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How students perceive attending Church in Wales primary schools: A psychometric
assessment of Section 50 inspection criteria

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Abstract

A sample of 4,581 year 4, year 5 and year 6 students (8-11 years of age) attending Church in Wales primary schools completed six short scales designed to operationalise the Section 50 inspection criteria concerning aspects of the distinctiveness of church school ethos and concerning school worship. The data demonstrated the internal consistency reliability of the six measures and showed more positive attitudes to be associated with being female, being younger, and attending church. Overall the students displayed positive attitudes toward school ethos, toward school experience, toward school teachers, toward relationships within school, and toward school and environment. Attitude toward school worship was less positive.

Keywords: Church in Wales, church schools, school inspection, student voices

Introduction

The peculiar situation of Anglican church schools in England and Wales can only be properly understood in light of the historical context from which they arose. The origins of the state-maintained system of education in Wales lies in the voluntary initiatives taken by the churches between 1780 and 1870, especially through bodies like the National Society founded by the Anglican Church in 1811 and the British and Foreign Schools Society founded largely by the Free Churches in 1814 (see Cruikshank, 1963; Murphy, 1971; Chadwick, 1997). It was not until the Education Act 1870 that the state established a mechanism for building schools independent of such voluntary initiatives (Rich, 1970). The current provision was largely shaped by the Education Act 1944 (Dent, 1947) which incorporated the results of detailed negotiations between the government of the day and the Churches (Butler, 1973). As a consequence of this Act, the Churches were able to retain their involvement in the state-maintained system of education through both voluntary controlled schools and voluntary aided schools. In voluntary aided schools the church retained on-going financial responsibilities in respect of the fabric, and as a consequence also retained greater control over staff appointments and religious education.

The classic discussion of the purpose and rationale for the Anglican Church's continued involvement within the state-maintained sector of schools in England and Wales advanced by the Durham Report (1970) distinguished between two distinctive objectives defined as the *general* aim (intending to serve the nation through the provision of education for all) and the *domestic* aim (intending to serve the children of the Church). The Durham Report (1970) argued that, while in 1811, when the National Society was founded, these two aims may have been closely aligned, by the 1970s the changing nature of society had polarised them. The Durham Report prioritised the general aim over the domestic aim, prioritising service of the nation over the nurture of the children of the Church. This view was

consistent with a wider view of that time that a clear divide should exist between the educational function of schools and the nurturing function of churches (see Schools Council, 1971; Hirst, 1972; Hull, 1975; British Council of Churches, 1976, 1981). Subsequent key reports from the Church of England have maintained this key distinction presented by the Durham Report (1970) between the general function and the domestic functions of church schools, but suggested different ways of returning the balance between these two functions (Waddington, 1984; Dearing, 2001; Chadwick, 2012).

A key motivation for the Anglican Church in England and Wales to reflect on the distinctive mission and identity of church schools within the state-maintained sector arises from the Education (Schools) Act 1992 that provided for the regular inspection of every state-maintained school in England and Wales. This inspection system was managed by the same government office across all state-maintained schools. Additionally, however, the governors of voluntary schools within the state-maintained system were required to appoint independent inspectors to ensure that those aspects of the school which had been their responsibility to oversee, with advice from the church that provided the school, were inspected on the same time scale. The provisions for the main inspection were contained in Section 9 of the Education (Schools) Act 1992 and for 'denominational inspection of church schools' in Section 13. These two inspections became known by schools and others involved as Section 9 and Section 13 inspections. The Education Act 1993 contained an amendment to the Education (Schools) Act 1992 which was designed to clarify the arrangements for inspection of voluntary controlled schools, where the drafting in the previous year had left room for different interpretations of a key clause. Although the School Inspections Act 1996, being a consolidation act, changed nothing of the content of the law, it did change the numbering of the sections by which the law becomes known in common parlance. Thus, until the Education Act 2005 the denominational inspection were known as Section 23 inspections. Since the

passage of the Education Act 2005 the inspections have been known as Section 48 inspections in England and Section 50 inspections in Wales.

The need to provide a coherent rationale and model for shaping and inspecting Anglican schools in England and Wales generated a series of publication reflecting on and specifying aspects of the character and distinctiveness of Anglican schools, including Lankshear (1992a, 1992b, 1992c, 2000), Duncan and Lankshear (1995), and Lankshear and Hall (2003). The Anglican Church also published a series of booklets on specific school-related issues, including the curriculum (Lankshear, 1990), spiritual development (Brown & Furlong, 1996), moral education (Ainsworth & Brown, 1995), anti-racism (Griffith & Lankshear, 1996) and the multi-faith church school (Brown, 1997). Building on these kinds of initiatives the National Society published a series of handbooks designed to encourage, shape and inform the inspection of Anglican schools in England and Wales (see Brown & Lankshear, 1995, 1997, 2000).

In light of the divergence of the English and Welsh education systems following the devolution of powers concerning educational provision to the Welsh Government, the Church in Wales has created its own responses to the particular inspection needs of Church in Wales schools. This process was exemplified by the publication of *The Church in Wales Education Review* (Lankshear, 2009) and by the creation of a Church in Wales adaptation of the National Society's framework for inspection. The Church in Wales arrangements are known by the acronym GWELLA and are conducted under Section 50 of the Education Act 2005. Details of the arrangements for these inspection can be found at www.churchschoolcymru.org .

As part of its continuing response to Section 50 inspection requirement, during the school year 2013/14 the Church in Wales decided to engage the student voice by inviting David W. Lankshear and colleagues to design a set of scales constructed to map areas

identified by the Section 50 inspection criteria concerning aspects of the distinctiveness of the school ethos and concerning school worship. The design and development of these scales is reported by Lankshear, Francis, and Eccles (in press) drawing on data provided by 1,899 year-five and year-six students (9- to 11-year-olds), from church schools across Wales, who had participated in the two pilot projects conducted during the school years 2013-14 and 2014-15.

A sequence of factor analyses and reliability analyses identified from among the 50 items included in the questionnaire six sets of items (each set comprising five or six items) that mapped conceptually on to six areas identified by the Section 50 inspection criteria as discussed by Lankshear (1992b) in *Looking for quality in a church school*. These six areas were characterised as: attitude toward school ethos, attitude toward school experience, attitude toward school teachers, attitude toward relationships in school, attitude toward school and environment, and attitude toward school worship. These six scales generated alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) ranging from .73 to .78, demonstrating satisfactory levels of internal consistency reliability (DeVellis, 2003).

Research question

During the school year 2015-16 the project was launched across all six Dioceses of the Church in Wales, and five of the Dioceses accepted the invitation to participate. The aim of the present study is to explore the correlations between the students' scores on the six scales and their age, sex, and religiosity.

Method

Procedure

All Church in Wales voluntary aided and voluntary controlled primary schools throughout all six dioceses in the Province (Bangor, Llandaff, Monmouth, St Asaph, St Davids, and Swansea and Breacon) were invited to administer the survey to all their year 4,

year 5, and year 6 students as part of a routine assessment of school ethos. Participation by the students was voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. Responses were received from 87 schools, with the Diocese of Bangor deciding not to participate. This response represents about two thirds of the eligible schools within the five participating dioceses. Useable responses were received from 1,511 students in year 4, 1,544 students in year 5, and 1,526 students in year 6.

Instrument

Section 50 inspection criteria were operationalised by five six-item scales (assessing attitude toward school ethos, attitude toward school experience, attitude toward school teachers, attitude toward relationships in school, and attitude toward school and environment) and one five-item scale (assessing attitude toward school worship). Each item was assessed on the conventional five-point scale: agree strongly (5), agree (4), not certain (3), disagree (2), and disagree strongly (1).

Church attendance was operationalised by the question ‘Do you go to church on a Sunday (or other place of worship)?’ rated on a five-point scale: weekly (5), at least once a month (4), sometimes (3), once or twice a year (2), and never (1).

Personal prayer was operationalised by the question ‘Do you pray by yourself?’ rated on a five-point scale: daily (5), at least once a week (4), sometimes (3), once or twice a year (2), and never (1).

Participants

Of the total participants in year 4 there were 762 boys and 749 girls, in year 5 there were 764 boys and 780 girls, and year 6 there were 768 boys and 758 girls. In terms of worship attendance, 22% never attended church, 15% attended once or twice a year, 35% attended sometimes, 11% attended at least once a month, and 17% attended weekly. In terms

of personal prayer, 31% never prayed, 10% prayed once or twice a year, 35% prayed sometime, 9% prayed at least once a week, and 15% prayed daily.

Analysis

The data were analysed by the SPSS statistical package employing the frequency, reliability, factor, and correlation routines.

Results and discussion

- insert table 1 about here -

The first step in exploring the data was to check that the six scales were performing satisfactorily among each of the three year groups included in the survey (year 4, year 5, and year 6). These data are presented in table 1 in terms of the alpha coefficients for each year group separately (Cronbach, 1951). Even among the youngest age group the scales generated alpha coefficients ranging from .70 to .76, demonstrating satisfactory levels of internal consistency reliability. The alpha coefficients are slightly higher among year 5 students (ranging from .75 to .81) and among year 6 students (ranging from .73 to .80).

-insert table 2 around here -

The second step in exploring the data is to examine the students' responses to the individual items comprising the six scales. Table 2 presents these individual items together with two core statistics: the correlation between the individual item and the sum of the other items within the scale, and the percentage of endorsement of the item expressed as the sum of the agree and the agree strongly responses. The correlations demonstrate how well the individual items covary with the other items within the set. The percentage endorsement demonstrate the overall level of response of the student body. These percentage endorsements are for boys and girls across all three year groups considered together. Each of these six scales will be discussed briefly in light of the data presented in table 2.

The scale concerned with *attitude toward school ethos* found that around nine out of every ten students agreed that their school is a really good school (92%), that prayer is very important in their school (92%), that worship is very important in their school (91%), that their school is a really caring school (90%), and that their school is a really friendly school (87%). The proportion, however, dropped to 74% who agreed that their school treats every child fairly.

The scale concerned with *attitude toward school experience* found that at least eight out of every ten students agreed that in their school the rules are fair (89%), that their school is a safe place (89%), that their school looks good (83%), and that their school is a clean place (80%). The proportions, however, dropped a little to 74% who agreed that in their school they can be themselves, and 71% who agreed that their school is a peaceful place.

The scale concerned with *attitude toward school teachers* found that at least nine out of every ten students agreed that the teachers in their school care a lot about the school (94%), that the teachers in their school care a lot for all the children (92%), that the teachers in their school care a lot for each other (92%), and that the teachers in their school care a lot for the world around them (91%). The proportions, however, dropped a little to 82% who agreed that when they do well in their school the teachers praise them, and to 78% who agree that when they do well in their school the grown-ups praise them.

The scale concerned with *attitude toward relationships in the school* found that at least nine out of every ten students agreed that their school teaches them to care for other people (96%), that caring for others is very important in their school (96%), that their school teaches them to respect other people (95%), that their school teaches them to respect other people's things (95%), and that in their school they care a lot for each other (90%). The proportion dropped only marginally to 87% who agree that at their school they value each other.

The scale concerned with *attitude toward school and environment* found that nine out of every ten students agreed that their school teaches them to care for the world around us (94%), that keeping the school tidy is important in their school (92%), and that their school teaches them to respect wonderful things (91%). The proportion dropped slightly to 88% who agreed that the students at their school are proud of their school building, to 87% who agreed that the students at their school are proud of their school grounds, and to 86% who agreed that their school teaches them to respect things that grow.

The scale concerned with *attitude toward school worship* found that almost eight out of every ten students enjoyed being with the whole school at school worship (78%). At school worship around two-thirds of the students enjoyed visits from the vicar (69%) or found that singing is very important to them (65%). Between five and six out of every ten students agreed that listening to the Bible is important to them in school worship (59%) or that being quiet and still is important to them in school worship (54%).

- insert table 3 about here -

The third step in exploring the data was to examine the correlations between each of the six scales and two personal factors (sex and age) and two religious factors (church attendance and prayer). The data are presented in table 3 in terms of the Pearson correlation coefficient. In terms of personal factors, these data demonstrated that both sex and age are significant predictors of individual differences across all six attitudinal areas. Girls hold a significantly more positive attitude toward their church school than boys. Older students hold a significantly less positive attitude toward their church school than younger students. In terms of religious factors, these data demonstrate that both church attendance and the practice of personal prayer are significant predictors of individual differences across all six attitudinal areas. Students who attend church and students who pray hold more positive attitudes toward their school ethos, toward their school experience, toward their school teachers, toward their

relationships within school, toward their school and the environment, and toward school worship. The strongest of the relationships with church attendance and prayer are in respect of attitude toward school worship.

Conclusion

This study set out to report and to discuss how students attending Church in Wales primary schools perceive and rate their schools, seen through the interpretative lens of the Section 50 denominational inspection criteria. These criteria were made accessible to the students through the six psychometric instruments constructed and defined by Lankshear, Francis, and Eccles (in press). These instruments operationalised through six-item scales five areas relevant to the character and ethos of Church in Wales schools: school ethos, school experience, school teachers, relationships within school, and school and environment. A sixth area concerning school worship was operationalised through a five-item scale.

The three core questions posed by the present study concerned the correlations between scores recorded on the six scales of school-related attitudes and the three factors of age, sex, and religiosity. The findings are consistent with the trends established in the broader literature. The finding that girls held significantly more positive attitudes toward school compared with boys is consistent with historic studies conducted both at the primary level (Tenenbaum, 1944; Sharples, 1969; Croucher & Reid, 1981; Francis, 1992) and at the secondary level (Fitt, 1956; Richmond, 1985; Darom & Rich, 1988). The finding that school-related attitudes decline with age is also consistent with historic studies (Fraser, 1980; Francis, 1987; Montgomery & Francis, 1996). The finding that there is a positive correlation between religious practice (both prayer and church attendance) and more positive school-related attitudes is consistent with the earlier research published by Montgomery and Francis (1996).

Three main practical conclusions can be drawn from these findings. The first conclusion concerns the viability of the research programme initiated by the Church in Wales. It has proved possible to operationalise some of the criteria identified by the Section 50 inspection process in ways accessible to students within the age range of 8 to 11 years, enabling the student voice to be heard in the context of the inspection process. An output from the research process is that each individual participating school has received (confidentially) its own profile set alongside the profile for the whole Province. In this way the data can serve an evaluative and a developmental process within individual schools.

Second, the information generated from the survey confirms that, overall, the Church in Wales is achieving what it sets out to achieve through its church schools, in the sense of generating learning environments within which the students recognise the qualities that the schools are attempting to model. Having now in the school year 2015-16 established a benchmark against which future trends can be detected, the Church in Wales considers repeating the study in future years. Such monitoring serves well the school improvement agenda.

Third, the characteristics identified within four of the six domains noted as qualities of a good church school (school experience, school teachers, relationships in school, and school and environment) may well be rooted within the Christian tradition, but are by no means exclusive to that tradition. These characteristics may be seen as qualities of all good schools. The limitation with the present study is that it has concentrated only on Church in Wales schools. There would now be every benefit in primary schools without a religious character in Wales completing a similar research exercise so that the experience of students in church schools and in schools without a religious character could be set side-by-side.

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Table 1

Scale properties

	N items	Alpha coefficients		
		Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6
School ethos	6	.70	.75	.73
School experience	6	.72	.79	.76
School teachers	6	.74	.77	.79
Relationships in school	6	.73	.79	.80
School and environment	6	.71	.77	.78
School worship	5	.76	.81	.77

Table 2

Six scales of school-related attitudes

	All %	Yr 4 r	Yr 5 r	Yr 6 r
<i>Attitude toward school ethos</i>				
My school is a really good school	92	.46	.57	.52
My school is a really caring school	90	.50	.58	.59
My school treats every child fairly	74	.43	.50	.48
Worship is very important in my school	91	.37	.40	.36
My school is a really friendly school	87	.49	.54	.48
Prayer is very important in my school	92	.39	.37	.40
<i>Attitude toward school experience</i>				
In my school the rules are fair	89	.31	.43	.46
In my school I can be myself	74	.40	.48	.50
My school is a peaceful place	71	.54	.58	.63
My school is a safe place	89	.52	.59	.62
My school looks good	83	.51	.60	.53
My school is a clean place	80	.47	.57	.55
<i>Attitude toward school teachers</i>				
The teachers in my school care a lot for all the children	92	.50	.54	.55
The teachers in my school care a lot for each other	92	.49	.50	.51
The teachers in my school care a lot for the world around us	91	.44	.50	.52
The teachers in my school care a lot about the school	94	.41	.52	.49
When I do well in my school the teachers praise me	82	.51	.58	.60
When I do well in my school the grown-ups praise me	78	.56	.52	.57
<i>Attitude toward relationships in school</i>				
My school teaches me to respect other people	95	.46	.53	.54
My school teaches me to respect other people's things	95	.46	.54	.50
My school teaches me to care for other people	96	.48	.56	.59
At my school we value each other	87	.51	.56	.55
In my school we care a lot for each other	90	.48	.58	.60
Caring for others is very important in my school	96	.46	.54	.60
<i>Attitude toward school and environment</i>				
My school teaches me to respect things that grow	86	.46	.51	.53
My school teaches me to respect wonderful things	91	.49	.57	.56
My school teaches me to care for the world around us	94	.45	.48	.56
At my school we are proud of our school grounds	87	.43	.54	.52
At my school we are proud of our school buildings	88	.48	.59	.55
Keeping the school tidy is important in my school	92	.34	.41	.49
<i>Attitude toward school worship</i>				
I enjoy being with the whole school	78	.54	.55	.49
I enjoy visits from the vicar	69	.61	.65	.62
Singing is important to me	65	.46	.55	.48
Being quiet and still is important to me	54	.47	.57	.50
Listening to the Bible is important to me	59	.59	.67	.63

Table 3

Correlations

	Correlation coefficients			
	Sex	Age	Church	Prayer
School ethos	.14***	-.08***	.11***	.14***
School experience	.13***	-.06***	.06***	.06***
School teachers	.08***	-.11***	.07***	.09***
Relationships in school	.11***	-.10***	.07***	.10***
School and environment	.09***	-.10***	.06***	.10***
School worship	.14***	-.21***	.22***	.39***

Note: *** = $p < .001$