Parent-school partnership: report of survey findings from parents, principals and clergy

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Parent-School Partnership

Report of Survey Findings from Parents, Principals and Clergy

Diocese of Lismore

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Overview

The following report presents the findings from three surveys conducted by the Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University, in partnership with the Catholic Schools Office, Lismore, during August - September 2014. The surveys gathered the views of parents/carers, principals and clergy on the topic of parent-school partnership. This report contains the executive summary, recommendations, background, literature review, results, discussion of key findings, references and appendices. A summary of key results for partners, a two page summary for parents, and a Powerpoint presentation of key results are also available separately.

Executive summary

Background, aim and research questions

An important aspect of the mission of the Catholic Schools Office (CSO) is to address the education of the whole child, including their social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, in close partnership with parents. There is now strong evidence that there are important outcomes for all stakeholders when parents are meaningfully involved in school-life. For many years, the CSO has had in place a well-resourced, system-wide approach to supporting parent-school partnership, while encouraging schools to implement initiatives in ways that work best at the local level. Given most of the CSO schools are parish-based, these initiatives incorporate a parent-school-parish perspective. The latest Diocesan wide initiative is ‘Proclaim Lismore’ (2013-15) which is a three-year collaborative venture to enhance and strengthen the foundations of Catholic culture within Catholic education. In 2014 the particular focus is on parental partnership.

The CSO sought the evaluation and research services of the Centre for Children and Young People (CCYP) to assist its review of parent/school partnership initiatives across the
Lismore Diocese. The research aimed to identify how different stakeholders – parents, principals, clergy – view current and future parent involvement, including whether this has positive outcomes in relation to academic performance, wellbeing and faith formation. In addition, the research aimed to identify existing national and international evidence about parental partnership – what works, why and how – to assist the CSO in with future planning.

The study also addresses a significant gap in a recent Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage project (LP110100656) on wellbeing in schools, led by the CCYP and involving the CSO as one of the Linkage partners (Graham and colleagues, 2012 - 2014). This research included principal, teacher and student views on wellbeing but did not include parents due to funding constraints. However, the findings of the research pointed to the critical role parents play in matters of children’s wellbeing at school. The current research project will go some way in addressing this gap concerning optimal approaches to parental involvement by surveying key stakeholders; parents, school principals and clergy. The study sought to answer five research questions:

1. What does parent-school ‘partnership’ mean?
2. Why is parent-school partnership important?
3. How is parent-school partnership currently facilitated and/or experienced in the regional Diocese?
4. Are current approaches to parent-school partnership in the regional Diocese perceived to be effective?
5. How could parent-school partnership be best planned, supported, measured and monitored into the future?
Method

The survey gathered the views of 283 parents/carers (53 males, 215 females, 15 gender not reported), who had children attending Catholic schools in Lismore Diocese from Kindergarten through to Year 12. Twenty two school principals completed the survey, consisting of 17 primary school principals (eight males and nine females) and three secondary school principals (all male). Two male principals did not report whether they were from a primary or secondary school. Principals had worked in schools for an average of 30.1 years ($SD = 7.85$, range 14 - 41 years).

Findings

1. Parents, principals and clergy generally reported a favourable school culture with regard to parents.

2. This favourable culture requires close attention as there is only minimal unity of purpose regarding parental partnership. The data revealed areas where unity exists and at the same time revealed differences that potentially diminish cohesion and a shared sense of purpose within the school community. Examples of this are:

   A) While “better values and morals” was the agreed first choice of parents, principals and clergy for why parents choose a Catholic school, there was a marked lack of agreement regarding the other reasons.

   B) While parents, principals and clergy viewed parent-school partnership as very important, they believed that it was not the practical norm in schools. Moreover, there was a discrepancy between parent and principal/clergy views regarding parents’ competency in helping their children with their homework, and in their ability to nurture their child’s religious development.
C) Parents, principals and clergy were in agreement that the main barrier to forming stronger parent-school partnership is lack of time. However, the remaining perceived barriers varied across groups.

D) While principals and clergy thought parent views were very welcome in their schools, parents felt their views were only somewhat welcome.

3. Parents and clergy were invited to most school events, although in the crucial areas of community development and advice to principals, namely, Parents and Friends, Parent Assembly and Parish School Forum, attendance by clergy and parents was minimal. Moreover, parents’ experience with other parents and parent initiatives in the school were mixed.

4. There was strong agreement that the Principals’ role is very important for building stronger parent partnerships within schools.

5. Many parents, all principals, and all clergy were aware of the Catholic School Parent Assembly, were clear about what it could offer parents and Catholic education, but overall they rated it as only mildly useful.

6. Collaboration, shared responsibility and dialogue appear to be the principles and processes required to take parental partnership forward, as evidenced by many of the responses to the open-ended item.

7. There were no policy guidelines for parental partnership cited by participants in the research.

8. The data does not reveal any evidence that parental partnership and engagement in Catholic education is guided by a research based framework.

9. Based on the above findings, including qualitative comments, the effective embedding of parental partnership will require culture change processes and opportunities to develop parents, clergy and principals understandings, skills and practices.
Recommendations

1. Develop a policy statement with a set of agreed outcomes for parent partnership and engagement in Catholic education, based on key research evidence, ‘grey’ literature in education, relevant Church teaching about the purpose of Catholic schools and the results of recent consultations across the Diocese of Lismore.

2. Develop a framework to guide the policy implementation referenced to the Commonwealth Government’s Family School Partnership Framework – A Guide for Schools and Families with its seven dimensions of: communicating; connecting learning at home and at school; building community and identity; recognising the role of family; consultative decision-making; collaborating beyond the school; and participating.

3. Promote a culture of parent partnership and engagement based upon principles and processes of collaboration, shared responsibility and dialogue.

4. Clarify, seek agreement and document the roles and expectations of clergy, parents, principals and staff in promoting parental partnership and engagement.

5. Develop a plan for professional development and support of principals, clergy, parents and staff members to undertake their roles in parental partnership and engagement.

6. Develop an agreed set of programs and processes to support and enhance parent partnership and engagement. Particular special attention should be given to the role of the Parent Assembly.
Report of Online Survey Findings: Introduction

Background and rationale

The Catholic Schools Office (CSO), Lismore, provides education support services to 33 primary and 12 secondary schools in the regional footprint extending from Tweed Heads to Laurieton, NSW. An important aspect of the mission of the CSO is to address the education of the whole child, including their social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, in close partnership with parents. As demonstrated in the literature review that follows, research shows that there are important outcomes for all stakeholders when parents are meaningfully involved in school-life, such as improved student wellbeing, academic achievement and motivation. Notwithstanding this key role of parents, school-parent relations remains an under-researched area (Gurr, Drysdale, & Walkey, 2012).

For many years, the CSO has had in place a well-resourced, system-wide approach to supporting parent-school partnership, while encouraging schools to implement initiatives in ways that work best at the local level. Given most of the CSO schools are parish-based, these initiatives incorporate a parent-school-parish perspective. The latest Diocesan wide initiative is ‘Proclaim Lismore’ (2013-15) which is a three-year collaborative venture to enhance and strengthen the foundations of Catholic culture within Catholic education. In 2014 the particular focus is on parental partnership. Other parent run organisations are currently running in the Catholic sector that further manage, promote and foster parent-school partnerships, these being the Council of Catholic School parents and the Catholic Schools Parents Assembly, Lismore.

The Council of Catholic School Parents (CCSP) represents the interests of all Catholic school parents in NSW with members from the ‘eleven diocesan parent bodies and the group of Catholic congregational schools’ (Bowlby, 1969). The CCSP is a ‘significant contributor to the advancement of the partnership between families and schools’ and is dedicated to
improving outcomes for students by providing leadership, advocacy and support for all parents.

The Catholic Schools Parent Assembly, Lismore, recognises that parents ‘are the greatest influence on a child’s life and education’ with every parent needing ‘support to fulfil their faith and educational responsibilities to their children’ (Bowlby, 1973). The Parent Assembly aims to help parents ‘build partnerships with parish schools’ and ‘engage with the priorities’ of the Catholic Schools Office (Bowlby, 1973).

The CSO has sought the evaluation and research services of the Centre for Children and Young People (CCYP) to assist its review of parent/school partnership initiatives across the Lismore Diocese. The research aimed to identify how different stakeholders – parents, principals, clergy – view current and future parent involvement, including whether this has positive outcomes in relation to academic performance, wellbeing and faith formation. In addition, the research aimed to identify existing national and international evidence about parental partnership – what works, why and how – to assist the CSO in with future planning. Models, such as those by Epstein and Hoover-Dempsey, and the findings of empirical research stemming from these models (see literature review below), are resources that may assist local schools and education systems to develop stronger and more collaborative parent-school partnerships.

The present study also addresses a significant gap in a recent Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage project (LP110100656) on wellbeing in schools, led by the CCYP and involving the CSO as one of the Linkage partners (Graham and colleagues, 2012 - 2014). This research included principal, teacher and student views on wellbeing but did not include parents due to funding constraints. However, the findings of the research pointed to the critical role parents play in matters of children’s wellbeing at school. The current research
project will go some way in addressing this gap concerning optimal approaches to parental involvement by surveying key stakeholders; parents, school principals and clergy.

It is expected that the survey results will convey information to the Catholic Schools Office, Lismore, about parents’, principals’ and clergy’s current understandings and experience of parent-school partnership. The survey results identify and provide measures of participants’ attitudes, hopes and perceived barriers in relation to parent-school partnerships. The results will inform and guide the CSO Lismore in planning, supporting, measuring and monitoring future parent-school partnership initiatives. An expected outcome of the study findings includes improved parent-school partnerships, which will subsequently lead to benefits for all stakeholders, including students. It is also expected that results will inform future qualitative research with staff and parents.

To recap, there is a gap in knowledge of stakeholders’ views of parent-school partnerships. The present study adds to what is known about how parents, principals and clergy experience and view parent-school partnerships. The survey asks each stakeholder to share their experiences, attitudes, perceived barriers and hopes for the future in relation to parent partnerships. Bringing these different views into dialogue will identify tensions, gaps and areas of common concern. Such knowledge will be useful to inform research, theories, policy and practice.

Literature Review

Policies on parent school partnership

Policies in Australian state education systems in the 1980s placed home-school interaction as an adjunct to remediation of behavioural concerns (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012). In recent years, publications outlining best practice in home-school partnerships have become more prevalent on government and educational websites (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012). The Family-School Partnerships Project (Saulwick Muller Social Research, 2006) and the
Australian Government's Family-School Partnerships Framework (Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations [DEERWR], 2008) outline the principles, supporting structures and key elements of home-school partnerships and parental involvement in education. They also acknowledge the challenges of forming and maintaining partnership and the cultural changes that teachers and parents may need to make to support effective collaboration. In particular, principals and teachers need to acknowledged the role of the parents, not only as "first educators" but as "continuing educators", and to find a place for parents in the educational life of the school (Saulwick Muller Social Research, 2006, p. 15). Concomitantly, parents need to recognise the importance of their educative role, and to see the value they can bring to the educative process (Saulwick Muller Social Research, 2006). These documents reflect the growing recognition at a national level of the value of collaboration between parents and teachers, however, they also indicate that these cultural changes have not yet been achieved within Australian schools (Saulwick Muller Social Research, 2006).

Some studies have focused on gauging the concerns and issues surrounding parent-partnership within the Catholic school context, including the reasons why parents choose Catholic schools for their children, as this decision demonstrates parental expectations of schools and sets the scene for their relationship with the school.

**Why parents choose Catholic schools**

Hugonnet (1997) found the reasons parents send their children to Catholic schools falls into three broad categories: religious, social-emotional and physical-intellectual. Religious reasons included living a full Christian life, understanding the Catholic faith, and finding a Christian value system for living. Social-emotional reasons included learning to be hopeful, forgiving, compassionate and considerate. Physical-intellectual reasons included gaining knowledge, caring for physical needs of the learner, being a learner for life and being
adaptable. Flynn and colleagues (Flynn, 1993; Mok & Flynn, 1998) found that most parents did not emphasise religious reasons for choosing a Catholic school for their child. Parents were found to rank the curriculum highly, but religious reasons as low, in their reasons for choosing Catholic school (Flynn, 1993). Thus, previous literature suggests that parents choose a Catholic school mainly for physical-intellectual reasons. This literature also captures a sense of concern that the gap between the goals of Catholic schools and the expectations of students and parents is widening (Warren, Young, & Hanifin, 2003). The present study gathers the views of not only parents, but also principal and clergy views on the reasons parents choose Catholic schools, so that any differences in perspectives can be identified.

Benefits of parent-school partnership

There is now international consensus and “abundant evidence” (Bastiani, 2000, p. 35) that there are important outcomes for all stakeholders when parents are meaningfully involved in school-life. These outcomes for students include improved wellbeing and mental health (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Emerson, Fear, Fox, & Sanders, 2012; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Warner, 2010), academic achievement and increased motivation (Christenson & Hays, 2004; Emerson et al., 2012; Jeynes, 2007; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2007; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Warren & Young, 2002; Warren et al., 2003), improved school attendance (Sheldon, 2007) and greater engagement with school, resulting in fewer behavioural problems (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Schools and communities also benefit from improved school effectiveness, stronger collaboration and innovation in schools, additional and more efficient use of resources, enhanced community connectedness and stronger social networks (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, n.d.). Many studies now report that parents and teachers agree that parent-school partnership is valuable and beneficial for children’s learning needs (e.g., Jeynes, 2007; Ludicke & Kortman, 2012; Warren & Young, 2002). However, as shown below, the terms
used to describe parent-school partnership are varied and are often used in ways that have different meanings. This lack of consensus about the meaning of terms leads to confusion in expectations of parent roles and processes used in schools in relation to parent partnership.

**Definitions of parent partnership, involvement, and engagement**

The literature makes frequent reference to the notion of *parent partnership*, although as yet, there is no universally agreed upon definition. Glueck and Reschly (2014) and Reschly and Christenson (2012) delineate between relationships and partnerships. They state that relationships infer connection and interactions between the two learning domains of home and school, and act simply as a function, whereas partnerships refer to “a specific type of relationship…one characterized by collaboration and joint ownership of responsibilities and accountability for [student] outcomes” (Glueck & Reschly, 2014, p. 297). Other authors have also identified collaboration (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations, n.d.) and reciprocity within relationships (Delsandes, 2001; Dunst, Johanson, Rounds, Trivette & Hambly, 1992) as central tenets of parent-school partnership. These definitions of partnership imply parents need to be viewed as equal partners with the school in the education of their children, rather than as guests in the school.

The parent-school partnership literature often refers to the related terms *parent involvement* and *parent engagement*, which both signal parents’ desire to be connected with the school. Parent involvement is often classified as home-based and/or school-based (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey, Sandler, Green, & Walker, 2007; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Home-based involvement includes practices that take place outside of school which help children to achieve academically and engage them in intellectual activities, such as visiting the museum (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007, pp. 374-375). School-based involvement includes contact with schools, such as parental involvement in school meetings, talking with teachers, or higher-level involvement in advocacy (Pomerantz et al.,
Recently, parental involvement has been extended to also include *academic socialisation*, which refers to the extent to which parents communicate educational goals, values and aspirations to their child (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Academic socialisation (Hill & Tyson, 2009) refers to parent behaviours that positively impact on learning and academic outcomes. Where home-based involvement may involve a parent helping a child with homework, creating an environment at home that is conducive to learning, and taking children on educational outings, academic socialisation involves communication between parents and their children about parental expectations for education and the value and enjoyment of learning, talking about learning strategies and making links between school work and other topics such as current events, as well as fostering educational aspirations and plans for the future (Emerson et al., 2012; Hill & Tyson, 2009). Academic socialisation assists children’s decision making and problem solving skills and develops their autonomy and academic abilities (Emerson et al., 2012).

Parent engagement can be understood as an outcome of meaningful parent-school partnerships. Emerson, Fear, Fox and Sanders (2012) defined engagement as the responsibility of the school, including a whole-school approach “between families, schools and communities, raising parental awareness of the benefits of engaging in their children’s education, and providing them with the skills to do so” (p. 7). The Catholic Education Office in Melbourne (2013) describe parent engagement as “developing relationships with the primary caregivers of students to empower them as active partners in their child’s learning” (p. 5). Harris and Goodall (2008) argue that involving parents in school activities has an important social and community function, but it is only through engagement of parents in learning at home that is most likely to result in positive differences to learning outcomes.

**Models of parent-school partnership**
Scholars, governments, schools and education systems have developed models and frameworks of parent-school partnerships with the goal of understanding and improving parent relationships with schools to ultimately facilitate children and young people’s academic achievements and wellbeing (Epstein, Sanders, & Simon, 2002; Ludicke & Kortman, 2012; Porter, 2008; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990). Some models describe parent-school partnership as a typology, and these assist in classification of the type or extent of parent partnership occurring in a school. For example, Spry and Graham (2009) position parent-school partnerships into three categories of increasing involvement ranging from ‘silent’ (in which parents are passive and teachers are viewed as experts), through to ‘managed’ (in which parent-school relationships are supervised by the school and parents are viewed as only being interested in their own child’s needs), to ‘activist’ (in which parents are engaged with the school as equal allies with teachers and are viewed as morally interested in outcomes for all children and as co-leaders and joint decision makers with staff) (Gurr et al., 2012).

Other models offer a deeper explanatory level of understanding of the processes and structures of parent-school partnership. The best known and influential of these models are Epstein’s overlapping spheres of influence (Bowlby, 1969; Epstein, 1992, 2001; Epstein & Salinas, 2004), Hoover-Dempsey, Sandler, Green and Walker’s (2007) model of parent involvement, and the enabling and empowerment model (Bouchard, 1998, cited in Deslandes, 2001; Dunst, Johanson, Rounds, Trivette, & Hambly, 1992). Each model will be described in turn below.

Epstein’s (1992) model postulates three overlapping spheres of influence on the student – school, family and community. Each sphere has the capacity to contribute to successful family-school partnerships to produce “a true community of learners” (Epstein & Salinas, 2004, p. 12). When schools and parents work together “…students hear that school is
important from their parents and teachers and perceive that caring people in both environments are investing and coordinating time and resources to help them succeed” (Epstein, 1992, p. 3). According to Epstein (1992, 2004), the three overlapping spheres of influence manifest in six types of parent-school involvement:

- **Type 1: Basic obligations of families ‘parenting’** – Providing positive home conditions that support learning and behaviour (such as for health and safety, preparing children for school and maintaining development between grades). Schools help families to develop the knowledge and skills they need to understand children at each grade level (i.e., workshops and parent education).

- **Type 2: Basic obligations of schools ‘communicating’** – Schools communicate with families about children’s progress and school programs, along with helping children make important decisions at each grade level (courses, programs, activities). Schools strengthen partnerships by encouraging two-way communication.

- **Type 3: Involvement at school** – Parents and other volunteers who assist teachers and children in classrooms or other areas of the school are involved. Schools vary schedules so that more parents can participate. Schools recruit and train volunteers so they are helpful to teachers, students and school improvement efforts.

- **Type 4: Involvement in learning activities at home** - Teachers request and guide parents to assist children’s learning at home. Schools enable parents to understand how to help their children at home across the grades.

- **Type 5: Involvement in decision making, governance, and advocacy** - Parents serve on P & C, management teams and other committees or school groups and/or activists in other groups in the community. Schools assist parents to be leaders by training them in decision-making and communication skills and including parents as true contributors to school decisions.
• **Type 6: Collaboration and exchange with community organisations** – Schools collaborate with agencies, businesses and community organisations in education and to provide families access to community and support services that strengthen home conditions and assist learning and development.

Epstein’s (1992) original model tended to view the school as having authority on educating the child, and viewed parents as requiring training and guidance, rather than being respected and valued for their knowledge of the child, and the skills and perspectives that parents bring to the school. Epstein’s more recent publications (e.g., Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010) have revised this view, and instead position parents, schools and communities as equal partners, and importantly, also argues that students have an active voice in school matters that affect them. Epstein states that students play a key role in parent-school partnership as they link educators, families, and communities to each other and therefore need to have a meaningful participatory role in this partnership (Epstein, 2001, p. 4).

Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues (2007) developed a model to predict student achievement based on parental involvement in their children’s schooling, thus assisting understanding of the underlying process of developing strong parent-school partnership. The model includes five levels: (1) parent’s motivational beliefs and perceptions of their role in their children’s education and their self-efficacy surrounding their role, parents’ perceptions of invitations for involvement from others, and parents’ perceived life context; (2) parental involvement behaviours, which include encouragement, modelling, reinforcement and instruction in home and school settings, (3) children’s perceptions of parent involvement, (4) child attributes that lead to academic outcomes, and (5) student achievement. Each level is postulated to impact on those above it.
The family enabling and empowerment model (Bouchard, 1998, cited in Deslandes, 2001; Dunst et al., 1992) advocates parent-teacher relationships characterised by complete sharing of knowledge, skills and experiences. Empowerment refers to each person’s actualisation of their resources and competency, while enabling refers to parents’ ability to define their role and influence the type of collaboration between themselves and school staff (Dunst et al., 1992). This model takes into account parents’ and teachers’ expectations and views, and is based on the concept of equality. Dunst et al. presented four characteristics which facilitate parent-school partnership: (a) emotional dispositions or attitudes based on trust, commitment, generosity, empathy and understanding, (b) intellectual predispositions or beliefs based on honesty, trust, mutual respect, flexibility and sharing responsibility, (c) open, two-way communication that involves active listening and self-reflection, and (d) actions that manifest attitudes and beliefs. In this model parents are viewed as educational resources, who have the capacity to enrich the teacher within a relationship of mutual exchange (Deslandes, 2001).

While these models help to understand the content and process of parent-school partnerships, the theoretical foundations for family-school partnership remain underdeveloped (Daniel, 2011). Of critical importance for children’s learning and wellbeing outcomes, there is a gap between the rhetoric of partnership and practice (Ludicke & Kortman, 2012). As noted by Reay (2009), “in reality parent-teacher relationships are characterised by the struggle for control and definition” (p.53). Lumby (2007) argues that teacher views are privileged in schools partly due to their greater expertise, but also to perceptions that teachers are motivated by community interests. In comparison, parents are frequently viewed as self-interested, focusing only on their child’s needs rather than the greater good, and although parents are capable of contributing to schools and schooling, lack of democratic partnership within schools renders their voice as denied or silent (Lumby,
Following is a brief review of the evidence surrounding such tensions between the views of parents and teachers, which act as barriers to fulfilling and beneficial partnerships.

**Tensions in parent and teacher views of parents’ roles**

Role construction consists of expectations and beliefs which guide behaviour and serve as a basis with which to interpret one’s own behaviour and others’ behaviours (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). Parental views of appropriate roles in relation to their child’s schooling is formed by family, school and cultural background, beliefs about how children develop and their responsibility regarding desired outcomes for their child, as well as social norms and perceptions of what others expect of them (Emerson et al., 2012; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). The extent to which parents participate in their child’s schooling depends to large extent on how they view their parental role. Teacher expectations of parent roles also shape parent-school interaction.

Some key studies on parent partnership from both qualitative and mixed-method approaches have asked parents and school staff, particularly teachers, about their views on the role of parents in parent-school partnerships. Warren and Young (2002) conducted a mixed-methods study and reported that Australian parents were keen to be involved in their child’s learning at home and would like to communicate with the school about how to be helpful. In contrast, teachers from the four schools in their study viewed parents’ roles as limited to helping within the classroom. Limited teacher expectations about the role of parents was also reported by Christianakis (2011), who interviewed 15 teachers in one elementary school in an urban setting in Northern California. Teachers at the school valued parents’ help in the classroom, but held negative and stereotypical attitudes toward parents who did not help at school. The teachers did not treat parents as equal partners and parents did not have a say about the kind of help they could or should provide, instead teachers
assigned parents tasks that they determined to be helpful in the classroom due to lack of teachers’ aides.

Further tensions were identified by Ludicke and Kortman (2012), who sampled parents and teachers from a Catholic secondary school in a regional city in Australia and used semi-structured interviews to ask about their understandings of their roles in collaborative partnerships. They found key differences between parents’ and teachers’ beliefs about the practices of communicating, sharing knowledge and developing strategies towards the child’s learning. Parents emphasised involvement in supervision of homework and attendance at meetings and other formal school events as constituting parent involvement with school. However, teachers emphasised volunteering, communications, community involvement, homework support, participation on councils and parenting skills workshops. Despite subscribing to best-practice rhetoric, teachers did not appear to value parents as a source of knowledge regarding the child's access to learning programs or the child's learning style. The differences in parent and teacher understandings and expectations of partnership roles contributed to ongoing strained relationships within the schools.

Another Australian study by Warren et al. (2003) focused on the values underpinning successful parent-school partnerships in six Queensland Catholic school communities. Warren et al. conducted a mixed-method investigation, consisting of questionnaires with follow-up focus groups. Their two key research questions focused on parent and teacher beliefs in relation to the key characteristics that underpin successful parent school partnerships in Catholic communities, and parent beliefs on key characteristics of a faith community. Their results showed that while both teachers and parents believed that the school often assisted with their child’s spiritual growth, parents reported more frequently sharing ways of helping their child grow spiritually than was perceived by teachers. This difference in observation of the roles played by parents in assisting their child’s development
was further reflected in the way each cohort viewed the important characteristics of successful parent-school partnership, as discussed below.

**Parent and teacher views of characteristics of successful parent-school partnership**

The parents and teachers who took part in Warren et al.’s (2003) study classified the key characteristics of a good partnership between school and family into four categories: *good communication* between school and the family, underlying *socio-emotional values* (i.e., trust, honesty, respect, openness, valuing all people in the community, understanding and friendliness), *learning*, and *other*. Parents emphasised both communication and socio-emotional dimensions. Parents valued the importance of good communication between the principal and parents, frequent newsletters, and expected that school personnel would be available to discuss their child’s needs in an open door policy throughout their schooling. In contrast, teachers rarely mentioned communication and commented that it took too much time to prepare newsletters and maintain high levels of communication.

Communication was also cited by Roffey (2004) as critical in the facilitation of parent partnership. Some schools overtly conveyed an inclusive ethos that often stemmed from strong leadership (Roffey, 2004). Roffey also stressed that informal conversation between parents and teachers provides a message of equality, and that teachers’ interpersonal skills are paramount to fostering positive interactions. She found that parents valued transparency in their interactions with teachers, and highlighted the need for the teacher to understand the family context.

In regard to social-emotional values, Roffey (2004) found that parents emphasised what they wanted for their children (e.g., mutual respect) and how they wanted to be treated within the school community. Parents wanted recognition from teachers and the school that they are essential participants in their child’s learning, and that this recognition be continued from primary school through to secondary school. While teachers agreed that they need to
value parents as partners in learning, they also said that parents need to value them. Furthermore, while reciprocity was espoused by the teachers, embedded in their comments was an underlying message that teachers’ know best about children’s learning. Roffey’s (2004) study signalled the need for deep attitudinal and cultural change in relation to parent partnership. It also highlights the importance of relationships for fostering strong parent school partnerships, and how differences in role construction form barriers to parent partnership and all the benefits it brings with it. Other studies have identified barriers that range from pragmatic obstacles through to lack of democratic systems, as briefly discussed below.

**Barriers to parent-school partnership: Tensions in parent and teacher views**

Several studies have reported various barriers that prevent parents participating at school events. For example, parents’ busy schedules, lack of childcare availability, both parents working during school hours, role perceptions, problems with effective communication between school and home, perceptions of whether teachers want parents involved (Watson, Sanders-Lawson, & McNeal, 2012), financial constraints, lack of transport, shift work, single parenthood, prior negative experiences with the school, and children not wanting parents involved in school life (Baker, 1997). Furthermore, schools rather than parents are often “hard to reach” due to lack of, or poor communication, and a sense that the schools are a “closed system” that disempowers parents (Harris & Goodall, 2008, pp. 277, 285).

This disempowerment is reflected in tensions in relationships between teachers and parents and the different beliefs and expectations held by teachers and parents within these relationships. DeCastro-Ambrosetti and Cho (2005) surveyed pre-service and in-service teachers and found their stereotyped negative attitudes toward parents from minority groups created a communication barrier between school and home and produced an adversarial
atmosphere. Taking courses that included cultural diversity concepts positively influenced many of the pre-service and in-service teachers’ attitudes towards issues of diversity (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005). Interviews with 16 pairs of parents and teachers in two Norwegian schools (Westergard & Galloway, 2010) identified that parental disillusion with their child’s school impacts on the quality of the partnership between parents and teachers. This tension was reduced if either a parent or a teacher took action to improve the relationship.

Lumby (2007) interviewed parents and investigated the reasons why parents’ views on curriculum, pedagogy, and the purpose of schooling are commonly seen as less relevant or legitimate than those of teachers. Lumby argued that privileging teachers’ views is grounded on the belief that they “are motivated towards the public good rather than their own private benefit” (Davies & Coates, 2005, p. 119), whereas parents are stereotypically said to be only interested in their own child’s interests. Lumby found that the silencing of parents’ views is more likely due to their different values and expectations and their critical attitude to schooling and individual teachers. Although the models and rhetoric suggest otherwise, current parent school relationships may not be democratic partnerships, but instead be attempts to educate parents on professional views, or as tokenistic instances when parents may speak but are not heard (Vincent & Martin, 2005). Indeed, Gurr et al. (2012) recently found that parental involvement in Victorian Catholic schools was typically controlled by the school, rather than in a more participatory, activist and reciprocal way. As argued by Lumby (2007), the reason for silencing parents’ voice are likely to be “other than their ability to contribute cogently to the debate on schools and schooling.”

**Aim and Research questions**

The present research project investigated parent, school principal and clergy views of parent-school partnership in an Australian regional Diocese using online surveys that
included both quantitative and qualitative response formats. The survey aimed to gauge similarities and differences in parent, principal and clergy views on parent-school partnership, including the strengths and limitations of current initiatives intended to promote such partnership. The findings will help inform future planning and monitoring of culture change processes aimed at improving the quality of Catholic education, including in respect to parent-school partnership. This aim generated five research questions:

6. What does parent-school ‘partnership’ mean?
7. Why is parent-school partnership important?
8. How is parent-school partnership currently facilitated and/or experienced in the regional Diocese?
9. Are current approaches to parent-school partnership in the regional Diocese perceived to be effective?
10. How could parent-school partnership be best planned, supported, measured and monitored into the future?

Method

Participants
The three surveys gathered the views of 283 parents/carers, 22 school principals and six priests. One priest completed the survey in online format, while five priests completed hard copies. All principals and all parents/carers completed the online versions of the survey. Demographic details of the participants are reported in the Result section below.

Materials
The research consisted of a 20 minute online survey, which was delivered using the Qualtrics website. There were three versions of the survey, one each for parents, school principals, and parish clergy (see Appendices A, B and C, respectively). The surveys were developed in close consultation with the CSO and included parent, executive staff and
researcher feedback, and a pilot study. The survey questions consisted of categorical tick-box style items, ranked selections from a list, 7-point Likert scales, and opened-ended text boxes. The survey content measured demographic characteristics, perceived reasons that parents send their child to a Catholic school, perceptions of how welcoming the school is of parents, parent/clergy invitations and attendance at school activities, attitudes and perceived norms towards parent-school partnership, the role of principals and clergy in promoting parent-partnership, barriers towards building strong partnership, and awareness and evaluation of an existing parent assembly. In the parent version of the survey parents with children at more than one Catholic school were given the option to respond to items about a second school. The formation of composite scores are described below in relevant sections of the Results.

**Procedure**

The project was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (ECN-14-196). A pilot study was conducted with parents, principals and a priest. Feedback from the pilot participants was used to adapt the final versions of the surveys. Participants were recruited in consultation with the Catholic Schools Office, who sent a memo on school newsletters to announce the upcoming study (Appendix D), followed by a broadcast email invitation to all parents within the Diocese (see Appendix E). The CSO also sent email invitations or hard copy letters of invitation to all principals (see Appendix F) and clergy (see Appendix G). The letter of invitation provided potential participants with information about the research project and, in particular, the online survey. It was stressed that participation was anonymous, voluntary, confidential, and that participants could withdraw from the survey at any time without any negative repercussions from the CSO or the researchers. The email invitations contained a hyperlink to access the appropriate version of the survey. Participants were also given the option of completing a hard copy of the survey. Submission of responses were taken as consent. Surveys took 20 minutes on average to complete.
Design and data analysis

This study was exploratory and collected both quantitative and qualitative data in an online survey. Quantitative results were analysed using IBM-SPSS statistical analysis software. Open ended responses were analysed for re-occurring themes.

Results

Parents

Participants

A total of 283 participants completed the parent version of the survey. In terms of gender, 53 males (18.7%) and 215 females (76%) completed the survey, with 15 participants (5.3%) skipping the gender question. The majority of participants were parents (n = 276, 97.5%), however one carer, three grandparents, and one ‘student counsellor and parent connect’ completed the survey. Approximately two-thirds of the sample were Catholic (n = 190, 67.1%), one fifth identified as ‘Other Christian religion’ (n = 58, 20.5%), just under 10 percent (n = 28) had no religion, and approximately 2.5% (n = 7) followed a non-Christian religion. Participants’ ages are reported in Table 1 below, and show that most participants were aged 36 – 55 years.

Table 1.

Frequency of Parent/carer Ages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age range in years</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-65</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66+</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>283</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 reports the number of children participants had in their care, and shows that two children was most common.

Table 2.

*Number of Children in Parents’ Care.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children in participants’ care</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>43.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 reports participants’ responses to the question ‘How many children in your care attend a Catholic school?”, and shows that one child was most common, but just under 40% of the participants had two children attending Catholic schools.

Table 3.

*Number of Children Attending a Catholic School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of children in participants’ care who attend a Catholic school</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>43.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or more</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approximately one fifth of participants ($n = 71, 25.1\%$) had more than one child attending Catholic schools. Slightly fewer participants had children who attended Catholic primary schools ($n = 128, 45.2\%$) compared to Catholic secondary schools ($n = 143, 50.5\%$), while 65 participants (23\%) had children who attended both primary and secondary Catholic
schools. Table 4 reports the participants’ responses to the question ‘What Year are your children currently in at school?’, and show a fairly even spread of participants across school Years.

Table 4.

*Children’s Year at School.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child’s Year at school</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Percentages do not add to 100% because participants may have selected multiple categories due to having more than one child in Catholic schools.

**Reasons parents send their children to a Catholic school**

Parents were asked to rank from 1 to 5, the reasons they chose a Catholic school for their child/ren. The results are presented in Table 5 and Figure 1. Figure 1 shows the highest bar on the graph was that for ‘Better values and morals’, followed by ‘Spiritual development of your child’, ‘Better discipline’, and ‘Better academic outcomes’. This is similar to principal and priest responses in that they also selected better morals and values, better discipline and better academic outcomes, but differs in that parents selected their child’s spiritual development. This finding has identified a gap in priest/principal and parent views and is an area that may be addressed in future parent-school partnership initiatives by informing principals and clergy that, based on the survey results, parents do consider their child’s spiritual development as a main reason for attending a Catholic school.
When looking at the five rankings separately, Figure 1 shows that the most frequent first reason (darker blue bars) was ‘Better morals and values’ followed by ‘Catholic faith for your child’. The most frequent second reason (red bars) was ‘Spiritual development of your child’, followed by ‘Better discipline’. The most frequent third reason (green bars) was ‘Better morals and values’ followed by ‘Better discipline’, and then ‘Spiritual development of your child’. The most frequent fourth reason (purple bars) was ‘Better discipline’, closely followed by ‘Better academic outcomes’, ‘Staff are more committed’, ‘Better values and morals’ and ‘Spiritual development for your child’. Finally, the most frequent fifth reason (light blue bars) was ‘Better care’, followed by ‘Spiritual development of your child’.

Thus, parents send their children to Catholic schools for reasons of higher quality education (morals and values, academic outcomes and discipline) but also for their child’s spiritual development, particularly, the Catholic faith development. This contrasts with principal and priest views, although they both endorsed educational reasons as well, they gave more emphasis to practical reasons, while parents emphasised both education and spiritual/religious reasons for sending their child/ren to a Catholic school (also see Table 6 below). Figure 2 shows the parent, principal and clergy responses to the reasons why Catholic schools are selected as a percentage of each respective sample.

Table 5.

*Frequency of Parents’ Five Reasons for Why Parents Choose a Catholic School for their Child/ren (N = 283)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>First</th>
<th>Second</th>
<th>Third</th>
<th>Fourth</th>
<th>Fifth</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You/child's other parent went to Catholic school</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child's friends at same school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To attend a Catholic high school</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better discipline</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>151³</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better values and morals</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>228¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better care</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better academic outcomes</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More resources</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic faith for their child</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual development of your child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff are more committed</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff better qualified</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a private school</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More affordable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's in your parish</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You/your child's other parent are Catholic</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Superscripts show ranks of the top five most frequent responses overall.
Figure 2. Parents’ top five reasons for parents sending their child/ren to a Catholic school.
Figure 3. Priest, principal and parent reasons why parents’ send their child to a Catholic school
Table 6 compares principals’ and parents’ overall top five reasons for sending a child to a Catholic school, and shows that ‘Better values and morals’ was the most frequent response overall for both principals and parents. While better discipline and better academic outcomes were frequent response for both groups, the child’s spiritual development was the second most frequent response for parents but was very rarely selected by principals.

Table 6.

A Comparison of Principals’ and Parents’ Top Five Reasons for Choosing a Catholic School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Better values and morals</td>
<td>Better values and morals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Better discipline</td>
<td>Spiritual development for your child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>They are Catholic</td>
<td>Better discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Better care = Better academic outcomes</td>
<td>Better academic outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5th</td>
<td>They went to a Catholic school themselves</td>
<td>Catholic faith for your child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Invitations to parents and parent attendance at school events

Table 7 shows the frequency of parent responses to the question of they had been invited to and attended several school events over the previous 12 months. As can be seen in Table 7, the majority of parents reported they had been invited to most events, apart from principal appraisals, sacrament preparation and school excursions. Many parents had attended parent-teacher meetings, school sporting events, school concerts/plays, school liturgies/prayer, school Masses, and fund raising events. However, many parents did not attend Parents and Friends meetings or Parish School Forum, Parent Assembly, canteen roster, Sacrament preparation, principal appraisals or excursions.
### Table 7.

**Parent Responses: Have You Been Invited to and Attended School Events Over the Past 12**

*Months (N = 283)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Invited to….</th>
<th>Attended….</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent teacher meetings</td>
<td>266</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and Friends meetings OR Parish School Forum</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Assembly</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class or Stage</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Program School sporting events</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School concerts/plays</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canteen roster</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class activities</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School liturgies/prayer</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Masses</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrament preparation opportunities</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent education opportunities</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund raising</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal appraisals</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School excursions</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How welcome are parents’ views at school?**

Parents rated how welcoming their school was of parents’ views on five items, and responded on a 7-point scale where 1 represented ‘Extremely unwelcoming’ and 7 represented ‘Extremely welcoming’. Overall, parents rated their schools as somewhat welcoming toward their views on all items, as shown in Table 8. There were no differences based on participants’ gender, age, parent-carer status, number of children in a participant’s care, the number of children attending a Catholic school, whether a participant had children attending more than one Catholic school, or their religion.
However, there was a significant difference between participants with children in primary, secondary or both schools on how welcoming they rated their school on hearing their views on their child’s religious and faith development, $F(2,263) = 5.32$, $p = .005$, eta squared = .04. Games Howell post hoc comparisons were conducted due to the assumption of homogeneity of variance being violated as shown by a significant Levene’s test, $p = .013$. Parents of children in primary schools ($n = 108$, $M = 5.61$, $SD = 1.33$) rated schools as significantly more welcoming of their views about their child’s religious and faith development than parents of children in secondary schools ($n = 95$, $M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.78$), $p = .004$. Parents with children in both primary and secondary schools ($n = 63$, $M = 5.41$, $SD = 1.69$) did not differ in comparison to either those with children in just primary school or just in secondary school.

Table 8.

*Parents’ Ratings of how Welcoming their School is of Their Views*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How welcome are parents views about …</th>
<th>Minimum score</th>
<th>Maximum score</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…their child/ren's academic development</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>1.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…their child/ren's wellbeing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>1.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…school governance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4.70</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…their child/ren's religious and faith development</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…how the school is living up to its Christian beliefs and values</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Parents’ experiences with parent-school partnership*

Just under 40% of participants ($n = 112$) said that other parents had invited them to be involved with their school, but a similar number ($n = 117$, 41.3%) said this had not happened. Very few participants had received a phone call from a parent representative form an official group to welcome them to the school ($n = 236$ or 83.4% said ‘no’; $n = 14$ or 4.9% said ‘yes’ and $n = 19$ or 6.7% said ‘unsure/don’t know’). Most participants felt that other parents were happy to see them ($n = 163$, 57.6%). Many participants were unsure as to whether there were
parent groups they could join ($n = 121, 42.8\%$) and many were also unsure whether parent groups represent their views ($n = 164, 58\%$). Only one fifth of the parents surveyed felt that the parent groups did represent their views ($n = 59, 20.8\%$).

**Parents’ views of children perspectives on parent-school partnership and their own competency in helping with homework**

Participants agreed that their children wanted their parents to be involved with the school ($221$ participants or $78.1\%$ said ‘yes’; $29$ or $10.2\%$ said they were ‘unsure/don’t know’; and $24$ or $8.5\%$ said ‘no’), and that their children seek their parents help with their education ($258$ or $91.2\%$ said ‘yes’; only $5$ or $1.8\%$ said ‘unsure/don’t know’, and $12$ or $4.2\%$ said ‘no’). Most parents ($n = 195, 68.9\%$) said they felt competent to help their child in all aspects of their homework. Only $20$ participants ($7.1\%$) said were ‘unsure/don’t know’, and $59$ ($20.8\%$) said ‘no’. This result contrasts with principals’ views, as only one principal ($4.5\%$) said ‘yes’ to the statement that ‘parents feel competent to help their children in all aspects of their homework’, seven ($31.8\%$) said they were ‘unsure/don’t know’, and $14$ principals ($63.3\%$) said ‘no’. These results highlight a discrepancy between parent and principal perspectives, and point to a lack of confidence from principals in regard to parents’ competency in helping their children with their homework. Parents of primary aged children were more likely to agree that they felt competent to help their children in their homework, while parents of secondary aged children were less likely to feel competent in this regard, $\chi^2 (4) = 30.42, p < .001$.

**Parents’ views on their school’s culture in relation to parents**

As shown in Table 9 below, most parents agreed that the school office staff were welcoming, that it was easy to make contact and communicate with the principal and teaching staff, the principal knows them, the class teacher knows their name, that a teacher
would listen to them if they had an issue, that they know some staff very well, and that they know other parents in the school.

Table 9.

*Frequency and Percent of Parent Responses to Questions about School Culture in Relation to Parents (N = 283)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th></th>
<th>No</th>
<th></th>
<th>Not sure/Don’t know</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>% of sample</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>% of sample</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>% of sample</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school office staff are welcoming</td>
<td>254</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easy to make contact and communicate with the principal</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easy to make contact and communicate with the teachers</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>81.6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal knows me</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The class or home room teacher knows my name</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>71.7</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am confident that if I had an issue the teacher would listen to me</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know some of the staff at the school very well</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>65.4</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know other parents in the school</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were no differences based on gender, parent-carer status, number of children in the parents’ care, or the number of children attending in a Catholic school. There were significant associations between parental age and the responses provided by participants, as follows:

*Parental age*

- Younger parents (aged 26-35 years) were more likely to say no to the statement ‘It’s easy to make contact and communicate with the teachers’, \( \chi^2(8) = 16.95, p = .031 \), Cramer’s \( V = .18 \).
• Parents aged 45-55 years were more likely to say no than expected for the statement ‘The class or home room teacher knows my name’, and those aged 56-66 years were more likely to say unsure/don’t know, $\chi^2 (8) = 24.46, p = .002$, Cramer’s $V = .21$.

**Parents with children attending more than one Catholic school**

• Parents who had a child or children attending one Catholic school were more likely to respond ‘Unsure/Don’t know’ to the statement ‘I know some of the staff at the school very well’, while fewer parents who had children attending more than one Catholic school were likely to say ‘Unsure/Don’t know’, $\chi^2(2) = 7.62, p = .022$ Cramer’s $V = .17$.

**Parents with children attending primary and/or secondary Catholic schools**

• Parents with children attending secondary school were more likely to say ‘no’ or ‘not sure/don’t know’ to the statement ‘The principal knows me’, $\chi^2 (4) = 15.30, p = .004$, Cramer’s $V = .17$.

• Parents with children in primary school (either primary schools only, or both primary and secondary schools) were less likely to say ‘no’ and ‘not sure/don’t know’ to the statement ‘The class teacher or home room teacher knows my name’, while parents with children in secondary school only were more likely to say ‘no’ or ‘not sure/don’t know’, $\chi^2 (4) = 69.44, p < .001$, Cramer’s $V = .36$.

• Parents with children attending both primary and secondary schools were less likely to say ‘no’ and ‘not sure/don’t know’ to the statement ‘I know some of the staff at the school very well’, $\chi^2 (4) = 11.33, p = .023$, Cramer’s $V = 15.70$.

**Religion**

• Catholic parents were less likely to say ‘no’, or ‘not sure/don’t know’ to the statement ‘I know some of the staff at the school very well’, while parents of a non-Christian
religion were less likely to say ‘yes’ or ‘not sure/don’t know’, and more likely to say ‘no’, $\chi^2(6) = 16.51, p = .011$, Cramer’s $V = 0.17$.

How important is parent partnership in your school?

Parents rated the statement ‘Parent partnership is important in my school’ on a 7-point scale where 1 represented ‘Extremely unimportant’ and 7 represented ‘Extremely important’. Scores ranged from 1 to 7, with a mean of 6.48 ($SD = 1.08$) which indicates that on average parents rated parent partnership as very important in their school. There were no differences based on age, parent-carer status, number of children in the parents’ care, number of children attending a Catholic school, having children at multiple schools, or religion. However, female parents ($n = 208, M = 6.56, SD = 0.97$) rated parent partnership as significantly more important than male parents ($n = 52, M = 6.13, SD = 1.42$), $t(63.37) = -2.06, p = .043$, Cohen’s $d = -.35$. The effect size is medium.

Also, there were significant differences based on whether parents had children attending primary or secondary schools or both, $F(2,269) = 3.28, p = .039$. Post hoc Games Howell tests were used because the assumption of homogeneity of variance was violated as indicated by a significant Levene’s test, $p = .025$. The only group differences were between parents with children at both primary and secondary Catholic schools ($n = 63, M = 6.71, SD = 0.63$), who rated parent-school partnership significantly more important than those who had children at Catholic secondary schools only ($n = 99, M = 6.28, SD = 1.09$), $p = .005$. Parents with children at primary Catholic schools only ($n = 110, M = 6.52, SD = 1.23$) did not differ significantly from parents with children at Catholic secondary schools only ($p = .309$) or those with children at both Catholic primary and secondary schools ($p = .353$).

How important is the role of principals and clergy in building stronger parent partnerships within schools?
Parents rated two statements regarding the importance of clergy’ and principals’ roles in building strong parent partnership within schools using 7-point Likert scales, where 1 represented ‘Extremely unimportant’ and 7 represented ‘Extremely important’.

**Principals’ roles.** Parents rated their principal’s role in facilitating parent school partnership as ranging from 1 to 7, with a mean of 6.30 (SD = 1.18), thus indicating that they see principals as highly important in this role. There were no differences based on gender, parental age, parent-carer status, number of children in the parents’ care, or number of children attending a Catholic school.

**Clergy’ roles.** Parents’ ratings of the role of clergy in facilitating parent school partnership ranged from 1 to 7, with mean of 4.83 (SD = 1.82), and this was significantly less important their ratings of principals’ roles [t(271) = 13.39, p < .001]. Parents with children at more than one Catholic school (n = 68, M = 5.22, SD = 1.74) thought the role of clergy was significantly more important for building parent-school partnerships than those who had children at only one school (n = 204, M = 4.70, SD = 1.84), F(1,270) = 4.19, p = .042.

Parents’ religion had a significant effect on how important they viewed the role of clergy in facilitating parent partnership at schools, F(3, 268) = 5.71, p < .001. Tukey’s post hoc test showed that parents who identified as having no religion (n = 26, M = 3.50, SD = 1.77) viewed clergy roles as significantly less important than Catholic parents (n = 184, M = 5.03, SD = 1.78; p < .001) and parents of other Christian religions (n = 55, M = 4.76, SD = 1.83; p = .016), but not from parents of other non-Christian religions (n = 7, M = 5.14, SD = 1.22; p = .134).

**Attitudes and Norms Regarding Parent-School Partnership**

Seven items from Bracke and Corts (2009) were adapted for the present study, which measure attitudes and perceived norms of parents’ roles in schools. Items a – d measure attitudes and items e –f measure perceived norms. Participants responded on a 7-point Likert
scale where 1 represented ‘strongly disagree’ and 7 represented ‘strongly agree’. Items b and g were reverse scored.

- a. The most successful schools have consistent partnership with parents
- b. Schools, not parents, are responsible for educating children
- c. Children’s education will benefit if parents are involved with the school
- d. It is important for parents to meet and keep in touch with their child’s teacher
- e. Most parents at my parish school are actively involved in school life
- f. Parents’ friends and neighbours, and students’ grandparents are actively involved in the school
- g. The majority of parents at my parish school are unable or unwilling to be actively involved with the school

Composite scores were formed for both attitudes and perceived norms by summing the relevant items. Total attitude scores could potentially range from 4 to 28, with higher scores indicating more favourable attitudes towards parent-school partnerships. Total perceived norm scores could range from 3 to 21, with higher scores indicating norms of increasing parent-school partnership.

**Total attitudes**

In the present study, parents/carers ($n = 269$) scored between 11 and 28 on the total attitudes scale, indicating parent/carer attitudes ranged from mildly negative attitudes to extremely positive attitudes. The mean score was 23.04 ($SD = 3.81$), thus indicating that on average parents/carers have moderately favourable attitudes towards parent-school partnership. There were no differences in total attitudes based on parental gender, parental age, number of children in a parents’ care, number of children attending Catholic schools, having children attend multiple schools, having children attend a primary vs. secondary school, and parental religion.

**Total perceived norms**

In regard to total norms, parents/carers ($n = 262$) scored between 3 and 20, indicating that perceived norms ranged from very low levels of parent partnership to very high levels. The mean for total norms was 10.40 ($SD = 3.49$), indicating that on average parents/carers perceived the norm of parent partnership to be quite infrequent/low. There were no
differences in total perceived norms based on parental gender, parent age, number of children in a parents’ care, number of children attending Catholic schools, having children attend multiple schools, having children attend a primary vs. secondary school, and parental religion.

Parents’ responses to the statement ‘Parents are interested in discussing religious aspects of their child’s education’

Parents responded to the statement ‘Parents are interested in discussing religious aspects of their child’s education’ using a 7-point Likert scale where 1 represented ‘strongly disagree’ and 7 represented ‘strongly agree’. The 268 parents’ scores in the present study ranged from 1 to 7, with a mean of 3.06 (SD = 1.56). These results show that, on average, participants perceived that parents are not interested in discussing religious aspects of their child’s education.

Barriers to forming stronger parent-school partnership

Parents were asked to nominate which of a list of barriers to forming stronger parent-school partnership were relevant to them. They could choose as many barriers as they liked. Figure 4 shows the number of parents who selected each barrier. ‘Work commitments’ (66.7%) was the most frequent option, followed by ‘Lack of time’ (51.7%). The majority of other options were selected by approximately 6 - 12 percent of the sample, with lack of transport only selected by 1% (n = 3) parents.
Perceived barriers to forming stronger parent-school partnerships
Figure 4. Frequency of parents’ perceived barriers to forming stronger parent-school partnership. Numbers inside bars are frequencies of parents/carers choosing each option.
The 37 parents (12.8%) who chose ‘Other barriers’ were given the option of elaborating on their responses. ‘Other barriers’ nominated included parental illness, caring for elderly relatives, living a long distance from town, dislike of the principal or teacher, sole parenthood and consequent work commitments, perceived ‘clicky’ parent groups, and strong dissatisfaction with the school in regard to behavioural incidents with their child. Several parents/carers commented that lack of a Parents and Friends group and/or Parent Assembly at their school discouraged them from being involved. The following comment captures the general sentiments of these parents:

- The most obvious reason to me is that our school does not have a parents and friends association or assembly. I have raised this concern from the time my eldest child attended secondary school. In primary school this existed and worked well. I felt I had easy access through the p/f to participate and share views about my children’s education and to assist in other aspects such as fund raising etc and improve relationships with teachers and other parents. There is a parent representative I believe in an overarching school advisory board. I couldn’t even tell you who that was and I have no confidence that that is a forum through which parents can be involved in the day to day aspects of school life at secondary level.

The following comments from parents/carers elaborate further on common barriers to parent-school partnerships:

Lack of communication between school and parents/carers:

- I sometimes resent the lack of communication between teachers and us as parents, so I start to wonder why I would give more of my time. Often there is no appreciation for what parents do contribute.
- There is often very little notice given for events such as athletics carnival- events just appear no forward planning.
- Haven't really been invited to be involved and feel that if there was reason to be involved the school would contact me.
- Some decisions have been made that effect the current Year 12’s social calendar of which the parents were not consulted and were told could not consult the school or there would be consequences for those Year 12 students.

Lack of welcoming gestures from staff:

- The school staff can be very welcoming of some people & not so with others. It's simply human nature to be relaxed & friendly with familiar people but school staff need to reach out beyond 'comfortable' parents to welcome new people into a school community.
- I am not interested in the activities the parent groups do, such as going out for dinner. The fundraising committees have little say over the functions they are in charge of running or what funds are spent on in the school. Principals take the efforts of a very few dedicated people for granted and the whole thing is very unrewarding personally. Definitely gives me the feeling of ”we can get by just fine without you”. I have more to do with parents of children from my kids’ weekend sporting teams, where there is a feeling that we are doing something good for our kids, together.
- Some teachers are unapproachable and discourage parental involvement with what feels like a closed door policy. Parental involvement in assemblies has decreased in the last year. Parents are no longer
welcome as classroom helpers for literacy and numeracy groups. Opportunities to be involved in the school in a way that I can interact with my child have diminished over the last year.

- Some opportunities also clash with out of school activity commitments of our family. Many opportunities seem to only be offered to 'selected' students and/or parents. Example that springs to mind is ANZAC Day March- where SRC members are the only ones who represent the School and other students and their families cannot be included on a day when parents could be supportive and part of a community activity.

Lack of accommodation of parents’ diverse needs:

- The school has a lack of understanding of parents with Disabilities. I have had multi spinal operation and can't stand or sit for any length of time, but this always is a problem when we go to school. Even sending in letters in regards to this - still have not heard back from any staff member.

Lack of informal activities for parents:

- I think there are not enough activities for just the parents to get together. To get to know others. It is very hard when you work and don't get to meet and talk with parents each morning or afternoon. This would help build those partnerships. Also we need to provide more activities to build community. That could involve more activities for each year to get together out of school time. We need a parent group that could have input or suggestions on making the school community more accessible to all. There is the parent forum but something less informal.

Deep cultural change is needed:

- I think there are substantial barriers to parental involvement in our child's school, and they are not superficial tangible constraints as provided in your list from which to select, but rather endemic barriers in the organisational culture and school leadership which restrict parental involvement or input which may "rock the boat" or challenge some of the practices which need review and development. I feel the staff at [school name omitted to maintain anonymity in this report] needs a substantial review, professional development and critical reflection of some of their education practices, catering to educational diversity and need, and general teacher quality. Some staff are excellent, others seem to need strong professional development or in some cases be offered VERs to make space for better qualified, more enthusiastic, less tired and worn, fresh staff with an openness to move forward. Sadly I think the parameters you list as constraints to "parental involvement" are merely superficial pragmatically, rather than challenging and examining the 'real barriers'. The barriers your survey list merely make for easy quantifiable reporting. I am happy to be contacted to follow up, [name and contact details omitted]. There are significant aspects about the little school which are outstanding and of great value, these too need to be acknowledged, but so far the survey hasn’t addressed these. Sincerely, [name omitted]

Lack of leadership:

- In the primary school the principal has too much of an overbearing attitude towards the P&F. The committee and parents offering their support need to have some say in where all their hard work in fundraising goes, rather than being told this is what we are getting with the money raised. I believe a Principal is supposed to be the leader but he should be allowing the teachers, families and students the encouragement to move forward rather than restricting and manipulating every area he can. It is with a sad heart we are moving onto High school with our child after so many happy years.

Other barriers:

- I don't think it's necessary in secondary school.
- We are new to the area and my child is in high school where I feel that they need to develop independence
The Catholic School Parent Assembly

Just under 58 percent \((n = 165, 57.3\%)\) of parents/carers were aware of the Catholic School Parent Assembly, with 21.2% \((n = 61)\) unaware of it, and 16.3% \((n = 46)\) ‘not sure’. Figure 5 below shows the most frequently perceived role of the Parent Assembly was to provide a link between families, schools and parishes, followed by to provide faith enrichment opportunities for families, and to provide parent education opportunities.

Figure 5. Frequency of parents/carers’ perceived roles of the Catholic School Parent Assembly \((N = 165)\).

When asked how useful parents considered the Catholic School Parent Assembly, scores ranged from 1 to 7 on a 7-point scale where 1 indicated ‘Not at all useful’ and 7 indicated ‘Extremely useful’. The mean score was 4.64 \((SD = 1.54)\) with a mode at 4.00. Thus, on average, parents only mildly agreed that the Parent Assembly is useful. Figure 9 below shows the data was slightly negatively skewed, with more parents responding above
the mid-point than below the mid-point, again showing that overall, parents mildly agreed that the Parent Assembly is useful.

Figure 6. Frequency histogram of parent/carer responses to the question ‘How useful do you consider the Catholic School parent Assembly’ (n = 157).

Other comments

At the end of the survey parents/carers were invited to add further comments, particularly in relation to their hopes for parent-school partnership in the future. Comments that capture the sentiments and ideas expressed by parents/carers are presented below.

Several parents expressed requests or adaptations to school functions that foster parent-school partnership:

- I would like to see more social functions at the school on weekends in the mornings to cater for parents who work during the week.
- Parent partnerships need to cater for working parents, after school meetings are the best way to communicate and involve parents.
…would like to see events to encourage the parents on the edge of being involved... [we] need specific fun based events to get them together…. Encouragement [and] easy access are needed. Parents new to school processes need time to adapt and come in.

I am not sure what has happened to the Year Assemblies. From Kindy it was easy to attend assembly in the morning and I was made aware of the class assembly and invited, however I no longer am told of any assembly or when my child’s class is involved. Indeed my child has told me this no longer happens. It was a great opportunity to attend the school with other parents in my child's year to see them present. I would like to see more user friendly religious teaching for the adults. To help guide and pass onto their children…

I would like to be invited to class Liturgies.

…need for more than one parent/teacher meeting for each semester.

Involving parents in the classroom in literacy/numeracy groups like they were before team teaching was introduced, as the inconsistency of teachers and classrooms has led to my children being more unsettled, less confident and happy in school and having parental involvement in the classroom cut out has exacerbated this feeling. I would hope to see more of an open door policy in classrooms, greater availability of teachers to discuss issues as/when they arise, and more invitations for parent helpers at a level where their children can …benefit from their presence in the classroom.

I think the initiatives both primary and secondary schools are using to involve grandparents is of great value and should be further encouraged. Often grandparents have the time to be able to build stronger links between families, parishes and schools.

Provide surveys for parents. So, they can have input and express any concerns or comment on the things they like. They are not happening enough. In my four years at the school I can only recall one school survey.

We need to be open to programs that build community. Such as the "kindness cards". I hope opportunities for parent partnerships are not missed.

Maybe at the beginning of each term or year... the parents come into school as a group and meet their child's teacher and they could outline what will happen that year/term and then parents could meet.

I think the parent info nights about such topics as "Safe Partying", "Sexualisation of girls at a young age", "Drugs and Children" have been really good. I have attended them and been surprised that more parents did not take advantage of them. Keep up this good work. The topics have been very relevant. I was disappointed that the last one had a fee of $20 (consequently I did not attend)…. Thank-you for the opportunity to comment.

Parents/carers also asked for more regular and reciprocated communication with the school, and particularly requested that parents be consulted more about school issues:

I would like to be consulted in relation to the end of schooling functions for the Year 12 students.

Listen to the parents - get more involved with the idiosyncrasies of the child.

I would like to be kept informed in regards to the removal of the school principal. My daughter’s school has been moved to AP so this has disrupted her schooling. Status of the review would be appreciated to give us a time frame.

I would like a term planner of all relevant activities excursions sports carnivals. I need notice to plan my work commitments.

Asking what parents would like to see their children learn - for example, formal/specialist IT lessons were removed from my child's primary school and I feel this is a big dis-service to my child in this age of technology.

We really liked getting a photo of all the teachers in Kindy and think it would be nice to do it with the photos each year.

I would like to see teacher comments from my child's subject teachers on reports.

End of school year parent teacher night - There is no end of year update on your child's progress.

Dates on homework/notes from the teachers not just the week of term i.e., week 7..... I have no idea when it's week 7 and seem to miss a lot.

I would like more information from the school about what is happening in class and more notice for events. I think the presumption is that mothers are at home and able to attend events with minimal notice. In reality, most mothers are working. Example - Father's Day celebrations are breakfast at 7.30am, Mother's Day is morning tea at 10am.
There are numerous examples of our children bringing the information home verbally where a quick note or message on the app would be more reliable.

The class parent system works well when there is a parent rep who is proactive and shares information. At other times the parent rep has taken on the role solely and not involved other parents who would be interested in helping out.

I do not find the teachers in our school welcome parent input, but that they “know best” - nor are parents well informed of the reasons for, let alone involved in, decisions like staff changes, expenditures, subjects, sporting or academic options.

It is clear, from discussions with our children, that drugs are present in their school. Yet, there has been no mention of this by the school in any newsletter or other advice. I am sure that if there are drugs in one school, then there are drugs in other schools, and that parent knowledge of this would not lead to students being unenrolled. On the contrary, my hope is that it would encourage family discussions on the topic. I certainly have noted the prevalence of drugs in society now, as compared to when I was at school. To this end, I would like for the school to open up a conversation with parents regarding this issue.

I feel the most important thing with the changes I have seen in teaching and the learning environment (one child in kinder and one in year 5) of late, is keeping up with communication. In small bits in the weekly newsletter, via email and internet links in the newsletter, with larger meetings for parents and each individual teacher making an effort, one on one, when it arises. We all cope with changes better if we are informed and able to express our concerns in an open and accepting way. It is always has been and always will be a 2 way street between parent and teacher, with the same ultimate aim in mind.

Parents noted that a key area for improving parent-school partnership is in secondary schools:

...real change needs to happen with the involvement with parents in secondary schools, I dislike it when it is said ‘they don’t want you about in high school’ - well why not?

It is interesting that a huge amount of parent partnership is requested from Catholic primary schools, but when the children go to high school, there seems to be no need or want of parents’ participation. …it is very hard to get to know other parents…. Perhaps for years 7 and 8 (or even just year 7) parent participation and functions could be organised so that parents have an opportunity (other than Canteen, which is very busy and not much down time for cuppa and chat). Maybe when the year 6s coming into year 7 meetings and the first term of year 7 could have dedicated parent gatherings (where parents have to attend) and at these info sessions some conference-style getting-to-know you games or activities could be done - or for parents to know a dinner is on after the info session and they have to move tables for each course or something that gets people interacting and finding common interests.

The secondary school experience is dichotomous to the primary school experience most blatantly in its failure to engage parental input to a point wherein there is a feeling of active discouragement to be involved. It appears that the school executive (Co-ordinating Principal downwards) prefers to not be accountable for the running of the school. There is little feedback/information as to strategic and individual goals and programs and there is little input requested from parents. The School Board (or whatever it is termed) is an absolute joke with no disclosure of participants, agenda, decisions or for that matter criteria for inclusion on the Board. In contrast with Primary School that encouraged an active parent/teacher body the Secondary system is sadly lacking in capacities to integrate parental input.

Some parents commented specifically about Parent Forums, Parent Assembly, and Parents and Friends associations as avenues for parent-school partnership:

The Parent assembly is not active in our primary school. We do not have a representative nor regular information relevant to us easily available.

Due to the funding being cut for education of parents and other parent assembly roles, it is near impossible and a real challenge to provide those education programs parents want to be involved in. A qualified person or speaker wants to be paid for their time. Schools need money to provide this service and in turn it helps to build these partnerships with the schools and their parents.

Please fund Parent Assembly to be able to access Parent Education professionals again. I went to every opportunity offered with this service to our school. Apparently the funding was removed and this is a
loss of opportunity to build on the school-parish connection. Practical sessions get agents and families involved!

- In the past I have enjoyed the parent assembly family retreat however, a change in time of the year in which they were run and running the same ignition program as the teachers made the program redundant for my family and I.

- The level of parent participation possible through Parent Assembly at my child’s high school is not clearly explained and there does not seem to be a regular forum for discussion and sharing of information as is available at many primary schools.

- I really think a parents and friends association at each secondary school could be an ideal forum for parents to share ideas with the school about a whole range of issues not just religious aspects. I think it would improve the school’s credibility with parents and definitely provide opportunity to improve relationships with the school. Often as a parent I feel as though I have been provided with decisions made by the school about various issues, handed down to me with little or no opportunity for input. I am not alone in sharing this perspective, having discussed it over the years with friends and family and families of children at the school. Unfortunately, despite trying to raise this in the past nothing has changed and I fear it will fall on deaf ears.

- Parent Forum has a levy attached to it - but is not accountable to the parents on the spending of such money - suggestions fall on deaf ears. We need to create Schools Boards and have experts from other outside agencies as strong voices for guidance and leadership. Most innovative private schools have a Board - staff (teachers) may be experienced in educational spheres but they lack skills in some areas where outside agencies may be able to offer other ideas. i.e., a Board comprising lawyers, uni lecturers, principals from other schools, parent, engineers, business figures. It would be a great step forward to throw open some autonomy to those who have a vested interest or otherwise in the school. To give a greater sense of community development.

- I think the parent forum model in primary school doesn’t work as it is a group of 10 or so parents making all the choices for a larger number of parents. It’s hard to get parents involved most of the time but they usually have a bit of enthusiasm in the first few years of schooling. Many people haven’t heard of parent assembly or even know what they do, most people just think it’s another exclusive club within the Catholic Schools Office of chosen parents. Enthusiastic people put their hands up to be reps and they are told they have found someone more suitable - such a shame it has become so exclusive which is why they don’t have my support anymore. I once loved going to the parent events but no longer not that we have many chances any more. Reps need to have a servant’s heart and not be out to serve only themselves. Reps should be practicing Catholics and live by the faith. Reps and the cluster organisers all need to look outwards more. Talk to everyone and be nice to everyone not just a chosen few or talk to people then talk behind their backs once they are gone. They need to be more disciples and less bitchy. I don’t think the parent partnership will ever change in my children's schools until we get a Principal, teachers and staff willing to live the faith. Not just claim they are Catholic but really be authentic Catholics. I haven’t seen many changes since the staff participated in Proclaim.

Some parents highlighted the critical role of school leadership staff, particularly the role of school principals, in fostering a school climate conducive to forming stronger parent-school partnership:

- I would like the principal to be more available for the casual chats e.g., talking to parents who are waiting at pickup or maybe an afternoon tea in the parent hub before monthly assemblies.

- A principal’s ability to relate to parents and their children can contribute to a negative relationship with some general school activities. Principals need to accept that there are difficult issues at school and problem solving can be a partnership between school and family. When a principal is aggressive and offensive it detracts from a parent’s confidence when dealing with the school and this can flow through to ones perception of the Catholic system in general.

- I think it is paramount, not only for the positive flow-on effect to staff and pupils, but also to parent partnerships, that the school has a really strong Principal and that he/she is appraised more stringently and more often.

- My hope for the future is that more Principals develop improved skills in developing meaningful relationships with the parent community. Principals can make or break a school. My recent experience
with Principals is that they do not actively listen to you, they are out of touch with today’s families and the varying circumstances families struggle with. Unfortunately my bad experience with a Principal has impacted on the whole family. We are now leaving the Catholic system and seeking a more compassionate education system for our child. A principal needs to be an efficient communicator with compassion and understanding of individual needs - Not just a wealth of information with curriculum. Perhaps they should have a role description attached to their job and be accountable for their actions and decisions. I have wondered why they say the Parish Priest are in charge of our school when this is not the case.

- …the secondary principal sees the parent assembly as his to dictate to and does not like parents questioning his authority. He is determined to appoint the committee president. Parents are frightened to challenge his authority as he may use his position against your children.
- I truly believe to achieve the outcomes desired by Catholic school education above and beyond that of other non-Catholic schools the teachers and principal must rise above their ‘I think I’m smarter, better or above these parents because I am better educated’ and also think they know our kids better than parents do. Children, as do adults, have a tougher side for everyday public life then the vulnerable side shown to family members because they are safer in a home atmosphere. I feel we need a whole generation of attitude change from principals, teachers and staff, especially principals to help make parents feel welcome into our children’s school life and not viewed as their enemy.

Parents also commented about the role of parish clergy in facilitating parent-school partnership, and their concerns regarding the link between the parish and schools:

- The parish priest needs to make more of an effort to actually know the names of children whom regularly attend mass and assist as altar servers. If a parish priest concentrates on the elderly, the parish reflects that with an average age of 70 of those present in the local parish mass each week. This would encourage more young families to stay involved in the parish and encourage parent partnerships with schools of Catholic schools. Currently the majority of new families at our school would be non-Catholic identifying.
- There was a question [in the survey] about the role of the parish priest in the school partnership program. I did not have an answer for this as I had never really thought about it. If the parish priest does have a role in partnerships with parents then this may need to be defined and better communicated. Thanks
- As the parent in the household who is not Catholic I find it hard to get overly excited about improving the link to the parish and the priest but as a Christian who attends another church I get where you are coming from. I have been so impressed with and pleased with the faith journey that my children are on that is being so beautifully expressed and nurtured at school. I did not have that during my education. I support everything that would make that stronger and more real for my children and others.

Parents commented on the important role of feeling welcome at school by the school office staff:

- As parents see the school office as their first portal into the life of the school, it is crucial office staff (secretaries etc.) are welcoming.

Some parents commented that schools need to recognise and adapt to societal and technological changes in order to foster innovative ways for parents partnership to develop:

- As a single parent I am financially responsible for my family and as such work full time, most of my friends work full time to manage the expense of day to day living. My friends and I would love nothing more than to be able to support the school with our time and resources but the world has changed and stay at home parents are more and more are a concept from the past. I would suggest that the school will need to take these demands on families into consideration when trying to work out where the extra supports are going to come from.
• Effective leadership and partnership should provide professional development for teachers to withstand the unpredictability of changes in the shifting world including technological advancements. This of course will filter through forming daily use of these new practices from teachers to students staying abreast of technological and social movements that trend towards change but should also involve parental collaboration too. I feel [school name] are paving the way (I can only speak from my experience with Year 1 teachers) and how they have tried to engage parents in consultation for new practices in the curriculum.

Many parents expressed their dissatisfaction with their children’s schools and articulated how this dissatisfaction lead to parental disengagement with the school, and in some cases even led to the decision to remove their children from the Catholic schooling system. The comment below is typical:

• Our hope for the future is that the Catholic schools through their teachers and principals encourage a stronger faith amongst the students. Also that the Catholic principles of respect, love for one another and nurturing become a priority amongst parents and the school community.…. At the moment, the schools are not adhering to their mission statements and this is of real concern to us as we have placed one child in their care. Our youngest child was removed from her Catholic primary school this year and is having a much happier time in the public system - a heart-wrenching decision for us as a practising Catholic family, but one we are very pleased we made as issues at her school spiralled out of control. We do not have much confidence in our parent partnership with the school unfortunately, and in recent discussions we do not see change will happen soon.

Many parents also made positive comments about existing parent-school partnership and highlighted the successful initiatives and approaches that are already occurring in schools. The following examples express the sentiments of this positive feedback:

• Keep up the great work. The link between principal and parents is great!
• We are very happy with the Catholic school our children attend. We enjoy sharing in the school liturgies and assemblies. We would love to have more Parish involvement in our school as the school seems to be the main point of contact with the Church for many families. Thank you.
• We are extremely happy with the small Catholic primary school that our children attend. The link between parish and school is a highlight for us and the RE Coordinator arranges fun activities for our children to attend that make church fun and age appropriate. We are so happy with our little school and the care that the teachers give to our children.
• As a parent with a child who has Aspergers, I have had full support from both the Principal and the staff.
• As a custodial grandparent, retired teacher qualified in many areas of primary education who has found herself flung into the veritable whirlpool that is contemporary child raising, I will be forever grateful for the caring atmosphere provided to a troubled little girl by [school name]. I have discovered this by becoming as involved as I possibly can. In this digital age I see no excuse for non-communication between parent and teacher/school. Full marks to the Skoolbag & Class Dojo apps. If I am able to avail myself of their features at 73.......? My only question.... Are parents involved in the process of review at the end of a teacher's contract?
• Very happy to see our child's education as a shared responsibility and work collectively with the school community to achieve a meaningful and valuable education for our children…. We feel the children's school has a very positive and healthy approach to encouraging our active involvement as parents - it is always welcomed.
Principals

Participants

A total of 22 school principals completed the online survey, consisting of 17 (77.3%) primary school principals (eight males and nine females) and three (13.6%) secondary school principals (all male). Two male principals did not complete the question that asked whether they were from a primary or secondary school. For ten principals (45.5%; six males and four females) this was their first appointment as a principal, while for 12 principals (54.5%; 7 males and five females) this was not their first appointment in the role as principal. In the total sample, the number of students enrolled in schools ranged from 45 to 2400. For primary schools, the number of students ranged from 45 - 600 (M = 293.4, SD = 166.5, Mdn = 335.0). For secondary schools the number of students ranged from 800 - 2400 (M = 1367.3, SD = 895.8, Mdn = 902). Overall, principals had worked in schools for an average of 30.1 years (SD = 7.85, Mdn = 31.5, range 14 - 41 years). Females has worked in schools for an average of 32.9 years (SD = 8.13, Mdn = 34.0, range = 14 - 41 years). Males had worked in primary schools for an average of 26.38 years (SD = 7.17, Mdn = 29.50, range 15 - 24 years) and in secondary schools for an average of 35.33 years (SD = 4.51, Mdn = 35.00, range 31- 40 years).

Reasons parents send their children to a Catholic school

Principals were asked to rank from 1 to 5, the reasons they thought parents send then child/ren to a Catholic school. Results are presented in Table 10 and Figure 7. Figure 7 shows the highest bar on the graph was ‘Better values and morals’, followed by ‘Better discipline’. When looking at the five rankings separately, Figure 7 shows that the most frequent first reason (darker blue bars) was ‘Better discipline’, followed by ‘Better values and morals’, then ‘Better care’ and ‘Better academic outcomes’. The most frequent second reason (red bars) was ‘Better values and morals’ followed by ‘Better care’ and ‘Better academic
outcomes’. The most frequent third reasons (green bars) were equally, ‘Better care’, ‘Better academic outcomes’, ‘Better values and morals’ and ‘They are Catholic’. The most frequent fourth reasons (purple bars) were equally ‘Better values and morals’ and ‘They are Catholic’. The most frequent fifth reason (light blue bars) was ‘They went to a Catholic school themselves’. Some reasons were not chosen by any principals: ‘It’s the closest school to where they live’, ‘Staff have better qualifications and skills’, and ‘It’s in their parish’.

Thus, principals in the survey took the view that parents send their children to Catholic schools for reasons of higher quality academic and behaviour education compared to other school systems, rather than for faith development, practical or social reasons.

Table 10.

*Frequency of Principals’ Reasons Why Parents Choose a Catholic School for their Child/ren*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons…</th>
<th>First reason</th>
<th>Second reason</th>
<th>Third reason</th>
<th>Fourth reason</th>
<th>Fifth reason</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They went to a Catholic school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10&lt;sup&gt;5&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child's friends at same school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To attend a Catholic high school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better discipline</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16&lt;sup&gt;2&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better values and morals</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21&lt;sup&gt;1&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better care</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better academic outcomes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11&lt;sup&gt;4&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More resources</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic faith for their child</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child's spiritual development</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff are more committed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff better qualified</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a private school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More affordable</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's in their parish</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are Catholic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13&lt;sup&gt;3&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Superscripts show ranks of the top five most frequent responses overall.
Figure 7. Principals’ top five reasons for parents sending their child/ren to a Catholic school.
Invitations to parents and parent attendance at school events

Table 11 shows the frequency of principals’ responses to the question of whether parents at their school have been invited to and attended several events over the previous 12 months. As can be seen in Table 11, the majority of principals reported that parents had been invited to and attended most events, apart from principal appraisals.

Table 11.

*Principals’ Responses: Have Parents Been Invited to and Attended School Events Over the Past 12 Months (N = 22)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Invited</th>
<th>Attended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent teacher meetings</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and Friends meetings OR Parish School Forum</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Assembly</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class or Stage</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School sporting events</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School concerts/plays</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canteen roster</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class activities</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School liturgies/prayer</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Masses</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrament preparation</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent education opportunities</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund raising</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal appraisals</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School excursions</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Missing: -
How welcome are parents’ views at school?

Principals rated how welcoming their school was of parents’ views on five items, and responded on a 7-point scale where 1 represented ‘Extremely unwelcoming’ and 7 represented ‘Extremely welcoming’. Overall, principals rated their schools as very welcoming toward parents’ views on all items, as shown in Table 12. There were no differences based on principals’ gender. Comparisons between primary and secondary principals were unreliable as there were only three secondary principals.

Table 12.

Principals’ Ratings of how Welcoming their School is of Parents’ Views

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How welcome are parents views about …</th>
<th>Minimum score</th>
<th>Maximum score</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…their child/ren's academic development</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…their child/ren's wellbeing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…school governance</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…their child/ren's religious and faith development</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.45</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…how the school is living up to its Christian beliefs and values</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.50</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spearman’s correlations showed that principals from larger schools \( r(20) = .43, p = .045 \), and those who had been teaching for longer \( r(20) = .53, p = .012 \), rated their school as more welcoming of parents views about ‘…how the school is living up to its Christian beliefs and values’.

Principals’ views of children and parents’ perspectives on parent-school partnership

Principals agreed that children want their parents to be involved with the school (20 principals said ‘yes’, and two said they were ‘unsure/don’t know’), and that children seek their parents help with their education (16 said ‘yes’, six said ‘unsure/don’t know’). However, only one principal (4.5%) said ‘yes’ to the statement that ‘Parents feel competent to help their children in all aspects of their homework’, seven (31.8%) said they were ‘unsure/don’t know’, and 14 principals (63.3%) said ‘no’. Furthermore, 13 out of 22 principals (59%) said
‘no’, to the statement that ‘Parents are competent to nurture the religious development of their children’, while nine principals (40.9%) said ‘don’t know/unsure’, and none (0%) of the principals said ‘yes’. These results indicate principals hold negative attitudes regard to parents’ competency in nurturing their children’s education, and as such represent an area to address in future initiatives.

**Principals’ views on their school’s culture in relation to parents**

Principals rated several statements about how welcoming their school is of parents and the school culture surrounding parental involvement at school. Principals responded on 7-point Likert scales where 1 represented ‘Strongly disagree’ and 7 represented ‘Strongly agree’. As shown in Table 13, the mean scores were all above 5.59 on the 7-point scales, indicating very favourable views of their schools’ parent culture.

Table 13.

*Principals’ Views on their School’s Culture Regarding Parents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Minimum score</th>
<th>Maximum score</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school office staff are welcoming to parents</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easy for parents to make contact and communicate with me</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.68</td>
<td>0.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easy for parents to make contact and communicate with teachers</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.41</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know many parents at my school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The class teacher or home room teacher knows the parents names</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school staff listen to parents</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.59</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents know some of the staff at the school very well</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.05</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents know other parents in the school</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was only one difference between male principals and female principals. Males $(M = 6.69, SD = 0.63)$ rated the school office staff as significantly more welcoming to parents than females $(M = 5.89, SD = 1.05)$, $t(20) = 2.24, p = .036$, Cohen’s $d = 0.92$. Spearman’s correlations showed that larger school size was associated with principals rating the office
staff as significantly more welcoming to parents \( r(20) = .49, p = .021 \), principals knowing significantly fewer parents at their schools \( r(20) = -.53, p = .011 \), and rating class teachers and home room teachers as knowing parents’ names significantly less often \( r(20) = -.59, p = .004 \).

**How important is parent partnership in your school?**

Principals rated the statement ‘Parent partnership is important in my school’ on a 7-point scale where 1 represented ‘Extremely unimportant’ and 7 represented ‘Extremely important’. The 22 principals rated parent partnership in their school as ranging from 4 (neither important nor unimportant) to 7 (extremely important). The mean rating was 6.41 \( (SD = 0.96) \), which indicates that on average principals rated parent partnership as very important in their school. There were no significant differences between female and male principals, nor between primary and secondary principals \( (p > .05) \).

**How important is the role of principals and clergy in building stronger parent partnerships within schools?**

Principals then rated two statements regarding the importance of their own and clergy’s roles in building strong parent partnership within schools using 7-point Likert scales where 1 represented ‘Extremely unimportant’ and 7 represented ‘Extremely important’.

Principals rated their own role in facilitating parent school partnership as ranging from 5 to 7, with a mean of 6.77 \( (SD = 0.53) \), thus indicating that they see their role as highly important. There were no differences based on gender, nor whether they were primary or secondary principals, \( (p > .05) \).

Principals’ ratings of the role of clergy in facilitating parent school partnership ranged from 1 to 7, with mean of 5.50 \( (SD = 1.60) \), and this was significantly less important than their own role \( t(21) = 4.42, p < .001 \). Again, there were no differences based on gender, however, primary principals \( (M = 5.94, SD = 1.14, n = 17) \) rated clergy as significantly more
important than secondary principals ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 1.73$, $n = 3$), $t(18) = 3.84$, $p < .001$, Cohen’s $d = 2.01$. This is a very large effect size but caution in interpreting this result should be applied due to the very small number of secondary principals in the sample.

**Attitudes and Norms Regarding Parent-School Partnership**

Seven items from Bracke and Corts (2009) were adapted for the present study which measure attitudes and perceived norms of parents’ roles in schools. Items a – d measure attitudes and items e –f measure perceived norms. Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 represented ‘strongly disagree’ and 7 represented ‘strongly agree’. Items b and g were reverse scored.

a. The most successful schools have consistent partnership with parents
b. Schools, not parents, are responsible for educating children
c. Children’s education will benefit if parents are involved with the school
d. It is important for parents to meet and keep in touch with their child’s teacher
e. Most parents at my parish school are actively involved in school life
f. Parents’ friends and neighbours, and students’ grandparents are actively involved in the school
g. The majority of parents at my parish school are unable or unwilling to be actively involved with the school

Composite scores were formed for both attitudes and perceived norms by summing the relevant items. Total attitude scores could potentially range from 4 to 28, with higher scores indicating more favourable attitudes towards parent-school partnerships. Total norm scores could range from 3 to 21, with higher scores indicating norms of increased parent-school partnership.

In the present study, the 21 principals’ total attitude scores ranged from 19 to 28, with a mean of 24.81 ($SD = 2.56$), indicating moderate to strong favourable attitudes about parent-school partnership. Principals’ total scores for norms ranged from 6 to 18, with a mean score of 12.48 ($SD = 3.70$), thus indicating quite low perceived norms of parent-school partnership. There was no significant difference between genders on total attitude scores (Males: $n = 13$, $M = 24.61$, $SD = 2.90$; Females: $n = 8$, $M = 25.13$, $SD = 2.03$), $t(19) = -0.43$, $p = .699$. 
However, female principals scored significantly higher on total norms \((n = 8, M = 14.50, SD = 2.61)\) than male principals \((n = 13, M = 11.23, SD = 3.79)\), \(t(19) = -2.14, p = .046\), Cohen’s \(d = 1.00\). The effect size was large.

Similarly, there was no significant difference between primary \((n = 16, M = 24.87, SD = 2.33)\) and secondary principals’ \((n = 3, M = 26.33, SD = 2.08)\) total attitude scores, \(t(17) = -1.01, p = .329\). However, primary principals \((n = 16, M = 14.06, SD = 2.38)\) scored significantly higher on total norms than secondary principals \((n = 3, M = 7.67, SD = 2.88)\), \(t(17) = 4.16, p = .001\), Cohen’s \(d = 2.41\). The effect size is very large. Caution on generalising and interpreting these results is advised due to the very small sample of secondary principals.

**Principals’ responses to the statement ‘Parents are interested in discussing religious aspects of their child’s education’**

Principals responded to the statement ‘Parents are interested in discussing religious aspects of their child’s education’ using a 7-point Likert scale where 1 represented ‘Strongly disagree’ and 7 represented ‘Strongly agree’. The 22 principals’ scores in the present study ranged from 2 to 6, with a mean of 3.05 \((SD = 0.95)\). Eleven principals slightly disagreed with the statement by choosing ‘3’, while six disagreed and chose ‘2’. Four principals neither agreed nor disagreed and chose ‘4’. Only one principal agreed with the statement and chose ‘6’. None of the principals strongly agreed or strongly disagreed. These results show that overall, the principals in this study reported that parents are not interested in discussing religious aspects of their child’s education.

**Barriers to forming stronger parent-school partnership**

Principals were asked to nominate which of a list of barriers to forming stronger parent-school partnership were relevant to them. They could choose as many barriers as they liked. Figure 4 shows the number of principals who selected each barrier. ‘Lack of time’ was

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\(^1\) The small sample of three secondary principals may lack statistical power to detect a difference if there is one there.
the most frequent option, along with the category of ‘Other barriers’. Principals who chose ‘Other barriers’ were given the option of elaborating on their response. The following comment captures the sentiments listed by several other principals as well:

Sometimes I think parents are too busy to get too involved. They will do what they can when it suits them. Whilst we have a good band of parents willing to give their time it is typically the same ones. Sometimes we have had some issues with some parents who have their own bandwagon they want to push and that can get them offside with staff and other parents. Sometimes parents are fearful to get involved because they think they might end up having to do much more than they bargained for.

Other barriers listed by principals included:

- Finding the right forums for parent participation
- Parents - if they are happy with the school - tend to not get involved
- Cultural differences
- Trust
- Insecurity of parents when engaging with the school as an educational institution - Education is not a priority for many parents at our school
- Staff/parent relationships can be difficult to build. [It is] easier to do this often at Principal level without [the] behaviour of students as [an] issue. Also some parents do not understand the need for this relationship - too busy, not comfortable.
- Parents traditionally have been kept outside of the school
- Change of culture to welcome parents is needed
- Young staff need training to work in partnership with parents.

These comments also capture the third most frequent response, ‘Parents don’t seem interested in forming partnership with the school’ (see Figure 8). Three principals said they didn’t want to burden teaching staff with more tasks. Only one principal said the existing school policies and guidelines did not support their role in facilitating parent-partnership, and only one principal said they were satisfied with existing levels of parent-school partnership and saw no need for change. None of the principals chose their own lack of understanding of what partnership means, or lack of confidence in working with parents as barriers that were relevant to them.
The Catholic School Parent Assembly

All 22 principals who completed the survey were aware of the Catholic School Parent Assembly. When asked how useful they considered the Catholic School Parent Assembly, principals’ scores ranged from 2 to 6 on a 7-point scale where 1 indicated ‘Not at all useful’ and 7 indicated ‘Extremely useful’. The mean score was 4.18 ($SD = 1.10$) with a mode at 4.00. Thus, on average, principals only mildly agreed that the Parent Assembly is useful. Figure 9 shows the data was slightly negatively skewed, with more principals responding
above the mid-point than below the mid-point, again showing that overall, principals mildly agreed that the Parent Assembly is useful.

![Histogram](image.png)

**Figure 9.** Frequency histogram of principal responses to ‘How useful do you consider the Catholic School Parent Assembly’.

**Other comments**

**Principals’ role in facilitating parent-school partnership**

At the end of the survey principals were invited to add further comments, particularly in relation to their role in facilitating parent-school partnership. Their comments are presented below:

- Sometimes parents are happy to let the school get on with doing what they do and don’t feel the necessity to contribute much. Parents are very disengaged with the Church and really want the school to be responsible for passing on the faith to their kids. I think they want some kind of connection without having to commit themselves to too much themselves. They see that teaching kids values of kindness etc. is important and are happy for it to be in a faith context but they don’t see the need to commit to participation in parish worship.

- It is an extremely vital role - to value the parents and carers, to be available when they need you, to be sensitive to their particular situations and to continue to build relationships.
Facilitating Parent Partnership does not necessarily mean running a program or having an information evening. The most important thing in my view is to create a welcoming environment where parents feel comfortable to be involved, that they and their children are valued, and they know that their views are listened to. The Principal has a significant role in setting the tone/creating the climate for this to happen.

Parent partnership in my setting is about being available and listening. I am new to the role so I do a lot of listening in this school community. Teacher parent partnership must include “getting on the front foot” - teachers need to be supported and encouraged to get parents in for the good and not work from a fear perspective. Teachers recognising that parents just want the best for their own is really significant in this setting.

Parents get involved at the level that they feel comfortable. Quiet often out of an interest that is their own and/or their child's specific interests.

We have engaged two parent reference groups this year, one in the area of student learning and the other regarding Catholic life and RE. These groups are proving very beneficial in understanding how to reach parents more effectively with our messages so as to engage them more. We are also learning about the range of different parent experiences and understandings - there is great diversity in our parent community in terms of level of knowledge, interest in being involved as partners and availability of time.

It is a challenging issue especially for secondary schools. These days the majority of parents work by the time their children are in high school and are time poor. There are numerous demands on their time with students’ out-of-school sport and other activities. Furthermore, many who have had extensive involvement in primary schools are “over it” by the time their children reach high school. But just because they are not turning up in such big numbers to school related activities should not be always interpreted as apathy. Schools can forge effective partnerships with parents using modern technology...internet, email, text messages, telephone. Face-to-face contact is great but not always feasible. I think we have far more communication and more effective partnerships with parents today than was the case in the past. In many ways parent partnership is an attitude or philosophy that should underpin all we do. Its effectiveness cannot be measured in attendance at meetings or sports carnivals. The work of our graduation committees is just another example of that partnership and I really value the advice and input from our Parent Consultative Committee on a range of decisions.

Like to see much more parent education. Many areas have video conferencing now. This is much needed. Social issues in parent ed is needed. That is........ Social media. Internet safety. Bullying. Restorative justice refresher. CLF Proclaim for parents. Australian Curriculum. Having interactive, video conferences in some of these areas would be great, even a parent website with links to some of these areas. Parent bodies could then run their own, in their own area. Avoid the travel to the bigger cities. Just a thought. Thank you.

We have a small core group of parents who run and are involved in many things at the school. We have a good group of parents that attend the infants’ classes during the day to assist in class with reading etc.

Hopes for the future

In the final question, principals were asked if they would like to add any further comments, particularly in relation to their hopes for the future for parent-school partnership. Their comments are presented below:

I would like to think that parents always feel they can come to the school when they need to discuss something. We have had a much improved response to Sacramental programs from parents as we have changed what we do. I would love to see parents take the faith development of their children more seriously and commit to being present at the weekend parish celebrations on a more regular basis. I would like parents to commit to helping to build a vibrant positive school community by offering to be more involved.

Parent partnership is very 21st century in nature when you talk more through email and phones as the parents are 98% working. Old models do not really meet their needs.
• Parent partnership is becoming a more complex issue with 'contemporary busyness.' We are currently rethinking ways to stimulate and engage more effective partnership.

• I believe that developing a system that involves a school based parent liaison officer instead of the Parent Assembly Model would be more effective in reaching out to parents. This could be in clusters of schools in a parish or geographic area - this would personalise and focus the connection between Parish, schools and parents. The parents are not linked to Parishes and the parent assembly has failed to forge these links and has had little impact on those not involved in the parishes. It could be a way to link Parishes to school parents more effectively. The liaison person would need to be trained and should not need to be a teacher. The Parent Assembly in its various incarnations has not really delivered widespread parental involvement in the "Catholic Education" of their children because it has not really had that direct connection with the Parish or the parents. I think that it can be seen as "clubby" and removed from the lived experience of the average parent. It needs to be seen as somehow more personal, relevant and connected. A local person attached to schools may be a solution.

• I think the way forward is to seek very different ways of engaging parents. The Catholic school is still a significant avenue for parents to engage in community. Parents seek this but have less experience of it and are increasingly reluctant to put their toes in the water. Creativity is required I think to find new ways of engaging parents in a non-threatening way that can then lead to more of a partnership.

• A community of mutual trust and respect.

• I would like the parents more involved in the Parent Forum, so we can look at different groups such as education etc. We currently have a small group that is like a fundraising committee. I'd love to see the parents more involved in the religious life at the school. I would like to see more parents continue to bring their children to Mass on weekends after they have received the Sacraments. I would like to see a home based Sacramental Program where there are opportunities for evangelising the parents.

• Parents become truly valued as partners in the education of their children. They need to also be seen as a resource of knowledge about their child.
Clergy

Participants

Five of the six participants had been a priest for 21 - 40 years, and one for 11-20 years.

Clergy’ responses to an open ended question that asked how many Catholic parents had students enrolled in their schools were:

- I don’t have exact figures at the time of completing the survey, however at 14 August, 2014 there are 416 kids in primary and 493 in secondary. Roughly 243 of the primary kids are Catholic and 269 of the secondary kids are Catholic. If at least one parent is Catholic there are at least 512 parents who are Catholic and no doubt this figure would be higher.
- 600
- unknown
- 60% Catholic 40% non-Catholic
- 160
- 275

Reasons parents send their children to a Catholic school

Clergy were asked to rank from 1 to 5 the reasons they thought parents send their children to a Catholic school. As shown in Figure 10 and Table 14 below, the most frequent reasons overall given by clergy was ‘Better values and morals’ and ‘To attend a Catholic high school’ (tallest bars on Figure 10), followed by ‘Better discipline’. When looking at the five rankings separately, Figure 10 shows that the most frequent first reason (darker blue bars) given by clergy was ‘They went to a Catholic school themselves’. The most frequent second reason (red bars) was ‘Better care’. The third reasons (green bars) were: ‘Better values and morals’ and ‘Better academic outcomes’. The fourth reasons (purple bars) were each chosen by one priest each and were: ‘They went to a Catholic school themselves’, ‘Their child/ren’s friends attend the same school’, ‘It means their child can then attend a Catholic secondary school’, ‘Better discipline’, ‘Better values and morals’ and ‘For their child’s spiritual development’. The most frequent fifth reason (light blue bars) was ‘It means their child can then attend a Catholic secondary school’.
Thus, the four clergy sampled take the view that parents are sending their children to Catholic schools for reasons of children receiving better discipline and better values and morals compared to other school systems, and to gain entry to Catholic secondary schools.

Table 13.

Frequency of Clergy Reasons for Why Parents Choose a Catholic School for their Child/ren

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>First reason</th>
<th>Second reason</th>
<th>Third reason</th>
<th>Fourth reason</th>
<th>Fifth reason</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They went to a Catholic school</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closest school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child's friends at same school</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To attend a Catholic high school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better discipline</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better values and morals</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better care</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Better academic outcomes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More resources</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic faith for their child</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child's spiritual development</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff are more committed</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff better qualified</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a private school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More affordable</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It's in their parish</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are Catholic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 10. Clergy’ top five reasons for parents sending their child/ren to a Catholic school.
Invitations to clergy and priest attendance at school events

Table 14 shows the frequency of clergy receiving invitations to and attending several school events over the previous 12 months. As can be seen in Table 14, clergy had been invited to and attended most events, except for the Parent Assembly, Parents and Friends meetings or Parish School Forum, and three clergy had not attended parent education opportunities or fund raising events.

Table 14.

Clergy’ Responses: Have You Been Invited to and Attended School Events Over the Past 12 Months (N = 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Invited to….</th>
<th>Attended….</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and Friends meetings OR Parish School Forum</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Assembly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School sporting events</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School concerts/plays</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class activities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School liturgies/prayer</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Masses</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrament preparation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent education opportunities</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund raising</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School social gatherings</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How welcome are parents’ views at school?

Clergy were asked to rate how welcoming the schools in their parish are of five aspects of school life on 7-point Likert scales, where 1 represented ‘Extremely unwelcoming’ and 7 represented ‘Extremely welcoming’. The clergy’ responses are reported in Table 15 and show the clergy all differed in their views, with one priest responding extremely unwelcoming on all items, but the other clergy generally agreeing that schools welcome
parent views to some extent on all items except ‘Their child/ren’s religious and faith development’.

Table 15.

*Clergy’ Responses to Questions about how Welcoming Schools are of Parents’ Views*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Clergy’ responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Their child/ren’s academic development (helping with learning)</td>
<td>1, 5, 6, 6, 7, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their child/ren’s wellbeing (welfare, bullying, personal development)</td>
<td>1, 5, 6, 7, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School governance (attending P &amp; F and/or Parish school forum meetings; school boards)</td>
<td>1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their child/ren’s religious and faith development (attending school Mass/liturgies, preparation for Sacraments, prayer for parents)</td>
<td>1, 1, 2, 4, 4, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the school is living up to its Christian beliefs and values</td>
<td>1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Clergy’ views of children and parents’ perspectives on parent-school partnership*

Clergy generally agreed that children want their parents to be involved with the school (four clergy said ‘yes’, and two said they were ‘unsure/don’t know’), and that children seek their parents help with their education (three said ‘yes’ and three said ‘unsure/don’t know’). However, four clergy said ‘no’ to the statement that ‘Parents feel competent to help their children in all aspects of their homework’, and two clergy said they were ‘unsure/don’t know’. Furthermore, three clergy said ‘no’, to the statement that ‘Parents are competent to nurture the religious development of their children’, while the other three clergy said ‘don’t know/unsure’.

*Clergy’ views on their parish schools’ culture in regard to parents*

Clergy rated several statements about how welcoming their parish schools are of parents and their own relationships with parents. Clergy responded on 7-point Likert scales where 1 represented ‘Strongly disagree’ and 7 represented ‘Strongly agree’. As shown in Table 16, clergy generally agreed that school office staff, school principals and school teaching staff are very welcoming to parents, but they also generally agreed that they did not know most parents at the schools and did not rely on parent networks to support their
ministry. Clergy were divided in how much they thought that parents knew other parents in
the school, with three clergy choosing the scale mid-point of 4 (neither agree nor disagree)
and three clergy choosing 6, indicating agreement with the statement.

Table 16.

*Clergy’ Views on their Parish Schools’ Culture in Regard to Parents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Clergy’ responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school office staff are welcoming to parents</td>
<td>3, 5, 6 ,6 ,7, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know most parents at my parish schools</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 3, 3, 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents know other parents in the school</td>
<td>4, 4, 4, 6, 6, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I rely on a large school parent network to support</td>
<td>1, 2, 2, 2, 2, 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my ministry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school principals are welcoming to parents</td>
<td>6, 6, 6, 7, 7, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school teaching staff are welcoming to parents</td>
<td>5, 6 ,6 , 6, 6, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How important is parent partnership in parish schools?

The four clergy rated the importance of parent partnership in parish schools as 4, 4, 5
,5, 7, 7 respectively on a 7-point scale where 1 represented ‘Extremely unimportant’ and 7
represented ‘Extremely important’. Thus, clergy’ scores ranged from the mid-point indicating
neither important nor unimportant, to extremely important. Overall, four of the clergy agreed
to some extent that parent partnership is important in parish schools.

How important is the role of principals and clergy in building stronger parent
partnerships within schools?

Clergy then rated two statements regarding the importance of their own and
principals’ roles in building strong parent partnership within schools using 7-point Likert
scales where 1 represented ‘Extremely unimportant’ and 7 represented ‘Extremely
important’. Clergy rated the importance of their own roles as 2, 3, 4, 5, 5 and 7, and they
rated the importance of principals’ roles as 6, 6, 6, 7, 7, 7. Thus, clergy placed greatest
emphasis on the role of principals in facilitating parent school partnership.

Attitudes and Norms Regarding Parent-School Partnership
Seven items from Bracke and Corts (2009) were adapted for the present study, which measure attitudes and perceived norms of parents’ roles in schools. Items a – d measure attitudes and items e – f measure perceived norms. Participants responded on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 represented ‘strongly disagree’ and 7 represented ‘strongly agree’. Items b and g were reverse scored.

a. The most successful schools have consistent partnership with parents
b. Schools, not parents, are responsible for educating children
c. Children's education will benefit if parents are involved with the school
d. It is important for parents to meet and keep in touch with their child's teacher
e. Most parents at my parish school are actively involved in school life
f. Parents’ friends and neighbours, and students’ grandparents are actively involved in the school
g. The majority of parents at my parish school are unable or unwilling to be actively involved with the school

Composite scores were formed for both attitudes and perceived norms by summing the relevant items. Total attitude scores could potentially range from 4 to 28, with higher scores indicating more favourable attitudes towards parent-school partnerships. Total norm scores could range from 3 to 21, with higher scores indicating norms of increasing parent-school partnership. The sample of six clergy scored 19, 23, 24, 25, 25 and 26 on the total attitudes scale, respectively, thus indicating quite strong favourable attitudes toward parent-school partnership. The six clergy scored 9, 9, 9, 9, 11 and 12, on the total norms scale, indicating that clergy perceived norms of parent involvement at their parish schools to be low.

Clergy’ responses to the statement ‘Parents are interested in discussing religious aspects of their child’s education’
This statement was also responded to on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 represented ‘strongly disagree’ and 7 represented ‘strongly agree’. The four clergy responded 2, 2, 2, 2, 4 and 4, indicating that the clergy perceived that parents are not very interested in discussing religious aspects of their child/ren’s education.

**Barriers to forming stronger parent-school partnership**

Clergy were asked to nominate which of a list of barriers to forming stronger parent-school partnership were relevant to them. They could choose as many barriers as they liked. Figure 11 presented the barriers nominated by the six clergy. Figure 11 shows that lack of time and the perception that parents do not seem interested in the faith were each nominated by five of the six clergy. Two clergy were concerned about child protection issues. One selected ‘other barriers’ and wrote ‘Parents have great difficulty finding the time to build partnership with school’.
The Catholic School Parent Assembly

All six clergy who completed the survey were aware of the Catholic School Parent Assembly. When asked how useful they considered the Catholic School Parent Assembly, clergy’ scores were 3, 5, 5, 5, 6, and 6, on a 7-point scale where 1 indicated ‘Not at all useful’ and 7 indicated ‘Extremely useful’. Thus, one priest thought the Parent Assembly was not useful, and the five other clergy thought it was useful to some extent, ranging from mildly useful (5) to very useful (6).
Other comments

At the end of the survey clergy were invited to add further comments, particularly in relation to their role in facilitating parent-school partnership. One priest commented and he gave feedback about the survey questions: “It was difficult to answer the questions insofar as the questions could be answered differently for primary and secondary schools”. The final questions gave clergy the opportunity to write about their hopes for the future of parent–school partnership. One priest commented: “hope it can grow farther”

Summary of Key Results and Discussion

This research has added to what is known about parent-school partnership in a Catholic school context by surveying parents, school principals and clergy on their views, experiences and understandings of parent partnership. The nine key findings are discussed below with reference to previous literature and theories of parent-school partnership.

1. Parents, principals and clergy generally reported a favourable school culture with regard to parents.

   Clergy generally agreed that school office staff, school principals and school teaching staff are very welcoming to parents, but they also generally agreed that they did not know most parents at the schools and did not rely on parent networks to support their ministry. Principals indicated very favourable views of their schools’ parent culture overall. However, male principals rated the school office staff as significantly more welcoming to parents than female principals, and principals from larger schools rated the office staff as significantly more welcoming to parents than those from smaller schools. Principals from larger schools also said they knew significantly fewer parents at their schools, and that class teachers and home room teachers knew parents’ names significantly less often.
Most parents held favourable views of the school culture in relation to parents, however their responses were nuanced by their age, whether their children attended primary or secondary schools, and their religion. Younger parents (aged 26-35 years) disagreed that it is easy to make contact and communicate with the teachers, while older parents (aged 45-55 or 56-66 years) were more likely to disagree or be unsure about whether the class or home room teacher knows their name. Parents with children attending secondary school were more likely to disagree or be unsure about whether the principal and teachers know them, while parents with children in primary school agreed that the class teacher knows their name. Catholic parents were more likely to know some of the staff at the school very well, while parents of a non-Christian religion were unlikely to do so.

2. This favourable culture requires close attention as there is only minimal unity of purpose regarding parental partnership. The data revealed areas where unity exists and at the same time revealed differences that potentially diminish cohesion and a shared sense of purpose within the school community. Examples of this are:

A) While “better values and morals” was the agreed first choice of parents, principals and clergy for why parents choose a Catholic school, there was a marked lack of agreement regarding the other reasons.

Clergy, principals and parents selected “better values and morals” as a key reason why parents send their children to a Catholic school. This result aligns Hugonnet’s (1997) socio-emotional reasons for choosing a Catholic school. Principals and parents also selected “better academic outcomes” and “better discipline”, while clergy nominated that parents send their children to Catholic schools to gain entry to a Catholic secondary school. These results align with Hugonnet’s category of physical-intellectual reasons for choosing Catholic schools. Although not selected by principals or clergy, parents reported sending their child to a Catholic school for their child’s spiritual development, and in particular, Catholic faith
development. This results fits with Hugonnet’s category of religious reasons, however, differs from Flynn and colleagues (Flynn, 1993; Mok & Flynn, 1998), who found that most parents do not emphasise religious reasons for choosing a Catholic school for their child. Where the previous literature captured a sense of concern that the gap between the goals of Catholic schools and the expectations of parents is growing (Warren et al., 2003), the present study’s results suggest that the gap, and resulting concern, lies in differences between parent perspectives and those of principals and clergy.

B) While parents, principals and clergy viewed parent-school partnership as very important, they believed that it was not the practical norm in schools. Moreover, there was a discrepancy between parent and principal/clergy views regarding parents’ competency in helping their children with their homework, and in their ability to nurture their child’s religious development.

Four of the six clergy agreed to some extent that parent partnership is important in parish schools. Principals and parents also rated parent partnership as very important in their school. Female parents rated parent partnership as significantly more important than male parents. Parents with children at both primary and secondary Catholic schools rated parent-school partnership significantly more important than those who only had children at Catholic secondary schools. These findings concur with others’ findings (Jeynes, 2007; Ludicke & Kortman, 2012; Warren & Young, 2002) and the wealth of evidence showing the benefits of strong parent-school partnership (Bastiani, 2000). As discussed earlier, these benefits accrue to students (Emerson et al., 2012; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Jeynes, 2007; Sheldon, 2007; Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Warner, 2010; Warren & Young, 2002; Warren et al., 2003), schools and communities (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, n.d.).

Parents’ attitudes towards parent-school partnership ranged from mildly negative to extremely positive, and on average were moderately favourable. Parents’ perceived norms
ranged from very low levels of parent partnership to very high levels, with the average norm quite low. Principals held moderate to strong favourable attitudes about parent-school partnership, but perceived quite low norms of parent-school partnership. Female principals scored significantly higher on perceived norms than male principals. Primary principals scored significantly higher on perceived norms than secondary principals. Clergy held quite strong favourable attitudes toward parent-school partnership, but perceived norms of parent involvement at their parish schools to be quite low. These results support those of Bracke and Corts (2009), who found that regardless of the perceived level of parental involvement, almost all parents held favourable attitudes towards parental involvement, that is, they believed that engagement with their child’s education was important. Furthermore, Bracke and Corts found that perceived social norms were the defining variable in determining parent’s actions with regard to being involved or not in their child’s schooling. They concluded that the perception of parental participation as a socially normal was likely to improve parental involvement. Bracke and Corts’ research was guided by the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), which posits that behaviours are determined by attitudes/beliefs, perceived social norms and perceived control of behaviours. This approach aligns with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s (1995, 2005) work, which alluded to social norms and argued that active role construction is a means to improve parental involvement.

Parents, principals and clergy generally agreed that children want their parents to be involved with the school and that children seek their parents help with their education. However, only one principal and none of the clergy agreed that ‘parents feel competent to help their children in all aspects of their homework’. In contrast, just under 70% of parents said they felt competent to help their child in all aspects of their homework. Furthermore, none of the principals or clergy agreed with the statement that ‘parents are competent to
nurture the religious development of their children’. Parents, principals and clergy agreed overall that most parents are not interested in discussing their child’s religious development.

These results highlight a discrepancy between parent and principal/clergy perspectives. Specifically, they identify a lack of confidence from principals and clergy in relation to parents’ competency in helping their children with their homework, and in their ability to nurture their child’s religious development. This discrepancy is similar to Warren et al.’s (2003) finding that parents more frequently reported sharing ways of helping their child grow spiritually than was reported by teachers. These results are similar to Roffey’s (2004) finding that embedded in the teachers’ comments was the belief that teachers know best about children’s learning. These findings signal the need for deep attitudinal and cultural change in relation to parent partnership. They also highlight the importance of relationships for fostering strong parent school partnerships, and how differences in role construction form barriers to parent partnership and all the benefits it brings with it.

The present results suggest that parent partnership is functioning at a “silent” or passive level as proposed by Spry and Graham (2009), where teachers are presented as the experts. The results also suggested that parents are viewed as uninterested in their own child’s religious development, thus are not functioning at Spry and Graham’s “managed” level of parent partnership. Future initiatives need to address this tension in perspectives so that stronger parent-school partnership can be achieved, and move towards an “activist” level (Spry & Graham, 2009), whereby parents are engaged with the school as equal allies with teachers and are viewed as morally interested in outcomes for all children and as co-leaders and joint decision makers with staff.

C) Parents, principals and clergy were in agreement that the main barrier to forming stronger parent-school partnership is lack of time. However, the remaining perceived barriers varied across groups.
The most frequent barrier nominated by parents was work commitments, followed by lack of time. The majority of other options (lack of available childcare; I don’t have the skills that are needed; I am unaware of how to get involved; I feel uncomfortable or unwelcome; I don’t want to be the only parent who gets involved; I prefer not to be involved in religious aspects of the school) were selected by approximately 6 - 12 percent of the sample, with lack of transport only selected by 1% of parents. Other common themes in the barriers written about by parents included lack of communication between school and parents, lack of welcoming gestures by school staff, lack of accommodation of parents’ diverse needs, lack of informal activities for parents, lack of leadership from the principal, and perception that deep cultural and attitude change is needed in the schools. These results support those of earlier studies (Baker, 1997; Harris & Goodall, 2008; Watson et al., 2012; Westergard & Galloway, 2010).

The barriers selected by principals suggest that they are denying or avoiding responsibility for facilitating parent partnership, as indicated by their perceptions that they lacked time, parents are not interested, and they do not have any gaps in their understanding and skills in relation to working with parents. One or two of the clergy, on the other hand, did acknowledge their own lack of confidence in working with parents. Clergy also nominated lack of time as their most frequent barrier, and two clergy nominated concern about child protection issues. These results suggest that in-service training and support for principals and clergy may be helpful.

D) While principals and clergy thought parent views were very welcome in their schools, parents felt their views were only somewhat welcome.

Principals generally rated their schools as very welcoming toward parents’ views on all items – their children’s academic development, wellbeing, religious and faith development, school governance, and how the school is living up to its Christian beliefs and
values. Parents’ responses ranged from extremely unwelcoming to extremely welcoming, but on average parents rated schools as somewhat welcoming toward their views on all aspects. Thus, although parents and principals both agree that schools are welcoming of parent views to some extent, principal survey responses were far more positive than the parent responses. The discrepancy between principal and parent responses suggest the perception of how welcome parents’ views are at school is a source of tension that may be a barrier to forming stronger parent-school partnership.

This finding underscores the challenges of forming and maintaining partnership discussed by Saulwick Muller Social Research (2006), and the cultural changes that teachers and parents may need to make to support effective collaboration. As Warren et al. (2003) and Roffey (2004) stated – the importance of good communication between school and the family, where teaching staff and schools welcome and respect parents’ views, is critical to fostering stronger parent partnerships. Furthermore, underlying messages that ‘teachers know best’ detract from collaborative and reciprocal relationships between parents and school staff (Warren et al., 2003).

3. Parents and clergy were invited to most school events, although in the crucial areas of community development and advice to principals, namely, Parents and Friends, Parent Assembly and Parish School Forum, attendance by clergy and parents was minimal. Moreover, parents’ experience with other parents and parent initiatives in the school were mixed.

Clergy had been invited to and attended most school events, except for those that specifically involved parents (Parent Assembly, Parents and Friends meetings or Parish School Forum, parent education opportunities). Thus, there appears to be a lack of opportunity for clergy to meet with parents in structured activities at the school in which parent roles and perspectives are discussed. This is an area which could improve parent-
school partnership as it would allow parents, school staff and clergy to collaborate and share ideas.

Principals reported that parents had been invited to and attended most events, apart from principal appraisals. The majority of parents reported they had been invited to most events, apart from principal appraisals, sacrament preparation and school excursions. Many parents had attended parent-teacher meetings, school sporting events, school concerts/plays, school liturgies/prayer, school Masses, and fund raising events. However, many parents did not attend Parents and Friends meetings or Parish School Forum, Parent Assembly, canteen roster, sacrament preparation, principal appraisals or excursions.

These results point to participation in Epstein’s (1992) first three types of partnership:

- **Type 1**, basic obligations of families ‘parenting’, in which schools help families to develop the knowledge and skills they need to understand children at each grade level (i.e., workshops and parent education);
- **Type 2**, Basic obligations of schools, ‘communicating’, in which schools communicate with families about children’s progress and school programs, along with helping children make important decisions at each grade level (courses, programs, activities). Schools strengthen partnerships by encouraging two-way communication.
- **Type 3**, involvement at school, in which parents and other volunteers who assist teachers and children in classrooms or other areas of the school are involved. Schools vary schedules so that more parents can participate. Schools recruit and train volunteers so they are helpful to teachers, students and school improvement efforts.

Attendance at the above school activities and events do not signify Epstein’s higher types of partnership, such as Type 5, involvement in decision making, governance, and
advocacy, or Type 6, collaboration and exchange with community organisations. Furthermore, invitations and attendance at the above events capture only one aspect of parent involvement – school based involvement, and they omit home-based involvement and academic socialisation (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2007). Harris and Goodall (2008) argue that while involving parents in school activities has an important social and community function, it is only through engagement of parents in learning at home that is most likely to result in positive differences to learning outcomes.

Just under 40% of parent participants said that other parents had invited them to be involved with their school, but a similar number said this had not happened. Very few participants had received a phone call from a parent representative from an official group to welcome them to the school. While most participants felt that other parents were happy to see them, many were unsure as to whether there were parent groups they could join and many were also unsure whether parent groups represent their views. Only one fifth of the parents surveyed felt that the parent groups did represent their views. As highlighted in level one of Hoover-Dempsey and colleagues (2007) five-level model of parental involvement, part of the foundation of building strong parent partnership rests on parents’ perceptions of invitations for involvement from others. Additionally, as stated in Epstein’s (1992, 2001) overlapping spheres of influence model, schools need to assist parents to be leaders by training them in decision-making and communication skills and including parents as true contributors to school decisions (Type 5).

4. There was strong agreement that the Principals’ role is very important for building stronger parent partnerships within schools.

Parents, principals and clergy rated the role of principals in building stronger parent partnerships within schools as highly important, and those of clergy as still import but less important than principals’ roles. These results were nuanced, as parents with children at more
than one Catholic school thought the role of clergy was significantly more important for building parent-school partnerships than those who had children at only one school. Parents who identified as having no religion viewed clergy roles as significantly less important than Catholic parents and parents of other Christian religions, but not different from parents of other non-Christian religions. This emphasis on the importance of principals’ roles supports Warren et al. (2003), who found that parents valued good communication with their school principal as a critically important component of successful and collaborative parent partnership. The present survey findings also support Roffey (2004), who found that some schools overtly conveyed an inclusive ethos that often stemmed from strong leadership.

5. Many parents, all principals, and all clergy were aware of the Catholic School Parent Assembly, were clear about what it could offer parents and Catholic education, but overall they rated it as only mildly useful.

Parents perceived the role of the Parent Assembly as providing a link between families, schools and parishes; providing faith enrichment opportunities for families; and providing parent education opportunities. In the open ended comments, some parents requested the Parent Assembly be funded and re-instated at their school as they thought it provided them with opportunities for education, meeting other parents and being actively involved in their child’s school.

6. Collaboration, shared responsibility and dialogue appear to be the principles and processes required to take parental partnership forward, as evidenced by many of the responses to the open-ended item.

As evidenced by the numerous rich comments provided by parents/carers in relation to their hopes for the future of parent-school partnership, collaborative relationships between school staff and parents, shared responsibility for children’s learning and wellbeing, and meaningful communication that involves teachers listening to parents and providing frequent,
clear communication to parents, were strong themes identified as ways of promoting parent-school partnership. These findings support those of Warren et al. (2003), and Roffey (2004) who found that communication was viewed as critical in the facilitation of parent partnership. Furthermore, the comments provided by parents in the present study support Roffey’s results that showed parents wanted recognition from teachers and the school that they are essential participants in their child’s learning, and that this recognition be continued from primary school through to secondary school.

7. **There were no policy guidelines for parental partnership cited by participants in the research.**

   None of the open-ended responses from parents, principals or clergy referred to any policy guidelines, thus signalling a potential gap between the rhetoric of parent-school partnership and its practice. This finding supports those reported in the Family-School Partnerships Project (Saulwick Muller Social Research, 2006), who acknowledged the challenges of forming and maintaining partnership and the cultural changes that teachers and parents may need to make to support effective collaboration. In line with Saulwick Muller Social Research (2006) the present study’s survey findings indicate that these cultural changes have not yet been achieved within Australian schools.

8. **The data does not reveal any evidence that parental partnership and engagement in Catholic education is guided by a research based framework.**

   Similarly, none of the participants’ comments referred to guidance from research based frameworks, such as models or theories of parent school partnership. Models and frameworks of parent-school partnerships assist with understanding and improving parent relationships with schools to ultimately facilitate children and young people’s academic achievements and wellbeing (Epstein, Sanders, & Simon, 2002; Ludicke & Kortman, 2012; Porter, 2008; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990). Potential useful models (please see the literature
review above for description of the key tenets of each model) include typologies of parent partnership such as Spry and Graham (2009), and others that provide a deeper explanatory level of understanding of the processes and structures of parent-school partnership. These include Epstein’s overlapping spheres of influence (Bowlby, 1969; Epstein, 1992, 2001; Epstein & Salinas, 2004), Hoover-Dempsey, Sandler, Green and Walker’s (2007) model of parent involvement, and the enabling and empowerment model (Bouchard, 1998, cited in Deslandes, 2001; Dunst, Johanson, Rounds, Trivette, & Hambly, 1992). Reference to such models will provide systematic guidance in relation to strengthening parent-school partnership and will assist in closing the gap between the aspiration expressed in the frameworks and practice.

9. Based on the above findings, including qualitative comments, the effective embedding of parental partnership will require culture change processes and opportunities to develop parents, clergy and principals understandings, skills and practices.

In total, the survey results indicate that effective parent-school partnership will require cultural change processes. In alignment with the discussion provide by Saulwick Muller Social Research (2006), a cultural shift in regard to the way parents’ roles in schools is needed. That is, parents need to be viewed as "continuing educators" and to find a place for parents in the educational life of the school (Saulwick Muller Social Research, 2006, p. 15). Such changes are supported by the growing recognition at a national level of the value of collaboration between parents and teachers as detailed in the Australian Government's Family-School Partnerships Framework (Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations [DEERWR], 2008). Following the family enabling and empowerment model (Dunst et. al., 1992) culture changes need to facilitate trusting, mutually respectful relationships between school staff and parents, open, two-way
communication, and actions which foster such relationships. Although the challenges in creating such partnership are many, as the international literature emphatically shows facilitation of strong parent-school partnership has wide reaching benefits for children and young people, families, school staff, schools and the broader community.
References


Bastiani, J. (2000). 'I know it works ... actually proving it is the problem!: Examining the contribution of parents to pupil progress and school effectiveness. In S. Wolfeendale & J. Bastiani (Eds.), *The contribution of parents to school effectiveness*. London, UK: Fulton.


Appendix A: Parent Partnership with Schools Survey for Clergy

Hello

Welcome to the parent-school partnership survey. If there are some questions you don’t want to answer or can’t answer, you can skip them by leaving them blank. To move to the next page click the forward arrow button at the bottom of the page. You can also use the back arrow button at the bottom of the page to review your answers. There are no right or wrong answers. We are just interested in your thoughts and opinions.

Are you a:

☑ Parish Priest
☑ Assistant Parish Priest

Please type the number of Catholic parents who have students enrolled at your parish school/s in the space below: (text box provided)

How many years have you been a Priest?

☑ 5 years or less
☑ 6 to 10 years
☑ 11 to 20 years
☑ 21 to 40 years
☑ 40 years or more
Please rank from 1 to 5 the five most important reasons why you think parents choose a Catholic school for their child/children:

Type ‘1’ in the box near the reason you think is most important. Type ‘2’ in the box near the reason that you think is second most important, and type ‘3’ in the box near the reason you think is third most important, and so on up to 5.

1. They went to a Catholic school themselves
2. It’s the closest school to where they live
3. Their child’s friends go to the same school
4. It means their child can then attend a Catholic secondary school
5. Better discipline
6. Better values and morals
7. Better care
8. Better academic outcomes
9. More resources (e.g., better equipment)
10. Catholic faith for their child
11. Spiritual development of their child
12. Staff are more committed
13. Staff have better qualifications and skills
14. It is a private school
15. More affordable than other private schools
16. It’s in their parish
17. Other

For this question please read the statements on the left below and then choose any number between 1 'Extremely unwelcoming' to 7 'Extremely welcoming'.

How welcoming are schools in your parish of parent partnership in:

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<th>7</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Their child/ren's academic development (helping with learning)</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
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<td>Their child/ren's wellbeing (welfare, bullying personal development)</td>
<td>o</td>
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<td>School governance (attending P&amp;F and/or Parish School Forum meetings, School Boards)</td>
<td>o</td>
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<td>o</td>
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<td>Their child/ren's religious and faith development (attending school Mass/liturgies, preparation for Sacraments, prayer for parents)</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
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Since the beginning of this year which of the following school activities have you been invited to and attended?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>I have been invited to:</th>
<th>I have attended:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parish School Forum</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Assembly</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent and Friends meetings</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>School sporting events</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>School concerts/plays etc.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class or school activities</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>School liturgies/prayer</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>School Masses</td>
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<td>Sacrament preparation</td>
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<td>Parent education opportunities</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>Fund raising</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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Please read the statements on the left below and then answer 'Yes', 'Not sure/Don't know' or 'No'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Not sure/Don't know</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child/ren want their parents to be involved with the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Child/ren seek their parents' help with their education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents feel competent to help their child/ren in all aspects of their homework</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents are competent to nurture the religious development of their child/ren</td>
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</table>
Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the statements on the left below.

Choose any number between 1 'Strongly disagree' and 7 'Strongly agree'.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The most successful schools have consistent partnership with parents</td>
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<td>Schools, not parents, are responsible for educating children</td>
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<td>Children’s education will benefit if parents are involved with the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is important for parents to meet and keep in touch with their child’s teacher</td>
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<td>Most parents at my parish schools are actively involved in school life</td>
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<td>Parents’ friends and neighbours, and students’ grandparents are actively involved in my parish schools</td>
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<td>The majority of parents at my parish schools are unable or unwilling to be actively involved with the schools</td>
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<td>Parents are interested in discussing religious aspects of their child’s education</td>
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Please identify any barriers that prevent you as a Priest from forming stronger parent partnership at your schools? (Tick as many as you like)

- Lack of time
- Existing school policies/guidelines don’t support my role in facilitating parent partnerships
- I do not have a good understanding of what partnership means
- I do not feel very confident working with parents
- I am satisfied with current parent partnership and see no reason for further change
- Parents don’t seem interested in forming partnership with the school
- Most parents are not interested in the faith
- I am concerned about child protection issues
- Other barriers

If you chose ‘Other barriers’ in the question above please tell us what those are in the space below: (text box provided)

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the statements on the left below. Choose any number between 1 'Strongly disagree' and 7 'Strongly agree'.

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<th>Statement</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school office staff are welcoming to parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know most parents at my parish schools</td>
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<td>Parents know other parents in the school</td>
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<td>I rely on a large school parent network to support my ministry</td>
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<td>The school Principals are welcoming to parents</td>
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<td>The school teaching staff are welcoming to parents</td>
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Read the question at the left below and then choose any number between 1 'Extremely unimportant' and 7 'Extremely important'.

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<th>6</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How important do you view your role as a Priest in facilitating parent partnership with schools?</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>How important do you view the Principals’ role in facilitating parent partnership with schools?</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Are you aware of the Parent Assembly, Lismore?

- Yes
- Not sure
- No

If “yes” was selected for the previous question, the following question will be shown:

Read the question at the left below and then choose any number between 1 'Not at all useful' and 7 'Extremely useful'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How useful do you consider the Parent Assembly?</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is there anything you’d like to add about your role in facilitating parent partnership with schools? Please write your comments in the box below:

What do you hope for in the future regarding parent partnership with schools? Please write your comments in the box below:
Appendix B: Parent Partnership with Schools Survey for Principals

Hello.

Welcome to the parent-school partnership survey. If there are some questions you don’t want to answer or can’t answer, you can skip them by leaving them blank. To move to the next page click the forward arrow button at the bottom of the page.

You can also use the back arrow button at the bottom of the page to review your answers. There are no right or wrong answers. We are just interested in your thoughts and opinions.

Are you the Principal of a:

☑ Primary school
☑ Secondary school

Please type the number of students enrolled at your school in the space below:

Are you:

☑ Male
☑ Female

Is this your first appointment as a Principal?

☑ Yes
☑ No

Please type the number of years since you began teaching in the space below:

Please rank from 1 to 5 the five most important reasons why you think parents choose a Catholic school for their child/children:

Type '1' in the box near the reason you think is most important. Type '2' in the box near the reason that you think is second most important, and type '3' in the box near the reason you think is third most important, and so on up to 5.

1. They went to a Catholic school themselves
2. It’s the closest school to where they live
3. Their child’s friends go to the same school
4. It means their child can then attend a Catholic secondary school
5. Better discipline
6. Better values and morals
7. Better care
8. Better academic outcomes
9. More resources (e.g., better equipment)
10. Catholic faith for their child
11. Spiritual development of their child
12. Staff are more committed
For this question please read the statements on the left below and then choose any number between 1 & ‘Extremely unwelcoming’ to 7 ‘Extremely welcoming’.

How welcoming is your school of parent partnership in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Their child/ren’s academic development (helping with learning)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their child/ren’s wellbeing (welfare, bullying, personal development)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School governance (attending P&amp;F and/or Parish School Forum meetings, School Boards)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their child/ren’s religious and faith development (attending school Mass/liturgies, preparation for Sacraments, prayer for parents)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the beginning of this year which of the following school activities has your school invited parents to, and which activities have parents attended?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parents have been invited to:</th>
<th>Parents have attended:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent teacher meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and Friends meetings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Assembly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish School Forum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class or Stage Parent Program</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not sure/Don't know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School sporting events</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>School concerts/plays etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canteen roster</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School liturgies/prayer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Masses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrament preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent education opportunities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund raising</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal appraisals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School excursions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please read the statements on the left below and then answer 'Yes', 'Not sure/Don't know' or 'No'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Not sure/Don't know</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child/ren want their parents to be involved with the school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child/ren seek their parents’ help with their education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents feel competent to help their child/ren in all aspects of their homework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents are competent to nurture the religious development of their child/ren</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the statements on the left below.

Choose any number between 1 'Strongly disagree' and 7 'Strongly agree'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The most successful schools have consistent partnership with</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Schools, not parents, are responsible for educating children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children’s education will benefit if parents are involved with</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is important for parents to meet and keep in touch with their</td>
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<tr>
<td>child’s teacher</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most parents at my parish school are actively involved in</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school life</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents’, friends and neighbours, and students’ grandparents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are actively involved in the school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The majority of parents at my parish school are unable or</td>
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<tr>
<td>unwilling to be actively involved with the school</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parents are interested in discussing religious aspects of their</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>child’s education</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please identify any barriers that prevent you from forming stronger parent partnership at your school? (Tick as many as you like)

☐ Existing school policies/guidelines don’t support my role in facilitating parent partnership well
☐ I do not have a good understanding of what partnership means
☐ I do not feel very confident working with parents
☐ Lack of time
☐ I am satisfied with current parent partnership and see no reason for further change
☐ Parents don’t seem interested in forming partnership with the school
☐ I don’t want to burden teaching staff with more tasks
☐ Other barriers

If you chose ‘Other barriers’ in the question above please tell us what those are in the space below:

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the statements on the left below. Choose any number between 1 'Strongly disagree' and 7 'Strongly agree'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The school office staff are welcoming to parents</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is easy for parents to make contact and communicate with me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easy for parents to make contact and communicate with teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I know many parents at my school</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The class teacher or home room teacher knows the parents</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school staff listen to parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents know some of the staff at the school very well</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents know other parents in the school</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Read the question at the left below and then choose any number between 1 'Extremely unimportant' and 7 'Extremely important'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important do you view your role as Principal in facilitating parent partnership at your school?</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Are you aware of the Parent Assembly, Lismore?

- Yes
- Not sure
- No

The following question is displayed if “yes” is selected to the previous question.

Read the question at the left below and then choose any number between 1 'Not at all useful' and 7 'Extremely useful'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How useful do you consider the Parent Assembly?</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Is there anything you'd like to add about your role in facilitating parent partnership at your school? Please write your comments in the box below:

What do you hope for in the future regarding parent partnership at your school? Please write your comments in the box below:
Appendix C: Parent Partnership with Schools Survey for Parents

Hello

Welcome to the parent-school partnership survey. If there are some questions you don’t want to answer or can’t answer, you can skip them by leaving them blank. To move to the next page click the forward arrow button at the bottom of the page. You can also use the back arrow button at the bottom of the page to review your answers. There are no right or wrong answers. We are just interested in your thoughts and opinions.

I confirm that I am 18 years of age or over:

☑ Yes, I am over 18
No, I am younger than 18

If ‘No, I am younger than 18’ is selected, the survey automatically skips to the end of the survey

Are you:
☑ Male
☑ Female

How old are you?

I am a

- Parent
- Carer
- Grandparent
- Other (with text box)

How many children do you have in your care?

☑ 1
☑ 2
☑ 3
☑ 4
☑ 5 or more

How many of your children attend a Catholic school?

☑ 1
☑ 2
☑ 3
☑ 4
☑ 5 or more
What Year are your children currently in at school? (Choose as many as needed)

- Kindergarten
- Year 1
- Year 2
- Year 3
- Year 4
- Year 5
- Year 6
- Year 7
- Year 8
- Year 9
- Year 10
- Year 11
- Year 12

What is your religion?

- Catholic
- Other Christian
- Other religion
- No religion
Please rank from 1 to 5 the five most important reasons why you chose a Catholic school for your child/children:

Type '1' in the box near the reason you think is most important. Type '2' in the box near the reason that you think is second most important, type '3' in the box near the reason you think is third most important and so on up to 5.

______ You went to a Catholic school yourself
______ It’s the closest school to where you live
______ Your child’s friends were going there
______ It means your child can attend a Catholic secondary school
______ Better discipline
______ Better values and morals
______ Better care
______ Better academic outcomes
______ More resources (e.g., better equipment)
______ Catholic faith for your child
______ Spiritual development of your child
______ Staff are more committed
______ Staff have better qualifications and skills
______ It is a private school
______ More affordable than other private schools
______ It’s in your parish
______ Other

For this question please read the statements on the left below and then choose any number between 1 'Extremely unwelcoming' to 7 'Extremely welcoming'.

How welcoming is the school of your partnership in:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your child/ren’s academic development (helping with learning)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your child/ren’s wellbeing (welfare, bullying, personal development)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School governance (attending P&amp;F and/or Parish School Forum meetings, School Boards)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your child/ren’s religious and faith development (attending school Mass/liturgies, preparation for Sacraments, prayer for parents)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Since the beginning of this year which of the following school activities have you been invited to and attended?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>...been invited to?</th>
<th>...attended?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent teacher meetings</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents and Friends meetings</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Assembly</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parish School Forum</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class or Stage Parent Program</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School sporting events</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School concerts/plays etc.</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canteen roster</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class activities</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School liturgies/prayer</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Masses</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sacrament preparation</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent education opportunities</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fund raising</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal appraisals</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School excursions</td>
<td>Yes, I was invited</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please read the statements on the left below and then answer 'Yes', 'Not sure/Don't know' or 'No'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Not sure/Don't know</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent groups have contacted me to be involved in their group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The parent groups represent my views</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other parents are happy to see me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent groups run activities in the school for other parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are parent groups I can join</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please read the statements on the left below and then answer 'Yes', 'Not sure/Don't know' or 'No'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Not sure/Don't know</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My child/ren want me to be involved with the school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child/ren seek my help with their education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel competent to help my child/ren in all aspects of their homework</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please rate how much you agree or disagree with the statements on the left below. Choose any number between 1 'Strongly disagree' and 7 'Strongly agree'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The most successful schools have consistent partnership with parents</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools, not parents, are responsible for educating children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My child’s education will benefit if I am involved with the school</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important to meet and keep in touch with my child’s teacher</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most parents at my child’s school are actively involved in school life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
My friends and neighbours, and my child’s grandparents are actively involved in the school

The majority of parents at my child’s school are unable or unwilling to be actively involved with the school

Parents at my child’s school are interested in discussing religious aspects of their child’s education

Please identify any barriers that prevent you from forming stronger parent partnership with the school? (Tick as many as you like)

☐ Lack of transport
☐ Inflexible work schedule
☐ Lack of available childcare
☐ Lack of time
☐ I feel I don’t have the skills or knowledge that are needed
☐ I am unaware of how to get involved
☐ I feel uncomfortable or unwelcome
☐ I don’t want to be the only parent who gets involved
☐ I prefer not to be involved in the religious aspects of school events
☐ Other barriers

If you chose ‘Other barriers’; in the question above please tell us what those are in the space below:

Please select either 'Yes', 'No' or 'Not sure/Don't know' in response to the statements on the left below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Not sure/Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school office staff are welcoming</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easy to make contact and communicate with the principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is easy to make contact and communicate with the teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The principal knows me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The class teacher or home room teacher knows me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school staff listen to me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I know some of the staff at the school very well
I know other parents in the school

Read the question at the left below and then choose any number between 1 'Extremely unimportant' and 7 'Extremely important'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th align="left">How important do you view the Principal's role in facilitating parent partnership at your school?</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td align="left"></td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
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<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are you aware of the Parent Assembly, Lismore?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ No

The following 2 questions are only seen if the participant selected ‘Yes’ to the previous question:

Which of the following do you understand to be the role of the Parent Assembly? (Tick as many as you like)

- ☐ Provide faith enrichment opportunities for families
- ☐ Provide parent education opportunities
- ☐ Offer support to families in need
- ☐ Advocate at state and national levels of government for Catholic school parents
- ☐ Offer advice to parents about Catholic education issues
- ☐ Provide a link between families, schools and parishes
- Other

If you chose ‘Other’ to the question above, please list them here in the space below:

Read the question at the left below and then choose any number between 1 'Not at all useful' and 7 'Extremely useful'.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th align="left">How useful do you consider the Parent Assembly?</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>○</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What do you hope for in the future regarding parent partnership with your school? Please write your comments in the space below.
Appendix D: Recruitment Memo Sent on Catholic Schools Office Newsletter

Catholic Schools Office
Diocese of Lismore

Parent Partnership Survey 2014
Invitation to Parents, Clergy and Principals

The Catholic Schools Office (CSO) has contracted the services of Southern Cross University (SCU) to assist its current review of parent-school partnership initiatives across the Diocese of Lismore. A short (20 minute) online survey has been developed for principals, parents and clergy to share views about parent-school partnership in a confidential and anonymous way. The survey has been emailed directly to all invited participants, with provision made for paper copy completion as well.

Specifically, the online survey will map the ways parents are currently engaged in their children’s education, provide feedback on current partnership initiatives and identify ways to strengthen the ways schools work with parents. To take part in this online survey you need to be:

1) A parent or carer of a child who is enrolled in a Catholic school in the Diocese of Lismore; OR a Principal of a parish school in the Lismore Diocese; OR a Parish Priest responsible for one or more of these schools.

2) Able to access a computer and an internet connection or contact Dr Donnah Anderson at Southern Cross University (donnah.anderson@scu.edu.au) for a hard copy of the survey to be posted to you.

3) Aged 18 years or older.

Southern Cross University has the following ethical requirements that must be closely adhered to for this survey (Ethics approval number: ECN—16-198):

1) Participation in the study is voluntary, and you will not be asked for your name.

2) Submission of your responses online will be understood as giving your consent to participate.

3) No individual, school or parish will be identified in any publication.

4) If you decide to start the survey you can stop at any time with no negative consequences.

5) All information will be stored securely at the University in password-protected computer files for 7 years, which only relevant Centre for Children and Young People staff will access.

6) If you have complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of this research, you may contact the Ethics Complaints Officer by telephone: (02) 66269139; or email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.

Survey findings will be distributed to parents, clergy and principals by the Catholic Schools Office. If you have any questions about the survey instrument please contact Dr Donnah Anderson by phone on (02) 6620 3998 or by email at donnah.anderson@scu.edu.au. Dr John Graham is the CSO contact for this project and can be contacted on (02) 6622 0422.

David Condon
Director of Catholic Schools
Appendix E: Letter of Invitation and Information Sheet for Parents

Dear parent/carer

An important goal of the Catholic Schools Office (CSO) Lismore is to work in close partnership with parents to ensure the best education for every student. To this end, the CSO is currently reviewing its approach to parent-school partnership across the Diocese of Lismore.

As part of this review, the CSO has asked the Centre for Children and Young People (CCYP) at Southern Cross University to seek your views regarding parent-school partnership. We will also be inviting principals and parish clergy to take part in a similar online survey.

This 20 minute survey is an opportunity to share your experiences and views about parent-school partnership in a confidential, anonymous way. This will also help ensure you are part of the building of a stronger Catholic education for each student.

Specifically, the online survey will map the ways parents are currently engaged in their children’s education, provide feedback on current partnership initiatives and identify ways to strengthen the ways schools work with parents.

To take part in this online survey you need to: 1) be a parent or carer of a child who is enrolled in a Catholic school in the Diocese of Lismore; 2) have access to a computer and an internet connection or contact Dr Donnah Anderson at the CCYP on 02 66203802 for a hard copy of the survey to be posted to you; 3) be aged 18 years or older.

SCU has ethical requirements that will be closely adhered to (approval number: ECN- 14-196). Participation in the survey is voluntary, and you will not be asked for your name. Submission of your responses online will be understood as giving your consent to participate. No individual, school or parish will be identified in any publication. If you decide to start the survey you can stop at any time with no negative consequences. All information will be stored securely at the University in password-protected computer files for 7 years, which only relevant CCYP staff will be able to access. If you have complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of this research, you may contact the Ethics Complaints Officer by telephone: (02)66269139; or email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you would like to take part in the survey please click on the following link:

http://tinyurl.com/parent-school-parents

A summary of the survey findings will be distributed to parents by the CSO later this year.

If you have any questions about the survey please contact Dr Donnah Anderson by phone on (02) 6620 3698 or email donnah.anderson@scu.edu.au
Yours sincerely,

David Condon

Director of Catholic Schools
Appendix F: Letter of Invitation and Information Sheet for Principals

Dear Principal

As you know, Proclaim Lismore Parent 2014 is well under way. An important aspect of this process is to build stronger partnership with parents. To this end, the CSO is currently reviewing its approach to parent-school partnership across the Diocese of Lismore.

As part of this review, the CSO has asked the Centre for Children and Young People (CCYP) at Southern Cross University to seek parent, Principal and Clergy views regarding parent-school partnership. Dr Donnah Anderson at SCU is the contact person for this project, which includes an online survey.

We invite you to complete this 20 minute survey as a way of sharing your experience and views about parent-school partnership in a confidential, anonymous way.

Specifically, the online survey will map the ways that schools currently engage with parents regarding their children’s education, provide feedback on current partnership initiatives and identify ways to strengthen links and relationships with parents.

SCU has ethical requirements that will be closely adhered to (approval number: ECN- 14-196). Participation in the survey is voluntary, and you will not be asked for your name. Submission of your responses online will be understood as giving your consent to participate. No individual, school or parish will be identified in any publication. If you decide to start the survey you can stop at any time with no negative consequences. All information will be stored securely at the University in password-protected computer files for 7 years, which only relevant CCYP staff will be able to access. If you have complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of this research, you may contact the Ethics Complaints Officer by telephone: (02)66269139; or email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you would like to take part in the survey please click on the following link:

http://tinyurl.com/parent-school-principals

A summary of the survey findings will be made available to you by the CSO later in 2014.

If you have any questions about the survey please contact Dr Donnah Anderson by phone on (02) 6620 3698 or email donnah.anderson@scu.edu.au

Yours sincerely,

David Condon
Director of Catholic Schools
Appendix G: Letter of Invitation and Information Sheet for Clergy

Dear Father

As you know, *Proclaim Lismore Parent 2014* is well under way. An important aspect of this process is to build stronger partnership with parents. To this end, the CSO is currently reviewing its approach to parent-school partnership across the Diocese of Lismore.

As part of this review, the CSO has asked the Centre for Children and Young People (CCYP) at Southern Cross University to seek Clergy, Principal and parent views regarding parent-school partnership. Dr Donnah Anderson at SCU is the contact person for this project, which includes an online survey.

**We invite you to complete this 20 minute survey as a way of sharing your experience and views about parent-school partnership in a confidential, anonymous way.**

Specifically, the online survey will map the ways that schools currently engage with parents regarding their children’s education, provide feedback on current partnership initiatives and identify ways to strengthen links and relationships with parents.

SCU has ethical requirements that will be closely adhered to (approval number: ECN-14-196). Participation in the survey is voluntary, and you will not be asked for your name. Submission of your responses online will be understood as giving your consent to participate. No individual, school or parish will be identified in any publication. If you decide to start the survey you can stop at any time with no negative consequences. All information will be stored securely at the University in password-protected computer files for 7 years, which only relevant CCYP staff will be able to access. If you have complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of this research, you may contact the Ethics Complaints Officer by telephone: (02)66269139; or email: ethics.lismore@scu.edu.au. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and you will be informed of the outcome.

**If you would like to take part in the survey please click on the following link:**

[http://tinyurl.com/parent-school-priest](http://tinyurl.com/parent-school-priest)

A summary of the survey findings will be made available to you by the CSO later in 2014.

If you have any questions about the survey please contact Dr Donnah Anderson by phone on (02) 6620 3698 or email donnah.anderson@scu.edu.au

Yours sincerely,

David Condon

Director of Catholic Schools