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The embodiment of tolerance in discourses and practices addressing cultural diversity in Irish schools

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**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES**

The embodiment of tolerance in discourses and practices addressing cultural diversity in Irish schools

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SCHOOL OF POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



**Work Package 3 – National Case Studies of
Challenges to Tolerance in School Life**

**D3.1 Final Country Reports on Concepts and
Practices of Tolerance Addressing Cultural Diversity
in Schools**

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ACCEPT PLURALISM is a Research Project, funded by the European Commission under the Seventh Framework Program. The project investigates whether European societies have become more or less tolerant during the past 20 years. In particular, the project aims to clarify: (a) how is tolerance defined conceptually, (b) how it is codified in norms, institutional arrangements, public policies and social practices, (c) how tolerance can be measured (whose tolerance, who is tolerated, and what if degrees of tolerance vary with reference to different minority groups). The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium conducts original empirical research on key issues in school life and in politics that thematise different understandings and practices of tolerance. Bringing together empirical and theoretical findings, ACCEPT PLURALISM generates a State of the Art Report on Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Handbook on Ideas of Tolerance and Cultural Diversity in Europe, a Tolerance Indicators' Toolkit where qualitative and quantitative indicators may be used to score each country's performance on tolerating cultural diversity, and several academic publications (books, journal articles) on Tolerance, Pluralism and Cultural Diversity in Europe. The ACCEPT PLURALISM consortium is formed by 18 partner institutions covering 15 EU countries. The project is hosted by the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies and co-ordinated by Prof. Anna Triandafyllidou.

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List of Abbreviations

ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland
CSO	Central Statistics Office (Ireland)
EEA	European Economic Area
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
EU	European Union
EUMC	European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia
FOSIS	Federation of Student Islamic Societies
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
ICCI	Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland
ICCL	Irish Council for Civil Liberties
ICI	Immigrant Council of Ireland
IFI	Islamic Foundation of Ireland
IHRC	Irish Human Rights Commission
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
JMB	Joint Managerial Body (of Voluntary Secondary Schools)
NAPD	National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCCRI	National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism
NPAR	National Action Plan Against Racism
OMI	Office of the Minister for Integration
RTE	Radio Telefís Éireann
TD	Teachta Dála (Member of Irish Parliament)
TUI	Teachers' Union of Ireland
UK	United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
VEC	Vocational Education Committees

Executive Summary

Education is an area in which crucial issues of tolerance with respect to religious and cultural minorities have arisen historically throughout Europe, and continue to arise today. In the case of religion, these issues range across the settlement with respect to religious schools, the teaching of religion in schools, and the presentation of self by pupils and teachers in schools. Each European country has had to develop policies on religion and schools in general, and the treatment of religious minorities in the context of the wider settlement with respect to the relationship of church and state, from strict separation to the establishment of a state church. Historic settlements reached with indigenous religious minorities have influenced the treatment of newer immigrant religious groups. Yet policies are still evolving across European countries in the face of new challenges. Of central interest is the way in which issues of tolerance arise and are dealt with in policy and practice in a Europe where host societies are often becoming less religious, while new immigrant religious groups bring new challenges of diversity.

The position of religion in education in Ireland has been distinctive, framed by the original constitutional position of the Catholic Church and simultaneous recognition of other religions, in a settlement different from the strict separationist, establishment and other accommodational models found in other European countries.

Historical and contemporary religious diversity has made accommodation in education a long-standing issue in Ireland. Education has been organised on a largely denominational basis, while primarily funded by the state. This constitutes a level of recognition for majority and minority religious groups in education. Most schools are managed by the Catholic Church, but there are also Protestant, Jewish, Muslim and multi-denominational schools. Trends in religious belief have brought about pressures of various kinds on these structural arrangements; recent immigration has led to increasing cultural and religious diversity.

It is in this context that we undertook as case studies two recent challenges that raised issues of tolerance in education: the funding of Protestant schools and the wearing of the hijab in school.

The first debate arose from the government decision in 2008 to remove some special funding, namely the ancillary grants previously provided to Protestant secondary schools. This special arrangement was seen as an acknowledgment by the government that these schools serve a special purpose by allowing the geographically dispersed Protestant population to maintain affordable education provision in accordance with their religious ethos. Despite claims of discrimination raised in the debate, the decision was not reversed. While the Protestant schools retain a block grant, and are thus treated in the same way as other fee-paying schools, they did not regain the ancillary grants.

The second was an appeal by a school principal in 2008 to the Department of Education to provide official guidelines for schools on whether to allow pupils to wear the hijab, previously a matter for each principal to decide. This followed a request from the parents of a 14-year-old girl that she be allowed to wear the Muslim headscarf to school. The school principal accommodated the pupil but was concerned that, in the absence of national guidelines or policy, she could encounter difficulties if she transferred to another school. The Department of Education responded by issuing non-binding guidelines for schools, which effectively left the decision to principals. Thus, while most schools appear to have increasingly accepted the headscarf, there was little change in practice as a result of this challenge.

The cases, however, represent touchstones in contemporary debates on school diversity in Ireland – debates on both the new diversity *within* schools and the growing diversity *of* (types of) schools. Both involved both practical and legal challenges, and were hotly debated in the media and the political arena. At the same time, these two issues represent very different diversity challenges to Irish education – while both engage with primarily religious (though also cultural) minorities, the first involves an historical ‘native’ minority (Protestants), and the second a relatively ‘new’ and (mainly) immigrant minority (Muslims). While both engage with the recognition of religious minorities’ rights to education, they embody significantly different demands and highlight different facets of tolerance in Ireland.

The debates that followed the reduction in funding to the Protestant schools were framed predominantly in terms of a) minority rights or elite privileges; b) retaliation for a previous legal challenge by the Protestant schools; and c) recognition and support for plurality and diversity more widely.

Overall the perception was that the Protestant community is generally well perceived and in a way well integrated in the Republic of Ireland, and the change tended to be seen, even by those who opposed it, primarily in terms of practical considerations, whether of politics or economic constraints.

Nonetheless, in locating this issue on the acceptance spectrum (intolerance, mere tolerance, respect-recognition), we can interpret the removal of funding for Protestant schools as a shift from a state of respect and recognition for this minority (level 3) to a level of basic toleration (level 2), where the state authorises and tolerates denominational / minority faith schools (and participates in their funding), but does not recognise their special needs as ‘minority’ schools.

But, given the structure of Irish education, which in some sense recognises all religions (at level 3) by financially supporting separate schools and their distinct ethos, this could, in a more complex sense, be seen as a change *within* the third, rather complex, level of respect, and thus as a reduction, but not a complete withdrawal of recognition.

Our second case, the hijab debate was selected as of particular interest as occurring in a country which has not seen any prohibition on headscarves in schools or public places. In this light, and in view of the fact that the episode did not lead to any regulation, it provides a contrast with those European countries where the headscarf has been a major issue or has been banned in schools. This debate brought out to a greater extent than any previous event a range of views on the new religious and cultural diversity, and is thus useful in casting light on the state of tolerance in Ireland.

This debate was framed (rather differently from the Protestant schools case) principally in terms of a) gender rights and protecting vs. rejecting the veiled woman; b) integration vs. segregation; and c) the place of religion in school and beyond.

This debate demonstrated a generally tolerant attitude towards headscarves in schools, with some dissenting voices. Almost unanimous intolerance towards the so far hypothetical case of the niqab in school (increasingly present in society) was noteworthy, however.

Thus, interpreting this case with respect to the spectrum of acceptance (intolerance, tolerance, respect-recognition), we may see it as ranging from general tolerance (level 2) of the hijab in Irish schools (if conditional on each school’s assessment of the situation) to hypothetical intolerance (level 1) of the niqab by all education actors.

The two challenges and debates studied here must be seen in the context of the major issues in education that are now coming to the fore, concerning the structure and control of schools (whether they should be religious or non-religious, and state managed or otherwise) and the role of religion and

religious education in schools. The evidence from these debates suggests that this will raise further challenging issues about acceptance of religious and cultural diversity.

At present, from this exploration of acceptance in Irish education, two main policy-relevant issues on which there appeared to be considerable agreement emerged:

Teachers in all schools will need to be equipped to deal with religious and cultural diversity within schools. There should be compulsory training for teachers in this area.

Entities facilitating the interaction of minority groups with government need to be maintained and expanded.

These suggest that policies of interculturalism rather than more assimilatory policies with respect to minorities should be maintained by government.

Keywords

Toleration, education, schools, Protestants, Muslims, hijab, interculturalism, accommodation, integration

1. Introduction

1.1. The education system in Ireland

Education has always been highly valued in Ireland and is now regarded as a central force in the economic, social and cultural development of Irish society. There is a high level of public interest in educational issues.

Many aspects of the administration of the Irish education system are centralised in the Department of Education, including curricula, regulations for the recognition, management, resourcing and staffing of schools, and negotiation of teachers' salary scales. The Minister for Education has specific responsibility for policy issues in the systems of primary, secondary, third-level and further education. But the provision and management of education is almost all devolved to other, largely private bodies, so that there is virtually no public state education in Ireland.

Primary education

Attendance at full-time education is compulsory for children between six and sixteen years of age, but many children start school earlier.

The structure of primary education is quite complex, combining state funding with management by a range of non-state institutions.¹ The current and capital costs of primary or 'national' schools, including teachers' salaries, are funded almost entirely by the State, supplemented by local contributions. Schools serving areas of particular disadvantage or children with special needs receive additional funding. The vast majority of national schools are State-aided parish schools, established under diocesan patronage, with State recognition of their denominational character. In recent years multi-denominational national schools have also been established in response to local parental demand. A significant number of national schools providing education through the medium of the Irish language have also been established in English-speaking areas under both diocesan and independent patronage.

The current system of primary school management, or patronage, originated with the establishment of primary education in 1831. The original intent was to establish non-denominational local national schools. However, within 40 years the existing church structures had become the basis of organisation for schools throughout the country. This system (now underpinned by the Education Act, 1998) came to include a range of patron bodies (the Churches, and bodies with limited company status organising multi-denominational and all-Irish schools).

The educational philosophy of the patron is reflected in the distinctive character of the education provided in the school, described in a variety of terms, from *ethos* through 'characteristic spirit', 'mission', 'purpose' or 'philosophy'. This is supported by the 'integrated curriculum', introduced in 1971, and still central to the programmes of Catholic and Church of Ireland schools (Mawhinney, 2007). Since the mid-1970s, day to day responsibility for running schools has been devolved from the patron to the board of management.

¹ For a detailed (historical) presentation of the Irish Education system see Coolahan (1981).

The (6) main types of primary school are:

- **National schools, also called ‘denominational’ or ‘faith’ schools in Ireland**, date back to the introduction of State primary education in 1831. They are usually controlled by a board of management under diocesan patronage and often include a local clergyman. Faith formation forms part of the school day. The majority of denominational schools are under the patronage of the Catholic Church. The other main denominational schools currently recognised by the Department are Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, Methodist, Muslim, Jewish and Quaker schools. In the context of the Education Act 1998, the Department of Education recognises the rights of the various church authorities to design curricula in religious education and to supervise their teaching and implementation.

- **Gaelscoileanna** started late in the 20th century. Irish is the teaching and working language of the school. Nearly 10% of school children attend Gaelscoils, the fastest growing education sector. Gaelscoileanna follow the standard curriculum. The ethos of a gaelscoil can be denominational, multi-denominational or inter-denominational depending on local circumstances.

- **Multidenominational schools** are another innovation, often opened due to parental demand and students from all religions and backgrounds are welcome. Most multi-denominational schools currently recognised by the Department are Educate Together schools, which currently number 58. These schools do not provide for faith formation or religious observance during school hours but do facilitate faith formation on school premises outside school hours.

- **Community national schools, under the patronage of local Vocational Education Committees (VECs)**, all in the greater Dublin area, were set up in response to pressures in areas with considerable numbers of immigrants, and where children could not get places in local schools. Two were established in September 2008 and a further three in September 2010. These are not intended to replace existing models but to provide an additional option, and to meet the demand for diversity and whole community inclusion. The delivery of religious education in the new schools is being developed on an experimental basis over the course of the pilot phase.

- **Preparatory schools** represent a small number of independent, fee-paying primary schools that are not reliant on the state for funding. Most are under the patronage of a religious order.

- Finally, there are **130 special schools**, under the patronage either of the Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland, or various public and private organisations that deal with disability.

Traditionally, the choice of primary school has been based either around the choice of denominational education, formation and practice, or choice of the language of instruction (English or Irish).

The Constitution enshrines the principle of parental choice. Article 42.3 provides that: ‘The State shall not oblige parents in violation of their conscience and lawful preference to send their children to schools established by the State, or to any particular type of school designated by the State’. Article 42.4 provides that: ‘...the State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation’.

Table 1 presents the patronage of primary schools in 20010/11.

Table 1 Total number of primary schools by patron body (2010/11)²

Patron Body	No of Schools	% of Total
Catholic ³	2,841	89.65
Church of Ireland ⁴	174	5.49
Presbyterian	17	0.54
Methodist	1	0.03
Jewish	1	0.03
Islamic	2	0.06
Quaker	1	0.03
John Scottus Educational Trust Ltd	1	0.03
Lifeways Ireland Ltd	2	0.06
An Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna		
Lán-Ghaeilge Teo	57	1.80
Educate Together Ltd		
(national Patron Body)	44	1.39
Educate Together		
School with own patron body ⁵	14	0.44
Vocational Education Committees	5	0.16
Minister for Education & Skills	9	0.29
Total	3,169	100.00

Source: Report of the Commission on School Accommodation

Second level education

The second-level education sector is also quite diverse and consists mainly of three sectors: voluntary secondary schools; vocational schools and community colleges; and community and comprehensive schools.

Voluntary secondary schools are privately owned and managed, while teachers' salaries are paid by the state. They are under the trusteeship of religious communities (largely Catholic), boards of governors or individuals. The Education Act 1998⁶ requires them to have boards of management that include parent and teacher representatives. Such schools may be fee-paying or non-fee-paying.⁷ The majority of secondary schools in Ireland do not charge fees, participating in the free secondary education scheme introduced in the 1960s. Such schools receive grants based on the number of pupils attending the school to assist with their running costs. Schools rated as disadvantaged receive an additional grant per pupil. Even students attending non-fee-paying schools must pay for books, uniforms and examination fees. In fee-paying schools, the State pays the salaries of all teachers, but the schools do not receive any state grants towards their running costs. There is thus no strictly private or independent secondary school system in Ireland.

² This table presents the patronage of ordinary mainstream primary schools and does not include Special Schools.

³ 187 of these schools operate through the medium of Irish (106 schools in Gaeltacht areas and 81 gael scoileanna outside Gaeltacht areas).

⁴ One Church of Ireland School has shared patronage with the Methodist Church, four schools have shared patronage with the Presbyterian Church and three schools have individual patron bodies.

⁵ One of these schools is a gael scoil.

⁶ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/pdf/1998/en.act.1998.0051.pdf>.

⁷ The system of fee/non-fee paying schools is given expanded treatment in our first case study

Vocational schools and community colleges are owned by the local vocational education committees (VECs), statutory bodies set up by local authorities (usually county councils). Their boards of management include VEC, parent, teacher and community representatives. These schools and colleges are largely funded by the Department of Education. Initially, they were orientated towards providing a technical education; today they generally provide a wide range of both academic and practical subjects.

Community and comprehensive schools were established in the 1960s as part of an initiative to provide a broad curriculum for all the young people in a community. Many were established as the result of the amalgamation of voluntary secondary and vocational schools. They offer a wide range of academic and vocational subjects. They are financed entirely by the Department of Education, and managed on behalf of the State by boards of management which are representative of local interests and include religious orders and/or Bishops.

Second-level education consists of a three-year junior cycle followed by a two or three-year senior cycle. The Junior Certificate examination is taken after the three-year Junior Cycle. The Senior Cycle is now typically a three year cycle, including a 'Transition' Year that includes a wide range of educational inputs and work experience at a remove from the examination focus. A number of options for graduating from the Senior Cycle through the Leaving Certificate examination are provided. This is usually taken at the age of 17 or 18, after 5 or 6 years of post primary education.

Second-level education in Ireland is undergoing a period of transition in response to educational, cultural, demographic, legal and constitutional change. This finds expression in increasing pluralism, new management structures for Catholic schools, changing patterns of religious commitment among pupils, parents and school staff, and increased parental choice in school selection. In recent decades the decline in the number of members of religious orders, an increase in the number of lay teaching staff, and the amalgamation of schools, for instance by the merging of existing single-sex voluntary Catholic secondary schools with vocational schools, has brought the question of the distinctive character of Catholic schools especially into greater prominence.

1.2. Cultural and religious diversity in school life

In addition to the existing religious and cultural diversity, reflected in school structures, Irish society has become more diverse in terms of nationality, language, ethnicity and religious affiliation, as immigrants increased from 3% of the population in 1993 to 6% in 2002 to 10% in 2006, originating from more than 188 countries (Ruhs, 2006; CSO, 2008). While immigration has benefitted Ireland economically and provided a welcome cultural diversity, it has posed certain challenges for schools with little prior experience of dealing with ethnic, cultural, linguistic and to a certain extent, religious, diversity (Devine, 2005; Smyth et al., 2009; Gilligan et al., 2010). Unlike countries with a long-standing history of immigration, Ireland does not yet have a substantial second immigrant generation and thus the majority of children with an ethnic minority background are first generation immigrants (Taguma et al., 2009).

The statistical tools to estimate the numbers and situation of immigrant students and compare them with native students is less well-developed and robust in Ireland than in many other countries because of the recent and rapid shift in immigration patterns. However, Ní Laoire et al. (2009), using the information available from the 2006 population census, highlight that just over 10% of the total childhood population of Ireland was born in countries other than Ireland (mainly EU); children make up almost 20% of the total immigrant population (as defined by country of birth); just over 7% of all children living in Ireland do not have Irish nationality; and the most common nationality of immigrant children living in Ireland is British (22,157), followed by EU15-25 (13,828) and Africa (9,788). The

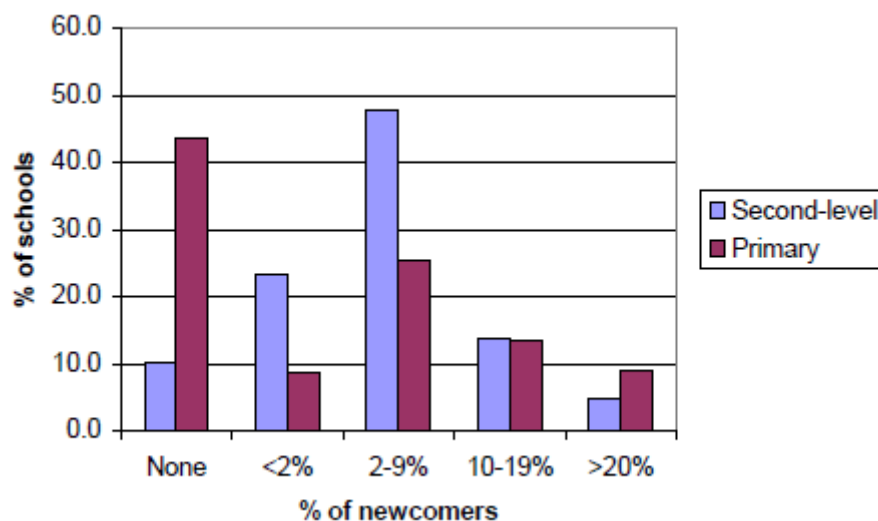
2006 Census does not record the nationality of 13,000 children because their nationality was not stated.⁸

There are a number of differences between the primary and second-level sectors with regard to the distribution of newcomer students. Smyth et al (2009) estimate that at primary level, out of a total school population of 476,600, there were 45,700 newcomer students, making up around 10% of the total primary school population in 2007 and that over three-quarters of these were non-English speaking. At second level, of a total school population of around 327,000, approximately 18,000 were newcomers.⁹ Thus newcomers made up 6% of the total second-level school population in 2007. Based on these estimates, about 70% of newcomer students at second level are non-English speaking.

There is no evidence of school segregation in relation to immigrant students relative to international comparisons, as most immigrant students are quite broadly dispersed, and in schools with a low proportion of immigrant students. But there are marked differences between primary and second-level schools (see Figure 1). While approximately 90% of second-level schools in Ireland record newcomer students, only 56% of primary schools do. Almost half of the second-level schools in Ireland have between 2% and 9% of newcomers. Primary schools in general tend to have higher proportions of newcomers, or none at all. Almost one in ten primary schools has over 20% of newcomers.

Non-Irish students are also diverse in terms of nationality, as 160 different nationalities were recorded at second level in the school year 2006/2007. While there are more East Europeans than other national groups, overall, there is a substantial mix of nationalities within individual schools. While this absence of segregation on the basis of nationality is positive, it also offers greater challenges for schools, given the variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds of newcomer students (Smyth et al., 2009). The nationality of immigrant students in a school is important in a number of respects. It is usually a good indicator of English language competency, which may have a crucial impact on learning outcomes; it may also indicate cultural distance, where certain nationalities may be seen as ‘further’ from Ireland than others, in terms of customs, cultural references, religion and a shared identity (Byrne et al., 2010).

Figure 1 Proportion of newcomers in Irish schools (by school level)



Source: Smyth & al, 2009

⁸ The most recent census took place in April 2011 and data should be available early in 2012.

⁹ At second level, the estimates from the survey have been adjusted using supplementary information from the Department of Education and Science and the 2006 Census of Population.

Religious diversity among newcomer pupils is also a challenge for the largely denominational Irish school system. Findings from a survey of 450 of its members by the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN), showed four out of five primary schools now cater for pupils from at least two religious backgrounds, with one-in-six catering for children of at least six different faiths. Cleary et al. (2001) argued that there is a lack of research on children of minority beliefs in the Irish context, while in her study of the experiences of minority belief parents in the denominational primary system, Lodge (2004) concluded that '...differences in belief are denied in the denominational primary system and those whose beliefs are different are rendered invisible and subordinate' (p. 32).

The greatest challenge for Irish schools, however, has been that the majority of newcomers do not have English as their first language. Indeed, existing research on immigrant students identify language issues as one of the biggest challenges (Keogh and Whyte, 2003; Devine et al., 2004). The language barrier is generally seen as a major barrier to student achievement, affecting their grasp of subjects as well as their self-esteem (Keogh and Whyte, 2003; Vekic, 2003).

While children from English-speaking immigrant families fare well in school, children from non-English speaking backgrounds are struggling. Results from the most recent (2009) PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) survey, in which 3,937 or 8.3% of the 15-year-old students participating in Ireland had an immigrant background, show that these scored significantly lower on reading performance (473.1) than native Irish students (501.9) (Perkins et al., 2010).¹⁰ This is a change from the 2006 PISA study, which found no performance difference in reading between Irish students and immigrant students.

Other evidence of educational disadvantage comes from a recent comprehensive study of early school leaving in Ireland. In their report using data from a longitudinal study of 12 post-primary schools, Byrne and Smyth (2010) find that 20% of non-Irish students leave school early (i.e., before completion of the Leaving Certificate examination), compared with 11% of Irish students. Language problems are the most commonly identified problem that principals and teachers report of non-Irish national students, and have a serious impact on both the academic performance and the social integration of non-Irish children (Lyons and Little, 2009; Smyth et al., 2009).

Teachers play a key role in integrating newcomer pupils; however, they bring their own cultural perspectives to the classroom and are in a position to strongly influence the views, conceptions, and behaviours of (all) students. Existing research in Ireland shows that newcomer students generally feel positive about their teachers (Vekic, 2003; Darmody, 2007; Nowlan, 2008). This is often linked to the fact that the majority of immigrants to Ireland are a highly educated group (Barrett et al., 2006; CSO, 2008) and thus have positive dispositions towards schooling and education in general. However, in her study of the experience of ethnic diversity in a selected sample of primary and post-primary schools, drawing on interviews with teachers as well as observation of school practice, Devine (2005) found that while teachers were positive about their experiences of working with newcomer students, often praising their work ethic and respectful behaviour in school, their views also demonstrated both class-related and racialised perceptions. Interestingly, the teachers showed more positive views of migrants of East European origin than other migrant groups such as African, Muslim, Asian and Roma migrants, the latter groups being more clearly outside the Irish 'norm'. She further observed that teachers showed feelings of ambiguity and insecurity, somewhat linked to the lack of policy within which they were working. For Devine (2005), 'The delay in the development of national guidelines on intercultural education signifies a *laissez faire* attitude by the state to this area, mirrored in the absence of the development of a national policy on immigration in Ireland as a whole' (p.66).

¹⁰ Immigrant students are defined as those who were born outside Ireland (the majority of the group) or those born in Ireland where both parents were born outside Ireland.

Government strategy

In line with the Office of the Minister for Integration's perception that 'efforts in education are critical to preparing immigrants, and particularly their descendants, to be more successful and more active participants in society', the Department of Education was one of three Government departments designated as having a central role to play in 'dealing with the integration of migrants into Irish society' (OMI, 2008: 67)¹¹ and a dedicated 'integration unit' within Department of Education was established in October 2007. Since the late 1990s, the Department of Education had made provision for the appointment of 'language support teachers' in schools to provide non-native English speakers with sufficient verbal and written skills to facilitate their integration (Joint Committee on Education and Science 2004). Students were entitled to two hours of language support tuition per week for a maximum of two years, which typically involves the withdrawal of pupils from mainstream classes (Nowlan 2008). Intercultural educational materials and guidelines have been produced by various statutory and non-statutory agencies in recent years. Most notably, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), an advisory body to the Department of Education, published intercultural guidelines for both primary and secondary schools (NCCA, 2005, 2006).

An Intercultural Education Strategy was launched in September 2010 by the Minister for Education and the Minister of State for Equality, Integration and Human Rights.¹² The strategy encompasses all participants in education (both education providers and students) from both immigrant and host communities, based on the EU principle that integration is a two-way process. It is relevant to all levels of education, from pre-school to higher education and has five main goals: (1) Enable the adoption of 'whole institution approach' to creating an intercultural learning environment (2) Build the capacity of education providers to develop an intercultural learning environment (3) Support students to become proficient in the language of instruction (4) Encourage and promote partnership between education providers, students, parents and communities and (5) Promote and evaluate data gathering and monitoring so that policy is evidence based. A data portal on accessing intercultural materials has also been developed for use by students, parents, educators, researchers and policymakers.¹³

As we have seen, a key issue for migrant children in Irish schools is the provision of English language tuition and, although the Intercultural Education Strategy emphasises that all teachers have a role as 'language teachers', the provision of English teachers for migrant students has been an issue of serious debate over the last few years. Current 'English as an Additional Language' (EAL) provision is allocated on the basis of the number of newcomer students.¹⁴ Provision had been extended in March 2007, but as a result of cuts in the November 2008/April 2009 budgets, 'the level of EAL support will generally be reduced to a maximum of two teachers per school, as was the case before 2007' (Circular 0015/2009). This change is likely to disproportionately affect schools with a high proportion of newcomers.

Restrictions on access to education

All children resident in Ireland have the right to access free primary and secondary education. Restrictions exist, however, on the rights of non-EU children to come to Ireland in the first place and enter the education system. The entry and residence of those from outside the EEA are subject to a

11 The OMI (Office of the Minister of State for Integration) is now The Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration

12 Intercultural Education Strategy 2010-2015 (2010)

13 <http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?pcategory=10856&ecategory=51922&language=EN>

14 Schools with fewer than 14 students receive a grant towards tuition; schools with 14-30 pupils one extra teacher; students with 31-90 pupils, two extra teachers. Schools with more than 90 students requiring English-language tuition need to make a special application to the DES (Circular 0015/2009). Available at: <http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?pcategory=19963&ecategory=52540&language=EN>

range of immigration and residency categories, and certain education restrictions. The children of international students are generally not allowed to access state funded education at any level, as this is interpreted as the student being in breach of the requirement of their residence permit. In cases where children have been attending a State school in Ireland for at least some of the last school year, they will be allowed remain in education until the completion of the parent's course (O'Connell and Joyce, 2010). With such exceptions, resident children, including unaccompanied minors and asylum-seekers, have access to primary and post-primary education on the same basis as Irish citizens, but do not have free access to further or third-level education or FAS training programmes.

Firstly, not all non-Irish nationals may enter third-level education. Asylum seekers and those whose parents are asylum seekers are generally not permitted to access third-level education. Secondly, while the majority of non-Irish nationals may access further and third-level, most must pay fees and non-EU nationals generally pay a considerably higher rate. Information on grants and financial assistance is often complicated (Coughlan et al., 2005), and information on the types of education open to immigrants is poorly disseminated and leaves many immigrants unaware of the opportunities available to them.

Immigration status itself can also be a serious issue for migrant children (and their access to education). Once they turn 16, all non-EU citizen migrant children must register with the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB), produce their registration card when requested, and may not be allowed to seek after school or weekend work. The GNIB issues the child with one of a number of immigration stamps, each of which carries different rules and entitlements. The stamps most usually issued to migrant children are those intended for students coming to Ireland to undertake second level education (Stamp 2A), or sometimes, those normally intended for migrants coming to study at a third level institution (Stamp 2). These stamps are issued even if the child has lived in Ireland for years and been educated mainly or wholly here. Sometimes the stamp issued to dependents is given (Stamp 3). This can create misunderstandings, confusion and anxiety. Issues intensify once children turn 18, when they must obtain independent immigration status and, if not naturalised by the time they reach third-level education, are generally required to pay either EU citizen or international student fees. According the Immigrant Council of Ireland (2010), 'The ad hoc nature of the immigration system, as it impacts on children, can cause an early realisation in young people that their sense of belonging in Ireland is not reciprocal'.

2. Exploring discourses and practices of tolerance in education in Ireland

2.1. Issues related to acceptance/tolerance in the school context

Over the years, a number of areas have raised debates concerning **issues of curriculum, pedagogy and general educational culture** in Ireland. The most important of these include the role of the Irish language in education, and the place of religion in the curriculum and the ethos of the school.

Irish is identified as the first national language in the Constitution (Article 8), though it is now the daily language of a small minority. The promotion of the Irish language has been an important aim of successive Irish Governments and its place in the education system has been consistently protected. Irish is compulsory for all pupils at primary and secondary level. There have been proposals that Irish should no longer be a compulsory subject beyond Junior Certificate level, most recently from Fine Gael before the election of 2011 that brought the party into government.

Education for children living in Gaeltacht areas (those identified as predominantly Irish-speaking) is provided exclusively through the medium of the Irish language. While this can be seen as recognition of the national heritage, and of the minority which speaks the language, some Gaeltacht parents would prefer their children to be taught through English. Even if these parents can choose a different school,

they cannot avail of state-subsidised transport to an English-medium school. It should be noted that these issues are driven mainly by Irish people who argue that the language should be less central to the education system, and not by immigrants to whom the language might be unfamiliar.

A second area in which there has been increasing debate is **the place of religion in the curriculum**, in particular the way in which religion is integrated into the whole curriculum in the great majority of primary schools. By law, schools *can* and *must* teach the 'integrated curriculum', in which religion is integrated with other subjects throughout the school day (e.g., prayers at start and end of day, religious assemblies, religious services in churches during school time, preparation for religious sacraments at ages 7 and 11, etc). According to Mawhinney (2007), the practice of an integrated religious curriculum in 98% of Irish primary schools endangers the freedom of religion of children who do not want to be exposed to doctrinal teaching; she argues that 'the Irish domestic legal order does not provide protection against involuntary religious indoctrination conveyed through the practice of a doctrinal integrated curriculum in primary schools' (p.402). In paragraph 411 of the Third Report by Ireland on the Measures Adopted to Give Effect to the Provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (2007), the State suggests that a student can be exempted from any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent or student, a practice referred to as 'the opt-out clause'. However, when an integrated curriculum is taught, 'opting-out' is not a viable solution. A child cannot be opted out of unscheduled and potentially continuous religious teaching woven into the fabric of daily education.

The most important issues regarding the **structure of the education system** have arisen with regard to the **denominational structure of management of primary education**, in particular the extent to which the vast majority of primary schools are controlled by the Catholic Church. As we have seen, there are no state-run or 'public' primary schools in Ireland, almost all primary schools are run by private bodies, but are financed by the state. 98% of these schools are religious. This means that the vast majority of primary schools, though publicly funded, are privately run denominational schools. This has facilitated separate State-supported primary schools for minority religions, including Jews and Muslims. Until recently the religiously segregated nature of the education system was not seen as really problematic. However, as the population becomes more (religiously) diverse, including a growing 'no religion' section, the issue of religious schools has given rise to growing debates over the years. Two main issues have been identified by Mawhinney (2006, 2007):

- First, in areas of high population growth there is a shortage of schools. Catholic schools in these areas operate admissions policies based on the religion of the families, and this has resulted in non-Catholic children being turned away and left without any school place. It has also led some parents to have their children baptised specifically to ensure they can gain entry to a school, any school. (This is the context in which the new Community national schools were set up.)
- The second problem arises particularly outside major urban areas and refers to a lack of choice. Very often parents who do not wish to have their children educated in a religious environment have no choice but to send them to the local Catholic or Protestant school. As doctrinal religion is taught in these schools through timetabled religious education classes and the integrated curriculum, the issue is the protection of the religious liberty of families who do not belong to the religions that run the primary schools but whose children have little option but to attend these schools.

An *Irish Times* /Ipsos, MRBI poll in January 2010 revealed that a majority of people (61%) believe that the Catholic Church should give up its control of the primary school system; 28% said it should maintain its position, and 11% had no opinion on the matter (Collins, 2010).

A specific controversy on the status of religion in education and the structure of education concerns the **funding provided for Protestant secondary schools**. Controversies emerged in 2008/2009 following the decision to remove the ancillary grants received by fee-paying Protestant secondary schools. This funding, in place since 1967, was seen as an acknowledgment by government that the schools served a special purpose, allowing the geographically dispersed Protestant population to maintain affordable education provision in accordance with their religious ethos. The decision was

widely criticised by the Protestant community. This issue is explored in more detail in our first case study.

There have also been some debates regarding the problems faced by Travellers in the education system, mainly poor levels of achievement, the lack of recognition of their culture in schools, and the need for more teachers from the Travelling community itself. Traveller educational status has been recorded repeatedly as considerably lower than that of their peers. The 2006 census revealed that 63.2% of Traveller children under the age of 15 had left school, compared to 13.3% nationally. Participation of Travellers in higher education was 0.8% compared to 30.2% of the national population (CSO, 2007a). In the past there was separate or even segregated teaching of Traveller children, and assumptions about intellectual capability were coloured by children's membership of the Traveller community. To address this, the 2006 'Report and Recommendations for a Traveller Education Strategy', proposed a 5-year strategy to examine Traveller Education from preschool to third-level education. The primary goal of the strategy is to achieve equality for Travellers in education, in terms of access, participation and outcomes.¹⁵ However, while there has been no shortage of policy production over the years, these have not translated into consequent 'practical actions' and the delivery of education for Travellers is still not satisfactory. In 2010, the All-Ireland Traveller Health Study revealed that bullying, name-calling and fights at school were also serious issues for both young Travellers and their parents.

Finally, with regard to 'well-being' and 'interaction' in the school context, Ireland has legislation protecting young people from discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation.¹⁶ Despite this, many young people identifying as lesbian, gay or bisexual (LGB) continue to experience name-calling, homophobic bullying and harassment.¹⁷ In 2010 a survey by University of Limerick researchers found that the majority of parents wanted the issue of homophobia on the curriculum and reported concerns about the professional preparation of teachers for dealing with issues such as sexual orientation and homophobia (Walshe, 2010). With regard to the 'new' migrant communities, a 2009 ESRI study reported that bullying and racism were mentioned as contributing a lot or quite a lot to difficulties among newcomer students (Smyth et al., 2009). In April 2010 a survey by the Teachers' Union of Ireland (TUI) revealed that almost 50% of teachers had reported a racist incident in their school in the past month and that the problem of racist abuse among pupils was particularly acute in Dublin (Flynn, 2010). While bullying or discrimination on the ground of religion have not made the headlines in the context of schools, a significant debate around the issue of the Muslim headscarf arose in May 2008; this issue will be explored in more detail in our second case study.

2.2. Focus of the current research and methodology

From these issues, in order to explore in more depth and details what the levels of acceptance: *intolerance – tolerance – respect*, mean in the area of education in Ireland and how they manifest themselves, we have chosen to focus on two (relatively recent) challenges relating to religious and cultural diversity in Irish schools. These will both illustrate and explore how 'tolerance' is conceived of, perceived, discussed and ultimately 'defined' by different actors in Irish society.

The first case study involves the controversies that emerged in 2008/2009 following the reclassification of schools in the October Budget and the subsequent decision by the Minister for Education to remove ancillary grants for fee-paying Protestant schools. As mentioned above, this special arrangement had been in place since 1967 and was seen as an acknowledgment that the schools

¹⁵ Department of Education (2006).

¹⁶ Amongst seven other grounds including age, race, marital status, family status, religion, disability, and membership of the Traveller Community.

¹⁷ Norman and Galvin (2006); Minton et al. (2006); O'Higgins-Norman (2008).

were viewed by the Government as separate, serving a special purpose by allowing the Protestant population to maintain affordable education provision in accordance with their religious ethos.

The second case study focuses on an issue that arose in May 2008, when the parents of a 14-year-old girl requested that she be allowed to wear the Muslim headscarf to school. The school principal accommodated the pupil but was concerned that, in the absence of national guidelines or policy, she could encounter difficulties if she transferred to another school. He wrote to the Department of Education seeking guidance and requesting 'official' guidelines on the issue, catapulting the matter into a national issue that ignited fiery debates and controversy among commentators, politicians and Muslims themselves.

Both issues have represented touchstones in the contemporary debates on school diversity in Ireland – debates on both the new diversity *within* schools and the growing diversity *of* (types of) schools. Both have involved not only practical but also legal challenges, and both have been hotly debated in the media and the political arena. At the same time, these two issues represent very different diversity challenges to Irish education – while both engage with primarily religious (though also cultural) minorities, the first one involves an historical 'native' minority (Protestants) while the other involves a relatively 'new' and (mainly) immigrant minority (Muslims) and while both engage with the recognition of religious minorities' rights to education, they embody significantly different demands and highlight different facets of tolerance in Ireland.

Each case study included both desk research and empirical fieldwork. The desk research consisted of collecting and analysing the available statistical data, media coverage, internet blogs, legal texts, parliamentary proceedings, consultation papers and policy documents related to the events/challenges investigated, and the relevant scholarly literature on the topics pertinent to each case study. The fieldwork consisted of semi-structured qualitative interviews and a discussion group and was for the most part conducted in the Dublin area (one interview was conducted in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and one in a town in Co. Roscommon).

Fifteen interviews in total were conducted between March and June 2011 with education experts, religious representatives, school principals, representatives from different organisations involved in education, parents and Muslim third-level students wearing the hijab. Some spoke exclusively about one case study, others discussed both issues. Most respondents agreed to be identified, and therefore to let us use their real names in the report – others have been anonymised to guarantee their privacy (the full list of interviews is presented in Annex 1). It proved difficult to arrange interviews with the individuals initially selected, as some were either busy educationalists, and others national politicians who, during our research, became involved in a general election that led not only to a change of government, but to some of the leading figures in the controversies losing their parliamentary seats.

Interview guides for each case study were developed from our initial desk research and adapted to each respondent (see Annex 2). The interviews started with a brief presentation of the research project, the case studies and the kinds of issues we were interested in, and a few background questions about the respondent. The interviews took place in the respondents' offices, homes, or, in some cases, in coffee shops, and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. With the exception of one interview conducted by phone, all interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

We provided respondents with an explanation of the recording and transcribing process, and offered to let them see the transcript in case they wanted to add or correct anything – some requested to see the transcriptions, some did not; amongst those who did, some sent back additional comments and clarifications which were all included in the transcriptions.

A discussion group on 'The embodiment of tolerance in discourses and practices addressing cultural diversity in schools' was organised with experts in the field of education and/or immigration on

Thursday 30 June 2011 in Dublin. In addition to the two researchers from the Irish ACCEPT Team, 8 people took part (see Annex 3 for a list of participants). All had been contacted previously (for the Launch event of the Project and/or since), and all had some knowledge of the project's aims and goals.

At the start of the session, we briefly outlined our research so far with particular emphasis on our two case studies: the headscarf in Irish schools, and the removal of funding for Protestant secondary schools, as well as the current wider issue of primary school patronage, and gave them a list of topics for discussion (see Annex 4). With the participants' agreement, we recorded the 2-hour session.

Combining data from the secondary sources gathered during the desk research and the empirical data gathered through both the interviews and the discussion group each case study provides a comprehensive picture of each challenge to tolerance in Irish education. The qualitative data were analysed using a critical discourse analysis approach (Wodak, 2001; Wodak and Meyer, 2009) and the main discursive topoi (argumentation strategies) are highlighted and discussed in each case study.

3. Case-study 1 – Removal of funding for Protestant fee-paying schools

3.1. Introduction – Protestants in the Republic of Ireland

At the partition of Ireland in 1922, 7.4% of the Free State's population were Protestant (Collins, 1993). By the 1960s, the Protestant population had fallen by half, in part reflecting a disproportionate rate of Protestant emigration. Many Protestants felt unwelcome in a predominantly Catholic and nationalist state, were afraid due to the burning of Protestant homes (particularly of the old landed class), regarded themselves as British, and did not wish to live in an independent Irish state. The Catholic Church decree, *Ne Temere*, whereby the children of marriages between Catholics and Protestants had to be brought up as Catholics also contributed to the decline in the population.¹⁸ After the end of World War II, the emigration rate of Protestants fell and they became less likely than Catholics to emigrate - indicating their integration into the life of the Irish State.

Significant Protestant denominations in the Republic of Ireland are the Church of Ireland (Anglican), the Presbyterian Church, followed by the Methodist Church. In 1991, the Republic's Protestant population was at its lowest point at approximately 3%, but by 2006 had risen to a little over 5% of the population, and all Protestant denominations had gained in numbers since 2002 - the Church of Ireland, for example, had experienced an increase of 8.7%.

There is a remarkable imbalance in the amount of research on Catholic-Protestant relationships in the two parts of the island: in the North the literature runs to thousands of items; in the South it comes to little more than a handful. While it seems that in the South Catholic-Protestant relationships are not a significant issue, available studies suggest, however, that the situation is a complex one.¹⁹

Protestantism was established in Ireland as part of a British colonising process and 'Irish independence placed Southern Protestants in the position that for centuries they had struggled to avoid: becoming a minority in a Catholic-dominated state' (Ruane and Todd, 2009). Traditionally, being a Protestant in Ireland has carried with it presumptions of British identity and loyalty, and of distinction from Catholics not simply in terms of belief, but by virtue of a different history on the island of Ireland and different ethnic origins.

Coakley (1998) explored whether Southern Irish Protestants are an ethnic or a religious minority, and his conclusions tended to indicate that they are now a religious rather than an ethnic minority. Most

¹⁸ The *Ne Temere* decree was issued in 1908. It was criticised by the Second Vatican Council and repealed in 1970.

¹⁹ See Bowen (1983), Mennell et al. (2000), Murphy and Adair (2002), Ruane and Butler (2007).

studies indicate that Protestants in Ireland, with few exceptions, see themselves as Irish rather than British. They are, however, conscious of a difference from their Catholic neighbours. Although there have been class divisions within the Protestant population, they have been less significant than in Northern Ireland, as were denominational differences, as the various Protestant Churches were present in smaller numbers.

After partition, Protestants were often considered to constitute a privileged minority in terms of ownership of land, industrial property, and income. However, Butler and Ruane (2009) argue that their situation was far from unproblematic: 'They were subjected to Catholic and nationalist triumphalism, they were not fully accepted by Catholics as part of the Irish nation, the Catholic Church's *Ne Temere* decree was given legal standing in law, no allowance was made for the British component of their identity and the Irish language was imposed on their schools though it was not part of their tradition' (p.73). Between the 1930s and 1960s a number of incidents led to significant controversies over cases of employment, education and intermarriage.²⁰

Nonetheless, with their higher social and economic status, freedom of worship, and state support for educational provision, toleration of Protestants was not widely perceived to be an issue.

More recently, the dominant view is that the transformation of the Republic into a modern, outward-looking, liberal and pluralist state means that Southern Protestants are now much more at ease with it. Catholics and Protestants share inter-church religious and commemorative ceremonies, schools, workplaces and leisure activities, and there is more recognition by the state of the distinctive history, identity and memory of its Protestant citizens. The evolution of the situation in Northern Ireland has also given Southern Protestants an opportunity to re-negotiate their identity, separating the religious and ethnic aspects of Protestantism and renegotiating boundaries. While the question of a 'dilution of the Protestant identity' within the majority culture has been raised,²¹ Todd et al. (2009) argue that, rather than 'disappearing', Protestants in the Republic are redefining their identity and renegotiating their ways of being Protestant in various ways.

Protestants and education in Ireland

The majority Catholic ethos was recognized in the Irish Constitution of 1937, along with the Catholic Church itself, which exercised influence widely in legislation and state policies. Other religious denominations were also recognised in the initial Constitution²² and, from the foundation of the State, certain accommodation was made for the Protestant minority in the domain of education. In so far as schools were expected to reflect the ethos of the patron, education policy supported the ethos of minorities as well as the majority religious ethos.

In particular, Protestant schools enjoyed special treatment when 'free' secondary education was introduced by the Irish government in 1967. In this scheme, all schools had to choose either to remain private and 'fee paying', thus receiving fewer state grants (though teachers' salaries would be paid by the state), or to become 'free', in which case the school would receive a per capita grant, though lower in many cases than the fees previously charged. Due to the geographically scattered nature of the Protestant population, in order to maintain the Protestant ethos many Protestant pupils would need to attend boarding schools. Thus a somewhat different arrangement was made for Protestant secondary schools, which were considered part of the free education scheme, while still being allowed to charge fees. What was paid to Catholic schools on a *per capita* basis, was paid as a 'block grant' to a

20 See for instance the appointment of a librarian in County Mayo in 1931 and the Fethard-on-Sea boycott in 1957.

21 See Bowen (1983); Brown (1996).

22 The Fifth Amendment of the Constitution Act, 1972 removed from the Constitution the special position of the Catholic Church and the recognition of other named religious denominations, and was signed into law on January 5, 1973. http://www.constitution.org/cons/ireland/constitution_ireland-en.htm.

committee representing the main Protestant Churches, and distributed to minority families to aid in the payment of fees.

In 1966, Donogh O'Malley, the Minister for Education who introduced the scheme, had stated that:

The Protestant schools are, therefore, a special problem and, I feel, require special assistance. It could be argued that they would be discriminated against because the nature of their problem would put them virtually outside the scope of the scheme for free education... The principle, therefore, of special treatment for Protestants to meet their special difficulties has already been recognised by my Department. I found it necessary, accordingly, to devise a scheme of assistance for Protestant children receiving post-primary education so as to provide equity of treatment with Catholic children.²³

In 1967 he justified his decision in the Dáil again:

In the matter of the free post-primary education scheme special consideration was given to the position of Protestant schools. If the general scheme had been applied to these schools, practically no Protestant pupils would have benefited. In order, therefore, to ensure that Protestants would be treated equitably in the matter of benefit under the scheme, a special arrangement was made whereby a Commission representing the schools under Protestant management is to be paid a lump sum which will be distributed by the Commission in grants towards the school fees of the pupils most in need of such assistance... It would just not be possible for my Department to distribute the grant in the same manner as we do to the Catholic schools... [The Secondary Education Commission for the Protestant Schools] came to the conclusion that the manner in which they were acting was the only manner in which they could act in order to ensure an equitable distribution, taking account of the varying circumstances of the pupils and their families.²⁴

Thus Protestant secondary schools, which had always had to provide a boarding element (and therefore to charge fees) were treated in the same manner as 'free' Catholic schools to facilitate the widely dispersed and sparse Protestant population. This special arrangement was seen as acknowledging that the Government viewed the schools as serving a special purpose, allowing the Protestant population to maintain affordable education provisions in accordance with their religious ethos.

After the introduction of the scheme in 1967, subsequent Ministers for Education continued to recognise the need to provide state support for minority faith schools and have pointed to the dispersed and scattered Protestant population as a particular reason for this support.²⁵ There are now 26 Protestant second level schools in Ireland. Five are Comprehensive Schools. The remaining 21 are Voluntary Secondary Schools owned by or associated with a particular Protestant denomination. Of these 21 schools, the majority are boarding schools. All fee-charging schools are in receipt of payment of salaries for a quota of teachers. Historically this quota was established on the same basis across all post-primary schools.

3.2. The 'event' that sparked the debates

Controversies emerged in 2008/2009 following the reclassification of schools in the October Budget and subsequent announcements by the Minister for Education, Batt O'Keeffe, as the decision was made to remove ancillary grants for fee-paying Protestant schools and to increase their pupil-teacher ratio.

23 Dáil Éireann Debate- Volume 225 - 30 November, 1966. Committee on Finance - Available at: <http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/D/0225/D.0225.196611300030.html>.

24 Dáil Éireann Debate, Vol. 230 No. 11, Financing of Protestant Schools, 26 October 1967 - Available at: <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/1967/10/26/00051.asp>.

25 See Minister Dempsey, Dáil debates, Vol.571, 02.10.2003; Minister Hanafin, Dáil debates, Vol.638, 02.10.2007.

While the ‘block grant’ remains in place, all minority faith schools in the voluntary sector have, in effect, been removed from the Free Education Scheme. This translates into:

- The removal of all grants, including those for caretakers and secretaries, that are payable to schools in the Free Education Scheme (totalling €2.8million).
- The classification of all voluntary minority schools as ‘outside the Free Education Scheme’ for the purpose of allocating teachers at a higher pupil-teacher ratio (20:1) than that applying to schools in the Free Education Scheme (19:1).

The decision was widely criticised by the Protestant community, and generated a significant media and political debate. In October 2009, Church leaders, teachers and parents intensified their campaign against the education cuts, and the ‘perceived discriminatory nature’ of the Budget was the subject of strong comment at the Church of Ireland General Synod, the Conference of the Methodist Church in Ireland and the Presbyterian General Assembly. A conference was organised by the Protestant community on 3rd October 2009 entitled *Protestant Secondary Education - A Challenging Future?*, to discuss the issues threatening Protestant secondary schools in Ireland. Involving church leaders, educators, parents, patrons and experts in the field of Irish education and constitutional law, this conference represented the largest gathering of Protestants across denominations on a single issue for many years.

3.3. Analysis of the debates

Combining data gathered through the desk research and the empirical study, our analysis employs a critical discourse analysis to highlight and discuss the main argumentation strategies – or discursive topoi (Wodak and Meyer, 2009) – through which the particular challenging event and the issues at stake have been constructed and debated. The empirical study involved 7 qualitative interviews²⁶ and a discussion group, and the desk research included over 100 media items (newspaper articles, TV and radio recordings), Oireachtas debates (Dáil/House of Deputies and Seanad/Senate debates representing over 40 pages of text), relevant official reports, legal documents and position papers (e.g., The Irish Constitution, the Education Act 1998, etc.) and relevant academic works.

Beside the budgetary arguments advanced by the Government and, to a certain extent, acknowledged by those who contested the cuts, **three main discursive topoi were identified in the debates.**

The first discursive topos can be termed the ‘minority rights vs. elite privileges’ topos.

This had a strong historical framing and underpinning. It emerged in the discourses of both those who criticised the removal of funding for the Protestant schools and those who defended it, and was probably the most controversial, perhaps because, as one interviewee emphasised, when assessing Irish education ‘You can’t see the immediate environment without understanding some of the background, historical traditions, which are deeply rooted’ (JC).

Historical recognition

References to the historical development of the Irish educational system were indeed numerous, and many commentators argued that, since the foundation of the Irish state, the Protestant community had been treated ‘sensitively’ and that successive governments had made particular effort to ensure that minority communities were treated fairly and equitably.

26 CW; DK; GL; EP; CB; DM; JC

Referring to the original Dáil speeches of Donogh O'Malley, many questioned the reasons behind changing a system that been in place for over 40 years and was perceived and interpreted as a recognition of Protestant minority needs:

...the Minister - and his Department - was very accommodating at the time and you could view this as 'positive discrimination' if you like, what he said was that the Protestant schools that charge fees will be accepted into the free scheme because they are a special case... (CW)

... the Catholic fee-charging schools had the option of going into the free scheme, we did not have that option, we never had that option... so we always maintained we should be treated equitably as a Protestant minority within the fee-charging scheme... we weren't looking for anything more actually, we were simply looking for the same level of funding as the free schools... every time there have been cuts in education to the Catholic free schools, there have been cuts in the Protestant fee charging, that's fine, it's exactly the same... it's when there was a difference there... but this is the first budget that there was a change of treatment, a change of status for us... (CW)

... so therefore the questions which we felt we have to ask... were... what has changed in the understanding of the State... that... these changes have taken place because, back when the current system of education was put in place... it was understood that, in order to maintain their identity, through schooling and all the rest... the Protestant community had extra costs, which were not necessarily met by the whole community... and they were respected in that way and the value of their education and their right to that education was respected and affirmed... in fact I think that in 1967, the settlement under Donogh O'Malley was a gracious thought and a generous settlement (DK)

When questioned about the surprise caused by the announcement and lack of consultation with the Protestant community, the Minister simply responded 'Of course we gave no notice; it was a budgetary measure'.²⁷

Not 'privileged' and not 'elite'

The historical references provided the context for the debate between those who argued that the previous state of funding represented an acknowledgement of the *rights* and *needs* of the Protestant minority and those who interpreted it as an 'anomaly', a 'privilege' granted to a community (also historically) perceived as relatively wealthy. Certain observers effectively welcomed the reform on grounds of the 'privileges' or 'elitism' which they associate with fee-paying Protestant schools. In a relatively vitriolic article in the *Irish Times*, Sean Byrne (2009), for instance, asked 'why should the taxpayer fund institutions of privilege?'.

This argument was strongly rejected by the entire Protestant community and several school Principals and parents rejected this claim in the media (e.g., McConnell, 2009). Critics of the removal of the grants insisted that the Minister was simply not 'comparing like with like', arguing that a child at a Catholic fee-paying school may have the option to go to a free local Catholic secondary school, while a Protestant child goes to a fee-paying school because there is no equivalent free Protestant school in his/her area. Indeed, for Catholic parents there is choice, and often considerable choice, of both free and fee-paying schools. For Methodist, Presbyterian, or Church of Ireland parents, there is not the same choice, especially outside Dublin. Indeed, in rural Ireland sending a child to a school of one's ethos means sending him/her to a boarding school, and it was argued, therefore, that the Protestant schools affected by the measures take in a large number of boarders from low income families whose fees are paid by the state, and so are not comparable to Catholic fee paying schools. Most of our interviewees developed these arguments:

²⁷ Dáil debates, 4 November 2008, Fee-paying Schools. Available at:
<http://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2008-11-04.186.0&s=protest>.

... I think it would be wrong to call them elite because they really do cater for their whole community and that's what they are there for... [...] ... you look across the water and maybe you see something like Eton, and people think well that's Protestant, but it's a world away from the schools that we have here... [...] as a parent, I don't have the same choices as my Catholic neighbour...we only have two comprehensive schools that are state-funded in Dublin... both of whom are way over-subscribed... so, if you want to have your child educated in the ethos of the home, you really have to pay and send them to a fee-charging school... so, that's... that's where I would see is the discrimination... in not supporting our schools in the same way as we support Catholic schools... (EP)

...the majority of Protestant children live in the Dublin area and they are certainly not all elitist... so, if we agree to a Government policy that imposes a level of fees in Dublin that's beyond the reach of a substantial number of our children, those schools will cease to fulfil the purpose for which they exist... because what will happen is they will be filled with the well-heeled... Catholic, Protestant, atheist, secular, you know... but the poor Protestant children, for whom the schools are supposed to exist, will be excluded because they are raising the bar [...] St. Patrick's Cathedral Grammar School is designated as a special area needs school... so where's your elitism? (GL)

The efforts and adjustments made by the Protestant community were also highlighted – for instance, many Protestant schools had merged with others, and the number of schools had already declined from 43 to the current 26.²⁸ It was also emphasised that Protestant schools cater not only for the Protestant population but for the whole community within which they operate, each school consciously welcoming pupils of other faiths and irrespective of socio-economic background, and that the grants received enabled the Protestant schools to be truly inclusive.²⁹ Indeed, many Protestant schools had earned a 'good' reputation which also attracted parents of other faiths and while the charging of fees was a method of ensuring adequate funding, it also allowed Protestant schools to provide facilities that the state did not give to schools as a matter of course.

...that's another thing that... often isn't taken into account because we cater for our entire community, we are not in the situation where you might have the local convent school, girls school, deals with the academic, and the VEC deals with the more vocational... we have to provide everything... [...] curriculum particularly, we would need to provide for the child who wants to take classical studies, Latin... down to the guy who needs to do woodwork..... plus... there was a joint Oireachtas Committee back in 2008 I think... that looked at the provision of special needs education in fee-charging schools... [...] and it was quite clear from that examination that the Protestant schools have a very high percentage of special needs students within their schools... so we would be up around 14%... which would be even above the national average... but again it's because we cater for all of our children, and not just some... whereas in some of the Catholic fee-charging schools it may have been two or three percent or below... (EP)

Interestingly, the 'inclusiveness' of Protestant schools was also interpreted and turned into a 'weakness' or a 'flaw' by some detractors. In the *Irish Times* for example, Byrne (2009) argued that 'The term Protestant school is misleading as there is no school in Ireland which admits only Protestant pupils who are committed to their faith. In the case of the larger Protestant schools, such as King's Hospital, Wesley College and Alexandra College, it is not clear whether even a majority of pupils are Irish Protestants. [...] A large number of pupils in these schools are either Catholics, non-believers or the children of affluent foreigners, of any or no denomination, for whom Irish boarding schools offer better value for money than those in the UK'; thus hinting that Protestant schools were somehow not only not 'Protestant enough' but also not 'Irish' enough.

The Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, Dr John Neill, argued that the reclassification of schools was discriminatory towards students who wished to be educated in the Protestant ethos. In his Presidential address to the Diocesan Synod, he argued that the Republic's Protestant schools could be

28 From 79 minority faith schools at the time of Independence, 43 remained in 1965 (O'Buachalla, 1988).

29 Committee on Management for Protestant Secondary Schools (2009).

entirely wiped out by cuts in their funding, and claimed that the decision was driven not by financial concerns, but rather 'driven by what amounts to a very determined and doctrinaire effort within the Department of Education to strike at a sector which some officials totally failed to understand'. He accused the Minister of trying 'to place all Protestants into a category of privilege – suggesting that they have chosen private education – [this] is manifestly unjust'.³⁰ In his experience many Protestant parents were 'very poor, and I mean very poor indeed', and they would be the worst affected by the cutbacks since schools hoping to survive 'will only do so by charging excessive fees, thereby excluding the very community they were founded to serve'. This was also emphasised by one interviewee:

...we have children in the school that come from families where they are on social welfare and they don't have any outside income other than income from the state and social welfare... and we would have then people who would have plenty of money and can well afford it... and then there's this group that are really squeezed in the middle, who are not getting any capitation, but they're having to pay fees... so, Protestant parents who choose to send their children to Protestant schools, usually do so at quite... it's quite an effort... so it means that they really have to... you know... put their money behind their... their beliefs... whereas my Catholic neighbour can have a school of, you know, equal standard, but doesn't have to pay a fee... so that's... that's the major, as I would see it, discrimination between the two... (EP)

Batt O'Keeffe acknowledged the problem in the Dáil in November 2008 saying 'I am well aware it will cause serious difficulty and I obviously have concerns about this. However, I must also bear in mind what is equitable and right'.³¹ However he cited the constitutional requirement of non-discrimination on religious grounds and argued that he had received advice from the Attorney General that 'to continue the grant that was available would be unconstitutional because it was being given to the Protestant denomination and being refused to the Catholic denomination' (McGarry, 2009a).

Both arguments were contested by the Protestant community. Article 44.2.4° of the Irish Constitution states that:

4° Legislation providing State aid for schools shall not discriminate between schools under the management of different religious denominations, nor be such as to affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending religious instruction at that school.

This article has been used in various contexts to support the right of minority communities to have their own schools. In this particular case, its interpretation was also 'contested'; as one interviewee argued that:

...in the Constitution... it's Article 44... I'm not sure which... that they are relying on now to stop giving us support... was actually put in place in 1937 to ensure that Protestants were treated equally to Catholics... so the piece of legislation that they are using to hit us with, was put in place to actually support Protestants... but the Attorney General has... interpreted it in a different way... (Name), who is now a judge, so we can use his advice anyway... would say that he believes that if it came to the Supreme Court... that it would be viewed in a different light, that the Attorney General is wrong... that it is there to ensure that minorities are supported equally to bring them up to the standard of the Roman Catholics... but they've used it in the opposite way... (EP)

On the issue of the recourse to the Attorney General's advice, many again questioned its justification, its timing and also its legitimacy. Enda Kenny (Fine Gael leader at the time, now Taoiseach) asked the then Taoiseach Brian Cowen why 'advice on this matter was sought from the Attorney General given that the system in place operated without any difficulty for the past 40 years'. He also asked who sought the advice and what question was asked, adding 'Does the Taoiseach believe the system that

³⁰ *Irish Examiner*, October 20, 2009

³¹ Dáil debates, 4 November 2008, Fee-paying Schools. Available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2008-11-04.186.0&s=protest>.

had been in place for 40 years is unconstitutional'? Mr Cowen declined to be drawn 'on the constitutionality of the measures' (O'Halloran, 2009). The Education Minister also refused to discuss the matter, and a request by the Irish Independent newspaper, made under the Freedom of Information Act, for all correspondence relating to the decision was refused by the Department of Education, which cited 'legal professional privilege' (Walsh, 2009).

Throughout the debates, Batt O'Keeffe also argued that the retention of the block grant meant that the State continues to uphold Protestants' 'right to have their children educated within their denominational ethos', thereby downplaying the effects of the cuts – and by implication the change in the degree of recognition or accommodation of the Protestant community.³²

The second topos can be called the 'retaliation' topos.

This appeared in various forms in both the media and parliamentary debates and in some of our interviews. In this argumentative strategy the budget cuts were associated with a kind of 'retribution' by the Minister of Education 'against' the Protestant schools and linked to a previous controversy. In fact, this was the second time that the Minister's policies had provoked anger among the Protestant community. In June 2007, four Protestant secondary schools had challenged the government's teacher redeployment scheme, which would have required them to accept teachers who had been made redundant by school closures elsewhere, and they had taken the government to court (Flynn, 2007a; 2007b). The schools had sought a declaration that it would be unconstitutional for the Minister for Education to compel them to employ teachers who were not of the Protestant faith without any assurance that these teachers would subscribe to the ethos of the schools concerned. The schools expressed concern that their hiring autonomy would be severely circumscribed.³³ A settlement was reached and while the exact terms were not released, it was perceived as a victory for the Protestant schools.

The issue was mentioned in the Dáil by Enda Kenny (Fine Gael leader, now Taoiseach) who suggested that the Department of Education reduced funding to Protestant schools to 'get at them' because the schools won a court victory against the Department, saying 'I understand from the Department of Finance that it is not a question of the extra grants for the fee-paying Protestant schools but of the fact that the Department of Education and Science lost its case against Protestant schools last year'.³⁴ The argument also appeared in the media, as one commentator argued that 'Whatever the rights and wrongs of the redeployment row, Protestant schools are entitled to feel angry and resentful. The Department is vulnerable to the charge it is punishing these schools because of their audacity in mounting a High Court challenge'.³⁵

Three of our interviewees also referred to the redeployment issue in a more or less direct manner, to provide an explanation of the budget cuts but also to highlight that this may have been an ill-advised strategy.

... now, we had no difficulty with redeployment... but we said we wanted to interview these people, check them for their suitability... we were not allowed to engage in any of that...and at the end of the day, they could impose that teacher on your school, even though we're legally an independent, separate... identity... and we would be the employer if an action was taken and therefore accountable... so, we went to the courts, we threatened to go to the courts...[...] they were told by the Attorney General to settle, because it was going to pull the whole agreement down... and, they said... well they never

32 Written answers, 4 December 2008, Departmental Funding – Available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2008-12-04.601.0&s=protesta>.

33 *RTE News*, June 12, 2008.

34 Dáil debates, 21 October 2009. Available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2009-10-21.2.0&s=protestant+schools+%22case+against+Protestant+schools+%22#g5.0>.

35 *Irish Times*, October 21, 2008.

honoured the judgments... I mean part of the judgment was that the Minister was to make a statement, and he never made that statement acknowledging that this had been done... so, then about... I suppose about, what, 12 months later... the Minister got up and imposed these cuts on us... (GL)

...the redeployment scheme back in 2008 therefore was perceived as a threat... to... Protestant schools being able to say 'we want to make sure that all our staff... understand... and can work within the ethos of our school'... so they took it to the court and... in the end, the Government lost... I mean it didn't entirely go through to court I think there was a settlement before but... the Protestant schools were prepared to go to court about it, on the big principle that the school does have a right to affirm its ethos and does have a right to see that those who are appointed to its staff are able to sign up to that ethos... [...] and the perception, rightly or wrongly, the perception among a number was that, because the Government in fact had lost this case... the Government were not going to be positively inclined towards the Protestant education sector as a result... (DK)

...as I understood it, that the view at the time was... and this was to do with redeployment, right, and schools feeling that they didn't want... right, so they went to court over that and I thought that that was unwise... in going to court and in looking to protect the right to interview under re-deployment issue, it was regarded afterwards as the Department putting the boot in... instead of giving the Catholic secondary schools, fee-paying secondary schools the same grants as the Protestant ones do, we take it away from the Protestant and level everybody down'... [...] but... I felt certainly that they were ill-advised to go to court... (CB)

Even though the Minister denied the link, arguing that the High Court hearing did not take place until June 2008, the shadow of the 'retaliation' argument hovered over the debates.³⁶

The third topos encompasses arguments dealing with the 'recognition of and support for plurality and diversity'.

The issue of the removal of 'specific' arrangements for Protestant secondary schools generated a broader reflection of the perception and accommodation of minority religions/minority groups in Ireland.

One facet of the argument emphasised the role of Protestant schools in promoting diversity in an overwhelmingly Catholic education system. This view, perhaps surprisingly, was strongly supported by the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Diarmuid Martin. Speaking on the Morning Ireland radio programme in October 2009, Archbishop Martin argued that Ireland would suffer without the Protestant communities and stated 'I believe there is a public interest in guaranteeing the right of the Protestant community to education... without the Protestant communities and without their schools, I believe Ireland today, or pluralism in Ireland, would be poorer' (RTE, 2009).

Archbishop Martin also reiterated this view to us, developing his perception of the importance and value of the Protestant schools in promoting a space for diversity and tolerance:

I did say and I do believe that... there is a public interest in... in giving special funding to Protestant education... it's a historical fact as well... it is a minority... the Protestant schools have actually played an important place in providing a space of tolerance also in Irish society, historically, you know when... there was this very strong Catholic ethos in the schools, people who were free-thinkers and more liberal, the Protestant education gave them a space, in addition to providing support for the Protestant community itself and keeping the community alive... it's very hard to be a minority culture and survive, and therefore... you know, I think that there's something in that... (DM)

36 Dáil debates, 1 December 2009, Grant Payments. Available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2009-12-01.99.0&s=protestant+schools+speaker%3A12#g107.2>.

This view was also expressed by Senator Ivana Bacik in the Seanad, when she also argued for the added value of Protestant schools in promoting diversity and offering ‘an alternative’ in the Irish education system:

Given that we work with a system in which the Equal Status Act allows schools to opt-out, thereby allowing them to discriminate on religious grounds, it is important there should be a choice available to parents, not only to Protestant parents but also to parents like me. I am an atheist and would like my children to attend an Educate Together secondary school but that is not possible because there are no multid denominational Educate Together secondary schools in the State. For parents in my position, therefore, who do not wish their children to be educated within the Catholic ethos there must a choice of schools with a different ethos, whether it be Protestant or, ideally, multid denominational. Currently, Protestant schools offer less inculcation in religious doctrine than most Catholic schools. [...] As Senator Norris said, in many Protestant schools there is a wider diversity of class backgrounds than in their Catholic fee paying counterparts. For that reason too, there is a case to be made for treating them differently from Catholic schools.³⁷

A second facet of this topos was the underlying idea that the state was not truly ‘interested in plurality or diversity’ – in the domain of education and possibly beyond. One interviewee articulated that view clearly:

I think it’s very clear that the Department of Education and Skills doesn’t... is not interested in diversity in education... [...] They are interested in *each* school accommodating diversity, within each school... but they are not interested in... in particular schools being diverse or different from each other... alright?... so... they are certainly interested in every school taking in... special needs children, and that the big thing, every school must take in children of all abilities, you may not discriminate in terms of academic ability, you may not discriminate in terms of being... membership of the Traveller community or... on a whole range of issues... [...] so you can have faith schools, Jewish schools... there’s only one Jewish school, there’s only one Methodist school... Catholic schools...

Q – Two Muslim...

Yes two Muslim schools... but they have shown no interest in tolerating the diversity... it’s... the Education Act certainly says that... the... the ethos of each school should be respected but nothing has come from the Department of Education to suggest that they have any meaningful regard for that, nothing... in fact you can say that the cutting of funding is a very deliberate wish to... to get away from recognition of diversity... between one school and another... do you see the difference that I’m making? (CW)

So the debate developed beyond the particular issue of the withdrawal of funding to Protestant schools to articulate broader concerns about ‘diversity’ and ‘pluralism’ in Ireland – these were:

- The perception and place of the Protestant community in the Republic of Ireland, and
- The perception and treatment of minorities in general and the valuing (or otherwise) of diversity.

Leading figures of the different Protestant Churches interpreted the cuts as a reflection of the manner in which the Irish State perceives - and treats - the Protestant community. Church of Ireland Bishop of Clogher Michael Jackson said: ‘One fell administrative swoop has cut at the root of this [the initial 1967 arrangement] and the devastation of its impact raises serious and ongoing questions about respect for Protestant identity as an interwoven component in national identity’ (McGarry, 2009c), while Cork’s Church of Ireland Bishop Paul Colton, said that it represented ‘a litmus of how Ireland treats and values us’ (McGarry, 2009b). The Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. John Neill also made a ‘minority rights’ claim, asserting that ‘widespread dependence on schools of the majority religious ethos requires that alternatives are catered for. A minority is as entitled to schools under their own patronage as much as the majority’.³⁸

37 Seanad debates, 8 October 2009, School Capitation Grants. Available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/sendebates/?id=2009-10-08.146.0>.

38 *Irish Times*, October 10, 2009.

For former Archdeacon of the Church of Ireland, Gordon Linney, although the current debate took place in the education area, the underlying controversy was a deeper one, 'one of forgotten or neglected minorities'. He said 'While I acknowledge that progress has been made this country still has a problem respecting the rich diversity and interests of its entire people. For many, being Irish means being nationalist or republican politically and Roman Catholic at least by background. This attitude creates the illusion that anyone different is alien and perhaps suspect. The historic contribution of Irish Protestants in politics, religion, culture, the arts and in every other facet of Irish life is largely unreported as such. People generally don't realise how overbearing the characterisation of Ireland as a Catholic country is for those of a different tradition. We have a long way to go in establishing an understanding of Irishness that is genuinely inclusive and represents the rich diversity of our past and our present' (Linney, 2009).

This notion was echoed in the coverage of the issue in Northern Ireland as Waugh (2009) argued that 'The fact is that, to a large extent, Protestants inhabit the Republic without socially being visibly part of it. Only a fragment are in the police. The last count I had showed 14 Protestants in a force of 12,000. Two Protestants sit among the 166 deputies in the Dáil, four in the Senate's 60 seats... Keeping heads down politically has become the name of the game... But the Republic still claims it is the seat of a modern, pluralist society'.

Several of our interviewees also referred to the history of the Protestant community in the Republic, emphasising their usual discretion and reserve.

...I have to say that I feel... the anxiety was as much that... an understanding which was 40 years old and more was just changed... and... there was a deep feeling of... almost betrayal about that... you know... the Protestant community in the Republic of Ireland have tended just to want to get on with living in the Republic of Ireland... quietly... [...] and I think some of this goes right back to... the War of Independence and the Civil War in the early 1900s, 1920s... where... the Protestant community did feel under threat, where... there were occasions where they suffered specific difficulties... but I think they took a very deliberate decision that it would not be for the good if they... if they kept on about this and they... almost drew a line on this, a line of silence in many ways... particularly further down south, in Cork and Wexford and so on... they drew the line of silence and therefore just got on with being a minority in the State... (DK)

...part of what we've been doing in this campaign is really putting our heads above the parapet... Protestants in the South have been very much... quiet and... and haven't really engaged in social... in public life... we did in the early days, but we've sort of come back from that, and it's almost apologetic... and the same is true of our schools, you know... (EP)

Some of our interviewees also emphasised how Protestants were highly regarded in Ireland and argued that the budgetary measures did not represent an intentional 'targeting' of the community.

...as an interested outsider, it seemed to me that it wasn't intended as... as an anti-religious, anti-Protestant move as much... I think there were anomalies there for a long time back and... I think it was in the context of straitened times, I think there was an attempt to address those anomalies... [...] but also not just to leave them high and dry because I think that the Irish state has been, it seems to me... very anxious over the years to be seen to be fair to the minority religions... I have never detected in all my dealings with officials down here... never detected and I have heard a lot, the slightest, and I can say this quite honestly, I have never detected the slightest animosity towards a religious grouping like the Protestants at all, not the slightest... (JC)

I think overall there's a certain sympathy to the needs of the Protestant community... but, as the cuts become savage, people will say 'they're far better off than the Travellers' so that... you know, the money should go there... the harsher the cuts become, the more self-centred people will become, and therefore their... intolerance comes when people are under threat, when people are prospering they can

be more tolerant and... I've never seen many examples of real intolerance towards the Protestant community, I think most places are proud that they have Protestant communities... (DM)

However, in the political arena, the opposition's views were more strident; the (then) Fine Gael education spokesman Brian Hayes appealed to the Minister 'to back down on this issue and to stop the inevitable collision course that he has set for himself between his Department and the various Protestant Churches', while the (then) Labour Party spokesman (and now Minister for Education) Ruairi Quinn accused Batt O'Keeffe of undermining the constitutional right of Protestant families to send their children to a school that caters for their faith, adding that this was 'doing irreparable damage to the relations between the State and the Protestant community in this country' (McGarry, 2009d).

Questions were raised regarding the perception and treatment of minorities more widely, and the valuation of diversity in Ireland. In the Dáil, Ruairi Quinn argued that 'The Government's decision is really an attack on the principle of diversity within this Republic. The Minister is undermining a principle that we cherished in the South when, north of the Border, there was bigotry and oppression of a kind that we prized ourselves on condemning. This decision is starting the process that obtained in the North and I urge the Minister to reconsider it. There is a short-term impact in a cash year or current year and there is a long-term impact that will extend way beyond education'.³⁹

These concerns were mirrored in some of our interviews by leading church members:

...I think it didn't bode well at the time for the State really working out an understanding how different communities in the State could be valued... and it does raise interesting questions about how other minorities within the State... particularly the Muslim community... may feel valued... [...] I think there are folks who would feel that deliberate lack of sensitivity doesn't bode well... [...] so I don't know what the future will bring but it seems to me that a Government which, for its own reasons, fails to be sensitive to its minorities... undermines trust... and the minority community thinks 'well... we just have to get on with living here'... and the Protestant people will do that... (DK)

...I believe everybody has to face the cuts... but one should be looking at the effects that specific cuts may have, simply in terms of... not just of tolerance, but of overall education policy, and allowing... you know the Irish Constitution is actually quite respectful of religious diversity and actually provides the ability for any religious body to establish schools of their own... now... the change that's taking place is a new understanding of pluralism and, in some cases, people would want pluralism to be... that we all become the same... people say 'let's close all these Catholic, Protestant, Jewish... let's all come together and have a real... the national school system and then we'll be very tolerant' but that's... that's ideal... it's never happened... (DM)

These criticisms were more or less ignored by the Education Minister, who repeatedly emphasised that maintaining the block grant for Protestant schools clearly indicated the 'importance the Government attaches to ensuring that students can attend schools that reflect their denominational ethos' indicating the level of support he (and the Government) considered appropriate for minorities in Ireland.⁴⁰

3.4. Conclusion

There was no 'back-down' from the Ministry – the cuts were carried out. Following the backlash, in December 2009, Batt O'Keeffe offered to review the possibility of funding for Protestant schools which were now in a particularly difficult situation, but stressed that he would not restore the grants in the previous format, citing again the constitutional basis of his decision.

³⁹ Dáil debates, 4 November 2008, Fee-paying Schools. Available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/debates/?id=2008-11-04.186.0&s=protest>.

⁴⁰ Dáil debates, Written answers, 5 March 2009, Grant Payments. Available at: <http://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2009-03-05.960.0&s=protestant+schools+speaker%3A12#g962.0.r>.

In June 2011, the new Minister for Education, Ruairi Quinn, questioned on State funding for capital projects in fee-paying schools, somewhat surprisingly considering his initial stance on the 2008/2009 issue, reverted to the 'Constitutional argumentation' and mirrored Batt O'Keeffe's statements, saying that '... considerations of State support for minority religions has been an important factor in the provision of funding for such schools, given that much of the fee-charging sector has traditionally been made up of Protestant schools and those with a minority religious ethos. Such considerations however have to take into account the constitutionality of making resources available to fee-charging schools of one ethos and not to those of another. Officials of my Department have been in discussions with senior representatives of the Protestant churches and schools concerning the funding arrangements, including funding for capital projects, for their schools. Such discussions are continuing'.⁴¹ This statement would seem to indicate that the new Government is not likely to be more inclined to provide special treatment for Protestant (and other minority faith) schools.

It can be argued that the removal of funding for Protestant schools represented a shift from a state of respect and recognition (level 3) to a level of basic toleration (level 2), where the state authorises and tolerates denominational / minority faith schools (and participates in their funding through teachers' salaries and per capita/block grant as for other schools) but does not recognise their special needs as 'minority' schools.

4. Case-study 2 – The hijab in Irish schools

4.1. Introduction

The 2006 census showed that there were 32,539 Muslims in Ireland, a 70% increase since 2002 (CSO, 2007b). Unlike the UK and France for instance, there is no dominant national or ethnic background within the Muslim community. Initial Muslim settlement from the 1950s was primarily of students or others with high educational and professional backgrounds. The Islamic Foundation of Ireland (IFI), for example, estimates that there are more than 2,000 Muslim doctors in Ireland.⁴² However, since the 1990s, Muslim immigration diversified to include refugees from Bosnia, Somalia and Kosovo, asylum-seekers from Nigeria, Algeria, Libya and Iraq, and economic migrants from across the world (Flynn, 2006). It is also estimated that now one third of the entire Muslim community are Irish citizens (NCCRI, 2007).

There has been limited research on Muslims in Ireland, and few surveys on the *perception of Muslims* in Ireland. A 2006 poll of Muslims themselves revealed that more than two thirds of Muslims felt Islam was compatible with Irish life and 77% felt accepted, although a minority of young Irish Muslims took a more negative view of Ireland (Lansdowne Market Research, 2006). While the Gardai deny that Islamist extremism is rife in Ireland, several newspaper articles in recent years have suggested links, particularly of young Muslims, with extremism (NCCRI, 2006b). In general, however, the Irish media has been rather indifferent, which may reflect a certain 'isolation' of Muslims from the 'mainstream community' – a separation both chosen and suffered, as Ali Selim stated: 'On Friday and Saturday night in town you often feel alienated, like a stranger in this city which is your home. It is more difficult for young Muslims' (O'Brien, 2004).

Ryan (1996) argued that the Irish Muslim community experienced 'very little overt prejudice from the host community', but a 2006 report stated that members of Muslim communities were more vulnerable to prejudice and discrimination than before (EUMC, 2006:60) and the NCCRI Racist

41 Dáil Debates, Vol. 734 No. 4, Written Answers - Departmental Funding, 8 June 2011 – Available at: <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/dail/2011/06/08/00060.asp>.

42 Islamic Foundation of Ireland, www.islaminireland.com.

Incidents reports (2001-2008) identified instances of racism as a result of 9/11, and instances of discrimination against Muslims on the basis of their religion, ranging from verbal abuse to physical assault.⁴³

While the events of 9/11 and July 2005 in London have raised the Irish public's awareness of Islam in a negative manner, efforts have been made in Ireland to educate the public about Islam in order to counter negative stereotypes and to address concerns about fundamentalism and militancy. The Islamic Cultural Centre (ICCI) at Clonskeagh has welcomed visitors, and academic courses of study and conferences on Islam have been widely organised in Ireland.

Muslims and education in Ireland

There are currently two Muslim state-funded primary schools in Dublin: the Muslim National School, set up by the Islamic Foundation of Ireland (IFI) in 1990 and the North Dublin Muslim School established in 2001.

According to Ryan (1996), 'The Muslim National School was the first such school to be recognised in these islands and will stand as a monument to the respect accorded by the Irish State to the religious beliefs of minority groups'. At its opening ceremony, President Mary Robinson said that the school represented a significant step in showing the 'open and pluralist society' for which she had wished at her inauguration, and spoke of the 'enrichment' brought to Ireland by minority groups such as Muslims. Also at the opening, Imam Yahya al-Hussein, head of the Islamic Community, stated, 'We do not wish to isolate ourselves or consider ourselves as having no contribution nor duties towards Ireland and its people. Our hope and intention is that our school will produce well adjusted Muslim Irish boys and girls who will contribute to the spiritual and material welfare of Ireland'.⁴⁴

Both schools follow the 'normal' Irish school curriculum, but have an Islamic ethos, teaching Arabic and Qur'anic studies. In order to cater for the spiritual and religious education of children who do not attend a Muslim school, other part-time schools have been established. The ICCI established the Nur Al-Huda School in 1999, since extended to two areas outside Dublin; and the Libyan School, which follows the Libyan curriculum. The IFI runs the Al-Falah Islamic School as well as the Sunday madrasa. There are weekend schools attached to mosques in Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford among others.

There are no Muslim secondary schools in Ireland, so Muslim children in secondary education (as well as the majority of Muslim children in primary education) attend mainstream Irish schools, which are mainly denominational (over 90% Catholic). The presence of a religious ethos and of a large number of single-sex schools is often attractive to Muslims. Because numbers are still low, it has been relatively easy for the school authorities to accommodate the needs of Irish Muslim students without disturbing the schools or drawing unwelcome attention to the Muslim minority. A variety of provisions appears to be made locally for students to absent themselves from Christian education classes and to pray in any available room.

43 The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) came into being in 1998 with a remit to engage racism and to promote an intercultural Ireland. It operated as an interface with relevant national and international actors and acted as the Irish national focal point for the European Racism and Xenophobia Network (RAXEN). As a result of budgetary cuts by the Irish government in 2008, the NCCRI ceased to exist.

44 *Sunday Tribune*, 8 October 1990.

The issue of religious symbols and religious dress in Irish schools

Religious symbols to be seen in Irish schools include the Sikh turban or the patka, the Sikh Kara (a bangle worn on the wrist), the Jewish kippah and Christian crosses (NCCRI, 2007). Some school uniforms include crests with religious symbols including the sacred heart and crosses.

In Ireland, there are no ‘rules’ limiting the wearing of Muslim dress, and it is now quite common to see Muslim women and men in religious dress, particularly in Dublin. With regard to women, this is mainly the hijab and jilbab; with a smaller number wearing the niqab.⁴⁵ In organisations which have uniform, such as the Gardai (police), however, Muslims must conform to that uniform, which at present does not include a hijab option.

Regarding the hijab, most schools came to permit it, as long as it was in the school’s uniform colours, although there was no consensus on the issue; for instance the *Sunday Business Post* reported in 2004 that a south Dublin school had banned the hijab, citing its Catholic ethos as justification (Wood, 2004).

4.2. The ‘event’ that sparked debates in Irish schools - and beyond

Significant controversy arose in May 2008, when the parents of 14-year-old Shekinah Egan requested that she be allowed to wear the headscarf to school in Gorey, Co. Wexford. The principal accommodated her, but was concerned, in the absence of national guidelines or policy, that she might encounter difficulties if she transferred to another school. He wrote to the Department of Education seeking guidance and requesting ‘official/formal’ guidelines on the issue. In June, a new Muslim group – the Irish Hijab Campaign – was set up to support the right to wear the hijab, and to lobby for legislation to protect and support those wearing the hijab – its chairwoman was the mother of the young girl in the Gorey school (McGarry, 2008).

The issue came to public attention when the *Irish Times* published the correspondence between the Department and the Principal, catapulting the matter into a national debate. The issue quickly gained momentum, sparking off controversy and extensive media coverage. Columnists, politicians, Muslim representatives, NGOs and ordinary people argued for and against in newspapers, radios and on the internet, and even the international news channel Al Jazeera paid a visit to Gorey to speak to the Egan family.⁴⁶

The Office of the Minister for Integration undertook a consultation in order to devise a formal set of Departmental guidelines for future reference. They surveyed over 4,000 primary and post-primary schools and consulted key stakeholders such as teachers’ unions, management and parent bodies.⁴⁷

On September 23, 2008, the Ministers for Education and Science and for Integration jointly agreed recommendations on school uniform policy. They emphasised that these were formulated on the basis of the consultation process and took account of the legal position in Ireland. The recommendations were that:

1. The current system, whereby schools decide their uniform policy at a local level, is reasonable, works and should be maintained.
2. In this context, no school uniform policy should act in such a way that it, in effect, excludes students of a particular religious background from seeking enrolment or continuing their enrolment in a school. However, this statement does not recommend the wearing of clothing in the classroom which obscures

45 National Women’s Council of Ireland (2010).

46 *Enniscorthy Guardian* (2008).

47 Report on the need for a Guidance Note to Schools when reviewing their policies on School Uniforms.

a facial view and creates an artificial barrier between pupil and teacher. Such clothing hinders proper communication.

3. Schools, when drawing up uniform policy, should consult widely in the school community.

4. Schools should take note of the obligations placed on them by the Equal Status Acts before setting down a school uniform policy. They should also be mindful of the Education Act, 1998. As previously mentioned, this obliges boards of management to take account of 'the principles and requirements of a democratic society and have respect and promote respect for the diversity of values, beliefs, traditions, languages and ways of life in society'.

In September 2010 further Guidelines for Catholic schools on how best to integrate students of other faiths were issued by the Joint Managerial Body of Catholic secondary schools.⁴⁸ They too emphasised 'accommodation and dialogue' between schools and parents and, most significantly, they drew a distinction between the hijab, which is accepted in Catholic schools, and the niqab, the full veil worn over the face, which is not.

4.3. Analysis of the debates

We combined secondary data from desk research and an empirical study, and applied a critical discourse analysis to examine the main argumentation strategies (discursive topoi) through which the event and its repercussions were constructed and debated. The empirical study comprised 11 qualitative interviews⁴⁹ and a discussion group, and the desk research included over 80 media items (newspaper articles, TV and radio recordings), Oireachtas debates (Dáil and Senate debates representing over 40 pages of text), official reports, legal documents and position papers, and academic works.

While the Muslim headscarf issue has involved an intricate web of stereotypes, prejudices and discriminations with regard to gender, religion, ethnicity, nationality, and citizenship, three main discursive topoi can be identified in the Irish hijab debate.

The first topos can be termed the 'gender rights' topos, encompassing debates about 'protecting vs. rejecting the veiled woman'.

Media commentaries covered the full spectrum of feminist perspectives, with contributors and letter-writers voicing either support for, or absolute opposition, to the hijab in Irish schools (and Irish society), while invoking women's and/or individuals' 'rights'.

In the *Irish Independent* for instance, columnist Martina Devlin asserted that the headscarf is inherently oppressive, and argued that 'if we accept [the hijab] in schools, we open the door to other practices in the Muslim world even more repressive to women, among them arranged marriages and female circumcision' (Devlin, 2008). Eilis O'Hanlon (2008) wrote in the same paper that Muslim girls whose parents do not wish them to cover, 'can frequently be bullied and made to feel inferior and ashamed by those who wear the hijab', while O'Connor (2008) argued in the *Sunday Business Post* that 'No matter how you spin it, this is such a visible sign of inequality, it can only harm women's efforts in furthering equality. Just ask women in Afghanistan or in Iran'. Already in 2006, Emer O'Kelly, had noted the increasing presence of veiled women (including those wearing the niqab) in Ireland and stated that 'I do not welcome the veil, and I do not believe it is racist to say so. Rather, I believe that to talk about embracing and welcoming what it stands for is to deny equality to women, even when the wearing is merely symbolic' (O'Kelly, 2006).

48 The Joint Managerial Body is the representative organisation for boards of management in voluntary secondary schools (under the trusteeship of either Catholic trustees or those of the Protestant tradition).

49 AM; AL; BH; CB; DM; JC; PW; Z&M; SM; SK.

Such arguments present the image of the veiled Muslim girl/woman as ‘oppressed’ by a patriarchal religion and/or culture. Letter writer Ruth Dudley Edwards, for instance, argued that allowing the hijab denies Muslim girls the possibility of contesting paternal authority, and equated the hijab with child abuse (*Irish Times*, 04/06/08).

Within this discourse of ‘protection’ it is perceived as Ireland’s duty, as an ‘enlightened’ and ‘liberal’ nation, to counter such tendencies by, for instance, banning the hijab from schools. Indeed, journalist Sinead Ryan argued that ‘we simply cannot have liberal equality laws and continue to pander to repressive minority customs’ (Ryan, 2008). Here the discourse of protection is equated with the promotion of gender equality through the protection of Muslim girls and women from oppressive and patriarchal foreign culture practices. This was raised in the Department of Education’s report which stated: ‘There was also some concern expressed that the hijab is worn by some women as recognition of a second class status in society and is enforced by some parents to emphasise the lower status of women. Such an approach by parents is not acceptable in Irish society which recognizes equality between the sexes. Schools should seek to counteract such attitudes in their work in the area of intercultural understanding.’⁵⁰

This resonates with European Court of Human Rights rulings⁵¹ that view the Muslim headscarf as incompatible with gender equality (Evans, 2006). It also reflects the widespread misunderstandings associated with the Muslim headscarf, seeing it as something that is necessarily oppressive rather than as a tool of empowerment where women are marking their identity, taking control of their bodies and giving them a sense of belonging. However, it begs the question of the voice(s) and of the choice(s) of Muslim girls/women.

However, this type of discourse can be interpreted as undermining the veiled woman as an autonomous agent and relegating her to a category of ‘woman in need’ of the state’s protection while her personal desires and aspirations are ignored. While girls (and women) should be protected from being ‘forced’ to veil, they should be seen as capable of making the choice themselves. This discourse construes the veiled woman as not only ‘different’, but also ‘inferior’.

In the media debate, a minority were supportive of Muslim girls’ choice; their discourse focused on the protection of girls/women’s rights: their right to wear the hijab, their rights to religious freedom and to freedom of choice. Breda O’Brien, for instance, regarded the demand to wear the headscarf in Irish schools as an indication of Muslim women’s autonomy, stating ‘a girl who makes the request to wear [the hijab] in school is likely to have thought about it and be clear about what it means to her. She is doing something brave and countercultural’ and questions why society should be so concerned ‘with young girls from a different background asserting their right to dress modestly’ (O’Brien, 2008). Here the notion of protection is centred on individual rights and freedoms. Mulloy (2004) similarly perceived the headscarf as a debate over individual rights, and argues that individuals must have the right to self-expression, cultural identity and freedom. In this perspective, the headscarf is perceived and construed as empowering – it enables girls/women to take control of their bodies, it gives them a distinct identity and a sense of belonging to a wider Muslim community.

The media debate on the hijab suggests that these opposing views reflect conflicting perspectives and interpretations of human rights. While those opposing the hijab perceive women’s rights as endangered by the headscarf and what it (supposedly) represents, those who support the wearing of the hijab in Irish schools perceive a ban to be an infringement on individuals’ right to self-expression (religious or cultural). Yet, in any case, wearing a headscarf as an expression of a Muslim woman’s

50 Office of the Minister for Integration (2008) Report on the need for a Guidance Note to Schools when reviewing their policies on School Uniforms, para. 2.2.

51 Leyla Sahin v. Turkey ; Dahlab v. Switzerland, Dogru v France.

religious conviction is protected by her constitutional right to freedom of religion (Irish Constitution, Article 44).

It may be noted that despite their prominence in the media debate, neither the issues of gender rights nor arguments portraying the hijab as either oppressing or liberating Muslim girls/women featured strongly in our interviews; we take this to underline the lack of prominence of this issue in Ireland.

One interviewee, however, specifically touched on the issue, hinting that, under the apparent understanding and support, some stereotypes were still lurking below politically correct discourses:

...I saw an interview in the Times about a month ago of some Irish teenager, Muslim girls... it all started out very positively and... that they're liberated, that they don't see... they're not oppressed, they really wanted to make a statement that they're normal, happy, Irish teenagers... but as the interview progressed then... and they were asked about boys and relationships and 'oh I'm married and I'm 20'... that organised marriage thing and I've been set up with somebody and... you can't date them until you're engaged and.. suddenly the interviewer was horrified... and it started great like 'we feel more liberated than western girls who have to like... expose their bodies, be half naked to be noticed by a man and... you have to completely sell yourself to... and... they have a point... that's an interesting point... but then on the other side of the coin they turn around and say... there's such control around... their whole sexual lives and... rules... that's the cultural separation... (AM)

Another interviewee linked the hijab to a different 'gender issue' with regard to Muslims in schools – the potential 'lack of respect' or 'lack of recognition of the authority' of female teachers by Muslim boys:

... and, the point I made, and it wasn't picked up on at the time, but certainly a bigger issue for us... would have been the attitude amongst Irish lady teachers, that perhaps the veil was a symbol of the subjugation of women... and also we had issues with young Muslim males and their attitudes to female teachers which was becoming an issue... it certainly came up as an issue for us that in the context of teachers trying to correct students, that because of the feminisation of the profession, many male Muslims objected to being corrected by them... (CB)

Two of our male interviewees actually mentioned the potential 'aesthetic' qualities of the hijab, thus highlighting a positive 'gendered' perception of the garment itself, stripped off any religious or political underlying meanings or representations.

Yes... I mean, obviously I... I personally have no difficulty with the veil... [...] ...now, is it a sign of... of discrimination against women? I don't think so in general... there are many Islamic women who wear a veil by cultural choice, the way that people wear jeans or... in fact they... in some cases it enhances their beauty, they're actually very elegant with it... (DM)

...and in fact all sorts of ironies came out of that, because in some schools apparently some young Muslim women were wearing hijabs, quite brightly coloured hijabs, attractive hijabs and actually other Irish school children were asking if they could wear them as well because they... or something similar, you know because... [...] They actually quite liked that... maybe it mightn't have been the hijab, but something, some sort of headscarf, you know... (PW)

None of the three respondents who wore the hijab themselves mentioned the 'gender issue' - the two students both emphasised that it was a serious choice for a girl to wear hijab because 'even for her to adopt that in a western country, for her friends to accept her, for the environment to accept her it's a big deal so...' (M). For SK, the issue of 'rights' was more prominent as she emphasised how 'disappointed' she had been by some of the politicians' comments at the time and how she would 'fight for future generations' right to wear the hijab' should that right be challenged again.

...I was very disappointed with some of the Government reactions, or... they were at the time the shadow Government as in Fine Gael... shockingly disappointed, actually I was... astounded by some of their remarks... and they're now in Government... but when I know their stance on the hijab... [...] and

I'm appalled... and Ruairi Quinn... Ruairi Quinn if you go back to this man in his days where he... stood for everybody's rights, you know... for once I'm wishing... wishing the years on so life will pass very quickly and there'll be another election... I'm trying to put my head in the sand until it passes because I feel that's the option in front of me... [...] but... there's a rebel in there somewhere who wants to say 'let them bring it on!' so at least we can challenge it now for future generations'... (SK)

The second topos can be identified as the 'integration vs. segregation' topos and encompasses debates about the nature of 'Irish interculturalism'.

The issue went beyond the question of the headscarf in schools to embody the first controversy concerning the Muslim presence and potential claims for recognition in Ireland, which had to come to terms with the fact that it was now a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society.

These debates originated mainly from statements made by the girl's family, the Egans, and the opposition parties (one of which, Fine Gael, is now in government).

Speaking on the Al Jazeera English channel, Liam Egan accused the Government of repressing minority rights and stated that: 'It is time the world witnessed the true face of Ireland. It has silently repressed Muslim rights while flaunting itself as the bastion of democracy for far too long. The issue of the hijab is a reflection of how Ireland treats its minorities' (Murphy, 2008). He argued that it was not an immigration issue but was about freedom to practise religious beliefs and the importance of tolerance. To the argument that he should assimilate, he responded that he was Irish and Muslim. Liam (or Mujahid) Egan, was quickly identified as a controversial personality. He set up a website on which he criticised the main representatives of the Muslim community in Ireland (the ICCI and the IFI) while propagating the austere Salafist strain of Islam. The 2008 TV report, which featured no representative from any Irish mosque, led the ICCI to complain to Al Jazeera. Egan's website disappeared in 2010, shortly before he left Ireland. 'I didn't like the direction it was going in due to some contributors', he said, 'It was becoming very anti-Irish and counterproductive. It needed to be reined in' (Fitzgerald, 2011).

The education spokesmen of the two main opposition parties at the time argued that the hijab raises crucial questions around the Irish approach to cultural difference, and called for a ban on the hijab in public schools. Labour's Ruairi Quinn (now Education Minister) indicated that he was no longer a supporter of multiculturalism but a believer in integration following his study of the experience of other European countries. 'I do not think that multiculturalism has worked in Denmark and Holland', he said, 'We have absorbed 10% of the population in a very short period of time. If we want to avoid the problems associated with other countries, we have to be as integrationist as possible'. As a result, his stance on the hijab was also clear: 'If people want to come into a western society that is Christian and secular, they need to conform to the rules and regulations of that country... Nobody is formally asking them to come here. In the interests of integration and assimilation, they should embrace our culture... Irish girls don't wear headscarves' (McDonagh, 2008). Speaking to the *Irish Times*, Fine Gael's Brian Hayes also warned that Ireland should not be going down the route of multiculturalism and gave his support for banning the hijab in public schools, adding that '[t]here is enough segregation in Ireland without adding this to it... It makes absolute sense that there would be one uniform for everyone. The wearing of the hijab is not about religiosity, it is more an example of modesty. It is not a fundamental requirement to be a Muslim' (McGee, 2008).

Many were confused by these positions. The Islamic Society of Ireland women's spokesperson, Summayah Kenna, branded the comments by Mr Hayes and Mr Quinn as 'baffling', adding that wearing the hijab was a religious obligation. Philip Watt, then Director of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism, said the 'ill-thought' comments from both political figures were 'disappointing' (McDonagh, 2008). NAPD⁵² Director Clive Byrne argued that individual

52 National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD).

principals should not have to make crucial decisions about the wearing of the hijab, as this was a decision for school boards and trustees. He said: 'Wearing a veil is unlikely to be an issue in most schools, but there will come a time when schools will be forced to deal with situations when parents demand that their daughters face be fully covered. Will it be found to be discriminatory under Equal Status legislation if school authorities insist that a full veil can't be worn?' (Ryan, 2008).

Throughout the debates, members of the Government rarely commented on the issue. In May 2008, Senator Joe O'Toole argued in the Seanad that 'the question of the wearing of the hijab by Muslim girls or women in Irish society needs to be addressed' and insisted that 'Everyone's view is important [because] It challenges us in all sorts of ways in terms of whether it helps pluralism and integrates society or does the opposite. One could argue both sides. It would be very helpful to have a debate in which people could offer their views and in which the Minister who will deal with this, whether it be the Minister for Education and Science or the Minister of State responsible for integration, could engage in an open way without prejudice to what might happen. Let us hear people's views'.⁵³ In the Dáil in July 2008, (then) Deputy Enda Kenny also asked the Taoiseach if there had been 'any discussion or explanation from the Government on its position on the wearing of the hijab, the headdress worn by Muslim women, and the burqa? ... Is that of concern or interest to the Government given that women in this country are supposed to have equality of opportunity? Was the issue discussed or raised or was any reference made to it?'⁵⁴

Apart from the consultation with school principals and selected stakeholders, no real public 'debate' was engaged in by the Government. Integration Minister Conor Lenihan simply stated that he had no problem with students wearing the hijab: 'For those that wear the hijab, it's an issue of modesty. It's not so long since Irish women wore headscarves to church, so we have to respect that'; while Education Minister Batt O'Keeffe said he did not regard questions over the hijab as 'a serious issue' in Ireland (Donnelly and Riegel, 2008).

Public opinion appeared to be relatively split, and people voiced their views and arguments though all the means at their disposal. The results of a TNS/mrbi poll on the place of the Islamic headscarf in Irish schools showed that 48% of those surveyed felt that Muslim students should be allowed to wear the hijab in state schools, with significant differences of opinion between men and women, younger and older people, socio-economic groups and supporters of the main political parties (O'Brien, 2008).

On July 3, 2008, in the Comments section of the *Irish Times* website, one entry by 'Bryan' asked if the 'hijab issue' was 'getting out of hand':

Honestly, what is the big deal? It's just a piece of cloth isn't it? If young Muslim ladies, or their parents for that matter, want them to wear it, what's the problem? Should this really be taking up two ministers' time as well as that of thousands of school principals? [...] Let's say that it is a genuine concern. What is the real underlying issue here? It cannot be about clothing. Or at least I really hope we aren't that petty as a society. Is it about Islam, or religion itself? Either way, if there is going to be a debate, let it be about Islam or religion as a whole and their place in contemporary Irish society.⁵⁵

Over the next few days, this question alone attracted 62 comments, demonstrating not only the public's interest in the issue but the variety – and sometimes ferocity – of views – some mildly supportive, most brutally critical and expanding the debate to the general issue of immigration in Ireland:

For me, I think allowing students to wear compulsory (to their faith) pieces of religious dress is fine as long as it is within reason. For instance, cross around the neck or hijab is fine. But a burka is not

53 Seanad Éireann - Volume 189 - 20 May, 2008, Order of Business.

54 Dáil Éireann - Volume 659 - 09 July, 2008, Questions - Dialogue with Faith Communities.

55 <http://www.irishtimes.com/blogs/outsidein/2008/07/03/the-hijab/>.

workable in a school with a uniform policy, and I'm not sure how tolerant I would be of allowing a woman to be hidden away from the world in such an outfit at school, no matter how much cultural relativism we engage ourselves in.

The argument is based on the fear in the Western world of Islamisation, I think; there seems to be a strong view, in Ireland and the UK, that Muslims operate through infiltration, instead of integration.

Well, if it's just a price of cloth, then they won't mind removing it, will they?

Fine in their own country, fine Irish/Christian women should cover themselves in Muslim countries if required too but not fine in my country.

Integrate or leave.

I am concerned about three things: 1) that Irish people will be disadvantaged either now or in the future due to the influx of so many other peoples to our country; 2) that the character/culture of Ireland will be changed beyond recognition; and 3) that there will be conflict between all these different peoples that are living on this small island. [...] We're, of course, no strangers to ethnic conflicts in Ireland ourselves. Ireland saw a migration of people from southern Scotland/northern England to Ulster several centuries ago. At the time, that migration resulted in a 10 per cent migrant population on the island. We can all see how well that migration has gone.

It could be argued that, in Ireland, the primary concern is of the loss of 'Irishness' through the dilution of Irish culture and we can see in statements such as Mr. Quinn's assertion that 'Irish girls don't wear headscarves' the emergence of a politics of belonging which defines Irishness, not in terms of birth or blood, but also in terms of behaviour.

One letter writer to the *Irish Independent* expressed concerns that 'non-ethnic Irish women who have citizenship by birth or naturalisation will take up positions in the public service. I do not want, as a woman, to see religion or symbols of religion as the face of public service' and emphasised that 'once one leaves or escapes the land of one's birth and enters a new society with a different culture and beliefs, one must adapt to existing values inherent in the new nation. When in Rome...' (Malone, 2009). Although a somewhat oversimplified representation of such views, this letter expresses a number of issues that lie at the heart of the accommodation/integration/assimilation – and tolerance – debate.

Throughout the hijab debate, the notions of 'ethnic' Irish and Christian were often conflated in the simplistic (but common) perception that 'to be Irish is to be Catholic'. Indeed, for O'Hanlon (2008), Ireland 'is not a secular State, but a Catholic one in which the Holy Trinity is invoked in the very first words of the Constitution. That leaves us much more open to a charge of hypocrisy on the issue, since we are seemingly willing to uphold some religious values and traditions but not others', while O'Brien (2008) observes that 'those who seek to justify their opposition to the hijab on the grounds that this is a Christian country are suffering from a large irony deficit. As Christians, we should be to the forefront in respecting the stranger'. However, an Irish person may also be Muslim, as was the father of Shekinah Egan, the school girl whose headscarf sparked the debate and, as one interviewee emphasised: 'What about Irish Muslims?' (Z). Within the discourse of the definition of Irishness and the 'preservation of the nation', the hijab has been clearly related to ethnicity and 'foreignness' and the veiled (Muslim) woman construed as a symbol of the (potential) loss of 'Irishness' and Irish values and the 'native' Irish Muslims have been largely ignored.

The overwhelming assumption seemed to be that there is a unitary Irish nation with cultural values that is accessible by newcomers to the country. This is expressed in one letter in the *Irish Independent*: 'immigrants to this country who accept the western way and may I say so the Christian way of life and who contribute positively to our society are welcome. We cannot drop our Christian ethos to suit special groups... The Irish nation has the ways and means to maintain our ethos and show Muslims

that we want integration, absorption, and not separation. People who wear Islamic dress in Ireland (or elsewhere) are seen as Muslims. We should see people as humans first' (McCullagh, 2007).

Here, non-Christians are clearly defined as 'others', and their presence is permitted on condition that they behave - and dress - according to the standards of the Western Christian nation of Ireland and 'contribute positively', revealing not only a boundary but also 'conditions of integration' to acceptance. Again, the general perception seems to be that all Muslims in Ireland are 'newcomers/immigrant' and not 'natives'.

In the context of schools more specifically, the accent has also been on 'integration/assimilation' with a strong emphasis on downplaying differences and on 'treating everybody the same'. In the Department of Education's statement, the emphasis is placed on school uniform as an instrument of integration: 'School uniforms are generally viewed by schools as a means of providing a group identity for pupils, thus eliminating possible competition amongst students in matters of dress and the wearing of jewellery, etc'.⁵⁶

In the spirit of 'treating everybody the same' most schools have been reluctant to develop a formal policy on cultural diversity (Smyth & al, 2009). Views downplaying differences were deliberately expressed in a teachers' union submission to the government on the hijab issue: 'If we focus on what we all have in common and respect difference, we reduce the significance of the difference... If we focus on difference we never get to the point of understanding what we have in common. To focus on difference can encourage the development of fundamentalist viewpoints... The emphasis should be on our common humanity & shared human experiences in the context of our tradition of respect for equality and liberty'.⁵⁷ Apart from diminishing the value of difference, and indeed problematising it, in one sentence 'difference' is equated with 'fundamentalism'. While it does not directly link the Muslim headscarf with fundamentalism, this connection echoes the underlying fear that if the headscarf led the way to greater Muslim visibility and greater Muslim affirmation in Irish society, it could possibly represent a first step towards the establishment of Islamic fundamentalism.

While our interviewees did not engage in an abstract debate about concepts of 'integration', 'multiculturalism' or 'discrimination', they did touch on these issues on a more 'grounded' 'pragmatic' level and discussed the 'smaller/more practical' and real-life concerns and issues they saw as important to address:

The Muslim students remarked that, aware of the negative perceptions associated with the hijab, some Muslims make a deliberate choice not to wear it to avoid being instantly 'labelled':

I do know that there's a part of the Muslim population ... who don't wear the headscarf because they're afraid that... it'll impact the way people treat them... to reach higher positions or to be accepted in certain places... [...] so that people would adapt... more easily to them.... so they'd mistake them for like... other European countries or something instead of... you know... labelling them as Muslims... (M)
So clearly then there is this fear within the Muslim community that there isn't a tolerance level within the Irish population... (Z)
The same thing in our college... we do have a lot of Muslims, there are a couple of... two or three that I've seen... actually professors... but they don't have the headscarf on... [...] it also could be like... because they want to fit in more or they're more comfortable that way... (M)

Associated with this, a few people mentioned the issue of the relative numbers of Muslim pupils in schools as an important factor:

56 Report by the Minister for Integration on the need for a Guidance Note to Schools when reviewing their policies on School Uniforms.

57 Submission from ASTI (Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland), 'Consultation on Clothing in Schools'.

...the difficulty is if they drift towards a smaller number of schools... you know there are some schools where, for various reasons, they were made very welcome and the parents like those schools... but if the Islamic population in the school becomes half the school then it's no longer the school that it's originally set out to be... [...] I think tensions could emerge and, strange thing, the result could be that the quality of the school would go down... (DM)

...I think it was just when... when they became more than 10 in a school or something... the management started to get anxious... and also... I think... once parents start coming in then as well and making demands and saying, you know... "we know our rights" or... you know, that's when the difficulty starts... (AM)

This issue of the 'number of Muslim pupils' in any given school – and thus of their 'visibility' but also of their potential 'strength' or 'weight' as a group capable to formulate requests – relates directly to the 'pragmatics' of accommodation and integration as it refers to 'how much' one is prepared – as a school but also as a community / a society – to welcome, to accommodate, to integrate – and possibly to assimilate. It can represent an indication of the nature (and 'quantity') of diversity one can deal with/accommodate.

Another 'pragmatic' issue highlighted by our interviewees was the training of teachers in dealing with increased religious and cultural diversity in Irish schools. The importance of such training was emphasised; while such training is currently available in teacher training colleges, it is, as many regretted, only optional, not compulsory:

...it's an option... there are courses there... in pre-service, in places like here... certainly there's a lot of culture and language in it, English as an additional language, there's good resources on that but... teaching about world religions... religious diversity... are optional electives... and I personally feel it needs to be an integral part of their training at this stage... (AM)

...like they have so many training days... why not introduce it into it... we're a religious minority, we're all Muslims here, that work in the centre but we're very different in that... there's Central Africans, there's North Africans, there's Irish, there's Europeans... we've had the intercultural training because it's a necessity... (SK)

Similarly, DM explained that in one teacher training school they had introduced an alternative, more 'philosophical' course for teachers who did not want to teach Catholic religious education, but that this course was not popular and that in another college, they had to withdraw a similar project because of lack of interest. As DM emphasised, it is difficult to determine the reasons behind such lack of enthusiasm; whether it highlights a lack of interest in diversity issues or a more practical belief that Irish schools will not be significantly affected by the religious and cultural diversity of their pupils, and thus that concentrating on the core teaching elements (and the teaching of Catholic religion) remains the focus of their training and their work.

One interviewee, AS, went further in suggesting that, in addition to improving the training of Irish teachers (and making 'diversity awareness' a compulsory element of that training), the Irish education system would benefit from including Muslim teachers in schools, despite the fact that their current absence was justified by a lack of recognised qualifications:

...I have been today on the Department (of Education) website and they have something that they call 'special needs'... well, can this be classified as a special need... you need to get Muslim teachers who can teach in these schools and they have to be exempted from certain conditions because it is really a special need... Muslim teachers will have an understanding of Islam and Muslim cultures that... has a dimension that will be definitely missed if we are talking about non-Muslim teachers... that would make the teachers' job easier and that would make the process of education easier for the children as well... (AS)

Finally, several interviewees emphasised dialogue and ‘common sense’ as another ‘basic’, ‘pragmatic’ issue in the ‘integration vs. segregation debate’, suggesting, as **PW** put it, that ‘a bit of give and take’ can go a long way in resolving challenging issues such as the hijab. In that respect, two individuals emphasised the importance – and current lack – of an independent ‘mediator’, a ‘buffer’ between minority/religious communities and Government/institutions, a role the NCCRI had successfully played for ten years (1998-2008), including in the case of the hijab, before being replaced by the Office of the Minister of Integration.⁵⁸

...I like to think that the organisation that I was part of [the NCCRI] is one of the reasons why there hasn't been a lot of controversy around it and that we were extremely pro-active in... seeking out a way which would... provide for the reasonable accommodation of religious symbols in the schools and indeed in other settings... [...] and our view on it was, that it's... it should be a matter for negotiation, you know... there should be certain principles but there needs to be some dialogue and negotiation with the communities themselves in terms of how it is enacted... (**PW**)

...I believe they did great work [the NCCRI]... they were a great team of people and they challenged, they really did... the misconceptions, all that... both sides of the facts, they challenged it... I believe they did great work and now we're at a loss, we're lost without them... we're not at a loss without the Minister for Integration... (**SK**)

The importance and value of such a mediating agent was highlighted in two organisations - the Gardai (police) and the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) - which have created a Racial, Intercultural & Diversity Office and a National Inclusion and Integration Committee respectively, each with dedicated inclusion officers, which have proved extremely successful in reaching out to and interacting with migrant communities.

However, if in effect, the hijab became a focus for debates about immigrants, and in particular, ‘Islamic immigrants’, despite the many calls to engage with this community and ‘defuse potential tensions before they arise’ (O’Brien, 2008), the only answer to the multitude of questions raised by the hijab controversy were the ‘Guidelines’ to schools released in 2008 (see previous section).

The main teacher unions welcomed the Ministers’ statement; for the general secretary of the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI), the recommendations ‘fully respect the various religious backgrounds of students in our schools while taking account of the legal position’, while the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) described the recommendations as ‘sensible and practical’ (Mac Cormaic, 2008). However, these guidelines, representing a relatively ‘laissez-faire’ approach, did not fully satisfy either the supporters or the opponents of the headscarf in Irish schools.

The Irish Council for Civil Liberties officially criticised the Government putting the decision back on to school principals, thereby ‘passing on’ their responsibilities; Director Mark Kelly said: ‘This would appear to be a policy not to have a policy In the absence of a nationally-agreed and enforceable policy, there remains a danger that individual principals could interpret this to permit them to exclude a child for wearing religious dress, such as the hijab. The Ministers should live up to their responsibility to close this loophole’ (MacCormaic, 2008). In September 2010, they released a consultation paper on the issue of the headscarf in Irish school highlighting the potential issues – not addressed by the Government – of Muslim girls being turned down by a school for requesting to wear the hijab and of school policies becoming opposed to hijab after students’ enrolments.

Similarly, two Muslim interviewees expressed their disappointment with the guidelines and highlighted not only that the absence of a strong ‘legal basis’ could prove problematic in the future but that it had already proved so:

58 Now converted into the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration

The guidelines... yeah, I saw them, they were... they were petty in a sense I believe... I didn't believe it changed anything because all it told the schools was 'to do your best' and... schools believed they were doing their best initially... (SK)

...that was the mistake, they shouldn't have said 'up to every school to decide' but actually because they... before issuing the guidelines they have referred it to an item in the Constitution saying... according to this item that... religion has to be respected and... what does it mean 'has to be respected' if you do not allow them to wear the hijab... so I don't think there was a need for... legislation [...] maybe there is a need for... a clear statement... a clear instruction issued by the Department of Education as an explanation to what we see in the legislation [Constitution]... maybe something like that would help... (AS)

Similarly, the 2010 Guidelines to Catholic schools were not legally binding, as one interviewee acknowledges.

...these are guidelines... well, it's not the role of the JMB or me to... to make rules for schools... but we got all the... all the trusts on board so... this is for secondary Catholic schools so... new lay trusts have been formed in the last few years and we got... we got them in on this .. I think there's still some issues in here that I've left kind of open... for example the wearing of the school crest... I think the crest is also significant and it has come up... I've heard maybe of 4 or 5 cases now and I'm sure there's a lot more, these are just the ones I've heard anecdotally... situations where there might be a cross on the crest... and a student or a parent plucks out the stitching of the cross out of the crest or maybe the whole crest altogether... and... that can be seen as a hostile... subversive act by management... so... again, people just come to me and said "what should we do in that situation?"... (AM)

One interviewee, whose five children have gone through the Irish education system, also gave concrete examples where schools simply refused to accept the hijab, refused to accommodate certain demands or, more 'subtly' ostracised Muslim students. She explained how her eldest girls were allowed to wear the hijab in their secondary school (after they had been refused in a previous one) but were 'not allowed in the school photo'; and her youngest girl was not allowed to take part in the school play because of her hijab. Finally she emphasised that the accommodation of Muslim pupils in secondary schools was not restricted to girls and that, despite the 'encouragements to accommodate' made in both sets of guidelines, some issues could still prove problematic and even 'backfire' if the challenge proved too great for the school:

...now my son went to a Christian ethos school... there was a lot of Muslims in the school, well a sufficient number... they made a request to have an area where they could pray during the lunch hour, not during school time, during the lunch hour... absolutely no... they approached the head of the mosque here and asked him if he'd kindly write a letter, to explain the reasons why... it was done on three occasions and refused every single time... [...] it would have been sent in 2010, the last letter, and it was refused again... definitely... and then they stopped taking Muslims into the school altogether... they didn't say 'Muslims don't get in', they said... 'primarily Catholics... and then Christians... and then none... non-Christian faiths'... (SK)

This leads us to the **third topos – the 'Religion in schools – and beyond' topos**.

As we have said earlier, the hijab debate is not *only* about religion, however, it is *also* about religion, about how faith and religious beliefs are expressed, acknowledged and valued/respected. Unlike France or Turkey where the state has consciously been constructed as secular, Ireland has always enjoyed a close relationship with religious institutions, notably the Catholic Church. This special history has resulted in rather unique arguments both *for* and *against* the hijab.

Articles 44 and 42 in the Irish Constitution have tended to be interpreted as making pluralism and tolerance essential; and the fact that 'freedom of conscience and freedom of profession and practice of religion' are guaranteed would seem to translate into permitting wearing Muslim headscarves and other religious symbols.

However, in order to fully understand the issues for students of minority religion in Irish schools, we need to consider the denominational nature of the education system. Within the secondary sector over half (57%) of all schools are denominational institutions (Lodge & Lynch, 2004). The majority are owned and controlled by the Catholic Church while the remainder is under Protestant management. Vocational schools and community colleges, while defined as multid denominational, in practice are Roman Catholic in ethos; while community schools are officially described as interdenominational, denominational bodies also form part of their management structure. All comprehensive schools are denominationally managed.

A significant example of the influence of the Catholic Church in education is the exemption from equality legislation for religious-run institutions, where schools can refuse admission based on ethos.⁵⁹ The Employment Equality Act 1998, while in general outlawing discrimination on the grounds of religion, also contains a provision allowing schools employing teachers to discriminate on a similar basis.⁶⁰ These provisions can be seen as perpetuating a tradition of segregated education and thus, when a pupil of a religious belief other than Catholic is admitted into a Catholic secondary school, it can be regarded as a 'privilege' rather than a 'right'.

Thus, while the Education Act 1998 clearly outlines the rights and obligations of the state and of schools, these are somewhat 'qualified' by what has been termed the 'ethos let-out clause' (Lodge & Lynch, 2004). Almost all rights and obligations are subject to 'having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school', which Boards of Management are obliged to uphold, and which could involve potential conflict with the rights of parents and students whose of a different ethos.

It is clear the denominational nature of schools and the primacy attributed to the maintenance of ethos of religious institutions are significant factors which can conflict with the rights of religious minorities in Ireland and potentially lead to discrimination (Hogan, 2005). This was emphasised in the submission of the Joint Managerial Body (JMB), which stated that, while they are in favour of freedom of religious expression and the use of religious symbols in schools, this freedom is subject to the need to uphold the ethos of the school. According to Hogan (2005), the importance of maintaining the religious ethos of a school could be an argument to support a ban on the Muslim headscarf if a case eventually came before an Irish court.

The importance of maintaining the 'ethos' of a school was mentioned by some interviewees but, as we have seen earlier, the issue of the 'number' of Muslim pupils rather than their 'visibility' was perceived as potentially challenging:

...for example the girls, Islamic girls go to the Roman Catholic schools, particularly those with a religious ethos, particularly where there are nuns... even there, they're saying that... the balance is now changing... and if you have an Islamic minority in Catholic schools is one thing... as it grows it's changing the ethos of the school and it could become more difficult... (DM)

However the 'visibility issue' was also raised by two of our Muslim respondents: a mother (SK) who indicated that, in the (Catholic) schools her daughters had attended, the issue of maintaining the image/perception of the school as a *Catholic* school was often emphasised by the school management,

59 Under section 7(3) of the Equal Status Act 2000 schools can discriminate by giving preference to in admissions to children of a particular denomination, or by refusing to admit a child where such refusal is essential to maintain the ethos of the school.

60 Under the Employment Equality Act 1998 'certain religious, educational and medical institutions may give more favourable treatment on the religion ground to an employee or prospective employee where it is reasonable to do so in order to maintain the religious ethos of the institution'.

and a student (Z), who recalled that her hijab had attracted attention while attending an open day at a (prospective) secondary school:

...I was sitting in the front and the Principal of that particular school she... like... kind of pointed towards me and was like 'this is a CATHOLIC school' ... you know, and I was kind of like 'oh, I'm not going to this school' (laughs) ... you know, because you... the first time you get a bad vibe you just don't want to be there, you know... (Z)

The NCCRI has argued that those who advocated 'a ban on the hijab might not have fully considered the consequences of such a ban with regard to *all* religious symbols and obligations in the schools' (NCCRI, 2007; Hemani, 2008), highlighting the fact that banning the symbols of Christianity was not what those who opposed the hijab in Irish schools had in mind. Introducing rules against the hijab or other religious symbols is 'likely to result in tension with those communities where no tension existed before', said Philip Watt, adding that 'The banning of religious symbols or obligations solely aimed at one religious community or indeed all religious faiths is potentially discriminatory and likely to be tested in Irish law' (Neville, 2008).

Indeed, Catholicism, as the hegemonic belief system in Ireland, tends to be perceived as 'the normal way of life', whereas Islam, as a minority belief system, is perceived not only as religious, but also as ideological and somewhat backward, and construed as potentially 'divisive'. It can be suggested that it is not religion which is under attack by those who demand a ban on the hijab, but rather the presence of cultural and ethnic 'others' who, as we have seen in the previous section, are likely to be construed as 'outside what is considered normal and acceptable within Ireland'.

While one Muslim student compared her hijab with a religious emblem common in Irish schools, others in the Muslim community emphasised the distinctiveness of the hijab in Islam, in an attempt to 'exempt' it from the 'religious symbols debates' that have been raging in other European countries.

...with most schools in Ireland they have a crest... in the crest there's a cross... so if the crest has a cross that's kind of representing your religion, why can't we wear our... our thing... (Z)

Speaking at a lecture entitled 'From Mantillas to Hijabs: Are religious symbols acceptable in Ireland today?' in March 2007, Imam Hussein Halawa of the ICCI emphasised that the hijab was not just a religious symbol but 'an Islamic obligation'. He added: 'Just as nobody had the right to prevent people going to church, nobody has right to prevent Muslim women wearing the hijab'.⁶¹

Similarly for one interviewee:

...the hijab is not a religious symbol... hijab is an Islamic obligation, that's how Muslims see it... now if you ban an Islamic obligation, how do you expect us to react?... [...] they think that this is just to bring people closer to remove... but in fact you are dividing people with such a decision... because the hijab for Muslims is an essential component of their religious practices... if you deprive them of that, then what do you expect them to be... it's a horrible mistake... (AS)

However, some have used the debate to criticise the very presence of religion in Irish schools and argued that schools should be secular and ban all religious symbolism. In a letter to the *Irish Times*, Groarke (2009) argued that 'in a post-modern, multicultural Ireland, the time has come to remove religious teaching from our state education system' and explicitly included Catholicism within this argument. Similarly, one opinion article argued that the denominational system could force government to accept religious schools that might undermine democratic principles. The author advocated that 'the State... realise that the publicly funded education system is no place for the promotion of particular religions. Only a religiously neutral State education system can protect the

61 *Irish Times*, March 16, 2007.

education system from becoming a vehicle through which democratic values are undermined' (McCrea, 2009). More recently, Eoin Daly (2011) argued in the same paper that a 'universal model of non-denominational education' was needed in contemporary Ireland, and suggested that only such an approach could provide an effective protection of religious freedom in Irish schools. However, while the idea of a truly secular education system was mentioned by (only) two of our interviewees (**JC & CB**), neither of them could foresee such a development in Ireland in the near future:

...it might be lovely in theory, and I'm not saying I am opposed to it in theory, but the rights, the constitutional rights of the vast majority of the people at the moment, their rights are to have a denominational education if they want to believe in it... they do... that's constitutionally secure... and you would not... you couldn't do that without a constitutional referendum, you couldn't change that, and I don't think you would get a constitutional referendum passed on those lines in contemporary Ireland... and I think... talk like that is interesting... in an abstract way, an intellectual way, it takes you away... but in terms of practical politics, I don't think it is... (**JC**)

While such a strictly secular school system is unlikely to come about, the 2011 debate on the patronage of (primary) schools may however be accompanied by a reconsideration of the structure of post-primary education, including the development of 'multi-denominational' secondary schools and the possibility of a Muslim secondary school.

4.4. Conclusion

How the hijab is perceived is necessarily shaped by the cultural context in which it is worn, ideological traditions and prevailing perceptions, not only of Islam or even of religion generally, but also of women, of 'foreigners' and of 'difference'. Implicit within the opinions expressed are also nationalised notions of belonging and of the nature of Irishness and Irish values. Although the debate never gained the vigour of the headscarf debates elsewhere, Ireland's controversy provides an interesting angle on these interrelated issues and the more general conceptions of 'the new Ireland'.

The 2007 issue served as a touchstone for wider debates about Islam, identity and immigration in Ireland – until then the Muslim community in Ireland had been not only 'well integrated' but, in a sense, relatively 'ignored'; and this event sparked a questioning about the potential for controversy of Muslims and Muslim practices in Ireland. It also highlighted that, as Hopkins argues, Muslims in Europe are often placed in a difficult position as 'they are routinely viewed as 'in' Europe, but not 'of' Europe' (2011: 253). This was demonstrated in the Irish debate by the frequent conflation of 'Muslims' and 'foreigner/immigrant' and the tendency by both the opponents and the supporters of the hijab to overlook the existence of Irish Muslims (both Irish-born children and Irish converts). However, as the Muslim community is evolving and diversifying, and the second generation beginning to emerge, these kinds of issues are likely to develop.

While this issue primarily concerned the 'presentation of self and interactions in the school context', as the debate evolved it also touched upon issues about 'curriculum' and the 'structure of the education system' through the denominational nature of Irish education. With regard to 'levels' of tolerance it can be argued that this issue ranges from 'non toleration' of the full veil/niqab by all education actors (even though this particular issue has not yet emerged) to general 'tolerance' (level 2) of the hijab in Irish schools – even though, as we have seen, such tolerance can be conditional on each school's assessment of the situation.

5. Concluding remarks

In order to explore in depth what the levels of acceptance - *intolerance/tolerance/respect* - mean in the area of education in Ireland and how they manifest themselves, we have presented and discussed two recent challenges relating to religious and cultural diversity in Irish schools: the removal of ancillary

grants for fee-paying Protestant schools and the issue of the hijab. These illustrate and explore different facets of the management of cultural and religious diversity in education and highlight different ways in which ‘tolerance’ is conceived of and discussed by different actors in Irish society. We now attempt to reflect on them comparatively to consider any lessons to be learned.

5.1. Similarities and differences between the two diversity challenges

Both issues represented touchstones in the contemporary debates on school diversity in Ireland – debates on both the new diversity *within* schools and the growing diversity *of* (types of) schools. Both involved not only practical but also legal challenges, and were hotly debated in the media and the political arena. At the same time, these two issues represent very different diversity challenges to Irish education. While both engage with primarily religious minorities, one involves an historical ‘native’ minority (Protestants) and the other a relatively ‘new’ and largely immigrant minority (Muslims). While both engage with the recognition of religious minorities’ rights in education, they embody significantly different demands, and it is notable that the frame of religion was more prominent in the headscarf case, while respect for plurality and diversity was more prominent in the Protestant schools case.

In both cases there was a significant level of acceptance to begin with, and there is relatively little change. Schoolgirls were and are widely allowed to wear headscarves, and there is no public prohibition of such dress. Separate Protestant schools still receive a block grant and otherwise are treated the same as other fee-paying schools, even if they have lost some of their special funding. The only element of intolerance that emerges is a virtual consensus that the niqab/face covering (for either pupils or teachers) would *not* be tolerated in schools. However, both cases also revealed some tensions at the margins of this acceptance, highlighted in our interviews by references to instances where the hijab proves problematic in some schools and by the difficulties now encountered by some Protestant schools in terms of curriculum provision.

In both cases, the ‘support discourses’ were relatively similar, emphasising acceptance of religious minorities and support for their practices; and presenting the ‘other’ as an equal to be respected and accommodated. The ‘counter-discourses’, however, focused on ‘difference’ and sought ‘integration’ in the hijab case, while emphasising self-reliance and autonomy as a remedy for the Protestant community’s claims. It is interesting to note that our two cases engaged with two very different conceptions of ‘school autonomy’. In the hijab case, the focus was on the autonomy of each school to decide how best to deal with requests regarding the hijab, emphasising their freedom of action on the matter. In the Protestant schools case, the focus was on the need and capacity of the schools to be self-sufficient as custodians of their community’s heritage.

These cases generated broader debates about larger issues currently discussed in Irish society – mainly the role and place of religion in schools, but also to a lesser degree, the status of minorities in general. (It may be noted that, while both challenges were discussed and taken on by politicians from different parties, neither became a ‘party issue’).

Both engaged with the general perception of ‘Irishness’ and what it stands for in terms of values, traditions and customs. In both cases there was an underlying concern that minorities may not be adequately ‘recognised’ or incorporated into the contemporary definition of Irishness, and that they are not sufficiently recognised as ‘adding value’ to Irish society. In both debates, some reference was made to Northern Ireland and the spectre of the division to which religious division can lead, emphasising that this is an issue that has been all too familiar in Ireland in the past, and one to be wary of in the future.

5.2. The Irish conception of acceptance in the area of education

First, it is important to note that people have very different definitions and views of tolerance and what it stands for. In the Irish context, the term itself is widely regarded as inappropriate or undesirable; if associated with ‘political correctness’ it is perceived as weak, or, if associated with ‘permission’ it is perceived as ‘condescending’ and accordingly negative.

Most of our interviewees disliked and even rejected the term. Some argued that in Ireland the concept was outdated, and suggested terms such as integration or partnership as more appropriate. For instance, ‘the NCCRI completely rejected the concept of tolerance being put forward’ in favour of an intercultural approach that recognises the limitations and even failures of both multiculturalism and assimilation (PW). Indeed, the official emphasis has been on the integration of diverse religious and cultural communities, framed in terms of ‘interculturalism’, defined by the NCCRI as the ‘development of strategy, policy and practices that promote interaction, understanding, respect and integration between different cultures and ethnic groups on the basis that cultural diversity is a strength that can enrich society, without glossing over issues such as racism’ (NCCRI, 2006a, p. 29). Such a definition would effectively seem to go beyond mere tolerance to represent respect/recognition (level 3).

In addition, those who embrace the idea of being more accepting do not necessarily identify the areas or groups in need of respect/recognition in the same way, or see these necessarily as requiring special treatment. Likewise, rejecting the word tolerance does not always mean rejecting the idea that strictly equal treatment is an adequate form of acceptance.

While the Irish hijab issue did not prove as controversial as in other EU countries, it represented a touchstone in discussions on the new diversity in Ireland and on the growing Muslim presence. The debate was welcomed by many people (though perhaps less by the Government), including many interviewees, and can be seen from the level of media interest.

In the hijab debate, there appeared to be a broad acceptance of difference and tolerance of diversity (level 2) in most schools. This level of acceptance of Muslims is also clear in the recognition of two state-supported Muslim primary schools (the first established in the early 1990s).

Some element of ‘nationalist intolerance’ emerged in the hijab debate, however, in views expressing that certain cultural and religious practices lie beyond what is appropriate and acceptable in contemporary Ireland. These were seen as potentially undermining core national values of Irishness and eventually the identity of Irish society (e.g. ‘Irish girls don’t wear hijabs’). Some of these views drew on ‘liberal values’ to oppose the hijab, reflecting an element of ‘liberal intolerance’ in the media debate in comments interpreting the hijab as oppressing Muslim girls and women.

Tolerance of the hijab was based on both pragmatic and principled reasons. It was recognised by most that wearing the hijab in schools was not a big step to accommodate as long as it was in school uniform colours, while the constitutional requirement not to discriminate on religious grounds was emphasised and supported by warnings that a ban on the hijab could have unwelcome repercussions on other religious symbols widely present in Irish schools.

Intolerance of the niqab was also based on both pragmatic and principled reasons, as it was emphasised that it would be impractical in an educational setting, and that it was also ‘too different’ to be accepted and integrated in Irish society.

The issue was discussed mainly in terms of respect for religion and acceptance of (other) religious beliefs and religious minorities, and the focus was on integration through inclusion. However, the issue of the relative numbers of Muslim pupils (and thus of their ‘visibility’) in any given school may

point to the nature and limits of such acceptance. The arguments that a growing number of Muslim pupils can ‘challenge the ethos of a school’ and affect ‘the perception of the school as a *Catholic* school’, for example, could indicate that acceptance of religious diversity is somehow limited to a certain extent of diversity and conditional on the consequences of such diversity for the schools’ self-perception.

This could be an interesting indication of the kind of diversity Ireland is prepared to deal with. The fact that some schools do not accept the hijab could be perceived as a strategy to avoid having to deal with such issues by limiting diversity within the school, and thus rejecting or denying diversity.

Another important aspect of the debate was the apparent tendency to overlook the existence of Irish Muslims, as most debates seemed to focus on Muslim immigrants; hence the contrasting views of ‘they should adapt if they want to live here’ and ‘we should be welcoming and work on integrating people’. This could be construed as an indication of (mere) tolerance (level 2) in this case; while Muslims are well accepted in Ireland, they are still not perceived as being part of the Irish nation. This was especially emphasised by two of our Muslim respondents:

The thing is why... why would you have to be tolerant at all... I mean, we are the same as you, we just... in terms of going to school, we are going for an education like everyone else, we are people... we just wear a headscarf... I don’t know why you have to use the word ‘tolerant’ towards us... that’s kind of discriminating already... tolerance... why would you have to tolerate us, we’re the same as you, you know... (Z)

...one third of the Muslim community is represented by Irish people... and what will you say to them... you can’t use tolerance of them and you can’t use integration either because it’s... it’s theirs... there is a need for a revolution of terms... (AS)

The issue involved both a legal and a practical challenge. While the ‘practical’ side was dealt with through accommodation of the hijab in most schools, the legal aspect was not clearly addressed. The 2008 government guidelines and the 2011 JMB guidelines have no legal standing. For Hogan (2011) ‘Individual Muslim students now face uncertainty as a result of the unwillingness of the Government to take a firm stand on the issue of the headscarf, and the spectre of disputes with individual school boards of management is a very real prospect’. This led to criticisms by the ICCL (2010) and by some of our interviewees who have been directly affected by this. On the other hand, there could be a concern that legally binding guidelines could be used to express intolerance by some actors, and that the law can send a signal of exclusion to some sections of the population.

While mere tolerance was an issue in the hijab case, where the question of a possible ban, or non-tolerance arose, the Protestant case is somewhat more complicated.

Here it may first more simply be seen as lying on the border between respect/recognition (level 3) and tolerance (level 2) – the removal of the special funding representing a retreat from recognition of ‘particular minority needs’ established in 1967, to equal treatment, or mere tolerance. But, given the structure of Irish education, which in some sense recognises all religions (at level 3) by financially supporting separate schools and their distinct ethos, this could, in a more complex sense, be seen as a change *within* the third level of respect, and thus as a reduction, but not a withdrawal of recognition.

Some people had difficulties talking about this issue in terms of ‘tolerance’ of the Protestant community, but had no problems about talking about ‘discrimination’. One of our interviewees expressed the difficulty of discussing the needs of the Protestant community in Ireland in terms of ‘acceptance’ or ‘tolerance’, and the complexity of defining what is required to recognise and address the needs of minority communities:

...I'm not so sure that the word 'tolerance' is right in this context... you have to make an effort to be tolerant and, I think that the effort is to go one step further for minority groups if you really want to afford them equitable treatment and that was the... that was the phrase that was used back in the 1960s when the original system was set up... the Minister for Education at the time used the word... used the phrase 'equitable treatment', he wanted to provide... he wanted to treat the Protestant community equitably... but in order to treat a group equitably, if they're a minority group, you have to provide a little bit more for them... and... I think that's where he was coming from... and that is the case if you want to provide the Muslims... if you really want to provide the Muslim community or another community, the Irish-speaking community with something special... you've got to provide them with something special... I think everybody recognises that within small communities you need to give that little bit more in order to facilitate an equal treatment, so that's now... that's now gone... is that a lack of tolerance... it's certainly a lack of generosity of spirit, it's certainly... not really caring anymore... (CW)

If the argument that minorities require more than equal treatment to sustain themselves is accepted, a strictly equal system of recognition for all religions, majority and minority, is arguably not sufficient in practice to constitute effective respect and recognition for minorities (level 3).

There was a general recognition of the need for, and value of, the Protestant schools, as they were described not only as the custodians of the Protestant heritage in the Republic but also as providing 'a space of tolerance' for those of other religious backgrounds or of no-religion, and even the discourses involving an economic justification for the cuts acknowledged that these were affecting more than educational provision for Protestant children.

Overall the perception was that the Protestant community is generally well perceived and in a way 'well integrated' in Ireland. Here again, however, if more substantial respect/recognition involves providing special treatment, withdrawal of such special treatment implies that the current respect for minorities does not stretch that far into level 3.

This has implications for other religious minorities. Indeed one argument, advanced by Daly (2010), was that discussing the issue as one of a religious minority to some extent misrepresented it, and that the religious affiliation was over-emphasised. For him the special measures the Protestant schools enjoyed before were allocated in fact on a 'secular criterion' as 'it ha[d] been allocated to those secondary schools serving demographically marginal and dispersed religious communities, in recognition of their purpose in enabling parents belonging to these communities to avail of the benefits that are accorded to Catholic parents under the free secondary scheme' (p.102). Thus, the fact that such schools were Protestant was almost 'coincidental' and therefore the initial provisions did not contravene the Constitutional provision of non-discrimination on religious grounds (Art. 44). This argument would suggest that any school (religious or otherwise) in such circumstances would be in a position to claim additional funding. For Daly, accordingly, 'the controversy surrounding the ancillary grant shows up the systemic inadequacy of the constitutional framework for religious liberty in the public education context, since it makes the full measure of this liberty for citizens subject to highly precarious, particularist and contingent measures such as those subject to recent public and constitutional controversy' (p.85).

Whether identical treatment for all or special accommodation for minorities are the appropriate ways to deal with diversity is a particularly live issue in the realm of education in Ireland at a time when the primarily denominational structure of schools is under serious reconsideration for the first time.

In March 2011, the Minister for Education, Ruairi Quinn, established a Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector and called for submissions on three specific themes:⁶²

(1) How to establish the demand for diversity of patronage

⁶² All the information concerning the Forum (including the submissions and the recordings of the Forum's sessions) is available at: <http://www.education.ie/home/home.jsp?pcategory=10856&ecategory=56743&language=EN>.

- (2) The practicalities of managing the divesting of patronage
- (3) How diversity can be accommodated where there is just one or two schools serving a community

Over 200 submissions were made by stakeholder groups and the wider community, and open working sessions were held in June 2011. The Advisory Group will prepare a final report by the end of the year. Professor John Coolahan, Chair of the Forum, stressed that the aim was not to design a new blueprint for the national education system but to examine the existing form of school patronage with a view to making it more generally acceptable to all citizens. He emphasised that the significant social changes that have taken place in Ireland in recent years have led to increased demand for new forms of multi-denominational and non-denominational schooling and that the need to adapt patronage structures to meet this changing reality was generally accepted; the key issue addressed by the Forum is *how* change can be implemented.

The issue of the denominational structure of education has been on the agenda for some time, and the possibility has increasingly been raised that schools should be run by the State, and should be multi- or non-denominational. The general view appeared to be that an overwhelmingly secular model is unlikely to come about, mainly because of the historical frame of Irish education and the weight given to parents' choice and rights in the education of their children; as one interviewee explains:

....it might be lovely in theory... but the rights, the constitutional rights of the vast majority of the people at the moment, their rights are to have a denominational education if they want to believe in it... they do... that's constitutionally secure... and you would not... you couldn't do that without a constitutional referendum, you couldn't change that, and I don't think you would get a constitutional referendum passed on those lines in contemporary Ireland... talk like that is interesting... in an abstract way, an intellectual way, it takes you away... but in terms of practical politics, I don't think it is... (JC)

The question then will be how to accommodate growing religious diversity in largely denominational schools. There, three main issues have been identified as problematic, as summarised by Eoin Daly and Tom Hickey (2011) in their submission to the Forum on Patronage:

- The issue of schools' exemption from equality legislation on the basis of ethos
- The need for 'critical mass' for minorities to have their demands considered
- The lack of real religious freedom in schools

Finally, it is important to keep in mind that debates take place, and policies are implemented in a specific political, social, historical and economic context, which has to be taken into account when analysing the current situation and planning for the future. The structure of the Irish education system has been shaped by specific historical, cultural, economic and social forces. Debates on, or reforms of, the education system do not start from a blank sheet, as many people have acknowledged. Policies, guidelines, and forums without actual practical implementation can be seen as merely 'lip-service'. If a debate on patronage cannot lead to a real change in the patronage of many schools because of historical traditions, demographics, lack of funding, or an impasse between conflicting views, then perhaps another approach will have to be considered, which places more emphasis on accommodation of diversity *within* each school

It is nevertheless important to acknowledge that the current educational framework, while shaped by the past and constrained by the economic context, has not been totally rigid and static, but has proved quite capable of accommodating rapid change in recent years, and, as we have seen, there is structural evidence of acceptance of religious and cultural diversity in schools in Ireland in the recognition inherent in state-supported denominational schooling, and in acceptance of the headscarf.

5.3. Lessons to be learned

In a short period of time, Ireland has had to develop policies for a population that has become increasingly diverse, and the debate on how best to respond to this change is still in the early stages. Interculturalism, as an approach was increasingly being incorporated into key policy documents such as the National Action Plan against Racism⁶³ which aimed to ‘develop a more inclusive, intercultural society’. Intercultural guidelines for schools were developed ‘to ensure reasonable accommodation is made for cultural and ethnic diversity’ (NCCA, 2005, 2006). However, in the government’s most recent policy document, Migration Nation (2008), the key theme throughout was ‘integration’. The shift from interculturalism to integration can be perceived to reflect at best some confusion, or at least some hesitation on the government’s part, at worst a retreat from recognition/respect (level 3) to basic tolerance of diversity. The closure of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism in 2008 and, more recently, the dissolution of the Office for the Minister for Integration can also raise questions as to the government’s commitment and approach to diversity.⁶⁴ In July 2011, the new Minister for Justice, Alan Shatter, stressed the importance of integrating minority ethnic groups into Irish society. ‘I reject the notion of parallel societies and believe that integration and not multiculturalism is the approach we have to take’, he said, ‘It is imperative that we encourage immigrants to be part of mainstream Irish society and not to perceive themselves as outsiders living apart from it’ (Coulter, 2011).

On the positive side, we have seen that the Irish educational system has been able to offer a level of structural accommodation to religious and cultural minorities, though its capacity to extend respect and recognition to all minorities, including the non-religious, is currently in question.

The hijab debate suggests that the level of acceptance of Muslims in education is dependent on a number of factors, including the limited nature of the claim, and the prosperity and relatively small numbers of the minority. A further indicator will be the treatment of the proposed Muslim secondary school. How the acceptance of Muslims will evolve may depend on the development of the Muslim community, increasing numbers of Irish Muslims in the next generation, and whether or not geographical or cultural segregation emerges.

The case of the Protestant schools shows the extent to which substantial recognition of minorities is subject to a variety of pressures, including economic constraints. It also shows that the long-established place of religious groups in Irish education is increasingly open to question. The current debate on the patronage *of* schools and associated discussion of the place of religion *within* schools is likely to affect the way in which existing minority faith schools (mainly Protestant but also Muslim, Jewish and Quaker) are considered and financially supported. While their existence is not in danger or even in question, the recognition/respect allocated to them is likely to be affected by the debates and potential reforms in which the Irish education system is now engaged.

From this exploration of acceptance in Irish education, three main policy-relevant issues on which there is consensual agreement have emerged:

Whatever the shape of future Irish education, teachers need to be equipped to deal with religious and cultural diversity within schools. **There is a clear need for more compulsory training for teachers** in this area.

⁶³ Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2004)

⁶⁴ The Office of the Minister of State for Integration has now been renamed to the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration. The operations of the Office have been transferred from the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs to the Department of Justice and Equality.

Following on from this, minority groups need to be facilitated in interacting with institutions and government, with **mediating bodies** filling the role previously performed by the NCCRI , such as, for example, the Garda Intercultural Office.

More broadly, these debates display considerable support for **policies of interculturalism**, and suggest that this language and policy could usefully be maintained by government, rather than adopting the language of a more assimilatory approach to integration.

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7 – Annexes

Annex 1 – List of Interviews (in chronological order)

AM - Aiveen Mullally – Religious Educationalist; Author of the 2010 *Guidelines on the Inclusion of Students of Other Faiths in Catholic Secondary Schools*, currently working in Marino Institute of Education (MIE) – Interview 22.03.11, Dublin

PW - Philip Watt - Former Director of the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) (1998-2008) – now CEO Cystic Fibrosis Association of Ireland – Interview 23.03.11, Dublin

AS – Ali Selim – Spokesperson for the Islamic Cultural Centre of Ireland (ICCI), has worked as a teacher in the Muslim National School and as Secretary General of the Irish Council of Imams – Interview 24.03.11, Dublin

SK - Summaha Kenna - Spokesperson for the Women’s Department at the Islamic Cultural Centre in Ireland (ICCI), part of her work is speaking about Islam and helping those new to Islam integrate into the community; born into an Irish Catholic family but has been practicing Islam for 33 years – Interview 24.03.11, Dublin

CB - Clive Byrne – Director of the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD); NAPD is the only association representing principals and deputy principals across all sectors in Irish second level education – Interview 29.03.11, Dublin

BH - Brian Hayes - Fine Gael politician, currently TD for the Dublin South West constituency and also Minister of State at the Department of Finance. He was party spokesperson for Education and Science from 2007–2010 – Short telephone interview with only note taking, 31.03.11.

DK - Rev. Donald Ker - Former President of the Methodist Church in Ireland – now Secretary of Conference; the larger part of Rev. Ker's ministry has been in the field of academia – Interview 06.04.11, Belfast

GL - Rev. Gordon Linney - Former Archdeacon of the Church of Ireland; had been very vocal in the media about the cuts – Interview 07.04.11, Dublin

Z – ‘Zakhia’ – Student at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) and involved in FOSIS Ireland (Federation of Student Islamic Societies); born and raised in Ireland, parents from Pakistan – Interview 09.04.11, Dublin (not her real name)

M – ‘Mouna’ – Student at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) and involved in FOSIS Ireland (Federation of Student Islamic Societies); from the Middle East and has arrived in Dublin in the last few years to study – Interview 09.04.11, Dublin (not her real name)

EP - Eleanor Petrie - Public Relations Officer of the National Association of COMPASS, a constituent body of National Parents Council (post primary) representing parents who choose to educate their children in schools which promote a Protestant or a minority ethos; also a Governor of Wesley College – Interview 13.04.11, Dublin

CW - Christopher Woods - Principal of Wesley College, Dublin, the only Methodist Secondary school in Ireland; had addressed the Joint Committee on Education and Science on the issue in April 2009 – Interview 14.04.11, Dublin

DM - Archbishop Diarmuid Martin – Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, Vice President of the Irish Bishops’ Conference. As Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Martin is patron of 470 primary schools and 185 secondary schools in the Diocese. He is also patron of Mater Dei Institute of Education, Dublin’s Third Level College for the formation of teachers of Religion – Interview 24.05.11, Dublin

JC – John Coolahan – Emeritus Professor of Education, National University of Ireland, Maynooth; currently Chair of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector – Interview 31.05.11, Dublin

SM – Sinead Mangan - School Principal of St Attracta’s National School, Ballaghaderreen, Co. Roscommon – Interview 07.06.11, Ballaghaderreen

Annex 2 – Interview Guides

CASE STUDY 1 - Issue of the removal of funding to Protestant schools

Can you recall how the issue of the removal of funding for Protestant secondary schools came out in Ireland?

How did it start? When? Where?

How did you hear about it the first time?

Can you tell me what ‘happened’ exactly?

What did you think about it initially?

What was the issue really about for you? Did it have to do with strict budgetary issues or with something else? (religion, culture, traditions, education system, school rules, laws, etc?)

In what kind of context did that come out?

Do you remember how the issue came to the fore? Were there any indications of this before the budget was made public or was it a total surprise?

Who discussed it – who got involved in the debate – what were the main arguments on both sides?

Did you think it was an important event / debate?

Did you discuss it a lot? With whom?

What was your own position on it?

How did this issue evolve? In the media, in the political arena, in the education arena?

What do you think were the actual ‘repercussions’ of these budget cuts? For the schools? For the families, teachers, etc... for the Protestant community in general?

What kind of ‘measures’ were taken by Protestant schools? By the Department of Education?

Who did what exactly – on both sides? Did people compromise, adapt, stick to their position?

What really happened – changed?

What did you think about that? Did you think the issue was dealt with in an appropriate manner?

What do you think could have been done and/or argued differently on both sides of the debate?

Why do you think each side reacted the way they did? Was it because of beliefs, principles, laws, etc?

What do you think it means for Protestants in Ireland? What kind of ‘message’ does it convey to them?

Would you say it shows that Protestants are ‘tolerated’, ‘accepted’, ‘recognised’, ‘respected’ by the Irish education system / the Government? How about in Ireland/Irish society more generally?

What do you think about the Irish education system overall – do you think it’s a good one, an open one?

What kind of values do you think it conveys and tries to transmit to children in Ireland?

Would you say Irish schools respond in an appropriate way to cultural and religious diversity – do they acknowledge it, tolerate it, accept it, respect it, encourage it?

If yes, Can you give me examples of principles or practices that demonstrate that – what do you think demonstrate ‘tolerance/acceptance/recognition’ of diversity in Irish schools?

If not – do you have example of this? What would you like to see change in the current system?

Are there still tensions remaining with regard to that particular issue?

Are there other (potential) issues for Protestants with regard to education these days? Which ones?

How about in society in general?

CASE STUDY 2 - Issue of the hijab and school uniform

Can you recall how the issue of the headscarf came out in Ireland?

How did it start? When? Where?

How did you hear about it the first time?

Can you tell me what ‘happened’ exactly?
What did you think about it initially?
What was the issue really about for you? Did it have to do with religion per se or with something else? (immigration, culture, traditions, education system, school rules, laws, etc?)
In what kind of context did that come out?
Do you remember who brought it up? Who discussed it – who got involved in the debate – what were the main arguments on both sides?
Did you think it was an important event / debate?
Did you discuss it a lot? With whom?
What was your own position on it?
How did this issue evolve? Was the problem ‘solved’?
What kind of ‘measures’ were taken to deal with the issue of the headscarf in school?
Who did what exactly – on both sides? Did people compromise, adapt, stick to their position?
What really happened – changed?
What did you think about that? Did you think the issue was dealt with in an appropriate manner?
What do you think could have been done and/or argued differently on both sides of the debate?
Why do you think each side reacted the way they did? Was it because of beliefs, principles, laws, etc?
What do you think it means for Muslims in Ireland? For you, what kind of ‘message’ does it convey to them?
Would you say it shows that Muslims and Islam are ‘tolerated’, ‘accepted’, ‘recognised’, ‘respected’ in Irish schools? How about in Ireland/Irish society more generally?
What do you think about the Irish education system – do you think it’s a good one? An open one?
What kind of values do you think it conveys and tries to transmit to children in Ireland?
Would you say Irish schools respond in an appropriate way to cultural and religious diversity – do they acknowledge it, tolerate it, accept it, respect it, encourage it?
If yes, Can you give me examples of principles or practices that demonstrate that – what do you think demonstrate ‘tolerance/acceptance/recognition’ of diversity in Irish schools?
If not – do you have example of this? What would you like to see change in the current system?
Are there still tensions surrounding the issue of headscarves in school now?
Are there other (potential) issues for Muslims in Irish schools these days? Which ones? How about in society in general?

Annex 3 – Discussion Group - List of Participants (in alphabetical order)

Audrey Bryan	Education Department, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin
Eoin Daly	School of Law and Government, Dublin City University
Daniel Faas	Department of Sociology, Trinity College Dublin
Roja Fazaeli	School of Religions and Theology, Trinity College Dublin
Tom Hickey	School of Law, National University of Ireland Galway
Claire Hogan	School of Law, Trinity College Dublin
Iseult Honohan	School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin
Sarah Miley	Department of Education and Skills
Lia O'Hegarty	Irish Human Rights Commission
Nathalie Rougier	School of Politics and International Relations, University College Dublin

NB – While we include their professional affiliations here, it should be noted that the Discussion Group participants talked to us 'in a personal capacity' and not as representatives of their respective institutions.

Annex 4 – Discussion Group – Questions/Issues to be discussed

What is the state of tolerance for religious and cultural diversity in Irish education?

Identifying groups where tolerance is an issue

Our case studies

The headscarf in schools

Funding for Protestant Secondary Schools

Issues of religion in education and the patronage of primary schools

Diversity *of* schools or diversity *in* schools?

Integrated curriculum

Place of religious education

Recent initiatives

IHRC Report on Religion and Education

ICCL Consultation on the Headscarf

Forum on Patronage

General conclusions

