

# Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education in Catholic Secondary Schools: Stakeholders' Views

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*Abstract: During 1999–2000, the writer carried out survey of six randomly selected Catholic secondary schools in England to examine the attitudes of stakeholder groups towards Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education. Questionnaires were completed by six governors, 12 parents, 139 pupils, 12 teachers and six school leaders, providing insight into perceptions of the purposes of selected components of Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education, viz. Citizenship Education, Moral Education and Sex Education. Drawing on Hornsby-Smith's (1996) definition of contrasting perspectives, which he characterises as 'Open' and 'Closed' Catholicism, the enquiry located attitudes of the stakeholder groups along a continuum of values. While there was evidence of consensus across stakeholder groups within each component, differences in attitudes were also identified. The results indicated that governors and school leaders adopt more 'Open' attitudes towards Citizenship Education compared with pupils, teachers and parents; that school leaders adopt more 'Open' attitudes towards Moral Education compared with pupils; and that pupils and teachers adopt more 'Open' attitudes towards Sex Education compared with governors. One conclusion is that these results demonstrate that, when traditional religious values are challenged by rapid social and technological changes, stakeholder groups in faith schools are faced with added tensions to resolve.*

**Keywords:** citizenship; secondary schools; Catholic education.

## Introduction

It might be assumed that Catholic secondary schools in England, as part of a wider Catholic community and culture, would present a consistent approach towards a subject like Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education. Flynn (1993, p. 398), for example, argues that Catholic schools 'have much in common' and there is a 'relatively homogenous nature'. However, as Fincham (1989, p. 37) shows, it is also evident that there is a range of perceptions towards social and personal education in schools. The purpose of this research was to test how far there is agreement across stakeholder groups in Catholic secondary schools towards what Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education should set out to achieve and to investigate the source of potential differences.

## The Enquiry

Having located the enquiry in the Catholic sector of secondary education, the question was how to test how far perceptions of Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education were consistent in Catholic secondary schools. While there are many potential approaches that could have been adopted, for the purposes of the study, five 'stakeholder' groups were identified as a basis for comparison, that is:

- Governors
- Parents
- Pupils
- School leaders
- Teachers.

Adopting a form of purposive sampling, six Catholic secondary schools were selected for investigation and five stakeholder groups were represented across the schools, as follows:

- Six governors
- Twelve parents (five male; seven female)
- One hundred and thirty-nine pupils (73 girls and 66 boys)
- Six school leaders
- Twelve teachers (four male; eight female).

It is claimed that Catholic education, within a community of shared values, is consistent and distinctive (McLaughlin, 1999; Sullivan, 2001). Best (2006: 65) indicates that one way of defining community includes sharing 'at least some common values and attitudes'. Ostensibly, then, it might be reasonable to expect that attitudes across Catholic education would be characterised as predictable and conservative.

Consequently, a null hypothesis was proposed that there are no significant differences in attitudes across stakeholder groups in Catholic secondary schools towards the aims of Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education.

### **'Open' and 'Closed' Perspectives**

Hornsby-Smith (1996) presents a tension between two contrasting perspectives within the Catholic community in England, which he characterises as 'Open' and 'Closed' Catholicism, reflecting, on the one hand, a strategy of accommodation towards the wider society and, on the other, a religious strategy of intransigence.

Drawing on this analysis for the purposes of research, there are various ways of interpreting and elaborating 'Open' and 'Closed' perspectives. They could, for example, be refined in terms of a range of values between Progressive/Liberal and Conservative/Traditional polarities. These terms were not meant to portray pejorative connotations of legitimate positions, but provided a basis for designing an instrument to measure values.

Significantly, 'Open' and 'Closed' positions conform to an ideal-typical model, within which a continuum of values can be traced. It is unlikely in reality that anyone school, group or individual would conform to the characteristics of one 'ideal type' or the other. The focus would be to investigate a range of values between 'Open' and 'Closed' perspectives.

For the purposes of the enquiry, 'Open' and 'Closed' perspectives represent contrasting values, which can be characterised, respectively, as:

1. Concerns that maintain and conserve traditional Catholic values (i.e., 'Closed' values);

2. Concerns that foster flexibility and adaptability in a changing society (i.e., ‘Open’ values).

‘Open’ and ‘Closed’ dichotomies are not regarded as exclusive or comprehensive parameters with which to explore potential differences in perceptions. Neither do they necessarily provide a complete account of possible varieties of attitudes within Catholic schools towards Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education.

However, by establishing sets of values between contrasting ‘Open’ and ‘Closed’ perspectives, a framework is provided with which to investigate different positions that stakeholders might take up within Catholic education.

### **Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education**

Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education is a complex and wide-ranging area of the curriculum. Marland (1980) claims that pastoral care is the central task of the school. Hamblin (1978) identifies key transitional and developmental stages in the experience of pupils in secondary schools as ‘critical incidents’. Watkins (1985, 1995), for example, shows that personal-social education covers a variety of concerns within the dimension of pastoral care. For the practical purpose of investigation, though, the aim was to refine the field so that it would be possible to identify indicative components of Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education, which in turn could be elaborated to produce operational definitions of stakeholders’ views. In other words, it would then be possible to identify a set of factors that are likely to indicate what stakeholders think Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education should set out to achieve.

After considering potential components of Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education that would be representative of the subject, three components were identified as a basis for examination:

- Citizenship education (acquisition of socially acceptable behaviour, developing social skills that contribute to effective interpersonal relationships and co-operation with others);
- Moral education (understanding of moral issues that enable an individual to make fair judgements with consideration and respect for others); and
- Sex education (understanding of human sexuality, including legal and moral aspects of sexual relationships, growth and physical development and gender issues).

These areas of Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education were selected because it was considered that they would provide sufficient grounds for the examination of contentious issues and would elicit a range of opinions as a basis for discussion.

Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education is not confined to these three areas, of course, but they are sufficiently significant and representative.

### **Questionnaire Design**

The three selected components, viz., Citizenship Education, Moral Education and Sex Education, provided an integrated approach. Other criteria might have contributed towards a diversity of views but it seemed that these three would serve the purpose of teasing out potential differences in stakeholders’ perceptions. Initially, each component was defined in

terms of component statements (see Table 1). A possible limitation of this approach was that component statements were drawn up in a subjective way, based on the researcher's interpretation of what constituted prevailing concerns within each of the three components. However, discussions with professional colleagues and experts in the field helped to identify statements that would reflect stakeholders' perceptions of each of the three components.

*Table 1.* Table of components for the concept 'what Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education should set out to achieve' (to be used for questionnaire construction)

The following are indicative of areas that should be covered within the three identified components of Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education	Citizenship Education	Moral Education	Sex Education
Opportunities to discuss issues connected with bullying	√		
Opportunities to work together in groups and to get to know each other better	√		
Social development is seen as being just as important as academic development	√		
Opportunities to co-operate with each other in lessons	√		
Develop a sense of social responsibility towards the community	√		
Opportunities to contribute to the decision-making of the school	√		
Understand the need for rules in a community and their enforcement	√		
Satisfaction with personal relationships with other pupils	√		
Satisfaction with personal relationships with teachers	√		
Opportunities to learn about living in a community	√		
Opportunities to develop rational judgements about moral dilemmas		√	
Opportunities to develop responsible attitudes towards the consumption of alcohol		√	
Opportunities to develop responsible attitudes towards the smoking of tobacco		√	
Opportunities to develop responsible attitudes towards illegal drugs		√	
To promote responsible attitudes towards the maintenance of good health		√	
Appreciate that moral codes are subject to religious beliefs or particular philosophies		√	
Appreciate that tolerance requires that other moral perspectives should be listened to		√	
Appreciate that moral codes vary between groups and cultures		√	
Appreciate that everyone is involved in duties and obligations towards the wider society		√	
Learn to make informed decisions about moral issues		√	
Discuss issues to do with contraception and family planning			√
Learn about the responsibilities of parenthood			√
Discuss moral issues related to abortion			√
Discuss issues related to in vitro fertilization (IVF)			√
Awareness of aspects of human growth and sexuality			√
Discuss issues related to separation and divorce			√
Discuss issues relating to the subject of homosexuality			√
Discuss the causes of the transmission of AIDS			√
Learn about responsibilities of sexual relationships within marriage			√
Discuss issues about homosexual relationships			√

In terms of constructing the questionnaire, statements were devised that would reflect perceptions of Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education. Reliability was improved by designing two items for each statement in 'split-halves', i.e., each statement was reflected by a corresponding statement, which essentially re-presents the statement in a different way. The response to the first statement can then be checked against the response to the matching statement later in the questionnaire. Thus, the 60 statements represented 30 2 equivalent halves. The questionnaire is set out in the Appendix.

It is acknowledged that the definition of Citizenship Education here is selective and does not conform to the statutory subject of the National Curriculum, which was introduced in secondary schools in September, 2002, and which covers a wider range of topics, such as politics and government, the legal system and global issues. The intention was to bring together elements of Citizenship Education within Personal, Social and Health Education. According to this definition, it would include contributing to group and class discussions, developing skills of participation and responsible action and participation in community activities such as school councils. While this is, admittedly, an idiosyncratic approach, it was hoped at the time that it would recognise broader concerns.

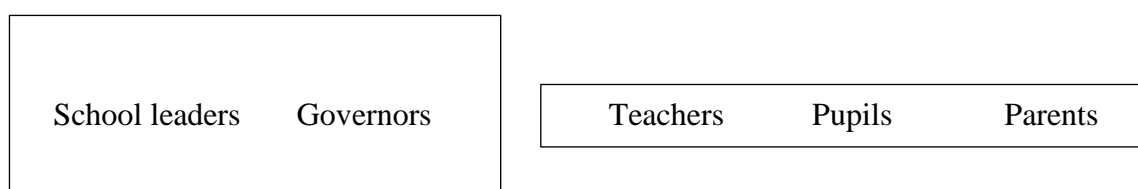
## Results

Representatives from all five stakeholder groups were invited to respond to a set of statements that required them to rate statements relating to the three identified components of Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education on a five-point (Likert) scale.

Having distributed questionnaires to each of the identified stakeholder groups and analysed the findings, it was possible to represent the results in the form of a Venn diagram, in which perceptions of stakeholder groups that are not significantly different are enclosed in a box, while stakeholder groups whose perceptions are significantly different from those within the box are outside.

### *Citizenship Education*

Where Citizenship Education is concerned, the diagram(below) shows that the responses of school leaders and governors displayed more ‘Open’ values when compared with teachers, pupils and parents.

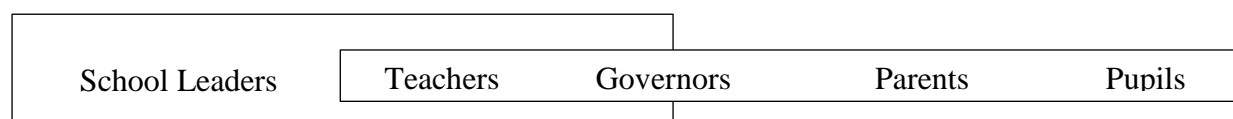


It might possibly be inferred that the latter are more concerned with discipline, bullying and conformity to school rules than the former. Being less involved with the day-to-day experiences of the classroom, school leaders and governors may be more likely to take a detached view of community. They are, perhaps, more likely to affirm Christian values of reconciliation and forgiveness than teachers, parents or pupils, particularly in a climate of social inclusion. There are pressures, too, to reduce the numbers of exclusions.

Indeed, Grace (1995, p. 68) found that headteachers were under pressure from groups of parents and groups of teachers, ‘who claimed that the exclusion of certain pupils was necessary for the common good of the school’. Anecdotal evidence, too, indicates that many parents would support a return to ‘traditional values’ in terms of discipline.

## *Moral Education*

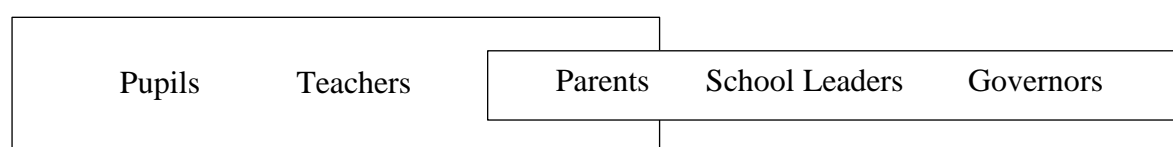
With regard to Moral Education, the results (displayed in the form of a Venn diagram below) showed that while school leaders show more tolerant values with regard to moral values than pupils, they are not significantly different from those of teachers, parents or governors. Grace (1995, 2002) says that senior managers attempt to operate a 'strategy of mediation' in the face of cultural and external pressures.



It is possible that school leaders are more likely to adopt a flexible approach towards conflicting demands and accommodate a diverse range of interests. Indeed, Grace (1995, p. 164) maintains that: 'Many of the dilemmas which the headteachers faced arose from a disjuncture between official Catholic moral teaching and the mores of contemporary society'. While pupils may adopt a more 'idealistic' perspective towards moral values, headteachers may adopt a mediating role, which takes account of individual situations.

## *Sex Education*

When considering the results of the questionnaire relating to Sex Education, the results presented in the form of a Venn diagram indicate that governors held a relatively 'Closed' position on the continuum of values compared with pupils and teachers, although not compared with parents and school leaders. Differences across pupils, teachers, parents and senior leaders are less marked.



The component of Sex Education, including issues such as abortion, contraception and homosexuality, poses sensitive and controversial questions within the Catholic community. One possible reason for a divergence of attitudes here is that pupils and teachers are directly involved in the experience of learning and teaching in Sex Education and will be engaged with the discussion of practical and immediate concerns in the lives of young people. Equally, governors may be more conservative in their perception of Sex Education as they are more conscious of the received teachings of the Church. It was hoped that further enquiry through semi-structured interviews with a sample of participants would allow for other explanations.

## **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Having found evidence of differences in attitudes towards the purpose of Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education in Catholic secondary schools, the concern was to explore the reasons for these variations. Candidates for interview were selected through a process of 'theoretical sampling' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) on the basis of scores elicited from the questionnaire survey. The guiding principle was to identify data that would help to illuminate the theory. The intention was to appreciate the reasons for differences of attitudes

across stakeholder groups. All interviews were selected with regard to perceptions shown by the results of the questionnaire survey. The criterion used for selection was that prospective interviewees held views that would characterise the general perceptions of the respective stakeholder groups. It was anticipated that these subjects would provide the most illuminating responses.

Having conducted semi-structured interviews with selected respondents from each of the stakeholder groups, a range of statements were recorded and transcribed. The following statements from participants are presented as a reflection of the attitudes of respective stakeholder groups towards the teaching of Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education in Catholic secondary schools.

### *Citizenship Education*

School leaders and governors adopted more 'Open' attitudes towards Citizenship Education compared with other groups, focusing on how wider community values can be promoted. Examples of responses articulated by school leaders include:

If children can be sociable together, they can support each other . . .

Everyone who goes in and out of the building is part of community.

I think school councils are good.

Governors, moreover, indicated that there are implications for Citizenship Education in other areas of the curriculum, including Religious Education:

. . . at some point during (Citizenship Education) . . .there will be some Religious Education.

. . . methods of discipline in schools have had to change . . .

With regard to Citizenship Education, pupils, parents and teachers emphasised concerns with regard to discipline, bullying and drugs. Pupils, for example, said that Citizenship Education is about:

not being a criminal, not vandalising . . . drugs . . . and basically how not to get yourself into trouble.

Bullying's out of order . . . I think you should definitely get the cane or suspension or expulsion.

Parents also raised anxieties about Citizenship Education with regard to other areas of the curriculum, suggesting that it detracted from the teaching of traditional subjects:

We've already got a crowded timetable . . . They're bugging about with PSE – that's what's happening.

We're being forced to do it in place of RE.

I . . . think PSE is a humanist RE.

. . . in my day . . . you would have got the strap . . .

. . . school council . . . I wouldn't be happy with it.

### *Moral Education*

The results indicated that school leaders and pupils adopted divergent attitudes towards the aims of Moral Education. One school leader suggested that young people are 'morally naïve'. Moreover, they considered that:

Young people . . . react to moral situations as blackand-white issues.

Pupils, however, adopted relatively 'Closed' positions with regard to ethical questions, expressing the conviction that answers to moral questions were either right or wrong, without regard to situational considerations. Pupils showed awareness of a distinctive Catholic ethos:

We are more slack (on moral questions) and we can say what we think more (than the older generation).

Religion is very serious . . . in a Catholic school, you're more together.

### *Sex Education*

The attitudes of pupils and teachers towards Sex Education were divergent from those of governors. Pupils said that they thought people should be able to make up their own minds about different kinds of sexual relationships. They indicated that their experience of Sex Education in Catholic schools tended to be limited, negative and unenlightened:

They're saying that you're wrong to have sex before marriage but I feel that if you're in a loving relationship and you're happy . . . and you've thought about it, then it's no problem.

In Catholic schools we're taught about (not having)sex before marriage but not everyone does that nowadays.

I don't think (there's) enough (Sex Education) at the moment, to be honest.

Teachers, too, articulated a view that Sex Education needed to cover broader issues:

Obviously, marriage is important but I think there is an emphasis put on loving and caring relationships.

We have a priest . . . who comes in a lot . . . but I think (he) is still quite removed.

It's the contraception (issue) that concerns me the most.

Governors emphasised the importance of Church teachings. Thus, they tended to adopt a detached and intellectual viewpoint:

I think that the ideal and example of marriage are important . . .

I think it should also aim to encourage them (young people) to see sexual activity as something which is a God-given and beautiful thing.

## **Conclusions**

Catholic secondary schools are located in a distinctive tradition and have developed in parallel with, but separately from, other schools within the maintained sector of education in England and Wales. Historically, they have retained a degree of independence in terms of their organisation and curriculum provision, based on a consistent and shared set of values. Increasingly, and particularly since the passing of the Education Reform Act (1988), Catholic schools have been subject to greater external influence and scrutiny. It is evident, too, that social and economic factors have contributed to a greater openness and debate within the Catholic community as a whole. Assuming Catholic education represents distinctive values, Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education can provide opportunities for Catholic schools to challenge secular, materialistic and market-oriented attitudes.

What are the implications for Catholic secondary schools? While the findings here indicate that stakeholders in Catholic schools may not always present a consistent view of the subject, their perceptions contribute to its development. The Catholic Bishops of England and Wales (1997, p. 13) assert, 'Education is about the service to others rather than the service to self'. This might offer a potentially controversial perspective in the modern world, where 'the market and individual self-interest' Grace (1995, p. 161) seems to prevail. One approach would be for Catholic schools to adopt a radical approach in teaching Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education, challenging the status quo with regard to issues such as Third World debt, responsibility for the environment and the effects of globalisation on the market economy.

There were limitations in the results of the study not only because of the size of the sample but also because there were difficulties in making multiple comparisons across groups of different sizes. Moreover, the subject of the study was complex and required clear definitions of the concepts under investigation. There were problems in this respect because component statements were based on the researcher's interpretation of what constituted prevailing concerns within each of the three identified components of Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education. On the other hand, the study set out to investigate an area where there is little previous research and could initiate a debate about what constitutes Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education in Catholic secondary schools.

A number of questions remain unanswered. While Catholic schools present a distinctive culture informed by core beliefs, values and traditions of the Catholic Church, there is evidence of different perspectives towards what Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education should achieve. Now that Citizenship Education is a statutory requirement of the National Curriculum, it may be subject to greater government prescription in this area. Adopting a 'prophetic approach' (Sullivan, 2001), for example, there is scope to challenge the prevailing notions of the market and of individual self-interest.

The modest findings of this research might encourage Catholic schools to explore approaches that promote a distinctive social, moral and spiritual perspective in the teaching of Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education. As there appears to be a paucity of material to address these concerns and values, there is potential for the development of resources specifically aimed at Catholic schools.

## Appendix

### *Questionnaire*

What are your attitudes towards what Citizenship and Personal, Social and Health Education should set out to achieve for pupils in a Catholic secondary school? (N.B. For the purposes of this study, pupils in a Catholic secondary school are to be defined as 11–16year-olds.)

Please indicate your attitude towards the following statements by ticking the appropriate box:

In a Catholic secondary school, pupils should		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not certain	Agree	Strongly agree
1	Be taught in classes arranged mainly according to their ability					
2	Forgive pupils who bully them					
3	Learn that married couples shouldn't separate or divorce					
4	Not be involved in decisions about school policies					
5	Regard any sexual relations outside of marriage to be wrong					
6	Regard it to be more important to pass exams than to develop social skills					
7	Regard learning about the effects of smoking cannabis to be as important as academic work					
8	Tell a teacher if they are having problems with another teacher					
9	Work together in small groups rather than as individuals					

In a Catholic secondary school, pupils should		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not certain	Agree	Strongly agree
10	Accept school rules without question					
11	Answer back if another pupil calls them names					
12	Be taught that homosexual behaviour is not wrong					
13	Consider it to be right to tell lies if it's to protect someone from knowing they're dying from an incurable disease					
14	Express the view that abortion is wrong					
15	Hold the opinion that single parents are as good as married couples at bringing up children					
16	Maintain that it's wrong for doctors to switch off the life-support machine of someone who is brain dead					
17	Not tell a teacher if a friend is smoking in the school toilets					
18	Regard learning about the effects of smoking tobacco to be as important as academic work					
19	Support the view that people who are homosexuals should not become teachers in Catholic schools					

In a Catholic secondary school, pupils should		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not certain	Agree	Strongly agree
20	Approve of the use of test-tube science to enhance the health and intelligence of babies					
21	Be allowed to question school rules					
22	Be allowed, as young teenage parents, to remain in the school to pursue their studies					
23	Be responsible for picking up litter in the classroom					
24	Be taught how to use contraceptives such as the condom and the pill					
25	Be taught that masturbation is not wrong					
26	Receive a talk from someone who has been infected with HIV/AIDS					
27	Receive lessons mainly in mixed-ability groups					
28	Regard academic work as more important than learning about the effects of smoking tobacco					
29	Take the interests of the school community into account before they think about their own interests					
30	Tell teachers about incidents of bullying in school					

In a Catholic secondary school, pupils should		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not certain	Agree	Strongly agree
31	Adopt the view that it is wrong for young teenage parents to study in a Catholic school					
32	Be permanently excluded if they are caught in possession of cannabis in the school					
33	Be represented in discussions about school policies					
34	Hold the view that it's right for doctors to switch off the life-support machine of someone who is brain dead					
35	Not tell teachers about incidents of bullying in school					
36	Regard learning about the effects of drinking alcohol to be as important as academic work					
37	Sort out incidents of bullying among themselves					
38	Take the view that people have a right to take their own lives in a hunger strike for a religious or political cause					

In a Catholic secondary school, pupils should		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not certain	Agree	Strongly agree
39	Adopt the view that homosexuality is a personal matter that has no bearing on one's professional life					
40	Be taught that masturbation is wrong					
41	Compete as individuals against one another for good marks					
42	Consider their own interests to be more important than those of the school community as a whole					
43	Disapprove of the use of test-tube science to enhance the health and intelligence of babies					
44	Express the 'woman's right' to choose to have an abortion					
45	Not be responsible for picking up litter in the classroom					
46	Regard academic work as more important than learning about the effects of drinking alcohol					

	In a Catholic secondary school, pupils should	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not certain	Agree	Strongly agree
47	Be taught that a married couple is better at bringing up children than a single parent					
48	Be taught that homosexual behaviour is wrong					
49	Be taught that it's wrong to use contraceptives like the condom or the pill					
50	Confront bullying with lessons in assertiveness rather than sorting it out among themselves					
51	Express the view that it is not wrong to have sexual relations outside of marriage					
52	Not receive talks from people who have been infected with HIV/AIDS					
53	Regard academic work as more important than learning about the effects of smoking cannabis					
54	Support the right of married couples, who agree they no longer get along with one another, to separate or divorce					
55	Take the view that it's always wrong to take one's own					

	In a Catholic secondary school, pupils should	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not certain	Agree	Strongly agree
56	Always tell the truth, whatever the circumstances					
57	Not tell teachers about problems they have with other teachers					
58	Receive counselling in the school if they are caught in possession of cannabis at school					
59	Regard it to be just as important to develop social skills as it is to pass exams					
60	Tell a teacher if a friend is smoking in the school toilets					

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