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Catholic Schools in a Country of Many Faiths.

Nancy Walbank
3rd Year PhD

Aims

- Catholic schools: a historical perspective for England and Wales
- A contemporary theological perspective
- Catholic schools admitting children who are not Catholic. What are the issues facing leaders and managers?
- Can a Catholic school be inclusive?

Historical model

Pre-Vatican II the Catholic Community in England and Wales was a tightly knit group in which every aspect of life took place e.g. education, marriage, social life and religious celebration

'The fortress parish'



Vatican II

- The Council sat from 1962-5. During this period it produced four Constitutions which re-evaluated the place of the Church in the modern world.
- *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, the Church is presented as being part of “*The hopes and joys, the griefs and anxieties of the people of this age.*”
- As such, the Church was a participant in the world rather than being ‘otherworldly’ and a voice for the human rights of all people.

What the Council said about schools.

*“The Catholic school pursues cultural goals and the natural development of youth to the same degree as any other school. What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a **community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love.** It tries to guide the adolescents in such a way that personality development goes hand in hand with the development of the “new creature” that each one has become through baptism. It tries to relate all of human culture to the **good news of salvation** so that the light of faith will illumine everything that the students will gradually come to learn about the world, about life and about the human person.”* Gravissimum educationis 8

A new model for Catholic schools.

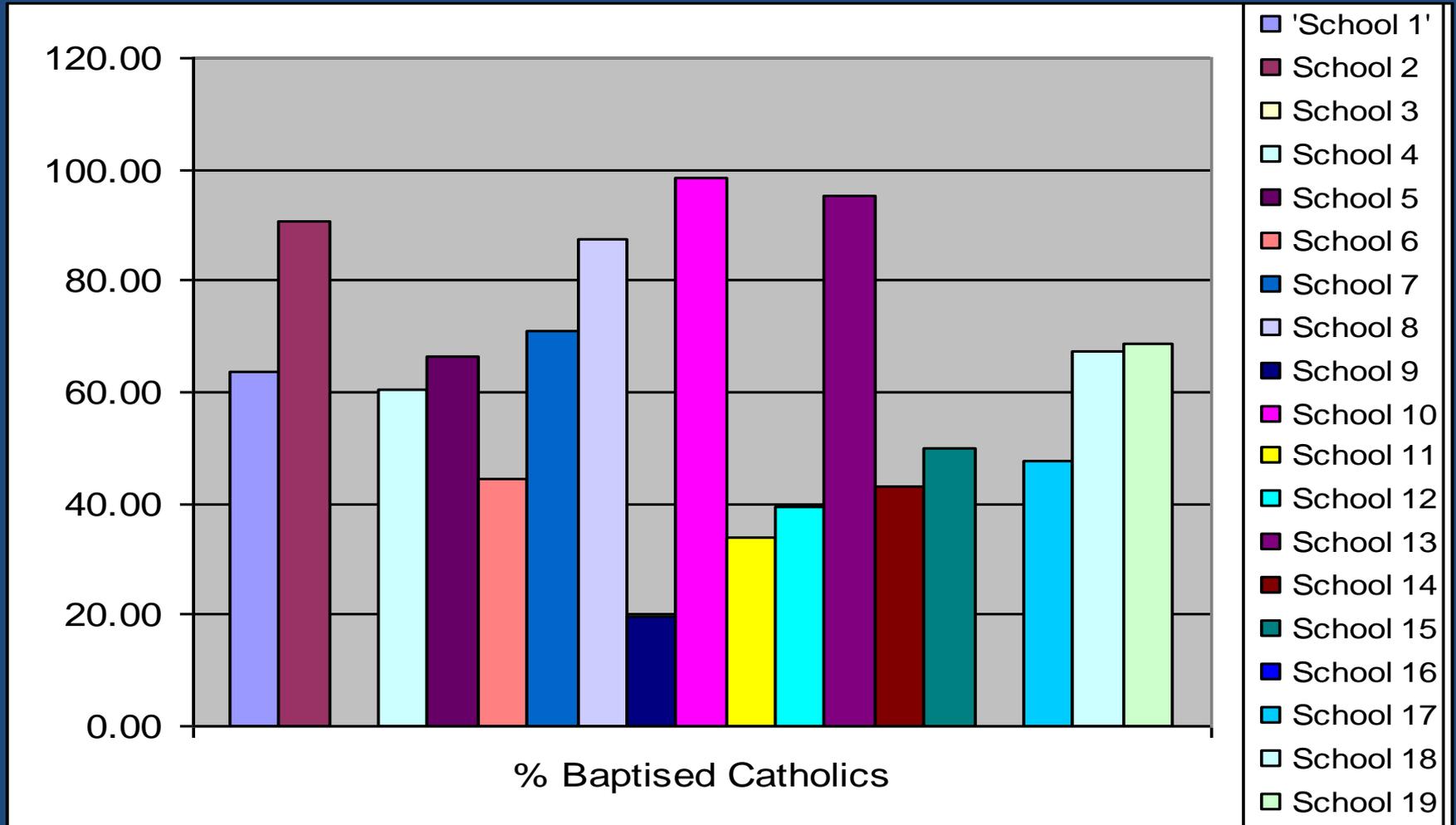
In addition to offering a high quality academic education a Catholic school should:



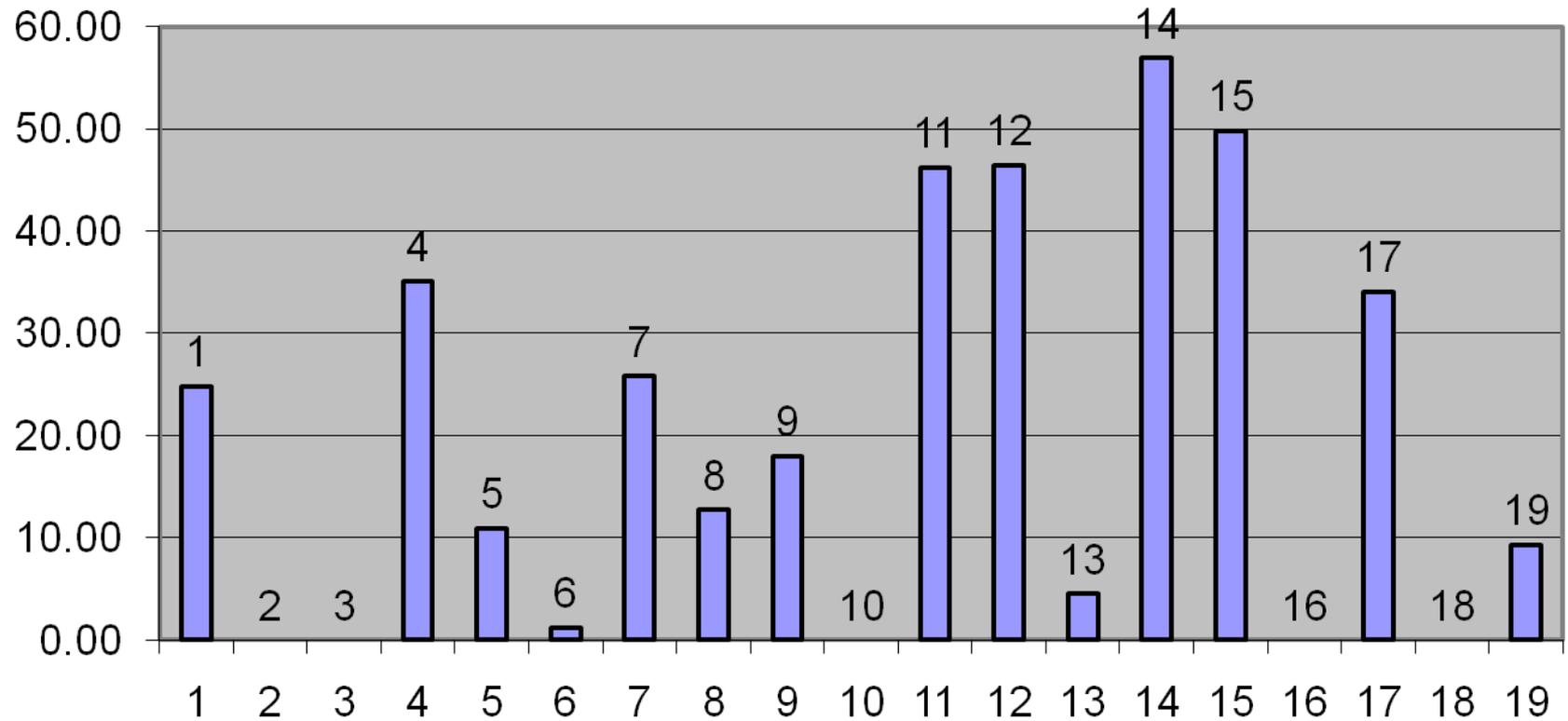
Who goes to Catholic schools?

- Research area was North West, based in Diocese of Lancaster which stretches from Preston to Carlisle.
- Figures quoted are from questionnaire circulated in 2007.
- Figures are based on a 27% return

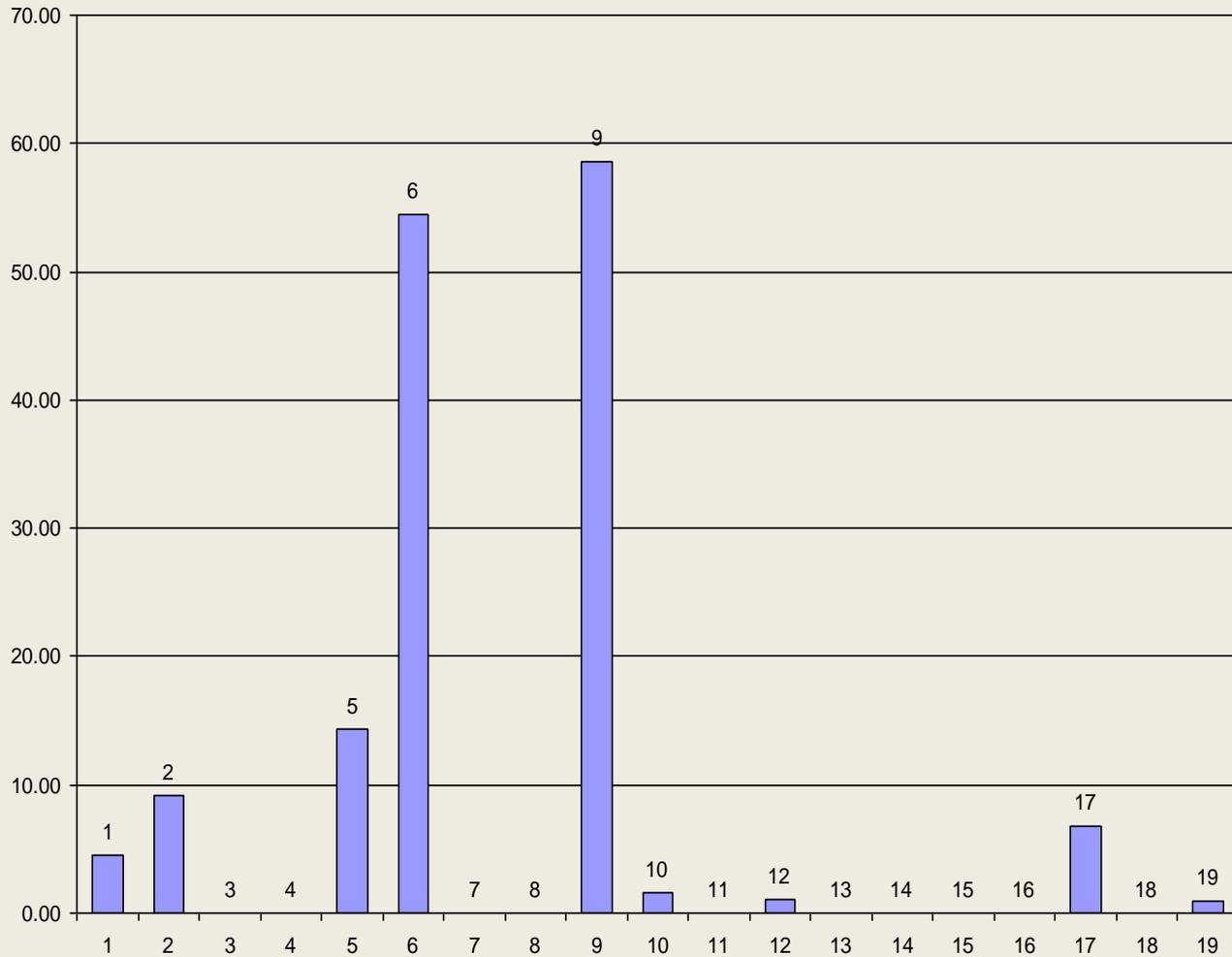
Baptised Catholics?



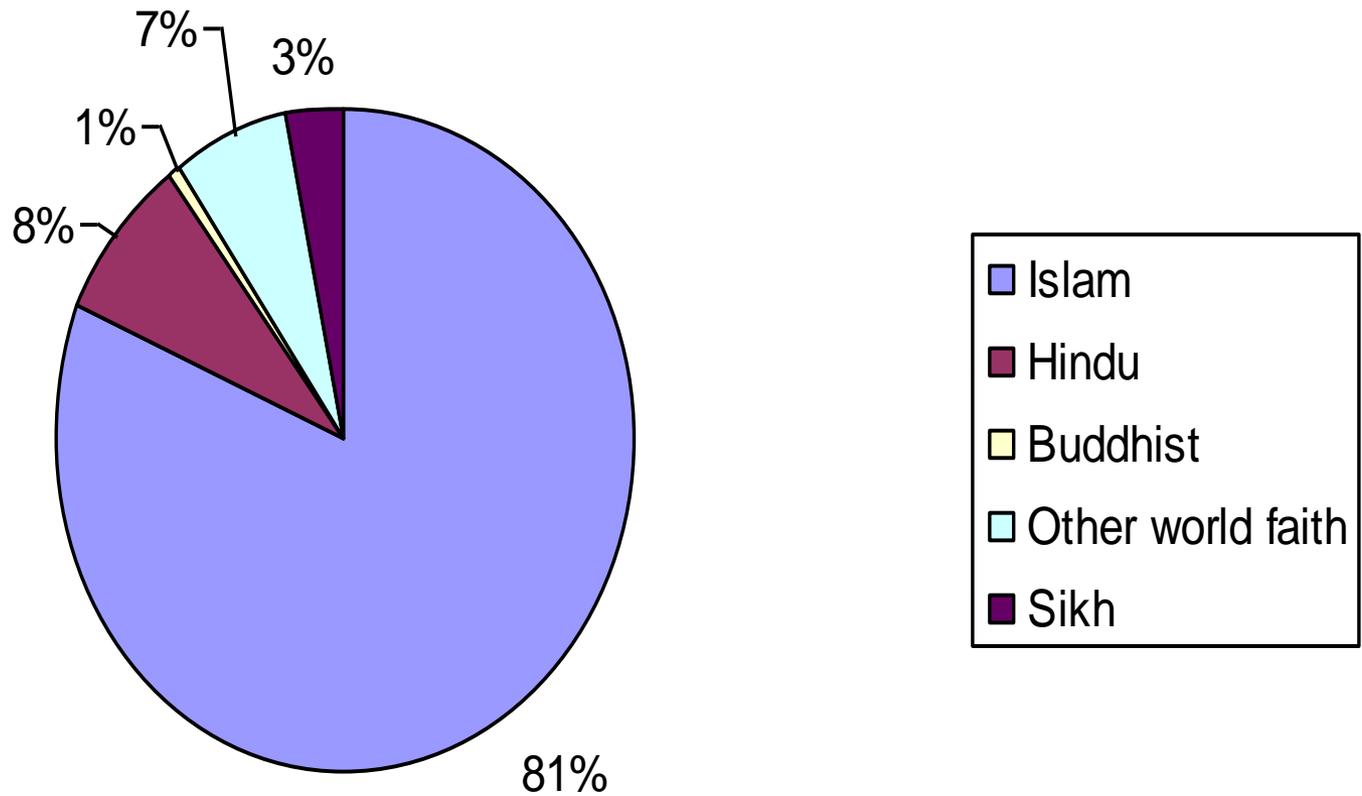
Other Christian?



Other world faiths?



Other world faith communities in the schools



What makes a school Catholic?

- Second phase of my research I interviewed head teachers and governors in the Lancashire area.
- I asked them what made their schools Catholic.
- What follows are quotes illustrating how they felt they maintained their Catholicity with a diverse intake.

“Well, straight away every room has a crucifix in there ...as far as the RE teaching is concerned we use a Catholic scheme. We follow the liturgical year, we celebrate feasts, we have Catholic Mass we have a good relationship with the Catholic church, the [name] church, the priest’s a welcome visitor, we put Christ at the centre of what we do. So it’s Catholic but it’s also very much Christian based.”

Hospitality model

- Catholic school admit children of all faiths and none but school still sees it's primary aim as Catholic formation.

“ I think that the fact that there are so many children of other faiths in this school is just testament to our Catholicity and testament to the fact that we are open and we’re not judging anyone else. We are saying we are all here on our own faith journey to work together. We still teach the same, from the same scheme of work... as an all Catholic school would teach from...The difference would be... when it lends itself to when it’s something we can share about Islam or Hinduism then we would invite somebody to come in just to give all the children that perspective. Christ is at the centre of this school Christ is the reason we are as we are. I think that is the reason we are a Catholic school.”

Service model

- School is a 'sign of faith'* in the community
- Education is a human right schools offers itself as a Christian presence to meet social and religious needs.
- Serving the needs of the poor?

*Catholic Schools and Other Faiths Bishops' Conference England and Wales 1997

“I believe that we are a very Catholic school because I believe that we preach and live out the Gospel and the word of God in a very special way. So yes we are Catholic and every person that comes into the school realises that we are a Catholic school ...we will share our faith with everybody and that Catholic faith is implicit in everything we do. But also, we are probably catholic with a small ‘c’ because we feel that we are universal and because of our community we seek to not preach but to live out the Catholic message whilst also trying to respect and understand everybody else’s faith and everybody else’s culture.”

Encounter and dialogue

- *Catholic schools can be universal by including everything and everyone in a spirit of openness and dialogue.*
- *Such a Catholic school would include and welcome to all in order to embrace diverse 'others' in a participative community.*
- *Does this weaken what it means to be Catholic?*

Can a Catholic school be inclusive?

- Yes, but how they are inclusive differs.
- Open doors to all but still maintain Catholic practice. (No school reported children withdrawn from RE and worship)
- Open doors and enter into inter faith dialogue with those who attend but this dependant on heads having a clear understanding of their faith perspective to avoid religious relativism