they get older will grow up with […] there is a distance clearly with the schooling environment they are going to. […] On my doorstep [...] they’d be bringing them down to the door […] keeping a bit of distance between the play life and the school life, being able to draw lines and not let them overflow into the two. [...] They play in the school, there is

> one buddy in school all right that we do an occasional play date with, other than that we are very focused on their cousins [...] if it's a bright evening I let them out on the road supervised to play with the kids like our neighbours (Nicola, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Nicola could afford to make the daily commute between school and home, which is well documented as the preserve of the middle-class educational consumer (e.g. Vincent 2017). The problematised 'undesirable' children and 'underprivileged area' in her village was a boundary distinct from the home. The symbolism of 'discipline' legitimised the physical social 'distance' from this group that her children attending a school in another town gave for protecting their future socialisation (Edwards et al. 2003, p.6). Her children's interaction with their classmates was kept within the school, while their home-play was with trusted family members who shared similar values. The management of 'play' is a routinely operated approach to reproduce exclusion, while diversity in the school with the right ratio is valued. Similarly, Alice's son's friendship with his ethnic minority classmates never went beyond the school's gate, as she explained.

> [...] some of his best friends are from the Travelling Community and he loves them, he is quite happy [...] when he comes home he doesn't go anywhere, no more than any of the other children, they don't do playdates, which I love, they don't do all this, they don't do birthday parties [...] we don't have any of that […] he plays football, he plays hurling […] he doesn't go to soccer […] there is not as many of the travelling community or the foreign nationals playing the sports.
>
> *Michelle: Is that because they are in the GAA clubs?*
>
> Well yeah and I don't mean to be mean but sometimes when there is money to be handed over they don't, you know if there is membership to be paid, whereas they play in their school (Alice, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Alice's son's participation in GAA 'football' and 'hurling' activities outside school meant that he did not interact with 'many' ethnic minorities. Active engagement in GAA activities is not a shared space with 'Travelling Community' and 'foreign-national' children. The racialisation of certain minority ethnic groups, particularly the Traveller Community according to negative dispositions, e.g. recipients of welfare, is well documented (Devine et al. 2008; Bryan 2009; McGinley & Keane 2021). This demonstrates the deeply ingrained, prevalent stereotyping and dominant discourses within Irish society of Travellers and 'foreign-nationals' who are perceived as having a preference to live on state welfare (McGinley & Keane 2021, p.15; Bryan 2009). The lack of multi-ethnic interactions in community activities such as the GAA shows how ethnic minorities' capacity to build community belonging is marginal. By contrast,

majority ethnic white settled parents can draw on their cultural resources to consolidate their power and privilege in building their children's social capital locally.

In sum, the doing of diversity is clearly racialised in relation to certain ethnic minority children and is primarily contained within the school because it is a safe and managed environment. The majority ethnic white settled parents' ability to move their children in and out of 'mixing' with children of 'different backgrounds' shows the power of the dominant Irish white Catholic settled ethnic culture of schools and community in family life. The routine work that goes into maintaining a boundary between home and school life suggests the school selected for its community belonging is a well-managed and coordinated system of social relations and understandings that perpetuate social class and ethnic segregation and the reproduction of historical Irish nationalist culture in the parish/community.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has outlined how community works in and through socio-cultural relations in the family way of life to shape the parents' school selection and their children's socialisation. It has shown how many of the parents' cultural habitus of the community way of living locally with social interrelations to Church and GAA activities mediate their school selection and the level of belonging endowed to families. Since community belonging is relational and constitutes identities, parents who are the product of an Irish parish way of life and know its socio-cultural workings are like 'fish in water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1990, p.127). I have demonstrated how parents with intergenerational community connections embody a default local school selection, however its selection does not take place in a 'value-neutral environment' (Grenfell 2008, p.153). The local school default selection is a product of a collective act, apprehended by parents, according to their own lived experiences and is 'an expression of a certain way of being' (ibid., p.158). The interest of the local school is constituted from group relations, which is 'the logic of practice' that already exists, formed by traditional practices and mediated by cultural capital with all the appearance of being natural (ibid., pp.153–7). The parish school, Church and GAA activities are the fabric of community culture in which the sense of belonging holds sentimental attachments and social relations are developed/sustained. The local schools are embedded in the culture and are therefore the locus of development of children's identity with community belonging. Although the local school is 'incorporated into the family's self-identity', however, children's needs are the priority for

parents when faced with issues for their social and/or educational interests (Holt 2008, p.238). Nonetheless, breaking links goes against the 'conferred embodied social capital' of the community and creates emotion (ibid.) Breaking local familial school ties means that community belonging is intensified through relationships in other communal spaces such as the GAA and the Church. This reveals the power of the parochial system's culture and social relations for belonging and family life locally.

I have also shown how newcomer majority ethnic, Catholic parents can transfer their socio-cultural competence and familiarity with the culture of the family way of living in a parish, with links to the GAA and Church, to build their belonging around their selected school. Their uncertainty in knowing the local schools' social contexts means that they use like-minded networks to gain local knowledge about schools' reputation: a strategy that helps to position their middle-class identity in the community through the school. However, building community belonging is more complex for those who are ethnic minority and are religious minority, as they do not have the local socio-cultural capital and dispositional know-how relating to family life's interrelations between the primary school, the GAA and the Church. The dominant Irish national culture of the parish/community and local school defines their minority ethnicity as 'different'. Billig (1995) argues that such 'routine and familiar' forms of 'banal nationalism' are overlooked because they 'operate mindlessly, rather than mindfully' (ibid., p. 60 cited in Bottero 2010, p.7). The nuanced ways ethnic minorities have to work their 'difference' to integrate through the school into the community such as build resilience in social culture, are accepted because their difference is refracted by the normative schools' and community culture. Furthermore, their valuation of a diverse school in the community is a means for them to partially integrate and not be the only ones 'different' in the school. The local school and relationship-building for community belonging is 'an imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power' (Bourdieu & Passerson 1977a, p.18 cited in Grenfell 2008, p.184).

The chapter has also shown how historical constructs of differentiation between town/village and country schools are practical signifiers of implicit classed and majority/minority ethnic distinctions, implicitly encoded through classed identities in the selection of either. Selecting a country school for the purpose of social distancing from the town's/village's disadvantaged and underprivileged families, who may be considered morally undesirable, reveals the distinctive rituals employed by parents to maintain their middle-class white identity. Moreover, attending the mixed catchment area town/village school does not

constitute social mixing, as the separation of home and school life is a well-managed process by parents to assure their children's socialisation in their broadly middle-class milieu. Organised playtime and engagement in GAA activities where ethnic minorities are unrepresented manifest the inner workings of classed and ethnic dynamics between community, family and school. This reveals how the schools' catchment population is managed to maintain their children's broadly middle-class, white Irish ethnic milieu. It also reveals the circulatory power of parish/community and school culture for determining the limits of belonging, where GAA activities are normative for majority ethnic children and hold associations with schools, while minority ethnic families and groups are unrepresented in this communal space for building social relationships and belonging. Further, parents' classed/ethnic consciousness of schools' social and diversity dynamics is routinely monitored and social distancing is implicitly operated through 'knowing everyone' in the locality. While diversity is a 'middle-class interest of difference as a project of cultural capital acquisition' (Reay et al. 2011, pp.90–101) in schools, parents have a definite tipping point beyond which the numbers of 'different background' families are not tolerated. The parents' aspirations for their children's future educational trajectories are paramount. The imagined 'right' classed/ethnic ratio composition is heavily racialised and protects, perpetuates and reproduces the parents' classed and majority ethnic dominant position in the school, corroborating findings in national and international studies (e.g. Kitching 2020; Devine et al. 2008; Bryan 2009; Lynch & Moran 2006; Reay et al 2007; Byrne & De Tona 2019). Thus, this chapter has revealed how the community is a well-organised space of classed and ethnic social relations that reproduces its Irish nationalist and broadly middle-class dominant culture. The sense of community belonging in parents' school selection is salient. Community-school circulatory relationships hold contextual modes of cultural practices that are imbued with classed and ethnic relations that are arbitrarily legitimated in the name of community belonging.

The findings of this chapter contribute to research on parent choice in rural locations to show the influence of the historical parochial culture, i.e. interrelations between the family, local school, GAA activities and Church, and the historical rural/urban classed perception (discussed in Chapter 1) in parents' school selection and their children's socialisation (e.g. Kitching 2020; Bagley & Hillyard 2015). It further shows the 'complexity and diversity of rural family life' (Walker & Clark 2010, p.242), and the power of nationalist culture and socio-cultural relations in positioning families/individuals in the community. The historical parish structure of primary school, GAA activities and Church is mediated through the normative

family way of life locally. Local schooling is a well-managed space through routinised 'separation' practices to assure children's classed and ethnic socialisation, yet the concept of the local school conveys community solidarity (Bourdieu 1998, p.102). This chapter reveals how the local school selection is not a benign practice to permit children from all backgrounds in the community to socialise together, as it might convey. The following chapter outlines the city location's competitive school system and details the parents' negotiations of their school selection.

Chapter 6

The classed dynamics of the city location's primary school system

In the previous chapter, I addressed the parents' primary school selection in the rural locations and demonstrated the ways in which community belonging shaped not only how their decisions were processed but also how their children's schooling and socialisation were managed. I argued that the parents' interest in community in their school selection is an inherent way of family life, where school, church, GAA and social relations work in tandem. Majority ethnic parents have the socio-cultural capital of the parish way of life in the routine operation of their children's classed socialisation, while ethnic minorities are aware of their cultural 'difference' and strive to gain marginal integration.

This chapter turns attention to the city location, Canalside (pseudonym), and its local school system. Canalside is a prosperous residential city area whose population is largely upper-middle-class and more ethnically and religiously diverse than national population averages.[115] Reflecting the location's large and diverse population, Canalside's primary school system is made up of 14 primary schools, comprising six patron types: seven Catholic patron primary schools, of which four are English-medium and three Gaelscoileanna; five Protestant schools comprising three different Protestant denominations; one multi-denominational school; and one non-Christian religion school. Of the 14 primary schools, two are fee-paying schools (one Protestant denomination school and a Catholic English-medium school[116]).[117] Thus, Canalside parents have a variety of school types to select from in comparison to parents in the rural study locations. At the time that the parents in this study were selecting their primary school, the Education Act (1998) stipulated that each school patron's admission policies give priority to their religious affiliation. Thereby, schools could preserve their religious character by giving priority to children whose family's belief was affiliated to the patron. However, schools' admission policy was amended[118] as of 2018, as discussed in

[115] See Chapter 4 for the full demographic statistics.

[116] This is a private, English-medium Catholic primary school that starts at second class.

[117] See Chapter 4, table 4.1 for details of school patrons.

[118] Under the new admission legislation (2018), Catholic primary schools cannot discriminate in favour of children on the basis of religion and all applicants must be treated equally regardless of their religion. There is an exception for minority religion schools, which may continue an admission policy in favour of children of their own faith if they are oversubscribed. This is to protect the ethos of these schools (Education Act 1998, amended 2018).

Chapter 1. This chapter explores parents' decision-making decisions of primary school in the city school system which has various patron types.

Canalside parents talked about the competitive nature of its primary school system and lack of school places from the outset. The purpose of this chapter is to capture the local dynamics of parents' experiences of choosing a school in a context where there is oversubscription and competition. It outlines the classed and racialised effects of schools' admission policies in parents' enrolment application processes. I illustrate the workings of admission criteria through parents' strategies undertaken to gain access to a place. As in the previous chapter, the local school is the preference for many of the parents, but in comparison to the local school in the rural school systems, access is not a taken-for-granted process in the city school system. The first section captures the nature of Canalside's competitive primary school system. It explores parents' school preferences to understand why schools are oversubscribed and access to a place is superseded by the requirements of complex, protracted and unpredictable admission processes. The second section examines the different strategies parents adopt to access their desired schools to reveal implicit classed and ethnic outcomes that are constructed by, and in turn reproduce, a hierarchical school system.

The competitive nature of the school system

This section sets up the context of Canalside's school system through the parents' decision-making experiences of primary school. It explores the ways in which the parents considered the local school system and their preferred school and examines their universal claim that it is hard to get a school place because of the competitive nature of Canalside's school system. The Canalside parents' school decision-making was narrated against the family's religion/non-religion status to evaluate their chances of accessing school places. I argue that the parents' perceptions of Canalside's competitive school system are related only to a spectrum of select, sought-after primary schools whose patrons are hierarchically structured in the local school system. I further show that the parents' values for their preferred school are shaped by social relations, experiences and a normative sense of place for their children within their middle-class neighbourhoods. However, accessing a school place is uncertain and tied up with covert admission criteria, which impacts the possibilities of gaining access to specific schools.

Unlike most of the parents from the rural sites who differentiated the schools by their location (town/village or country school), the Canalside parents were consciously aware of

each of the schools' patrons because of the different types in their local system. The prerequisite certificates (e.g. 'baptismal', 'birth' and sometimes 'marriage') for the different patrons were centred around the rules of the patronage system that necessitate 'declaring your denomination' (Violet, Canalside, majority ethnic Catholic). Religion is the visible master signifier to differentiate admission criteria between the primary schools and was the initial focus of parents' narratives about their school selection process. For example, Daisy, who is majority ethnic but not originally from the city and whose husband 'grew up' in Canalside, gave the following account of her local area's school system and how her family's Catholic belief mismatched the schools' patronage.

> The principal said, 'I don't think they're going to get in', because it's a Protestant denomination school. Our closest school is a Protestant denomination school. She didn't feel that they would get in, but I said, 'Well, I'll keep in touch over the years if that's okay'. In the meantime, [her daughter] had been accepted for the [Catholic English-medium school] up in Parkgate [pseudonym of school outside Canalside]. There's no Catholic school in this area of Canalside, you see, so it's very interesting [...] There's a Protestant denomination school, then there's another, which is Church of Ireland. There's the [non-Christian religion] school; then there's [name of school] which is a fee-paying Protestant primary school (Daisy, Canalside, Catholic, majority ethnic).

There are four schools in Daisy's locality under three different patron-types, which are predominantly Protestant and one of which is fee-paying. Furthermore, no Catholic school reflects its historical, upper-class Protestant residential location. This is not usual for primary school systems across the country, as 90% of the system is made up of Catholic schools (see Chapter 1). Daisy's reference to Canalside's school system as 'very interesting' points to the out-of-the-ordinary experience it generates for Catholic families, who find themselves having to think about religion and compete to gain access. Therefore, the religious orientation of the various school types was the initial benchmark against which the parents evaluated the possibility of getting a place. The misalignment between her family's religious belief and that of the patron motivated her assertiveness to let the 'principal' know that she 'will keep in touch over the years'. The ease of getting a school place in a 'Catholic school' in the nearby parish reflected the admission rules around religion. It also reflects the 'Catholic' school's less sought-after status in comparison to the uncertainty of access to her local Protestant school. Similarly, Julie, who self-identified as 'not from Ireland' and is Catholic, described the schools in her locality and her chances of accessing a school place in terms of religion.

> [...] so we had three schools within a 10-minute walk [...] we are Catholic, and they were all Church of Ireland and one non-Christian religion school. So they didn't; we were low down on the priority list because of the religion […] there is the private school, there is two in the locality, and there is a quite sought-after Protestant denomination school; there is a waiting list, although it is quite expensive. We just weren't willing to pay for primary school education, and I know […] the standard isn't any different, the teachers in the public schools are fantastic [...] One of the factors then, I was trying to get a multi-denominational school, but she didn't get a place there [...] it's really hard (Julie, Canalside, Catholic, minority ethnic).

There is an intertwining between religion and class within the local school system in this residential area. Julie describes a distinctly upper-middle-class school system in her neighbourhood consisting of two private schools, one of which is 'quite expensive' yet had a 'waiting list'. Whether Julie had the financial resources or not, she was not one of the aspirational middle-class parents who desired a private education for their children (Byrne & De Tona 2019). Instead, she was a socially aware supporter of state schools and believed in their teaching quality. Although her family's Catholic belief was different from all the non-fee-paying schools' patrons, this did not deter her from applying, indeed, like Daisy, she was motivated to compete harder. As such, the patronage system's taken-for-granted rules around religion produced uncertainty for the Catholic parents in accessing a school place in one of their local schools which were Protestant or the only multi-denominational school in Canalside.

The non-religious parents had an expectation that the multi-denominational school was the obvious one because of the families' lack of religious belief. However, entry to the multi-denomination school is dependent on getting one's child's name high up on the waiting list. Grace (non-religious, majority ethnic) had to eliminate the multi-denominational school from the start of her decision-making because of its obscure 'early' admission priority. She described how she was left in a precarious position because of her lack of religious belief.

> [...] we are not a religious family so I would have preferred to have my child in [...] the multi-denominational in Canalside and there was just no way we were going to get in [...] they told me at that stage that the chances of her getting in were minute, because at ten weeks old, they have an intake of thirty children and […] they said […] it is really unlikely that this child is going to get an offer because she is number one hundred and eleven or something [...] all of the [other] schools are religious schools and give preference based on religion, and it is entirely feasible that you don't get a school place because you are excluded from every single school. Because if they have lists of priority and my children are numbered, like they go through – all Catholic children in the parish, Catholic children from a different parish, other Christian children – my kids are down at number eight. And if you are a non-religious family, you don't get a place in any school because every school has you way down in the priority list (Grace, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic).

Grace felt disempowered and disillusioned that she did not get to place her 'ten-week-old' child's name on the waiting list of her 'preferred' 'multi-denominational' school because of its early admission 'priority'. She found herself in a state of tension between her 'non-religious' belief and the remaining schools' religious patron admissions policies. Thus, Grace felt constrained and placed in a marginalised position in the primary school patronage system that gave precedence to 'religions'. Oliver, from the city and also non-religious, perceived that families 'with no religion in this country are below every other religion' (Oliver, Canalside). Both Oliver and Grace felt disadvantaged in the consumer market of choice that transacted religion at the school system's admission juncture. They felt that 'non-religion' was not recognised in the patronage admission policies and therefore held no value in the primary school system.

None of the parents had an English-speaking Catholic school as their preferred school. All but one of the three English-speaking Catholic schools were on the periphery of Canalside's mainly upper-/middle-class location. That one Catholic school was only considered by two parents as an option if they did not get their preferred first choice Gaelscoil (Amy, Canalside, majority ethnic, Catholic) or local Protestant school (Jenny, Canalside, majority ethnic, Catholic) illustrates a lack of demand by parents for Catholic patron schools. Violet's (majority ethnic, lapsed-Catholic) first choice was 'one of the Gaelscoils in Canalside', but, as she stated, 'schools in Canalside are so hard-fought that it's kind of first-come first-serve' (Violet, Canalside).

The parents' first preference schools are restricted to a spectrum of sought-after, high-demand schools: local Protestant schools; the multi-denominational school; and the Gaelscoils. Canalside's middle-class families competed for access to these schools. Why parents preferred one school over another is discussed next to understand how schools are valued and what constitutes their sought-after status.

Preferred local school: location, cultural environment and school mix

My literature review in Chapter 2 pointed to the importance of understanding the social contexts of parents' valuation of the local school on the basis that judgements of schools are benchmarked in accordance to unacknowledged normalities (Reay et al. 2007; Byrne & De Tona 2019; Kitching 2020). Understanding parents' values regarding their preferred local school is vital to unpack the high demand and competition for accessing school places. In this

section, I examine the parents values/interests in regard to their preferred school to understand what drives them to partake in intra-middle-class competition to access one of the sought-after schools in Canalside. I show that the parents values in regard to their preferred schools are constituted from the interrelations between their schooling experiences and senses of self in their local neighbourhoods and the school system, in which they have visions for their children's schooling trajectory conceptualised around local family life, security and cultural factors such as the Irish language.

In considering which primary school to select, Julie liked the concept of her local Protestant school for its proximity to home and 'small' size.

> [...] so in my head, I wanted something small and that suited [child's] personality because she is quite introverted [...] They [two Catholic English-medium schools] weren't my top choice because they were very big schools (Julie, Canalside, Catholic, minority ethnic).

Matching her child's 'introvert' nature to the 'small' school denoted a safe and secure environment (Ball et al. 1996). As pointed to earlier, Julie's local schools are in an upper-middle-class neighbourhood, and it could be inferred that this represents a protective environment for developing her child's sense of self with 'people like us'. Being offered a place in two large, Catholic, English-medium schools in comparison to not gaining access to the 'small' local Protestant school illustrated the contrast in size that manifests in the latter's scarcity for places and constitutes its high demand locally. Daisy also desired her local Protestant school because it was 'small' and convenient.

> [...] number one, convenience, it's nice [local Protestant school]. The children go to the school in the village that they're in […] I heard it was a good school. It's a small school [...] so it kind of reminds me of the school I went to down the country. […] Up here you meet the same people […] I knew them from the park and the playground, it's very small (Daisy, Canalside, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Daisy's preference was formed through her own experience and desire to replicate her ideal local community with 'the same people'. The school's 'good' reputation affirmed her decision. Bottero & Prandy (2003 cited in Bottero 2005, p.171) point to the importance of recognising the way in which pre-existing social barriers that include and exclude are 'routinely and unintentionally reproduced through the search for social familiarity and comfort'. As such, the local school holds a familiarity in its social setting and gives a settled feeling and sense of belonging. Similar to parents in the rural sites, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, where

a sense of community constitutes the local school's preferential value, community belonging is bound by social relations where inherent known practices are operated for socialising the children. In Daisy's and Julie's accounts, the valued 'local' school was not a neutral space, but instead its 'small' size and geographical location secured their children's middle-class socialisation.

The parents' school preferences were expressed through their children's imagined futures, which evoked a particular desired cultural environment. Violet's preference for a Gaelscoil included her desire to develop her children's language proficiency, stating that:

> [...] it [Gaelscoil] also had a very good reputation […] I wanted something smaller and maybe more boutique. There was nothing about the supposedly elitism of the Gaelscoil. I like the Gaelscoil because I feel […] it opens your mind and it makes your ability to learn other languages easier if you learn one language. I also like the sense of identity offered by, like you go in and there's céili music, and there's a sense of identity in being Irish. I think in a global world it's nice to understand where you came from. [...] But I never had the basics in Irish [...] I always really struggled [...] [secondary school classmate] was fluent in Irish […] spoke with such ease [...] And I said, 'Well that's a gift to arrive in with the language' (Violet, Canalside, lapsed-Catholic, majority ethnic).

Violet defended her desire for this particular Gaelscoil by reference to its 'good reputation' as opposed to widely held views about its 'elitism' in comparison to the two other Gaeilscoileanna (Irish-medium schools) in Canalside. However, its 'smaller' size and 'more boutique' description are associations often ascribed to private schools (Bosetti 2004; Denessen et al. 2005). The social and cultural contexts of her desire to develop her children's distinct 'Irish' sense of 'identity' and language 'fluency' in a 'global world' point to the 'hierarchical positionality' that going to a gaelscoil denotes (Bottero 2004, p.994). Inglis (2008, pp.92–93) suggests that 'the increased value of embodying an Irish habitus […] and accumulating Irish cultural capital in the form of music, literature, art, and so forth […] could be a significant symbol of power in the international business world'. This brings attention to Devine & Savage's (2000, p. 194) claim about 'how cultural processes are embedded within specific kinds of socioeconomic practices'. Indeed, a Gaelscoil schooling is considered to give an 'advantage' through networking because this is where the 'social elites in Ireland have been able to exploit the resources of education to reproduce their advantage' (Watson & Nic Ghiolla Padraig 2011, pp.443–451). Such ideals may manifest in the high demand for Gaelscoils.

The school 'mix'

To understand the preference for the local school, I explore those schools that parents acknowledged avoiding. The unacknowledged normalities of the local school such as 'small', 'convenient' and 'good' are better comprehended against discourses of the schools in the local system that are shunned. The local school was not valued if it was a 'DEIS school'. For example, Oliver and his wife, both of whom are originally from another part of the city, thought their next-door proximity to a Gaelscoil meant it afforded them natural access, but unfortunately this was not the case. Oliver stated that 'it was very important' to them ' that we could walk down to' the school. However, when they received an offer of a place at the Catholic, English-speaking school on the same grounds as the preferred Gaelscoil, they did not accept it.

> I live right beside two schools, I live beside a gaelscoil that is one half of the site and one half, a national school [...] But when I went to that gaelscoil because [...] I think I would like the boys to learn Irish [...] and so it was – 'no sorry there is a waiting list'. [...] and we went next door to the national school and we got a place there so that was fine. So, the problem is […] it is a DEIS school, so you are thinking about – well what are the resources, what are the kind of, well what is going to be available here like (Oliver, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic).

The value of a school's convenient proximity could not overcome the uncertainty of the 'DEIS school' which was 'next door'' to the preferred 'Gaelscoil'. Parents' valuation of the local school, whether this is related to its size or the opportunity it offers 'to learn Irish', tends to denote specific social environments. Furthermore, contrary to Oliver's statement previously, his non-religious belief did not prevent him from getting a place in the Catholic 'national school' next door, and neither was it mentioned as a reason for his unsuccessful attempt to access the Gaelscoil, whose patron was also Catholic. His reason for not wanting this Catholic, English-medium school concerned 'the resources', which he related to his own schooling experience where the 'the level of the class was down a lot lower' (Oliver, Canalside). On this basis, he was not prepared to take a risk on the educational standard of the DEIS school for his child.

The school 'mix' was also intertwined within the factor that parents considered for not selecting this DEIS school. Amy, who was not from the city and relied on recommendations from her neighbours about the local schools, was definite about not wanting this school because of its 'more mixed' population. Ball & Vincent (1998, p.238) point to the influence of 'grapevine' knowledge in this connection, viz, informal social networks by which parents

‘make sense of’ and ‘take up positions towards’ schools and their surroundings. When I asked Amy what she meant by the ‘mix’, she explained how:

> [...] through conversations with the neighbours [...] they didn't really recommend the school. It wasn't a great school. There was a lot of feedback that it was a bit more mixed and it wasn't as good. That school itself was attached to an Irish school [...] and people said the Gaelscoil is the one to go to. If you can get into that one, that's the one to go to. [...] Mixed in terms of, that some of the kids that would have been going to the school would have been probably from less advantaged areas. The discipline in the school wasn't as good (Amy, Canalside, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Amy framed ‘mix’ around social class distinctions about ‘the kids’ ‘from less advantaged areas’ who are linked to problematic behaviours. This school is located on the periphery of Canalside, but so too is the Gaelscoil next door. However, the latter’s admission criteria include proficiency in the language, especially since it is oversubscribed, which would deter many families from applying as Irish language proficiency is found to be the haven of the middle-classes (Ó Riagáin, 1997; Watson & NicGhiolla Phadraig 2011). The problematisation of the ‘less advantaged’ in the English-medium Catholic school, as demonstrated in Chapter 5, concerns fear of the wrong environment for their child’s schooling that is constructed against a ‘desirable mix’ to characterise white middle-classness in the right schools (Byrne 2009, p.431). However, this was never explicitly named in the parents’ narratives; instead, ‘a bit more mixed’ or questioning ‘resources’ in the school were euphemisms associated with it not being the right fit for their children’s socialisation and/or schooling.

In comparison, when I questioned Violet about the diversity of her preferred Gaelscoil, the ‘mix’ was definitely homogenous.

> There's no one outwardly appearing from a different ethnic background, where you would kind of make an assumption [...] No, and it's [diversity] not particularly easy to achieve anyway in this area of Canalside […] it wouldn't be the same as say, out in Charlestown or Whitefield [pseudonyms for areas in the city], where it would be very diverse. You know, I suppose if that's one end of the Bell Curve, well, certainly [...] it's kind of a homogenous system […] But it's definitely upper-middle-class, like there is a lot of Range Rovers and like travel cruisers and stuff (Violet, Canalside, lapsed-Catholic, majority ethnic).

The school’s location was cited to give a sense of what to expect in relation to its population being ‘upper-middle-class’. Bunar & Ambrose (2016, p.39) point to ‘the power relations between residents [...] and members of surrounding society [as] reflected in the way the symbolic representation of the area [is] [...] constructed’. The lack of cultural (classed, religious and ethnic) diversity is talked about in relation to ‘visibility’ where there is ‘no

outwardly appearing [families] from a different ethnic background' in the school. However, according to the CSO (2016), Canalside has a higher ethnic and religious diversity in comparison to the wider city population and national average, as explained in Chapter 4. This points to classed and majority/minority ethnic distinctions in Gaelscoils' admission selection processes and school populations because of their patron's requirement of Irish language proficiency and Catholic affiliation for entry. Similarly, Daisy described her local Protestant school as 'very one-dimensional' in that it was 'very middle-class'; however, it did have a 'good mix of culture' (Daisy, Canalside). Schools 'have intimate relationships to the areas in which they are cited' (Byrne & De Tona 2019, p.39). Parents' values for their schools represent the unacknowledged normalities of social relations with their middle-class/upper-middle-class neighbourhoods.

The parents' preferred schools were shaped by the areas in which they were located. Distinctions between the 'good' school and one to be avoided were already formed when the parents came to making their school decisions. Such distinctions are relationally constructed and normative within localities, i.e. affinity and aversion structure, and are structured by the social relations of school spaces (Ball et al. 2004). The parents were definite about not wanting a school for its 'mix' and 'DEIS' status. The schools that parents did not want were critical for understanding the unacknowledged normalities of their preferred schools. The criteria that parents valued included small size, proximity and convenience to the family home; cultural factors, including language and music; and the multi-denominational school's ethos that non-religious parents' aligned with their identity. The local school is a relative criterion, which is important as the neighbourhood around the school shares the same familial values, e.g. meeting in the 'park' and 'playground', a 'good school', knowing the 'same people' (Daisy, Canalside), all of which reflects the 'area of Canalside' (Violet, Canalside). The local school engages a coming-together of normalities in the context of unacknowledged socialisation with 'people like us' (Ball & Vincent 1998). As such, the preferred schools represent their local neighbourhood middle-class populations. However, the parents could not 'choose' these schools as they were in high demand and getting a place was not a certainty. This insecurity of getting a school place shaped an intra-middle-class competitive school selection process, in which the parents had to engage with a complex and often implicit school admission process that required access to local knowledge. The parents' strategisation of their admission application process is discussed next.

Parents' strategies for accessing the 'right' schools

Thus far, I have demonstrated that the competitive school system is in fact a competition between certain sought-after schools. In the examples presented, I have shown how the parents' values for their preferred schools are underpinned by social relations to their neighbourhoods. Turning to the parents' navigation of their admission application processes, I explore the strategies they operated to access their preferred school. Key strategies include long-term planning in order to be ready with the application once the child is born and access to networks with social relations to the highly sought-after schools. I argue that the covert admission criteria of the sought-after schools are the internal mechanisms that sustain these schools' elite status in Canalside's primary school system. This section demonstrates how the parents' application processes are determined by the dynamics between their local social relations and positions in Canalside's primary school system's selective 'choosing'.

First, I discuss the parents' schools' application processes, their strategic plans and how they differ between locals and newcomers in the competitive local school market. This is followed by a discussion of their experiences of their application processes that reveal the implicit local classed dynamics of the process.

Newcomers and locals: implicit local knowledge

The parents self-identified whether they were from Canalside, the countryside or were minority ethnic when they talked about the period when they started to think about schools for their children. They laid significance on this in relation to knowing when and how to apply to the local schools. There is a differentiation between the strategies of locals who plan ahead of their application process and newcomers who have to adapt. The covert admission criteria and the approaches parents undertake to succeed in gaining access to a school place are intertwined in specific social networks.

Like many of the parents who move to Canalside, Daisy found the admission to schools is 'so different' from what she knew 'down the country'. However, her husband's family were from the locality, so she knew from relatives that she should put her daughter's name down for all the schools in Canalside and a few outside as 'you're not guaranteed anything'.

> So I did. I put them down in all the primary schools in Canalside area, and a few in area outside but beside Canalside. [...] Then the night before she was due to start in junior infants [in the Catholic school outside of Canalside], I got a call from local National School [Protestant] next

> door saying, 'Do you still want a place?' So literally last minute. I had to think about it then, because you're all geared up to go one place (Daisy, Canalside, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Daisy's acceptance of a place in her preferred local Protestant school, even though it was the night before schools opened and the preparations for the 'big school' (Catholic) were complete, indicates the local school priority and its interconnections with the neighbourhood.

Like Daisy, Julie, who self-identified as 'not from Ireland', only found out from 'people' locally that she needed to 'apply for everywhere' and 'hope' that she would 'get a place', However, she did not get a place in her preferred local Protestant school, as she explained:

> I heard a lot of people who aren't Church of Ireland are there [her local school], but then I think we were late putting our name down (Julie, Canalside, Catholic, minority ethnic).

Although the mismatch between her family's Catholic religion and her preferred local Protestant school's religion was spoken about at first (see previous section), another major criterion for accessing this school was an 'early' application. Why Daisy secured a place at her preferred Protestant school and Julie did not could be, as Lareau (2003, p.196) suggests, because 'the activation of capital' is not always 'effective for some parents in some situations'. Nonetheless, the ambiguities in accessing a school place indicate nuances in the intra-middle-class struggle to access these schools. Finding out about the 'early' application process when it was too late was a recurrent theme for parents who were not from or did not have family connections to Canalside. Jenny and Grace, were in the same situation, both being from another part of 'Ireland', and only found out in hindsight about 'early' enrolment at schools.

> I am from [name of] county in Ireland and […] so I thought you just go to the school. It never dawned on me until someone said to me [...] that was when she was two (Jenny, Canalside, Catholic, majority ethnic).
>
> Literally the second day […] I remember talking to other mothers and they said 'Oh no, the second day after that baby was born they had sent their husband down to the local school to register them (Grace, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic).

Jenny did not think of applying to schools when her child was very young because she thought it was the same as the process down the country where you 'just go to the school'. She cited her country origins as the reason for her not securing a place at her preferred local Protestant school. Similarly, Grace who did not get to put her child's name down at her preferred multi-denominational school, was enlightened afterwards that its ambiguous first-come, first-served

admission criterion was the 'day after' the 'baby's' birth. Like Jenny, she was not from the city and did not have the local contacts with the inner workings of the 'early' admission process.

Having access to local knowledge in effect meant being from Canalside. Kim and Oliver are both from the city but not of Canalside locality and, like the previous parents, only found out in hindsight about the 'early' enrolment priority in the sought-after schools. As a result, they were eliminated from the get-go from accessing the sought-after schools. Although Kim had family in the 'multi-denominational' school who told her 'to get her application in', she still didn't get a place, which she put down to there being a 'lot of siblings' in 'that particular year' (Kim, Canalside, Catholic, majority ethnic). Like all the sought-after schools, their admission criteria gave priority to 'siblings' already in the school as well as an 'early' application. Oliver did not get a place in the multi-denominational school or his next door Gaelscoil because he was too 'late' and as he explained, he 'naively thought' he just turned up.

> Very late [...] when [son] was about three we went looking [for a school] and we found that it wasn't a very transparent or easy process. I assumed that I could just wander next door [...] But [...] it [the Gaelscoil] was, no sorry there is a waiting list […] it was a big surprise [...] We didn't know, there's no shared knowledge, it was only later on we found out that people [...] are very actively making sure that their children are down here and here […] So it was a real 'first up, best dressed' effort and there were people who were making sure that they were there on the list, first up, years before we even considered the thought. […] So that was a bizarre kind of thing, my general moral thinking is that I am not a big fan of the 'first up, best dressed' because not everybody knows these hidden silent rules [...] and I am educated now [...]We were very un-middle-class, middle-class people, in that we did not know about this [...] like my background was if you were to use class […] we didn't have these generations of experience (Oliver, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic).

The inner workings of the admission application process are the object of parents' intra-middle-class struggle. Those with the highest social and cultural capital could access the 'hidden rules' while parents like Oliver, who did not have the right network with the 'knowledge', ended up getting a place in one of the large, Catholic, English-medium schools. Although Oliver identified himself as 'educated' and 'middle-class', he felt marginalised by Canalside's schools' admission process. Having social networks with the sought-after school reproduces its classed elite status by eliminating access for children whose families do not have the right socio-cultural capital. Furthermore, social networks with the school also reproduces advantaged families' social position locally.

Being a 'Canalside' 'local', Violet had the advantage in the application process because she not only knew what 'early' meant but had prepared to go into action once the child was born. She explained her process as follows:

> I blanket formed every school in the area – including Educate Together, the local parish school. My first choice was the Gaelscoil in Canalside, and the reason for that was that I am local, so I know the area […] I tried to put them down when they were in utero but you have to have a birth certificate, and schools in Canalside are so hard-fought that it's kind of first-come, first-served [...] So when you have a young baby, the rush is on to get into Harley Street [pseudonym] where you register birth […] and get your birth certificate [...] (Violet, Canalside, lapsed-Catholic, majority ethnic).

The sense of adrenaline before a race was evident in Violet's narrative of trying to get ahead in the 'Canalside's' 'schools'' admission process. However, the hidden meaning of the application start-line for the 'first-come, first-served' policy across all schools meant 'early' could only take effect with the evidence of a 'birth certificate'. Planning and preparation before the child's birth was critical for gaining a place at one of the sought-after schools. The uncertainty surrounding accessing one of these schools was thus strategically covered by applying to all schools, illustrating the protracted nature of the admission process. Having a plan from the outset was common practice for parents who knew how 'hard-fought' this process was but who had the local knowledge to decode the 'early' application deadline. Unlike the parents who were not from or did not have a family connection with Canalside, and whose only strategy was to apply to all schools, being a 'local' meant that the child's name was with the school 'early' and therefore there was a chance in gaining access.

Access to local knowledge was thus key to deciphering the ambiguous meaning of the 'first-come, first-served' admission priority and, more importantly, knowing that 'early' did not only apply to the multi-denominational school but was critical for all of the sought-after schools. Only local parents had the insight into the inner knowledge critical for getting their child's admission application accepted. The newcomer parents to Canalside were eliminated from the sought-after schools at this entry point into the application process in which the first step is getting the application form in 'early', but the next step was getting through the schools' selection process.

Specific social networking

To get through the sought-after schools' selection process to obtain a place required specific social networks with links to the school. Oliver was very vocal about the networking goings-on within a privileged social group:

> I know the nonsense that goes on and the conversations that people have [...] like you live in Canalside. In the Canalside area, you are talking about being very classist; it is extremely classist, it is massively classist, like I mean the prejudice against certain schools is horrendous […] In terms of 'Oh yeah, I got the place because such and such, is actually thing's mother', what I mean 'Paul went down and had a chat', that kind of stroke pulling kind of thing, I don't like it (Oliver, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic).

Oliver's observation of Canalside being 'massively classist' with 'prejudice against certain schools' indicates social workings within the intra-middle-class struggle to gain access to sought-after schools. The classed distinctions between schools and the classed struggle they generated to gain access to select 'schools' was inevitable – but only to those who were within a specific group of social relationships. He was completely unaware of the nature of the sought-after schools in Canalside's school system as he claimed in the previous quotation, which were 'difficult to see'. Social relationship groupings differentiate parents in the intra-middle-class struggle to access school places. Oliver's aversion to localised 'stroke-pulling' strategies applied in the pejorative sense of 'parish pump politics' points to the social networking within Canalside's school system, which was hostile to outsiders like himself. Violet declared local lobbying as the mechanism for gaining access to her preferred Gaelscoil.

> [...] my parents lobbied the school heavily, so I remember getting a call as Gaeilge then from the prefecture and me trying to cobble together my Gaeilge […] And then, you weren't sure whether they would have had a place, I lobbied heavily then to get into the naíonra that was associated with the school, and when you get into the naíonra you have a first preference to get in, and I put my son into the naíonra and that's still guaranteeing his place in the school. (Violet, Canalside, lapsed-Catholic, majority ethnic)

Violet's family social networks with influence in this Gaelscoil enabled her to get a school place for her child. Having 'lobbied heavily' signified the Gaelscoil's high-ranking position in Canalside's school system and the necessity to mobilise specific cultural and social capital. The general entry requirement of being able to speak the language was not enough; instead, accessing a place in such a sought-after school was dependent on specific 'social interconnections' (Bottero 2009, p.14). As Barnes (2000) indicates, to operate within the 'rules of the game' depends upon active alignment in the 'coordination and standardisation of practical actions by networks [...] who profoundly affect each other as they interact' (ibid.,

pp.64–66 cited in Bottero 2010, p.13). In other words, there is a general agreement within specific social networks tied to sought-after schools on the strategies for access. Because schools are hierarchically positioned in relation to their demand, so too are parents' social positions and network ties hierarchically positioned for accessing sought-after school places. Therefore, membership of the hierarchical sought-after schools' networks is a symbolic capital. The parents' social interconnections with sought-after selective schools differentiate their intra- middle-class positions. As Bunar & Ambrose (2016, p.38) point out that 'symbolic capital is one of the most important […] locally constructed organising principles' that position parents and schools. As such, one's social network within the application admission process was a normalised practice circulated between a select number of parents' social milieu locally.

Like Violet, Amy used her network to influence her application to another of her preferred schools, which was Catholic patronage. After her experience with her preferred Gaelscoil, which would not even give her an application form because she was too 'late', her subsequent anxiety motivated her to use her networks. Amy was not from the city but had a family contact with social interconnections to this school.

> [...] in the end, it was through a cousin of mine […] she knew somebody who was somewhat connected with the school, and she spoke to them and asked them about finding out was [child] going to get a place. And I don't ever know did he have any influence in that decision. Very possibly did, but I never found out for certain. But I got a letter in the post to say that [the child] had a place (Amy, Canalside, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Although Amy did not know if her network had input into securing her child's school place, its locally known practice reflected the contingent nature of schools' admission process in Canalside. There are many different networks, to which parents' access is structured primarily by class-related factors. Where you live, who you know and the social group to which you belong are constructed within and across localities and are vital determinants of accessing schools in Canalside (Ball & Vincent 1998). Having particular local networks can advantage parents in getting a school place, but locals like Violet know and have the specific social networks to access the elite schools such as the Gaelscoil.

Implicit silent rules in certain schools, such as the Gaelscoils' application process, were internalised in parents' decision not to apply. Jenny did not consider them in her application process because as she said, 'I didn't think I would get a place in [the gaelscoils] anyway'

(Jenny, Canalside, Catholic, majority ethnic). Similarly, Grace wrote off one specific Gaelscoil 'in [her] head' because she felt it would not 'give us an offer', as she explained:

> There was a couple of other gaelscoileanna, and we applied to them, and I remember one of them asking very specific questions about – as a parent, what can you contribute to the school – and I was not sure if they were talking in monetary terms or free time, but it was very much – this was as important as your child in terms of what you as a parent would contribute to this particular school, and both my husband and I work, so I kinda knew we wouldn't be able to […] and that is quite a prestigious gaelscoil, it is obviously quite selective in how they look for parents, they want parents of a particular type. I think so I had to write that one off in my head, […] I kind of knew from the application form and what I was able to answer, that that one was not going to give us an offer. So then I just applied to all the other ones, and quite a few of the schools at that stage, even in Canalside, were just asking you to register a name, so it's those ones that I felt we had more of a chance with [...] (Grace, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic).

Grace's practical expectation, i.e. her subjective hope, and the objective likelihood that she would succeed in her application to this particular gaelscoil, shows how the inner workings of elite schools occur through parents self-selecting themselves out of the process. These parents recognised their lack of cultural and social capital associated with this gaelscoil, in particular, and/or knowing its application criteria – all of which dictate a sense of place or not. This shows how the school's admission process can imply 'a particular type' of 'parent' to apply. The application form tends to function and fulfil the social closure of inclusion and exclusion (Swartz 1997, p.188). The symbolic power of the admission application means that parents like Grace and Jenny accept it as being a 'prestige' process and unwittingly extract themselves from the application process.

Long-term strategies to accumulate an advantage

Other strategies were undertaken to access sought-after school places, revealing the extent of the intra-middle-class competition. Apart from having the inside knowledge of covert 'early' admission criteria and specific social networks to sought-after schools, the parents were innovative in other ways, as explained by Violet.

> I know people who moved to the area just to get them into the gaelscoil and, like one of the mothers there learned Irish so that she could go in and talk to the prefecture [...] I would have christened my child, whatever would have got them into the school, and I remember ringing my old school, which is fully Protestant now. And I rang up and I said, 'What if I got an open-minded Reverend to baptise him into the Protestant faith?' And he [the principal] went, 'It's called double-dipping, my dear, and we're onto it.' […] So, you know, I would [have] actually

> consider[ed] that. And I know friends of mine who started attending the local Methodist Church to get their kids into [name of the school]. People do start making themselves known (Violet, Canalside, lapsed-Catholic, majority ethnic).

Strategies such as moving to the prized school's locality or learning the 'Irish' language to increase their chance of getting 'into the Gaelscoil' show the high sought-after demand this school generates for parents. This is also the same school that Jenny and Grace self-selected themselves from. The 'Irish' language fluency barrier preserves the status of this Gaelscoil by separating those who can/cannot speak the language. The parents' determination to learn the language indicate its sought-after status, whose strategies for carving out various advantages showed the extraordinary lengths gone to, especially thinking about 'baptising' one's child into both the Catholic and 'Protestant faith' to meet the overt admission criteria. All of these strategies require cultural and economic resources, such as time, confidence, determination and finances. These are distinguishing strategies that produce differentiations within the intra-middle-class competition for sought-after school places, but are only in connection to meeting the overt admission criteria related to the schools' culture, i.e. the patron and the Irish language. As demonstrated heretofore, the key factor in accessing places in the high-ranked, hierarchically positioned schools is knowing their admission processes' inner workings and having membership of their social interconnections network.

Finally, in the case of those parents who did not enjoy the generations of local social interconnections to access sought-after schools, parent groups worked at 'set(ting) up a new multi-denominational school'. Oliver saw the undertaking of such a long-term strategy as a means for a like-minded, middle-class Irish parent group to create an 'imagined school' that reflected its identity.

> You can even see it in the politics around the opening of a new multi-denominational school, I can guarantee you that the parents who are all over that are not the parents of Johnny whose dad works in the butchers, I know from being at the meeting [...] in their head is this idea that we will create this little school and we will mould it in our image, and we will just try and create a nice little exclusive club and one that's not a Catholic school, I don't think the multi-d, from my experience of multi-denominational schools in the city in the area that I live, the only difference between them and the Catholic schools is the fact that they don't do religion, I don't see any great difference in the sense that one is more open and accessible than the others (Oliver, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic).

Oliver likened the setting-up of the 'multi-denominational school' to that of an 'exclusive club' for a middle-class group of 'Catholic' parents. In his view, they are seeking a 'multi-denominational school' to segregate their children from the 'Catholic schools'. Furthermore,

he sees the patron's religious ethos as a smokescreen, as the Catholic school's population is religiously diverse while the multi-denominational school is populated by mostly Catholics, yet neither is accessible to families who are non-religious. Hence, the setting-up of a multi-denominational school is a long-term strategy by parents to acquire the 'right' socialisation environment for their children since access to the Protestant schools and gaelscoileanna tend to be only available to families with specific social and cultural capital required by these schools.

Parents strategised in their application processes to the sought-after schools to gain advantage in accessing a school place. Different strategies were implemented to acquire the religious and Irish language criteria necessary for entry. However, as demonstrated, the key factors in accessing places in the high-ranked, hierarchically positioned schools were first, knowing the inner workings of applying 'early', i.e. immediately after their children's birth, and, second, having the social interconnections to the school. These are the defining intra-middle-class differentiations between the parents for gaining access to the hierarchical status schools in the system. Should the specific social networks be lacking, the alternative is the long-term strategy of setting up a multi-denominational school to assure their children's schooling and middle-class social trajectory.

Diversity, the key distinction between schools: parents' critical reflections

The hidden inner workings of schools' admission practices created an anxious, insecurity ridden selection process for parents. Schools hierarchically positioned in the local school system determined who got a place. The parents' reflections on their selection and application processes focused on the diversity differences and classed and ethnic dynamics between the schools. Religion, which was spoken about at the outset of the parents' school selection decision-making, was not the focus of the defining differences between the schools. For example, Oliver's experience of the application process was likened to a 'club' of which he was not a member.

> [...] what I found when I walked around Canalside areas, that some of the schools were very white middle-class, and that was reflected in the kind of you know the 'first up best dressed' kind of effort for the enrolment policy and it was like this kind of club and with these people, it was kind of like a secret whisper [...] the rest of the people are rocking up and they are kind of going but what do you mean what, there's no place? And they would actually be told 'Oh have you tried [name of] school [Catholic]?' [...] I think the ethos of a school is more than just whether it is labelled Catholic or whether it is Protestant or it is multi-denominational school.

> I think that's a convenience […] in theory, it's a multi-d school but it is very exclusive and you could have the Catholic school five hundred yards away that has more diversity than the multi-denominational school, and again it is down to diversity. So my experience in the city is that it is to do with the school rather than the actual patronage of the school (Oliver, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic).

The 'exclusive' status of the 'Protestant' and 'multi-denominational' patrons symbolised a homogenous middle-class and mainly Catholic Irish population, in comparison to the 'Catholic' school's 'diversity'. These sought-after schools are constructed by classed and majority/minority ethnic distinctions. Oliver does not mention the Gaelscoils, however, from Violet's earlier description of the one her child attends, it is homogenously white upper-middle-class and Catholic, while Grace described her child's Catholic, English-medium school as diverse 'ethnically', 'religiously' and 'on a class basis' in comparison to an Educate Together school.

> I remember talking to the previous school Principal about an Educate Together and she was, to be honest, you can send your kids to an Educate Together you won't get diversity. It is white middle-class parents sending their children there and most of them make their first Communion [...] outside of the school (Grace, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic).

Contrary to their multi-denominational ethos, the Educate Together had a 'middle-class' population that was mainly 'Catholic'. This echoes Darmody & Smyth's (2018, p.11) findings that multi-denominational ET school populations are more likely to come from middle-class backgrounds and less likely to be attended by 'immigrant children'. Since the 'early' admissions policy eliminated middle-class families like Oliver and Grace, one would expect that ethnic minority and working-class families would have no hope of accessing these schools. Grace recognised the diversity differences between the Catholic and ET schools' population; however, her reflection on the admission process was only around religion.

> I know, and it is the thing that drives me nuts actually and I can understand why they [ET] don't do priority, but I think as a non-religious parent, it would be nice if the Educate Together did give non-religious parents priority because we don't get priority anywhere. I understand they do it just first-come, first-served […] But I do kind of think, you know the Catholic parents have enough priority everywhere else and they are swooping in taking over two thirds and they are all making their First Communions anyway, I don't understand it (Grace, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic).

Grace's imagined ideal school would be one that prioritised 'non-religious' families in its admission policies. She did not talk about the workings of the intra-middle-class and racial

practices within its 'first-come, first-served' admission criterion. For her, the primary school system's admission policies which mark her as different in her middle-class sphere were only related to 'religion'. This could be related to her familiarity with and sense of self within the middle-class grouping that was disrupted in Canalside's primary school system by what she perceived to be her 'non-religion'. Religion is not only the overt criterion of primary schools' admission policies but the historically distinguishing characteristic of schools and means through which social reproduction is facilitated in Irish education for the middle-class majority. As such, 'Catholic parents' – meaning those who are middle-class – had sufficient sites for their social reproduction, and therefore the ideal would be for Educate Together schools to give priority to 'non-religious' families. In this way, non-religious middle-class parents could have the Educate Together schools as their home for social reproduction.

It is understandable how Grace would like to have a school that prioritises her non-religious identity in its admission criteria. She had feelings of displacement because of the anxiety she felt during her application process. Her fear was ending up in the appeals system, as she explained.

> There is a situation in [this city] where it is quite common particularly if you are not a religious family, apart from the multi-d's which give preference based on waiting lists – all of the schools in Canalside are religious schools and […] if you are a non-religious family you don't get a place in any school […] and in that case you go to the local Education Board and you appeal and they give you a place in a school in the area. But for us in Canalside, the local Education Board covers both [an area outside Canalside] and Canalside – so you could get a […] I mean I could have got a school in Smithtown, or in Grandtown [psuedonyms] which would have been a four mile drive in commuting hours to get the kids to school, so it is entirely unsatisfactory (Grace, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic).

Grace felt particularly vulnerable because of her 'non-religious' position in the admission process and dreaded the thought of the 'appeal' system should she not get a 'place in any school'. Contrary to the ordinary meaning of 'appeal', which is to seek reversal of a decision, 'appeal' in this context involves the assigning of a school after a failure to get a place through the application process. This is a powerless position to find oneself in, with no control over the location of the school one gets. The geographic areas that Grace pointed to in her narrative of where her child could have been placed if her application went through the appeal process are in contrast to the middle- and upper-middle-class population of Canalside. To end up in the 'appeals' system with the risk of being placed in a school in one of the working-class and ethnically diverse locations was not a situation that Grace wanted; indeed, the application process left her 'entirely stressed, and 'in bits'.

The parents were ‘uncertain’ about the application process. Even parents who were local and had social interconnections to the school of preference experienced the process as anxiety-provoking.

> [...] there was anxiousness [...] mothers would be kind of victorious in a schoolyard, that it's your one such success as a parent, you know. You have to rear your children and look after them, you need to educate them. So, getting them into a school is critical in my mind. And I think most people would view it that way (Violet, Canalside, lapsed-Catholic, majority ethnic).

‘Victory’ in getting into the right school was the framework within which the middle-class parent is validated and shows the symbolic meaning that specific schools hold. The long waiting time parents had to endure in not knowing if their child had got into their preferred school added to their anxiety. The admission process could run over four years before confirmation was received, as Amy explains.

> When you think about the whole process, if you don't get the place, I was lucky that the school that I ultimately, was at the top of the list of the ones I wanted [...] But I think if you didn't, it requires an awful lot of readjustment in a fairly short space of time if you find out in January and your child is starting school in September (Amy, Canalside, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Schools did not confirm their school places until ‘January’ which is only eight months before the child was due to start school. The parents only option in this protracted process was to compete hard from the outset to obtain one of the sought-after school places.

The parents’ reflections revealed religion was not the defining characteristic that differentiated the schools but rather their social class and ethnic diversity. Most of the parents ended up with their children attending a Catholic English-medium school. They described them as religiously, ethnically and socially diverse in comparison to the multi-denominational school, which was middle-class and mainly white Catholic, while the Protestant schools were middle-class with some cultural and presumably religious diversity, and the Gaelscoileanna were middle-class (one particular Gaelscoil was upper-middle-class), white and Catholic. It is the classed and ethnic dynamics of the schools’ admission process that shape their schools’ populations and in turn, the intra-middle-class struggle and anxieties in the competition for access.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has demonstrated that the parents' school preferences are shaped by location, religious/non-religious orientation and cultural (language) desires, but their choice was superseded by the requirements of a complex, protracted and unpredictable admission process. The parents' preferred schools represent the local neighbourhood middle-class populations. Their preferred school was narrated through values for their children's imagined futures, which evoked desired environments: closeness to the family home; small size; cultural factors, including language or space for non-religious children; and 'mix'. However, places at the sought-after schools – Protestant schools, Gaelscoils, and the multi-denominational school – were in high demand. These schools' high-ranking status in the local school system is recognised as conferring esteem, prestige and 'victory' in gaining access, all of which are agreed upon locally and legitimised by parental demand. Their exclusive identity involves socially embedded norms and values that hold historically inherited, classed identities that are autonomous in themselves to discourage and encourage specific parents' participation (Lynch & Moran 2006). As pointed to in Chapter 1, Protestant schools were historically occupied by the landed Irish elite families, who held the economic, social and cultural capital in Ireland during the 18th and 19th centuries compared to the majority of poor Catholics (Courtois 2018). Protestant patronage schools continue to have a high status today. Similarly, gaelscoils have historical connections to the most eminent nationalist families in Ireland with roots in the 1916 Rising, and links to the Gaelic League (Sisson 2004). Furthermore, a small but strong wave of urban middle/professional class have supported the Irish movement's push for Irish languagage gaelscoils, especially since the 1970s (Borooah et al. 2009). The symbolic power of Protestant schools and Gaelscoils lie in their historically recognised elite and cultural value. The more recently established (1978) ET is also recognised by parents' as sought-after. As this chapter substantiates, its social composition of middle-class, well-educated families (Darmody & Smyth 2018; Darmody et al. 2012), differentiates it from the large, Catholic, English- medium schools nearby. These sought-after schools are classified by the culture of the educational system in Ireland as 'markers of underlying class distinctions' (Swartz 1997, p147). The symbolic power dynamics of the sought-after schools is their aspirational values, which are accepted by parents and families as legitimate.

The parents' desires for their preferred school were juxtaposed between their senses of self and Canalside's primary school system. The parents' access to their preferred schools is complicated by the rules of the patronage school system where religion is an admission criterion when the schools are oversubscribed, except for the multi-denominational school

which prioritises children on a ‘first-come, first-served’ basis. When the Catholic parents’ participate in the admission process to the sought-after Protestant schools, they find themselves in a struggle where their middle-class positions are threatened. The multi-denominational school carried an expectation among non-religious parents as the obvious choice for non-religious families, but the main criterion for entry is a place high on the waiting list, which threatened non-religious families’ middle-class positions. Non-religious parents felt that their religious status positioned them at the bottom of the waiting lists in the remaining religiously patronage schools. Religion is intertwined in accessing all of the schools, even the multi-denominational patron. The Gaelscoils prioritise proficiency in the Irish language to access places in their oversubscribed schools. Therefore, parents cannot ‘choose’ their preferred school as getting a place is not a certainty. The insecurity of getting a school place has shaped an intra-middle-class competitive school selection process.

The parents had to engage with a complex and often implicit school admission process requiring them to strategise their school application process. The primary strategy undertaken by all parents is to apply to all of the schools as there is no guarantee of entry to the sought-after schools. The first step is to get the admission application accepted by the sought-after schools. This requires knowing the ‘early’ deadline and how to complete the application forms. The ‘first-come, first-served’ protocol applies not only apply to the multi-denominational school but is a covert prerequisite for all the sought-after schools. Only Canalside locals were in the know concerning the implicit ‘early’ deadline, which is the ‘second day after the baby is born’. Not getting onto the waiting list early meant that newcomer parents who did not have family connections to Canalside did not have a chance of getting a school place. The arbitrary admission criteria that govern sought-after schools’ application process constitute parents’ perception of the competitive nature of Canalside’s system and their action. I have demonstrated how the Gaelscoil’s prestigious position was embodied in the parents’ practical sense of their position and place by their belief that they had no chance of getting a school place and did not apply. Such judgements allow social and economic capital differences, as well as classed/ethnic inequalities, in accessing school places appear natural, inevitable and just (Crossley 2008). Access to the Gaelscoil requires religious affiliation (Catholic) and proficiency in the Irish language and, as Grace expressed, being a ‘particular type’ of parent. As Lynch & Moran (2006) argue, schools are not passive recipients of parents’ choices but actively determine choice parameters.

The second critical step in the application process for getting a place requires the symbolic capital relevant to the preferred sought-after school. Parents like Violet have the right social networks with the contiguity and opportunity for access to the sought-after schools (Bottero & Prandy 2003). Select groups generally know the specific network ties necessary to sought-after schools. Bottero & Prandy (2003, p.190) point to these differential associations in social networks that distinguish individuals when 'socially aggregated into generalised advantage'. Intra-middle-class boundaries in the competitive application process take shape through the mobilisation of social networks. These social interconnection networks to the sought-after schools are a collective and classed institutional boundary (Swartz 1997). Parents' class positions cannot be determined directly by a rigid middle-class group identity (occupation/income/education) as there are intra-middle-class differences in families' access to sought-after schools. Instead, parents' intra-middle-class positions are derived from the dynamics of social relations and interactions within the field of schooling which influence the activation of social resources, such as accessing a sought-after school. Having specific social networks are a form of differentiation to (re)produce positional advantage within the local school system. Furthermore, specific social interconnections to sought-after schools are a cultural practice that is symbolic of parents' and schools' mutual hierarchical positions in the local school system. As Bottero & Prandy (2003, p.194) contend, such specific social interconnection requirements are a '*sui generis* social ordering of generalised advantage'. Social interconnection networking in the application process reproduces the schools' hierarchical status and families' hierarchical social position in the local school system.

This chapter contributes and advances the literature on school patronage and parents' primary school selection process by revealing how the historically hierarchical school system structure is sustained through the circulatory power of its admission process to manifest a hierarchical social ordering between the middle-classes for purposes of access. It demonstrates how classed and ethnic dynamics in the parents' school selection processes are intertwined within the interrelations between parents' social networks and schools' covert admission practices that appear arbitrary. The legitimation of schools' hierarchical status is constituted within and through the symbolic relations of their hierarchies of value that are normative. Furthermore, I question the amended admission policy's (DES 2018) ability to make the rules more 'structured, fair and transparent' (DES 2018). This amendment does not allow primary schools to use religion as a basis for admission and prioritise students based on their religious beliefs (DES 2018). The focus on religion in the amendment also precludes class and ethnic

inequalities. This chapter has further demonstrated that the sought-after schools are havens for white middle-class and mainly Catholic parents in contrast to many of the Catholic schools nearby. Classed and ethnic dynamics are intertwined with religion in schools' admission application process. Religious affiliation can still be used in minority belief schools' admission processes (DES 2018). Furthermore, when religious schools are oversubscribed, they have autonomy through their admission criteria to determine who gains access (DES 2018). Moreover, Irish-language schools can prioritise students who have a reasonable, age-appropriate level of oral fluency that satisfies the school (DES 2018). Therefore, the sought-after schools in Canalside maintain their autonomy in their admission criteria, which serve as a smokescreen behind which privilege is maintained. This chapter has revealed the pre-existing religious identity of schools' patron and religious affiliation admission criteria in parents' narratives that obscure the dynamic intersections of religion, ethnicity and class that are iteratively produced in everyday subjects and their practices (Grenfell 2008). I have argued that the need to use covert practices, such as inner knowledge and specific social networks, to access schools implies a school admission system that functions with classed, raced and religious inequalities for their function.

Chapter 7

The role of patron and religious practices in parents' school selection processes

This chapter turns its attention to how the participating parents negotiated their school selection with regard to patron and religious practices. Chapter 1 outlined how the parish contributed to a Catholic cultural way of family living around the Church, the school and the GAA. Although there have been many socio-cultural changes since the 1960s (as outlined in Chapter 1), the Catholic Church still occupies the dominant position in the primary school patronage system. The increasing diversity of the Irish population from the early 1990s justified the sanctioning of parent choice policy in 2012 to reshape the patronage primary school system and meet the diverse society's needs via divestment (Coolahan et al. 2012). Thus, religion is central to 'diversity' and 'choice' in the political process of reshaping the patronage school system (Daly 2016).

This opens up an opportunity to examine how patronage and religion interact with parent choice. Inglis (2007, p.207) contends that, although the Catholic institution is diminishing in Irish people's lives, Catholic culture and traditional rituals are 'a shared collective memory' that continues within the normative fabric of family life in Ireland. Inglis (2007, p.205) tells us that most Irish Catholics have an embodied Catholic habitus that creates 'a Catholic sense of self and a way of behaving and interpreting the world'. As discussed in Chapter 3, habitus is understood as the place where the 'internal operations produced by reality' are located (Lizardo 2004, p.387). These 'internal operations' are embodied 'systems of durable, transposable dispositions which are both the product and the producers of subsequent objective structures' (ibid., p.387). This helps to explain how perceptions and practices are shaped by history 'internalised as second nature and so forgotten' and are inseparable from the field structure in which interactions/transactions and practices take place (Bourdieu 1990, p.56). Because practices contain motives and interests 'aimed at maximising material or symbolic profit' of a field (Bourdieu 1990, p.209 cited in Swartz 1996, p.74). The concepts of culture, Catholic habitus, field, capital and interests facilitate an exploration of how parents' perceptions of patronage and its religious practices intersect in their children's school selection and schooling. Religious practices refer to religious education (instruction,

teaching and learning), rituals, sacraments, faith practices and rituals linked to organised religion and school ethos.

This chapter contributes to the few studies (e.g. Kitching 2020; Darmody & Smyth 2018; Smyth et al. 2013; Smyth et al. 2009) on how patronage and religion interact with school choice at the micro-level of parents and families. However, it delves deeper by exploring how parents' perceptions of patron and its religious practices intersect in their children's school selection and schooling and how they experienced the National Parent Survey since it was undertaken in their schools and their perception of the divestment of patron. This chapter further keeps in mind that there is considerable variation in the way people practise as Catholics, and therefore this group is not viewed as a homogenous 'majority' in the study (see Inglis 2007). The parents usually self-identified as Catholic around the terms 'practicing/non-practising', which is related to attending Mass or not. Avram & Dronkers (2010) find that religion in schools is more a historical product than a reflection of contemporary religious belief among the population. Studies that explore the role of religion in school choice in Ireland find religion is not explicitly mentioned as a criterion in many parents' school selection but is important for those of minority beliefs and no religion (e.g. Smyth et al. 2009; Smyth et al. 2013). Smyth et al. (2018) point to the dominance of Catholic schools in the system and suggest that religion may be implicit in many of the parents' selection. Instead, location and convenience are the factors for these parents, whom Kitching's (2020, location no. 1212) study identifies as 'Catholic and white-settled Irish'. To explore the parents' experiences of the patronage system and religious practices during their process of choosing a school, and later as their children navigated everyday life at school, this chapter uses the terms 'Catholic' and 'minority religious' to differentiate parents' religious beliefs, not with the aim of reinforcing fixed constructions. But rather to build an understanding of the relations between these groups on the one hand and between religion and patronage on the other, as well as an understanding of how/if parents' religious beliefs intersect with their school decision-making.

First, I inquire into how the parents understand 'patron' in their school selection. I argue that this term is normative and never questioned in the parents' selection processes because the patronage structure of the primary school system is the reality. Secondly, this chapter outlines how the parents perceive the patron's religious practices. I argue that religious practices are embedded in the structure of the school system patronage culture and are normative. Drawing on parents' experiences, I outline how religious practices are cultural resources that constrain, enforce conformity upon and provide possibilities for some of the

parents to reconstruct traditional practices that hold the potential for reshaping the primary patronage beyond the control of the Church.

Patron: the standard rule of the patronage system mobilises culture to sustain its reality

Criticisms of proposals for changes in the education system within the political domain were historically justified by the adage that patron management of schools was 'in the interests of the people' (see e.g. Daíl Éireann Debates 1979). This section explores how patronage is perceived by parents across the three sites. Local contexts of the primary school systems frame parents' meaning-making of 'patron' differently. I illustrate how parents' meaning-making of 'patron' is shaped by their experiences in a way that constitutes its normativity in their school selections. Second, I explore parents' experiences of the National Parent Survey (2013). By examining parents' perspectives on the survey, I show how the patron, extends to the realm of traditional rituals in family life.

It is important to point out that I did not directly raise the question of patronage during the interviews because I wanted to see how it played out in the parents' school selection. Many parents voluntarily initiated the discussion, particularly those in the city location because the primary school system had varying patron types that required knowledge of their admission policies. In comparison, most of the parents in the rural areas did not talk about the patron with a few exceptions, viz, particularly minority religious parents who had no other option than a Catholic school. Considering that the patron is the object of parent choice policy, it became evident quite quickly that many parents did not consciously associate the term with their children's primary school selection. For example,

> I don't think there is even a huge knowledge of who the patron is […] (Emily, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).
>
> No, no – I don't know who the patron of the school is (Ashley, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Like many parents in the rural locations, Emily's and Ashley's immediate understanding of the primary school did not require a consciousness of 'patron'. Although the idea of patronage of the school was almost alien to many parents, assuming they did not know who the 'patron' was would be incorrect. Instead, the school's patron took the form of an embodied knowing. For example,

> I don't know. You mean the patron [...] the saint? [...] I didn't think I had reasons to think about it; it was being done […] I know the priest goes into the school, and I'm involved in the choir in the church. I knew everything was above board and okay, and the sacraments would all be, I didn't need to think about, because I knew it was being done (Isabelle, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

The Catholic parish primary school and the parish priest's visits have over generations reproduced the parish social structure that is normative in families' way of life. The normativity of the Catholic parish school and way of life demonstrates the working of Isabelle's Catholic habitus. 'Know(ing)' the 'school' is Catholic is a common-sense, embodied and intuitive form of predisposed unconsciousness. Though 'patron' was an intuitive 'know(ing)', it was also the basis of conscious decision-making, such as the decision made by Harry and his partner to move back to Ireland for their children to get the 'same' schooling they experienced.

> To be honest, probably not [thought of patron]. But that would have been based on an assumption that I just expected them all to be as we were. It probably would have been a factor, though [...] we came back [from living abroad] for them to go through the Irish education system, and that included the Catholic education that we got ourselves that was passed on to us, and we felt we should pass on, right or wrong.[...] Well, it would have been a factor. I just came to it knowing that it was what it was (Harry, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

The taken-for-granted 'assumption' that schools are 'Catholic' did not require thought or articulation because 'the Irish education system' holds implicit associations with a national Catholic identity. The interconnection between primary schools and national identity rests on parents' embodied belonging to a Catholic cultural heritage that is shaped by, and in turn shapes, Catholic schools as the reality and patron as the doxa (Inglis 2007). This also demonstrates how Catholic culture and primary schools work in tandem.

Local primary school systems in Ireland, especially outside urban/city locations, consist mostly of Catholic schools (Darmody & Smyth 2018). As such, for many of the parents in the rural sites, there was no need to reflect on the patron in the school selection process.

> I don't even know who the patron [ ] The church, No, I didn't, because I think it wasn't a factor because all the schools around are just the same […] I knew it was Catholic, but while we're not very staunch Catholics [...] (Clara, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

However, the schools' patrons are not all 'the same' in Meadowlands, as there is a small Protestant school in the school system. The legacy of historical boundaries around

Catholic/Protestant parish schools, structured through the Church, families and everyday local parish life, continues in parents' schemas to produce and generate their perception of 'patron' (Inglis 2007). In this instance, 'patron', as represented by the 'same', referred only to the Catholic schools, while the Protestant school was not in the picture. Similarly, Iris did not think about 'patron', because she only had Catholic schools in her decision-making selection.

> No, I didn't [consider the patron] [...] Well, there would have been one that I wouldn't even have considered because it was - it wouldn't have been a Catholic school. […] I suppose it's because I'm a practising Catholic myself and that's important to me so I'd like the same (Iris, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Iris's afterthought concerning the Protestant school in the local school system was justified by the fact that she 'wouldn't even have considered' it because she wanted to pass on the family's 'Catholic' heritage to her children. Parents' Catholic habitus produces the patron doxa to mean Catholic in their school selection processes. To say that the rural sites are homogenous spaces would be incorrect. Parents of minority beliefs/no religion across the rural and city sites perceived patron around the multi-denominational school's multi-religious ethos that caters for all beliefs and none, seeing the multi-denominational patron as a fit for their families' minority beliefs/no religion. Similarly, a small number of Catholic parents whose preference was for an ET patron associated it with its multi-religious ethos but for the purpose of learning about other religions and other factors, discussed later.

Although all the parents were very much aware of patrons in the city location, 'patron' functioned as a taken-for-granted set of admission rules that required knowing of Canalside's perceived competitive school system (see Chapter 6). After some consideration, a few of the parents perceived the patron for what it was not. For example, Daisy distinguished her children's Protestant school from 'another school which is non-Christian' religion and which would have been a 'different ball game' (Daisy, Canalside, Catholic, majority ethnic). The patron's Christian significance correlated with her Catholic belief and functioned to legitimise her selection, while the Catholic school in which Julie found herself was perceived as 'Christian' and 'not so Church-led Catholic' and aligned with her preferred 'not so religious school' where she did not get a place (Julie, Canalside, Catholic, minority ethnic). Parents' meaning-making around 'patron' was determined by knowing the rules of the various patrons' admission procedures and evaluated through the schools their children attended to legitimise the school's patron where they found themselves. Their perceptions of 'patron' were primarily

constructed from the taken-for-granted and normative admission rules of the primary school patronage system structure.

Across all the sites, the patronage structure was never challenged; instead, it was granted a 'recognition that escapes questioning' because it was the reality (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.98). The power of the patronage structure is that it is embedded in the culture of primary schooling, invisibly going-by while reproducing the power relations of the patrons. The power of Catholic patronage is its doxa to reproduce itself in the rural sites, while in the city the power of the patrons is found in the admission criteria and taken-for-granted rules that enable sought-after schools' classed and ethnic compositions to reproduce themselves (as discussed in the previous chapter). Considering that the patron was not a conscious term for many parents in the rural sites and functioned for knowing the rules in the city to access schools, I turn to parents' experiences of the National Parent Survey to further explore the workings of 'patron' in parents' choice.

The orchestration of religiously inflected cultural sentimentality

Key to how the patronage system is reshaped to meet the needs of a diverse society was the National Parent Survey regarding parental preferences on primary school patronage (DES 2013; 2012). This was undertaken in 2013 (with a pilot survey in 2012) in 43 identified areas nationally to indicate the 'level of parental demand' for patron change (DES 2013, p.3). This sub-section explores parents' experience during the course of this survey.

Since the patronage primary school system is the reality and the patron is normative, information about the National Parent Survey and its purpose is critical for engaging parents. From this small study, located in three of the national survey's 43 sites, most parents (17 of 28) did not remember the survey and/or complete it. Lack of knowledge about the survey was a recurrent theme in parents' experiences across all sites, and those who did recollect the survey showed a similar pattern: the meanings that parents took from information received about the survey were either derived from the perspective of getting an ET/multi-denominational school or 'protecting the denominational schools'. For example, Oliver reported:

> I got it on the grapevine [...] 'Oh yeah you need to fill this out now, you need to make sure that we have school' – but it was actually from the religious side [...] to protect the denominational schools. That was the undercurrent that was out there, I never heard anything from the other side of the fence – and it annoyed me [...] and I read up, and I filled out the [...] and I have seen the report (Oliver, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic).

Many parents, like Oliver, heard about the survey through their social networks. The information parents received was drawn from either side of a dichotomy. Oliver received his information 'from the religious side' and was annoyed that 'the other side', meaning the ET multi-denominational patron, was not vocal. Non-religious parents saw the multi-denominational patron as the one that accommodated the non-religious family. Grace, also non-religious, had known at the stage of the survey that she would not get a place in Canalside's only existing multi-denominational as her child's name was too far down on the waiting list. Hence, it was important to her to complete the survey as it held hope for the possibility of another 'multi-d'. Meanwhile, Jenny's recollection of the survey was about 'Getting petitions together to get numbers' for 'another ET' (Jenny, Canalside, Catholic, majority ethnic). The survey did not hold importance for Jenny because her preference at the time was for the local Protestant school, albeit she ended up getting a place in a Catholic school, which was her second school of choice. Thus, the survey was perceived as generating a competition between ET and Catholic patrons.

Most of the parents in Meadowlands could not remember the survey. Two of the principals I talked to from Meadowlands stated that information about the survey was passed onto parents, but it was 'never really talked about' because 'people have no interest in it' (Principal 2, Meadowlands). Alice, the only parent on this site to remember the survey, recollected it being about 'keep[ing] it, as a Catholic school' (Alice, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic). While there were no discussions around an alternative multi-denominational patron, Alice wanted the patron to stay 'Catholic' for 'the Communion and Confirmation'. The Liaison Officer of this school indicated its decreasing enrolment figures were due to 'an increase in other nationalities that has marginalised Irish parents' and that the school had only 'seven Irish families' (School Liaison Officer, Meadowlands). Such problematising of 'other nationalities' in relation to the decrease in majority ethnic families in the school is a clear example of racism and opens up further questions around ethnic segregation.

In comparison, many of the parents in Sunnyvale remembered the survey because their schools proactively campaigned to maintain their Catholic patron. Considering that the principals of schools in Meadowlands (and Canalside) expressed that they had informed parents about the survey, it seems that schools' campaigning was the medium through which parents became more conscious of the survey. The Catholic schools that campaigned during

the survey assumed that their school was 'pinpointed' for change. For example, Lily's school had a drive to promote the survey.

> Yes, it certainly was talked about [...] the school was proactive […] there is a strong religious ethos in it, the Principal – very, very strong [...] she took it very seriously, it was absolutely identified as a Catholic school. That would have been really important to her; we were one of the schools that were pinpointed […] there was paperwork prepared and sent out to the parents [...] It came back that we wanted to stay with Catholic leadership, there was a percentage who didn't, and she knew they were there anyway, you know they would have been sort of vocal about it. She had always said yes, we are a Catholic school, but we welcome children of all faiths and none, you know that was certainly there without a doubt (Lily, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Thinking that their school 'was pinpointed' for change is the information that Lily and other parents understood to be the case in the 'proactive' campaign to maintain the 'Catholic' patron. The schools determined the type of information that parents received and the level of discussions that pervaded locally. Lily's village school's religiously and ethnically diverse population is similar to another school in the nearby town that also campaigned. Olivia describes her children's school's population as follows:

> […] and that's the school with most different religions and most diverse in culture – so that's the one they were really thinking would be changed (Olivia, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Again, Olivia's school was thought to be the one that was targeted for 'change' because of its diversity. These schools felt threatened because the diversity of religions and ethnicities amongst their populations created uncertainty about how parents would make their choice. To deal with their concerns, the schools targeted religious rituals as the medium through which to raise the interest of the Catholic parents to maintain their patron status.

> [...] telling us about the survey they urged us to complete it but they also kept stating to keep it as it is [...] and an awful lot of parents at the time were saying that they were trying to influence our decision, and they kept on saying it – 'why fix what's not broken?' [...] 'our school is under Catholic patronage and it's fine', I remember that year they were doing their Christmas play and the principal stood up and said 'do you know that the survey that you are doing now, if ye complete that survey if ye vote against this patronage we won't be having our Christmas plays, we won't be having Christmas here' [...] every day we were collecting the children and they were there 'don't forget your surveys now and vote against that' (Olivia, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Olivia described how the principal drew on festive celebrations as a purposeful action to spark parents' interest in maintaining the patron. Like other 'Catholic' schools that campaigned, 'patronage' was raised from the realm of the unarticulated doxa to the authority of orthodoxy. Catholic rituals and festivities hold traditional meaning in many Irish families' lives and, as such, enact emotions and sentiments (Inglis 2007; Blommaert 2015). The orthodoxy of the Catholic patron emerged in the struggle over change and called into existence the patron's distinctive cultural practices that are traditional in Irish family life. This gives Catholic schools, as the 'creators of culture', symbolic power against any subversion for change. As such, Catholic schools are 'a community of memory' (McLaughlin 2002 in Williams 2010, p.24). Cultural repertoires rekindle traditional communal memories to create solidarity amongst the Catholic majority parent choice in defence of their patron. However, tensions were created between schools and the parents who wanted change. One such parent who confronted the teacher was Hazel, who is non-religious. Hazel disliked the school positioning itself as the custodian of the common good and was annoyed that parents' autonomy was thought to be a 'foregone conclusion' and parents' choice was to confirm that the school stays 'Catholic'.

> There were posters up […] Certainly, they brought our attention to our need to protect the school, that was very much the theme, it wasn't our need to express our opinions [...] our opinions were a foregone conclusion, now we just needed to share them with the government [...] it was quite insulting. I took the teacher to task ... I think she is quite religious herself, so you are very much against – 'Oh it's a Catholic country and people want to preserve their religious rights in the school' [...] I kind of sometimes wonder if they took the sacraments out of the school would the parents be so invested in their need to keep it there (Hazel, Sunnyvale, non-religious, majority ethnic).

This quotation demonstrates how the campaign for parents' choice created both group identities – the dominant 'Catholic' majority since 'it's a Catholic country' – and their antithesis in outsiders like Hazel. The school delegated itself as the guardian of Catholic parents' 'religious rights' framed through the cultural workings of national sentiment and tradition. This constrained minority beliefs/no-religion parents, who were in the minority, in their capacity to create change. Hazel recognised her powerlessness between the schools' mutual collective Catholic dispositions and the culture that was permeated by the patron structure. Interestingly, both minority religious, minority ethnic parents, Anna and Laura, did not remember any information received or talk about the survey, even though their children

are attending this school. It might be wondered whether their minority ethnic ethnicity and network of information exchanges are related.

Protecting the Catholic patronage of the local schools was also the message at local Mass. The parish priest used his position during the National Parent Survey to extend the message to Catholic members from the pulpit that 'your schools' would not be divested to an 'Educate Together school'.

> [...] the priest in Mass stood up, and he said, 'the Educate Together school, they are very likely to come here, but they can build, they can start laying bricks themselves, they can't take one of your schools' – it's a bit deflating (Olivia, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

The priest's portrayal of the schools as 'your schools' held the notion of community solidarity and was utilised to maintain the cultural order in Sunnyvale. Control over schooling in the local community is pertinent to conserving the Catholic patron and reproducing its symbolic Catholic culture. The priest knew there was a demand for an 'Educate Together school' and focused his battle on protecting the local Catholic schools from divestment. The struggle to hold the dominant Catholic patron position is over 'legitimate knowledge', which includes traditional rituals of the cultural way of living locally that presently go by invisibly (Swartz 1997, location no. 129).

'Culture eats strategy' in a change process

The previous sub-section showed how parents' perceptions of the survey and thus, their participation in it depended on their interest in the ET patron or the schools' campaign to maintain the Catholic patron. The concept of divestment which is central to reshaping the primary patronage school system was never publicly contextualised in terms of how it would work in the school for families. Furthermore, there were no public forums/discussions locally for parents to express concerns and ask questions about the effects of patron change for their children's schooling (O'Kelly 2019). This section explores parents' perception of divestment, and how/if it could ever happen in the foreseeable future.

The parents who hoped the outcome of the survey would materialise in an ET school in their locality were despondent about the whole process. It should be pointed out that this study is not making a charge for more ET schools and/or Catholic patron change. The underlying aim is to explore parents' experience of the survey and their perception of the divestment of patrons. Grace viewed the National Parent Survey as a window-dressing

performance to pacify the minority group of parents who wanted more multi-denominational schools in the system, like herself.

> I know it was the argument that the patrons gave that our current parents don't want us to change but given that 50% of the kids in St. Lawrence [pseudonym] don't make their First Communion I would imagine there would be a lot of parents who would, so long as you don't change the Principals/teachers. I don't mind if the Board of Management changes. I think that's a bit of a fig leaf, to be honest, I think parents in a religious school probably feel they have to support the school, there would be pressure put on them and I think it's just a line that the patrons have come out with (Grace, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic).

The school Grace's child attended was religiously and ethnically diverse with approximately 50% minority religious families who would probably want divestment. But she knew that the Catholic parents would not go against the school's BOM which represented the patron because of 'pressure' or as revealed earlier, the patron considered itself the authority of parents' needs.

For the other parents, divesting the school's Catholic patron would be a contentious issue. For example, Isabelle definitely would not want the parish school to change patron because it held 'traditional' and historical meaning for local life.

> Honestly, if I heard in the morning that they were going to change, I'd say oh my god [...] even if people don't go to mass [...] I think even those still wouldn't want to change [...] I have a very strong feeling, just because they're not using the facility, I think they still want in the back of their mind or in their life, they want it still to be there [...] It's like the church. If the church closed, even though I might not have visited in the last three years, I'd be devastated. Why? It's like the local shop. It's kind of the same thing [...] it's kind of like tradition. A creature of habit (Isabelle, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Parish life deployed a sense of local embedded relations between the Catholic 'Church', and the primary school for the family and humanises the term 'our parents are happy' that Walshe (2014) referenced in terms of parents not wanting their schools' Catholic patron to divest. The possibility of change held emotional sentiment, inherited and built-upon from a concatenation of intergenerational cultural traditions. The parish school (Catholic), the Church (Catholic), family, and the GAA, as shown in Chapter 5, are intertwined in an invisible system of relations between community/parish members. As Bourdieu (1994, p.53) states, it is 'not the visible individuals but the invisible space of relations between individuals is the *ens realissimum'* (cited in Vandenberghe 1999, p.42). Indeed, O'Mahony and Murphy's (2018, p.39) knowledge gathering of Catholic parish boundaries to produce the first (digitised) official parish map of Ireland, identified the primary school, the Church and the family as 'the three pillars' that compose a parish/community.

However, not all the parents held the sentiment of the parish school and the Church relations, though they were realistic about the notion of divestment. Anna saw, minority ethnic families like herself as the main group 'hoping for a change':

> [...] you still have very strong traditionalists, this is the way we have always done it, it worked for us [...] I would think it would be mostly foreigners who would be hoping for change (Anna, Sunnyvale, minority religious, minority ethnic).

The collective identity of the 'traditional' national Catholic majoritarian group resisting 'change' was contrasted against that of 'foreigners' whose only option was to simulate. The dynamics of Catholic traditional culture needs to be decontextualized in respect of parent choice, the primary patronage school system and the needs of the more diverse Irish society that divestment was proposed to meet.

Many parents were pragmatic about change but recognised the power of culture and the role of information in communicating what divestment would mean in the school. For example:

> [...] if it were presented to parents properly they might go along with it. Most people wouldn't move in the end of the day (Harry, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

> There's a phrase, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast," I think change has and will always be resisted, it depends on how the change is managed [...] (Violet, Canalside, lapsed-Catholic, majority ethnic).

Resistance to change is natural and requires engagement with parents if the state is serious about reshaping the patronage school system to accommodate the needs of diversity. Parents need context about how patron change would impact their children on a daily basis. For Bourdieu, change creates a lag between individuals' embodied being and social structural transformation. Managing 'change', first of all requires parents to be able to have open discussions/forums about divestment.

Overall, the parents' recollection of the survey depended on how or if they received information and whether a patron change was of interest to them. The state cultivated the conditions for the production of information during the survey, giving autonomy to the schools to inform parents (Coolahan et al., 2012). Since multi-denominational schools are negligible in the rural sites, the parents relied on their Catholic schools for information. Information about alternative patrons was minimal among their community of parents. When Catholic schools felt threatened because of their diverse populations, they drew on religious rituals such as the

sacraments and Christmas festivities because of their symbiotic relations with cultural and national sentimentality. This demonstrates the symbolic power of religious rituals in reproducing Catholic culture. The conservation of the Catholic patron is critical to reproducing their symbolic power, and the ET patron threatened this in the rural locations where the system is historically Catholic and parochial. The National Parent Survey in the Meadowland site did not support patron change. On the other hand, Canalside and Sunnyvale showed sufficient support for divestment of an existing Catholic school to an ET patron; however, this has not happened to date. Next, I explore the parents' perception and experiences of religious practices in their school selection.

Culture: the power of religious practices

This section turns to an understanding of the parents' perceptions and experiences of religion within their children's schools. First, I examine how Catholic parents, whether practicing, non-practicing or lapsed, and minority religious parents perceive and experience religious practices. I show that parents' experiences of religious practices are shaped by many of the parents' embodied Catholic culture. Next, I explore the dynamics of local socio-cultural relations and religious practices and how they are intertwined in the context of the local school system structure thus, a diversity of patrons provides social acceptance for Catholic parents to reconstruct traditional practices.

Catholic parents' meaning-making of schools' religious practices

This section focuses on the religious practices of the Catholic patronage since the children of all parents, except Daisy, attend its schools and it is also the dominant patron in the school system nationally. How parents perceive, engage with and experience religious practices differs. Catholic parents who intuitively knew the patron was Catholic, perceived the schools' religious practices as neutral and inclusive.

> They don't do a lot of religion [...] they are filling pictures [...] but I don't think there is anything like there was years ago […] I don't think even the Catholic children are that interested (Alice, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).

The school's 'religion' is mediated from Alice's own schooling experience of religious practices to portray its contemporary light touch. The ordinariness of 'filling pictures' reflects

a disposition immersed in Catholic culture that perceives their religious content as a secular activity. The perception that 'Catholic children are not interested' confirms the neutrality of religion. Other parents highlighted the shared functional nature of religious practices to inflect universalism as opposed to just Catholicism. For example,

> It [religion] is just very much just about being a good person, there is no Jesus [...] there is a couple Church of Ireland [children] and they don't make their Communion, whereas most do (Clara, Meadowlands, Catholic, majority ethnic).
>
> It's fine there are kids in my sons class that would be Jehovah's Witnesses and Sikhs; they are learning about other religions, they are respecting the fact that there are other religions and other cultures, and it doesn't make any difference (Nicola, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Parents' perceptions of religion are reflected through present-day classrooms with their students of minority beliefs and/or no beliefs. Perceptions of religion mediate between traditional Catholic education characteristics – producing 'good' individuals – and the 'common good' narrative of 'respecting other(s)' (Grace 2002). Religious practices in the school are never questioned; they are the reality. Clara's perspective that the school's' religion has 'no Jesus' could represent a desire for unity with minority beliefs/no-religion. Nonetheless, parents' perception that religious practices are neutral and natural in the school misrecognises their impact on the minority religious children.

On the other hand, those parents who do not practise but identify as Catholics perceive schools' religious practices as a performance: they are the reality, so the parents' include their children's in religious education and practices to assure a sense of belonging. Importantly, they have the Catholic cultural capital to do so seamlessly. The significance of having Catholic cultural capital lies its symbolic power in the classroom to facilitate participation in religious practices and rituals in order to fit in with the majority of children. For example, Cathy, who self-identified as having 'Christian beliefs but not [being a] practising Catholic', acquiesces to her children making their Communion and Confirmation, because 'it's difficult to exclude your child from that' (Cathy, Meadowlands, majority ethnic). Similarly, Violet, a lapsed-Catholic, had the symbolic capital of her preferred Gaelscoil patron. Even though she was determined the family was registered on the Census as no-religion, the symbolic power of the school's religious culture constrained her agency to conform to participating in its religious practices:

> I had to go at my husband for ticking Roman Catholic on the Census [...] I put my children down as no. I baptised them to get them into the school. It's the only reason we did it. [...] But I suspect people like me will just let the child go and do it. I don't want to make my child that different from the rest of them. Just let him follow the crowd and mix (Violet, Canalside, lapsed-Catholic, majority ethnic).

Census data is essential for policy decision-making and planning at a national level (CSO.ie). However, at the individual level, the symbolic power of the school's religion in forming children's collective identity for belonging meant that Violet utilised her inherited Catholic capital to play the game. Participation in the school's religious practices is a purposeful performance so that children are not recognised as 'different from the rest'. Therefore, their religious interests are 'an escape from the gaze' which compel their participation (Ball 2000, p.9). Such performances are effective for the children to fit into the dominant culture in the classroom, but they reveal how the Catholic patron sustains itself in the dominant position of the school system. Furthermore, participation in religious practices reflect how the Catholic patron and its religious practices are normalised through such performances and how Catholic subjectivities are (re)produced. Therefore, since religious practices are the reality, natural and, for many, neutral, how Catholic parents perceive them for minority religious children in the classroom is explored next.

Religious practices are a choice for minority religious families

The Catholic parents' perceptions of the school's religious practices for minority religious children were drawn from taught Christian charity discourses that include concepts such 'inclusive', 'accepting' and 'welcoming'. Like many of the parents, Lily and Kim perceived the school's religious practices in terms of their generosity towards minority religious children, who are always 'kept part of the class':

> [...] and the likes of the Holy Communion ceremonies, they would always be kept part of the class and have a job [...] and that would be driven by the Principal talking to the parents saying 'if you pull them apart and they are different they will feel different, and if you include them, you do whatever religious thing you want to do, I would like them to stay as part of the class,' she is quite inclusive. Which is good and it is good for all the kids (Lily, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

> [...] out of 27 there was actually 15 children that made their confirmation, but the other children were part of it [...] so they weren't excluded from it [...] they were invited to do that (Kim, Canalside, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Many Catholic parents perceive inclusion through the lens of the schools' hospitality, 'inviting' minority belief/no-religion children to take 'part' in the religious rituals. The concept that their participation in religious practices is 'good for all' means that doing so does not disrupt the harmony of school's Catholic culture. Catholic parents' meaning-making around inclusion is perceived from their perception that their school's religious practices are the only normative reality. Therefore, minority belief/no-religion parents are the ones who make their children 'different' when they do not participate in religious practices in the classroom. Evaluated from the perspective of normative schools' Catholic culture, minority religious parents are viewed as having a 'choice'.

These quotations highlight the embodied Catholic culture and immanent worldview incorporated in parents' habitus that structures their perception of the normativity of schools' religious practices (Bourdieu 1998 in Reay 2004). They outline how Catholicism is 'a cultural ingredient' and the baseline from which parents' meaning-making is generated (Inglis 2014, p.206). Parents' perceptions of religion in Catholic schools are structured through embodied 'practical schemata' that are themselves structured by parents' own schooling and socialisation to constitute schools' Catholic religious practices as the reality (Lizardo 2004. p.376). Since religious practices are normative, these parents do not need to explicitly reflect on religion in their school selection, whereas they individualise religious autonomy for minority religious parents who have the choice for their children to participate or not in religious practices. Therefore, Catholic parents' perceive minority religious parents to be responsible for making their children different/not different. The symbolic power of schools' normative religious practices elides any discussion about the patron structure, or the privileged position of being Catholic that the school patron via religious practices reproduces. Having demonstrated how religious practices are embodied in Catholic parents' cultural habitus and their perceptions of the normativity of religious practices, minority religious parents' experiences are explored next.

Minority religious parents' experiences of exclusion

In contrast to the narratives up to this point, minority religious parents do not have the Catholic capital to choose whether to play the religious game in the school or not. As demonstrated above, religious practices are the micro-performances circulated within schools that refract the patrons' observance but they also produce children's identities as different or not in the

classroom. The performance of religious practices is made possible if parents possess the symbolic capital of the patron: Catholicism. Therefore, being Catholic, no matter the level of belief, practised or otherwise, gives parents the symbolic means for their children's sense of belonging and maintains Catholic patron dominance.

Minority religious parents' experiences of religious practices were expressed in relation to specific incidents that they considered unfair. For example, Grace spoke about how the schools' religious practices caused her child stress.

> [...] we had this trouble that her teacher was telling her all of this about religion [...] And she was really stressed out about it, and she was really struggling with the concept of 'hang on a minute, but my teacher believes this, and you don't mama' [...] and why don't you believe it? Who is right [...] I said I don't want her to feel excluded, she is just trying to integrate [...] in junior infants they need to feel part of things and the teacher said you know I have to teach this [...] So in the end, we decided that my daughter would do religion and fit-in with everyone else, but it created this conflict within her, she was really confused (Grace, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic).

Grace's daughter falls between two stools – the school's Catholic practices and the family's lack of religion; whether to believe her 'teacher' or her 'Mama' – which placed her young mind in a chaos. The lived reality of the school's religion for non-religious children expresses itself in the internalised 'conflict' of messages from two key role models received at a very young age and demonstrates the effects of religious practices on children like Grace's daughter whose family's beliefs are incongruent with the patron. The power of the school's religious culture compelled Grace to submit and leave her child in the religion class to 'fit in'. The symbolic violence of the school's patron's culture is that 'fitting in' is always through the lens of a Catholic normativity that permeates the school norms (Lodge & Lynch 2002). Similarly, Oliver, whose family is non-religious, describes his child's experiences that caused great concern.

> [...] it was quite clear that he was not going to make his Holy Communion and he started to be excluded [...] we became very concerned about the way in which the exclusion was happening in that there were gatherings [...] under the auspices of 'grandparents day', but it was a religious thing and my son and the other boys would be off in a room doing maths and that has a big effect on young children, the exclusion was happening (Oliver, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic).

Rather than Oliver having the right to opt his child out of religious practices, as stated in the Education Act (1998), his son was opted-out of all 'religious'-leaning events, whether he wanted it or not. The 'exclusion' felt by being separated from the class, especially during

celebrations such as 'Grandparents' Day' is constituted by the schools' Catholic culture. Children of other beliefs/no-religion are not recognised. This may be due to a lack of awareness by this school around the effects that such separation causes for minority religious children. Lodge & Lynch's (2002, p.155) study finds that only 1% of teachers are aware that issues related to 'religious identity, race or ethnicity, sexual orientation or disability' are factors that contribute to inequalities. Awareness about the effects of separation on children's self-image and feelings around identity only comes about when religious practices are explicitly contextualised in relation to the specificities of Catholic culture in everyday classroom/school experiences and its normativity and dominant power to privilege one group and exclude the rest. Catholic cultural dialogue is not initiated at the state level. Instead, practices are left to the discretion of the management of each school (Lynch & Lodge 2002). Oliver took his child out when he got a place in a nearby Catholic school, showing that non-belief parents accommodate Catholic culture in their children's interests. The historical opt-out clause is a taken-for-granted normative cultural process that reproduces schools' Catholic culture. Minority belief/no-religion parents are compelled to have their children participate in religious practices in marginal ways to fit in as best they can for the sake of their sense of belonging. Thus, religious practices and the opt-out clause act as direct sources of inequality via misrecognition.

Religious practices in the classroom determine the preconditions for social belonging. The power to define identities constitutes the symbolic power of the Catholic patron. The visibility of religious identities become magnified during the sacrament preparation years.[119] King (2003, p.200) suggests that 'religious rites of passage are unique events that intentionally celebrate and affirm a young person's sense of identity'. Concurrently, religious rites create group identities that disrupt the communal space in a classroom. Hazel, also non-religious, describes her experience of the sacraments' preparation year and the exclusion that manifested through group identities in the classroom.

> [...] every time second class comes up, my shoulders get tense, it's a long year, a lot of time put into Communion [...] Last year I had a bit of trouble[during sixth class, the confirmation year] [...] the children had religion homework and to offset that and make it fair, the non-religious children were given geography homework. So I refused to allow him to do it [...] The vice-principal [...] sought me out and said 'you know he needs', and I said 'the class didn't need geography homework; he is given it to make things equal [...] things aren't equal in that class', it's very much against him, so the one time he got a little bit of something where he had no homework, the teacher felt the need to pacify the other children who were up in arms […]

[119] Second class children prepare for Holy Communion and in sixth class for Confirmation.

> the children who have these sacraments, there is a lot of effort being put into their education whereas my child has a deficit there and then somehow he was still seen as someone who had an advantage (Hazel, Sunnyvale, non-religious, majority ethnic).

The notion of 'fairness' for Catholic children vexed Hazel. Minority belief/no-religion children like her son are left at the back of the classroom daily during religious class. Her child's exclusion from the same 'education' that Catholic children receive is blindly ignored because it is an agreed-upon 'opt-out' rule that is habitual and codified in religious schools and legitimised by the state. However, the unspoken logic of Catholic dominance and privilege that underlies the inequalities of minority beliefs/no-religion is inverted to the Catholic majority group experiencing inequality over homework. Since they were perceived as the victims of unfairness in regard to getting 'religious homework', the minority religious children were given 'geography' homework to create a perceived balance in the classroom. The Catholic majority group is not consciously aware of its privileged dominant position because it is the only common-sense worldview of the classroom it knows (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). The implicit unspoken inequalities that normative Catholic practices produce are only raised when the privileged group's position is ruptured. Catholic culture is the rule that is intelligible for action and thus enables many contradictory possible forms to manifest. Both the vice-principal's and Hazel's argument over fairness held the same implicit distinction in common around 'equality'. This shaped their respective arguments into binary opposites, each of which hinged upon contrasting definitions of equality (Slater 2017). However, the ability to evaluate and argue about the existence of religious practices and the opt-out rule is implicitly *verboten* (Slater 2017). Religious practices and Catholic culture belong to the school qua patron and therefore are not amenable to argument. Instead, the paradox is that the implicit inequality entailments of the school's Catholic culture are the explicit exclusion for minority belief/no-religion children. The legitimacy of Catholic culture in schools lies in its symbolic power to normalise implicit inequality through explicitly intelligible rules such as opt-out and normative religious practices. Normative Catholic culture and minority belief/no-religion is the shared binary in all challenges and discourses related to patronage change. In such challenges, the recourse of Catholic institutions/organisations[120] is always grounded in the

[120] The Catholic Schools Partnership (CSP) (2017), in defense of the impending changes to the admission rules, that Catholic schools could not prioritise children from families of Catholic religious belief, states that 'parents from a Catholic tradition seeing himself/herself being treated less favourably than parents from minority faith traditions' (ibid., p.6). Similarly, the Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS) (2017) report states that 'a desire to accommodate minority denominational group was more in evidence than was a corresponding concern for Catholic patrons' (ibid., p.4).

term ‘equal’ rights (e.g. CSP 2017; ATCS 2017). The normative Catholic culture is the background against which Catholic institutions/organisations compare themselves in arguments over religious resources around minority belief/no-religion in the patronage school system to demand hold of their privileged dominant position. Minority belief/no-religion families do not misrecognise the explicit forms of inequalities; however like Hazel, Oliver and Grace, they can only contest individual incidents. All the while, the historically opt-out clause is a taken-for-granted normative cultural process that reproduces schools’ Catholic culture. Thus, religious practices and the opt-out clause act as direct sources of inequality via misrecognition.

Interestingly, the minority ethnic, minority belief parents such as Anna were fine with religious practices because the school does not ‘force anyone to do’ religion (Anna, Sunnyvale, Evangelical, minority ethnic). Again, the explicit rules coded into the system are only intelligible against the background norms that are implicit in practice (Brandon 2011 cited in Slater 2017). Similarly, Laura was content that her children did not ‘feel’ ‘left out’ because they are ‘with other kids of different religion’ (Laura Sunnyvale, Evangelical, minority ethnic). Both Anna and Laura pragmatically conform to the collective normativity of Catholic religious practices in the school. Like all minority religious parents, they have no option but to negotiate and adjust to the normative Catholic culture. Parents contest inequalities when issues relevant to their children arise and if they feel they can make some impact, while the larger cultural structure is beyond their power. A focus on parents’ perceptions of religious practices through their experiences and engagement gives insights into the dynamic interplay between the school patron structure and Catholic culture, via religious practices. How local contexts impact parents’ perceptions and engagement, and whether they conform to, contest or see possibilities to reconstruct religious practices, is discussed next.

Local social relations and cultural religious traditions

Catholic culture is not just bound within the walls of schools but permeates routine interactions with family, friends and neighbours across local communities. For example, First Communion is a tradition that symbolically foregrounds a milestone in a child’s life and holds collective significance in the Irish family and its social world (Kitching 2020; Inglis 2007; 2014).

Traditional religious rituals mediate social pleasantries with calls to order to the cultural norm. For example,

> I had another friend ask me 'are you going to do Communion?, you will have to nail your colours to the mast now', but we're not Catholic, it's not a conversation we would have. People see it as a tradition [...] see there's not a lot of religion during the day [...] but they are making Brigit's crosses and drawing pictures of the cross [...] they are not thinking of that as religion [...] and everyone is like, 'Oh you are making your communion' because she is seven [...] It's just a passing phase, people don't even think, and they get embarrassed when you say no [...] Or 'ah, getting your ears pierced, 'Oh, get them pierced now around the Communion time', there are all these (Hazel, Sunnyvale, non-religious, majority ethnic).

Hazel's reflexive consciousness of Catholic culture arises from her non-religious disposition, which does not fit seamlessly with the school's culture and local social relations. In comparison, for Catholic parents, Communion is the 'product of the practical sense' of the way of life; it is the 'tradition' (Rey 2007, p.45). The collective power of internalised Catholic culture orients a societal 'call to order' towards parents of minority beliefs/no-religion like Hazel to 'nail her colour to the mast' about Communion (Bottero 2010). Such an idiom underlies the idea that minority religious families have a choice to go with or against such ritual norms. Bottero (2010, pp.13–14) argues that the 'call to order from the group' represents a 'component feature of the collective accomplishment' of cultural practices, such as religious practices/sacramental rituals. As such, families not affiliated with the normative Catholic culture of society can only act according to the expectations of those they encounter in situational social interactions (Bottero 2010).

It cannot be said that minority religious parents passively consent to the norms of culture and religious rituals locally. New forms of play of traditional religious rituals are invented. For example,

> I remember last year [...] there was a little girl who had a non-Communion party [...] what – have a non-Communion party for, but other than that it just passes, it's just they take the lead in something else (Sarah, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Sarah could not understand why a minority religious parent actively transformed the normative nature of a sacramental celebration. This was incomprehensible to her because it went against the collective social order, the normative ways of doing things. The 'non-Communion party' was an antithesis to the occasion of Communion that symbolises a Catholic communal tradition. Celebrating a child's Communion' carried and communicated cultural meanings

‘inscribed within a symbolic system’ of social order around religious identities (Gauthier 2019, pp.173–4). The minority religious parent’s innovative, non-Communion party was contesting Catholic culture because she/he saw themselves outside its norm and it could evidence change within society’s traditions. Nonetheless, Sarah’s sense that the school’s culture enables minority religious children to ‘take the lead’ at other times maintains the symbolic power of Catholic culture and its normativity in creating inclusion/exclusion around religious identities.

Parents are part of a larger social structure where the tapestry of living is interwoven in intersubjective social relationships that individuals negotiate and coordinate in seeking recognition from and by others through their actions, e.g. to belong (Atkinson 2020; Bottero 2010). Such recognition processes in actions/practices are worked between ‘embodied dispositions, routine self (and other) monitoring, reflexive accounts and accountability and collective obligations and influence’ (Bottero 2010, p.15). The production of identities and conditions of affiliation for belonging are evaluated through recognition processes, the unconscious/conscious practicalities embedded in social relations, routines and practices (Bottero 2010). As shown previously, the school patron contributes to the production of local religious identities, and Catholic religious practices define the boundary of belonging. Religious practices and rituals, as has been shown, express the symbolic power of the Catholic patron to reproduce itself over generations and refract through local culture. Catholic culture is a socio-cultural way of life that is locally contextual for how parents engage in schools’ religious practices.

The possibilities for restructuring traditional religious practices

Religious practices hold possibilities for Catholic parents to reconstruct traditional religious practices; however, this is dependent on social conditions locally. To explain further, before Liz moved to Sunnyvale, she lived in a city location with various patron types in the local school system. Her son attended the ET school which provided the ideal condition to have his religious formation outside of school. Liz, self-identified as a practicing Catholic who goes to ‘mass every Sunday’ and did not like that Communion was ‘the done thing’ for many parents in Catholic schools. Therefore, having the preparation for religious rituals outside of school was ‘lovely’, as she describes.

> [...] my eldest son's Communion, it was lovely, he had to do an hour extra after-school, the parents that came together and we organised that Communion. And up to the week before his Communion, he never knew that there was money in a card. It was only that his friend in the Catholic school [...] had his Communion and said "I made whatever money" and [...] I said 'oh no, it's all about the sacrament' [...] What kind of frustrates me, [...] are the ones that are there for the big days, that kind of 'oh we have to do Communion because it's the done-thing'[...] I feel here [Sunnyvale] because it is a Catholic school and it is the done-thing, people would be saying 'but why aren't you?' (Liz, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Religious preparation outside of the Catholic school enabled a distinction between Catholics like Liz and materialistic Catholics like her son's 'friend's' family. Kitching (2020) identifies such differentiations as authentic/inauthentic Catholics, where the former represents reverence in comparison to the materialistic consumptions of the latter. The active performance of the religion outside of 'Catholic school' showed commitment, in contrast to it being 'the done thing'. However, when Liz moved to Sunnyvale, the local Catholic cultural norms constituted social 'calls to order' (Bottero 2010, p.16). She feels that there is social pressure for all the children to make their Communion through the local Catholic school, because to do otherwise would arouse suspicion. Therefore, conforming to the Catholic cultural normativity of religious education and sacraments' preparation in the school is maintained in localities where no other patron type is available. This highlights how denominational schools and their communities mutually reinforce and reproduce the Catholic cultural norm.

Whereas different patron types such as Educate Together in the local school system bestow social acceptability for parents to have their children's religious formation (education) outside of school. Daisy, also a self-identified practising Catholic, knows the 'country' way of doing 'Catholic school(ing)' culture with its links to the GAA, but, now that she is 'in Canalside', 'the local village' Protestant patron 'school' was her 'priority'(Daisy, Canalside, Catholic, majority ethnic). Therefore, attending another patron school gives Catholic parents the social conditions acceptable to the social 'call to order' locally to reconstruct the tradition of religious practices to 'after school', as Daisy explained.

> [...] religion teachers that come and they just do an hour after school [...] parents organize that [...] Now, maybe it's this part of Canalside, the dresses are beautiful [...] but there isn't the same kind of hype about you know [...] down the country its bouncy castle, bouncy castle, bouncy castle. They're still there a week later (Daisy, Canalside, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Having their children's religious formation 'after school' enables parents to come together and form a social network group with the same collective religious affirmation. The group's sacramental rituals' preparation outside the Catholic schools is expressed through aesthetic

differences (Swartz 1997). The materiality of 'Communion' events 'down the country' hold euphemisms that distinguish the more refined authentic celebrations amongst families in this particular upper-middle-class location. Kitching's (2020) study finds that parents' 'Catholic-centric, classed, racialised and gendered types of judgement' were tied to children's participation in religion (ibid., location no. 2766). Similar to parents' narratives in this study, the materialism of 'some families who were purely there for the day out' was indicated to by a priest in Kitching's (2020) study in relation to his 'concern for the sacredness of the sacrament' (ibid., location no. 2776). Such discourses illuminate how institutional power in constructing the notion of materialistic Catholics influence the perpetuation of stigma to 'others' that do not conform to the perceived collective way of being Catholic. Another parent, Olivia would have liked to have had the option of such a scenario (religious preparation outside of school) in Sunnyvale. In addition, as a self-identified 'practising Catholic', Olivia's preference was for an ET school because it would allow her to move her children's religious formation outside of school time. Here she describes why she preferred an ET patron.

> [...] my brother-in-law's children go to an Educate Together [...] and it just sounds fantastic [...] it's all inclusive and they have made their sacraments in their own time which seems better to me because the parents come together and they do the preparation outside of school and it kind of creates a nice little club around that for the year [...] a lot of the time people are making their Holy Communion and they never go to Mass, they don't have anything to do with religion but they are doing it from school anyway [...] (Olivia, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic).

Olivia differentiated herself from parents who 'never go to Mass' and leave their children's religious formation to the school, which she sees as an enabler of passive belief. Her desired 'Educate Together' patron would facilitate her children's 'Catholic' religious formation within a 'nice little club' of like-minded parents committed to their faith. This club would separate authentic parents dedicated to their children's religious formation from those who 'don't have anything to do with religion' (Kitching 2020). Authentic Catholicism and materialism as a distinction connected to Communion events is a type of morally classed boundary-making (Kitching 2020) that is enabled and legitimised in local social life through attendance at one of the few minority religious schools (10% nationally). Whether the local parish priest, as discussed earlier, is aware or not of the possibilities for religious practices' transformation that attending an ET school would provide to Catholic parents, his message to his congregation during Mass was that one of their Catholic schools was not divesting to the ET patron (Olivia, Sunnyvale). ET schools hold the possibility of Catholic parents reconfiguring religious practices embedded in Catholic schools in a way that has the potential to disrupt the cultural

process of reproducing the Catholic patron. Therefore, as the parish priest who carries out the functions of the patron (on behalf of the Catholic bishop) and leader of the local Catholic community, he may be attempting to limit how his congregation accesses an ET patron, but he cannot predict how parents will respond when an ET patron eventually comes to Sunnyvale. Bringing religious practices outside of Catholic schools reconstitutes the tradition of religious practices and rituals in the school system but is dependent on local systems having other patron types in city/urban locations and an ET patron in rural locations. The legacy of historical boundaries around Catholic/Protestant schools in the parish system continues today as the Protestant school is not considered by some of the parents in the rural locations.

Concluding remarks

By examining parents' perceptions of 'patron' and 'religious practices', this chapter has revealed the entanglements and interconnections between children, parents, families, teachers/principals, school and the local community's social relations. The patron is embedded in parents' school selection because the patronage system is the embodied schema and taken-for-granted structure through which their decision-making is processed. The city's school system structure with its different patron types represented the reality that school enrolment required knowledge of patrons' admission criteria, while in the rural sites, the nature of perceptions of the patron was influenced by the parents' Catholic habitus. For many, it was the way of schooling that granted the patron a 'recognition that escapes questioning' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.98).

By integrating parents' experiences of the National Parent Survey in the study, this chapter has revealed that the Catholic patron is a repository of cultural resources that is important to parents in their school selection. While most parents were not aware of or interested in the survey, the Catholic schools that campaigned were usually those with a more diverse population. This raises a question about schools being sanctioned the power by the state to disseminate information to parents (Coolahan et al., 2012). The Forum Report (2012) was politically mindful and cognisant of historical political contestations[121] in matters relating to education's 'cultural co-optation' with religion (O'Sullivan 2005, p.490). Hence, it called for no 'plebiscites or large town hall gatherings' but instead urged that 'the solution, for the common good, needs to be sought in a calm, respectful and reasonable way' (Coolahan et al.

[121] For example, the setting up of the ET school (1978); and the Education Bill (1997) and its proposal of Regional Education Boards (see Chapter 1).

2012, p.57). This chapter has illuminated the Catholic patron in positioning itself as the custodian of the common good. The Catholic patron's proactive campaign raised the term 'patron' from the unarticulated doxa to the orthodoxy by means of threats to culture's traditional religious rituals and instigated parents' responses to endorse the patron. Cultural repertoires rekindle traditional communal memories to create solidarity amongst the Catholic majority's parent choice decision-making in defence of their patron. The symbiotic relations between the Catholic patron's traditional religious rituals and national sentimentality constitute the symbolic power of traditional religious rituals that are embedded in the cultural way of family life for the majority, thereby demonstrating that religion is an implicit criterion for many parents' school selection.

This chapter has demonstrated that religious practices are an embedded and normalised part of school life. None of the parents questioned the existence of religious practices because they represent the reality of the patronage school system structure. For Catholic parents, schools' religious practices produce an inherent feeling of naturalness intrinsic to the schooling they experienced (Verdery 1994, p.48). Parents' Catholic habitus are the sedimentations of life-experience and social conditioning for ways of being and relating and underlie the production of their meaning-making of inclusivity for minority religious children (Bottero 2010). Minority religious children's differences in the classroom were perceived as related to their parents' choice to include or exclude their children in relation to religious practices. This concept of choice echoes nationalist education policy enactments that valorise choice (Kitching 2020). The parents' blindness to the classroom's Catholic culture in the name of inclusivity enabled them to acknowledge religious differences while delegitimising minority religious identity (Raveaud 2008). The harmony between the school's religious practices and parents' Catholic habitus is grounded in the inextricable dialectic between the parents' accumulation of experiences in Catholic schools and the embedded tradition of religious rituals in family life. Patronage and religious practices are the operational processes of the schools' Catholic culture that bring about parents' participation, e.g. to belong; to be part of traditional family rituals; not to be different. Religious practices in the classroom constitute families' and children's identities in relation to their beliefs/no belief, thereby setting the limits of the levels of belonging. In this way, having Catholic capital enabled non-practising/lapsed Catholic parents' children to fit in seamlessly by participating in religious practices for the sake of their sense of belonging. Belonging reflects the interest in and reason

for participating in religious practices and in turn reflects the patron's symbolic power in reproducing itself and Catholic culture in the school system.

Catholic religious practices are the symbolic system of social relations in the classroom and give legitimacy to minority beliefs/no-religion parents' desire for an ET patron for their children's schooling. Schools' Catholic religious practices impose continual negotiations/renegotiations of distinctions and integrations and encounters of conflicts upon minority beliefs/no-religion parents (Bell 1992). Religious practices destabilise minority religious children's social belonging in the classroom. While minority religious parents' contestations over religious practices are around equality as related to individual incidents, the existence of religious practices and the taken-for-granted opt-out clause are never amenable to discussion. Religious practices are the normative bedrock of the patronage school system structure and give legitimacy to a diversity of patrons. The misrecognition and non-recognition that minority belief/no-religion children experience is a product of the symbolic power of the Catholic patron's religious practices and the existence of a patronage school system and its opt-out rule that give parents the right to remove their children from religious education during the school day (Constitution 1937; Education Act 1998).

I have also demonstrated how religious practices impose and naturalise a way of living, acting, and knowing how to conform within local social community relations. Participation in religious practices, a symptom of parents' interest in their children's belonging in the Catholic school, in turn reproduces the Catholic school culture that permeates the local cultural system. The Catholic cultural way of life emerges as a pre-reflexive response in friendly interactions locally, e.g. when a young girl is of age, Communion is played off in convivial social interactions, 'ah, getting your ears pierced' (Hazel, Sunnyvale, non-religious, majority ethnic). Such convivial social interactions reveal the degree to which religious practices, rituals and Catholic culture 'diffuse throughout the mental life' (Widick 2005, p.703). The call to order regarding what is acceptable is always dependent on local contexts and the nature of the collective group. Social calls to order hold possibilities for self-identified, practising Catholics to differentiate themselves from materialistic Catholics who only participate in religious practices/rituals for the sake of 'the done thing'. Reconfiguring traditional religious practices outside the Catholic school depends on the social condition of a diversity of patron types in the local school system. Attending a multi-denominational, and/or minority belief school in the city, – as Protestant schools do not tend to be considered by Catholic parents in rural school systems — gives Catholic parents legitimacy within local social calls to order to create after

school 'clubs' for their children's religious instruction and sacramental preparations. Parents are not merely working from a set of inscribed cognitive operations generating habitual practices but also from meanings that participate in the value-laden socio-cultural order in the wider local community (Reay 2004). The collective norm of religious practices in school and social life locally expresses the symbolic power of Catholic schools to reproduce Catholic culture locally. The local priest declaring that the 'ET' patron will not get one of the local Catholic schools through divesting indicates the power of Catholic religious practices in schools to reproduce the patron. While an ET patron in the local school system might disrupt the reproduction of Catholic patron dominance in local school systems, it would not affect the reproduction of Catholic culture between the local school system and community. A corollary of an ET patron in the local school system is that it would re-constitute Catholic religious practices into two distinct groups of the large Catholic group of school-going children, viz, authentic Catholics and the rest, which also produces classed and majority/minority ethnic distinctions. This reveals how religion is intertwined with classed and majority/minority ethnic distinctions in parents' school selection.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore parents' primary school selection-making experiences in Ireland by investigating the socio-cultural relations between parents and the primary school patronage system within which they made their decision. The sanctioning of parent choice policy (2012), as recommended by the 'Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector' report (2012), to reshape the patronage system to meet the needs of a more diverse society and the subsequent National Parent Survey (2012; 2013) that identified parents' preferred patron (primarily an ET patron) to which existing Catholic schools would divest has been an opportune frame within which to explore how parents' selected their primary school. Divestment has been almost negligible to date with only three schools, one a closed Catholic patron and the other a Protestant patron school divesting to an ET patron (DES 2014), and one Catholic patron school divesting to a CNS, as discussed in Chapter 1. Legal and social complexities from the foundation of the Irish State were pointed to by the then Minister for Education, Jan O'Sullivan, in 2016 as reasons for the almost negligible divestment (DES 2016). In the meantime, Catholic schools claimed 'our parents are happy' and did not want a change of patron (Walshe 2014, p.89).

This study has returned to three of the sites in the 'Report on the surveys regarding parental preferences on primary school patronage' (2013) to contribute to the small body of research on primary school parent choice in Ireland (e.g. Kitching 2020; Darmody & Smyth 2018) by exploring the parents' experiences of their primary school decision-making and gaining insights into how patron and religion were entangled in shaping their selection process. Kitching (2020) identified white-Irish Catholic majoritarianism in the workings of parents' school selection and children's schooling. Smyth et al. (2010) found that religion was not an explicit criterion for many parents in their school choice, however, it was a factor for parents of minority religious beliefs and no belief. Darmody & Smyth (2018) suggested that religion may be implicit in parents' school choice since the majority of primary schools are Catholic patronage. In this study, the parents were not explicitly asked about patronage and religion at the outset of the interviews in order to see if these factors played implicit roles in their school selection. When patron and religion were not brought up by the parents in their stories around their school decision-making, I followed up with direct questions on these topics. My study

took on board the consistent finding in the literature that school choice is a locally-specific process with local meanings around expressing and enacting identities rather than informed by an underlying rational decision-making as choice policies assume (Byrne & De Tona 2019; Bunar & Ambrose 2016; Ball 2003; 2006).

The central question that has guided this study was: *What are parents' experiences of decision-making and selecting their children's primary school in Ireland?* In addressing this overall question, a sub-question helped to focus this inquiry: *How do parents negotiate their school selection process and children's schooling with regard to patronage and religion?* The study has illustrated how the parents' selection-making process was framed by the local primary school systems' patronage structure and aspects of aspirations they held for their children that differed in terms of their local socio-cultural relations and accumulation and compositions of cultural, social and economic capital.

The main argument of this thesis is that the patronage school system is a pre-determined structure in parents' selection process across all sites and is the normative base from which the parents constructed and strategised their school decisions. As a consequence, the local school systems' context framed how the parents selected their school. The local patronage primary school systems in the two rural sites differed from the city school system in that the rural sites are predominantly Catholic patronage schools with one Protestant patron school in comparison to the city site which has a diversity of patron types: Catholic patronage, three different Protestant denomination patrons, a multi-denominational patron and a non-Christian religion patron school. The parents' perceptions of the patron across all sites were similarly constituted from a pre-constructed, normative primary school patronage system, whose existence was never questioned or challenged. In the rural locations, the patron was granted recognition by many parents that escaped questioning and operated unconsciously as a pre-reflective knowing that the local school was Catholic. Many Catholic parents did not need to think about patronage in their decision-making because they were working from the 'normative standards' of the cultural workings, i.e. their embodied knowing from their experiences growing up that the schools were Catholic (Swartz 1997). Catholic majority ethnic parents' experiences, backgrounds, dispositions and interpretative schemes of thought knew the primary schools and the local parish Church are one-and-the-same. In comparison, parents in the city location were conscious of the patrons because of the different types in the system and perceived the patrons in relation to their admission criteria for strategising access to their desired school. Across all sites, a number of the parents' desired a multi-denominational

patron; however, their reasons differed depending on the families' religious belief/no-religion status. Although the local primary school system from which the parents' made their school decision impacted the parents' different perceptions of the patron, their school decision-making was not simply the product of the local patronage structure, as they brought their habitus, schemes of thinking, their social relations and capital to the process.

Chapter 5 demonstrated how the parents' local school selection for community belonging intersects with the Church and GAA in the family way of parish life that was embedded in the habitus of the majority ethnic parents. The community is a symbolic system through which forms of belonging, socialisation and identities/position-taking are processed between parents/families and communal spaces (parish school, Church and GAA). Historically, the parochial system gave shape to everyday practices and social relations through the family, the Church and schooling and developed a collective Irish Catholic cultural habitus in its function (Inglis 2007), as outlined in Chapter 1. Residues of the parochial system are still lived out in parents' school decisions. A community way of living was the framework in which the parents manifested their perception and practical orientation, and gave meaning to their school selection. The local school symbolised the community's social relations for developing children's socialisation and anchoring their sense of self and belonging. Those parents with intergenerational links to the community embodied its culture of shared dispositions, understandings, ways of being and sense of belonging which altogether constituted the obvious default local school selection. The local schools' familial links were incorporated into the family's self-identity to constitute a sense of responsibility to maintain its existence and in turn, develop their children's local social capital. Nonetheless, their aspirations for their children's educational trajectory and socialisation were paramount in their school selection and schooling. Although causing parents' emotional tension, when issues arose in relation to their children's needs, they broke the familial link with the local school. The importance of community belonging meant that these parents intensified their social relation-building in the other communal spaces, viz, the Church and/or the GAA, showing the centrality of the parochial system in family life.

The majority ethnic parents who moved to the locality for work reasons brought their experiences of the cultural workings of the family way of parish life and transferred this know-how to their school decision-making process. They knew the cultural workings of the parish/community family way of life through their life- experiences growing up, as well as the logic of its structure and the family's interrelations between school, the Church and the GAA.

The parish school's associations with the GAA and the Church established a set of cognitive presuppositions, the silent doxa that conditioned parents' decisions in their school selection. In contrast, the minority ethnic parents did not have the dispositional know-how of local socio-cultural relations in the parochial system. Minority ethnic families work at integrating into the local community through the school because their 'difference' is refracted by the school and the community's culture that operate normatively. The local school is seen as a means for their children to build resilience in regard to their 'difference'. The power of the normative parish/community national Catholic culture is that minority ethnic families self-identified as 'different'. These families find solace in a school that is diverse because they are less completely part of the community. They are also not endowed with the sense of belonging that Irish ethnic families can readily create or sustain. For ethnic minority families, from the point of view of community integration, the local school is 'an imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power' (Bourdieu & Passerson 1977a, p.18 cited in Grenfell 2008, p.184). Misrecognition operates through an arbitrary parish way of life between the primary school, the Church and the GAA that is so naturalised that families' social relations are transformed into levels of belonging locally that marginalise mainly minority ethnic families. Belonging is organized by a set of relational practices of family-making mobilised to support a vision of community without raising the question of the conditions of access which involves the 'accumulation and transmission of cultural and symbolic privileges' (Bourdieu 1998, p.69).

The dynamics of diversity in the parents' accounts of schools is that it is valued by majority ethnic parents for its potential to develop their children's multi-cultural consumption, tolerance and know-how in a cosmopolitan world of ethnic and classed diversity. However, such valued 'diversity' is acceptable only to a limit: parents' routine surveillance of diversity quota in the classroom is primarily focused on the 'under-privileged' and 'disadvantaged' because of fears for their children's educational and socialisation trajectory. The parents' sense of their position in their local social world are always constructed through relations that constitute individuals'/groups' as either 'like us' or 'not like us'. Known internal local coding between the country and town/village schools in the rural locations were operated to regulate classed and ethnic boundaries in parents' school selection. Parents' perceptions of town/village and country schools were constituted through schemes of social ordering depending on their self-positioning in setting the schools apart (tough/safe; bad/good behaviour; disadvantaged/like-minded middle-class; grounded/airs; normal/accent; respect/arrogance). Such dichotomies continuously enabled parents to orientate their school

selection with ‘people like us’ (Byrne 2009). The country school and town/village school distinctions in parents’ narratives were not constructed in a vacuum but built on historical social attitudes that were implicitly classed. The scheme of social ordering in the urban/rural dichotomy reveals consistency with the historical-cultural construct of urban/rural distinctions that served state-making purposes, as discussed in Chapter 1 (Horgan 2004). The romanticism of rural life, with its representations of communalism and morality in comparison to the urban poor, was portrayed by the state and Church in nationalist ideology concerning the Catholic way of parochial life (Horgan 2004).

The country schools’ homogeneous Irish Catholic and broadly middle-class populations were facilitated by parameters of constraints around economic, cultural and social capital to give them symbolic meaning for securing children’s social milieu. Attending a country school by families in the town required capital (e.g. time and transport). Although the composition of the town/village schools are classed and ethnically diverse, the local town/village school selection by the parents in this study revealed that the school ‘diversity’ was well-managed to maintain their children’s broad middle-class socialisation by separating home life from school. Furthermore, GAA activities facilitated children’s socialisation because ethnic minorities did not usually tend to join the club. Thus, the valued diversity is acceptable only to a limit in the selected school, however, when it comes to their children’s socialisation outside of school, diversity is reduced to an irrelevance in their lives. The school was acknowledged to include diversity but only as a separate sphere of family community life. Hence, the community’s cultural way of living held locally coded forms of identity-markers worked through constructs of ‘affinity and aversion’ that were inherently known and routinely operated in family life and schooling in the socialisation of children (Bourdieu 1987, p.7). The cultural interrelations of GAA and Church with schooling and family life show that community is produced from within, through the interactions between individuals.

In comparison, the distinctive profiles associated with the different patron types in the city school system constituted parents’ strategies in relation to their admission processes. Chapter 6 has demonstrated that the city’s school system’s competitive nature only arose between perceived higher status sought after schools: Protestant schools, Gaelscoils and the multi-denominational school that required inner knowledge to access places. The historical Protestant and Gaelscoil social prestige, as discussed in Chapter 2, is embodied in their present-day symbols. High-demand schools’ hierarchical status are safeguarded through covert admission practices that convey religion as the prioritised criterion, as evidenced in

parents' perception of not getting a place in Protestant schools through claims that 'we were low down on the priority list because of the religion' (Julie, Canalside, Catholic, majority ethnic). Religion is the capital in the patronage primary school system's admission policies as the multi-denominational patron does not give priority to minority belief and no-religion families. This leaves 'no-religion' with no value in the system. As one non-religious parent stated, 'people with no religion in this country are below every other religion' (Oliver, Canalside, non-religious, majority ethnic). Non-religious parents were despondent in not gaining access to the multi-denominational school because of its high demand and ambiguous first-come, first-served admission criteria. This left them with no option but to compete against religious families in accessing places at the remaining Catholic and minority faith schools. However, religion intersects with class and ethnicity in the workings between parents' socio-cultural relations and the sought-after Protestant, Catholic-patron Gaelscoils and multi-denominational schools. The rules of the game for access to sought-after school places in the intra-middle-class struggle are played out in the differential associations in parents' social networks regarding contiguity with and interconnections to the school (Bottero & Prandy 2003). Schools' prestigious positions were reflected in parents' practical sense of their own positions that constituted their beliefs about gaining/not gaining access. Therefore, differences between the parents' social and cultural capital in regard to accessing school places appeared arbitrary, natural and inevitable (Crossley 2008). High-status schools actively determined the parameters of parent 'choice' to maintain the intra-middle-class competition for accessing school places. The most prestigious sought-after schools such as one of the Gaelscoils are thus in a position to select from the upper-middle-class parent group, thereby maintaining their symbolic position as an elite school. The Protestant schools are in a similar position due to their sought-after status, small size and the improbability of another Protestant patron school being established. Establishing an ET school allows new position-takings to become possible within the primary school patronage system for the middle-classes struggling to access elite schools. Parents' position-taking and strategising to gain access to perceived high-status schools reflect the internal logic of the hierarchical school system's structure of difference that retains relative autonomy vis-à-vis these schools' selective selection, such that, the classed and ethnic culture of constraints and possibilities can be said to be relatively autonomous in respect to the local social structure (Emirbayer & Johnson 2008).

The class and ethnic subtleties, nuances, and sometimes distinct differences between schools are the product of parents' boundary-making, parental responsibility and fear for their

children's socialisation entwined within the complexity of the social trajectories, i.e. position-taking/aspirations of middle-class families in school choice (Ball 2003). This study corroborates with the view in the literature (e.g. Byrne & De Tona 2019; Kitching 2020), that choice is a social construct that advantages the white middle-classes with access to social and cultural capital specific to the local school system context. Although many of the large Catholic, English-medium schools are more socially and ethnically diverse, this is probably due to their dominance (90%) in the primary school system. There were differences between Catholic schools: DEIS Catholic schools were specifically avoided by many parents in this study because of their 'tough' reputation and population 'mix'. It is not the intent of this study to judge parents but rather to reveal the operation of classed and ethnic dispositions, perceptions and values and the role of capital that local patronage school systems and choice policy perpetuate. The parents' separation of their children from families deemed disadvantaged and under-privileged were expressed through discourses around such families' behaviour and lack of educational motivation, which operate as historical constructs in education. The state and the Catholic Church's lay organisations such as CORI and Mater Dei have perpetuated the construction of the disadvantaged through responsive policy actions to combat inequalities (Fahey 1998). As discussed in Chapter 1, the disadvantaged are distinguishable bounded identities perceived as educationally unmotivated and at risk of dropping out of the system, distributed across individuals/families and locations (O'Sullivan 2005; Fahey 1998). The ideology of meritocracy locates educational failure in individuals/families, thus eliding any focus on social structures and political accountability.

I have argued in Chapter 7 that Catholic religious practices/rituals express the symbolic capital and power of Catholic schools because they are legitimate, normative and reproduce Catholic culture across local school systems and the surrounding social world. Children's religious identity as either different/not different and belonging in the classroom are constructed through religious practices, which drives non-practising/lapsed Catholic parents to comply and allow their children to participate. The performance of religious practices is only possible if parents possess the symbolic capital of the patron, therefore, being Catholic, irrespective of the level of belief, practising or not, gives parents the symbolic means for their children's sense of belonging and maintains Catholic patronage dominance in the school system. The consequence for minority religious children is that they can only gain partial integration through involvement with the choir or orchestra in religious rituals.

This study has demonstrated how the implicit inequalities of Catholic religious practices were only raised by the teacher when the privileged Catholic majoritarian group's position was ruptured in the classroom. Catholic culture is symbolically hijacked in the notion that the Catholic majoritarian group is treated less favourably in relation to minority beliefs and no-religious children, e.g. in regard to their being set religious homework, in comparison to the minority beliefs and non-religious children. Catholic culture, however, is the rule that enables many contradictory possibilities of intelligible forms of action to manifest around inequalities. Normative Catholic culture on the one hand and minority belief/no-religion on the other hand is the shared binary in challenges and discourses around equality that stem from the patron's religious practices. All the while, the opt-out rule that legitimises the patron's religious practices is never challenged. Article 44's conscious clause of religious freedom (Irish Constitution 1937) gives parents the right to withdraw their children from religious instruction in schools that receive state-funding while reproducing the dominant Catholic culture in the school system. Minority beliefs and no-religion parents are compelled to include their children in religious practices in marginal ways to fit in as best they can for their sense of belonging in the school. Thus, religious practices and the opt-out clause act as direct sources of inequality. A focus on parents' perceptions of engagement in religious practices through their experiences gives insights into the dynamic interplay of the effects of Catholic cultural reproduction that goes by mindlessly as doxa. The symbolic power of Catholic culture's doxa in the school is that it is denied recognition of its effects on minority religious children, as Catholic parents are culture-blinded in relation to religious practices. The compromised dynamics of 'inclusion' narrated by Catholic parents through associations of hospitality towards minority religious children; and perceptions that art classes, e.g. making 'Brigit's crosses' were secular to all except minority religious parents; were shaped by a collective Catholic cultural habitus that in turn, shaped a sense of the limited effects of religious practices. Catholic, majority ethnic parents tended to individualise religious autonomy, perceiving minority religious parents as having a choice to allow/or not their children's participation in religious practices. Thereby, attributing responsibility to minority religious parents for their children's 'difference' in the classroom.

This thesis contributes to Kitching's (2020) study, by showing how the traditional rituals of Communion and Confirmation are habitual dispositions, internalised in the majority of families' way of life and form part of the schematic logic of schooling and navigation in social life. The arbitrary character of Catholic culture's power relations in pre-reflexive

convivial social interactions/pleasantries locally, especially when a child is of Communion age, e.g. such remarks as 'ah getting your ears pierced' (Hazel, Meadowlands, non-religious, majority ethnic), illuminates dominant thinking that does not recognise other realities. The relations between religious practices that constitute children's difference, parents' aspirations for their children's belonging and social interactions in the surrounding world are the Catholic patron's power in reproducing Catholic culture and heritage that 'diffuse(s) throughout the mental life' (Widick 2005, p.703) in schooling and across local society.

This study has illuminated how the National Parent Survey (2013) and the possibility of divestment threatened Catholic schools which had a diversity of students because of the risk that minority belief/no-religion parents posed to patron change on the one hand, and the risk that Catholic parents would not recognise the relevance of the survey because the patron was a taken-for-granted normative – not reflective of the everyday routine of their children's schooling – on the other hand. The survey and divestment challenged these Catholic schools to raise their patron from the doxa to the orthodoxy with rhetoric around religious rituals to facilitate a collective mobilisation of solidarity in maintaining their control of the reproduction of inherent Catholic heritage norms in family life. Indeed, Bourdieu (1971) maintains that orthodoxy emerges in times of field struggles over the 'monopoly of cultural legitimacy' by calling into existence the 'logic of distinction that operates in cultural fields', in this instance, religious rituals (ibid. cited in Swartz 1997, p.127). The power designated to schools by the state to disseminate information about the survey meant that the level, type and who received it was determined by local schools which were predominantly Catholic patronage, especially in rural areas. Catholic schools that campaigned during the survey period carried the authority of the common good in regard to Catholic parents' maintaining its patronage. Knowing that religious rituals are distinctive embedded cultural traditions in Irish family life, Catholic patrons purposefully activated them to generate emotional reactions in Catholic parents. Contestation of divestment is centred around the Catholic patron safeguarding its dominance against the ET patron in local school systems. The concept of winners and losers, the logic of neoliberal choice, is the game that Catholic schools have deployed. The historical conditions of the Catholic population's majority and the Church's struggle for power in the national school system over the first four decades after its establishment (1837), gave the Catholic patron power to produce and reproduce the traditional ways of Irish national and parochial family life, and in turn, access to use traditional religious rituals as threats because of their symbolic power. Catholic traditional rituals are the internal logic of schooling and the social

world for the majority of families, reproduced and interpreted as natural and never cognised until threatened with extinction. Catholic patronage schools, in emanating the cultural heritage of the majority of the population, hence hold the power in the patronage primary school system where religion is the symbolic capital. Thus, the symbolic power of Catholic heritage culture lies in the Catholic patron's autonomy.

This thesis provides distinctive insights into the patronage school system's symbolic power to legitimate religion, Catholic culture and the classed and ethnic order of society by engaging parents' adherence to the established order via patrons' admission policies and schooling. By drawing on Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field, and their relations to social positions, dispositions and position-taking in parents' school decision-making, it has demonstrated the patronage school system's structure of cultural power, via patron and religion, which constitutes Catholic, white Irish and broadly middle-class culture. The patronage school system produces a form of recognition by parents of the social order implied by the arbitrariness of its foundations in the classification of schools that appears natural and self-evident. The rules of the patronage structure lie in its patrons' admission criteria around religion and/or first-come, first-served, but lost from view are the social and cultural inequalities and differential power relationships also present.

The demographic expansion of the middle-classes and the increased ethnic diversity of Irish society since the mid-1990s, as discussed in Chapter 1, have led to increased competition for places in minority faith, Gaelscoils and multi-denominational schools where they are available in local school systems. Entry to these schools is only available to middle-class families with the right accumulation of cultural, social and economic capital. My thesis contributes to the literature that finds that increased school types e.g. state-funded private schools in local school systems increase class and ethnic segregation and further widen the gap between middle-class families and working-class/ethnic minority families (e.g. Bellei et al. 2019; Bunar & Ambrose 2016). More patron types, e.g. ET and Gaelscoils, are the interest of the middle-class parents. Non-religious parents held hope during the National Parent Survey that an ET multi-denominational school would be established through divestment in their locality. Their interest in a multi-denominational school because of lack of religious belief is a product of the patronage system and therefore has all the appearance of being natural. As with the Catholic parents, the minority belief and non-religious parents never questioned the patronage school system but instead desired a multi-denominational school.

Overall, the concept of parents' interest in a particular patron is a collective act but apprehended individually according to their own socially constituted habitus. Parents gravitate towards schools that share their values and social interests for their children's socialisation. Their decision-making follows patterns conditioned by the social environment locally and parents' dispositions which orientate their perceptions and choice-making. In the competitive city school system, it is the high-status schools that select their students to maintain their hierarchy in the system. In rural locations, many instances of the parents' selection of their local Catholic school might be tacit, implicit or unconscious, but they are expressions of a particular class and ethnic position and consequences of an interest in the family way of life in the parish that pervades Catholic nationalist culture and marginalises ethnic minorities. The concept of interests in parents' school decision-making breaks with the utilitarian freedom of choice and rational perspective of calculation (Grenfell 2008). Parents' school selections may have rational ends, but they are achieved without rationality because their interest is an instinctively class-based and majority/minority ethnic distinction that is never posed as such (ibid.).

My thesis contributes to Kitching's (2020) studies by illuminating the workings of Catholic culture in parents' school selection-making and desires for their children's schooling. The exploration of community belonging and the parish way of family life in the local school selection have been investigated by Kitching (2020) and Devine (2011), but not to the same extent in research on parent choice in Ireland. A focus on patronage and religious practices in regard to parents' school selection has shown their symbolic role in children's socialisation which is very directly material. In other words, 'patron' and 'religion' impose meanings around belonging and admission rules as forms of expression but act as a carrier for the dominant Catholic culture of the primary school system, which in turn, operates to perpetuate specific power relations tied to the accumulation of capital. An ET school in the local rural primary school system where there is none available is desired by a number of Catholic parents because it would provide them with legitimacy by virtue of the social calls to order locally to have their children's religious formation outside of school time. Such calls to order include Catholic parents tending not to consider a Protestant primary school in rural school systems. Such is the power of Catholic culture pervading the local communities that an ET multi-denominational school in the local system is required by Catholic parents who desire their children's religious formation outside of Catholic schools in order to obtain collective social approval locally. An ET school offers the opportunity to form a 'nice little club' with like-

minded Catholic parents who can thus, separate themselves from those Catholics who only perform religious practices because it is 'the done thing' (e.g. Sarah, Sunnyvale, Catholic majority ethnic). This is the social norm in Canalside's city location for those Catholic parents whose children attend minority belief and multi-denominational schools. Organised religious formation outside of Catholic schools differentiates Catholic children from those who are materialist and enables classed and racial distancing. The local Catholic clergy know that a number of families want a multi-denominational patron locally but are resistant to divest their schools to the ET patron, claiming they can only do so by 'laying bricks themselves' (Olivia, Sunnyvale, Catholic, majority ethnic). The demand for the establishment of an ET school by the broad middle-classes converges with the state's policy of parent choice to reshape the patronage school system. This leads one to question the context of the increased diversity of Irish society for whom the patronage system is to be reshaped in order to meeting their needs (Coolahan et al 2012). Many working-class and ethnic minority families are not accessing multi-denominational ET schools. Darmody & Smyth (2018) suggest that the 'first-come, first-served' admission criteria of ET schools may inhibit their access, especially ethnic minority families. As discussed in Chapter 1, as of 2018, schools' admission policies no longer allow 'first-come, first-served' long waiting lists nor are patrons allowed to use religious beliefs as a basis for admission (DES 2018). Instead all schools are obliged to publish an annual admissions criteria notice (ibid). However, minority faith schools can prioritise families affiliated with their patron's religion to maintain their ethos, while oversubscribed Gaelscoils can prioritise children with proficiency in the Irish language, although proficiency is never defined (ibid.). Therefore, the changes to the admission criteria will not alleviate the competition for entry into sought-after, over-subscribed and high-status schools and does not provide specific provisions for non-religious families to access school places across the system.

This thesis also contributes to studies such as Darmody & Smyth's (2018) by illuminating parents' application processes to the high status minority faith, Gaelscoils and multi-denominational schools which require the mobilisation of specific social networking ties only available to few families and which in turn maintains the hierarchy of sought-after schools. Middle-class parents are struggling to gain access to these sought-after schools, which leaves one with little doubt that ethnic minority and working-class families would have very limited chances of gaining entry. The supply-side need for more patron types in the school system for the sake of a more diverse society and the demand-side need generated by middle-

class families seeking middle-class and ethno-specific environments are mediated by religion and patron. Thus, borrowing Bourdieu's 'logic of objective competition' for my analysis findings, parent choice of patron is based 'on the social opposition between perceived "elite"' schools and the "masses" schools (Bourdieu 1980b p.157 in Swartz 1997). The reshaping of the primary school system patronage structure via divestment involves a competition between Catholic and ET patrons. The Catholic patron schools want to sustain their legitimacy to (re)produce Catholic culture locally, while the ET patron provides middle-class parents with the opportunity to segregate and secure their children's social class milieu. The parents never challenged the patronage structure or Catholic schools' culture in the form of its religious practices, which contributes to the inherent reproduction of Catholic culture insofar as both are normative in the school system. Middle-class parents' position-taking determined by their accumulation of cultural, economic and social capital and strategising for access to high-demand schools is a circulatory process that maintains select patrons in their assuming of their prestige. The patronage school structure legitimises parents' classed, racial and religious interests, which are themselves the function of a primary school system that maintains social order.

The findings presented in this thesis raise important questions for future research into the classed and ethnic working of the patronage school system within local contexts. The significance of a Catholic culture that is imbued with nationalist sentiment and a parochial way of living in rural locations requires further in-depth investigation. The relationship between primary schools and local communities in Catholic culture, as well its associations with GAA activities for families' sense of belonging locally, is a specific focus that could elicit the workings of culture for minority ethnic families' integration into school and community life. This study has demonstrated that patron and religion are implicit in parents' decision-making and serve as an interest for classed and ethnic separation. However, my research has unveiled ethnic segregation between Catholic primary schools in rural school systems, showing that such segregation is occurring without different patron types in the system. This raises the questions of the extent of ethnic segregation between schools in rural primary school systems. Middle-class parents are continually transforming ways of securing their children's educational and social trajectories which leads to the further question of Community National Schools and how parents of all religious beliefs and no-religion perceive them in their selection decision-making, especially since Catholic sacraments' preparation/ religious education are part of their school day.

In the introduction to this thesis, I outlined how historical and religious struggles worked to the advantage of the Catholic Church, via its majority in the population, in gaining socio-political control over the education of the Irish people. The national school system served to inculcate Catholic social teaching to maintain social order and nationalist ideals in Irish society during the course of the latter half of the 19th century and at least six decades of the 20th century. This historic process is a reminder of the power of Catholic national culture and the pervasive weight of its majority. The implementation of parent choice of patron in 2012 to reshape the primary school patronage system holds promise for minority belief/no-religion families. However, cultural and religious rituals are rooted in Catholic cultural heritage, are traditional in Irish family life for the majority and are the foci of the Catholic patron's argument for maintaining their stance as the dominant schools' patron. If the Catholic patron depends so heavily on threats of ceasing traditional religious rituals and festivities in defence of divesting to an ET patron, a focus on Catholic cultural heritage will, a fortiori, be a significant factor in patronage-reshaping debates into the future. Otherwise, history is repeating itself with the instrumental use of the majority/minority binary in mediating the script of change. Religion, class and ethnicity are wedded together to advantage white, middle-class Catholic families and maintain specific school patrons' high status. Reshaping the patronage primary school system that segregates schools and children within schools and furthermore, reshaping the patronage system itself will not meet the needs of minority beliefs/no-religion families. As Bourdieu contends cultural capital is unequally distributed among the contestants in field struggles (cited in Swartz 1997). It is the embodiment of religious practices in family life and the need of parents to perform their practices for children's belonging in school that are the internal mechanisms of Catholic culture's autonomy that sustains the patronage structure (Swartz 1996, p.81). Catholic culture is a symbolic power in the patronage primary school system and schooling and, where there is power, there will always be inequalities, with winners and losers.

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Appendix A: Sample Parent Interview Guide

The parent interviews will offer an opportunity to uncover nuances in the ways parents appropriate and reproduce ideas of social relations, i.e. their perspectives on and experiences of choosing a primary school for their children.

Topics	**Prompts**
Family background	Where did you grow up? How many children do you have and their stages at school?
Brief overview of education and work	
Living in this community	How long have you been living here? Did you move for the schools? Family/friends in the community?
How did you approach deciding on a primary school for your children? When?	Was it a joint decision with your partner? How did you make your decision? Did/Do you discuss primary school options with your friends or other parents? What did you discuss? Do your friends' children go to this school?…other members of your families' children go to this school? What was it about this school that attracted you to it for your children? Tell me more about these. Why did you prefer this school? Is this school near where you live?
<u>Reflective questions</u> Did you feel you had/have a choice of primary schools for your child to attend?	What were the choices of schools that you had? Why did you not pick one of these schools? So what is it that you feel this school has for your children over the other schools you could have chosen?
Does the school meet with your expectations?	What had you expected of the school in respect to your child's schooling? are they different now? how? Would you say you have the same priorities today for what you wanted from the school compared with when you were deciding on the school? Tell me more..

Would you make a different school selection now?	Why? Explain further
Is diversity important to you for your child's experience in the school? Are there families in the school of different religions?	Have you ever thought about diversity? Why? How do you see diversity in your child's school? How does it transpire in daily school life/friendships? How do you see religion in the school/ in relation to minority beliefs and no religion families? Is religion important to you to have in your child's schooling? Why?
Did you consider the school patron when deciding on the primary school?	Was it a factor? Explain, why? If you had a choice of patron, would it be a factor? Explain.
Were you aware of the National Parent Survey carried out by the DES in 2013, where parents in your area were asked to choose your school patron preference?	Did you get information from the school about it? What was the information? What did you think was the purpose of the survey? What was your experience of this period? Did you participate? how did you decide on your preference of school patron? Factors? What would you think if your school suggested changing patron?

Appendix B: Information Letter for Principal Participants

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
INFORMATION LETTER

Dear Principal,

I am undertaking a study to examine and understand how parents make their decision to choose a primary school for their children as part of my PhD research in the Department of Sociology at the University of Limerick. The title of my study is '**Parent Choice in Irish Primary School Patronage Policy and Practice**'. The study will be conducted in nationally distributed locations identified from the National Parent Survey carried out by the Department of Education and Skills in 2012/2013 for the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector.

I am extending an invitation to you to participate in the study.

What are you invited to do?
I would like to meet with you at a day and time that suits you best to discuss the study, and invite you to participate in the study. Your participation in the study will involve (1) answering questions in relation to your school ethos and school demographics and (2) your permission to meet with parents to invite them to participate in the study. To expand further:

(1) The questions I would like to ask you are about your school demographics and discuss with you the topic of your school ethos. These questions are related to how you lead ethos? and how ethos operates in the daily running of the school?
This meeting will take no more than 45 minutes as I appreciate you have a very busy schedule each day.

(2) I would also like to get your permission to give out information letters to parents at your school gate at morning drop-off time and home time for 5 days over a period of two weeks. The 5 days will be selected in advance in agreement with you. The information letters will give details of the study inviting parents to participate. Parent's participation involves a

conversation-like interview with them to get their perspectives on the practice of parent choice of primary school (I have attached a copy of the information letter for your information). Access to the school gate will give me the opportunity to hand out the information letters to parents and answer any questions they may have about the study and about their participation. Preferably, I would like to meet with parents of children in junior classes as they would have more recent experiences in making a school choice.

I will also be inviting parents to participate in a focus group discussion anticipated to take place two months after the interviews. However, I will explain to parents that they are under no obligation to participate in the focus group stage of the study.

What are the benefits of the study?
The benefits of this research will be to provide insights and evidence to inform education policy and planning and also to contribute to scholarship of parent choice.

What happens to the information?
There are no risks to you, your school and the parent participants in this study because of your right to anonymity. Pseudonyms will be mandatory for all participants (principals and parents), school and location in all notes, papers, reports and dissertation and any document produced in relation to this research study. As a participant in my study you have the right not to answer any questions that you do not wish to and can withdraw from the study at any time. You will be given an opportunity to review the meeting transcript and any clarifications or edits you request will be made.

In accordance with the commitment of the University of Limerick to protecting the rights and privacy of individuals, the handling of all research data will comply with the obligations under the Data Protection Act 1988 and Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2003. You are assured that good data handling practices are in place in order to uphold the privacy of personal data. A single hard copy of all research documents will be kept in storage at any one time in a locked filing cabinet in UL, and all digital copies of the research data will be protected in a secure, password protected file in the PhD student's UL computer. The research data will be stored for a period of seven years and will be securely destroyed after that time.

What if I change my mind, and do not want to participate?
Participation is voluntary. If you agree to participate in this study, but later change your mind, you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason. There will be no risks to you or your school or the parent participants in this study.

What do I do if I would like to participate or have any further questions?
Please contact one of the following if you have any further questions about the study, and if you would like to participate:

Michelle Starr
PhD Student,
University of Limerick
Tel: 086 3514081
Email:
Michelle.Starr@ul.ie

Dr. Breda Gray,
Senior Lecturer,
Department of Sociology,
University of Limerick
Tel: 061 234207
Email:Breda.Gray@ul.ie

Dr. Aoife Neary,
Lecturer Sociology of Education,
School of Education,
University of Limerick
Tel: 061 202075
Email: Aoife.Neary@ul.ie

What if I have any concerns about the study and want to talk to an independent person?
If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact:

Chairperson Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
AHSS Faculty Office
University of Limerick
Tel: +353 61 202286
Email: FAHSSEthics@ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (*Ref: 2017-09-11-AHSS*).

Appendix C: Information Letter for Crèche Managers

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
INFORMATION LETTER

Dear Madam/Sir,

I am undertaking a study to examine and understand how parents make their decision to choose a primary school for their children as part of my PhD research in the Department of Sociology at the University of Limerick. The title of my study is 'Parent Choice in Irish Primary School Patronage Policy and Practice'.

I am writing to ask if you would please post the attached flyer at your crèche for the purpose of informing parents about the study and inviting them to contact me if they are interested in finding out more about participating in the study.

What are parents invited to do?
I will supply interested parents with an information letter about their participation in the study which is summarised below and arrange to meet with them:

Their participation will involve a conversation type interview with me to discuss their experiences of choosing a primary school for their child. The interview will be approximately one hour duration.

After the interviews, parents will be invited to engage in a focus group discussion if they wish, and are under no obligation to participate in this phase of the study. The focus group discussion will be a further elaboration on choosing a primary school. It is anticipated that the focus group discussion will take place two months after the interview, and will be approximately one hour in duration.

Where will the meetings take place?
The meetings for the interview will take place at a location agreeable to parents and at a date and time that suits them best.

What are the benefits of the study?
The study will provide a voice for parents to contribute to discussions on parent choice in education policy.

What happens to the information?
There are no risks to parents, schools, crèches and locations in this study because of the right to anonymity. Pseudonyms will be mandatory for all participants (parents), schools, crèches

and locations. As a participant in the study, parents have the right not to answer any questions that they do not wish to and can withdraw from the study at any time. Parents will be given an opportunity to review the meeting transcript and any clarifications or edits requests will be made.

In accordance with the commitment of the University of Limerick to protecting the rights and privacy of individuals, the handling of all research data will comply with the obligations under the Data Protection Act 1988 and Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2003. You are assured that good data handling practices are in place in order to uphold the privacy of personal data. A single hard copy of all research documents will be kept in storage at any one time in a locked filing cabinet in UL, and all digital copies of the research data will be protected in a secure, password protected file in the PhD student's UL computer. The research data will be stored for a period of seven years and will be securely destroyed after that time.

What if parents change their mind, and do not want to participate?
Participation is voluntary. If parents agree to participate in this study, but later change their mind, they may withdraw at any time without giving a reason. There will be no risks to them in this study.

What do parents do if they would like to participate or have any further questions?
If a parent would like to participate or have any further questions about the study, please contact one of the following :

Michelle Starr
PhD Student,
University of Limerick
Tel: 086 3514081
Email:
Michelle.Starr@ul.ie

Dr. Breda Gray,
Senior Lecturer,
Department of Sociology,
University of Limerick
Tel: 061 234207
Email:Breda.Gray@ul.ie

Dr. Aoife Neary,
Lecturer Sociology of Education,
School of Education,
University of Limerick
Tel: 061 202075
Email:Aoife.Neary@ul.ie

Email: Aoife.Neary@ul.ie

What if parents have any concerns about the study and want to talk to an independent person?
If there are any concerns about this study and parents would like to contact an independent authority, they can contact:

Chairperson Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
AHSS Faculty Office
University of Limerick
Tel: +353 61 202286
Email: FAHSSEthics@ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (*Ref: 2017-09-11-AHSS*).

Appendix D: Information Letter for Parent Participants

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
INFORMATION LETTER

Dear Parent,

I am undertaking a study to explore and understand how parents make their decision to choose a primary school for their children as part of my PhD research in the Department of Sociology at the University of Limerick. The title of my study is '**Parent Choice in Irish Primary School Patronage Policy and Practice**'. I am extending an invitation to you to participate in the study.

What are you invited to do?
Participation will involve a conversation type interview with you or with you and your partner together on the topic of choosing a primary school, your experiences of choosing a primary school for your children and the ways in which you came to choose this particular school. The interview will be approximately one hour duration.

After the interviews, you will be invited to engage in a focus group discussion if you wish, and you are under no obligation to participate in this phase of the study. The focus group discussion will be a further elaboration on choosing a primary school. It is anticipated that the focus group discussion will take place two months after the interview, it will be approximately one hour in duration.

Where will the meetings take place?
The meetings for the interview will take place at a location agreeable to you and at a date and time that suits you best.

What are the benefits of the study?
The study will provide a voice for parents to contribute to discussions on parent choice in education policy.

What happens to the information?

You will not be identifiable in the study as your anonymity will be protected. Pseudonyms for all participants, schools, crèches and locations will be mandatory. With your permission, I would like to use audio recording of the interviews in the interest of accuracy. These recordings will not be made available to third parties unconnected with the research, and will be destroyed once they are transcribed. You have the right not to answer any questions that you do not wish to. You will be given an opportunity to review the interview transcript and any clarifications or edits you request will be made.

In accordance with the commitment of the University of Limerick to protecting the rights and privacy of individuals, the handling of all research data will comply with the obligations under the Data Protection Act 1988 and Data Protection (Amendment) Act 2003. You are assured that good data handling practices are in place in order to uphold the privacy of personal data. A single hard copy of all research documents will be kept in storage at any one time in a locked filing cabinet in UL, and all digital copies of the research data will be protected in a secure, password protected file in the PhD student's UL computer. The research data will be stored for a period of seven years and will be securely destroyed after that time.

What if I change my mind, and do not want to participate?
Participation is voluntary. If you agree to participate in this study, but later change your mind, you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason. There will be no risks to you as a participant in this study.

What do I do if I would like to participate or have any questions?
Please contact one of the following if you have any questions about the study and if you would like to participate:

Michelle Starr
PhD Student,
University of Limerick
Tel: 086 3514081
Email:
Michelle.Starr@ul.ie

Dr. Breda Gray,
Senior Lecturer,
Department of Sociology,
University of Limerick
Tel: 061 234207
Email:Breda.Gray@ul.ie

Dr. Aoife Neary,
Lecturer Sociology of Education,
School of Education,
University of Limerick
Tel: 061 202075
Email:Aoife.Neary@ul.ie
Email: Aoife.Neary@ul.ie

What if I have any concerns about the study and want to talk to an independent person?
If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent authority, you may contact:

Chairperson Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

AHSS Faculty Office
University of Limerick
Tel: +353 61 202286
Email: FAHSSEthics@ul.ie

This research study has received Ethics approval from the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (*Ref: 2017-09-11-AHSS*).

Appendix E: Consent Form

FACULTY OF ARTS, HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
CONSENT FORM

Consent Section:

I, the undersigned, declare that I am willing to take part in research for the project entitled 'The Discourse and Practice of 'Parent Choice' in Primary Schools in Ireland'**.**

I declare that I have been fully briefed on the nature of this study and my role in it and have been given the opportunity to ask questions before agreeing to participate.

The nature of my participation has been explained to me and I have full knowledge of how the information collected will be used.

I am also aware that my participation in this study may be recorded (audio) and I agree to this. However, should I feel uncomfortable at any time I can request that the recording equipment be switched off. I am entitled to copies of all recordings made and am fully informed as to what will happen to these recordings once the study is completed.

I fully understand that there is no obligation on me to participate in this study.

I fully understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time without having to explain or give a reason.

I am also entitled to full confidentiality in terms of my participation and personal details.

Signature of participant: ______________________________

Date: ______________________________

Ethics approval reference: 2017-09-11-AHSS

Appendix F: Flyer distributed to Crèches

Would you like to be part of a study about why you've chosen your child's primary school?

Who is invited to take part?

Parents of a child in crèche and/or primary school junior classes (infants, senior infants and 1st class), are invited to participate in a study of how parents choose a primary school for their children.

What will participation in the study involve?

Participation will involve a conversation type discussion over about one hour with you as an individual parent or with both parents together. I would arrange this for a date and time that is convenient and at a location that is agreeable to you.

Will there be any follow-up?

Only if you wish, you will have the option to take part in a follow-up focus group discussion anticipated to take place two months after the interview. You are under no obligation to participate in this stage of the study.

Are there any risks?

Your anonymity is guaranteed through the use of pseudonyms at all times before, during and after the study, so there are no identity risks involved in participating in interviews and limited risk in focus group discussions.

What are the benefits?

The study will provide a voice for parents to contribute to discussions on parent choice in education policy.

If you would like to take part in this study or would like more information, Please contact:

Michelle Starr, University of Limerick, Tel: 086 3514081, Michelle.Starr@ul.ie

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Review Board, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Studies, University of Limerick.

Appendix G:
Data Referenced in the Forum Report to Identify the Changing Patterns of Religious Attitudes

Cassidy, E.G. (2002) 'Modernity and Religion in Ireland: 1980-2000', in Cassidy, E.G., ed., *Measuring Ireland: Discerning Values and Beliefs,* Dublin: Veritas, pp.17–45;

Educate Together (2011) *Choices in Primary School Selection: A Survey of Pre-School Parents*, Dublin: Behaviour and Attitudes;

IPPN (2007) *Pre-Conference Survey*; RedC (2008) *Religion in Schools – What 750 Principals Say*, for the IPPN;

IPSOS/ MRBI Poll (2010) *Catholic Church's control of primary schools*, for The Irish Times;

Lodge, A., & Tuohy, D. (2011) 'Parental Values in Protestant Primary Schools: a new survey', *Search,* 34(3), pp.188–195, available: https://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/church-of-irelandcentre/2011_search_lodge_and_tuohy_search_article.pdf.

MacGreil, M., & Rhatigan, F. (2009) *The Challenge of Indifference: A Need for Religious Revival in Ireland*, Maynooth: Department of Sociology, Tables 3.2;

RedC (2009) *Church attendance*, for Iona Institute, available: https://ionainstitute.ie/wpcontent/uploads/2014/11/Press_Release_by_The_Iona_Institute_2Nov2009-1.pdf);

RedC (2008) *Factors Determining School Choice,* for the Iona Institute and the Bishop's Council for Research and Development;