

Goodness Me, Goodness You!
Programme for Junior Infants to Second Class
Review Report:
The Experiences of Stakeholders

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Goodness Me, Goodness You! (GMGY) is the patron's programme for Community National Schools (CNSs) and caters for children of all beliefs; religious and non-religious. As such it aims to support, promote and underpin the multi-denominational characteristic spirit of these schools. It is the policy of the CNS model to respect, celebrate and recognise diversity in all areas of human life.

While GMGY began its development under the authority of County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC) since 2012 the programme has been developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in collaboration with the network of Community National Schools and the CNS Steering Committee. The transfer of development from County Dublin VEC to the NCCA took place as the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class was being developed. The further progression of the programme, within NCCA, involved a continuation of development in the direction previously established. This work concluded in June 2015. It is worth noting that while the development of the programme was completed in 2015, in some schools the programme has been enacted since their foundation in 2008. This was possible because as lessons were developed they were made available to schools on an ongoing basis. Upon completion of the programme for junior infants to second class, attention turned to the development of the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class. This development was completed in October 2016.

This review of the junior infant to second class programme takes place in line with the regular curriculum review processes and has been supported by the CNS Steering Committee, CNS Management Group and the GMGY School Network. This document presents a review of the junior infants to second class programme, and signposts possible directions for the redevelopment of the programme.

This introduction presents the broad context in which the development of the programme and the review has taken place, and concludes with an overview of the remaining chapters in the report.

Context

In 2007, Mary Hanafin, the then Minister for Education and Skills, announced a new additional model of primary school patronage; the Community National School. The Minister signalled that these schools would be community-based and that the local Education and Training Board (formerly known as the Vocational Education Committee) would be the patron of the new model. The model was established *in recognition of the changing face of modern Ireland* (DES, 2007). Minister Hanafin stated that it was her intention to ensure that the school would cater for the *diversity of religious faiths represented in the area served by the school* and that provision would be made *within the school setting for the religious, moral and ethical education of children in conformity with the wishes of their parents* (DES, 2007).

In March 2007, it emerged that in St. Mochta's parish in West Dublin, there were no school places available for approximately 80 children. The two local schools were denominational. The children left without a school place mainly identified as belonging to religions other than Catholicism and were also from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Thus, there was a need to establish an emergency school which would effectively become the first Community National School in time. The first Community National School opened its doors in 2008. Until 2016 the Community National Schools were under the patronage of the Minister for Education and Skills with the Education and Training Boards (ETBs) of Ireland as patrons designate. The formal transfer of patronage of these schools to the local ETBs took place in September 2016. There are currently twelve Community National Schools, although it is expected that this number will continue to grow in the coming years.

Policy context

Historically, religious bodies (predominantly the Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland) acted as patrons of primary schools by initiating the process of establishing a new school when one was needed to serve a specific geographic area. Today, these schools are privately-owned, publicly-funded institutions, with their denominational character and characteristic spirit respected by the State and underpinned in the Education Act (1998). In denominational schools, the patron's programme is often a religious education programme that reflects the faith-tradition and aspirations of the school's patrons.

In more recent times, other patron bodies such as Educate Together and local ETBs in respect of the multi-denominational sector, and An Foras Patrúnachta in respect of the Gaelscoileanna, have been recognised as the patron bodies for new schools. The majority of primary schools in Ireland are denominational in character, as can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Patronage of Primary Schools in Ireland 2016-2017 (DES, 2017)

Year 2016-2017	
Catholic	2794 (89.7%)
Church of Ireland	175 (5.6%)
Inter-denominational (Gaelscoileanna)	17 (0.54%)
Jewish	1 (0.03%)
Methodist	1 (0.03%)
Multi-denominational (CNS and Educate Together)	109 (3.4%)
Muslim	2 (0.06%)
Presbyterian	15 (0.48%)
Quaker	1 (0.03%)
Total	3,115

Curriculum context

GMGY began its development in 2008 under the authority of the County Dublin Vocational Education Committee. During this period GMGY was developed by the Marino Institute of Education (MIE). Since 2012, GMGY has been developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) in collaboration with the network of Community National Schools. The GMGY programme for junior infants to second class and the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class have been developed through different development processes. For this reason, they have different features due to an evolving understanding of the Community National School model and its characteristic spirit. The next section outlines the development process for the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class and the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class.

Junior infants to second class development process

Development aims and principles

The GMGY programme for junior infants to second class focuses on the themes of Self-in-relation, Other-in-relation and Worlds-in-relation. The programme provides weekly lessons for the teacher. The focus of each lesson is a story which explores one of the themes of the programme. Each lesson comes with an accompanying homework activity. This activity aims to involve parents in the programme and assist them in passing on the belief of the family to the child.

In seeking to balance the wish to be inclusive in a plural setting alongside the wish to cater for separate belief-specific nurture, the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class involved learning in both common and separate belief groups¹. In both cases, the class teachers led the lessons irrespective of their personal belief. For three weeks of each school year, children attended belief-specific lessons. The children were divided into four groupings—Roman Catholic, Christian, Muslim and a group of Hindus, Buddhists and Humanists.

Pedagogical approach

The GMGY programme for junior infants to second class used what is described as a ‘poetics’ or ‘hermeneutics’ approach to religious education. It seeks to facilitate expression of one’s belief through the exploration of content from children’s literature as well as from religious stories.

All lessons in GMGY explore the life and experience of the child. For children of a non-religious belief, the world in which they live is the context for their exploration. For children of a religious belief, the world itself is to be seen in context: it is seen as created and sustained by God. The lessons do not dictate the religious content to be explored but offer children an opportunity to see their belief identity in the stories. The belief-specific lessons also explore children’s experience, but these lessons take deliberate account of experiences that are related to the child’s religion and its teachings.

The programme was founded on the idea that children of differing beliefs share one very important common experience; that of childhood. By exploring all children’s ordinary experiences GMGY opens multiple possibilities of interpretation but does not give priority to any one significance or view. Children themselves attribute this significance out of their family and religious community background and its tradition.

Development process

Lessons were created using a story as the foundation for the lesson. Each lesson provides content for one week’s work (five thirty minute GMGY classes). A sample of the lessons were reviewed by the Reference Group made up of representatives from various educational bodies and belief organisations, and the Steering Committee, which comprised of VEC representatives and DES representatives. Feedback was also collected from teachers and principals in Community National Schools and parents of children who attended Community National Schools. GMGY lessons were finalised based on this feedback and then shared with schools.

¹ The practice of belief-specific teaching has now been discontinued in all schools. This decision was made by local ETBs in consultation with schools.

Third to sixth class development process

Curriculum framework

The GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class is organised in line with wider developments in the curriculum at national level. For instance, it uses strands, elements and learning outcomes in a similar way to the new *Primary Language Curriculum/ Curaclam Teanga na Bunscoile*. The curriculum has four strands; story, we are a community national school, thinking time, and beliefs and religions. Children do not attend belief specific lessons when learning about beliefs and religions. Instead all children remain in their classroom with their peers during the teaching of beliefs and religions.

Pedagogical approach

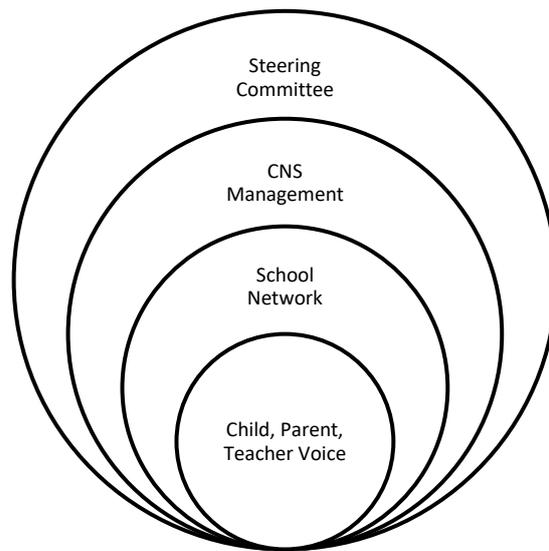
In terms of philosophy and pedagogy, the curriculum for third to sixth class can be described as interdisciplinary which seeks to develop different aspects of children's potential. The approach fosters a culture that celebrates and respects difference. GMGY encourages conversations and discussions ensuring a greater understanding for the child of their sense of identity and belonging in this world. This underlying philosophy and pedagogy has been developed consistently from the principles of the *Primary School Curriculum* (DES, 1999) and *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009).

Development process

The curriculum for third to sixth class is a process curriculum; a curriculum which evolves as the school evolves. The development of the curriculum took place in line with an authentic collaborative model of development, where teacher experience and voices, alongside child and parent voices, are central. In addition, the GMGY Project Team works closely with the CNS Principals Forum comprising of school leaders, the CNS Steering Committee comprising of ETB representatives and officials from the Department of Education and Skills and the ETBI. Engagement with these groups provides an opportunity to share information from the Community National Schools and to discuss matters relating to curriculum implementation.

Figure 1 offers an outline of the development process of the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class.

Figure 1. Development Process of the GMGY Curriculum for Third to Sixth Class



Overview of the remaining chapters

Chapter two describes the methodology employed and justifies the use of the research approach, methods and instruments. The research was undertaken from a social constructivist perspective and was qualitative in its approach. It was conducted as narrative research in an effort to investigate the experiences of stakeholders in relation to the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class.

Chapter three presents the GMGY narrative using the data collected during interviews. The narrative is structured in chronological order and presents data about the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class. Statements in the narrative are supported by published documents pertaining to GMGY.

Chapter four presents data collected from pupils who participated in the review. The research method and data analysis employed are outlined and the findings are presented.

Chapter five sets forth the next steps in the development of GMGY. It explores questions that require further consideration by stakeholders. The questions presented arise from the GMGY narrative and the data collected from pupils. The questions aim to form the basis of future consultation and collaboration with stakeholders in the redevelopment of GMGY.

Chapter 2: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter aims to offer an account of the methodology used to explore the experiences of principals, teachers, parents and other stakeholders who participated in this research. The chapter describes how the research was conducted and analysed. The aim of the research is outlined and the philosophical assumptions on which the research is based are set forth. Finally, the research instruments used to investigate the experiences of stakeholders are charted and data collection and data analysis are summarised.

Research aim

To investigate the experience of parents, teachers, principals, school managers and patron representatives in relation to the development, implementation and practice of the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class in Community National Schools and in doing so to examine and review its evolution from 2008 to 2017.

Research questions

- What is the experience of parents, teachers, principals and patron representatives in relation to the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class?
- How has GMGY evolved since its original conception and why have these changes occurred?

Research paradigm

The research assumes a social constructivist perspective under which participants in the project are considered actors in the creation of meaning and knowledge within their world (Merriam, 1998). The research accepts the belief that there is no one 'truth' and that narratives are co-constructed between the participant and the researcher in a particular social, cultural, and historical context. A qualitative

narrative approach allowed for the gathering of rich data which attempted to create a comprehensive story of the experiences of participants in this study.

Research methodology

A qualitative methodology which employed semi-structured narrative interviews was used to collect the experiences of stakeholders in this part of the review process. The method is described in more detail below.

Phase one – creating a timeline

In June 2017, the GMGY Project Team from the NCCA held a round-table meeting. Principals and teachers were in attendance as well as representatives from the ETBs and the DES. As part of the initial phase of investigation, the group worked to create a timeline of development for GMGY. Key decisions and events, which had an impact on the development of GMGY, were outlined and discussed. The timeline which was created can be seen in Figure 2 and Figure 3 below. Using this information, the GMGY project team worked to design a narrative research approach.

Figure 2. The Development of the CNS and GMGY

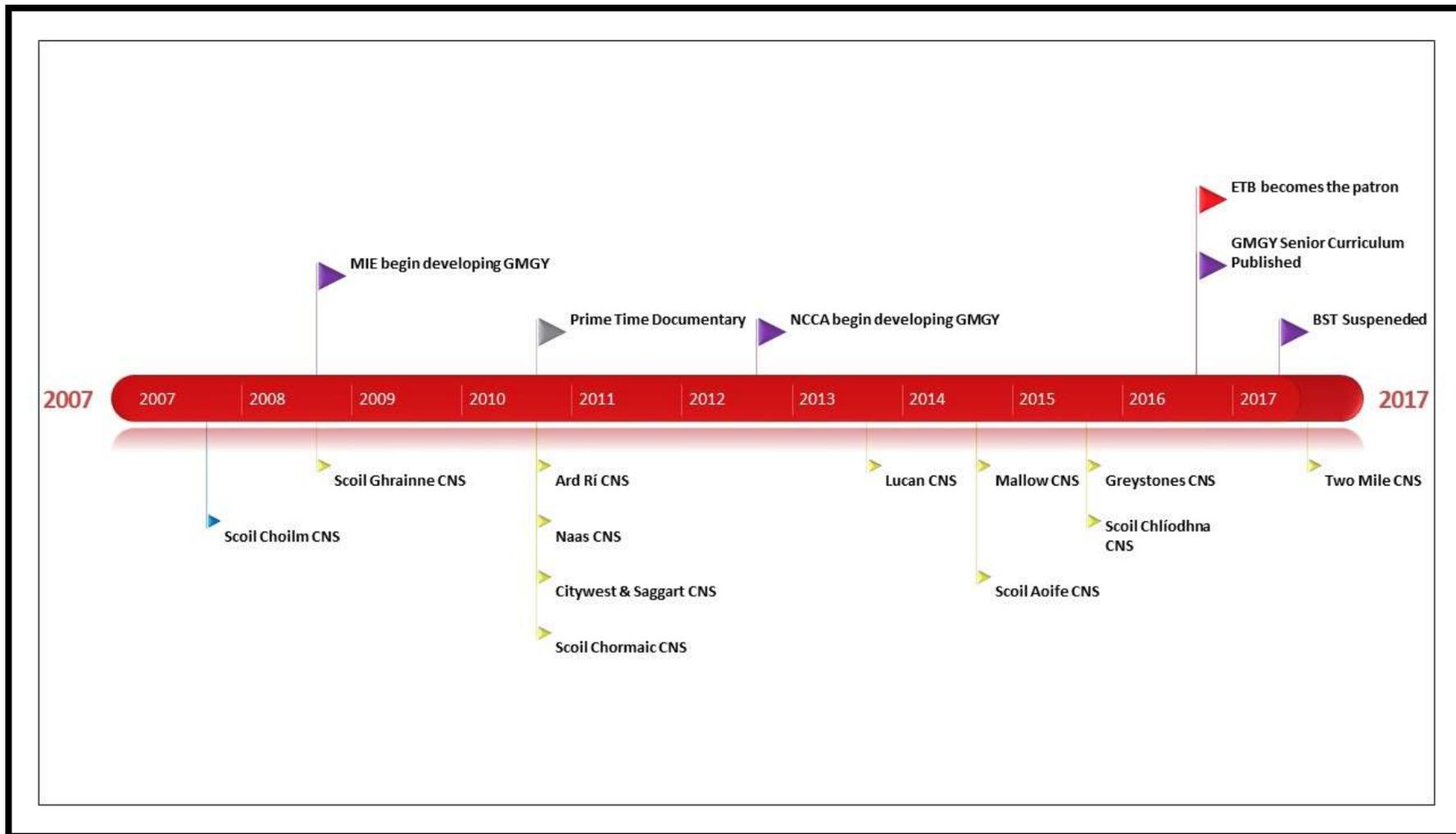
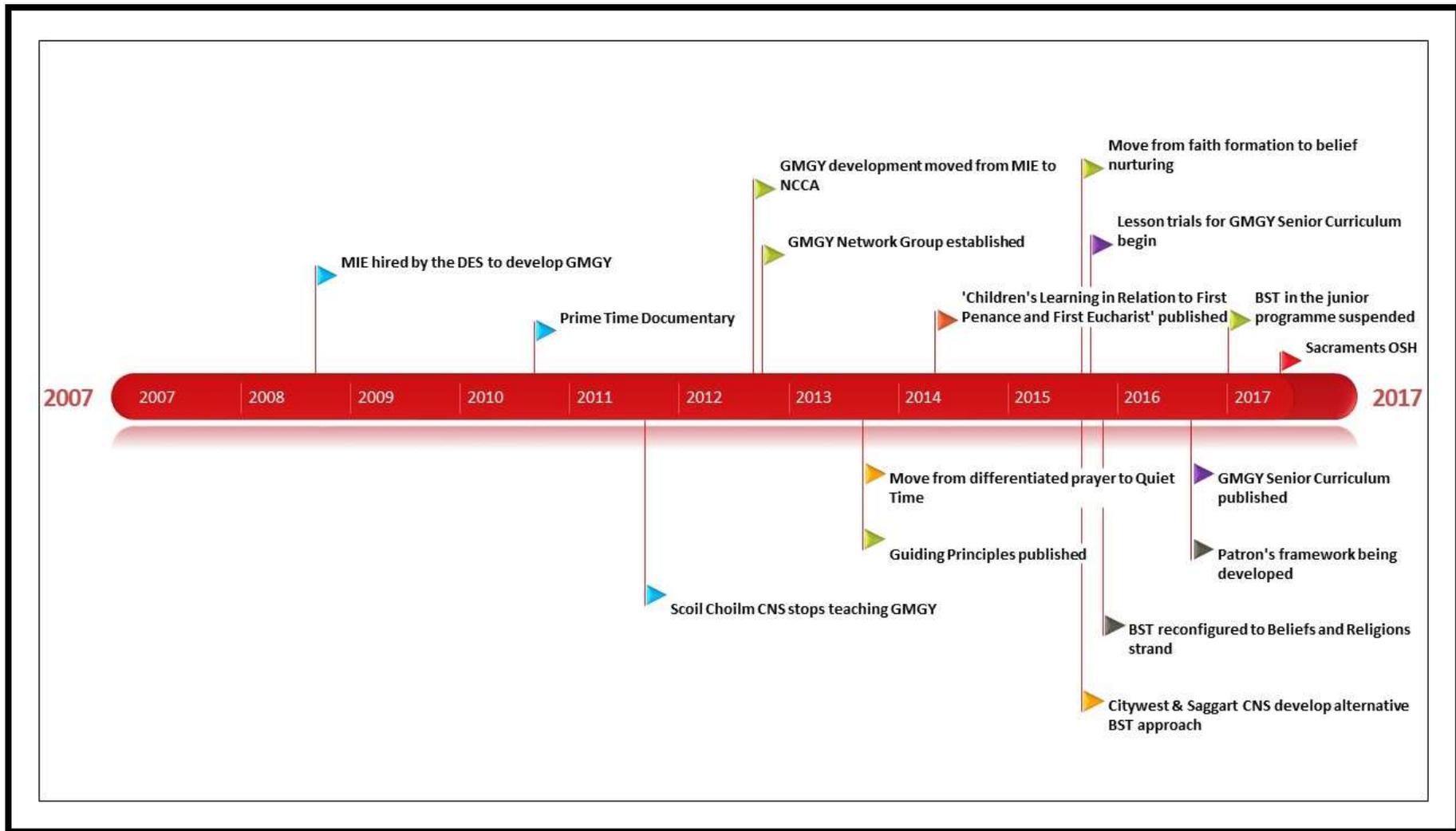


Figure 3. Key Decisions and Events



Phase two – semi-structured narrative interviews

Narrative inquiry was chosen as a method of data collection to capture the experiences of people involved in the creation and implementation of the programme. Narratives express the truth of a point of view at a particular time, space and socio-historical context (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). The development of GMGY has been informed by its positioning at a particular time, space and socio-history and therefore it was felt that narrative interviews would enable participants *to translate their personal experiences into stories* (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000).

Based on the timelines above, each participant was provided with a bespoke timeline, relevant to their experience and participation in the programme. Respondents were asked to speak to their experience and decisions that informed the development of the GMGY programme.

The structure of the narrative interview is outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Structure of the Narrative Interview

Structure of Narrative Interview	
Before the Narrative Interview	Bespoke timeline and associated questions sent to respondent(s) in advance of the interview.
During the Narrative Interview	Respondent(s) welcomed and timeline displayed. Respondent(s) asked to tell their narrative account of the events/ decisions outlined on their bespoke timeline. When a natural break is reached in the narrative account the researchers ask clarifying questions (who, when, where, why). At the end of the narrative the researchers question respondent(s) about decisions/events that were present on their timeline but that they omitted from their narrative account.

Respondent selection

The review process included six individual semi-structured narrative interviews, one teacher focus group, two parent focus groups and seven focus groups with children. A breakdown of respondents is outlined in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Respondents

Respondents	Number of Participants	Further Information
Teachers	5	The teacher focus group was made up of teachers from five different community national schools. All teachers in the focus group were also GMGY coordinators.
Principals	3	Three CNS principals were interviewed individually. Each principal had joined the model at different points during the development of GMGY.
School Manager	1	The school manager was the manager of five CNSs. They had been involved in the management of CNS schools since 2007.
Patron Representative	2	The patron representatives worked closely with the existing community national schools over the past decade.
Parents	8	Two parent focus groups took place in two different schools.
Pupils	36	There were seven pupil focus groups in seven different schools.

Data analysis

In narrative analysis, texts are analysed within their social, cultural, and historical contexts (Hunter, 2010). They are deconstructed in order to reveal *powerful discourses, hierarchies, presuppositions, deliberate omissions and polar opposites* (Grbich, 1999). The narrative analysis employed in this study examined multiple voices in an effort to explore the development and evolution of the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class.

The narrative data was analysed using the following method:

- The audio-recorded narrative interviews were transcribed.
- After transcription, the data was separated into indexed material and non-indexed material.²
- The indexed data was ordered into a chronological trajectory, based on the initial timeline.

² Indexed material includes rational, concrete, the scientific content of who does what, when, where and why. Non-indexed material includes information that goes beyond the events and expresses values, judgements, refers to wisdom learned.

- Existing literature and documents pertaining to GMGY were studied in an effort to validate the chronological trajectory which had been created.
- The non-indexed data was grouped into subject groups.
- Similarities among subject groups were explored allowing for the identification of collective values, judgements and wisdom learned.

The researcher composed the final narrative by combining the indexed and non-indexed material in a chronological trajectory.

Chapter 3: The GMGY Narrative

Introduction

The following narrative has been composed through analysis of the data gathered. The factual data presented emerged from narrative interviews and has been validated through exploration of supporting published documentation pertaining to GMGY (see bibliography). The narrative also presents the values, judgements and wisdom of the respondents that emerged from the data. The data was *re-storied* in order to place it within a chronological sequence (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002). This section presents the narrative of the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class.

April 2007 – preparations for a new patronage model

Prior to the announcement of the new school model, a meeting was held between the DES and the Catholic Primary School Management Association (CPSMA) in April 2007. The meeting was arranged in an effort to consult with religious organisations prior to establishing the Community National School model. A former VEC employee who participated in the study explained that, historically, there are long-standing, strong partnerships between the Catholic Church and VEC (now ETB) schools in Ireland. The respondent confirmed that the model was conceptualised based on the VEC community school model at second level. Traditionally many community schools were developed using the ‘co-trusteeship’ model; where the local religious body and the state shared the patronage of these schools.

The hope was that these schools would be rolled out to be like community schools [at second level], schools for all the children of the community. Remember their title is community national school and remember there is religious buy-in in community schools. They are actually co-patrons. (Former VEC employee)

The minutes of this meeting noted that if co-trusteeship was to be considered in relation to the CNS then the following requirements would need to be met within the new model; *religious instruction and formation of Catholic children in the faith by a qualified teacher, during the school day*. The minutes stated that alternatively the CNS could be non-denominational and operate a moral education programme. The minutes outline that the characteristic spirit would need to be *inclusive of the religious instruction of children from differing faith backgrounds in their own faith* and that the

schools would also cater for parents who wanted *no religious formation for their children* (CPSMA, 2007).

According to the VEC respondent, there was an opinion within the VEC that if the Catholic Church did not openly endorse the Community National School model it would not be attended by Catholic children. One principal respondent explained that;

There was a lack of school places in the locality and a number of children had been left without a school place [...] they were mostly of international newcomer backgrounds. [...] They [The Catholic Schools] decided to enforce their Catholic enrolment policy and I think that was probably the only thing that they could have done at the time and it left the children of other faiths and beliefs without a school place. (Principal 1)

According to participants, this had the potential to separate children by religion within their communities; Catholic children would attend a Catholic school, Church of Ireland children would attend a Church of Ireland school and children of other religions or those identifying as having no religion would attend a CNS. Participants reported that this was one reason why it was deemed necessary to consult with the CPSMA in relation to the CNS model.

If you want [...]parents of all faiths to send their children to the school you also want the Catholic parents to send their children to the school and therefore you want the Catholic Church to say we are happy for your children to go to this school. (Former VEC employee)

The consultation resulted in an agreement between the CNS and the Catholic Church. It was agreed that Catholic children attending a CNS would receive three weeks of instruction in the Catholic faith every year. One former VEC employee understood that this instruction would be age appropriate for the children and that, in so much as possible, concepts of religious education that were explored with children in the Catholic classes would also be explored with children from other religions.

We came to a compromise that they would get three weeks of specific instruction but that also there would be an understanding that you are teaching children of an age about the concepts of religious education, so a lot of the things would be similar no matter what faith you would be teaching. (Former VEC employee)

It was, therefore, decided that belief-specific classes would also have to be provided for children from other religions and for those children who identified as having no religious belief. At this early stage of development, there was an acknowledgement of the importance of equal treatment for all pupils.

If you made a compromise or an agreement with one group that you had to be able to encompass that for all the other faiths as well. As a state school I would have felt very strongly about that, that you wouldn't give preference to any one faith group. (Former VEC employee)

September 2007 – the first school

The first Community National School, Scoil Choilm CNS, was opened in 2007 under the patronage of the Archbishop of Dublin. It was agreed by the DES that the Archbishop of Dublin would be a temporary patron and that a new patron would be established by September 2008. During the first year of Scoil Choilm CNS, there was no patron's programme in existence. Respondents conveyed that the foci for the initial year of the school were the practical facets of getting a school established; acquiring a building, hiring staff and enrolling pupils.

It was really a question of getting the school up and running [...] I wouldn't say at that stage we were thinking in terms of community national school because we weren't even regarded as a community national school. (School Manager)

The vast majority of pupils who enrolled in Scoil Choilm CNS were from international newcomer families. The principal noted that there was uncertainty about how best to approach the development of a patron's programme. As the school was initially under the patronage of the Archbishop of Dublin, the Alive-O programme³ was suggested as a possible patron's programme. However, upon realising that the vast majority of children enrolled in the school did not identify as Catholic, there was recognition that the Alive-O programme would not be a suitable programme for the school.

When the school started we never actually taught Alive-O, the Catholic programme, we knew immediately it just wasn't a runner, we couldn't do that, it would have been inequitable. (Principal 1)

Patronage transferred to the DES in the school's second year of existence. Although the County Dublin VEC (now DDLETB) were the 'patron-in-waiting', they were reported to be a very active 'patron-in-waiting'.

The DDLETB was the 'patron-in-waiting' and they were a very active 'patron-in-waiting' and we were delighted of course by that. Because from the very beginning, even though they weren't actually patron, they were very involved in the school and very excited by the school. (School Manager)

County Dublin VEC recognised the need for a new patron's programme and the principal recalled being delighted at the prospect of a specially designed programme for Community National Schools.

They commissioned the Goodness Me, Goodness You! programme and we were delighted to think that there was going to be some sort of a programme for our school. (Principal 1)

³ The programme for religious instruction in schools under the patronage of the Catholic Church is the Alive-O series.

December 2007 – the Minister’s announcement

In December 2007 the Minister for Education and Skills announced the foundation of the Community National School Model. The aim of the new schools was to cater for children of *all religions and none in line with the wishes of parents* (DES, 2007). Scoil Choilm would become Scoil Choilm CNS and would be joined by a new school, Scoil Ghraíne CNS (DES, 2007).

A change in legislation was required to enable VECs to become patrons of a primary school model. An amendment to the ETB Act was made in 2013, 6 years after the opening of Scoil Choilm CNS. Delays in the transfer of patronage were described by one respondent:

You had to wait for the new Vocational Act for education first. Initially, there was going to be an amendment to the original act. That had been prepared and was ready to go and then it didn't get on the statute book for one or two years after that. And then the new act was coming in so we were waiting for that. It shouldn't have taken so long. (Former VEC employee)

July 2008 – the patron’s programme

The patronage arrangement led to the DES and County Dublin VEC working closely in the development of a patron’s programme for Community National Schools. Initially, the DES approached the NCCA to develop a religious education programme for Community National Schools. The NCCA advised that the request to provide both common and separate religious education classes for pupils in Community National Schools *runs counter to research on how children settle in at school* (Looney, 2008). Respondents reported that it was later decided that Marino Institute of Education would be requested to develop the programme for Community National Schools.

The Marino Institute of Education had a very good reputation in terms of intercultural education and also religious education, and really what you needed was somebody who'd be competent in both. (School Manager)

The programme brief, which was based on the Minister’s press release, was generated by the DES and County Dublin VEC and stated that the programme would;

- Cater for children of all faiths and none.
- Recognise the wishes of parents to have their children receive religious education or morality based education as an integral part of the school curriculum.
- Cater for parents who do not wish their children to receive religious education in any one particular faith.

- Operate through an characteristic spirit of inclusiveness and respect for all beliefs, both religious and non-religious.

The programme created would become known as the Goodness Me, Goodness You! programme. The project officer was seconded in July 2008 and tasked with producing lessons for the coming September. According to a letter sent to the DES from the then president of MIE, the project officer would be required to produce lesson content immediately that met the brief outlined above.

Given that the schools will open in September 2008, the project will operate on an 'action research' basis, the immediate priority being to develop basic material for the initial eight weeks of the school year, with material for the remainder of the programme to be developed in advance as the year progresses. (O'Gara, 2008)

Respondents also reported that time was limited in relation to the creation of the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class. Lesson content was required immediately for trialling in the schools. Under such time restraints, a framework for the development of the programme was not produced.

The author was under enormous pressure from the beginning. Really it was incredible [...] the pressure, they were supposed to produce, at that stage, a programme for senior and junior infants, working on their own, meeting with parents, meeting with teachers, meeting with the Reference Group. So it was an enormous pressure. (School Manager)

These time constraints influenced the development and implementation of the programme, which is detailed later in the research.

September 2008 – the Reference Group

To support the development of GMGY, County Dublin VEC established a Reference Group. A representative from County Dublin VEC chaired this group which was made up of representatives from various educational and religious bodies including; the Islamic Foundation of Ireland, the National Catechetical Office, the INTO, County Dublin VEC, Mater Dei Institute of Education, Church of Ireland Board of Education, the DES, Marino Institute of Education, Educate Together, Irish Bishop's Conference Education Commission, Kagayu Samye Dzong, St. Patrick's College, NCCA, Ireland Vinayaka Temple and the Humanist Association of Ireland (HAI). The first meeting of the Reference Group took place in September 2008. The group was convened from 2008 until 2013 and met, on average, four times per year.

The role of the Reference Group was outlined as follows;

- an advisory role in relation to the programme
- provide guidance in relation to the driving principles and mode of delivery of the programme

- act as guarantors to see that the basic beliefs and practices of the faith traditions values were respected in the development of the programme.

October 2008 – GMGY begins in schools

The teaching of GMGY began in October 2008. Lessons were presented in PowerPoint presentations and were delivered to schools on a USB key. It was normal for the lessons to arrive at the school each Monday morning and be taught during that day.

When I first joined it was all on USBs and the lessons used to come to the school on a weekly basis. (Teacher 4)

Some principals detailed their experiences with the arrival of the lessons and some of the content that was present in the lessons:

Lessons had come and there was no chance to review them, no chance to look at them, they were just taught immediately [...] now some of the things were very good, I mean there were very nice sentiments in it and songs and that but you know there was a lot of things that just were not appropriate [specific religious content]. (Principal 1)

Teachers stated that the programme was easy to teach and that the children enjoyed the stories. This was evident in the data collected from pupils. The majority of the pupils who took part in the research reported enjoying the methodologies employed in the programme.

The things I like about GMGY are the stories, the videos and the songs. (Pupil 15)

I really enjoy doing it. I like the stories and the lessons. (Pupil 14)

The approach used in GMGY was recognised by respondents as being very child-friendly, based on ideas of friendship, family and community. However, some of the content used was reported to have strong connections to the Catholic religion. Some teacher and principal respondents reported disappointment at the use of content from another religious education programme. Some lessons had drawn content (stories, songs and images) from the Alive-O programme, the religious education programme for Catholic schools.

I remember being shocked. When I first went through GMGY with junior infants a lot of the songs were from Alive-O. (Teacher 4)

I thought that there were similarities between GMGY and the Alive-O programme. We felt we couldn't teach that and that it was wrong. We talked about that and in fairness, there were changes made. The programme wasn't a direct copy of Alive-O, but there were similarities. (Principal 1)

One respondent reported that the use of content from another programme was possibly due to a lack of available time to create original material.

The author developed really comprehensive lessons, with songs, activities, poems, interactive whiteboard slides and activity sheets for the home. They must have been working at a crazy rate to get all that done by themselves. I remember songs with them [the author] singing themselves on it, just trying to get everything done. (ETBI representative)

There were various accounts by teachers of their understanding of GMGY and its pedagogies but little congruence on these understandings.

I understood it as a religious education programme [...] it was a multi-faith programme where children were to learn from each other and about each other but through which prayers and stuff were actually done within the classroom. (Teacher 1)

From my own perspective I never saw it as a religious education programme, I thought more of it as a common programme, we'll all do this but we won't discuss religion (Teacher 5)

I was told it was a religious education programme and my own personal thinking was it probably really wasn't, I didn't know what it was, but it definitely wasn't a religious education programme. (Teacher 4)

The role of the teacher in relation to religious education in GMGY was reported to be ambiguous by all teacher respondents. In an effort to offer clarity in relation to this, teacher induction sessions for new teachers were held annually and delivered by the author of the programme. However, despite this provision, teachers identified the lack of professional development in this area as an additional barrier to understanding GMGY and to successfully implementing the programme in their classrooms. The majority of teachers had joined the CNS model as newly qualified teachers and specified that additional professional development would have been helpful for teachers and principals.

Teacher 5: *I think we needed professional development, I mean we've to bear in mind we had three schools, three principals who had only been principals of those particular types of schools for three years, they were new to this as well and they needed professional development too.*

Teacher 3: *And we had a large cohort of newly qualified teachers.*

Teacher 4: *It was a lot to ask of NQTs and new staff and new principals.*

(Teacher Focus Group)

Teachers reported their gratitude for the training that was provided but stated that limited time meant that the training was not substantial enough to offer sufficient guidance. There were differing opinions by principals as to the sufficiency of such training, with some principals devising their own training for GMGY in their schools.

The principal who had joined the model at a later date felt that sufficient guidance had been provided in relation to the religious education pedagogies used in GMGY. This principal understood that the approach used was not confessional in nature and did not allow for 'faith-formation' to take place in school. Teachers were expected to allow pupils to express their beliefs in the classroom through the dialogue encouraged by the stories they encountered. The respondent stated that this understanding of the programme had come from meetings and discussions with the project officer who developed the programme.

The prescriptive nature of the GMGY programme required little or no preparation of lesson resources. This influenced the level of ownership which teachers could possess of the lessons and was inconsistent of approaches in other curricular areas.

It was completely different because, for every other subject, you have to sit, prepare and think about what's going to happen, what you want the children to learn but for GMGY I hold my hands up I didn't prepare for it. You didn't have to. (Teacher 4)

November 2008 – parents in Scoil Choilm CNS

concerned

Between 2008 and 2011, two meetings were held with parents of children attending Scoil Choilm CNS and Scoil Ghráinne CNS. The meetings were aimed at providing an opportunity for parents to view a selection of lessons, ask questions and discuss the programme. Parent respondents reported that initially, they were happy with the selection of GMGY lessons shown to them.

The lessons we used to see in the meetings, was a very nice story about how to be inclusive, how the giraffe would be friends with the crocodile and all these kind of nice stories. So we liked it so much and we had positive feelings about it and those who taught the belief-specific programme were known to us, they're from our community. (Parent 6)

However, some concerns arose for parents of a Muslim background in Scoil Choilm CNS upon viewing all of the lessons that had been developed. The parents reported that incorrect information had been used in some of the content pertaining to Islam and this had resulted in the misrepresentation of their religion. Christian references were reported by the parents to have been used in a large proportion of GMGY lessons. The parents felt that it was unsuitable for one person to be tasked with writing a religious education programme for all religions. They recommended that a person belonging to each religion should oversee all material before it is taught in the schools to ensure the accuracy of information. The programme content was not openly available to parents which resulted in what

parents reported to be a lack of transparency. The approach to group prayer in GMGY was deemed unsuitable for Muslim children by the Muslim parents in Scoil Choilm CNS and the approach to religious education was referred to as *ambiguous*.

Although the issues were predominantly raised by parents of a Muslim background, they felt their concerns had implications for children from other beliefs. One-third of parents withdrew from the GMGY programme in Scoil Choilm CNS in 2012. Parents felt their concerns had not been sufficiently addressed. In order for them to re-engage with the programme, the following requirements were outlined by the parents in Scoil Choilm CNS:

- The programme should focus on the general moral values and avoid referring to any religious themes or characters and should not include group prayers.
- Parents should have full access to the programme.
- The programme, in its entirety, should be reviewed by the Islamic Foundation of Ireland (IFI) and changes on items contradicting Muslim faith approved.
- Any future reviews or amendments to the programme should be approved by the IFI before implementation.
- Islamic belief-specific classes should be provided by the IFI and reviewed by the project officer with responsibility for the development of the GMGY programme.

The lack of a curricular framework was cited by one parent as a barrier to overcoming many of the requirements outlined above.

We thought that programmes taught in this school should be designed through an authority like the Department of Education or NCCA, a proper curriculum department. We discussed all these issues and we could see a clear problem. The programme had no clear guidelines, no clear blueprint. (Parent 6)

A school manager offered an explanation for the absence of such a framework.

Some teachers were saying I don't know what the overall picture is, I can't get it. We were saying that initially too. But the author was so busy trying to respond to the pressure of producing the next lesson that really it was all subsequent. It's interesting that it took until 2013 for the author to develop their philosophy on it. (School Manager)

The situation which arose in Scoil Choilm CNS was reported to be a very difficult one. Respondents felt that these difficulties were often exacerbated by a lack of religious and cultural understanding and experience. This often meant that school management and patron representatives found themselves in unfamiliar territory, navigating new situations, new intercultural relationships and not foreseeing possible issues that would arise in relation to GMGY.

I think everybody found themselves, I don't mean this in a bad way at all, but everybody found themselves in a situation where we were out of our depth, we didn't know what to do or how to cope. (Principal 1)

April 2010 – Prime-Time

In 2010 RTÉ aired a Prime-Time report that focused on the Goodness Me, Goodness You! programme. The programme highlighted the belief-specific aspect of the programme and also the provision for Catholic children in relation to the sacraments in a CNS. The Broadcasting Association of Ireland found that the programme had not treated GMGY in a *fair, objective and impartial manner* (Broadcasting Association of Ireland, 2010). The teacher focus group conveyed that the Prime-Time report caused teachers to be fearful of the GMGY programme. Teachers expressed their opinions about their perceived role and the possible conversations that could occur.

Teacher 1: *It all came back to how teachers were prepared for that as well because they didn't know, well I didn't know any way how far you could take it.*

Teacher 3: *Yes, and how to manage a discussion like that.*

Teacher 5: *The time we joined the CNS was just after the Prime Time piece had aired. And there was no direction where we were to take it and I mean like the girls were saying there about mentioning God, I think that came from those media reports and I mean some of the things that were happening in Scoil Choilm CNS [the suspension of the programme] around the GMGY programme and how it was too Christian. Do we now not say God, because that's too Christian? You know, and I think that's where all this fear came from and that fear has existed until very recently and the effects of that have lasted in teachers' minds.*

(Teacher Focus Group)

The Prime-Time report was described as having done *immeasurable damage* (Principal 1) to the public image the Community National School model and GMGY.

November 2010 – Humanist Association of Ireland

raise concerns

In November 2010 the HAI wrote to the Minister for Education and Skills requesting that children would no longer be separated for the purpose of religious education, that the GMGY programme should teach 'about' religions and that 'faith-formation' should take place outside of the school day.

In October 2011, the HAI resigned from the Reference Group in protest at what they saw as a misrepresentation of their position in relation to GMGY by the CNS in its submission to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism. The HAI stated that they were not satisfied with the programme, particularly the practice of separating children for the purpose of religious education.

September 2011 – parent's consultative group

established

A parents' consultative group was established in 2011 to actively engage parents with the development of GMGY. The first meeting of the Parents' Consultative Group was held in Scoil Ghráinne CNS on the 8th of February 2011. Parents from five different Community National Schools and representing six different belief traditions were in attendance. In addition, a school principal, the GMGY project officer, three members of the Department of Education and Skills and the school manager were present.

The consultative group was established to enable parents to have their wishes represented and respected in the development of GMGY. Parents were informed that they would be;

- representing the views of parents in the Parents' Consultative Group and feeding back information to the parents in each school from the group.
- feeding back their children's responses to the programme.
- advising the project officer on the development of resources for parents which would enable them to support their child's learning in GMGY.
- putting forward their own ideas or drawing on their personal skills or faith tradition resources to complement the programme.
- Highlight stories from their own cultural or faith traditions which would be appropriate for GMGY. (Parents Consultative Group Meeting Minutes, 2011)

Respondents reported that in 2011 there were three further meetings with the Parents Consultative Group. The last meeting was held in November 2011. Throughout 2012 the meetings with parents

were confined to meetings with the parents from a Muslim background in Scoil Choilm CNS in an effort to resolve their concerns about the GMGY programme.

January 2012 – GMGY suspended in Scoil Choilm CNS

The DES and County Dublin VEC met with the parents in Scoil Choilm CNS on a number of occasions, however, the two parties were unable to reconcile the issues outlined previously. As a result, the GMGY programme was suspended for all pupils in Scoil Choilm CNS from 2012. The parents reported their concerns regarding GMGY to the Ombudsman for Children in 2013.

GMGY was not suspended in the other Community National Schools at the time. Principals reported that parents had not raised concerns about the programme in other schools. One principal reported that parents in their school were very supportive of the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class.

It was a programme that our parents were really attracted to, when we were setting up the school and speaking to parents about the GMGY programme [...] in which we fostered inclusivity and a way in which we would link with different communities within our school, but it's one that parents really bought into and it's one that they really wanted their children to experience. (Principal 2)

County Dublin VEC were still the 'patron-in-waiting' at this time and participants in the research noted a lack of leadership as a factor that may have contributed to the reported issues in GMGY. Respondents stated that this lack of leadership may have been due to the delay in the change of patronage from the DES to the local ETB. When complaints were made about aspects of the programme, for example in Scoil Choilm CNS, these complaints were not acted upon in a timely manner.

There was nobody with leadership to make a decision as to what was to be done [...] there was a sort of paralysis for a few years. (Former VEC employee)

Questions were asked, I suppose there was no real answering of them, to be honest. (School Manager)

September 2012 – CNS teachers teach all belief-specific classes

In order to address the issue of teacher suitability in the delivery of belief-specific classes to children from a Muslim background, a member of the faith community was employed to deliver lessons in Scoil

Choilm CNS and Scoil Ghrainne CNS. This decision was reported to have been well received by parents from a Muslim background.

Then, when they introduced the belief-specific teaching and got a Muslim teacher to do it [...] they said this is wonderful, this is fantastic. (School Manager)

This temporary arrangement was reported to have been unsuccessful for a number of reasons. The person delivering the lessons did not hold a teaching degree and some of the teaching approaches differed to those used by other teachers employed in the school. Furthermore, the same person was visiting two schools and it was difficult for the teacher to get from one school to the next in time for the scheduled lessons. The lesson content was delivered in Arabic. These aspects were reported to be challenging.

Some of the parents were complaining because the teacher was teaching Arabic, she was teaching through Arabic and not all the Muslim children spoke Arabic and that was a big issue and there were other things like some of the teachers that were in the rooms felt the methodologies used were different to our own methodologies and maybe were not in keeping with methodologies of the primary school curriculum. (Principal 1)

What gave me a concern was even though we did have another adult sitting in the room at the time, it was done through Arabic. So we had no governance over, no understanding of and no control over what was or wasn't done. (Principal 3)

A decision was taken by these principals in 2012, in consultation with the School Manager, to stop this practice. Teachers in Community National Schools would have responsibility for delivering the Muslim belief-specific classes and some training would be provided to these teachers.

November 2012 – GMGY moves to NCCA

In 2012 the development of the GMGY programme transferred to the NCCA. One of the reasons cited for this transfer was that the work was becoming too onerous for one person. It was also reported to be in response to concerns raised by parents of a Muslim background and their request that the programme would be developed by more than one person.

In an attempt to introduce new structures and processes to the development of GMGY, the NCCA established the GMGY school network. The first school network meeting was held on Thursday the 29th November 2012. School principals, GMGY coordinators (one teacher representative from each school) and school managers were in attendance. The purpose of the meeting was to review experiences of GMGY and to hear about new developments in the management of the programme. Those present at the meeting were invited to identify the achievements and challenges of the programme as they had experienced it to date.

The School Network was established to ensure the process of curriculum development was in line with the needs of the Community National Schools. Although initially, the network included school managers, principals and the GMGY coordinator from each school, it was reported that this composition often resulted in discussions which focused on school management issues rather than curriculum development.

When I first started coming to the NCCA it was me, the principal and the school manager of all schools together. And we used to sit around and talk about [...]a very broad range of issues about CNSs in general. It was almost at times delving into management meetings and other types of issues were coming up and being discussed. (Teacher 4)

Schools had differing experiences of GMGY and for this reason divergent opinions arose about the direction of the programme.

There were polar opposite views on the content being developed for the programme, the vision for the programme, the language around the programme. Really it was going nowhere. I can't imagine that the NCCA would have been able to walk away from any meeting going this is the direction we're going to go from now on with this. (ETBI representative)

The composition of this group changed over time and in recent years this group has been made up of teachers, teaching principals and the primary support officer for ETBI. Teachers reported this as a positive change.

Teacher 5: *Just comparing back then to now there's more coming back to the school on practical level [...]and the school's information coming back to the network meetings and I suppose that's one of the major differences I've noticed.*

Teacher 3: *And trialling, you know, trialling the senior curriculum and all those things, none of those things were done when I first started. It feels like we're getting somewhere now.*

Teacher 4: *Yes exactly like, the schools are having an input, the GMGY coordinator's role is important in helping the school get GMGY to where it needs to be and forming what it's going to look like in our own schools. Whereas, when I first started coming to the NCCA, I think the coordinators sometimes might as well not have been there because the discussion wasn't GMGY focused all of the time but now it is.*

Teacher 3: *I think in the beginning I came home with more questions that I went with.*

(Teacher Focus Group)

January 2013 – the GMGY guiding principles

The GMGY Guiding Principles were developed and published by the NCCA in 2012. The guiding principles were developed for schools in planning for and using the programme. The Guiding Principles are described as the core values that inform and guide the teaching and learning of GMGY in Community National Schools. They are intended to be *lived out* by all members of the school community.

- Community National Schools seek to nurture the development of the whole child, and they value all dimensions of the child's family and community life, including beliefs and religions.
- Parents are the primary educators of their children, and families and communities are responsible for passing on traditions, values and beliefs.
- Respect for and celebration of the different beliefs of children is central to the characteristic spirit of a Community National School.
- The GMGY programme is developed with school communities in a process of engagement with partners.

The guiding principles provided support in the absence of a framework or rationale for GMGY programme. Some teachers reported that they depended on their principal to offer guidance in relation to GMGY, others believed that the dependency on individual principals to lead the implementation of the programme resulted in a disparity between GMGY in different Community National Schools.

June 2013 – Quiet-Time rationale

When the programme originally began a group prayer or reflection was included at the end of all common lessons. There were two types; one was religious in its language and the other was non-religious in its language. A teacher would lead each group in saying the religious prayer or the non-religious reflection.

This practice was later removed and replaced with 'Quiet-Time'. In 2013 the NCCA published a rationale for Quiet-Time. The document stated that Quiet-Time enables the child to silence him or herself, in order to listen more intently. The approach was linked to mindfulness, a focus on the

present moment, that is practised in different forms by individuals and groups from a wide range of religious and secular traditions.

Contemplative traditions emphasise the discipline of silence and stillness, as critical in enabling people to listen beyond the clamouring immediacies of now – not in order to escape that clamour- but in order to live in it out of a relationship with the God of their faith tradition. (Quiet-Time Rationale, 2014)

Quiet-Time was said to offer children of a faith tradition an opportunity to learn the contemplative discipline and, through the support of parents, to deepen their own personal relationship with the God of their faith tradition, should parents wish to avail of this.

Parents from a Muslim background who participated in the study raised concerns over the Christian-centric nature of the content of the GMGY programme. The common prayer initially used in the programme was not in keeping with the practice of prayer in Islam. The common prayer used in GMGY was closely aligned to the Christian approach to prayer. There were also concerns raised over the practice of Quiet-Time in its revised format. This was seen as religious in nature, having links with Buddhist meditation.

May 2014 – children’s learning in relation to the sacraments

In 2012 schools requested clarification in relation to the sacraments of First Penance and First Holy Communion. A variety of practices had occurred throughout the existing Community National Schools in relation to the sacraments. Requirements in relation to children’s preparation varied from parish to parish. This led to different arrangements being made in each school for children receiving the sacraments. A document entitled ‘Children’s Learning in Relation to the Sacraments of First Penance and First Holy Communion’ was published in order to clarify the role of GMGY in relation to sacramental education. The document stated that:

Within the Christian faith tradition, participation in the faith community’s sacraments is integral to the spiritual and moral flourishing of the child. Therefore it too is supported by the GMGY programme. (Children’s Learning in Relation to the Sacraments of First Penance and First Holy Communion, 2012)

The document noted that for children from a Roman Catholic background, GMGY acknowledges its role in supporting the family and the parish in their pursuit of education for their children with regard to First Reconciliation, First Eucharist and Confirmation. It was outlined that GMGY has an educational role in supporting the work of the family and the faith community within the classroom. The document

also states that the programme has a role in linking content, as appropriate, with the Alive-O programme, so that children in CNSs may participate with other schools in the community, in the celebration of the mass.

The practices surrounding sacramental education continued to differ in schools and was largely dependent on the supports already available in the parish. In some schools, sacramental education was provided by the parish outside of school hours and in other schools, this education and preparation were undertaken by teachers inside the school day. The inclusion of sacramental education within the school day evoked much discussion within the CNS and it was noted as an agenda item for the majority of GMGY school network meetings⁴.

March 2015 – Citywest & Saggart CNS implement an alternative approach to BST

In 2015, Citywest and Saggart CNS implemented an alternative approach to the belief-specific aspect of the GMGY programme. Teachers in the school voted in favour of changing the traditional approach as they felt that the arrangements for BST were in opposition to the equality policy of the school. The school drafted a substitute programme. The programme was constructed around a number of agreed themes which offered equality of opportunity and opportunities for inter-belief dialogue.

September 2015 – development begins on the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class

In September 2015, work began on the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class. As described in the introduction, the development process for the curriculum differed significantly to the development process of the programme for junior infants to second class. The GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class was implemented in all Community National Schools in September 2016.

The development of the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class offered stakeholders an opportunity to reflect on their experiences of the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class.

⁴ Sacramental Education is not a feature of the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class. In June, 2017, the ETBs, in consultation with their schools, decided to move sacramental education outside of the school day.

Respondents recalled these meetings in their narratives as a time of questioning, reflection and exploration.

We were asked to define what a CNS was and then through the development of the senior curriculum [...] things started to really be looked at and listened to. I think the hard questions were asked and people were beginning to realise there was a problem [with the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class]. In more recent times with ETB taking over [...] and the Trinity research [...] and actually opening ourselves to criticism, taking it on board and moving forward with it and making those hard decisions and kind of saying we'll deal with the consequences. (Teacher 4)

June 2016 – ETBs become patron of the CNS

In June 2016 the local ETBs took over as patrons of the CNSs. The issue of having a temporary patron was reported by respondents to have hindered the process of developing a patron's programme. For others this time had been a chance to think about the model and to define its identity and characteristic spirit.

I don't think that was a time of stagnation. I think there was huge robust discussion and huge robust decisions made on ironing out the program [...] there was a lot of flux and a lot of transition, but there were constant decisions. (Principal 3)

These schools were opened as emergency schools and I feel that we have spent the past 10 years trying to catch up with that situation, trying to find an identity and a characteristic spirit and define that really clearly and consistently across the model and it has taken a full 10 years to get there. (ETBI representative)

The transfer of patronage was seen as a positive development for the CNS by all respondents. Participants in this research were hopeful that the new patron would offer clear guidance as to the 'ethos' or 'characteristic spirit' of the schools and how this is supported by GMGY.

September 2016 – ETBI begin developing a patron's framework and defining the CNS characteristic spirit

In September 2016 ETBI hired a primary support officer. The officer began developing a patron's framework which would assist schools in articulating their characteristic spirit. This document is currently in development. The characteristic spirit of the CNS was noted by principals and teachers as

something that was emergent. Principals recalled being asked during their interview for the position about how they would create an characteristic spirit in their school, rather than how they would live-out the CNS characteristic spirit.

One of the questions wasn't how would you ensure the multid denominational characteristic spirit of your school, it was how would you create a characteristic spirit in the school and it would very much have been tying in with your personal vision and your mission for the school. (Principal 2)

The characteristic spirit of the community national school and its approach to religious education was a factor for the majority of parents when choosing to send their child to a community national school. Some parents expressed a preference for their children to have a different experience of school to what their own had been, particularly in relation to religious education. There was an agreement from parents who attended the focus groups that children benefit from learning about other religions and beliefs and become more respectful of diversity through encountering differing beliefs and religions at school. Parents expressed a desire for their child's religious identity to be welcomed and supported at school. For them, it was important that this aspect of their child's identity was not overlooked at school.

Parent 1: *Growing up, in my education, in terms of faith and religion I would be very uneducated about other religions and beliefs and I really didn't want that for my kids. I wanted them to have a very broad understanding.*

Parent 2: *I didn't want him going somewhere where religion is excluded from his life, it is a huge part of his life, and [...] I wanted him to learn about other religions so that he's open and knows the difference from day one. I thought it would make him a more rounded individual, I just think a more open approach to religion than just one religion or absolutely no religion. I liked the idea of all of the religions being included.*

(Parent Focus Group 2)

Teachers reported that a lack of clarity in relation to the characteristic spirit of the community national school model in the past had an impact on the GMGY programme. Teachers were uncertain of the role of GMGY in relation to the characteristic spirit of the CNS in the initial years of the model but the work of the ETBI in defining the characteristic spirit of the CNS was viewed positively.

Teachers reported the importance of GMGY underpinning the characteristic spirit of the CNS as is currently the case, in their view, with the curriculum for third to sixth class.

Teacher 3: *I just think that the strands clearly relate to the characteristic spirit and they allow you to really link it all together whereas, in the junior programme, I don't really see much of a link.*

Teacher 5: *There are aspects of the junior programme that support the characteristic spirit and that's a strength going forward if you're trying to develop a new junior curriculum but then there are aspects that completely contradict our characteristic spirit as well.*

(Teacher Focus Group)

Teachers reported that one of the main concerns in relation to the GMGY programme was the inequitable treatment of their pupils. Belief-specific teaching and sacramental education were cited as the two areas that teachers felt currently impinged on the Community National Schools commitment to equality in education.

I think it came back to the two main kinds of bugbears of the whole thing, provision for the sacraments and the segregation of children [for belief-specific teaching] and then the Humanists, Buddhists and Hindus group. That was raised at nearly every meeting. (Teacher 5)

Well, at the time I would have felt we were claiming to be something that we weren't [...] that we were saying that it was equal and everyone was equal but then you had Humanists, Buddhists and Hindus in the same group and that's not equal. (Teacher 4)

These concerns had been raised by teachers during school network meetings and had been further explored by Faas, et al. (2018) in his research on the CNS and GMGY, outlined later in this document.

In the teacher focus group, respondents discussed their experiences of teaching belief-specific classes, where the beliefs of the pupils differed to the beliefs of the teacher.

I had the Muslim group and the first year I did that we were only up to third class and that group only had 12 children in it. [...] I remember being asked questions like 'Teacher, are you Muslim?' You're being put in a very difficult position because at the time I didn't know what my role really was. (Teacher 3)

Similar to the teacher's focus group some principals who took part in the study identified belief-specific teaching as a challenge faced by Community National Schools, particularly in catering for non-Catholic groups. The challenges differed across schools. For some, the challenge was logistical while for others the practice of belief-specific teaching was seen as working in contradiction to the characteristic spirit of the school.

We didn't feel comfortable from day one really in terms of belief-specific teaching [...] It all seemed really wrong and strange. Teachers running here and there and children being divided into this room or that room. (Principal 1)

Due to concerns at both a logistical and philosophical level different practices emerged in different schools, in consultation with their parents.

February 2017 – Trinity College Dublin research GMGY and the CNS model

In 2016, Dr Daniel Faas and Dr Aimee Smith, sociologists from Trinity College Dublin, conducted research in 11 Community National Schools. It was the first systematic study on this school sector. The study included the views of pupils, teachers and principals. The research showed that the approach to religious education in the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class enabled pupils to engage in learning about religion and learning from their peers. The study focused on children's agency, their ability to understand their own world and act on it. A summary of the findings of the research can be seen in Appendix A.

The study recommended that belief-specific teaching, at the time practised in 2 of the 11 Community National Schools, should be discontinued. The researchers argued that in the absence of the same levels of diversity as found in urban areas, there is a need for a more pro-active teaching approach in rural areas to equip students with the intercultural and multi-religious skills needed in an increasingly diverse global society.

June 2017 – ETBI discontinue BST and move sacramental education outside the school day

The practice of belief-specific teaching had been suspended in the majority of Community National Schools prior to the research by Faas, et al. (2018). In an effort to continue discussions surrounding the practice of BST and sacramental education the ETBI and NCCA organised a GMGY conference in June 2017. This was attended by DES representatives, GMGY coordinators, CNS principals, ETBI representatives and the GMGY project team from NCCA. At this conference, Dr Faas and Dr Smith presented the findings of their research. Dr Patricia Kiernan also addressed all stakeholders about inter-belief dialogue and its perceived advantages for children's learning. The group discussed the findings of the research by Dr Faas and Dr Smith and their own experiences of sacramental education in relation to GMGY. After careful consideration, the decision was taken by the ETBs and the DES to

move sacramental education to outside of the school day and to review the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class.

Michael Moriarty, the general secretary of Education and Training Boards Ireland, said the move was aimed at ensuring all children are treated equally in CNSs.

If everybody is to be treated equally, then belief instruction would have to be outside school time[...]the idea of a community national school is a clear multi-denominational school which welcomes all faiths and creates an environment where faith is respected, without any particular faith being promoted[...]This anticipated decision reflects the evolution of that model. (Moriarty, 2017)

The decisions to remove belief-specific teaching and sacramental education from within the school day were met with varying responses from parents.

I'm very annoyed. I feel that when my son came into this school I was told he would be given his Catholic belief-specific teaching and that's my faith and that's what I wanted. But now it's being taken out of the school. (Parent 2)

Not having the belief-specific element, it was great, you know, [...] the grouping and the labelling didn't sit well with me and I'm almost relieved in some respects [...] not to have that label and the segregation is a positive for me. (Parent 5)

When presented with the finding of the TCD research, which found that sacramental preparation has led to a perceived privileging of Catholic students over other groups of Community National School, parents acknowledged that it was not acceptable for CNSs and expressed their opinions regarding inclusion and equality.

Parent 4: *At the end of the day the last thing you want your child in a school is to feel excluded and isolated.*

Parent 1: *Yeah.*

Parent 2: *That's exactly it.*

Parent 4: *Yeah and can I just say that [...] this school is so focused on making people feel involved and loved and everything.*

Parent 2: *I couldn't agree more, I couldn't agree more.*

(Parent Focus Group 2)

2018 – The next steps

As part of the review, all respondents were asked about changes they would like to see in a new GMGY programme for junior infants to second class. When asked what a redeveloped GMGY programme for junior infants to second class might look like there was agreement amongst the teacher focus group

that the framework developed for the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class may be a good starting point. The approach taken in the 'Beliefs and Religions' strand was identified as a positive aspect of the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class, in particular, the inclusion of the family project. The 'We Are A CNS' strand was also commended for its ability to create a school ethic which could then be applied to other areas of the curriculum.

There was agreement that the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class could no longer be referred to as a religious education curriculum because it was about more than religion. The teachers felt that the term which most appropriately describes the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class was a multi-belief and values curriculum.

Teachers displayed a preference for a curriculum approach rather than a programme approach. In a curriculum, teachers have the autonomy to create their own lessons and resources in order for their pupils to achieve the learning outcomes. In a programme, all the lessons are prescribed.

It's what we're used to. In every other subject we are given a framework and a set of objectives and we're told to go and create lessons and create resources, that's what we're used to. I think it's not going to be much of a shock to people that we have a curriculum for GMGY now because that's what we're used to. (Teacher 5)

Teachers felt that although the new approach offered equal opportunities to all children to express their belief in school some parents would struggle with the new approach and may require additional support. Teachers stated that it should not be the role of the teacher or school alone to offer that support. There was an acknowledgement on the part of all parents that GMGY asked a lot of parents. Parents are viewed as the primary educators of their children and as such are responsible for passing on beliefs and values to their children. Catholic parents found this more challenging than parents from other religions. One of the reasons cited for this was that parents from other religions were well supported by their belief communities. Weekend religious classes were available for their children to attend and these supported parents in passing on their beliefs to their child.

We send our children to Islamic school at the weekend because it supports our faith formation. [...] We want a school where there is not faith-formation. Faith-formation should be from the home, or outside of school, in a multi-denominational school. (Parent 6)

This was not the case for the Catholic parents who took part in the focus group. Access to weekend classes was not readily available and parents felt uncertain as to how to best support their child in this area. Parents requested additional supports in relation to their children's learning in GMGY. Going forward, parents felt that it was very important that they and their belief community would be kept informed of what their child was learning so that they could support their child.

We [parents] need guidance [...] guidance on what we need to be doing [for religious education outside of school]. I didn't send him to a denominational school, so I want to know what he's going to learn about other religions so that I'm able to discuss it. (Parent 2)

I want to be aware [about other religions and beliefs] [...] so I'm able to say to him you're going to be celebrating this, we don't celebrate that but there are people in your class that do and I don't have that awareness. (Parent 3)

When asked about what types of learning experiences the GMGY curriculum should aim to offer children, parents expressed a desire for their children to be taught about other beliefs and religions, to respect others, to stand up for their beliefs and to see difference and diversity as positive aspects of society. Children should be encouraged to be active citizens in their community and to stand up for themselves and for others.

Parent 4: *Respect for everybody and respect for everybody's opinions. They may be not what you agree with but they're their opinions so you respect that.*

Parent 2: *And also to be a participant in your community, to not just stand back. That just because I'm different doesn't mean that I stand over there or just because they're different I push them away. That they have to be a participant in their community and that everybody is valued.*

Parent 3: *But also I'd hope that they'd [...] have the strength of personality to be able to deal with being different and be able to be confident enough to say what I believe in is okay. And [...] also the confidence to make others respect them, without being aggressive about it, but being able to actually stand up for themselves and say it's okay that I'm different.*

Parent 2: *Yeah. Or even to stand up for somebody if they see something is wrong.*

Parent 1: *Yeah if they see that in another setting, like outside of school, that it's a whole person thing, it's not just when you're in the classroom, it's in the whole community, it's confidence, it's respect.*

(Parent Focus Group)

For parents who were familiar with the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class, they believed that the approach taken would be the best approach to take in the junior classes. Some parents felt that the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class lacked clarity due to the lack of an overarching curricular framework that they were familiar with from other subject areas. The religious education approach used was also reported to have led to uncertainty and ambiguity about what the lessons were trying to achieve. Each lesson had multiple possible interpretations and for some parents, this was not a suitable approach for religious education.

I think if the junior programme goes the same way [as the GMGY senior curriculum] with the clarity, the transparency and the strands [...] I think it's going to be one programme, one very clear programme for both junior and senior classes. (Parent 5)

Chapter 4: Letters from Pupils

Introduction

As part of the review of the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class 36 children in community national schools were asked about their experiences of GMGY. The following section outlines the research method, the data analysis and the findings which emerged from this aspect of the review.

Research method

Qualitative focus group interviews were used to examine the experiences of children in relation to GMGY. The children in this study were pupils from third to sixth class who had experienced both the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class and the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class. Each focus group contained no more than six children. Where possible, children in the focus group ranged from 10-12 years of age. The focus groups aimed to have a balance of gender (3 male and 3 female children), a variety of ethnicities and a variety of personalities represented within each group. Groups also aimed to comprise of children from a variety religious and non-religious beliefs. For the purpose of this study, the focus groups took place in the schools the children attend, in a room the children were familiar with, to minimize distractions. The focus groups took place during the morning period (between 9 am and 11 am). The GMGY coordinator from each school moderated the focus groups. Training and an instruction manual were provided to the GMGY coordinators. A standard statement was read aloud to each group to ensure they received the same information. The format and nature of the group discussion were outlined in this statement, alongside reminders about confidentiality.

Questions for discussion

The children were shown a selection of images from the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class and the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class. They were then shown a simple timeline which highlighted significant experiences they had encountered in GMGY from junior infants to sixth class.

The children were asked to recall and reflect upon these experiences. The timeline was discussed by the group with a focus on the following questions:

- Tell me about what you remember about GMGY when you were in junior infants.
- Tell me about when you went to different classrooms to learn about your religion or belief.
- GMGY changed when you reached third class. You now learn about the 'Story', 'We are a CNS', 'Thinking time' and 'Beliefs and religions'. Tell me about what you thought about this change.
- When you were in third class you stopped having classes for religion in a different classroom. Tell me about this.
- How would you describe GMGY to your friends?

After the discussion children were asked to write a letter to the GMGY developers informing them about what they like and dislike about GMGY and what they would change if they were asked to rewrite the programme. 36 letters were collected at the end of the focus group and submitted for analysis.

Data analysis

The letters were analysed with the help of the GMGY school network. The GMGY coordinators, which make up the GMGY school network, had collected the data and for this reason, were best placed to assist in the analysis of the data. The data was coded and organised into themes. These themes were refined and interpreted by the GMGY project team.

Presentation of the findings

This section seeks to outline the pupils' responses along three themes. Firstly, it examines the pupils reported experiences of learning about beliefs and religions in GMGY. Secondly, it describes how pupils displayed a preference for pedagogies which allow for child agency to develop and thirdly, it depicts the methodologies that children reported to find most enjoyable in GMGY.

Beliefs and religions

A significant proportion of children reported that they enjoyed learning about beliefs and religions. Six children mentioned that they preferred learning about beliefs and religions together in the GMGY

curriculum for third to sixth class rather than in separate belief-specific classes. For many children their reason for requesting this was because they wanted to learn about other beliefs and religions as well as their own.

Keep the religions together because I want to learn new things. (Child 8)

Children described the new approach to learning about religions and beliefs as *inclusive* and *very interesting*.

The thing I didn't like about GMGY is that we got separated in senior infants, first class and second class. I didn't like it because we only learned about one religion.... If you were a Christian you only learned about Christianity. If you were a Catholic you would only learn about Catholic stuff and if you were a Muslim you only learn about Muslim stuff. If I were to make changes I would see if children like being in a class that only their religion is in. If they don't I would allow them to stay in their usual class and learn about different religions. (Child 1)

Three children reported that they had enjoyed the belief-specific classes and were disappointed that this aspect of the programme had been discontinued.

I also felt a bit sad about stopping religion classes in 3rd class.(Child 11)

The same children also expressed interest in learning about religions other than their own and mentioned the *inclusive* nature of the community national school as something they liked about the model.

I would describe community national schools as a place where everyone can be part of a big community and everyone is treated equally.(Child 11)

For many children, learning about beliefs and religions was seen an opportunity to become knowledgeable about an area that they did not know very much about prior to engaging with GMGY.

I really like GMGY because we can learn about other religions and you will become really intelligent. It is very interesting learning about different religions like Christianity, Buddhism and the other religions.(Child 2)

One child reported that learning about different religions and beliefs can be *confusing* but stated that it was still *great to learn about your religion and others (Child 34)*.

Child agency

Pedagogies which enable children to exercise control over their learning were mentioned in many of the pupil's letter. In particular lessons which were dialogical in nature were described favourably in letters from pupils. Five children reported that they enjoyed the self-expression that GMGY allowed them. In lessons that incorporated talk and discussion children reported that they were enabled to

share their opinions and felt *respected* and *listened to*. There was an acknowledgement that sometimes *there can be disagreements* but that this is ok as long as there is an effort made to disagree in a respectful and kind manner. For one child it allowed them to *say the thoughts they have been holding back*.

I would describe GMGY as a great way to express the way you feel and what you believe. (Child 7)

Children described the importance of child-centred approaches to dialogue in GMGY. One pupil favoured child-led discussions where the teacher acted as a facilitator of dialogue and children led the discussion.

I also didn't like the way there is a lot of where the teacher would talk and less of where the children were involved. So basically I would like where the children can discuss. (Child 30)

Methodologies

The vast majority of children reported that story was something that they really enjoyed about the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class and the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class. Many asked for the inclusion of more stories in the senior classes. Children described the stories in GMGY as *exciting* and *interesting*.

The stories are really special. They make me feel better and happier. (Child 17)

Nearly all of the children from 3rd and 4th class requested more stories, whereas children from 5th and 6th class requested additional opportunities for talk and discussion. Older children expressed an interest in learning about *deeper* concepts like politics and societal issues.

I feel when we are in 5th and 6th class we should learn about problems in the world or stuff people are protesting about. (Child 13)

Eleven children reported that they enjoyed the songs in GMGY and also suggested including more cross-curricular integration art into the lessons.

I like the songs. (Child 16)

Put art into it. (Child 31)

Three children stated that they particularly enjoyed quiet time or mindfulness and suggested adding more of this into the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class.

I would also like if they added more mindfulness. (Child 28)

Playfulness was reported as an important aspect of GMGY which children were keen to see remain. Children expressed a preference for *games* and *activities* to be part of GMGY lessons.

Chapter 5: Next Steps

Introduction

The aim of this research was to investigate the experience of pupils, parents, teachers, principals, school managers and patron representatives in relation to the development, implementation and practice of the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class in Community National Schools and in doing so, to examine and review its evolution from 2008 to 2017. Using a qualitative narrative methodology, experiences were collected and analysed to create a narrative through which a number of questions arise including:

- How is the Goodness Me, Goodness You! curriculum defined and what are the aims of the curriculum?
- What values underpin the Goodness Me, Goodness You! curriculum?
- What is the role of stakeholders and how will they be supported in these roles?
- How will the redeveloped Goodness Me, Goodness You! curriculum be structured?

The definition and aims of Goodness Me, Goodness You!

The Goodness Me, Goodness You! programme for junior infants to second class was predominantly defined as a religious education programme which sought to nurture the beliefs of the child. The Goodness Me, Goodness You! curriculum for third to sixth class is a curriculum framework described as a multi-belief and values education which seeks to nurture the whole child.

Nurture is a term frequently used in Goodness Me, Goodness You! The GMGY junior programme aims *to nurture children to live childhood to the full*, but also uses '*belief-nurture*'. In this study respondents reported that the meaning of nurture in the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class was not clearly defined and was associated with '*faith-formation*' in belief-specific lessons. The term

nurture is not uncommon in documents pertaining to education in Ireland. It appears in the Introduction to the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) and *Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009). The term comes from the Latin word *nutritura* which means to nurse, nourish and to promote growth. However, Cooling (2010) notes that where nurture is associated with a religious or spiritual dimension, it is difficult to untangle it from past connections to 'faith-formation'.

In later years of development, the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class stated that nurture in GMGY is not intended to be associated with 'faith-formation', however, a reported dearth of guidance concerning the concept of nurture in GMGY had led to correlations between 'belief-nurture' and 'faith-formation' in the initial implementation of GMGY.

In light of this finding stakeholders have been asked to consider if the term belief-nurture will continue to be used in Goodness Me, Goodness You! It has been proposed that the form of religious education in the 'Beliefs and religions' strand will be referred to as 'multi-denominational religious education'. In this strand children will learn 'about' a variety of beliefs and religions and 'from' beliefs and religions. Learning 'from' religion will be enabled through engagement in inter-belief dialogue in the classroom where children express their own beliefs, develop their religious literacy and are enabled to understand and respect their own and others' belief.

Stakeholders have also been asked to consider the aims of GMGY. Teacher respondents highlighted that GMGY is more than a religious education curriculum. It incorporates arts education, values education, philosophy and multi-denominational religious education. Consultation with stakeholders will examine if the breadth of learning experiences provided for children in GMGY are clearly articulated in the current aims of the curriculum.

The values of Goodness Me, Goodness You!

Goodness Me, Goodness You! is a curriculum for Community National Schools. Community National Schools are state schools and as such promote the values of the state. Concepts of respect, citizenship, human rights and equality are all explored by children in the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class. Respondents reported that at the beginning of the CNS's history there was an absence of a clearly articulated characteristic spirit. Respondents described the characteristic spirit as something that was emergent from school life. Parent respondents stated that their choice of school was based on their perceived ideas on what the characteristic spirit of the school was, often described as one of inclusion and mutual respect.

The ETBs have begun developing a patron's framework which will clearly articulate the characteristic spirit of Community National Schools. In the past year the patron, in consultation with stakeholders, decided to discontinue the practice of 'belief-specific teaching' from the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class and sacramental education from within school hours. This decision was taken in order to ensure the equitable treatment of all children. Such decisions suggest that the value of equality is one to which the CNS is aspiring towards. Alignment between the patron's framework and the GMGY curriculum will be essential moving forward.

As a process curriculum the GMGY curriculum aims to reflect the values emerging from grass-roots practice of Community National Schools. For this reason, the values of inclusion, respect, equality, human rights and child-centred education are at the heart of the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class. In consultation with stakeholders these values and others will be further articulated and defined in the coming months and applied to the redeveloped curriculum for junior infants to sixth class.

Supporting teachers and parents

The position of the teacher in GMGY lessons for the junior programme has been reported as being an *issue* (Nelson, 2017). No formal definition of the role of the teacher was provided in the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class. The GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class defines the teacher's role as one of a *positive role model* and a *facilitator of respectful engagement*. The respondents identified the ambiguity of the position of teacher in the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class as a concern.

The findings suggest that a clear definition of the role of the teacher is required in GMGY. Teachers will need to be supported with resources which elaborate on these roles in a real and practical manner. Continued professional development (CPD) for teachers will be essential to ensuring a successful implementation of a redeveloped GMGY curriculum. Such CPD could also address issues around pedagogical approaches as well as engaging with the role of parents.

Parents are identified in GMGY as the primary educators of their child. The review found that some parents were unsure of their role in relation to GMGY. The GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class explains the role of the parent as a *reciprocal relationship between home and school*. A clear explanation of the role of parents in relation to GMGY, in the form of supporting materials, should be considered as an accompaniment to the redeveloped GMGY curriculum.

The data showed that regular consultation with teachers and parents can lead to successful curriculum development and implementation. Consultation with parents through the formation of GMGY

committees in each school and the role of the GMGY school network group were viewed very positively by all respondents. It is hoped that this extensive consultation with parents and teachers will continue to inform development.

The structure of GMGY

In the absence of a rationale and clear guidance for schools the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class GMGY was adapted to meet the needs of the various Community National Schools in which it was employed. An example of this evolution was described in this study and was also documented by Faas et al. (2018) in their study of leadership in Community National Schools. At the time of data collection, the research notes that *two schools remain in-keeping with the original GMGY programme* for junior infants to second class, where children are separated into religious groups for three to four weeks of the year, while the majority have suspended this practice. The majority of principals and teachers who participated in this study reported that the 'belief-specific' aspect of the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class was seen to contradict the characteristic spirit and values of their school. In an attempt to rectify this some respondents report making school-level adaptations in order for the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class to better align with the values their school promotes (Faas, et al., 2018).

The GMGY programme for junior infants to second class was developed on a lesson by lesson basis. Teacher respondents reported their uncertainty as to how best to utilise the programme due to its divergence from regular curricula structures. They also noted that the aim and purpose of the programme were unclear. Contrary to their intention, the prescribed nature of lessons disempowered teachers and provided for less engagement with the content of the lessons.

Through consultation with stakeholders it has been decided that the GMGY programme for junior infants to second class will be redeveloped in line with the curriculum framework structure employed in the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class. Thus, the four existing strands of 'Story', 'We are a community national school', 'Thinking time' and 'Beliefs and religions' may be further developed and considered as appropriate across the curriculum from junior infants to sixth class. The overall aims of the curriculum and the philosophy of GMGY will be developed more fully and in particular, the question of whether one strand should be the leading or overarching strand, will be clarified.

Summary of the next steps

The Goodness Me, Goodness You! curriculum for junior infants to sixth class will be developed in partnership with the Education and Training Boards of Ireland, local Education and Training Boards, Community Nationals Schools (principals, teachers, parents and children) and the Department of Education and Skills. The curriculum will further develop and consider the adaption of the structure utilised in the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class. The concept of belief nurture will be further considered to examine if it is the most appropriate term to describe the learning process that takes place in the Beliefs and religions strand of the curriculum.

Consultation with stakeholders about the aims and definition of Goodness Me, Goodness You! will be central to development of the curriculum and its rationale. The NCCA and the ETBs will work collaboratively to clarify and articulate the values that underpin Goodness Me, Goodness You! to ensure it supports the characteristic spirit of the CNS, as is expressed in the patron's framework.

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Appendix A – A Summary of the TCD Research

Findings

The study found that:

- Pupils expressed a preference for the whole-classroom approach where they would learn together in one class with their classmates of different beliefs, as opposed to being separated into ‘belief-specific’ groups. Teachers and principals also raised concerns that belief-specific teaching could not provide for all beliefs equally.
- Sacramental preparation has led to a perceived privileging of Catholic students over other groups in Community National Schools. The Community National Schools offer sacramental preparation for communion and confirmation within the school day. The amount of time dedicated to preparation differed throughout the schools, largely influenced by parish demands.
- Many teachers in the study felt inadequately prepared to deliver parts of the GMGY programme and lacked confidence in operating in culturally and religiously diverse classrooms.
- Differences exist between urban and rural (often less diverse) locations of the Community National Schools. In some of the rural schools, the study found children would have less knowledge of other beliefs, which can be attributed both to (lack of) delivery of the beliefs component of the GMGY curriculum for third to sixth class as well as the level of diversity in the school.
- Multi-ethnic friendships were widely reported throughout all schools and belief groups, with shared interests forming the basis of friendship more so than (religious) background. Pupils formed friendships around shared and common interests rather than religious or ethnic backgrounds.

