

ARTICLE

# Assessing the Ethos of Anglican Primary Schools in Wales: The Student Voice Project

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(Received 8 April 2020; revised 2 September 2020; accepted 14 April 2021; first published online 17 May 2021)

## Abstract

Since the Anglican Church in England and Wales began to build schools long before the state developed machinery to do so, around a quarter of all primary schools remain connected with the Anglican Church. The church school inspection system maintains that Anglican schools have a distinctive ethos. The Student Voice Project argues that school ethos is generated by the implicit collective values, beliefs and behaviours of the students, and was designed to give explicit voice to the students in response to six specific areas of school life identified by the Anglican school inspection criteria as relevant to school ethos. Drawing on data provide by 8,111 year-five and year-six students attending Church in Wales primary schools, the present study reports on the six ethos measures and on significant differences reported by female and male students, and by year-five and year-six students.

**Keywords:** church schools, quantitative research, school ethos, student values, student voice, Wales

## Introduction

Anglican church schools remain a highly visible component of primary school provision throughout England and Wales, currently accounting for 26.1% of primary schools in England and 9.1% of primary schools in Wales, and currently providing 18.4% of primary school places in England and 7.8% of primary school places in Wales. This discrepancy between the proportion of schools and the proportion of school places indicates that church schools tend to be smaller schools and serves as a reminder of their historical origin. The current provision of the state-maintained system of education in England and Wales arose not from an initiative by the state but from initiatives by voluntary societies founded by the Churches and inspired by denominational rivalries during the first half of the nineteenth century, including the National Society in 1811 (an Anglican initiative), the British and Foreign School Society in 1814 (largely a Free

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Church initiative), and the Catholic Poor Schools Committee in 1847 (see, further, Cruikshank, 1963; Murphy, 1971; Francis, 1987, Chadwick, 1997). When the Government first voted monies for the provision of schools in 1833, such monies were distributed through the voluntary societies to support and supplement voluntary subscriptions. The turning point of the Education Act 1870 established the mechanism through School Boards for building schools not associated with voluntary societies or denominations. This mechanism, however, was not intended to supplant voluntary initiatives but to fill gaps left by voluntary initiatives.

From 1870 onwards schools built by the voluntary initiatives of the Churches and schools built directly by the state existed side by side (Rich, 1970). While the Education Act 1902 changed the funding mechanism of both types of schools, the major changes were left to the Education Act 1944. Under pressure to reconstruct and to refinance a nationwide post-war provision of schools, the Education Act 1944 protected the place of church schools within the state-maintained provision, and did so by offering church schools a choice between two kinds of future. Voluntary aided status allowed the Churches to retain basic control over key aspects of school management (including appointing a majority of governors, appointing core staff, and determining religious education provision), but at the cost of ongoing financial liability for the buildings. Voluntary controlled status allowed the churches to pass all ongoing financial liability to the public purse, while still owning the building and having reduced control over aspects of school management (Dent, 1947). In the second decade of the twenty-first century the Churches still retain the provisions of voluntary aided schools and voluntary controlled schools (in England and in Wales) alongside further distinctive opportunities for involvement within the state-maintained sector through academies and through offering a variety of educational support and advisory services.

The nature of the Anglican Church's involvement within the state-maintained sector of schools in England and Wales has been (and remains) quite different from that of the Roman Catholic Church. The difference comes as a consequence of the Church of England being the Established Church of the realm, across both England and Wales in 1811 when the National Society came into being, although disestablished in Wales from 1920. The clearest understanding of the Church of England's involvement in the system of state-maintained schools remains in the Durham Report (1970). This report clearly distinguishes between the two distinctive objectives of the Established Church in the provision of schools. The first objective is defined as the *general* aim, intending to serve the nation through the provision of education for all. The second objective is defined as the *domestic* aim, intending to serve the children of the Church. The Durham Report (1970) argued that, while in 1811 these two aims may have been closely aligned, by the 1970s the changing nature of society had polarized them. The Durham Report recommended the wisdom of the Church of England prioritizing the general aim over the domestic aim, prioritizing service of the nation over the nurture of the children of the Church. This view was consistent with a wider view of that time that a clear divide should exist between the educational function of schools and the nurturing function of churches (see Schools Council, 1971; Hirst, 1972; Hull, 1975; British Council of Churches, 1976, 1981).

Subsequent key reports from the Church of England have maintained (implicitly or explicitly) this key distinction presented by the Durham Report

(1970) between the general function and the domestic function of church schools, but suggested different ways of re-tuning the balance between these two functions (Waddington, 1984; Dearing Report, 2001; Chadwick, 2012; Church of England, 2016). The Church in Wales' most recent report on the church school system within the state-maintained sector drew on new independent research which demonstrated that 77% of all Church in Wales primary schools were fully committed to the general aim, while 23% also expressed some commitment to the domestic aim in their admissions policies (Lankshear, 2009).

### **Reflecting on School Ethos**

The introduction of the concept of *school ethos* into educational debate is often attributed to the classic study, *Fifteen Thousand Hours: Secondary Schools and their Effects on Children*, by Rutter *et al.* (1979), as evidenced by Hargreaves (1995) and by Graham (2012). The concept of school ethos has, however, remained fragile and contested. For example, Allder (1993) speaks of the ethos of a school as 'that illusive item which is so difficult to recognise, measure, or improve' (p. 69). Donnelly (2000) argues that 'much of what we understand by school ethos is superficial and contradictory' (p. 135). In spite of such acknowledged limitations, the concept of school ethos has come to play an important part in affirming the identity and distinctiveness of church schools within the state-maintained sector of education in England and Wales and found its way securely within the inspection system appertaining to schools with a religious character following the Education (Schools) Act 1992.

The aim of the present study is to describe and to reflect on the Student Voice Project, spanning three schools years (2014–15, 2015–16 and 2016–17) designed to assess the ethos of Anglican primary schools in Wales by engaging the student voice. The context for describing and reflecting on this empirical project is shaped by three steps. Step one explores how the concept of the ethos of Anglican primary schools in Wales has been refined and embedded into the inspection system since the Education (Schools) Act 1992. Step two identifies how one specific research tradition has prioritized the student voice in exploring the lived-experience of school ethos within the church school sector. Step three introduces the Lankshear Student Voice Scales, the instrument constructed to implement the Student Voice Project.

### **Characterizing the Ethos of Anglican Primary Schools in Wales**

The incentivization for Anglican schools in England and Wales to be explicit about the characterization of their ethos emerged as a consequence of developments in the school inspection regime. The Education (Schools) Act 1992 provided for the regular inspection of every state-maintained school in England and Wales. For voluntary schools within the state-maintained system the governors were required to ensure that those aspects of the school that had been their responsibility to oversee, with advice from the church that provided the school, were inspected on the same time scale. The provisions for the main inspection were contained in Section 9 of the Education (Schools) Act 1992 and for the 'denominational inspection of church schools' in Section 13. These two inspections became known by schools and others involved as Section 9 and Section 13 inspections. Although the School Inspections Act

1996, being a consolidation Act, changed nothing of the content of the law, it did change the numbering of the sections. Thus, until the Education Act 2005 the denominational inspections were known as Section 23 inspections. Since the passage of the Education Act 2005 the denominational inspections have been known as Section 48 inspections in England and Section 50 inspections in Wales.

Around the time of the Education (Schools) Act 1992, a series of publications emerged from the Church of England Board of Education and the National Society focusing on the defining characteristics of Anglican schools, including work by Lankshear (1992a, 1992b, 1992c) and Duncan and Lankshear (1995). In his book, *Looking for Quality in a Church School*, Lankshear (1992b) proposed a framework for those wishing to identify the factors that contribute towards the ethos of an Anglican school being described and rated 'good'. This book provided an important starting point for the preparation of the National Society's inspection scheme in this area.

Before 1992 schools in England had been inspected by Her Majesty's Inspectors only rarely, by local authority inspectors if their authority chose to undertake inspection work, and, in the case of Church of England schools, only if the diocese offered this service and the governors requested it. The passage of the Education (Schools) Act 1992 led to a radical redevelopment of this rather haphazard arrangement for school inspection. Part of this redevelopment of inspection posed an important challenge to the Churches that provided schools within the state-maintained system. While the Roman Catholic Church decided to provide an inspection service for its schools at diocesan level, the Anglican Church commissioned The National Society (Church of England) for Promoting Religious Education (usually known as The National Society) to provide a national scheme for its schools. No other denomination had a sufficient stake in the system to develop a clear policy on the issue, but the Methodist Church used the Anglican scheme and framework for most of the inspections of its schools.

To support the National Society's programme of the 'denominational inspection of church schools' an initial guide to the inspection process was produced (Lankshear, 1993), followed by a more formal handbook (Brown and Lankshear, 1995). Two years later the second edition of the handbook was published (Brown and Lankshear, 1997) and a third edition was published in 2000 (Brown and Lankshear, 2000). Currently the Church of England inspection arrangements are known by the acronym SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools).

In 1999 powers concerning education provision in Wales were devolved to the Welsh Government. As a consequence, the Church in Wales has had to create its own responses to the particular needs of Church in Wales schools. This response led to the publication of *The Church in Wales Education Review* (Lankshear, 2009), the Church in Wales primary school religious education syllabus (Kay, 2004), and the creation of a Church in Wales adaptation of the National Society's framework for inspection. The Church in Wales arrangements are known by the acronym GWELLA (see [www.churchschoolcymru.org](http://www.churchschoolcymru.org)).

### **Assessing Anglican School Ethos**

In an earlier study, Francis and Penny (2013) argued that, although there is a great deal of point and value in debating from theologically, sociologically and

educationally informed perspectives what the ethos of Anglican schools should be, there is also value in empirical enquiry examining what is the case in practice. While such empirical enquiry cannot be employed to establish what church schools *should* be like, there may nonetheless be advantages in establishing what church schools actually are like. Empirical studies concerned with what different groups of people think church schools are actually like can take a number of different forms. Research can focus on what is said about church schools in their policy documents, in their brochures, or on their websites (Wilkinson, 2019). Research can listen to what clergy and lay church members have to say about church schools (Francis *et al.*, 2005), or to the view of church school governors (Francis and Stone, 1995), to the views of those who teach in church schools (Francis, 1986; Francis and Grindle, 2001), or to the views reflected in inspection reports (Lankshear, 1997; Brown, 1997). Francis and Penny (2013) argued, however, that the clearest voice on school ethos should be accessed by listening to the students themselves.

In their foundation study, Francis and Penny (2013) argued that it is the collective worldview of the pupils that is crucial in reflecting and shaping the ethos of schools. In order to generate insight into the ethos of Anglican secondary schools the collective worldview of 3,124 students (13–15 years of age) attending 15 Anglican schools is set alongside the collective worldview of 4,929 students attending 25 comparable schools with no religious character. The worldview of students was profiled across 10 value domains defined as Christian beliefs, church and society, non-traditional beliefs, personal aims in life, personal well-being, attitudes towards school, attitudes towards sexual morality, attitudes towards substance use, attitudes towards right and wrong, and attitudes towards the environment. Two main conclusions were drawn from these data: that the collective worldview of students attending Anglican secondary schools was not greatly different from the collective worldview of students attending comparable schools with no religious character; and that the collective worldview of students attending Anglican schools generated an ethos consistent with a predominantly secular host culture.

In two subsequent studies, Francis *et al.* (2018a) and Francis and Village (2020) reported on a study exploring the voices of students attending 10 Christian ethos secondary schools. In the first of these two studies, Francis *et al.* (2018a) argued that it is the collective worldview of the students that is crucial both in reflecting and in shaping the ethos of schools. In order to understand the potential distinctiveness of Christian ethos schools, Francis *et al.* (2018a) undertook two different analyses. In the first analysis they compared the collective worldview of 2,942 year-nine and year-ten students attending the 10 Christian ethos schools with the collective worldview of 13,861 students attending 71 schools without a religious character. In the second analysis they drew on the characterization of the Durham Report (1970) that distinguished between the two main objectives of the Anglican Church's involvement in state-maintained education as serving churchgoing families (the domestic aim) and as serving the local community (the general aim). Then they compared the collective worldview of 194 students attending an Anglican school that prioritized the Church's domestic function in education with the collective worldview of 302 students that prioritized the Church's general function in education as made explicit in the two schools' and mission policies. These data demonstrated that the major differences occurred not between Christian ethos schools

and schools without a religious character, but between Anglican schools that voice their interpretation of the Church's mission in education differently.

In the second of these two studies, Francis and Village (2020) argued that assessment of student attitude toward Christianity may provide a crucial indicator of the lived-experience of Christian ethos schools. In this study, Francis and Village (2020) employed multi-level linear statistical modelling to examine the power of school-level and individual-level factors to predict individual differences in scores recorded on the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (Francis *et al.*, 1995) by 6,036 students (who self-identified as either Christian or as no religion) in year-seven, year-eight, year-nine, year-ten and year-eleven classes within the 10 Christian ethos secondary schools. The data demonstrated the complex relationships between school admissions policies, parental church attendance, and the students' age and sex. Overall, parental church attendance emerged as a decisive factor in promoting a positive attitude toward Christianity among the students. Interpreting this finding, Francis and Village (2020) argued that Christian ethos secondary schools needed to make a realistic assessment of the connection between admissions policies and the formulation of ethos statements and aspirations.

### **Introducing the Lankshear Student Voice Scales**

As part of its continuing response to the Section 50 inspection requirements the Church in Wales initiated the Student Voice Project in 2013 in order to assess the extent to which the students' experiences of their schools were consistent with the aspirations of the church concerning the distinctive school ethos of church primary schools. During the school year 2013–14 David W. Lankshear and colleagues worked alongside the Provincial Education Officer for the Church in Wales to design a set of scales constructed to map areas identified by the Section 50 inspection criteria concerning aspects of the distinctiveness of the school ethos and concerning school worship. The design and development of these scales is reported by Lankshear *et al.* (2017) drawing on data provided by 1,899 year-five and year-six students (9- to 11-year-olds), from church schools across Wales, who had participated in the two pilot projects conducted during the school years 2013–14 and 2014–15.

A sequence of factor analyses and reliability analyses identified, from among the 50 items included in the questionnaire, six sets of items (each set comprising five or six items) that mapped conceptually on to six areas identified by the Section 50 inspection criteria as discussed by Lankshear (1992c) in *Looking for Quality in a Church School*. These six areas were characterized as: attitude toward school character, attitude toward school experience, attitude toward school teachers, attitude toward relationships in school, attitude toward school and environment, and attitude toward school worship. These six scales generated alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) ranging from .73 to .78, demonstrating satisfactory levels of internal consistency reliability (DeVellis, 2003). Together these six scales have been known as the Lankshear Student Voice Scales (LSVS).

In a second study, Francis *et al.* (2018b) tested the psychometric properties of the Lankshear Student Voice Scales proposed by Lankshear *et al.* (2017) among a sample of 4,581 year-four, year-five and year-six students, examining data for the



three year groups separately. Among year-six students the alpha coefficients ranged from .73 to .80, and among year-five students from .75 to .81. Among year-four students the alpha coefficients ranged from .70 to .76, confirming satisfactory performance among this younger age group. Francis *et al.* (2018b) also reported a consistent correlation across all six scales with sex, age, church attendance and personal prayer. Higher scores on all six scales were associated with being female, being younger, attending church and engaging in prayer.

### **The Student Voice Project**

The Student Voice Project invited Anglican primary schools across the six dioceses of the Church in Wales to administer the Lankshear Student Voice Scales developed by Lankshear *et al.* (2017), together with the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (see Francis *et al.*, 2017) and a measure of spiritual well-being (see Francis *et al.*, 2018c), to their year-five and year-six students during the three consecutive school years, 2014–15, 2015–16 and 2016–17. The aim of the project was to provide on each of these school years profiles for the whole Province, for each participating diocese and for each participating school. The school level profiles were designed to assist governors and staff within individual schools to reflect on their students' perception of the school ethos and to draw on these data both to assist school self-reflection on strategic development, and to contribute to an evidence-based school inspection process.

On the completion of the three-year project, the aim of the present study is to review the data collected over the three-year period in order to assess the properties of the Lankshear Student Voice Scales, to map the ethos of Anglican schools in Wales as seen through the eyes of the students attending these schools, and to explore potential differences in the perception of school ethos between male and female students, and between year-five and year-six students.

## **Method**

### **Procedure**

All Church in Wales voluntary aided and voluntary controlled primary schools through the six dioceses in the Province (Bangor, Llandaff, Monmouth, St Asaph, St Davids, and Swansea and Brecon) were invited to administer the Student Voice Project survey to all their year-five and year-six students during the three consecutive schools years 2014–15, 2015–16 and 2016–17. Participation by the students was voluntary, anonymous and confidential. Over the three years, 118 schools participated in the project, although not all of these schools participated each year: 44 participated in 2014–15, 85 in 2015–16, and 88 in 2016–17. This response represents a high proportion (79%) of the 150 schools eligible for participation in the project. Over the three years useable responses were received from 8,111 students.

### **Instrument**

The Lankshear Student Voice Scales (LSVS; Lankshear *et al.*, 2017) operationalized the Section 50 inspection criteria by five 6-item scales (assessing attitude toward

**Table 1.** Scale properties

	N items	Alpha	Mean	SD
School character	6	.75	26.2	3.3
School experience	6	.79	26.6	4.1
School teachers	6	.78	26.3	3.4
Relationships in school	6	.80	27.0	3.0
School and environment	6	.77	26.3	3.2
School worship	5	.80	18.5	4.5

Note:  $N = 8,111$ .

school character, attitude toward school experience, attitude toward school teachers, attitude toward relationships, and attitude toward school and environment), and one 5-item scale (assessing attitude toward school worship). Each item was rated on the conventional 5-point scale: disagree strongly (1), disagree (2), not certain (3), agree (4), and agree strongly (5).

### Participants

Over the years 8,111 students participated in the survey: 1,899 in 2014–15; 3,070 in 2015–16; and 3,142 in 2016–17. Overall, the 8,111 participants comprised 4,098 boys and 4,013 girls, 4,092 year-five students and 4,019 year-six students.

### Analysis

The data were analysed by the SPSS statistical package, employing the frequency, reliability, and *t*-test routines.

### Results

The first step in exploring the data was to check that the six scales were performing satisfactorily among the present sample of 8,111 year-five and year-six students. These data are presented in Table 1 in terms of the alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) and the means and standard deviations. The findings are in line with earlier reports on the scale generated by Lankshear *et al.* (2017) and by Francis *et al.* (2018b), with alpha coefficients ranging between .75 and .80.

The second step in exploring the data was to examine the students' responses to the individual items comprising the six scales. Table 2 presents these individual items together with two core statistics: the correlations between the individual items and the sum of the other items within the scale, and the percentage endorsements of the item expressed as 'yes' (sum of agree and agree strongly response), '?' (not certain), and 'no' (sum of disagree and disagree strongly responses). The correlations demonstrate how well the individual items co-vary with the other items within the set. The percentage endorsements demonstrate the overall level of response of the students across the three years in which the survey was conducted. Each of these



**Table 2.** School-related attitudes: overview

	<i>r</i>	Yes %	? %	No %
<i>Attitude toward school character</i>				
My school is a really good school	.56	91	7	2
My school is a really caring school	.62	89	9	2
My school treats every child fairly	.51	73	16	11
Worship is very important in my school	.38	90	9	1
My school is a really friendly school	.54	84	12	4
Prayer is very important in my school	.40	91	7	2
<i>Attitude toward school experience</i>				
In my school the rules are fair	.42	86	11	13
In my school I can be myself	.47	70	17	13
My school is a peaceful place	.59	67	21	12
My school is a safe place	.62	86	10	4
My school looks good	.55	81	13	6
My school is a clean place	.58	78	15	7
<i>Attitude toward school teachers</i>				
The teachers in my school care a lot for all the children	.53	91	7	2
The teachers in my school care a lot for each other	.51	90	9	1
The teachers in my school care a lot for the world around us	.52	89	10	1
The teachers in my school care a lot about the school	.51	93	6	1
When I do well in my school the teachers praise me	.58	79	14	7
When I do well in my school the grown-ups praise me	.56	77	16	7
<i>Attitude toward relationships in school</i>				
My school teaches me to respect other people	.51	95	4	1
My school teaches me to respect other people's things	.50	95	4	1
My school teaches me to care for other people	.60	95	4	1
At my school we value each other	.58	84	13	3
In my school we care a lot for each other	.59	86	10	4
Caring for others is very important in my school	.61	95	4	1
<i>Attitude toward school and environment</i>				
My school teaches me to respect things that grow	.52	83	14	3
My school teaches me to respect wonderful things	.53	88	10	2
My school teaches me to care for the world around us	.53	93	6	1
At my school we are proud of our school grounds	.53	85	12	3

(Continued)

Table 2. (Continued)

	<i>r</i>	Yes %	? %	No %
At my school we are proud of our school buildings	.53	87	11	2
Keeping the school tidy is important in my school	.47	89	8	3
<i>Attitude toward school worship</i>				
I enjoy being with the whole school	.53	71	20	9
I enjoy visits from the vicar	.63	65	22	13
Singing is important to me	.53	60	21	19
Being quiet and still is important to me	.54	54	25	21
Listening to the Bible is important to me	.66	56	24	20

Note: Yes = sum of agree and agree strongly; ? = not certain; no = sum of disagree and disagree strongly.

six scales will be discussed briefly in light of the data presented in Table 2 in order to describe how students perceived the ethos of their Anglican school.

The scale concerned with *attitude toward school character* found that nine out of every ten students agreed that their school is a really good school (91%), that prayer is very important in their school (91%), that worship is very important in their school (90%), and that their school is a really caring school (89%). The proportions, however, dropped to 84% who agreed that their school is a really friendly school and to 73% who agree that their school treats every child fairly.

The scale concerned with *attitude toward school experience* found that eight out of every ten students agreed that in their school the rules are fair (86%), that their school is a safe place (86%) and that their school looks good (81%). The proportions, however, dropped to 78% who agreed that their school is a clean place, to 70% who agreed that in their school they can be themselves, and to 67% who agreed that their school is a peaceful place.

The scale concerned with *attitude toward school teachers* found that nine out of every ten students agreed that the teachers in their school care a lot about the school (93%), that the teachers in their school care a lot for all the children (91%), that the teachers in their school care a lot for each other (90%), and that the teachers in their school care a lot for the world around us (89%). The proportions, however, dropped to 79% who agreed that when they do well in their school their teachers praise them, and to 77% who agreed that when they do well in their school the grown-ups praise them.

The scale concerned with *attitude toward relationships in school* found that nine out of every ten students agreed that their school teaches them to respect other people (95%), that their school teaches them to respect other people's things (95%), that their school teaches them to care for other people (95%), and that caring for others is very important in their school (95%). The proportions, however, dropped to 86% who agreed that in their school we care a lot for each other, and to 84% who agreed that at their school we value each other.

**Table 3.** Mean scale scores by sex

	Male		Female		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> <
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
School character	25.8	3.5	26.6	3.1	9.9	.001
School experience	24.2	4.3	25.1	3.8	10.9	.001
School teachers	26.1	3.5	26.5	3.2	5.5	.001
Relationships in school	26.8	3.1	27.3	2.9	6.9	.001
School and environment	26.1	3.3	26.5	3.1	6.0	.001
School worship	17.8	4.7	19.1	4.1	13.0	.001

Note: *N* = 8,111.

The scale concerned with *attitude toward school and environment* found that nine out of every ten students agreed that their school teaches them to care for the world around them (93%), and that keeping the school tidy is important in their school (89%). The proportions, however, dropped to 88% who agreed that their school teaches them to respect wonderful things, to 87% who agreed that at their school they are proud of the school buildings, to 85% who agreed that at their school they are proud of the school grounds, and to 83% who agreed that their school teaches them to respect things that grow.

The scale concerned with *attitude toward school worship* found that item endorsement was lower in this area than in the other five areas. Here the statistics demonstrated that 71% of the students enjoyed being with the whole school, 65% enjoyed visits from the vicar, 60% agreed that singing is important to them, 56% agreed that listening to the Bible is important to them, and 54% agreed that being quiet and still is important to them.

The third step in exploring the data was to examine the differences in the overall mean scale scores recorded by female students and by male students. These data, presented in Table 3, demonstrate that on all six scales female students recorded significantly higher scores than male students. Table 4 illustrates the implications of these significant differences between mean scale scores in terms of the individual scale items.

In terms of *attitude toward school character*, 94% of female students rated their school as a really good school, compared with 88% of male students; 92% of female students rated prayers as really important in their school, compared with 89% of male students. In terms of *attitude toward school experience*, 90% of female students rated their school as a safe place, compared with 83% of male students; 81% of female students rated their school as a clean place, compared with 76% of male students. In terms of *attitude toward school teachers*, 92% of female students rated the teachers in their school as caring a lot for all the children, compared with 89% of male students; 81% of female students agreed that when they do well in school the teachers praise them, compared with 77% of male students. In terms of *attitude toward relationships in school*, 96% of female students agreed that caring for others is very important in their school, compared with 93% of male students; 96% of

**Table 4.** School-related attitudes by sex

	Male %	Female %
<i>Attitude toward school character</i>		
My school is a really good school	88	94
My school is a really caring school	87	91
My school treats every child fairly	70	76
Worship is very important in my school	89	91
My school is a really friendly school	82	87
Prayer is very important in my school	89	92
<i>Attitude toward school experience</i>		
In my school the rules are fair	83	89
In my school I can be myself	68	73
My school is a peaceful place	66	69
My school is a safe place	83	90
My school looks good	78	84
My school is a clean place	76	81
<i>Attitude toward school teachers</i>		
The teachers in my school care a lot for all the children	89	92
The teachers in my school care a lot for each other	89	91
The teachers in my school care a lot for the world around us	88	90
The teachers in my school care a lot about the school	93	94
When I do well in my school the teachers praise me	77	81
When I do well in my school the grown-ups praise me	75	78
<i>Attitude toward relationships in school</i>		
My school teaches me to respect other people	94	96
My school teaches me to respect other people's things	94	95
My school teaches me to care for other people	94	96
At my school we value each other	83	85
In my school we care a lot for each other	85	88
Caring for others is very important in my school	93	96
<i>Attitude toward school and environment</i>		
My school teaches me to respect things that grow	82	85
My school teaches me to respect wonderful things	86	90
My school teaches me to care for the world around us	92	94
At my school we are proud of our school grounds	84	86

(Continued)

**Table 4.** (Continued)

	Male %	Female %
At my school we are proud of our school buildings	85	89
Keeping the school tidy is important in my school	88	90
<i>Attitude toward school worship</i>		
I enjoy being with the whole school	68	73
I enjoy visits from the vicar	63	67
Singing is important to me	49	71
Being quiet and still is important to me	52	57
Listening to the Bible is important to me	54	57

**Table 5.** Mean attitude scores by school year

	Year 5		Year 6		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i> <
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
School character	26.4	3.3	26.0	3.4	6.8	.001
School experience	24.8	4.1	24.5	4.1	3.3	.001
School teachers	26.5	3.3	26.0	3.4	6.8	.001
Relationships in school	27.2	3.0	26.8	3.1	5.9	.001
School and environment	26.5	3.2	26.1	3.3	6.0	.001
School worship	18.9	4.5	18.0	4.4	9.3	.001

female students agreed that their school teaches them to care for other people, compared with 94% of male students. In terms of *attitude toward school and environment*, 89% of female students were proud of their school buildings, compared with 85% of male students; 85% of female students considered that their school teaches them to respect things that grow, compared with 82% of male students. In terms of *attitude toward school worship*, 71% of female students considered singing was important to them, compared with 49% of male students; 67% of female students enjoyed visits from the vicar compared with 63% of male students.

The fourth step in exploring the data was to examine the difference in the overall mean scale scores recorded by year-five and year-six students. The data presented in Table 5 demonstrate that on all six scales year-six students recorded significantly lower scores than year-five students. Table 6 illustrates the implications of these significant differences between mean scale scores in terms of the individual scale items.

In terms of *attitude toward school character* the main drop in endorsement between year five and year six concerned the item, 'My school treats every child fairly', from 76% to 70%. In terms of *attitude towards school experience*, the main drop in endorsement between year five and year six concerned the item, 'In my school the rules are fair', from 88% to 84%. In terms of *attitude toward school*

**Table 6.** School-related attitudes by school year

	Year 5 %	Year 6 %
<i>Attitude toward school character</i>		
My school is a really good school	91	91
My school is a really caring school	89	89
My school treats every child fairly	76	70
Worship is very important in my school	91	90
My school is a really friendly school	84	85
Prayer is very important in my school	92	90
<i>Attitude toward school experience</i>		
In my school the rules are fair	88	84
In my school I can be myself	71	70
My school is a peaceful place	67	68
My school is a safe place	87	86
My school looks good	81	80
My school is a clean place	78	78
<i>Attitude toward school teachers</i>		
The teachers in my school care a lot for all the children	91	90
The teachers in my school care a lot for each other	91	89
The teachers in my school care a lot for the world around us	91	87
The teachers in my school care a lot about the school	94	93
When I do well in my school the teachers praise me	79	79
When I do well in my school the grown-ups praise me	77	77
<i>Attitude toward relationships in school</i>		
My school teaches me to respect other people	95	95
My school teaches me to respect other people's things	94	95
My school teaches me to care for other people	95	95
At my school we value each other	85	83
In my school we care a lot for each other	86	86
Caring for others is very important in my school	95	94
<i>Attitude toward school and environment</i>		
My school teaches me to respect things that grow	85	82
My school teaches me to respect wonderful things	89	87
My school teaches me to care for the world around us	94	93
At my school we are proud of our school grounds	85	85
At my school we are proud of our school buildings	87	87

(Continued)

Table 6. (Continued)

	Year 5 %	Year 6 %
Keeping the school tidy is important in my school	89	89
<i>Attitude toward school worship</i>		
I enjoy being with the whole school	72	70
I enjoy visits from the vicar	68	61
Singing is important to me	63	58
Being quiet and still is important to me	57	52
Listening to the Bible is important to me	60	51

*teachers*, the main drop in endorsement between year five and year six concerned the item, 'The teachers in my school care a lot for the world around us', from 91% to 87%. In terms of *attitude toward relationships in school*, the main drop in endorsement between year five and year six concerned the item, 'At my school we value each other' from 85% to 83%. In terms of *attitude toward school and environment*, the main drop in endorsement between year five and year six concerned the item, 'My school teaches me to respect things that grow', from 85% to 82%. In terms of *attitude toward school worship*, the main drop in endorsement between year five and year six concerned the item, 'Listening to the Bible is important to me', from 60% to 51%.

## Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to draw together the data provided by the 8,111 students who participated in the Student Voice Project, to assess the Lankshear Student Voice Scales, to map the ethos of Anglican schools in Wales as seen through the eyes of the students attending these schools, and to explore the potential differences between the perceptions of female students and male students, and between the perceptions of year-five students and year-six students. Five main conclusions emerge from the findings generated by this study.

The first conclusion concerns the Lankshear Student Voice Scales. These scales demonstrated good criteria of internal consistency reliability, both in terms of the alpha coefficients and in terms of the correlations between the individual scale items and the sum of the other items in the scale, and were sensitive to and useful in identifying significant patterns between male students and female students, and between year-five students and year-six students. On these grounds the Lankshear Student Voice Scales can be commended for further use.

The second conclusion concerns the claims that can be made about the ethos of Church in Wales primary schools on the basis of the data generated by the Lankshear Student Voice Scales. Data of this nature allows the Church in Wales to move beyond aspirational statements about the kind of ethos it would like its schools to reflect to descriptive statements about the lived-experience of the students and how they perceive the ethos of the school that they attend. These data would allow the Church in Wales to make the following kinds of claims:



Nine out of every ten year-five and year-six students attending Church in Wales primary schools perceive their schools as a really good school, where worship and prayer are important, where the teachers care a lot about the school and about the students, where the school teaches respect for individuals, and where caring for others and for the world around us is really important.

The third conclusion is that the student voice not only affirms some of the aspirations regarding school ethos identified in the inspection process, but also draws attention to other aspirations that are not being so readily recognized by the students. Items endorsed by fewer than four-fifths of the students may invite further reflection. Fewer than four-fifths of the students affirmed that: their school treats every child fairly; in their school they can be themselves; their school is a peaceful place; their school is a clean place; and when they do well in their school their teachers praise them. Fewer than four-fifths of the students affirmed any of the five items concerned with attitude toward school worship. Further reflection on these items may result in Anglican schools agreeing that such issues are not really core to their school ethos, or in Anglican schools exploring how students' perceptions may be enhanced in such areas.

The fourth conclusion is that the student voice draws attention to ways in which the lived-experience of school life and the perception of school ethos are reported differently by male students and by female students. Specifically in terms of the present survey, a more positive attitude toward the ethos of Anglican primary schools in Wales is reported by female students, and this difference emerges with greatest clarity in relation to the explicitly religious aspects of the schools (including school worship). This finding is consistent with the more widely reported tendency for women to be more favourably disposed to the Christian tradition than men (see Francis and Penny, 2014). In discussing school ethos church schools may be wise to keep this sex difference in mind.

The fifth conclusion is that the student voice draws attention to ways in which the lived-experience of school life and the perceptions of school ethos are reported differently by year-five and year-six students. Specifically, in terms of the present survey there was a significantly less positive attitude toward the explicitly religious aspects of the school reported by year-six students than by year-five students (including school worship). This finding is consistent with the more widely reported tendency for decline in attitude toward Christianity during the years of childhood adolescence (see Kay and Francis, 1996). In discussing school ethos church schools may be wise to keep this age trend in mind.

The limitations with the present study include the reliance on a small set of five 6-item scales and one 5-item scale to operationalize the notion of Anglican school ethos as reflected in the Section 50 inspection criteria, and the restriction of the Student Voice Project to one Province of the Anglican Church. The findings from the research should, nonetheless, be strong enough to encourage further research in other Anglican Provinces with the opportunity to build on the Lankshear Student Voice Scales and possibly extend their reach to assess other identified aspects of school ethos.

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