"The importance of community and the necessity of the numinous": how chapel contributes to UK private senior schools.

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Abstract

Many private senior schools have a Christian foundation and a purpose-built chapel, alongside a regular requirement for the whole school community to worship together. The focus of this study is on the contribution that chapel - both as place and practice - makes to these school communities. The research aimed to establish new knowledge that provides valuable insights for the sector about the potential benefits of maintaining the practice of chapel. The findings of this thesis are underpinned by Durkheim's sociological account of religion as the symbolic expression of social experience, and further supported by a broad range of research literature that considers the possible contribution of religion and communal worship to people's lives.

A multiple case-study design was developed to investigate chapel in three private senior schools. 40 participants were interviewed using qualitative, semi-structured, and in-depth interviews. These generated a rich dataset, analysis of which produced accounts of chapel's contribution in each school. The multiple case approach aimed to ensure a greater range of voices and a richer narrative account, and it was also hoped that some 'analytic generalisability' might be possible from cross-case analysis. Participants were selected according to their role or position in each school community and care was taken to include the key stakeholders including the head, chaplain, director of music, director of admissions and marketing, houseparents, current parents, alumni, and current pupils.

Against a backdrop of declining Christian adherence within the UK, and utilising Durkheim's sociological account of religion as a means of enhancing community cohesion (by distinguishing between that which is 'profane' and that which is 'sacred'), this study highlights the socio-cultural features of chapel on one hand and its sacred features on the other. This distinction is captured by the summary of chapel's contribution offered by one participating head, which eventually became the title for this thesis: "the importance of community and the necessity of the numinous".

Under the first main theme, 'building community, culture, and identity', four important sub-themes were identified and explored. Following Durkheim, 'community cohesion and identity' was the most prominent sub-theme expressed by participants, and almost all of

them described this as a core benefit of whole-school chapel. 'Moral messages and values education' was identified as another strong sub-theme describing chapel's distinctive contributions; many participants considered chapel a particularly conducive environment for moral guidance. A third dimension of chapel was 'communal singing' which was reported to be an important and enjoyable feature of chapel for many, especially the pupils. The culture of communal singing was not strong in all schools, but participants nevertheless referenced its benefits as a potentially uplifting and community-enhancing activity. 'School marketing and promotion' was a less prominent theme in the analysis, and in most cases, references were to how chapel plays a very limited role in this aspect of school life. The second main theme arising from the analysis I term 'engaging with the sacred, and taking pupils beyond their everyday and profane experiences'. This too had several important sub-themes. 'Engagement with faith and religion' was described as a key contribution of chapel by almost all participants, regardless of their personal faith background; it was seen as valuable for pupils to have the opportunity to encounter, and question matters of faith, enabling them to reach a more informed viewpoint. 'Opportunity for calm reflection' was highlighted by most participants, with chapel often described as the only time and place during the busy week that allowed for genuine space and separation from the demands of everyday school life. A third sub-theme was 'comfort and reassurance' and seemed to be particularly important where schools had experienced recent tragedy or loss. Chapel was considered a uniquely important space in these cases for both communal and private expressions of grief.

The central contributions of chapel discussed in this thesis were referenced by a large majority of participants, seemingly irrespective of their personal faith position, their position in the school, or which case-study school they were connected to. Unsurprisingly, not all participants were positive about chapel, and some were particularly opposed to its compulsory status. However, the overwhelming majority spoke favourably about chapel and expressed support for its continued, whole-school practice, referencing the sacred setting of chapel in positive terms. In general, chapel's religious content and Christian teaching were attributed far less importance than chapel's affordances to 1) gather as a school community, and 2) to spend time in recognition and appreciation of the non-material aspects of human life.

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Thank you to the three heads of my case study schools. They are not named in this study, and their schools are anonymised, but hopefully they might one day read the findings and understand how vital their cooperation was.

I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my family for their unwavering support during my 7 years of EdD study, and especially during the thesis writing phase; to my children, Fen, Delphi, and Orlando, but above all to my wife, Dr Caroline Macpherson, who has kept me focused and motivated throughout the process. I could not have done this without her constant support and encouragement.

I would like to dedicate this doctoral thesis to my father, David Macpherson, who was always a source of great inspiration to me, but who sadly died very shortly before my completion of this study.

Chapter 1: Introduction & Context

Introduction

This doctoral thesis examines the contribution of chapel to UK private senior schools. In the context of this study, 'chapel' refers both to place and practice, as a regular act of collective Christian worship within schools that have Christian foundations and purpose-built chapel buildings. I have chosen to focus on UK private senior schools for several reasons, and I will outline these during this chapter. The main reason for this focus, which is worth stating here at the outset, is that many of the UK's private senior schools maintain a strong culture of whole-school chapel attendance, built upon a Christian foundation and charter, often utilising a purpose-built chapel building. Typically, these chapels are architecturally grand, beautiful, and imposing buildings, and they are usually located centrally within the school's campus. In many cases, the chapel building provides the only space that can accommodate the whole school community together. As such, these chapels stand as visible testimony within the school infrastructure to an historic and cultural legacy built upon Christian beliefs and practice, and they suggest an ongoing importance and centrality of collective worship within the daily life of the school.

Given a declining picture of Christian adherence in the UK, and ever-increasing secularity, multiculturalism, and religious pluralism, the question about how chapel might continue to contribute to UK private senior schools appears timely and important for the sector.

Background

Questions around the practice of whole-school chapel have arisen for me in various forms throughout my life, and my own interest in this study is both personal and professional. As a boy I boarded at Bedford, a private senior school with a strong chapel tradition; we attended chapel three times during the week as a whole school and then again on Sundays, for those of us who were boarders. I became head of the chapel choir in my final year and have maintained a love of choral music ever since. As such, it is important to note early in the

thesis that I do not come to this study as an impartial observer; I return to the issues of bias and the pros and cons of being an insider researcher later in the thesis.

Figure 1: The Bedford School chapel (Bedford School, 2018)

Since my own school days, I have worked as a teacher in three different UK private senior schools: Brentwood, Oakham, and Stowe. All these schools, like Bedford, have Christian foundations, purpose-built chapel buildings, and a strong tradition of whole-school chapel worship. Images of the chapel buildings of these three schools are also included here, to provide a further impression of the centrality and importance of chapel within this sort of school.

Figure 2: The Brentwood School chapel (Brentwood School, 2018)

Figure 3:The Oakham School chapel (Oakham School, 2018)

Figure 4: The Stowe School chapel (Stowe School, 2023)

During my time as a teacher of GCSE and A-Level religion and philosophy I have explored questions with many teenagers about the value and nature of faith and worship. My MA thesis considered the impact of personal faith on A-Level pupils' understanding and acceptance of the 'ontological argument' for God's existence. Additionally, during my time as a boarding housemaster at Stowe, I often faced questions from boys in my house about why they should be compelled to attend an act of Christian worship, especially if, as many of them told me, they held little or no personal faith. Whilst my own positionality on matters of faith is broadly atheistic, I undertook my MA and my earlier PGCE through a Catholic institute. As such, I am very familiar with notions of chaplaincy, evangelism, and catechesis, and the

challenges posed by the modern world to such endeavours, especially in encounter with modern teenagers.

These various experiences combined to provide the motivation for me to undertake this professional doctorate in education (EdD), to better understand the contribution that chapel makes within my professional setting. In broader terms, as Parker (2008) suggests:

> there is as yet no articulated and coherent justification for the creation of 'sacred' spaces in educational contexts, either from educationalists themselves or, indeed, from the theologians of the faiths represented amongst chaplains.

Christianity in the UK – recent trends

England and Wales Census	Christian	No Religion
2001	71.8%	15%
2011	59.3%	25.2%
2021	46.2%	37.2%

Figure 5: UK Census Results from 2001, 2011, & 2021

A further motivation for undertaking this study is the national backdrop against which the practice of whole-school chapel is maintained. As Argyle explains:

> The great sociologists of the past, Durkheim, Weber, and Marx, all predicted that industrialisation, urbanisation, and prosperity would lead to the decline, perhaps the disappearance, of religion (2000, p. 215).

In the 2021 UK census, for the first time in England and Wales, less than half of the population (46.2%, 27.5 million people) described themselves as "Christian". This showed a decrease from 59.3% in 2011, and 71.8% in 2001. "No religion" was the second most common response in 2021; 37.2% (22.2 million) reported having no religion, up from 25.2% in 2011, and 15% in 2001 (Office for National Statistics, 2022). These two trends reveal an apparent decline in the role and centrality of Christianity within people's lives in the UK, and the shift appears sizeable and significant. Further to this trend in the national census data, Brierley's Church Census in 2005 found that just 6.3% of the population regularly attended church (Guest, Olson, &

Wolffe, Christianity: Loss of monopoly, 2012), and that was back when over 70% of the population still described themselves as Christian, as opposed to the current 46%.

Secularisation is described by Argyle (2000) as taking 3 different forms:

1) Less religious activity in terms of church membership and attendance.
2) Religion having less influence on people's behaviour.
3) Society becoming 'desacralised', meaning supernatural forces are no longer thought to be important.

However, despite a prominent trend of 'secularisation' in the UK, "many continue to believe that there is more than a material world" (Argyle, 2000, p. 221). This is an important consideration when exploring the contribution of chapel in private senior schools, because of the possibility that chapel provides an opportunity to explore ideas connected to the numinous and non-material. In his book 'A Sociological History of Christian Worship, Stringer refers to "a gradual process of de-Christianisation and the impact this has had on liturgy and worship" (Stringer M. , 2005, p. 179) since the Reformation.

Despite the reduction in the number of UK citizens identifying as Christian, Christianity appears to maintain a position of prominence and centrality within UK national identity. One example that at least points to its historic legacy is that almost all UK villages contain a parish church. A further connection to Christianity on a national level comes through the fact that the monarch is not only the Head of State but also the 'Supreme Head of the Church of England', a title created for Henry VIII in 1531. The funeral of the late Queen Elizabeth was a Christian church service, watched at its peak by over 30 million UK citizens (BBC, 2022). Royal weddings, funerals, and coronations always command huge attention from the British public and, above all else, these are Christian church services. Further to this, Westminster Abbey adjoins the Houses of Parliament, signifying the prominence of Christianity as the nation's established church (Davie, 2013). Later in this chapter I will consider the historic connection between the UK's private school sector and the political and ruling classes, exploring the potential relevance for this study.

In their re-examination of the 'secularization thesis' Inglehart and Norris (2007) considered why Weber's prediction that 'reason' would eventually replace any appeal to the 'mysterious' in post-industrial societies has not come to pass. Their conclusion, that "a broader type of spiritual concern has become increasingly widespread" (p. 253), is of great relevance to this thesis, because it suggests that some form of appeal to the sacred still occupies an important place in modern society. As such, my thesis fits within a wider question about the contribution of religion to society and people's lives. My focus on chapel's contribution to private senior schools provides a pertinent focus for my professional and educational setting but should also hopefully connect with and speak to some of the wider contributions that others have identified regarding religion and collective worship.

The contribution of religion in sociological terms

Religion, worship, and spirituality have closely accompanied human philosophical, sociological, and cultural development and expression throughout history. Therefore, any investigation considering the contribution of religious worship to a particular community is bound to invite connections to broader sociological ideas about the role and impact of religion on people. Consequently, this thesis utilises a theoretical framework drawn from the world of religious sociology, to help underpin and explain its findings.

Many people have written about the social dimensions of religion, but the work of the French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) has proved especially resonant for this study, in two key areas. Firstly, in his account of the communal and social origins and foundations of religious worship. Secondly, in what Durkheim identifies as the powerful human drive to designate certain objects and practices as 'sacred', and therefore distinguishable from the 'profane' items that accompany everyday life. The Literature Review chapter considers research findings that illuminate firstly the impact of communal worship and religion on social cohesion and identity, and secondly on the profound human attraction to spiritual and non-material concepts. This second area of literature connects to the most distinctive feature of chapel's contribution, which derives from its appeal to the sacred. As Hulme writes:

> The idea of a soul has been extremely consequential and has had powerful influence, through Plato on various church fathers, including Augustine, and through Augustine on Christian theology, and through Christianity on the entire mindset of Western civilization, secular as well as religious (Hulme, 2007, p. 84).

In its way, this thesis speaks to wider sociological observations about the contribution of religious worship and notions of spirituality on people's lives.

National debate about whole school worship and current legislation

A further motivation and context for this study arose from the national debate about legislation relating to collective worship in schools. According to Section 25.1 of the 1944 Education Act, "the school day in every county school and in every voluntary school [in England and Wales] shall begin with collective worship on the part of all pupils in attendance at the school". This worship is required to be of a "broadly Christian nature", unless the school is registered with the Department for Education as having designated an alternative faith. This law has remained largely unchanged for over 70 years, despite the matter having been revisited for debate in the 1988 Education Reform Act, the 1996 Education Act, and the 1998 School Standards and Framework Act.

In 2011 Lord Avebury sought to remove the requirement from the Education Bill altogether with his introduction of Amendment 92, arguing that the compulsory act of predominantly Christian worship in schools was "grossly out of step with the attitudes of the majority of the population" (Hansard, 2011). After nearly two hours of intense debate, he was moved to withdraw the amendment, but these were his closing words: "Sooner or later we will get rid of the act of compulsory worship in schools, and the sooner the better" (Hansard, 2011).

There is not the scope here to explore the nuances of this debate, but some awareness of the voices that oppose the current legislation does help to locate this thesis within an important national and educational context. Some people have stated their opposition to the law by indicating that it is more honoured in the breach than the observance, and that "no other piece of departmental advice is as outdated" (Clarke & Woodhead, 2015, p. 19). In 2004 the

Chief Inspector of Schools drew Parliament's attention to the fact that 76% of secondary schools were breaking the law by failing to provide daily acts of worship. In July 2011 ComRes carried out the 'Worship in Schools Study' (Weldin, 2012) for the BBC and also concluded that a great many schools ignore the legal requirements, while a majority of people do not think the law should exist in the first place. In their sample of 1746 parents, 60% said that the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship in schools should not be enforced.

Thompson (2015) contends that the status quo is perpetuated because one third of state-funded schools are designated as faith schools. He argues that these schools constitute an extremely powerful lobby, as do the major national religious organisations. Comparing figures from the DfE annual school census with the Church of England's annual *Statistics for Mission*, Thompson shows that in 2014, the Church of England had more children in its schools participating in collective worship every weekday than it had parishioners in its pews on any given Sunday. Cumper & Mawhinney (2015) examined the data relating specifically to this issue, which they described as having been controversial for decades. They highlighted:

> Disagreement about the appropriateness of such acts in an increasingly pluralistic, multicultural UK; the degree to which the current system properly affords respect for the rights of individuals and minority groups, including those with no religious faith; and concerns that the present arrangements do not adequately develop the spiritual/moral education of pupils, or promote a community spirit and shared values in school (Cumper & Mawhinney, 2015, p. 1).

More recently, in the 2nd Lords reading of the 'Education (Assemblies) Bill', Baroness Burt of Solihull said:

> We have become a diverse, multicultural society and we put more store on children and their rights—except in the UK, and in this matter of compulsory religious worship. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recently recommended the repeal of all collective worship in UK schools as a contravention of children's human rights, but the UK remains the only sovereign state in the world to impose Christian worship as standard (Hansard, 2021).

These various points invite questions around the justification and rationale for mandating schools to provide collective worship for children. Whilst private senior schools are not compelled to follow the same legislation as state schools, many of them have foundational charters and purpose-built chapels, and so they often demonstrate what those in favour of the legal obligation might consider an exemplary model. An exploration of the contribution that chapel makes to UK private senior schools therefore seems pertinent and timely, given the evident decline of Christian adherence nationally and the broader debate on the issue of collective worship in UK schools.

Why private senior schools?

As mentioned above, many of the private senior schools that retain a practice of whole-school Christian worship were founded with specific charters that enshrined this requirement. In previous decades this would not have raised too many difficult questions for school leaders, but with the evident decline of Christianity nationally, there is perhaps a greater onus on schools to understand and articulate the possible contribution that chapel can make. This thesis is intended to assist current school leaders and policy makers, by shedding light on the various ways that whole-school chapel can be seen to make a worthwhile contribution.

In 2020 the Sutton Trust showed that 7% of children in the UK are privately educated and mostly within one of the 1300 schools that are part of the Independent Schools Council (ISC). These schools are often members of further affiliations and groups. For example, the four schools named already, in relation to my own education and professional experience, are members of the Headmasters' and Headmistresses Conference (HMC), as are the three schools that provided the case studies for this thesis.

Some facts and figures about HMC schools will further help to set a context for this study. Firstly, it is worth noting that the average annual fee for HMC schools is £15,897 (day pupil) and £38,448 (boarder) (HMC, 2023). It is important to understand the level of investment required of parents who select private education for their children, because this explains the high expectation that parents have of such schools to add value to their child's education. The contribution of chapel is therefore important to consider in this context and this thesis will

explore the extent to which chapel can be seen to contribute to perceptions around the overall added value of private schools.

The HMC describes itself as "a professional association of heads of the world's leading independent schools". At the time of writing, membership comprises 302 schools, of which 226 (75%) identify as Christian and 76 (25%) are non-denominational, multi-faith, or other faith. Of the 226 schools that identify as Christian, 188 (83%) designate themselves as Church of England, 21 (9%) as Roman Catholic, 12 as Methodist (5%), and 4 (2%) as Quaker (HMC, 2023). It is not possible from publicly available data to ascertain how many HMC schools have a purpose-built chapel, so I randomly selected 10 from the HMC Schools Directory and then conducted a web-search on each one. The result of this brief search was that 7 schools have purpose-built chapels and 3 do not. This is clearly not a complete or thorough survey, but it does help to support and illustrate the idea that collective Christian worship is a central feature of a significant proportion of UK private senior schools.

A statement on the shared aims and values of associated member schools is outlined on the HMC website as follows:

> Pastoral support in our schools is paramount to create environments in which pupils are happy, secure, confident, and valued. We pride ourselves in the personal and academic development of our students. We develop students into confident and successful young adults by fostering self-esteem and self-reliance (HMC, 2023).

An important component of this study is the extent to which chapel might be seen to contribute to these aims and values. As with most the UK's private schools, HMC schools are subject to the inspection framework of the Independent School's Inspectorate (ISI). Alongside many other requirements within the ISI framework, the following is explicitly stated as something that private schools are judged on: "Spiritual understanding: to develop spiritual understanding and an appreciation of non-material aspects of life, whether religious, philosophical or other" (ISI, 2019). This does not mean that 'chapel' is required, but private senior schools are explicitly judged on how well they extend their pupils philosophically and

spiritually. In those schools that maintain the practice, chapel stands to offer a contribution towards this part of the ISI framework.

There are potentially contentious political and moral questions about the separation of private and state-funded education in the UK. This study also explores some of the discrepancies and areas of sensitivity around the perceived advantages of private education. The contribution of chapel serves as one possible lens through which to view these potential advantages. The concept of an 'old boys' network' operating to the advantage of the privately educated is perhaps not as prevalent as it once was, because people are now seemingly more attuned to notions of privilege and elitism. However, Boris Johnson was the 20th Old Etonian out of the 57 Prime Ministers that have occupied the role since Robert Walpole in 1721. Of these 57 Prime Ministers, 42 were privately educated and 43 studied either at Oxford or Cambridge University, where college chapels often stand as prominently and centrally within the life of the community as they do at private senior schools. The Sutton Trust (2020) revealed that 16 of the 26 members of Cabinet at the time were privately educated (62%, against 7% of the national population) and that 13 went to Oxford or Cambridge University (50%, against less than 1% of the population). Interestingly, and some would say it is anachronistic, the daily proceedings in both houses of parliament open with morning prayer, and there are 26 'Lords Spiritual'[1]. To reference a different sphere of influence, 85% of senior judges in this country were privately educated (The Sutton Trust, 2020).

It is reasonable to conclude that a disproportionate number of people rising to the most influential roles in the UK experienced traditional chapel worship as part of their education

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[1] These are the Church of England bishops who hold seats in The House of Lords.

and upbringing. It is not a great stretch of imagination therefore to consider chapel as potentially contributing to a currency of social worth. Lin (1999) describes social capital as 'assets in networks' and if traditional chapel worship is a common formative experience for many of the elite and influential in UK society, then it is reasonable to explore and analyse chapel in private schools as a potential contributor to such assets.

Teenage attitudes towards religion and worship

It is important for this study that the focus is on private senior schools, and not private junior or 'Prep' schools. This focus means that the pupil populations of my case study schools comprise teenagers, who are more likely to have established an independent and rationalised view of the role of religion and worship in their lives. This means that my interview data can contribute in a more meaningful way towards my overall thesis, because my pupil participants have a greater capacity to articulate their ideas about chapel.

The 1999-2001 'World Values Survey' used a sample of 20,000 18- to 21-year-olds from 41 countries. Just 10.2 % of respondents from Great Britain put religion as 'very important' in their life and whilst 64% said they 'believed in God', only 8.6% said that 'God was very important in their life' (Lippman & Dombrowski Keith, 2006). The 1997 'Young Europeans Survey' sampled 9,400 respondents from 15 countries and found that only 13.2% of 15- to 24-year-olds in Great Britain regularly participated in a religious community. Importantly for my study, a gulf between 'belief' and 'practice' was revealed (Lippman & Dombrowski Keith, 2006), with the phenomenon of 'spirituality without religiosity' observed as more prevalent among the more highly educated. This finding suggests that pupils' spiritual beliefs may not necessarily align with the specific Christian doctrine offered through a traditional chapel service. As such, information on how chapel contributes to UK private senior schools should prove helpful and informative for school leaders within the sector.

In 1995, Francis and Kay conducted the 'Teenage Religion and Values Survey'. This study analysed data from anonymous questionnaires issued to 13,000 UK children between the ages of 13 and 15, to explore various aspects of their religious beliefs. As with my own study, the age-group was selected because "these pupils are at a point of transition between

childhood and adulthood" (1995, p. 2). In response to the statement 'I believe in God', 39% agreed, 35% were not certain and 26% disagreed. When presented with the statement 'I think Christianity is the only true religion' only 16% agreed, 42% were uncertain and 42% disagreed. From these two sets of statistics, it is apparent that those who believe in God are in a minority amongst teenagers, and those who believe exclusively in the claims of Christianity are in a very small minority. Whilst this survey was conducted quite a long time ago, it still provides relevant context for my study because it suggests that a significant proportion of pupils attending chapel are unlikely to be religious, and fewer still will be committed Christians. If chapel does not contribute to the personal faith of pupils, then it is important to understand its role and what sort of contribution it potentially does provide.

	Agree %	Not Certain %	Disagree %
RE should be taught in schools.	33	36	31
Schools should hold a religious assembly daily.	6	21	73
Church is boring.	51	27	22
I believe I can be Christian without going to church.	50	33	17
I want to get married in church.	78	17	5
The church seems irrelevant to life today.	27	46	27
The bible seems irrelevant today.	30	43	27
I want my children to be baptised in church.	57	27	16
Christian ministers do a good job	36	47	17

Figure 6: Teenage Religion and Values Survey Results

Francis' analysis of his data led to some significant interpretations:

> If pupils were given a vote on the abolition of a daily religious assembly, the stipulations about collective worship in the 1988 Education Reform Act would not have been passed. Even weekly churchgoers can only muster 17% of their number in support of daily religious assemblies. Most pupils, of whatever age, group or sex, do not want such gatherings (Francis & Kay, 1995, p. 197).

Despite some of the negativity and ambivalence surrounding aspects of worship and religion, some of the rites of passage offered by the church are clearly important to young people, with only 5% of teenagers disagreeing with the statement 'I want to get married in church'. This leads to an important observation for my study. Pupils potentially value the ceremony and dignity afforded to big life events by religion and places of worship, but they do not want a daily diet of religious participation. Maybe this invites reform rather than abolition of the daily requirement to worship, since something of the experience of prayer and devotional gathering does seem to speak to the hearts and minds of young people, even if only 6% agree with the current legislation.

Several other studies have demonstrated a phenomenon among young people who consider themselves to be "spiritual, but not religious" (Lippman & Dombrowski Keith, 2006). This distinction between 'spirituality' and 'religiosity' is an important consideration for my exploration of chapel's contribution. Lippman and Dombrowski Keith (2006) offer helpful definitions of each term:

> Spirituality is generally considered to be beliefs, experiences, or practices, such as prayer or meditation, that foster a connection to a higher power that transcends daily physical existence, and which may be unrelated to the practices of any religion per se. Religiosity is generally considered to involve following the specific practices, attending services of, or identifying with the beliefs of a specific religion or religious community (2006, p. 110).

A significant number of teenagers describe themselves as 'spiritual' without being especially religious. This also accords with my professional experience of teenagers' beliefs. Some also suggest that one can be Christian in a cultural sense without actively participating in worship, or possibly even believing in God.

Given the various contexts described in this opening chapter, and the changing nature of religion and worship in UK society, my research stands to provide an important insight into how far these various phenomena have a bearing on ideas about the contribution of chapel, and what this all means for the continuation of this practice within the UK private senior school sector.

Thesis structure

This thesis is structured in the following way, with a brief description here of what each of the chapters aims to achieve.

Chapter 1 (Introduction & Context) has outlined the aims of this study and the underlying motivation and inspiration for it. The wider context for this study is a reported decline over recent years in the importance of Christianity in the lives of UK citizens, alongside the national debate about legislation relating to collective worship in schools. Also referenced is a need for sensitivity relating to some of the issues raised by disparities between private and state education in the UK, and the potential advantages sought by parents who invest in private schooling for their children.

Chapter 2 (Literature Review & Theoretical Framework) outlines the religious sociology of Émile Durkheim and explains the relevance and application of his theory to my study. Durkheim's central assertion, that distinguishing between what is 'sacred' and 'profane' is an important instrument of social bonding, is central to his account of how religious worship contributes to society and individuals. Further to this theoretical framework, Chapter 2 will explore a wide range of previous studies that help to ground and locate my thesis. The possible contribution of chapel draws meaningful comparisons with broader research literature exploring firstly the contribution of religion and collective worship to communities and individuals, and secondly the powerful appeal for many of notions of the sacred and numinous.

Chapter 3 (Methodology & Methods) starts with a brief account of critical realism and discussion of how my thesis fits within this methodological and epistemological approach to social scientific research. This chapter will explain the thinking behind taking a multiple case study approach, and for employing my central research method, which was qualitative, semi-structured interviews. It will also explain some of the ways that Covid and lockdown impacted on my research design and data collection. This chapter will also explain and justify my case selection (the way that I established my three case study schools) and my within-case selection (the way that I selected my 40 participants). This chapter will also briefly outline the

ethical considerations that were important for this study, and my thematic approach to coding and data analysis.

Chapter 4 (Case Reports) will present data from my 3 case study schools, from which I interviewed 40 participants (School P – 15 Participants; School A – 10 Participants; School C – 15 Participants). The data in each case report is presented in detail, using direct quotations from the interviews, categorised according to the study's overarching themes and emergent sub-themes.

Chapter 5 (Discussion & Findings) brings together the interview data from my three schools in a cross-case analysis, supported by the relevant research literature. From this discussion, the key findings of the study are drawn and outlined. Whilst each case study has its own distinctive identity, there is significant consensus between the schools and their respective participants about the contribution of chapel.

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis by explaining the central findings of this thesis and how they demonstrate the ways in which chapel contributes towards the community and its individual pupils. The relevance for the future of chapel worship within the sector, especially considering decline in Christian adherence nationally, will also be discussed. The appropriateness and value of compulsory, whole-school attendance at chapel is an important consideration, which this thesis gets some way towards answering. However, there are several imitations of this study, which are also outlined in this chapter, along with ideas for further, related research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to explore relevant theoretical and research literature, to better understand the potential contribution of chapel to UK private senior schools and against which to position my central findings in the later chapters of this thesis. As far as possible, I am interested to explore this as a current, rather than an historic issue, especially given the context of declining Christian adherence within the UK, as described in the previous chapter.

Utilising a theoretical framework offered by Durkheim's account of religion, this chapter will explore relevant literature within two overarching themes. The following distinction traces Durkheim's thinking and acts as a helpful way to group the research literature being explored:

- Theme 1: 'Building community, culture, and identity'.
- Theme 2: 'Engaging with the sacred, and taking pupils beyond their everyday and profane experiences'.

Whilst there has been plenty of research on the contribution of religion and communal worship within the broad scope of these two themes, there is very little specifically on how such contributions are experienced in chapel in UK private senior schools. By exploring existing literature for helpful findings and insights, I will be able to provide a wider academic and intellectual framework within which to locate and understand the discoveries that my own research brings forward.

Theoretical framework: Durkheim's sociological account of religion

The starting point for this literature review is religious sociology. However, there is so much social theory and thinking attached to communal worship and the practice of religion that it is difficult to know precisely where to turn. Many influential thinkers have constructed a view of religion in negative and critical terms, as far back as Machiavelli's reference to it as a "tool of the ruler" (1513), and as famously as Marx's description of it as the "opium of the people" (1844). Freud wrote about religion as "the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity" (1927,

p. 43) and, more recently, Althusser similarly identified the Church as "the ideological state apparatus *par excellence*" (1971). In another sociological account hostile to the concept of religion, Bourdieu describes it as a glaring example of 'symbolic violence', whereby the dominated class accepts as 'natural' or 'un-arbitrary', the forms and systems of meaning that enable social injustice to be maintained (1984).

Given the prevalence of such thinking, it would be easy to consider chapel in similarly negative terms, interpreting it as a model in microcosm of the sort of malign control attributed to religion by some sociologists. However, Durkheim's presentation of religion as a social institution enhancing social cohesion (1912) provides a much better framework, especially given the context described in the previous chapter, for ascertaining and understanding the potentially positive contributions that chapel makes. Afterall, whole-school chapel remains a favoured approach within many UK private senior schools, so a demonstration of why some people oppose it would seem to offer less insight and value than an examination of the ways in which it stands to contribute something of value.

For Durkheim, human beings derive their sense of a religious and sacred nature from living in society, and religion therefore sits at the centre of the social framework. Society comes first for Durkheim, and then religion emerges, facilitating a powerful means through which people enhance the strength of their social bonds and shared identity. Through observation of periodic ritual enactments and intense collective experiences, Durkheim saw religion consecrating social acts and activities, transforming material objects and people's ties to one another into something sacred. As such, the very notion of God can be seen as merely "a representation of society" (Durkheim, 1912). It is not the aim of this thesis to explore arguments for and against God, but rather to enable the clearest possible understanding of how chapel contributes to school communities and individual pupils. In this, Durkheim's account has a lot to offer.

Durkheim observed that there is no known society that does not include something that can be classified as religion, and this informed his view that religion is an essential component of society. As he wrote in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, "if religion has given birth to

all that is essential in society, it is because the idea of society is the very soul of religion" (1912, p. 168). He was convinced in the binding quality of religious worship, through which people build their societies. For Durkheim, religion is nothing more than the symbolic expression of social experience, and he proposed that communal worship can provide an aspect of social life that is simply lived out and taken for granted. According to Inglehart and Norris (2007), this is why Durkheim offers a more compelling account of religion than many other sociologists, because he sees religion not simply as a system of beliefs and values, but also as a system of rituals and ceremonies that help sustain social cohesion and stability. If chapel is still going strong in private, senior schools, despite the low levels of Christian adherence amongst British teenagers, Durkheim's theoretical position might provide part of the explanation.

Durkheim's philosophy contrasted with those previously influential philosophers who derived their categories of understanding from a priori reasoning. He saw religion as the primary way that people develop categories with which to understand and make sense of the world around them. This theoretical framework fits well with my own positionality and enables me to locate my study in a less antagonistic space than some of the other theories of religion would have done. Durkheim's social theory of religion provides space for the more positive contributions of chapel to emerge, and it stands to help make sense of these contributions. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* Durkheim defined religion as:

> A unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them (1912, p. 19) .

Human beings use these 'sacred things' to feel connected in some way to the supreme being, which imbues their lives with a deeper and greater sense of reality. Durkheim's view is that religion fosters group membership, thereby encouraging the social circumstances that create an environment within which people accept a particular way of life. This idea is a very helpful one for exploring the potentially community-building aspect of chapel, and the sense of identity and belonging that it might contribute.

Durkheim famously distinguished between the profane and sacred, suggesting that neither can exist without the other. The profane is the non-sacred, the everyday, the material and non-mysterious features of life. The sacred is defined as anything that is extraordinary, numinous, or other, instilling in people a sense of reverence.

Durkheim examined the social origins and function of religion, and the beliefs associated with it, and concluded that these are reinforced by rituals and worship ceremonies. The appeal to the sacred that is associated with religious practice and ceremony is precisely what Durkheim considered essential for strengthening society. As such, Durkheim's separation of ideas relating to the profane and sacred provides a very helpful template for exploring the literature in this chapter and the potential contribution of chapel. My own research considers this idea closely, analysing how far chapel's contribution to school communities is driven by an appeal to the sacred.

Alongside his view that reverence of the sacred provides a cohesive social force, Durkheim saw other ways that communal worship contributes to society. Another function of religion that he observed is the way it often engenders a sense of purpose, meaning and comfort in its followers (Durkheim, 1897). By providing a means of contemplating the sacred, collective worship gives people an opportunity to look beyond the profane, potentially allowing them to reflect on, and even reach, a higher sense of purpose and meaning in their lives.

Durkheim's account of the contribution of religion to society is summarised by Kumar:

> Durkheim argued that religion has three major roles to play in the functioning of society. First among them is that religion acts as an agent of social cohesion. Secondly, Durkheim argues religion helps in building social control, that is, people in society behave in a morally sanctioned manner to respect the sacred. Thirdly, he argues that religion provides people in society with a sense of meaning (Kumar, 2021, p. 139)

All these ideas will be explored in this chapter's review of literature. One of the significant features of this thesis is the way that chapel can be understood as distinct from assembly[2] in character and contribution, and Durkheim's sociological account of religion helps to provide a way of defining and understanding this distinction.

As has been suggested in this summary of influential sociological literature, communal worship can be understood as the ultimate expression of social unification, providing a powerful way for human beings to establish deep levels of meaning and connection in their lives. With this framework established, I will now present my research questions followed by the associated review of literature, exploring and evaluating various findings that help to support and frame my own thesis.

Research questions

The central question addressed by my thesis is:

How does chapel contribute to UK private senior schools?

The subsidiary research questions are:

- How does chapel contribute towards building the school's community, culture, and identity?
- How does chapel contribute towards providing opportunities for pupils to engage with the sacred, taking them beyond their everyday and profane experiences?

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[2] The term 'assembly' has taken on a more general meaning as a whole school gathering, which might have a religious element and might not. For the purposes of this study, 'chapel' is seen as distinct from 'assembly' because it is wholly and exclusively a Christian worship gathering, in a separate and purpose-built chapel building. Whilst assemblies tend to include routine notices, announcements, and awards, chapel is typically a gathering that is preserved exclusively for a communal act of worship.

This literature review will explore previous research that is able to provide a helpful backdrop for my own study. By exploring ideas and prior findings related to the two central themes of this study it will be possible to frame my own data, discussion, and findings later in this paper.

Theme 1: Building community, culture, and identity

Building on Durkheim's influential account of religion, much work has been done to explore the ways in which religion and communal worship can build and enhance community cohesion. As some have argued, church-based social ties may function more effectively than social relationships in the secular world (Krause, 2011). Others have proposed theories on why this might be, including Ellison and George (1994), who found that participants in religious communities often enjoy larger, denser, and more satisfying social networks, because of the emphasis that religious teachings place on forgiveness. At any rate, a sense of connection, belonging, and shared culture is well recognised by sociologists as an essential component of human experience and identity. The American sociologist Brené Brown (2010) argues that we are 'neurobiologically wired' to make connections with others and that these connections give purpose and meaning to our lives.

Numerous studies have concluded that religion plays an important sociological function, helping to bring people together and consolidate a sense of connection, belonging, and shared cultural identity. Argyle puts it:

> Part of the milder religious experiences obtained in church are feelings of unity and concern for others, feeling part of a family. This kind of social cohesion is perhaps a central part of religious experience (2000, p. 115).

One former head of Eton College, reflects that "a teenager's quest for personal identity is shaped by their experience of collective identity" (Little, 2015, p. 143). If studies have shown that religion can consolidate a sense of shared cultural identity, it is worth considering how far chapel contributes to this in private senior schools and what the impact is on pupils' sense of personal identity.

Figure 7: Eton College chapel (2021)

According to Durkheim's account of religion, communities and cultures coalesce around religion through communal worship and an appeal to the sacred, which lends power and significance to the strength of a community and the identity of those within it. This type of unifying experience runs deep in many communities and can be observed in several influential studies. In 'Congregations', Ammerman (2009) explains that "the gathered congregation is very likely to sing together, to read sacred texts, and to listen to some sort of inspirational speech" (p. 565); the typical school chapel service potentially delivers all three of these. People are generally more comfortable in groups comprising others who appear similar (Putman, 2009), and collective worship has been observed as a powerful way of experiencing a sense of 'homophily'. As Dunbar (1971) explained, historically, human survival has been shown to be more likely in groups espousing the same beliefs and rituals. Chapel is first and foremost a coming together of the school community, and religious worship provides the platform and narrative for this gathering. Mark Wynn (2007) writes about the ways in which human identity proves to be relative to place because of its 'storied' nature, which relies upon being rooted in particular places. For Wynn, places are distinguished from 'sites' by virtue of their distinct identity and their capacity to act upon us; chapel, as distinct place, stands as a likely contributor to the narrative of pupil identity within schools where this is a central location and practice within the school community. There is also a significant body of literature that supports the idea that religion can be highly sociable, providing a community building experience for people through "a shared elevated mood" (Argyle, 2000, p. 111).

McIntosh, Sykes and Kubena (2002) focused on how religion helped to foster a sense of community within the social networks of the 424 elderly participants they interviewed. It was established that religious membership played a prominent role in the social networks of the study's participants, ranking in importance above ethnicity, friendship groups, physical proximity and living arrangements. This suggests that religion can significantly influence the formation and nature of a person's social networks. Whilst the study focused on elderly participants, it is of relevance to my study that religion and communal worship were determined to generate such a powerfully socialising force. The extent to which chapel contributes a community forming dimension within my case study schools will become clear as this thesis unfolds.

Roof (1978) showed how 'embedded' in the community local churches were, and he noted that those with stronger ties to their local communities tended to exhibit greater religiosity, both in terms of practice and belief. Whilst levels of church attendance have clearly declined since the 1970s, Roof's findings about the community enhancing aspect of local churches might still be applicable to the way that chapel continues to contribute to private senior schools. This idea is certainly supported by Durkheim's theory of religion presented at the start of this chapter, which describes the central importance of religion in strengthening community ties, historically, and across social and cultural backgrounds of all types. For Geertz (1973), religion originates collectively and functions to uphold society as well as to support the individual, in the same way that instances of culture do. Religion can be seen as a way of building meaning and making sense of life, and Geertz identified religion as an instance of culture in this way. Composed of beliefs and practices, religion can be seen to serve the same function as culture does more generally. Many private senior schools will refer to their ethos and culture in relation to their Christian foundation, which chapel clearly sits in the centre of. As such, chapel can be expected to play a role in helping school communities to come together and feel socially and culturally bonded.

Schools often use religious festivals to enhance the community building opportunities afforded by religious practice. A school carol service might serve as an easily identifiable example of this. The 'history and legend' of such festivals evokes "an emotional response that

can offer a glow or warmth and romance to proceedings" (Woodward, 1986, p. 270). The corporate nature of such community celebrations could provide a real benefit to schools and will be explored as one of the ways in which chapel might make an important contribution. Religious festivals also play a key role in defining the annual cycle, through the repetition of a regular calendar, which gives a sense of fulfilment and completion. This is such an important feature of a school's identity across the academic year and Woodward (1986) refers to "the mystique of purpose and plan that lies behind this cycle, putting pupils in touch with previous generations of celebrants" (p. 271).

Stephen Parker (2009) writes about the sociology of sacred spaces in 'Theorising 'sacred' space in educational contexts: a case study of three English Midlands Sixth Form Colleges'. This study explores the ways in which the location, layout, and aesthetical features of 'sacred' spaces are interpreted and understood in schools with a culturally diverse and religiously pluralistic pupil population. The paper also considers what, if any, educational rationale may be given for establishing and maintaining such 'sacred' spaces; Parker refers to "a dearth of religious and theological rationale for their existence" (Parker, 2009, p. 30), which again lends weight to the justification for this current study, exploring the contribution of chapel in UK private senior schools.

One of the ways that Parker identifies a contribution of sacred spaces is through 'learned patterns of action' provided through the communal formation of a 'sense of place'. The sense of ritual and coexistence with others at worship has a powerful influence on our interpretation of space and the identity that this helps to create. By forming a sense of place alongside others, as chapel stands powerfully to do, "loyalty and a sense of responsibility follow" (Parker, 2009, p. 35). This 'place-embodiment link' is imperative for children and young people's well-being. Mark Wynn (2007) argues for a strong connection between the ideas pf 'identity', 'personal story' and 'attachment to place', and Parker (2009) extends the thinking by suggesting that "even if a child's life has been previously severely disrupted, if they are able to find themselves in a place, then their identity in the world can become secure and coherent for them" (Parker, 2009, p. 36). As such, the creation of 'sacred' spaces is seen as critical for human identity; "places become 'sacred' to human beings when a person's

story, the communal ritual engaged in, and the faith-myth invoked intermingle – whenever I and others do something memorable and significant within them" (Parker, 2009, p. 37). This idea powerfully suggests the potential for chapel to play a distinctive and important role in the formation of identity and a sense of belonging within a school community.

A great deal of literature exists that supports the idea of religion and worship offering a profoundly important sense of community and identity for people. Guest (2007) explains how shared spiritual practice can be seen as an essential factor not just in individual advancement, but in the emergence and building of communities through genuine commitment to a greater order. Oppong (2013) saw specific value in religion for adolescents because of the way that it expresses "a deep sense of unity with others" (p. 12), and he described this as crucial for identity formation in young people. Zohar and Marshall (2004) wrote about *spiritual capital* as a notion of shared meaning and purpose and vision about what matters most in life:

> This equates to wealth that binds people together, provides a moral and motivational framework, engenders an ethos or spirit, and nourishes and sustains the human sense of identity and spirit (p. 28).

Oppong (2013) explored the link between religion and identity and suggested that there is a positive correlation, especially in adolescents. Oppong notes that a key aspect of adolescence is the exploration of self and the development of a sense of identity, and within this context religion can be hugely influential, especially at a time when individuals are very amenable to new ideas, new influences, and mentoring. As such, this study examines how far my participants reference ideas about chapel shaping their sense of identity, and how far Heads and Chaplains explicitly reference this idea as a distinctive contribution that chapel provides in their schools.

Perry (2010) found that 25% of Americans today live alone, describing them as potentially desperate for a sense of belonging within a wider community. The American philosopher, Daniel Dennett, has written extensively on the contribution of religion to people and communities. He contends that even within the pervasive secularity of the modern western world, religious worship is still capable of contributing something that secular institutions

have so far proved incapable of doing. Dennett (2002) describes a paradoxical situation where some people who consider religion irrational, still reach for it to provide something they feel is vital for their lives. The principal contribution he observes is the enhancement of what would otherwise be a diminishing sense of community. Dennett's observation is that the great virtue of existing religions is the way they provide a focus for common causes, within a 'face to face' organisation, where people recognise who you are. He also contends that emotionally binding rituals, such as religion offers, are very important signs of camaraderie that should be preserved. Dennett advocates a new form of rational secularity that recognises the community binding and life affirming values traditionally associated with religion. His thinking is firmly in line with Durkheim's account of religion, recognising the role of emotionally binding rituals and tradition in strengthening a social group. Applying this thinking to chapel in private senior schools, one can understand how it might stand to contribute towards an enhanced sense of community cohesion and identity.

Moral messages and values education

One of the defining features of religion is the way it proposes, or perhaps imposes, a code of ethics, a system of morality and values, that its adherents are expected to abide by. As such, the idea of chapel contributing a distinctive forum for moral messages and values education appears probable. As Turner (2016) has established, "religion played an important role in the moral reformation of many public schools in the nineteenth century" (p. 146). In line with his views on the socialising effect of religion, Durkheim (1912) proposed that the sharing of values, symbols, and social norms has a cohesive effect on people. This suggests that chapel's possible contribution to moral messages and values education sits within the broader theme of 'building community, culture, and identity'. This next section of my literature review will explore various connections that other researchers and thinkers have made between religion and worship, and people's perceptions of right and wrong, paving the way for consideration of this as a potential area of chapel's contribution within UK private senior schools.

Within western society we have institutionalised the values of tolerance and equality of rights for all. In other words, the values that are embedded in Christian ethics are also the values of UK society. People who do not follow Christian teaching nevertheless do so indirectly,

because it is represented in the broader values of society. Where religion stands to make an additional contribution, as Geertz (1973) argues, is "by providing social values with what they need most, which is an appearance of objectivity" (p. 95). The Government document 'Guidance on promoting British values in schools' (Department for Education, 2014) explains that schools have a duty to embed the values of 'mutual respect and tolerance' and 'individual liberty' into their curriculum. The Independent Schools' Inspectorate (ISI) framework considers how well schools meet their requirement to facilitate pupils' "spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development" (ISI, 2022). Clearly, the ethos and moral culture of a school is central to how well it discharges its educational and pastoral duties, and one would reasonably expect chapel to offer a potential contribution on this front.

Crawford *et al* (2006) explored the relationship between spirituality and resilience in teenagers and found that those with religious beliefs derived certain benefits. They observed that "religious teachings offer the fundamental assumptions that the world is a benevolent and meaningful place and that others and the self are good and worthy people" (p. 363). Exposure to Christian teaching in chapel could provide a similar function. The consistent message that the world is a good and meaningful place, and that other pupils are valuable and important, offers an ideal platform on which to construct a school ethos. Further to this, Crawford *et al* (2006) found that "religious involvement appears to help teens develop self-regulatory abilities by offering a standard for behaviour, or a guide for right and wrong" (p. 361).

Some have suggested that an appeal to the sacred and spiritual gives added weight and status to moral imperatives and that one needs to know what to believe before you can discern how to behave (King, 2000; Segal, 2012). There is not space in this review to tackle the philosophical problem of objectivity in ethics, but it is helpful for this study to explore how far my participants consider that chapel contributes to the school's moral messaging and values education. King (2000) suggests that spiritual education is that which inspires young people to live for others. He clearly sees a connection between an appeal to religious and spiritual teaching and the imperative to love one's neighbour.

Erikson (1968) suggests that religion helps to forge moral beliefs based on an ideological platform and that through religious beliefs and moral values, adolescents feel empowered to better understand the world and their place in it. As such, values generated through religion can serve to deepen their understanding of events and experiences beyond their experience of religion.

In western capitalist countries the concept of 'wealth' tends to be narrowly defined as monetary and material. Some writers have proposed the need for a concept of wealth that inspires people to give of their best in creating it (Zohar & Marshall, 2004). Social capital does not necessarily give stability to wider society, but spiritual capital can be conceived as that which gives meaning, purpose, and value to human existence. This reinterpretation of wealth is helpful when considering the sort of contribution that chapel might make to the 'school ethos' and to the lives of pupils. Lee (1993) suggested that "the circulation of value can only occur when values take on objectified form through some sort of specific instance of representation" (p. 162). Spiritual capital thus becomes a notion of shared meaning, purpose, and vision about what matters most in life. As Zohar and Marshall (2004) explain, "this equates to wealth that binds people together, provides a moral and motivational framework, engenders an ethos or spirit, and nourishes and sustains the human spirit" (p. 28). A possible area of chapel's contribution is as a specific instance of representation that helps the core values of a school to take on objectified form, enabling their effective circulation.

The 'Spirituality in Higher Education Study' (UCLA, 2004) revealed that students perceived qualities of 'the good life' such as compassion, kindness, helpfulness, generosity, forgiveness, and empathy, as being 'spiritual' qualities. Furthermore, spirituality was significantly correlated with increased optimism, greater civic responsibility, being more empathetic, exhibiting more tolerance of racial and ethnic groups, and stronger academic performance. It appears that spiritual capital enhances "the good life" (Wortham & Wortham, 2007). Dillon (2010) described the post-secular society as one that recognizes the relevance of religious ideas and intuitions in informing civic discourse and contributing to "remedying the social pathologies of modernity" (p. 143).

Communal singing

One of the regular practices of chapel in UK private senior schools is communal hymn singing. Whilst the literature that specifically considers communal singing in schools is almost non-existent, although there is some (Welch, 2014; Clapp-Itnyre, 2018), there has nevertheless been a great deal of research into how communal singing can prove beneficial to the social bonding and cultural identity of a community. In his large-scale survey, Chong (2010) demonstrated that 88.3% of people questioned said they derived pleasure and enjoyment from communal singing. In support of this observation, there is a significant body of literature that demonstrates how communal singing can provide a powerful, socially bonding experience (Warner, 1997; Gardiner, 2017; MacGregor, 2017; Borcak, 2021). Tair *et al* (2014) use the phrase 'self-other merging' to describe the sociological effect of communal singing whereby a person's sense of individuality is lost within the shared identity of the group. There is also plenty of literature that reveals that singing in groups leads to specific, incremental benefits to physical, psychological, social, and community well-being (Gridley *et al*, 2011; Skingley *et al*, 2015; Weinstein *et al*, 2015).

Borcak (2021) has been keen to identify how communal singing increases social bonding and she has considered the parallel medial conditions of "words and music". Firstly, words are seen to mediate world views that singers can identify and pledge allegiance to. The music is a second contributing factor for social bonding as "joint rhythmic entrainment" and "harmonic attunement" play their part in bringing people together. Hymn singing clearly offers the potential for both benefits and, as MacGregor (2017) argues, few things bring people together more effectively than putting meaningful words to a singable melody. Welch (2014) saw a particularly profound effect of communal singing on children's sense of social inclusion, which is of obvious relevance for my case study setting. Bailes (2022) found that singing with others contributes to a positive mood and promotes relationships. Warner (1997) also argued that singing together is a powerful means toward both group cohesion and spiritual transcendence. Pearce *et al* (2015) described the "ice breaker effect" of communal singing and saw that when compared to other social bonding experiences, singing seems to operate to "fast-track" a sense of togetherness and shared identity, working faster than anything else. The physiological effect of communal singing is worth consideration, and

Stephen Reicher (2017) refers to the way that "physical synchronicity" is very effective at creating "psychological synchronicity". Vickhoff *et al* (2013) were able to show that singers' heart rates synchronize because the rhythm and pace of the song guides and structures their breathing accordingly. In other words, a community can derive its sense of collective identity from singing together. By performing the physical act of standing and singing in unity, a feeling of togetherness and shared identity is cultivated and powerfully conveyed. John Butt (2017) further identifies the almost intoxicating experience of singing together, by considering the physiological effect of singing:

> Your breathing is changed, you sometimes are short of breath, you sometimes have more oxygen than normal. So, I think you really do go through some sort of buzz, which is very much physiological' (p. 1)

Kreutz (2014) compared singing to talking and found that the former enhanced wellbeing more than the latter, for several reasons that the following study can explain. Gridley *et al* (2011) showed group singing to be a powerful personal and social health promotion activity, concluding that the "findings on the improved social as well as personal dimensions of mental health and wellbeing that are associated with singing in groups are strong and consistent" (p. 28). These benefits are observed in the following ways: (i) increased self-confidence, empowerment, wellbeing, and interpersonal skills (ii) a general lifting of the spirits and a sense of joy and accomplishment (iii) lowered feelings of social isolation, depression, and anxiety (iv) increased social capital through participation in social, cultural and community activities (v) denser social and friendship networks.

There is some literature on the tradition of hymn signing within private schools, such as Clapp-Itnyre's study (2018) of children's hymn singing in the Victorian era. Clapp-Itnyre describes how schools such as Rugby, Harrow and Uppingham would have had their own versions of relatively expensive hymn books at the end of the 19th Century and that in the Victorian era, hymn singing became an important part of the chapel experience. As such, the hymn book has provided an instance of embodied cultural and spiritual capital within private senior schools for quite some time.

> Children were further encouraged to consider deep theology, peruse disparate hymns
> and tunes, found within their hymn books, and sing them boldly before an adult audience
> in missionary, temperance, or church settings (Clapp-Itnyre, 2018, p. 9).

Weinstein *et al* (2015) carried out a study on the social bonding effects of communal singing to see what effect 'scaling up' the choir had. They found that when the 'megachoir' (over 230 participants) sang together, the sense of being united to one's fellow singers was stronger than it was within smaller choirs. When a school chapel is filled with several hundred pupils singing a hymn together, the effect on the overall community and shared sense of identity and purpose might well be seen as significant. Returning briefly to Durkheim (1912), his observations on the socially bonding quality of communal worship were influenced by what he saw amongst Aboriginal Australians as "ritual collective effervescence". Durkheim referred to these "periodic ritual enactments and intense collective experiences" as "corroboree" and interpreted that the religious element of these ceremonies conferred sacred status to the social bonds that were thus strengthened. Borcak (2011) identifies communal singing as just such an instance of effervescence, and chapel will be examined as a potential source of the same type of socially bonding opportunity within a school community through the shared experience of hymn singing.

School marketing and promotion

In this section I will review literature that relates to the question of how far chapel might be seen to contribute to the ways in which schools market and promote themselves. As mentioned previously in this thesis, private education in the UK is an expensive commodity, afforded by only 7% of the population (Ball, 1996), and far beyond the financial reach of most. Sociologists have demonstrated that the education market is one of the most important loci of the class struggle (Bourdieu & Boltanski, 1976). There is a relevant body of literature that has analysed the reasons why parents make the decision to invest in private education for their children, which include: the promise of greater academic achievement, smaller class sizes, extra-curricular opportunities, cultural and social capital, and future earning-potential, much of which can be grouped into what Edwards and Whitty (1995) have called "entrenched prestige".

Most parents who select private education consider the cost to be a worthwhile investment and there is evidence to suggest that the earning potential of privately educated pupils, over the course of their working life, will exceed the cost of their schooling (Green, Parsons, Sullivan, and Wiggins, 2015); this same study also identified the following:

> Private school pupils have substantially higher levels of self-esteem, a more internal locus of control, higher job quality aspirations, higher occupational aspirations, and better perceived access to high-valued networks for job search (p. 2).

Whilst plenty has been written from a socio-economic perspective about parents' reasons for going private, very little of the literature has explored whether religious practice, collective worship, and chapel carry much influence in the decision-making process. This might be because, in so many cases, the presence of chapel is simply taken for granted. Chapel would therefore not present itself as something upon which parents would be drawing their distinctions and comparisons between prospective schools. However, there is related literature that supports an impression of chapel making a possible contribution to the sense of 'distinction' that private schools can generate. In such a way, chapel worship might be viewed as a proxy for some of the characteristics that are often associated with private school pupils, such as confidence and leadership. Communal worship certainly stands to promote certain key skills and desirable traits. As Crawford *et al* (2006) have shown, "children and adolescents who actively participate in religious activities are afforded many opportunities to improve their community and leadership skills" (p. 363).

Ball (1996) concludes that for many families selecting private education, it is a "reinvestment, or strategy of reconversion to conserve or enhance their class ranking" (p. 22). In his influential work 'Distinction' (1986), Bourdieu proposed the notion that education is a powerful mechanism for the acquisition of cultural and social capital, and the reproduction of the metaphorical qualities of "status and prestige". Chapel might be seen by some to contribute to the appearance of status and prestige associated with ideas of cultural and social capital. Also, as Portes (1998) says, "to possess social capital, a person must be related to others, and it is those others, not himself, who are the actual source of his or her advantage" (p. 3). Chapel potentially contributes a useful feature of the marketing and

promotional materials for private senior schools, especially if prospective parents see it as part of the private school's distinctive means of enhancing cultural and social capital.

When parents invest in the 'ethos' of a school, it is easy to imagine that notions of spiritual capital might inform their consideration to some extent, and that they might perceive benefits that will accrue in the same way as those of more overtly monetizable capital. As Furseth (2009) suggests, "religion and spirituality can function as distinctions in the sense that one seeks out that which is rare, distinguished, and separate" (p. 103). Here Furseth is utilising the language of Bourdieu to illustrate how capital advantages can be sought, and that religion and spirituality can certainly contribute in this way. Furthermore, spiritual capital can be interpreted as an essential factor not just in individual advancement, but in the emergence and building of communities through genuine commitment to a greater order (Guest, 2007). Again, this gives further credibility to the notion that chapel potentially contributes to the distinctive ethos of private senior schools and might therefore provide a valuable marketing asset. Ball (1996) describes the process whereby education facilitates the reproduction of metaphorical qualities of status and prestige, and chapel can very easily be imagined as one such instance of representation. It will be helpful to this study to demonstrate how far my conversations with participants from across the school communities reveal this.

Social capital involves the relationships, networks and norms that enrich individuals and communities (Kelly, 2012) and refers to the actual and potential resources that a person can access through his or her network of affiliations and relationships (Roehlkepartain & Patel, 2006). Bourdieu (1986) described social capital in the following way:

> An aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (p. 21).

The traditional model of chapel experienced in senior private schools can very clearly be expressed and understood in the terms offered here. Church of England worship maintains a strong association with the elite structures in British society, despite the evident national trend away from religiosity identified in the previous chapter. One only need consider some

of the major events of state, such as coronations, Remembrance parades, royal weddings, and state funerals, to recognise that significant social currency is still attached to expressions of Church of England worship.

Whilst considering the role of the monarch as Head of State and Head of The Church, it is perhaps easy to miss such obvious indications as the title of our National Anthem, 'God Save the King'. The newly minted 50p coin, the first in circulation to bear the image of King Charles III, bears the following inscription: "CHARLES III DG REX FD". This translates as Charles III, by the Grace of God, King, Defender of the Faith', showing again that proximity between the Church of England and the elite establishments of British society. Chapel worship can therefore be linked to social networks that hold power and influence in this country. As such, chapel can be understood in terms of social capital that might justify it as a feature of a school's marketing and promotion efforts and a possible contributing factor in parents' decisions to invest in private education.

Theme 2: Engaging with the sacred, taking pupils beyond their everyday and profane experiences

This section of literature will explore the idea that openness to the sacred and numinous, and therefore curiosity about religion, is fundamental to many people. The literature selected moves beyond the community building and cultural contributions of religious worship and focuses instead on the potential contributions provided by an appeal to the sacred. For Durkheim, attributing sacred status to the items of communal worship and religious ritual strengthens the social bonding that occurs. However, it generates a further potential range of contributions too, which draw on something in human nature that compels so many people to consider life beyond the everyday and profane.

When, in 2012-2013, Theos conducted a series of research surveys about Church of England cathedrals, the results showed the profound affect that such sacred spaces can have on people, even those who identified as non-religious or secular:

Rather than gratefully sloughing off their spiritual weeds when they found themselves in a cathedral, the non-religious often wriggled out of their secular selves (Spencer, 2016, p. 150).

Within this study, over half of the 'church non-attenders' who had visited a cathedral in the past 12 months said, "the cathedral gives me a greater sense of the sacred than I get elsewhere". Among the 'self-identifying secular tourists', 84% said they got a sense of the sacred from the cathedral building, 79 % that they got a sense of the sacred from the cathedral music, and 56% that they experienced God through the calm and quiet of the cathedral space. Others within this survey described the way the cathedral had the ability to make people slow down for a minute and ponder, and to think about others. As one participant put it: "It's about faith, not religion. It doesn't force you to believe in God or believe in the Bible. It instils faith in people, allowing them to make up their own minds" (Spencer, 2016, p. 150). All these ideas will be explored under the second theme of this literature review.

Weber (1930) thought that industrialisation was leading to rational ways of thinking in which mystery, magic, and the supernatural have no part. However, evidence suggests that whilst formal religious observance and churchgoing might have declined significantly in the UK, many people still allow space in their thinking for the mysterious, spiritual, and numinous (Inglehart & Norris, 2007). Durkheim (1912) saw human attraction to the sacred as something that marks us out from the rest of the material world and observed that there is no known society that does not include something that can be classified as religion. Human history is in many ways a history of religious faith, and cultural expression almost always has its roots in some form of appreciation of the non-material. The inescapability of mortality seems to leave many people yearning for a higher purpose, and religion is often observed to fill this gap. The literature in this section has been selected to help in my exploration of the ways that chapel might make a distinctive contribution, precisely because of its sacred dimension. There is a significant body of research literature that considers these various features of religious and communal worship, although very little that focuses on the way that chapel in private senior schools delivers them.

Engagement with faith and religion

Houtman and Aupers (2007) have challenged the commonly held view that we live in an increasingly secular world. A study conducted by Spencer and Weldin (2012) similarly showed that even as many as 23% of atheists nevertheless believe in the existence of a human soul. Whilst Houtman and Aupers (2007) recognise the same shift away from traditional Christian doctrines as others have done, they suggest that spirituality has had a corresponding upsurge. They use the term, "post-Christian spirituality", to describe this emerging belief system and they categorise it in the following way: "a belief that in the deepest layers of the self the 'divine spark' – to borrow a term from ancient Gnosticism – is still smouldering, waiting to be stirred up" (p. 307). This idea fits with the work of Hull (1995) who suggests that the statutory requirement for collective worship should be replaced with acts of 'collective spirituality'. Stern and Shillitoe (2019) pick up this idea in their work on 'prayer spaces' in schools, highlighting the value of opportunities for non-denominational, essentially non-religious, pupil engagements with the non-material and numinous.

It will be useful to this thesis to demonstrate how far a sense of post-Christian spirituality is present in the language that participants use to describe their experiences of chapel. As Ellens (2008) explains, 'spirituality' is used to describe an inner, subjective experience that generates a strong desire to understand the meaning of things in life. A traditional worship setting might be seen to contribute certain benefits to children fitting Houtman and Aupers' definition of post-Christian spiritualists, because of the opportunity for those children to explore and engage with matters of faith and religion.

Tillich (1965) defined religion as "that which we designate as our symbol of ultimate concern" and Pecorino (2000) called it "the most intensive and comprehensive method of valuing experienced by humankind" (p. 3). These ideas convey something of Durkheim's observation about the way that humans 'seek' and then 'set apart' the things that are thus designated as sacred. Chapel exposes pupils to the sacred and the spiritual dimensions of life, so one of the main areas of contribution might be seen in the opportunity it provides for pupils to move beyond the everyday and the profane, through engagement with faith and religion. There is a lot of academic literature to support the idea that most humans feel in some way called

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towards the spiritual and the sacred, although of course the way this calling is manifested in the lives of individuals can vary hugely.

In 'Contemporary Western Ethnography and the Definition of Religion', Stringer (2008) proposes an interpretation of western attitudes to religion that is influenced by the concept of 'animism'. Whilst Durkheim searched for his 'elementary form of religious life' halfway around the world, among the Aboriginal Australians, Stringer identifies several traits within the apparently more sophisticated society of Durkheim's late 19th century France that would have made it just as fitting for an ethnographic study of elementary religion. Equally, modern Britain would do just as well within Stringer's ethnographical investigation into "the most widespread and most common form of religion" (Stringer M. D., 2008, p. 101). Animism is generally seen as belief in spiritual beings; religion for Stringer therefore becomes "that body of discourse/language dealing specifically with the non-empirical" (Stringer M. D., 2008, p. 105). Whilst 'animism' is often interpreted as a term for the way that so-called 'primitive' people hold a belief that material things have souls, Stringer proposes that it should be understood instead to represent the idea that "there is a non-empirical element, a 'spiritual' part, to people and to many other objects in the world" (Stringer M. D., 2008, p. 107).

Some definitions of religion are characterised by the emotional response that people have when encountering the more mysterious aspects of human existence. One such account of religion was proposed by Otto in his influential book 'The Idea of the Holy' (1917) where he coined the term 'numinous' to capture the distinctive quality of human encounters with transcendence (Otto, 1917). Building on the work of Otto, Evans-Pritchard, in his book 'Theories of Primitive Religion' (1965), uses the label 'emotionalists' for a whole school of theorists whom, in their different ways, took the idea of 'awe' or 'wonder' as the starting point for religion (Stringer M. D., 2008). For the 'emotionalists' the sense of awe that we human beings have for something that is greater than ourselves becomes fertile psychological terrain within which religious concepts may lodge. As such, "many of the classic definitions of religion have continued to maintain the sense that religion is about that which is above and beyond the merely human" (Stringer M. D., 2008, p. 9). Durkheim's idea of the transcendent comes through in his interpretation that people must necessarily worship something greater

than themselves, even if that 'something' is society itself. This appeal to the transcendent leaves some to interpret Durkheim as belonging among the emotionalists (Ramp, 1998).

In these accounts of an elementary form of religious life, the idea emerges that human beings have an emotional response to their position of vulnerability and apparent insignificance within the cosmos, which is to experience awe and wonder. For Durkheim, Otto, Evans-Pritchard, and Stringer, this sense of the transcendent and numinous is a powerful precursor to religious sentiment. For Durkheim, it is society that steps in to fill the gap and from which religion emerges. Whatever the truest and most elementary form of religious life, it is very relevant for this study that chapel stands as a potential expression of the fundamental human impulse to seek meaning, coherence, and purpose in life. The emotions of awe and wonder are well documented in relation to magnificent worship buildings, and the chapels of my case study schools potentially stand to generate similar emotional sentiments.

Spencer (2016) highlights the ontological narrative that is provided by religious worship and suggests that any secular attempts at this will necessarily fall short, because they will not have the necessary foundations to support them. It is hard to argue with the notion that belief in God provides a platform on which to build a sense of human purpose. As Spencer (2016) says, humans live according to narratives, "consciously and subconsciously adopted", and the Christian story provides a highly positive and compelling narrative containing many of the essential values and beliefs that most schools want to espouse for their pupils. Having the opportunity to explore such a narrative could well emerge as one of chapel's important contributions.

As Roehlkepartain & Patel (2006) established:

> Congregations represent a unique crucible or focal point for exploring the dynamic interplay of numerous forces and processes in spiritual development: family, peer, personal agency, self-reflection – not to mention the rituals, traditions, and practices that build bridges to the sacred and transcendent (p. 324).

The chapel gathering is of course a religious congregation, so it is reasonable to assume that some form of spiritual development might be going on amongst the pupils. Woodward (1986) recognises however that religious celebrations in school will never match the contributions of a church service, because of those in attendance who have reservations and do not want to be there.

The opportunity to engage with faith and religion might be seen as an important contribution of chapel, through the way it provides an environment that allows for pupils' natural inquisitiveness and affinity for the spiritual. For some, 'religion' is simply a group-validated means of searching for the sacred (Ivtzan, Chan, Gardner, & Kiran, 2011), but in general terms 'spirituality' allows for this searching too, albeit on a more individual level. It might be expected that the 'religion' of chapel will appear less significant than the 'spirituality' of the pupil participants, because they are not necessarily committed Christians. If chapel is nevertheless seen to contribute something of value here, it might be in the way that it provides a forum for purposeful and legitimate engagement with questions of faith and religion. As Parker (2009) says, "young people learn about one another's world views not only in abstract but in the physical space allotted and the time allowed for the exploration of difference" (Parker, 2009, p. 36).

In the first half of this literature review I explored the potential contribution provided through chapel in the opportunity for congregational singing. The benefit of this activity was framed in this literature predominantly through the community enhancing aspect of singing in groups. There is a further potential contribution of the music making that goes on in chapel however, which is the way that music has been seen to open people up to a sense of the divine. As Argyle (2000) writes, "music has been said to symbolise the other-worldly, and to express the 'otherness' of religion, to convey the experience of the numinous or magical" (p. 113). As such, chapel might contribute an enhanced opportunity to engage with faith and religion, because the music making can predispose participants to such things. Moss (2019) completed a large international study looking at the effect of music making on the spiritual experiences of people, and participants frequently described a meditative or mindful benefit in singing, taking the mind away from their worries. Clear 'spiritual benefits' were found to

be connected to singing, along with the fact that music helped participants to transcend the difficulties they were facing in life.

Magill (2009), in researching the effect of music on those experiencing palliative care, similarly found that "the gift of music helps bestow a deeper awareness of the spiritual life that exists beyond time, boundary, and space, bringing comfort and serenity" (p. 34). Moss (2019) observed that music has always been associated with the divine and that it is used in almost all religious traditions to enhance prayer and faith. Ansdell (2014) found that music can take people "out of themselves" and "beyond themselves". Through the hymn singing and organ music that accompany chapel services, this potential contribution is worth exploration within my thesis.

It is observed that teenagers are particularly sensitive to thoughts and ideas relating to faith and religion and that religious festivals in schools therefore provide welcome opportunities to acknowledge power, or powers, greater than the individual participants (Woodward, 1986). Young people appreciate being given the chance to develop their understanding and awareness of faith and religion. The former Head of Eton, Tony Little (2015), has written quite extensively on his first-hand experience of the way that teenagers are intuitively open to wonder, and how they exhibit a strong desire to delve deeper and explore "life beyond the physical". There is enough research literature to support Little's view, and to predict a possible contribution of chapel from the way that it enables pupils to engage with faith and religion, even those who do not see themselves as Christian.

Opportunity for calm reflection

There is lots of research literature supporting the idea that religion and communal worship can contribute opportunities for people to step away from the stresses and strains of everyday life, through an appeal to the sacred. Not only does this experience bring possible spiritual benefits but it has also been shown repeatedly to be good for mental health. As such, religion and worship can be seen as a form of meditation and mindfulness as described here by Crawford *et al* (2006):

Religious worship often encourages the ongoing experience of positive emotions and rest, meditation, and quiet reflection, all of which are associated with good mental and physical health' (p. 362).

In their work on prayer spaces in schools, Stern and Shillitoe (2019) questioned 555 pupils across 15 schools and found that 88% referred to an opportunity for 'self-reflection' as 'the best thing' about prayer spaces. There were lots of references in the comments to the fact that the normal school day does not provide opportunity to contemplate life, but the introduction of prayer spaces does enable this, and the value of this for pupils.

In a personal testimonial essay, Heber-Percy (2016) gives an intriguing philosophical analysis of the role of 'space', as provided to him by his private senior school chapel. He sees this 'space' as distinct from 'place', the latter carrying preconceptions about purpose and functionality, describing his school chapel as such: "a retreat from the world. The silence of the chapel was a resonating chamber; it was the deep hush, the noiselessness of falling manna" (p. 217). This distinction between the 'profane' places of school and the 'sacred' space of chapel fits neatly alongside Durkheim's theory of religion:

> The classrooms downstairs were places for delivering information and for learning understood as absorption of facts. The chapel was the opposite: not a place at all, but a space for expanding myself into the silence and unknowable immensity of God (Heber-Percy, 2016, p. 217) .

In this we see a possible means of understanding the difference between assembly and chapel and why the sacred aspect of chapel potentially contributes something distinctive in terms of a space that is "set-apart, for contemplation of the numinous and other". As Argyle (2000) describes:

> Religious services are carried out in special places, which are set up to create a numinous experience - darkness and silence, but also candles, making the alter separate and unapproachable, elaborate decorations, incense, and music (p. 112).

The idea that religious worship can provide an opportunity for stillness, meditation, and calm reflection is well supported in research literature. In a study of children in Catholic schools in Australia Brendan, de Souza, & Kehoe (2014) explored the effect of meditation within the spiritual lives of the children was observed. It was discovered that meditation increased the children's 'sense of closeness to God':

> God for most of these children was a distinct presence in their lives, and meditation was one of the means by which these children were able to enhance their relationship with God (Brendan, de Souza, & Kehoe, 2014, p. 42).

Alongside their experience of prayer, ritual, and liturgy, the children in this study were seen to benefit from the opportunity for calm reflection, which was found to "increase relaxation and feelings of calm, reducing stress, reducing anger, and improving concentration" (p. 47). The benefit of a space for calm contemplation, away from the busy and demanding school day, providing pupils with a chance to connect with their spiritual thoughts, seems a likely potential contribution of chapel for some people within the school community. As Parker (2009) suggests, "chaplains (of whatever faith) are being true to their role definition, as that of guardians of 'sacred' space, if they are acting to preserve the places set aside for quiet prayer and spiritual exploration" (Parker, 2009, p. 36). Parker goes further in his analysis of the potentially unique contribution of a sacred space such as chapel for 'self-reflection':

> Though arguably the whole school should be one in which children find their self, identity and unfolding story from a sense of belonging, in the creation of particular 'sacred' spaces, quiet rooms, and prayer facilities, children and young people are potentially offered isolated spaces for ontological exploration, to find and restore themselves, or to seek religious experience. The value of places set aside for these purposes is that they offer children the opportunity to experience an enriched connection with others in any ritual engagement, with themselves in self-reflection, and with the world in what they are given as stimulus and inspiration, that may rarely be found by them elsewhere (Parker, 2009, p. 37).

Berryman (2010) writes, "presence reveals itself generously in silence and quiet, whether the relationship is with God, others, the deep self, or nature" (p. 265). The meditative quality

provided by chapel might well be seen to contribute an opportunity for pupils to feel such connections, through the contribution of a space for calm reflection. In a study by Dana (2012), the role of silence was explored in relation to Buddhist and Quaker worship. It was discovered that a calm and silent atmosphere was very productive in terms of the individuals' sense of interconnectedness. Something in the experience of a calm and reflective atmosphere was seen to be very powerful within the lives of the worshipers in how they felt about themselves and others. Whilst it will depend on the style of chapel worship employed in each of the case study schools, it is reasonable to posit that there will be prayerful and meditative moments that participants will potentially value and reflect on positively in their interviews.

The opportunity for calm reflection is evidently one of the valuable contributions that people draw from participation in religious worship, so it will be helpful within the scope of this study to examine how far the same is true of chapel. Zohar and Marshall (2004) refer to the concept of 'spiritual capital' as partly that which is found in "the provision of a space to get away from the noise and rush of daily life, to feel for at least a few moments each day, the reality of our inner lives" (p. 33). In reference to the chapel at Eton, Turner (2016) describes the fan-vaulted ceiling as providing, "that sense of eternity of which a really grand public school is capable" (p. 11). Considering this description, it is interesting to read the words of the former Headmaster of Eton, Tony Little (2015), reflecting on his experience of chapel:

> Gloom hangs above the heads of the black-coated boys in chapel; disconnected minds roam somewhere, anywhere other than where they are. Suddenly there is a break in the clouds and sunlight casts sharp splashes of colour on the stone wall. Everyone raises their heads as one, the light dances. For a moment we are beyond ourselves, taken out of the here and now (p. 137).

Such an opportunity would seem connected to a function of chapel that other school settings might be unlikely to generate. The chance to step aside from the profane and earthly commitments and responsibilities of busy school life and experience a sense of the sacred and 'other', in calm reflection, might yet prove to be one of the more powerful contributions of chapel.

Individual and subjective wellbeing

There is extensive literature on the positive correlation between religious practice and individual or subjective wellbeing. Durkheim (1897) also proposed that religion helps to promote well-being, although mainly through social integration. Park (2007) refers to 'religiousness' and 'spirituality' interchangeably, finding that there is a positive correlation between these ideas on one hand, and good health and wellbeing on the other. Ellison (1991) found the same:

> The positive influence of religious certainty on well-being is direct and substantial: individuals with strong religious faith report higher levels of life satisfaction, greater personal happiness, and fewer negative psychological consequences of traumatic life events (p. 80).

The benefits are shown to be derived firstly through an "increased sense of social support" and secondly from an "enhanced feeling of meaning in life" (Ellison, 1991). These two ideas track the broad themes against which I am exploring the contribution of chapel, essentially, the increased sense of community on one hand and the enhanced opportunity to explore the deeper questions of life on the other. As Ellison (1991) summarises, "social religious participation evidences the strongest positive correlation across all measures of wellbeing" (p. 81)

The literature that shows correlation between religious participation and subjective wellbeing has shown that this tends to occur in one of four ways:

1. Institutional settings and regular opportunities for social gathering between persons of like mind and values (Witter, Stock, Okun and Haring, 1985).
2. Members of religious communities may enjoy larger and more reliable informal social networks from which to derive support in adversity (Maton, 1987; Maton & Rappaport, 1984; Taylor & Chatters, 1988).
3. Religious communities may promote fundamental norms regarding health behaviours, interpersonal and familial relationships, and other dimensions of personal lifestyles that facilitate wellbeing (Levin & Vanderpool, 1987).

4. Religious congregants participate collectively in ritual events to which they accord significance, so worship reinforces private belief (Petersen & Roy, 1985).

My study explores how far chapel is seen to contribute to individual and subjective wellbeing within school communities. It is reasonable to predict that pupils might feel better about themselves and life in general when they get the opportunity to experience and participate in religious worship and ceremonial gatherings on a regular basis. As Spencer (2016) proposes:

> The more someone believes in and inhabits an overarching narrative of love and generosity, which they believe is ontological (written into the very fabric of the universe) rather than contingent, the more likely they are to enjoy a better sense of wellbeing in their lives (p. 17).

There are other ways that wellbeing can be enhanced through religious engagement, including the social participation aspect, which has already been explored in this literature review. Referenced in the following meta-analysis, 'Religion and Wellbeing: Assessing the Evidence', Spencer, Madden, Purtill and Ewing (2016) compiled 139 worldwide studies that were conducted to explore one facet or other of the relationship between religion and wellbeing. Within the sub-section analysing 'religious group participation', the co-authors discovered that most studies find a positive correlation between social religious participation and subjective wellbeing, though the strength of the relationship varies. By far the strongest correlation found across the 139 studies was between 'social participation' and 'subjective wellbeing'. It was found that belief alone is not as strongly correlated with wellbeing as social and personal participation activities. This suggests that the religious belief is of secondary importance in building subjective wellbeing to the social participation that communal worship entails.

The contention of the authors of the meta-analysis described above is that something in the process of gathering as a community is instrumental in constructing a sense of connectedness and belonging, which in turn drives a sense of self-worth and purpose, which encourages positive mental health. However, correlation does not equal causation and further

investigation is warranted into whether the religious content of collective worship adds value or whether the benefit comes primarily from gathering as a community.

Some research has sought to identify the distinction, as mentioned in earlier chapters of this thesis, between religion and spirituality, and their respective roles in improving psychological wellbeing (Ivtzan, Chan, Gardner, & Kiran, 2011). This study grouped 205 participants from a wide range of religious affiliations into 1 of 4 categories: (1) 'high religious involvement and spirituality', (2) 'low religious involvement and high level of spirituality', (3) 'high religious involvement and low level of spirituality', (4) 'low religious involvement and spirituality' (p. 920). On three different measures of subjective wellbeing, groups (1) and (2) consistently scored highly. This shows that it is 'spirituality' rather than the 'religious practice' that is the key predictor of wellbeing. This has implications for my study, given that I am exploring the contribution of a compulsory worship setting, where it might be assumed that some pupils might have low religiosity but high spirituality.

In some studies, high religious involvement without spirituality has been shown to negatively affect wellbeing (Greenway, Meagan, Turnbull, & Milne, 2007), because of the judgemental and exclusive nature of some religious practice. This suggests that chapel could have a negative impact on pupils if the approach to participatory worship is not sensitive and inclusive. The rise of secularism in the mid-1900s prompted researchers to separate the concepts of 'religion', which began to attract negative connotations of formality and prescriptiveness, and 'spirituality', which became associated with positive ideas of personal experiences of the transcendent (Ivtzan, Chan, Gardner, & Kiran, 2011). My participants' interpretation of the contribution of chapel will be shown in relation to the extent to which they describe themselves as religious and/or spiritual.

There is a substantial body of academic literature that cites religious faith and spirituality as contributing towards resilience in adolescence. One of the most prominent elements of religion is the formation of a relationship with a spiritual entity or divinity. This relationship has the potential to provide a profound sense of security and wellbeing. It is not difficult to imagine why such beliefs and practices are comforting for adolescents (Crawford,

O'Dougherty Wright, & Masten, 2006). This will be an important factor in how my participants perceive the contribution of chapel.

Whilst a lot of the documented wellbeing benefits of religious engagement have been associated with social integration, there is an increasing body of literature to suggest that personal religious practices, such as prayer and meditation, may also yield psychological benefits. By helping people to construct a divine relationship, that might carry the same benefits as a social relationship, personal prayer has been shown to be a much stronger predictor of spiritual wellbeing than worship attendance (Ellison, Gay & Glass, 1989; Idler, 1987). Francis, Fisher, Lankshear, & Eccles (2018) looked at the effect of worship attendance and personal prayer on spiritual wellbeing among 9–11-year-old students attending Anglican church schools in Wales. From their sample of 1,328 students from Y5 & Y6, alongside measures of frequency of worship attendance and frequency of prayer, they also found that personal prayer carried more influence on personal wellbeing than worship attendance. This suggests that chapel attendance alone is unlikely to predict subjective wellbeing in my participants, but that if they feel connected to what is going on in their personal prayer life, then chapel may well be seen to contribute this benefit.

Comfort and reassurance

The words of Psalm 23:4 express a sentiment that has accompanied religious thinking for centuries: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (King James Version, 1604). It is important for this study to consider the contribution that chapel makes in this regard. The literature in this section will be drawn from studies that demonstrate how chapel might be expected to provide comfort and reassurance at times of emotional challenge within the school community.

Since the time of King David many influential thinkers have expressed the idea that religion can be a salve for life's wounding experiences. The theologian Schleremacher (1978) conceives of religion as an extension of our dependence on the concept of a supreme, omniscient, and omnipotent being. For Schleremacher, religious belief arises from a

recognition of human limitations, and our inability to explain some of the mysteries of the world, especially death: "Man yearns for a Supreme Being that has all the answers and solutions to his problems, afflictions, and unanswered questions" (p. 5). As Oppong (2013) suggests, "religion builds a barrier of fantasy against fear" (p. 11). Scruton (2000) also writes about this:

> A primeval horror inhabits all of us – a horror of night and closure and nothingness. The religious rite dispels this horror, uniting us to the community, not here and now only, but in the land of the dead (p. 8) .

Scruton contended, as Kant had previously, that human beings exhibit a sacred dimension through their capacity for reason and self-reflection, and that this indicates a transcendental dimension to the human experience. Although Durkheim did not see humans as sacred or transcendental, Scruton's suggestion, that religion affords people a reassuring sense of sacred union with their community, certainly resonates with his theory of religion.

It is well established in the literature of religious sociology that humans often turn to God and religion in times of crisis and uncertainty. This phenomenon has been referred to by some as 'Terror Management Theory' (TMT) (Greenberg, Solomon, & Pyszczynski, 1997).

> TMT proposes that human beings have a deep-seated fear of death and feel very vulnerable, because we are programmed for self-preservation but are also self-conscious, making us aware of our inevitable end. We control this anxiety by the creation of cultural worldviews which enable us to transcend the natural world and elevate us to a higher plane of existence where we can transcend death (Argyle, 2000, p. 146).

Religion and communal worship can contribute an important source of comfort, by providing meaning during dark and troubling times (Berger, 1967; Becker, 1973; Pargament, 1997; Pevey, Jones, & Yarber, 2008). Studies have revealed that even people who do not usually consider themselves religious also turn to God in times of crisis (Hathaway & Pargament, 1991). It will be important for this study to demonstrate the extent to which chapel is a source of comfort and reassurance in this way to pupils, irrespective of their personal faith. This comforting effect might be felt particularly acutely by young people, as Crawford,

O'Dougherty Wright, and Masten (2006) showed in their study of resilience and spirituality in youth: "supernatural religious figures are conceptualized as someone who loves unconditionally. It is not difficult to imagine why this is comforting for adolescents" (p. 358). Oppong (2013) suggests that in the social and political milieu that confronts modern teenagers, the viewpoint provided through religious belief can be protective against despair and a sense of disenfranchisement. Chapel may well be seen to contribute a worldview that aids a sense of comfort and reassurance. With regards to threatening or distressing experiences, a religious worldview can put these into a larger, even cosmic, perspective (Segal, 2012).

Building on the theoretical works of Berger (1967) and Becker (1973), who theorised about the importance of religion as a resource to which dying people may look for comfort or meaning, Pevey, Jones, and Yerber (2008) used qualitative interviews to obtain richly descriptive accounts from people who found religion and spirituality enormously comforting in their final stages of life. Three themes of religious comfort arose from the interviews: cosmic order, divine relationship, and afterlife. Pargament (1997) explored various ways in which religion assists people in coping with death and found that 'surrendering to something sacred or superior' reduced despair because of the belief in an 'all powerful and caring deity' who retains ultimate control over our lives. Whilst a school community comprises children and adolescents who are hopefully a long way from their own death, the same principle might well be extended, that religion offers a sense of purpose and care through the surrender to something 'sacred or superior'.

In their examination of 'Insecurity Theory' across 26 European Countries, Immerzeel & van Tubergen (2013) found strong support for the idea that "increased religiosity is strongly associated with higher levels of general insecurity in life". Amongst other things, they found that religiosity was higher amongst people with an insecure job position, who had lost a partner, or who had experienced war in their own country. This extensive study gives compelling evidence to support the idea that people often reach for religion in times of emotional crisis. As Inglehart & Norris (2007) found in their re-examination of the 'secularisation thesis', "the need for a sense of reassurance in a highly uncertain world has

been a key factor underlying the mass appeal of religion" (p. 253). According to this study, the world is becoming more religious overall, as the rich, post-industrial population becomes a smaller proportion of the global population. However, rich nations are becoming more secular, because "sharply rising levels of economic resources, interacting with emergence of the welfare state, reduce the need for religion" (Inglehart & Norris, 2007, p. 253). Their argument is that as people move further away from a position of economic insecurity, they have less need of the "absolute and rigidly predictable rules" that religions provide. In this context one might expect the importance of religion to have declined, especially in the economically secure world of UK private education. This study will explore how far this is the case, whilst maintaining consideration of the distinction between religiosity and a broader concept of non-material spirituality, which studies have suggested still holds appeal for many.

Other studies have extensively considered the contribution of religion as a source of comfort for the bereaved. Warner (1959) found that religion can help people to "structure their grief", whilst McIntosh, Silver, and Wortman (1993) asserted that religion can provide "social support and meaning" to those who are bereaved. Cook and Wimberly (1983) note the sense of "larger purpose" provided by religion and the promise of reuniting with loved ones in the afterlife was helpful to some people in their grief (Pevey, Jones, & Yarber, 2008). Religion has been shown to help people maintain a positive outlook in the face of distressing situations (Gorush & Smith, 1983) and spiritual support offered by religion can be helpful for those experiencing very stressful life situations (Hathaway & Pargament, 1991). As Pevey, Jones, & Yarber (2008) conclude in their study examining the effect of religion on the dying, having interviewed 38 hospice patients: "generally speaking, and with few exceptions, religion and/or spirituality has been shown to be a source of effective coping in life's crises" (p. 44).

Religion can be a huge source of comfort and reassurance to people in times of distress and the literature mentioned in this section has given some context and explanation for this. Whilst chapel is ordinarily just a routine part of school life, the extent to which it plays an additionally supportive role in times of grief or crisis for the school community, particularly through the way that it appeals to the sacred and the numinous, will be explored in due course.

Summary of literature

The aim of this chapter has been to explore a wide range of research literature that connects to various ways in which chapel might be expected to contribute to UK private senior schools. The sociological account of religion offered by Durkheim has been used to create a framework within which to explore this literature, and it will continue to provide a structure for the rest of this thesis. The interpretation of religion first and foremost as a 'socially binding' construct emerges from the literature in a very compelling way and will be one of the key ideas against which the contribution of chapel is explored and examined. However, further to this is the distinctive aspect of religion and communal worship created through its appeal to the 'sacred', distinguishing it from the 'everyday' or 'profane' activities of life. As the literature in the second half of this chapter has sought to demonstrate, there is good reason to imagine chapel contributing to school life in some sort of elevated way, partly because of its appeal to the sacred. How far these two areas of contribution are expressed by participants will ultimately define the findings and conclusions of this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology & Methods

Introduction

Having explored a broad range of academic literature relating to the contributions that religion and communal worship make to people's lives, this chapter focuses on the specific research questions of my thesis. I will explain the methodological approach and the methods employed in pursuit of a meaningful and valid account of how chapel contributes to private senior schools. As explained in the earlier chapters, for the purpose of this study 'chapel' refers to a regular act of collective worship, within UK private senior schools that have a Christian foundation and a purpose-built chapel building. Many private senior schools fit the model described here, maintaining a practice of regular, whole-school chapel services.

The central question addressed by my thesis is:

- How does chapel contribute to UK private senior schools?

The subsidiary research questions are:

- How does chapel contribute towards building the school's community, culture, and identity?
- How does chapel contribute towards providing opportunities for pupils to engage with the sacred, taking them beyond their everyday and profane experiences?

A multiple case study approach was adopted to explore these questions and three suitable schools were selected in the hope of establishing findings and conclusions that could have what methodologists term 'analytic generalisability' and therefore useful insights for Chaplains and school leaders. The rest of this chapter will present and justify the methodological approach and the research methods adopted by this study in pursuit of meaningful data and valid answers to these central research questions.

Ontological and epistemological approach

Credible research requires a degree of recognition and openness on the part of the researcher about the core principles and assumptions that underpin their study. It is important to outline the methodological and epistemological paradigms being utilised, as these provide the necessary framework for understanding and evaluating the thesis. Clarity on this front helps to facilitate coherent reading, interpretation, and analysis of the subsequent findings. As such, one of the crucial features of this chapter is a brief account of the epistemological and methodological grounding for my study, which necessarily precedes any discussion of the research methods employed. I have approached my research from what might be termed a 'critical realist' position, utilising a multiple case study methodology and generating my data through qualitative, semi-structured interviews.

Thomas Kuhn (1970) contributed to a change in general perceptions and understanding about the nature of scientific enquiry by initiating a movement away from the broadly positivist model of science that had dominated social and educational research for the first half of the 20th Century. Hammersley's 'Methodological Paradigms in Educational Research' (2012) is very informative on the resulting shift of thinking and the competing paradigms that now exist within educational research:

> What we have is a large and complex field in which work of sharply differing kinds is carried out, accompanied by debates in which a disparate collection of theoretical and methodological labels and ideas are deployed (p. 1).

This chapter will demonstrate where my thesis sits relative to some of the other methodological approaches that are employed within the "large and complex field" of educational research.

The central argument of this thesis is that chapel can be seen to make a positive contribution to UK private senior schools in several distinctive ways. The nature of this contribution was never going to prove easy to capture and define precisely, with inevitable differences existing between the chapel cultures of different schools, and between the various beliefs and

perceptions of different individuals. A desire to make definitive claims about the contribution of chapel, whilst acknowledging the variety of practices and perceptions that exist, supports the case for employing some degree of critical realism. To demonstrate this approach in practice, the personality and approach of individual Chaplains has a clear bearing on a school's chapel culture, and therefore on how chapel is received and perceived by pupils within that school, but the core themes that emerge from my data, supported by my chosen theoretical framework and research literature, hopefully transcend such local differences.

'Ontology' refers to enquiry into, or assumptions or theories about, the nature of what exists (Hammersley, 2012). Researchers are part of the world they are researching, and meanings are rooted in time, space, cultures, and societies (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Initially, an interpretivist approach was considered for the design of this study, which typically begins with individuals and sets out to establish and understand their interpretation of the phenomena under investigation. However, this approach felt too subjective and untethered, given the level of consensus emerging from the thematic analysis of my interview data. Critical realism offers a more pragmatic and grounded methodological approach, which better fits the tone and ambitions of this thesis. As explained by Price & Martin (2018), researchers who take such an approach are 'realist' about their subject matter:

> They assume that 'something' has happened, or that 'something' is there; and that this 'something' has an existentially intransitive reality. These researchers therefore do not assume that models, which explain the empirical level, are simply social constructions or 'in the mind'. Instead, they assume that models refer to the real multimechanismicity that underlies the empirical and actual layers of reality (p. 90).

Critical realism seeks to explain social phenomena by searching for the causes that underpin them, to better explain people's interpretations of them. One of the most important ideas of critical realism is that ontology is not reducible to epistemology. In other words, our knowledge of what is real does not define what is real. As Fletcher (2017) puts it, "human knowledge captures only a small part of a deeper and vaster reality" (p. 4). Both positivist and constructivist approaches to social science risk reducing 'reality' either to what is empirically known, or simply what is perceived, interpreted, and understood. Critical realism allows for a

sense of reality that extends beyond mere interpretation of phenomena but does not apply the strict tests of positivism. As a means of conducting social science, critical realism therefore has a lot to commend it. Certainly, it fits well as a methodological approach for this study.

Critical realism treats the world as theory-laden, but not theory-determined'. Acknowledgement of a "real social world" that we can attempt to understand or access through philosophy and social science is central to a critical realist approach (Fletcher, 2017). The role of theory within critical realism is that it helps the researcher to get closer to reality by proposing causal mechanisms. Within this thesis, the theoretical account of religion offered by Durkheim helps to frame the way that chapel can be seen to make a real and substantive contribution to UK private senior schools. The further research literature explored in the previous chapter helps by sign-posting the broader realities and potential causation underpinning the various themes and sub-themes present within my own data. As Fletcher (2017) suggests, social events are always mediated through the filter of human experience and interpretation; hence why a multiple case study approach utilising qualitative interviews has proved such a suitable methodological approach for this thesis.

It is worth considering that a person's faith position might significantly affect their interpretation of the role and potential contribution of chapel. If someone is a committed Christian, they will believe that God exists to be worshipped, and that non-believers should be encouraged towards 'the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6), for the sake of their salvation. Plunkett (2007) writes about the importance of 'evangelising culture' and quotes Pope Paul's encyclical, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: "Cultures have to be regenerated by an encounter with The Gospel". These views are unsurprising, coming as they do from a former leader of the Catholic Church and the Senior Academic Tutor at Maryvale Catholic Institute. On the other hand, if someone is an atheist, they are bound to hold a different view on what sort of contribution chapel might make, if any at all. For example, Thompson (2017) argues that compulsory acts of collective worship in schools are an infringement of children's rights, but this is perhaps unsurprising from the Campaigns Manager for the British Humanist Society.

A critical realist approach allows for a more nuanced account of chapel's contribution to emerge than perhaps a debate between Plunkett and Thompson would. The views expressed often seemed to defy any simplistic distinction between 'believer' and 'non-believer'. I interviewed atheists who were very keen to maintain compulsory whole-school chapel, because they interpreted certain social and psychological benefits attached to the practice. I also interviewed committed Christians who told me they would prefer chapel to be optional, for what they saw as a small minority of committed believers, who could then attend voluntarily without the distraction of their less religiously committed peers. As such, critical realism allows for the social realities of chapel, beyond the perceptions of individuals, but for the reasons outlined, this is difficult to get to, so criticality is needed. My approach to data collection kept this in mind, as will be explained in the next sections of this chapter.

Multiple case study approach

There are various ways in which the term 'case study' can be applied, but commonly it refers to an instance that illustrates a general principle through a "bounded system that needs to be understood within its specific context" (Creswell, 1994). In other words, a case study must have boundaries to identify it as a distinct entity, and yet it must be part of a wider family of similar instances. Nisbet & Watt (1984) describe a case study as "a specific instance, designed to illustrate a more general principle" (p. 82). My interest here is in schools where chapel is a formal and traditional whole-school experience at the heart of the school's culture and everyday practices. For reasons that I will develop shortly, I always planned to have three case study schools. The exact selection of these schools was likely to be affected greatly by the willingness of heads to participate in my study, but I only approached private senior schools with Christian foundations, separate chapel buildings, and a strong and central tradition of compulsory whole-school chapel attendance.

Hitchcock & Hughes (1995) say that case studies:

- Are set in temporal, geographical, organisational, institutional, and other contexts that enable boundaries to be drawn around the case.

- Can be defined with reference to characteristics defined by the individuals and groups involved.

- Can be defined by participants' roles and functions within the case (p. 319).

These descriptors are certainly applicable to chapel within my three case study schools. As part of my critical realistic methodology, designed to elicit some deeper social reality beyond simply the interpretations of my participants in relation to chapel, I selected case study schools that are broadly representative of the wider sector. This was done with a view to the potential relevance that my findings might have for anyone involved in chapel provision in UK private senior schools. This chapter will expand my case selection process later.

Yin (2003) identifies that the case study is the preferred strategy of data collection under the following criteria:

- When "how" or "why" questions are being posed.

- When the investigator has little control over events.

- When the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon with some real-life context (p. 1).

All three of Yin's criteria apply directly to my exploration of the contribution that chapel makes to private senior schools. The central question 'How does chapel contribute?' uses the 'how' formulation; I had no control as the investigator over the character and culture of chapel within my case study schools, nor over my participants' beliefs and attitudes towards chapel; the focus of this study is clearly on a contemporary phenomenon with real-life context. Thomson & Hall (2017) writing about 'place-based methodologies' expand the benefit of a case study approach to researching schools by referencing the fact that schools are "simultaneously unique and alike" (p. 11). This sense of connection is very important for my study's claim that its findings provide insights that are of potential value to other schools within the sector.

Taking Yin's framework, my study provided strong grounds for a case study approach. Yin suggests that the "distinctive need for case studies arises out of a desire to understand complex social phenomena" (2003, p. 2). The contribution of compulsory whole-school Christian worship in UK private senior schools certainly constitutes a complex social

phenomenon, exposing an interplay of religious belief, school culture and community, pupil development, and educational practice and policy. The hope and ambition for this research project has been to arrive at a fuller understanding of how this social phenomenon impacts the lives of pupils and school communities. Whilst the case study method does attract significant criticisms, which I will outline shortly, some of these at least can be mitigated by a multiple case approach, which is why my study utilised 3 case study schools. Adopting a multiple-case approach, the firm ambition here is to draw conclusions that bear some degree of relevance and resonance for a range of similar schools across the sector.

As Silverman (2014) points out, even single cases can be highly illuminating. However, Yin (2003 & 2009) describes the advantage of multiple-case approaches, which he says are likely to be stronger than a single-case design. Campbell (1975) rejects the single case approach, because of its reduced ability to provide generalisations, and suggests that even just having two case studies to compare is worth more than having double the data from one case study:

> How much more valuable the study would be if the one set of observations were reduced by half and the saved effort directed to the study in equal detail of an appropriate comparison instance (Campbell, p. 180).

My research design, with three case study schools, has generated significant scope for cross-referencing and comparison, which provides my claims about the contribution of chapel with much greater validity and credibility than a single case study would have done.

Whilst some researchers still consider case study research to contain intrinsic weaknesses, Flyvberg (2004) suggests that this is often because of common misconceptions. Flyvberg promotes the value of case study research for producing "context-dependent" knowledge, arguing that knowledge does not need to be "context-independent" to be valuable. Flyvberg also dismisses the notion that case study contains a bias towards verification, suggesting that experience indicates it has a greater bias towards the falsification of pre-conceived ideas. This is especially important in relation to my own positionality, since I am an insider with a lot of experience of Chapel, and I naturally have my own preconceptions about its possible contribution, which I have worked hard to stay alert to throughout the thesis process. The

other misconception Flyvberg challenges is the idea that it is difficult to summarize and develop general propositions based on case studies, but he argues for Geertz's notion of "thick narrative" (Geerts, 1973), which is offered by good, detailed, qualitative research and can approach the complexities and contradictions of real life. I have been keen to analyse the richness and real-world depth provided through the intelligent, articulate, and thoughtful data contributed by my interview participants. Real life, emotions, community, worship, and religious beliefs are complex areas that deserve a 'thick' descriptive narrative.

Lamont (2005), through the work of the US National Science Foundation, offers four arguments that help to support and justify the methodological approach adopted in this study:

- Small samples can sometimes yield big results.

- By thoroughly examining a small number of cases, a researcher may explore in-depth the contextual dimensions that influence a social phenomenon. Larger-scale studies often flatten out variegated social patterns that can be characteristic of social processes.

- Systematic sampling can still be scientific, even if it is not random. It is essential to ensure that the sample contains enough variation along key demographic and theoretical dimensions to draw conclusions beyond the individuals studied.

- Relevance for broader contexts and processes is still achievable. Good proposals articulate clearly that the data gathered are meaningful beyond the cases, individuals, or sites studied, and specify precisely why they are significant, to whom, and to which institutions and processes the findings can be seen to relate (pp. 11-12).

As outlined, the nature of the contribution of chapel is heavily conditional upon its context within the wider setting and culture of the school, and I have needed to explore and understand this in each of my three cases. This further demonstrates the advantage of a case study approach for my research, as it has allowed me to elicit the school's culture and draw a more pertinent analysis of chapel's impact on my participants. I will not be able to say definitively that what happens in one school will happen in others, but by selecting three cases I have enhanced my ability to make connections. This, along with my use of a well-established theoretical framework based on the religious sociology of Durkheim, and

reference to relevant research literature, supports meaningful analysis of my data and has ensured that robust conclusions can be drawn.

Case selection

One of the possible ways of avoiding what might be considered an intrinsic case study, which is one that can only be seen to speak of itself, is purposive sampling. This requires the researcher to identify any grounds other than convenience or accessibility governing the case selection. Silverman (2014) describes purposive sampling as particularly helpful when one is studying organisations or social processes. As he explains: "purposive sampling allows us to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which we are interested" (p. 80). For my study, I was interested in the following criteria: private senior schools with Christian foundations and charters, stand-alone chapel buildings, and a strong chapel tradition, where all pupils are required to attend chapel during the week, and where chapel plays a visibly central role in the life of the school. I also wanted to consider mixed schools and schools with boarding too, because this allowed for a greater breadth of data and level of integration of chapel into the lives of the pupils. As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) say, purposive sampling seeks out groups, settings, and individuals where the processes being studied are most likely to occur. This was certainly true of my case selection, as described above.

It is important to remember however that each school remains a free standing and distinct case, and that the distinctiveness needs to be understood and embraced. The concept of 'generalisability' is often taken to be important in research findings, but this word is more commonly associated with quantitative studies. In situations where there is a sample or case selection, it is assumed that the value of the findings is bound up with how much they transfer and apply to other, similar instances. In other words, how representative the findings are to the wider population depends on how tightly defined the case is. Silverman (2014) suggests, sampling procedures are often unavailable in qualitative research, and that it can be unhelpful to try and apply this more quantitative practice to qualitive design. However, whilst there were clear convenience and accessibility elements to my case selection, as outlined above, I did employ several key criteria.

Thomson & Hall (2017) caution against drawing boundaries too tightly around school cases, emphasising that it is important to identify the distinctiveness of schools without losing the sense of their connectedness:

> We can only really understand what is common to all schools, no matter where they are and who is in them, if we also deliberately seek out what is special and unique to each of them (Thomson & Hall, 2017, p. 11).

The reason for this study's case selection is partly derived from my personal and professional experience, but it is also based on the grand and traditional way in which many UK private senior schools carry out their acts of collective worship, within purpose-built chapels, that tend to sit at the heart of the campus and play a key role in the broader life of the school. The apparent prestige and associated traditions and culture of private senior schools potentially find meaningful expression in chapel worship and therefore might feature in the thinking of the parents who choose to pay such large sums of money for their child's education.

Mason (1988) writes about "the wider universe" as a relevant consideration of case study and case selection. My wider universe is clearly UK private senior schools with a strong chapel tradition. The other important observation at this point is that whilst I have been interested to explore the contribution of chapel in three different schools, I have also established the thoughts, beliefs, and relationships towards chapel of my 40 individual participants. There is no reason to assume that a teenager or a house parent in one school should be fundamentally different to a teenager or a house parent in another school. As such, my study is more broadly about human responses to religion and worship, and the case studies and particularities of private school chapel experiences provide a conduit through which to explore this wider picture.

I wrote initially to twelve heads of private senior schools, to explain my research and its aims (see Appendix A). These heads were selected because I knew them either personally or professionally. Whilst this might be challenged as introducing a degree of bias, because these heads might have felt predisposed to help, there was no reason to assume that it would affect the quality or reliability of data. At this stage of proceedings, I simply hoped and assumed that

these heads might be more likely to grant me access to their schools. I explained in my letter that as head, they would act as gatekeeper to my further participants. That said, my letter made it clear that it would remain my role and responsibility to recruit these further participants, to avoid anyone feeling compelled in any way to participate. Even if the head was very supportive and keen on the project, my further participants needed to know that their decision to participate was entirely their own, and that they had the right to withdraw at any stage. It was also important for the ethics of my study to make it clear that their responses as participants would be kept anonymous, including from their own head. In the end, only 3 heads agreed to grant me access to their schools.

Clearly, there was a significant degree of accessibility and convenience sampling in my case selection, but it is important to note that all 12 schools that I contacted shared in all the important characteristics necessary for my study. Also, Verschuren (2003) points out that "the researcher is often integrally involved in the case and the case study may be linked to the personality of the researcher" (p. 122). This point is used by some people to challenge the scientific quality of case study results, because of the interactive role played by the researcher. However, my understanding of the private senior school sector, and my background as an 'insider', certainly helped me to gain the access necessary for my study.

Within case participant selection

All the participants were selected because of their first-hand experience of chapel and their distinctive vantage points, giving them a valid and meaningful opinion on how chapel contributes, both to the school community and to individual pupils. To facilitate interpretation and analysis, I sought a rich and detailed narrative account of my participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs regarding the potential contribution of chapel.

I devised a list of desirable participants for each case study school, to give me a broad range of perspectives, and to target certain key voices within the school community. The head was the initial gatekeeper in terms of gaining overall permission to carry out my research, and for access to members of staff in other key roles. After this, I used the houseparents as further gatekeepers for the alumni, current parents, and current pupils. I was clear with the

houseparents that I was not concerned about the religious background, gender, or age of my participants, I simply wanted pupils who would be willing and happy to talk to me about their views on chapel. Once I had the names and contact details of those who had expressed a willingness to participate, I got in touch to provide all the relevant documentation, information, and consent forms.

The obvious risk, given some of the participants selected, was that I might only hear from those with a positive view of chapel. The head and chaplain, for example, might well be expected to offer a positive account of chapel's contribution as part of their impression management of the school, and on their own such data would rightly have been judged as unrepresentative. However, I sought views across a range of stakeholders, and the alumni and pupil voices were always going to carry a lot of weight in the data. If the senior staff had suggested ways in which chapel provides a contribution, but these were not then reflected in what the alumni and pupils said, then it would have reduced the impact of this contribution on my study. My participants were never expected to provide a complete and unanimous account of chapel's contribution to the school; by interviewing 40 different people, across three case study schools, covering a broad range of positions within each school, I felt confident that my data would offer meaningful insights into chapel's potential contribution.

The following table shows everyone I was hoping to interview, and how many of these I was successfully able to:

Participants	School P	School A	School C
Head	P1	A1	C1
Chaplain	P2	A2	C2
Director of Music	P3	A3	C3
Director of Marketing and Admissions	P4	X	C4
Head of RS	X	A5	C5
Houseparent 1	P5	A6	C6
Houseparent 2	P6	A7	C7
Current Parent 1	P7	A9	X
Current Parent 2	P8	X	X
Alumnus 1	P9	A10	C10
Alumnus 2	P10	X	X
Current Pupil 1	P11	A14	C12
Current Pupil 2	P12	A16	C13
Current Pupil 3	P13	X	C14
Current Pupil 4	P14	X	C15
Current Pupil 5	P15	X	C16
Current Pupil 6	X	X	C18
Current Pupil 7	X	X	C19

Figure 8: Interview Participants by School

There were obvious challenges to securing the participants I wanted, ranging from how busy people working in schools are, to potential misconceptions about my project. One current parent who eventually did agree to participate had initially refused, because she did not feel she was 'Christian enough' for my study. I explained that my study relied on hearing a range of beliefs and perspectives, and she then agreed to take part. It was disappointing to only secure 2 pupil interviews in School A, but this was at the height of Covid challenges, and the houseparents found it very difficult to support the process from their end.

Although my research design outlined the particular people that I wanted to interview in each school, I saw this as an optimal list. My Findings chapter will present a strong case for the fact that the 40 participant interviews, spread across the 3 case study schools, generated enough data of sufficient quality and depth to draw valid and informative findings about the contribution that chapel makes in each of my case study schools, and more broadly to UK private senior schools.

Research method: qualitative, semi-structured, and in-depth interviews

From the outset of this study, it was clear that talking to people was going to provide the most meaningful and informative data on what sort of contribution chapel makes to school communities and the lives of individual pupils. Survey data and statistical analysis of national and teenage religious beliefs, as explored in the previous two chapters, certainly provide a helpful backdrop to this study, but I was keen to pursue the sorts of personal testimonies that would make my data richly informative.

My original research design included an ethnographical element; I planned to visit a Chapel service in all three case study schools, to take field notes relating to the content and construction of the Chapel services. This would have provided valuable context for my interviews and no doubt would have added a degree of richness and distinctiveness to the case reports. Unfortunately, at the time of my data collection, Covid became an insurmountable obstruction to this part of my research design and visiting schools was out of the question. In fact, at the time that I was conducting my online interviews, the practice of Chapel in the case study schools was either very reduced or had itself moved online for a time. As such I had to ask participants to reflect on their experiences of chapel in more 'normal' times.

The individual interviews that I conducted with the 40 participants across my 3 case study schools were carried out over a period of a year and a half, between July 2020 and December 2021. Some of the early interviews were conducted face-to-face, but as mentioned above, due to Covid restrictions most of them were held on Microsoft Teams. As a result of online

working and learning, everyone had become entirely used to online meetings and conversations, and whilst online conversations always feel slightly different to in-person ones, I did not perceive any difference in the quality of the data generated in this way. In all cases, the participants agreed to me recording the interview and I later used the recordings to create a full transcript of every interview for thematic coding. Each interview followed a semi-structured format and lasted somewhere between 20 and 40 minutes, depending on how much the participant had to say on the phenomenon of chapel, and its potential contribution to their school.

Interviews can be conducted and interpreted in a variety of ways, depending on the methodology being adopted, and the sort of data that needs to be generated for the study. It is important for the coherence and credibility of any research project that the methods used are in harmony with the methodological approach. Qualitative interviews within a multiple case study approach are acknowledged to fit well within a critical realist methodology (Fletcher, 2017). As such, my interviews were 'qualitative', 'semi-structured', and 'in-depth'. These terms will be explored in the next part of this chapter.

Qualitative social research

Qualitative social researchers gather information by observing and by talking with and listening carefully to the people who are being researched. They study people in their ordinary settings, where they live or work or play, analyse what they have heard and seen, and then convey to others, in rich and realistic detail, the experiences and perspectives of those being studied (Lincoln & Guba 1985). Kvale (1983) defines the qualitative research interview as "an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the 'lifeworld' of the interviewee, with respect to their interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena" (p. 174). Unlike survey interviews, in which those giving information are relatively passive and are not allowed the opportunity to elaborate, in qualitative interviews, interviewees "share in the work and the fun of discovery" (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 15). I wanted the participants to feel they had their own distinctive contribution to make to the study, and that their narrative was of genuine interest and value, whatever they had to say on the matter. This fitted my intention for using qualitative interviewing, as I was seeking to understand my participants' true

thoughts and feelings about the contribution of chapel to their lives and their broader school communities. Whilst a survey approach would have generated valuable information, it would never have generated the same kinds of rich data that are possible with qualitative semi-structured interviews.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) outline two different types of qualitative interviews, 'topical' and 'cultural'. Topical interviews rely on participants having knowledge and understanding of the matter being researched, giving them a degree of expertise to impart. This is not what I needed from my participants. Instead, my interviews were 'cultural', because there was no specific knowledge that I required my participants to have. I did not need to learn anything specific from the participants, and it did not matter what their level of 'knowledge' was about chapel practices. What mattered for my research was what the participants thought about the contribution of chapel to their school, and the experiences and personal reflections that they had formed because of it.

Problematising participants' beliefs

I needed to find a way to characterise the participants' position on Christianity and their general attitude towards faith and matters relating to notions of the sacred. This was not a key aspect of my data collection, but I felt it would help to inform and contextualise participants' responses. Having read many studies that problematise faith, I felt that none of the existing models were especially helpful for my purposes. I introduced a very light-touch terminology to the interviews, near the beginning, to establish if the participant self—identified as a practising Christian, confident in their beliefs around Christian teaching. If participants did not describe themselves in this way, then I offered three further means of categorising their beliefs. Two of these are well-established labels, 'atheist' and 'agnostic', but Category 2 required a bit more explanation. I was keen to have a category that indicated a degree of sympathy, involvement, and experience with Christianity, and Christian practices, but where the participant did not self-identify as a practising Christian. I assumed that this category would be meaningful and helpful in interpreting the data, because it seemed likely that some participants would be culturally Christian and/or have spiritual and non-material beliefs, but not count themselves as 'fully believing' or 'fully practising'. It would have been

very informative had I been able to interview practising members of other faiths, but unfortunately this opportunity never materialised.

It is notoriously difficult to accurately define people's religious and spiritual positionality. Constructing a narrative around people's lived spirituality requires research methods that are open to the diversity of ways in which individuals weave their personal stories about the community of faith to which they belong (Flanagan, 2012). Personal interviews and 'attentive listening' offer the best methods for capturing the spiritual response of an individual, since spirituality is hard to measure (Lippman & Dombrowski Keith, 2006). Therefore, my study never sought to focus closely on any sort of numeric value for religiosity or spirituality, but simply looked to categorise participants in broad terms.

Blackmoor (2007) suggests that "most people are dualists of one kind or another – believing in a non-material soul, spirit, or inner-self" (p. 14). She explains that this idea continues to dominate general thinking, even though most modern philosophers reject dualism. For my purposes in this study, it has been helpful to establish the position of my participants on the issue of God and the soul, to contextualise the rest of their responses. Therefore, I asked specific questions about my participants' religious and spiritual beliefs at the start of the interview.

Semi-structured interviewing

Qualitative researchers consider the semi-structured interview to be among the most effective research techniques, where a schedule is prepared that is sufficiently open-ended to enable the contents to be reordered, digressions and expansions made, new avenues to be included, and further probing to be undertaken as required (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011); my interviews were semi-structured, which did allow for some consistency in the way that data were generated, but also provided this desirable level of flexibility. For example, I started every interview by getting a sense of where the participant was coming from, in terms of their personal beliefs and attitudes towards religion and worship. Whilst I allowed the conversations to evolve organically, I maintained the same 3-part structure in each interview,

to enable a rich narrative description of the contribution of chapel to emerge. This structure will be explained shortly.

All the interviews began with the same preamble, including my thanks to the participant for agreeing to be interviewed, a check that they had received, read, and signed the information and consent paperwork, and a reminder that they had the right to withdraw at any point, or not answer specific questions. As Day (2006) suggests, "the most important considerations in conducting research are to protect the welfare of the research participants and to ensure 'informed consent'" (p. 5). I also spent a bit of time explaining that my research needed a broad range of views and that there were no 'right' or 'more/less helpful' responses; all I wanted to hear from them was what they honestly felt and believed about the contribution of chapel. I reminded participants of an important detail from the information paperwork, emphasising that the school and participant identities would be treated in confidence and remain anonymised in my write-up.

The rough 3-part structure of the interviews was as follows:

- Part 1: Enough discussion of the participants' personal background and beliefs to code them according to 4 categories:
    - 1 = Believes in God and identifies as a 'committed Christian'
    - 2 = Believes in 'something higher', spiritual or non-material, but does not identify as a 'committed Christian'
    - 3 = 'Atheist', meaning they do not hold any discernible religious or spiritual beliefs
    - 4 = 'Agnostic', meaning they are unsure what they believe and are still open to a range of possible ideas about religious and spiritual beliefs
- Part 2: Discussion about the participants' views on the character and culture of the school, to help add depth to the case description.
- Part 3: Discussion about the participants' views and interpretation of chapel and how it contributes, if at all, to the school and the individuals within it.

Using a semi-structured approach, I gave my participants certain questions as a starting point for each section of the interview, and then I waited to see where the discussion would lead. Some examples of such initiating questions are:

- 'What was your education and upbringing like in terms of religion and worship?'
- 'How would you describe chapel?'
- 'Do you think chapel contributes to the broader life of the school in any way?'

In-depth interviews

As my research was focused on questions about the potential value and contribution of chapel, in-depth interviews were more likely to yield the sort of data that would translate into a rich narrative description of the way that chapel contributes to real lives. This suited my case study design, as described by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011):

> A case study provides a unique example of real people in real situations, enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles" (p. 289).

For me to understand my participants' views on chapel, I needed to explore with them their personal beliefs and experiences. An in-depth approach to the questioning allowed for richness and detail to emerge. As Rubin & Rubin (2012) suggest, if what you need to find out cannot be answered simply or briefly, if you anticipate that you may need to ask people to explain their answers or give examples or describe their experiences, then you rely on in-depth interviews.

When considering the questions for my interviews, it was important to have one eye on the potential analysis that would follow, building on the key concepts that had been synthesised from the review of literatures. Together, the range of responses would then be able to inform a rich narrative picture of the contribution of chapel in that school. I envisaged at least some of the following ideas being proposed by participants, so I was attentive to these within the interview responses and would take the conversation into greater depth if necessary:

- Community cohesion and identity

- School tradition and history

- National cultural identity

- Moral messages and values education

- Communal singing

- School marketing and promotion

- Education about faith and religion

- Opportunity for calm reflection

- Aesthetics and culture

- Individual and subjective wellbeing

- Comfort and reassurance

These criteria were a way of demarking the contribution of chapel in the lives of the individuals and school community. They served only as a series of assumptions in the initial phases, based on the review of literatures, to help shape the interviews. Of course, there was no guarantee that the actual data would bear these out, or the extent to which each idea might prove to be significant.

I also asked every participant directly the following question, or a variation on it: 'If you had a big red button in front of you, and pressing it would remove compulsory, whole-school chapel from the life of the school, would you press it?' I wanted this direct binary question to frame the rest of the answers provided by my participants, as an interesting and helpful companion to the questions relating to personal faith and belief. These questions together provided a platform on which to interpret all the other answers given by my participants to questions around the potential contribution of chapel.

Coding and thematic analysis

As explained in the previous Literature chapter, I have utilised Durkheim's social account of religion to provide a framework for this thesis. As such, I have used a degree of analytic induction in this process, beginning with a working assumption about how chapel might contribute, and then exploring this further through related literature, ahead of generating my

own data. My data, which describe the potential contribution of chapel in UK private senior schools, ultimately represent insights and understanding drawn from the individuals most closely affected by the phenomenon that I am investigating and serve to consolidate the theoretical framework and the relevance of the literature that I reviewed.

Once completed, the interview data were transcribed and coded, using Saldana's model of thematic analysis (2013), and two very clear and distinctive themes emerged, along the lines drawn according to Durkheim's account of religion, with several discernible sub-themes within each. I colour-coded the transcriptions according to these themes and sub-themes and then transferred all the transcription material into their relevant colour categories. This made it possible to note the prevalence of each sub-theme, both in terms of how much of the interview data pertained to it, and how widely referenced the sub-theme was by participants across each case study school. This helped me to build a specific picture of chapel within each case study school and provided a rationale for focusing on certain sub-themes in more detail within the cross-case analysis in the Discussion & Findings chapter. Utilising a degree of analytic induction, these themes and sub-themes have already formed the basis of the structure of my Literature chapter, but as a reminder, they are as follows:

Theme 1: Building community, culture, and identity:

- Community cohesion and identity
- Moral messages and values education
- Communal singing
- School marketing and promotion

Theme 2: Engaging with the sacred, and taking pupils beyond their everyday and profane experiences:

- Engagement with faith and religion
- Opportunity for calm reflection
- Individual and subjective well-being
- Comfort and reassurance

Promotional and policy documents

In my original research design, I planned to utilise the publicly available promotional and policy documentation relating to chapel on each school's website. This was intended to help provide a sense of each school's chapel culture, through the stated aims around its practice. I gathered a wide range of data in this way from each case study school, but it quickly became obvious that if I quoted from this directly it would make the schools identifiable. Since I gave assurances to the participating heads, and to every individual participant, that they would remain anonymous within the thesis, I therefore had to adapt my use of this data. Further to this, I realised that this data was more representative of how the schools wanted chapel to be seen and understood, which was not necessarily going to be the same as what my participants described. In the Discussion & Findings chapter I will demonstrate that in fact there was a significant degree of overlap between the sorts of things my case study schools were claiming about the contribution of chapel and what my participants described.

Below are three excerpts from the websites of three private senior (HMC) schools, to show the sort of things that such data might have shown. It is important to emphasise that none of these are my case study schools, and that this is all publicly available information:

- The chapel plays an important part in the life of the school community, symbolising Bedfordians past and present and providing a daily reminder of life's spiritual dimension. (Bedford School, 2018)

- Each week, our regular chapel services provide an opportunity for reflection and during these important times together, we seek to deepen our understanding of the nature of what it means to be human and allow space for us to recognise the spiritual dimension to life. (Brentwood School, 2018)

- The chapel stands at the very heart of the community, and we hope that for all pupils, regardless of their denomination or beliefs, it can be a place of peace and reflection as they progress along their personal journey of faith. (Repton School, 2018)

Publicly accessible statements such as these, which are common to most private senior schools who maintain a culture of whole school chapel, are important for showing how such schools seek to communicate the contribution of chapel, especially to prospective parents. It

was always going to be more important to see if the pupils and others within the school community reflected similar beliefs and attitudes about the contribution that chapel makes to their lives. However, the potential richness of the language that might emerge from such conversations is perhaps already discernible in these brief excerpts.

Ethics

Several important issues arose from the potentially sensitive nature of the data I was gathering. The issues of data handling, consent, and anonymity were all managed relatively simply. The more delicate matter to handle was the need to be clear with heads that the interview data gathered from participants would not be shared with them. I needed to be explicit with participants on this issue too, partly to provide the reassurance that they could speak freely. This was particularly pertinent in respect of pupil participants, who might have been concerned about their views on chapel being shared with members of staff and the head. An important consideration for all social researchers is the potential effects of the research on participants, and "to act in such a way as to preserve their dignity as human beings" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 84). This guidance was firmly maintained at the centre of my research design.

All participants had the nature of my research explained to them and their consent to participate was sought. The right to withdraw consent at any stage of the process, and the participants' anonymity, were also outlined. There was a risk that potential participants might feel obligated to participate if their head had already agreed to the school being one of my case studies. This risk was mitigated by making sure that all would-be participants were approached by me, once the head had given approval for the project to proceed, and that they were fully aware of the nature of the project and their potential involvement and given clear guidance on their capacity to consent. There was also a risk that heads might want to know what members of staff or pupils had said about chapel, but this risk was mitigated by ensuring that anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and that heads understood from the outset that they would be provided with a copy of the final thesis document, but not the data.

At the start of every interview, I reiterated the nature of the study and the importance of consent. I also restated the fact that participants could withdraw from the study at any point and that they were free not to answer any question that made them uncomfortable. When I emphasised the anonymity of both school and participant within my study, one participant responded "yes, that's why I am being so candid".

The following documents are contained in the Appendices:

- Appendix: A Gatekeeper Letter
- Appendix B: Privacy Information for Research Participants
- Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet for Adults
- Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet for Pupils
- Appendix E: Consent Form for Adults
- Appendix F: Consent Form for Pupils

Summary

This chapter has explained the methodological approach and the epistemological and ontological positions adopted in this study. It has also demonstrated why qualitative interviews were the most suitable method of generating data capable of answering my central research questions. The next chapter will provide a detailed case report for each of the 3 case study schools. This data will show the depth and quality of data that the selected methodology and research methods have been able to generate. From the rich narrative account compiled for each case study school, a clear picture of chapel's contribution has been able to emerge through cross-case analysis. Ahead of that analysis, the next chapter will provide a detailed report on the data gathered in each of the case study schools.

Chapter 4: Case Reports Chapter

School P Case Report: *"A Place of Otherness"*

Introducing School P and its chapel

The Independent Schools Council, an affiliation of over 1,300 private schools, describes School P as a fully co-educational boarding and day school, for pupils aged 13-18, and praises its environment and facilities (ISC, 2021). The school currently has just over 800 pupils, of which roughly 500 are boys and 300 are girls. A significant majority of pupils are full-boarders (700), and the rest are flexi-boarders or day-pupils. The annual fees are just over £36,000 for boarders and £27,000 for day-pupils (ISC, 2021).

It is worth a reminder for the avoidance of any confusion, that the word 'chapel' is used interchangeably to describe the specific building and the act of gathering for collective worship. The chapel building is described by one current parent as "very imposing" (P7), and it stands centrally within the school's beautiful and spacious campus. Large enough to seat the whole school, pupils face forwards in pews in their respective 'houses'. The chapel is used for whole-school gatherings, including both 'assembly' (general notices and announcements) and 'chapel' (worship gathering). It is also used throughout the year for events such as New Pupils' Weekend, Remembrance Day, carol services, alumni events, memorials, and the leavers' service. It is a building that is used regularly, and participants describe it as an important space within the life of the school. This study is partly exploring the contribution of the chapel building however, but more prominently the contribution of the regular act of whole-school chapel worship. The school's website describes how the school was founded within the religious tradition of the Church of England, yet it now welcomes pupils and families from all world faiths and philosophies. The chapel is described as large enough to fit the whole school but also capable of offering spaces for quiet reflection, meditation, and prayer (School website, 2021).

The Head's introduction to the school's website refers to a "Christian ethos", that encourages pupils to develop a lasting sense of social, moral, and spiritual responsibility. The Chaplain's

contribution further outlines the tone of the school's approach to collective worship as one of openness and inclusion. This short summary says a lot about how chapel aims to contribute an important and distinctive element to school life in School P. Commitment to a Christian ethos is promoted in a way that fosters inclusivity and openness, maintaining the intention that chapel is for all, and should never be alienating for those with other faiths, or none. This makes it clear from the outset that at least the intention of School P is for chapel to contribute in a way that does not rest exclusively on the promotion and acceptance of Christian teaching.

Introducing the participants and their beliefs

I interviewed 15 participants from School P. The table below identifies these participants by their position within the school community. It also indicates their personal religious and spiritual beliefs, according to my simplified 4-point scale, and whether they felt that chapel should be a compulsory feature of school life for all pupils. As discussed in the previous chapter, 'Belief' was judged according to participants' responses to direct interview questions about their personal faith and attitude towards religion and worship.

	Participant Title	Belief	Compulsory Whole-School chapel?
P1	Head	2	Yes
P2	Chaplain	1	Yes
P3	Director of Music	3	No
P4	Director of Marketing	3	Yes
P5	Houseparent	2	Yes
P6	Houseparent	3	Yes
P7	Current Parent	2	Yes
P8	Current Parent	2	Yes
P9	Alumnus	2	Yes
P10	Alumnus	3	Yes
P11	Current Pupil	1	Yes
P12	Current Pupil	1	No
P13	Current Pupil	2	Yes
P14	Current Pupil	3	Yes
P15	Current Pupil	2	Yes

1 = Committed Christian	Yes: Compulsory whole-school chapel
2 = Believes in 'something higher'	No: Compulsory whole-school chapel
3 = Atheist	
4 = Agnostic	

Figure 9: School P participants & their basic beliefs

Of the 15 participants from School P, only 3 described themselves as a 'committed Christian'. 7 expressed their belief in the existence of something beyond the material, 'something higher'. Whilst the term 'something higher' is subjective and unspecific, essentially it means that these participants held beliefs about a soul, a higher purpose in life, the value of prayer, the mysterious, the non-material, and the numinous. I did not spend a great deal of interview

time exploring these beliefs with participants, because it was enough to know that they did not count themselves as a 'committed Christian'; nor did they describe themselves as an 'atheist' or 'agnostic'. 5 participants held no religious or spiritual beliefs of any sort and described themselves as an 'atheist'. None of the 15 participants followed an alternative faith to Christianity.

To help support my earlier claim, that most participants were broadly positive about the contribution of chapel, 13 of the 15 that I interviewed at School P, including all 7 who believed in 'something higher', said they would not want to abolish compulsory, whole-school chapel. The 2 participants who opposed compulsory, whole-school chapel included Pupil P12, who was one of the 3 'committed Christians'. P12 explained that some pupils become 'a bit restless' during services, so he preferred the idea of chapel services being "reserved for those who want to attend". The other opponent of compulsory, whole-school chapel was the director of music (P3), an atheist. Although he perceived clear benefits to whole-school gatherings, he felt these should be secular. He told me about one of his tutees, a committed Christian, who wished chapel could be optional, because he found it "quite intimidating, and hard for those who do believe and take it seriously, because there are lots of pupils who dismiss it". This clearly mirrors the comment from Pupil P12 and shows that chapel does not operate like a conventional church service, because of its compulsory nature, and the stated desire for inclusivity and broad appeal. As mentioned already, I never expected universal positivity and warmth about chapel, but enough distinctive ideas emerged throughout the data collection process to make these the meaningful focus of my thesis, which was always intended as an exploration of the broad ways in which chapel potentially contributes to school life.

The suggestion that a non-compulsory approach to chapel would provide "a safety net of respect amongst those who chose to attend" (P3) is a very interesting one. It is notable that there is a broad consensus of support for compulsory, whole-school chapel, even amongst participants who declare no personal religious belief. This does not seem to fit the characterisation offered by the two Christian pupils, who describe more resistance to chapel on the part of the non-religious pupils than my data suggest. It is possible that they are looking

for different things from the experience. If opposition to the idea of compulsory, whole-school chapel exists amongst some of the pupils who are committed Christians, it further emphasises the importance of discovering exactly what sort of contribution chapel makes at School P. This is what the remainder of this case report will focus on.

Theme 1: Building community, culture, and identity

		Building community, culture, and identity					
		1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6
P1	Head	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green
P2	Chaplain	Green	Red	Green	Red	Red	Red
P3	Director of Music	Green	Red	Green	Green	Red	Red
P4	Director of Marketing	Green	Red	Red	Green	Red	Green
P5	Houseparent	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red
P6	Houseparent	Green	Green	Red	Green	Red	Green
P7	Current Parent	Green	Red	Green	Green	Red	Green
P8	Current Parent	Red	Red	Green	Red	Green	Green
P9	Alumnus	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red
P10	Alumnus	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green
P11	Current Pupil	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green	Red
P12	Current Pupil	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green
P13	Current Pupil	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red
P14	Current Pupil	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red
P15	Current Pupil	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red

1.1	Community cohesion and identity
1.2	School tradition and history
1.3	National cultural identity
1.4	Moral messages and values education
1.5	Communal singing
1.6	School marketing and promotion

Figure 10: Prevalence of sub-themes within Theme 1 in School P

The grid above serves to represent the prevalence of the 6 sub-themes of Theme 1 that emerged from my thematic coding of the interview data from School P: green indicating that this sub-theme was discussed by the participant and red indicating that it was not.

'Community Cohesion and Identity' (1.1) was mentioned by all but 2 participants, making it the most prevalent; at least in terms of the number of participants who discussed it. 'Moral messages and values education' (1.4) comes next, with 11 out of the 15 participants referring to it. 'Communal singing' (1.5) was mentioned by all 8 of the former and current pupils, but none of the other participants, not even the director of music. As the most prevalent, these are the three sub-themes within Theme 1 that I will focus this data report on. I used this idea of 'prevalence' throughout my data presentation and analysis, not in a quantitative sense, which would possibly diminish the focus on rich qualitative data, but rather to give a rationale for why certain sub-themes were considered worthy of closer attention.

Community cohesion and identity

This sub-theme was referred to by 13 of the 15 participants that I interviewed from School P. Only one parent (P8) and pupil (P13) did not mention it during their interviews. The data show that chapel is felt to contribute towards a valuable and powerful sense of community cohesion and identity for participants. As the head explained, "chapel brings people together for some sort of collective act, not necessarily worship, but it brings everyone together and makes them feel part of something" (P1). It is notable that he feels it is not necessarily the 'worship' aspect of chapel that achieves this. One of the houseparents said something similar, again reducing the contribution of the religious nature of chapel and highlighting the community-building aspect: "In terms of the whole community, in a way taking the religion out of it, chapel brings the whole school together, in that shared experience, which I think is a good thing" (P5).

Other participants also emphasized the community-building and social nature of chapel, and in ways that were removed from the religious nature of the services. One such alumnus (P10) felt that the social contribution of chapel was very significant, particularly on a Sunday morning, after 6th Form Club the night before:

> Definitely a sense of community, and everybody turning up. And you know, on Sunday morning it used to be super-entertaining, because you'd have had 6th Form club the night before, and especially the choir, you wouldn't have missed it for the world. The choir

would be right at the back, facing inwards, and everybody who had been up to something the night before, or kissed somebody, or whatever, you'd get the ultimate view of them coming in and out. So, from a people-watching, social perspective, it was great. Definitely social. It was a communal gathering, and it was the whole school, which was quite special to me (P10).

This insight into chapel by a former pupil amplifies a sense that chapel at School P makes a major contribution to the community and the shared identity of the school, partly just by virtue of everyone having to go. This observation helps to explain a further contribution that chapel is said to make, towards the wider community, including alumni, as described by the chaplain:

> Of course, when alumni come back, the first thing they want is a chapel service, and I think it's maybe the Christian element but there's also something about coming together and being the community together. And I think that's why Heads like chapel and why a lot of Heads who probably are fairly liberal in their thinking say "no, it must be compulsory for everybody" (P2).

Whilst one might expect the chaplain to voice such a positive endorsement of chapel, the idea of alumni wanting to go back to chapel was one that I heard many times throughout my data collection. Current pupils also referred to a community-building aspect of chapel, one (P11) saying "the impact of being in that space, with so many other people, doing a similar thing, even if you're away with the fairies in your head, you do come away from that with a sense of togetherness" (P11). Another said:

> I think being with people, not just passing them in school; being with people, you're all there, focusing together on the same thing, singing the same songs, listening to the same voice. I think it brings the community together (P15).

Whilst this community-building aspect might be achievable through assembly, the director of marketing (P4) suggested that the identity offered through chapel is somehow distinct from that offered through assembly, even though assembly in School P is held in the chapel building: "I think the school gets an identity from being together in chapel, and if it was just

Assembly on a Monday morning, I think it would lose that slightly". This comment raises again the idea that chapel provides a distinctive contribution towards the identity formation of the community. This comment is arguably more resonant, given that P4 is an atheist, who nevertheless agrees with compulsory, whole school chapel. One houseparent, also an atheist in favour of whole-school chapel, similarly outlined a difference between assembly and chapel: "It's important to gather like that at different stages through the week, rather than just Assembly at the start of the week" (P6).

Alongside the community-building and identity-forming aspect of chapel in School P, there is potentially something distinctive suggested by virtue of it being a religious service, which will be explored in more detail under Theme 2, later in this report.

Moral messages and values education

11 out of the 15 participants referred to the moral messages and values education contributed by chapel. As with the previous sub-theme, the religious dimension of this contribution seemed less significant to many participants than the secular, although there were some comments that acknowledged the particularities of Christian teaching. There was also an acceptance and recognition that chapel services yield a certain 'moral authority', where people, most notably the chaplain, 'preach' about how people should behave, and that pupils might be more inclined to accept this within a religious context. This came across in one comment from the director of marketing:

> The other day I asked the chaplain if he could do something around 'inclusivity and diversity', so he did something around that for us, which was fantastic. So, I think it's a different way of getting across messages that are useful in day-to-day life. And it's done with thought, obviously, and with a bit more space and time devoted to it (P4).

The houseparent (P5) also emphasized the importance of the moral teaching component of chapel: "It's an opportunity, through the lens of religion, for the shared values of common decency that religions do promote, which can then be put forward to the community". Whilst moral teaching is achievable in a secular context, some participants appear to appreciate the

status and weight of moral teaching inherited through the Christian tradition. One pupil made an interesting observation about the moral character of chapel and the way that Christian teaching encourages people to think about others:

> I feel like everyone's quite selfish in their own way, and rightfully so; you look out for yourself. But I feel that when you're in chapel you think about other people as well, and how you're treating other people too (P13).

Another said something similar, showing the importance to them of the moral messages and values education provided through chapel, and again identifying that there is perhaps a universalizability to the central elements of Christian teaching:

> So, I think, it's a Christian school, and chapel services are Christian, but also it is very inclusive of other beliefs, and I think that's one reason why I really like those services, because they are obviously Christian, but the way they are presented focuses a lot more on the morals and the messages. It has readings and scripture, but that isn't the focal point, and if it is, it's done very tactfully so it's inclusive (P15).

He did not identify as a 'committed Christian', so this reference to the broader appeal of the moral messaging in chapel is significant. This comment shows the delicate balancing act that is conducted by those responsible for chapel provision at School P, in trying to retain the distinctiveness of Christian worship whilst speaking meaningfully to all pupils. Another pupil also mentioned the importance to them of the moral messaging in chapel, with the nuanced relationship between religious and secular teachings again coming through. They spoke about one of the general themes they recalled from the previous term:

> Last term we were focusing on 'great minds' in chapel when they did the readings, and for someone like me, who doesn't just look at it from a religious standpoint, I think it can be very useful for you as a person, and your personal development in general (P14).

This pupil self-reported as being atheist, so this comment seems particularly significant, because again it shows that School P seems to manage the moral teaching in chapel in a way that has broad appeal and does not alienate non-believers. Christianity does not have a

monopoly on moral messages and values education, but it appears to offer a well-respected and accepted conduit for these important elements of human life. In School P, chapel does appear to provide a valuable contribution towards the formation of a communal identity built on shared principles.

The head proposed this distinctive contribution of chapel compellingly:

> It doesn't matter whether death is the end or not, you must give an account; you must give a reckoning for your life. And it doesn't matter if it's part of a journey, and there is a soul, and you believe there is life after death, or not, because leading a good life and having a value system is essential. The simplest way of putting that together is through something like the 10 Commandments, or The Sermon on the Mount, or teaching something through a parable. It's just using the power of storytelling to give people a shape and a structure to the way they live their lives (P1).

Religion does not have a monopoly on ideas about how to live a good life, and many would resent the idea that a religious worship service has elevated potential in this regard. However, it is worth noting that this idea did seem to recur throughout the data, and that chapel provided a helpful forum for such moral messages and values education. A vision of the 'usefulness', for want of a better word, of Christianity in helping to convey a values education to the pupils in School P comes through from the data. It speaks to the attitude of this head, who does not see chapel as a means of evangelising to the pupils, but rather as a rich cultural well and tradition to draw from, and a valuable repository of moral wisdom. The Christian moral teaching utilised in chapel at School P seems to promote living a good life as centrally important, which is effectively mirrored in the claim on the school website that School P promotes a 'Christian ethos'. Chapel is evidently felt by many to be an important contributor to this ethos and the general moral identity of the school.

Communal singing

'Communal singing' was described as an important contribution of chapel by all the current pupils, and the two alumni from School P. However, apart from one of the current parents none of the other participants mentioned it, not even the director of music. It is worth noting

that, as an atheist, the director of music did tell me that he wished there was more separation between the chapel and the music department. He did not like the way that the music in the school was effectively 'commandeered' by chapel and did not consider that hymn singing should be such an important component in the school's music making.

Despite this view from the director of music, communal singing was the only feature of chapel's contribution that all the pupils referred to, and positively. This says a lot about how the pupils at the school appear to experience chapel, and what they consider to be important. As one pupil suggested:

> I do enjoy the hymn singing. I think it's one of the very enjoyable parts, and we have a great choirmaster who makes us sing properly, and it does bring a sense of community. You know, I think it's just one part of being part of this big community, being part of this big school. It's just a part of it, and it does unite people (P14).

One current parent noted that communal singing provides a particular opportunity because of the "strength in numbers", allowing pupils who would never sing otherwise "that kind of physical outpouring experience" (P8). A comment from one alumnus conveys this very clearly: "All of those people, in that moment of music, you can't deny there is definitely a sense of joy that comes from that and being together" (P9). One pupil said something very similar: "I think it is rather cool, you know, singing any of those big hymns with 800 kids going for it. It gets the hairs on the back of your neck standing up" (P10). As with the previous two sub-themes, this contribution seems removed from the religious dimension of the chapel provision; none of the positive and warm comments about the contribution of communal singing made any reference to it as a feature of worship, or as a means of learning about Christian teaching. One pupil put this very succinctly: "Everyone, without exception, sings Jerusalem, and everyone belts it out as loudly as they can. It's moments like this that really capture what chapel does for the school" (P15).

As much of my data collection was done during the time of Covid restrictions, it is arguably unsurprising that pupils reflected positively on the hymn singing, because they had not been able to do it for a while. One pupil made this point, saying that the mood in chapel was "less

happy" when they were unable to sing and reflected that the hymn singing was "part of why people like coming to chapel" (P13). As a contribution of chapel, the importance of communal singing for the pupils of School P does appear to be significant. Above all, participants suggested that this feature of chapel provides a fun and socially bonding experience for many in the pupil community.

Theme 2: Engaging with the sacred, and taking pupils beyond their everyday and profane experiences

Engaging with the sacred, and taking pupils beyond their everyday and profane experiences						
		2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5
P1	Head	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green
P2	Chaplain	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green
P3	Director of Music	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red
P4	Director of Marketing	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red
P5	Houseparent	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red
P6	Houseparent	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
P7	Current Parent	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green
P8	Current Parent	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green
P9	Alumnus	Green	Green	Green	Green	Red
P10	Alumnus	Red	Green	Green	Green	Green
P11	Current Pupil	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green
P12	Current Pupil	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red
P13	Current Pupil	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red
P14	Current Pupil	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green
P15	Current Pupil	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green

2.1	Engagement with faith and religion
2.2	Opportunity for calm reflection
2.3	Aesthetics and culture
2.4	Individual and subjective well-being
2.5	Comfort and reassurance

Figure 11: Prevalence of sub-themes within Theme 2 in School P

One of the interview questions that I asked many of the participants was: 'What, if anything, does chapel contribute that assembly does not?' Many of the ideas that emerged within Theme 1, 'Building community, culture, and identity', could arguably be replicated in a secular

gathering, such as an assembly. However, an important feature of this study is an exploration of the contribution that the religious and spiritual, or 'sacred', components of chapel might provide to individuals and school communities, even when many of the individuals comprising that community do not describe themselves as a 'committed Christian'. Theme 2, 'Engaging with the sacred, and taking pupils beyond their everyday and profane experiences', explores the most important ideas about the religious and spiritual contributions of chapel that were present in the interview data for School P.

Some of the comments from the head give a sense of Theme 2. He suggested that "removing compulsory chapel would leave a heart-shaped hole" (P1). The idea that chapel in some way provides a vital and spiritual core for the community is reflected across the interview data for School P. The head explained this in the following way, which clearly reflects his own religious and spiritual stance, as someone who believes in the non-material aspects of human life, without calling himself a 'committed Christian': "When you think about space, infinity, the bigger questions, Science doesn't have all the answers. So, into that vacuum you put religion, and it's a construct" (P1).

The grid above shows the prevalence of the 6 sub-themes within the interview data for Theme 2, according to how many participants mentioned each one. Again, my focus in this report will be on the three most prevalent sub-themes. 'Opportunity for calm reflection' (2.2) was interpreted from the data as an aspect of spiritual reflection and a meditative environment within which to consider life beyond the everyday and material. This was the only sub-theme that every participant referred to. 'Engagement with faith and religion' (2.1) was almost as prevalent, with all but one participant referring to it. The third most referenced sub-theme was 'Comfort and reassurance' (2.5), which relates to the way people often turn to religion and spirituality in times of emotional challenge.

Opportunity for calm reflection

This sub-theme was referred to by all 15 of the participants that I interviewed from School P. They all described a discernible difference in atmosphere between assembly and chapel even though, as previously mentioned, assembly is held in the chapel building. One pupil talked

about the "mundane things" covered in assembly but said that, by contrast, "chapel, without fail, manages to capture the big questions – the things that have been around forever" (P15). The ideas of stillness, a break from the demands of the school week, and having space to contemplate deeper questions about life were all expressed. One houseparent articulated this very clearly:

> Chapel offers the chance to reflect. Because it's such a busy lifestyle, no one ever really gets this otherwise. Although you're surrounded by 850 people, you still have that time to yourself, because it's quiet, and you can guarantee it's quiet. That's the pupils' time; 15 minutes to sit and think (P6).

This houseparent did not make this observation in relation to beliefs about God or religion. However, he still supported the idea of compulsory, whole-school chapel as an important opportunity for calm reflection. For some, chapel evokes a sense of space and peace that is not available at any other time in the week. For example, one pupil explained that Assembly is for "reporting what's been going on in the school week and the various achievements" whereas chapel is "to get away from school for a bit" (P11). The idea of chapel being somehow distinct and separate from the rest of the school week recurred time and again in the interviews with participants from School P, including both current parents. One parent said "I can see the benefits from simply a mental-health point of view: the ability just to learn to stop, and to learn to sit, and to contemplate" (P7) and another developed this idea further:

> You know, there are so many aspects to it, about the peace, holding yourself there, with very little expectation other than just to be, which they can't get through something else. It's an intimate position to be in an environment where the pace has gone, where you're contemplative. You're not normally in that state in a crowd (P8).

One alumnus described "a moment of stillness to be with your own thoughts" and said that in this way "Chapel probably contributes much more than people might expect" (P9). Whilst a secular context could no doubt be designed to achieve this effect, several participants from School P described the distinctive way chapel provides it, with a sacred dimension. Participants valued the way Chapel contributes time for pupils to contemplate life's bigger issues, within a space dedicated in part to sitting still, and being calm and reflective.

Engagement with faith and religion

This sub-theme was referenced by all but 1 participant. Many spoke about the way that chapel provides an opportunity to learn about religion, and to be immersed in an act of worship and faith, and that this was important somehow, even if pupils did not hold, or go on to develop, a personal commitment to Christianity. In many of the participant contributions there was a strong sense that the religious element of chapel was important to them. On the one hand chapel seems to provide a way of thinking and acting that is removed and different from the rest of pupils' daily lives, and they say they value this difference. On the other hand, chapel seems to teach pupils something about what it means to engage with religion and faith in one's life. Certainly, these ambitions for chapel came across very clearly in what the head said:

> The reason why I say we must have chapel, and it should remain compulsory, and people of different faiths and none must go, is that it is the only time in the day where you are forced to think about something outside yourself. Something that transcends understanding and goes beyond our imagination and beyond our mortal reach. I think it's important that pupils are reminded that there is something bigger than them, and always has been and always will be. For some, maybe religion will become important, but I think often for children it's not overtly important at the time; but it may drip into them in a positive way over time. They understand its importance as a place of otherness (P1).

The idea that chapel contributes a 'place of otherness', a unique space and atmosphere for a communal gathering, is evidently part of the strategic thinking at the top of the school. Chapel is also seen in part as an educational opportunity. There is not only the sense that chapel educates pupils towards reflecting on the deeper questions and issues of life, as discussed in the previous sub-theme, but also it teaches pupils certain details about religion and faith. As the head put it, "it means that when you're an adult you can attend a church service, and you will know what to do" (P1). The chaplain said something very similar:

> Part of what I hope is that pupils who are at the 'no faith' end of the spectrum are, at the very least, being informed as to what Christianity is about, and they're at least hearing

from me that it's a rational, reasonable, viable, transformational thing for those who embrace it (P2).

As a form of 'mission' this might seem reductive, and certainly a long way from any sense that his chaplaincy is about bringing people to faith. The chaplain is perhaps a realist in terms of what most of the congregation think and feel about Christianity, but he nevertheless wants pupils to know about it and to understand and respect its messages. Other participants clearly understood this ambition too. One houseparent put it like this:

> We must give pupils the option of believing in something. Whether they choose to be an atheist or theist, it's because they've made an informed decision. It's not 'negative atheism', because they've just never heard about or experienced what faith means (P5).

Both current parents that I interviewed said similar things to this and felt that chapel performs an educative function, giving their children an opportunity to explore religious and faith ideas, even if they might not to go on to adopt them for themselves.

> For young people I think it's important that you set them on a road. They can then make their choices, but if you haven't invited them to experience it, then I think you've let them down to a certain extent (P7).

The other current parent said "I want my children to make their own choices. I want them to have their own opinions" (P8). It is worth noting that the children at School P do not have a choice about whether to attend chapel, and that they likely had limited choice about being sent to a school with compulsory chapel. As such, it could be argued that there is a difference in what P8 is saying between her espoused view and her actions. However, the view that chapel facilitates opinion-forming and choice-making was clearly important to many of my participants. Some of the pupils also referenced this potential contribution of chapel, with one commenting on the fact that often the "disengaged" pupils would later reflect on the messages and ask each other "what did you think?" about a particular chapel or sermon (P15). Again, it seems that regardless of personal faith and background, the religious aspect of chapel is felt to contribute something, through the immersion and exposure to Christian practices and teachings that it offers.

A possible point of tension at School P, referenced by a few participants, exists between what some of the school's governors would prefer, a more directly evangelical style of Christian preaching, and what is in fact the case, which is a more ecumenical approach. The head described a "blurring" of secular and religious messages in chapel services and explained this partly reflects his own position and belief, since he does not see himself as evangelical. Rather, he feels his role within chapel is to introduce pupils to "something they haven't necessarily thought about". He told me that because he holds "a complete equivalence on faith", this does at times produce "a bit of conflict with the governors" (P1).

One houseparent referred to the same tension, between the foundational charter, promoted by some of the school's governors, and the attitudes and practices that exist within the school. He explained that there had previously been an objection from some governors that the Religious Studies department taught about Islam, and he described an "old guard in favour of a fundamental evangelical Christian ethos that they feel should run through the school, in keeping with the school's foundational charter" (P5).

Whatever the intentions and ambitions of some of the governors, it seems from the data that chapel at School P is not considered to be evangelical, and there is no explicit ambition to convert pupils to Christianity. Chapel at School P is undeniably a Christian worship service but the way it is presented seems to promote openness and inclusivity. Participants suggest it is intended to provide an environment within which to encounter and learn about what it means to live a Christian life. Such a broad approach might help to explain why many of my participants described an educative contribution of chapel, providing pupils with an opportunity to learn about faith and religion, without feeling forced down a particular path.

Comfort and reassurance

Any large community will have times of collective sorrow and strain. There will also be individuals at any one moment who are struggling with their own emotional burdens. It was interesting that 9 out of 15 of the participants from School P mentioned a distinctive contribution they felt chapel was able to provide them in these times. School P had experienced such moments in recent years, including the death in-post of two members of

the teaching staff. Some of the participant's comments reflected the importance of chapel to them at these times and their sense of the contribution that chapel was able to make to the community. The Chaplain reflected on one of these moments:

> The next morning after one colleague had died, we addressed the whole school. The pupils generally listen well, and it's pretty still, but this was *really* still. And you think, it's good to have this opportunity to be quiet, and for those who want to, to pray, and for those who don't want to pray, perhaps just to reflect, because otherwise you just bash on with life. I'm glad these sorts of things don't happen too often, but I think when they do there's a real place for chapel (P2).

As such, there is a consistent narrative running through much of the data that chapel in School P seems to be for everyone, regardless of faith and religious background, and that the chaplain is very aware of his responsibility towards the whole pupil body, not just those who are Christian or seeking a life of faith. It does appear that there is no pressure to be one thing or another and the opportunity is always there, especially in times of loss, sorrow, and confusion, to use chapel as a space to serve whatever end is needed for everyone. The fact that the mystery and emotional turbulence of death and grief draws people to chapel speaks to the way in which it is seen to be a sacred space and "a place of otherness" (P1). Chapel appears to represent the non-material and the spiritual elements of life, in ways that benefit and support the individual members of the community. The head reflected the same sentiment:

> In times of absolute stress, where do people want to be, where do they turn to? They go to chapel. It's really interesting. Whenever there is something that is kind of "Oh my goodness, I don't know how to deal with that", let's open chapel, let's bring 100 candles in, let's have some prayer. It's really, really interesting that in moments of crisis, whether it's national or local, people turn to religion (P1).

This view offers a rather sweeping generalisation, but it does nevertheless express the head's experience of how School P has responded in the past to times of grief, utilising the chapel as a space within which to gather and emote. Several other participants referred to the emotional support they derived from chapel. This was not always necessarily linked to times

of extreme sadness and challenge, but also some of the more routine pressures of school life. One alumnus reflected this very clearly in her interview comments, and it is worth bearing in mind that she was one of the 5 atheists I spoke to from School P:

> If we'd had a really busy and stressful week, or perhaps something shitty had happened in life, like we'd lost somebody, I could see that we might turn around and say "Hey, do you just want to go to chapel for an hour?", and we would have some reflection time (P10).

One pupil spoke about chapel helping people "forget about their concerns and take things off their mind" (P11) and another echoed this sentiment: "people need something to give them a rock to hold onto in life. That is where religion can be super important" (P14). A further pupil used an expression that seems to beautifully sum up this contribution of chapel, saying that "if something wasn't going right, then chapel would help you to just put it into the universe" (P15). This comment is helpful in the way that it is non-religious and yet broadly spiritual, and as such it seems to represent the narrative that consistently presented itself in School P. Chapel seems to provide a range of contributions to the community at School P, and many of these are apparently related to the fact that it is seen as "a place of otherness" more than a place reserved exclusively for Christian worship.

Case Summary

Despite the Christian foundation of the school, the apparent importance of Christian worship, and the compulsory nature of chapel, most participants described the services as open and welcoming to those of all faiths and none. In fact, the contribution of chapel to individuals was generally spoken about in terms not requiring a personal Christian faith. The contribution of chapel in School P emerges in the way it fosters a deep sense of community and identity, within a space that invites reflection and meditation on the non-material aspects of life, such as morality and spirituality. As 'a place of otherness', it seems to offer a valuable space away from the routine and business of everyday school life.

Across the two themes that overarch this thesis, data from School P present a reasonably consistent impression of chapel as a central and important space for participants, regardless of their religious background. This is partly seen in the way that chapel is described as socially bonding, enhancing a sense of community and able to foster and reinforce a sense of the school's identity. It also seems to have something to do with the way that chapel encapsulates the non-material aspects of life. Many of the participants appear to value chapel as a "place of otherness", separated both physically and in terms of its function from the demands and routine of school life. In this way, chapel is seen to provide a space for calm and reflective thought, which enables pupils to learn about Christianity and engage with questions of faith and belief, if they choose to.

School A Case Report: "The Necessity of the Numinous"

Introducing School A and its chapel

The Independent Schools Council describes School A as a co-educational boarding school, which has just under 1000 pupils, of which roughly 2/3 are boys and 1/3 are girls. The annual fees are just over £40,000 for boarders and just over £32,000 for day pupils (ISC, 2021).

The school's chapel is described as standing in the "heart of the campus", as chapel buildings tend to in such schools, and as being "central to the life and ethos of the school" (School website, 2021). The aim of chapel is described as ensuring that everyone feels connected to the school community, irrespective of their personal beliefs, and that pupils are encouraged to engage with notions of a moral and spiritual life. The chapel services are said to be distinctively Christian, but accessible to all. The openness of chapel towards all pupils, and the inclusive nature of the services, is a clear ambition, intended to account for the inevitable range of beliefs across the pupil population. This intention is certainly evidenced in the interview data that was collected and will be presented in this case report; multiple participants acknowledged that the focus on Christianity in chapel services is far from overt or overwhelming.

The head's welcome on the website also describes the spiritual and moral aspects of school life, developing the pupils' sense of responsibility and their ability to consider life beyond school and themselves. The idea of chapel helping pupils to feel connected to the world beyond their everyday experiences is another recurring theme in the interview data from School A. The latest ISI inspection report recognises pupils' ability to reflect on their own spirituality and beliefs. This judgement resonates with much of the data around the contribution of chapel to the lives of the pupils in School A.

The rest of this case report presents the analysis of the interview data from School A and shows how chapel makes meaningful contributions to the experience of many within the community. This is seen both in relation to the way that chapel helps to build community, culture, and identity, and in the way that it takes pupils beyond the everyday and profane. The "necessity of the numinous" is an idea expressed by the head and seems to capture much of what was said about chapel by the participants at the school.

There was a very strong sense from most of the participants in School A that Christianity, whilst still the prevailing religious culture of the school, is not forced upon the pupils and that chapel services were consciously adapted so as not to alienate those of other faiths, or none. The head told me that there are currently no regular church goers on the school's governing board and that "I was not asked, at any stage of my interview for the headship, if I was happy to lead a Christian school" (A1). The head happens to be a committed Christian, but he does not feel this helped him to get the role, which he suggested could easily have gone to a non-Christian. There would appear to be a strong current of secularity running through the school, despite a well utilised chapel building.

The tone of chapel in School A is characterised by the Chaplain's commitment to making it a welcoming experience for all. As the head explained, "the current Chaplain is in tune with the Zeitgeist and is open to a multi faith approach, and open to people of no faith speaking within the context of a Christian framework" (A1). The Chaplain expressed the importance for him of differentiating "the events that are compulsory and the events that are chosen, because they're very different" (A2). Whole school chapel is compulsory, and he is very aware that not

all pupils believe the Christian message, so he conducts these services in a different way, and "within a different atmosphere" to the optional services, such as Confirmation preparation. He also expressed his commitment to the notion that "this is 'our' chapel; this is not 'my' chapel. This is our community and chapel is our community space, and it's a place for everyone, regardless of their background" (A2).

The head of religious studies estimated that "95%, probably more, wouldn't choose to attend if chapel was optional" (A5). Whilst not objectively quantified, this gives a certain impression of pupil attitudes towards chapel in School A, but it did not stop most participants declaring various ways in which chapel contributes to the school community and its pupils. It is of course not necessarily a contradiction, that whilst many pupils would not freely choose to go to chapel, these same pupils might consider that it makes certain positive contributions to the school and to them personally. As the head explained to me, "there is a difference between the things that pupils might choose to do voluntarily and the things that are good for them to do" (A1). That said, the sense of religion and worship being of limited significance, even within the context of chapel, is something that featured in several participants' responses. The nature of chapel at School A, being open to pupils of all faiths and none, came through in many of the interviews. One houseparent said:

> The messages that come out are not overtly Christian. You know, I've got Muslim boys in the house, and Jewish boys in the house. They go because these religions, in terms of what they're preaching, are much the same. It's that sort of 'soft sell' of chapel" (A6).

The other houseparent said something very similar:

> "I had a girl a couple of years back who was a Muslim, and I did actually say to her 'you don't have to go if you'd rather not', but she wanted to; we have a couple of pupils from different faiths, and they all choose still to go" (A7).

These observations suggest that the Christian messaging in chapel at School A is liberal and inclusive. The alumnus that I interviewed also backed up this idea:

I think the school supports any beliefs. It is a Christian school, so we have our Christian services, but equally, I never felt like the Reverend was putting particularly Christian beliefs on us, if you see what I mean. The chapel services were centred around Christian tradition, but you were very free to believe what you wanted to believe. (A10)

The dominant themes that emerged from the interview data about School A suggest a school community that is liberal and inclusive, where the chapel services offer messages intended for everyone to unify the community around common values and spiritual ideas. Whilst many similarities have arisen between the chapel culture in School P and School A, this overt reference to inclusion of other faiths does stand out as distinctive to School A. This could be because of its geographical location (proximity to London), giving it a more multicultural demographic than the rural School P. The pupils also came across as slightly less invested in the culture and tradition of chapel attendance. The idea that pupils at School A only attend chapel because they are required to surfaced from several participants, alongside the way that Christianity is used as a framework for the services, rather than an evangelical focus. This is all summarized effectively by one of the pupils:

There's not some sort of overarching social pressure to conform to a certain point of view. Often, the services will link to a more general theme, perhaps relating to something based on current affairs, or maybe a charity they are pushing support for. There will be a sermon or something like that, which obviously pretty much explains the reading and then links back to whatever the main theme is for that chapel. There's also a hymn thrown in, which is occasionally linked. The Christian message is there but not oppressive, if you get what I mean (A14).

This introduction to the general attitudes and opinions relating to chapel in School A provides a platform for exploring the specific interview data, which will now follow. It is the dominant view amongst the participants that chapel provides an ecumenical environment, committed to giving pupils a broad and inclusive exposure to Christianity. This approach appears to prioritise general moral and spiritual messages, and helpful lessons for life, rather than a strict or doctrinal focus or evangelical approach to Christian teaching.

Introducing the participants and their beliefs

10 participants from School A were interviewed. Whilst I was able to secure most of the participants I wanted to, unfortunately, I did not manage to interview as many pupils as I would have liked. The two houseparents, who acted as gatekeepers for the pupils, were happy to be interviewed, but were not able to offer much support in setting up pupil interviews. Covid was placing an extraordinary pressure on schools around this time, and I did not feel I could ask too often. Notwithstanding these challenges, the data generated by the 10 participants give good insight into the sorts of contributions that people feel chapel makes within School A. Figure 14 lists the participants, how they responded to questions about their religious beliefs, and whether they felt that compulsory, whole-school chapel was a positive feature of school life that should be maintained.

	Participant Title	Belief	Compulsory whole-school chapel?
A1	Head	1	Yes
A2	Chaplain	1	Yes
A3	Director of Music	2	Yes
A5	Head of RS	4	Yes
A6	Houseparent	2	Yes
A7	Houseparent	1	Yes
A9	Current Parent	1	Yes
A10	Alumnus	1	Yes
A14	Current Pupil	2	Yes
A16	Current Pupil	3	No

1 = Committed Christian
2 = Believes in 'something higher'
3 = Atheist
4 = Agnostic

Yes: Compulsory whole-school chapel
No: Compulsory whole-school chapel

Figure 12: School A participants & their basic beliefs

Two of the striking elements of the data here are the high proportion of participants who described themselves as committed Christians (5 out of 10), especially given the multi-faith nature of the schools, and the overwhelmingly positive support for compulsory, whole-school chapel. These observations frame the analysis that follows. As with the report for School P, data are grouped within sub-themes and will be presented according to how prevalent these were within the interview data. The grids at the start of each section show which sub-themes the participants referred to within their interview answers; the most prevalent for each theme will provide the focus of this case report.

Theme 1: Building community, culture, and identity

		Building community, culture, and identity					
		1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6
A1	Head	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green
A2	Chaplain	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green
A3	Director of Music	Red	Green	Green	Red	Green	Red
A5	Head of RS	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green	Red
A6	Houseparent	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green
A7	Houseparent	Red	Green	Red	Green	Green	Green
A9	Current Parent	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green
A10	Alumnus	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red
A14	Current Pupil	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red
A16	Current Pupil	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red

1.1	Community cohesion and identity
1.2	School tradition and history
1.3	National cultural identity
1.4	Moral messages and values education
1.5	Communal singing
1.6	School marketing and promotion

Figure 13: Prevalence of sub-themes within Theme 1 in School A

The three sub-themes within the theme of 'Building community, culture, and identity' that were most frequently referenced by participants from School A are 'communal singing', 'community cohesion and identity', and 'moral messages and values education'. There were also several references to 'school marketing and promotion'. This section of the case report will present the analysis under these four sub-themes.

Communal singing

The opportunity provided by chapel for communal singing was the only sub-theme referred to by all 10 participants from School A. That said, several participants said that the hymn singing is not something that is done particularly enthusiastically at this school. Even the head made this observation:

> We sing so badly. I mean, compared to my previous place, where the school expressed itself through song in chapel. It occasionally sang well; it always sang loudly. And here we don't have that. One boarding house at my previous school could drown out the noise of the whole school here (A1).

Other participants said the same thing about the quality of the communal singing. One of the houseparents said, "here the choral tradition is not very good at all. People just sort of mumble their way through the hymns" (A6). The other houseparent said, "they're terrible at it; they really suck at it, but I really like them singing together" (A7). This suggests a level of self-consciousness on the part of the pupil body, and an embarrassment about singing. A weak culture of communal singing is a hard thing to reverse as new pupils join and discover that this is the way that singing is done here. That said, the head of religious studies was very clear that singing offers an opportunity that can be positive, both for the individual and the community:

> I think that the highlight of chapel for me is when you're allowed to sing. Singing the hymns together is really beautiful, and you do get that sense of "ah!" If nothing else, if a student leaves, and they feel uplifted because of the hymn singing, that's a positive experience isn't it (A5).

One current parent also acknowledged the benefit of group singing and one current pupil said:

> I do know there is something so powerful about a group of people just singing. It is so good for your mind and soul. Just singing and being together. You know it's hard to explain the kind of feeling that you get, just being a part of something like that. I think it is really, really important that we do continue with hymn singing (A14).

The general tone of the responses about chapel singing at School A is that it is not undertaken as positively as it could be. Nevertheless, most participants seem to perceive some value in it, and they suggest that chapel is well-placed to offer this contribution in school. The view of the director of music is a helpful place to conclude this section:

> There's something about music. It is spiritual, and you can't define what beauty is, and you can't define what God is, so the two for me link up very closely. It's so personal, and it's moving, and there are no words to explain it. It could also be the sense of community that you get when you sing in a choir, when you sing in any of these sorts of chapels (A3).

This final suggestion, that singing assists the sense of unity within a community is obviously felt by several participants, even if they seem to acknowledge that the level of singing in the school is not very good. The idea that music can lift people to an appreciation of the non-material aspects of life also comes through for some.

Community cohesion and identity

The second most prevalent sub-theme within Theme 1 was chapel's contribution to 'Community cohesion and identity', which 8 out of the 10 participants referred to in their interviews. The head talked passionately about the contribution of chapel to the overall sense of community in the school, through the way that it brings people together:

> Gathering in one place, acknowledging each other, saying good morning to people, being a community, seeing the rest of your boarding house. It is an unbelievably people based, truly nurturing, very, very warm school, that lacks any sense of hierarchy. I think that the

warmth and mutual respect of the community, and the acknowledgement of vulnerability, and all those things, are engendered by the experience of chapel (A1).

As such, chapel is described by many participants as an important element of the school's identity and culture, with an ability to bring the community together, through the physical process of gathering for a shared purpose. The chaplain further developed this idea in relation to the way that chapel assists the new members of the community every school year to feel welcomed and bonded to their new community:

The corporate thing is very important. Also, I think it's important to offer the ministry of hospitality and welcome. I think that's also very important. So, for people new to the community, chapel is very important because it helps with welcoming them to this new place, where they can flourish, grow, and facilitate their flourishing (A2).

The head of religious studies also picked up the theme of community and the importance of chapel in helping those pupils who are new to the school to feel a sense of connection and belonging:

You can see it in the new students; when they join, there is a sense that this beautiful building is an important part of belonging to the community. It is coming together, so I think chapel definitely has that status, in terms of being a center for the community. I think there is a strong sense of community and it's nice to see cohorts together in chapel (A5).

As someone 'unsure' of their own faith position, it is noteworthy that A5 described this communal aspect of chapel as important. One of the houseparents made a similar observation, about the way that chapel facilitates gathering in cohorts, and for them this meant chapel enabling them to sit together as a boarding house. Also, given the restrictions of Covid, he offered some reflections on how the value of community was being felt even more acutely at the time:

I enjoy chapel. I enjoy going as much for the community side of it as anything else, the identity of us as a boarding house, but also just the community, lots of people coming together. It's about community, about people getting together and being in one place. I

do think the importance of community has only been exacerbated by what we've gone through in the last year with Covid, and I do think that's the power of schools like this; this idea of the collective, the community, the identity that comes from people being together, and I can only see that idea of community becoming much more appealing as we lead a more splintered existence. You know, we're all leading these solitary lives, where we speak to people on screens, and then we disappear back into our world, and I think the idea of community is going to become even more important than it is now (A6).

One current parent also felt that chapel contributed a very valuable way for the community to come together: "It's great to have an area where the whole school can go and do a whole community thing" (A9) and an alumnus reflected on their time at the school and what chapel brought to their sense of community: "It's collecting together with your school or house. I think chapel really brought a more community flavour to the school that we wouldn't have had without it" (A10). Both pupils also referenced the contribution of chapel for helping secure a strong sense of community within the school, including one who saw this benefit, even as an atheist: "Chapel does bring the school together around something, even if it's, you know, linked to religion" (A16). The chapel at School A appears to contribute a sense of community and cohesion for many, that extends beyond it being a Christian worship service.

Moral messages and values education

7 out of the 10 participants from School A perceived chapel as contributing in some way to the morals and values shared by the school community. As such, chapel was presented in the role of helping to build and establish the school's corporate identity. Common values are clearly a very important aspect of life in any community, and chapel was seen as central to this for most participants from School A. The head's comment on this is perhaps a helpful place to introduce this feature of the data: "If you want to try to engender and encourage integrity, rather than entitlement, chapel is a pretty good place to do it" (A1). In this, the head seems to be referencing the Christian teachings about care for one's neighbours, and the fact that chapel provides this message, potentially as a challenge to pupils who come from very privileged and wealthy backgrounds. Other participants also referred to chapel as being important for establishing shared values for the community, as one houseparent put it: "I do think that chapel taps into the values of the school and our community in general, which we

don't touch on in the same way in assembly" (A7). One current parent said that chapel "makes thinking and reflection about Christian values part of the norm" (A9) and one alumnus said that chapel provides helpful reminders on "how to treat other people correctly, general behaviour, teachings, and moral values" (A10).

Both current pupils also commented on the contribution of chapel to their moral education, with one referring to the way that current themes and issues are woven into the teachings:

> It's more about real world issues and, you know, morals of real stories. So, I definitely think it's very important to have moral messages, but I wouldn't say it's extremely important for them to be religious messages (A14).

Similarly, one of the current pupils, an atheist, said that he did not think that the moral messages needed to be religious, and he rejected the implication that religion is important for maintaining basic morals. Still, there is little doubt that chapel in School A provides a forum for moral messaging, as explained by the chaplain:

> We've been having some services recently thinking about Black History Month and this week one of our upper 6th pupils, who's a Nigerian Christian, came up and gave a talk reflecting on the spirituality of postcolonialism, which was actually very informative. It was very nicely done, and he linked it to some Bible passages (A2).

Once again, chapel is providing a platform for sharing values and an opportunity for the school to come together around ideas of moral significance for the community. These are not exclusively religious in nature, but Christian teachings appear to offer a framework for the sharing of values and morals.

School marketing and promotion

Although 5 participants mentioned the idea of chapel contributing to the marketing of the school, in every case it was to emphasise that it does not really feature in discussions with prospective parents. As with School P, chapel does not get described by participants as a significant selling point of the school. Again, it is possibly that most parents simply expect and

accept its presence in the school. Presumably those who might have an issue with chapel probably would not get very far down the line in terms of enrolling their child. One houseparent said, "in my 7 years there has been one parent who asked about how active Christianity is in the school and what role it plays" (A7). The head described it as "fingers of one hand" (A1) in terms of how many times the matter had come up with prospective parents. In a similar vein, the other houseparent said:

> It's not really a factor when I'm talking to prospective parents. If I'm showing them around the school, I show them into the chapel, and they think it's a lovely, peaceful place. I don't think it's a deal breaker for the parents though (A6).

The head went further and was very clear on this position:

> We do not have a generation of pupils here, and we do not have a large number of prospective parents, who are overtly looking for a Christian education. I just don't know how common this is now. And yet, on the other end of the scale, it doesn't seem really to put people off either. And I do feel that for some there is a level of reassurance. They like the concept of a Christian ethos. They like the formality, the tradition, the culture, and all of that they happily buy into (A1).

This comment supports the earlier characterisation of School A as broad-faithed and ecumenical. It also speaks to the general context of this thesis, which is the declining role of Christianity in UK society. Chapel in School A might still be contributing on some level to the marketing of the school, but not because it offers regular Christian worship. The contribution that is described as appealing to prospective parents is more about the cultural aspect of chapel. As the head of religious studies put it, "I think it's the tradition of chapel, it's part of the heritage of the school, and I think a lot of the students really value that side of it too" (A5).

Theme 2: Engaging with the sacred, and taking pupils beyond their everyday and profane experiences

Engaging with the sacred, and taking pupils beyond their everyday and profane experiences		2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5
A1	Head	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red
A2	Chaplain	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green
A3	Director of Music	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green
A5	Head of RS	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red
A6	Houseparent	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red
A7	Houseparent	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red
A9	Current Parent	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red
A10	Alumnus	Red	Green	Red	Red	Red
A14	Current Pupil	Green	Red	Red	Green	Red
A16	Current Pupil	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red

2.1	Engagement with faith and religion
2.2	Opportunity for calm reflection
2.3	Aesthetics and culture
2.4	Individual and subjective well-being
2.5	Comfort and reassurance

Figure 14: Prevalence of sub-themes within Theme 2 in School A

The head described chapel as contributing towards "the necessity of the numinous". Whilst not everyone would agree with this characterisation, it is perhaps a useful way of linking the sub-themes within this section of the data. This theme relates to the way that chapel in School A can be seen to contribute the opportunity for pupils to consider the deeper questions and mysteries of life. There was a recurring sense amongst participants that chapel provides a space that takes them away from the business of the school day and prompt them to reflect more deeply on religious, moral, and spiritual ideas. Two sub-themes within this theme were referred to by participants much more frequently than any of the others: 'Education about faith and religion' and 'Opportunity for calm reflection'. These will provide the focus for this

section of my report, since none of the other sub-themes were spoken about by more than two participants.

Engagement with faith and religion

The head's reference to "the necessity of the numinous" represents something that a lot of participants from School A mentioned as a distinctive contribution of chapel. Having a space that is designated as sacred, and where religious beliefs are referenced and respected, does appear to offer a contribution for some that assembly cannot. For the head at School A, this contribution can best be understood in the way that chapel requires pupils to think beyond themselves and their everyday school experiences:

> I think for me the necessity of the numinous is the importance of recognising, albeit only once or twice a week, that something is larger than the self, and more important than the self. For a generation who, through no fault of their own, is perhaps even more self-regarding than teenagers have tended to be, this is so important. The sort of atomisation of society through the smartphone, through that tendency to disaggregate, is mitigated by joining together as a group. And of course, everyone will talk about community and the importance of community, but I feel this is slightly less important than people within that community recognising there is something bigger than them. There is something beyond me. There is something outside of me. And in so doing, helping young people to interpret the events that are going on around them, perhaps the death of the Duke of Edinburgh. It makes us think about things we wouldn't otherwise be thinking about. It gives us the opportunity to reflect on things and to look at the bigger picture. It opens our eyes to another way of thinking, living or being. Bringing the school into contact with the world beyond the school, the school bubble. It's a moment in the day when we try to burst the bubble (A1).

The chaplain used very similar language to express the same idea: "one of the key things for chapel is the moral and spiritual side of life; getting pupils to realise that they must go beyond their 'bubble', and start to embrace the 'other', is very important" (A2). One of the houseparents, who did not identify as a 'committed Christian', put it like this:

I like the idea that the pupils have this time to sit and listen. Otherwise, I don't think many of them would necessarily take the time to think that bit deeper, or allow themselves to be pushed outside of their comfort zone emotionally, or think about other people. I think with chapel, more than Assembly, you can tap into the emotional side of their life, rather than just chat to them about the academic side (A6).

There was also a clear sense in the data from School A that chapel contributes, at least for some, an opportunity to learn about the distinctive elements of a religious life, even if pupils might choose to reject these beliefs. As one current parent put it, "it means they can consider Christianity, because I suppose if they are not exposed to it, they can never have the choice to follow it" (A9). In a similar way, the chaplain identified the value that he perceives in chapel as an opportunity to learn about the application of religious thinking to life's important issues. As he explained:

I always ask the pupils if there are any topics they'd like to look at from a spiritual and moral perspective, which has led to chapels about eating disorders and mental health. We've also reflected on different religions and what they think of war (A2).

This educative quality of chapel is also referred to by one of the houseparents, in relation to a Muslim boy in his boarding house:

He was quite happy to go to chapel because he understood that the message being preached by the Chaplain was a similar message on how to lead your life and how to perceive life as if he'd been in his local mosque (A7).

This observation fits with the earlier description of the approach to chapel in School A as inclusive and broad, enabling pupils of all faiths and none to take something from the experience. Both pupil participants acknowledged this contribution of chapel to School:

I think it's definitely important to have some sort of belief, or at least be exposed to some sort of belief. I think that's definitely a good thing about chapel. A lot of people block out religion and any belief, whether that be Christianity or whatever. I feel like they're blocking out a chapter of their life. You know, you really should consider your beliefs. So yeah, I think it is definitely important that we have chapel. You know, despite what pupils

might want, they might want to lie-in, but it should probably be forced on people to a point. For the greater good, you know it's like homework. You don't want to do it, but it will benefit you in the long run (A14).

This is quite a significant observation, from a pupil who does not identify as a 'committed Christian', and it is in line with the head's comment to me that there can be a difference between what pupils sometimes want to do, and what might be good for them. In this we see chapel in School A potentially contributing an opportunity to learn about and reflect on what it means to lead a religious life, even if pupils decide not to adopt such beliefs for themselves. It is clear within the aims and ethos of chapel described by the head and the chaplain that this is more important than simply preaching the message of Christianity. Even a current pupil who identifies as an atheist suggested:

> It's really important that people should have a general awareness of religion, and some sort of philosophical and moral ideas. I suppose chapel is a good way of actually raising awareness about the sorts of things relating to a religious life (A16).

The consistency of opinion was striking, across 8 of the 10 participants from School A, that chapel offers a space for reflection and religious learning, through exposure to broadly Christian beliefs and teachings. Also, that this exposure is not pushy or demanding in School A, but done in such a way as to allow pupils to explore their thoughts and beliefs on their own terms.

Opportunity for calm reflection

The next most prevalent sub-theme within Theme 2, described by 6 of the 10 participants, regardless of their religious background and beliefs, was the opportunity for calm reflection. In a school week seen as highly instrumentalised and purposive, chapel was described by some as an enforced opportunity for 'time-out'. Chapel was described as providing a temporary shift away from utilitarian calculations about outcomes, and success, thus affording the pupils and staff much-needed mental and emotional respite. As the head of religious studies put it, "chapel should be a place for quiet time and very gentle spiritual messages, so anybody can go along and take something from it" (A5). Again, chapel in School

A is described as accessible and potentially beneficial to all. Both houseparents expressed this idea:

> Chapel gives the pupils some quiet and some peace. In the world in which they live, they're getting pings and notifications all the time, and actually it's a chance for them to just switch off. Even if they don't listen to what's going on, they can just sit there, maybe just daydreaming, and I believe that's really important (A6).

The second houseparent described this possible contribution in similar terms:

> Most of them will say they really like the fact that they can start the day in a quiet way, and just relax. Some of them are honest and will say that they don't really listen to what's being said, it's just the fact that they can sit there with their own thoughts and just start the day like that. Those who don't really believe, or don't really care about what's being said, I think they still like the fact that it is a calm start to a day. Then the quiet, and the stillness, and the meditation all really contribute to the kids. It's a chance to pause, and breathe (A7).

The former and current pupils shared similar ideas about this contribution of chapel; it is not just something that the teachers and senior leaders believe, or hope is the case. The religious aspect of chapel is not what matters most for this contribution. It is the space and calm that the pupils seem to value, as one alumnus described:

> Regardless of anything to do with Christianity, it's just a time of peace and solace and reflection. Reflections on our studies, on our relationships with our housemates, and our classmates, and the Chaplain designs his services so they are centred around things like that. Without having that centre of gravity bringing us back to that way of thinking, we would all just be going through our school life thinking 'OK, I need to do well in this subject, and this subject, and this subject, to get my grades' (A10).

The fact that this benefit and contribution was not exclusively described by those with Christian faith is captured in this response from one current pupil, an atheist: "You can actually just sit down and reflect a bit. I feel like I need to be there in chapel in order to reflect

on something" (A16). The toned-down nature of chapel as a Christian worship service continued to come through strongly across the interview data from School A.

Case Summary

Chapel in School A was characterised by participants as contributing to the personal and collective life of the school in two distinctive and significant ways. Firstly, it was described as an important contributor to the social and communal identity of the school. The sociological benefit of the community coming together in one place, with a shared sense of purpose, was referenced by 8 out of the 10 participants, irrespective of their religious beliefs. Secondly, the distinctive character of chapel services as a religious moment in the school affords pupils space to consider some of the deeper questions and ideas about human life.

Whilst described variously by participants, the head's phrase, "the necessity of the numinous" (A1), does capture the nature of this contribution rather effectively. In contrast to Schools P and C, very few participants referred to chapel playing an important role in times of grief and crisis, by offering 'comfort and reassurance'. It is possible that members of the community at School A do not perceive chapel in this way, but perhaps more likely that they have not been exposed to such a situation in recent times.

School C Case Report: "The Space of Non-Utility"

Introducing School C and its chapel

The Independent Schools Council describes School C as a co-educational, boarding and day school, for pupils aged 10-18: The school currently has just over 1000 pupils, of which roughly 500 are boys and 500 are girls. The split between boarders and day-pupils is also very even, with almost exactly 500 of each. The annual fees are £36,500 for boarders and £22,000 for day-pupils (ISC, 2021).

The school's website describes the school's Christian foundation and its dedication to nurturing a life of spiritual understanding for its pupils, through a chapel that sits "at the 'heart' of the community" (School website, 2021), which does seem to be a phrase that often gets used in relation to chapel in such schools. Respect and acceptance of pupils with different religious backgrounds is also recognised as important and is reinforced in the chaplain's expressed commitment to providing a quiet and reflective space for all pupils, regardless of their religious beliefs. Again, this is something of a recurring theme. A broad approach to religious worship is something that was repeatedly described by participants, including the chaplain; chapel is for everyone, and whilst services are structured around Christian worship, the benefits and contribution are intended, and perceived by several participants, to extend to those of other faiths and none.

Another central theme reflecting the possible contribution of chapel, suggested in the online literature, and repeated in the interview data, is the opportunity that chapel provides for coming together as a community, and for building a sense of tradition, identity and belonging. This was described by several participants in relation to the names of fallen old boys from the two world wars that are displayed in the chapel. School C has no assembly hall, again a recurring theme, and chapel is the only place for regular communal gathering.

The role and value of music, which also forms a central theme in the interview data, is another aspect of chapel's contribution to school life that is alluded to on the school's website, described as supporting a 'spiritual atmosphere'. The comments of the director of music,

presented later in this report, provide insight into the way that, through the opportunity for collective music-making, chapel can be seen to provide a particular and distinctive enhancement to the life of the community in School C.

Apart from the school's website, another source of online information about the school and its chapel is the latest inspection report. The Independent Schools' Inspectorate (ISI) inspects schools in terms of their 'educational quality', which is subdivided into two main sub-themes: 'pupils' learning and achievements' and 'pupils' personal development'. In their most recent EQI inspection (2019), School C received the highest grade, 'excellent', in both. Within the judgement about 'pupils' personal development' there are 8 criteria, of which the 3rd is 'spiritual understanding'. Schools are graded for evidence that they 'develop spiritual understanding and an appreciation of non-material aspects of life, whether religious, philosophical or other' (ISI, 2019). In the latest ISI report, in this category, School C was reported as having a strong sense of the non-material aspects of life and pupils were described as having regular encouragement to reflect on spiritual matters. Chapel, is once again described as being at the 'heart' of the school, affording the pupils a chance to reflect on their faith, or reflect quietly on the important questions of life.

The suggestion that chapel contributes an opportunity for quiet reflection, away from the business (and busy-ness) of the school day, is a theme that comes through strongly in the interview data, and which will be outlined more fully later in this report. The characterisation of chapel as 'the space of non-utility' came from my interview with the head of religious studies and reflects an idea that chapel potentially provides a break from the purposiveness of all other school engagements and enterprises. This quality of chapel, reflecting a physical and temporal space away from other school business, comes through in several participants' reflections and will be explored further in this report.

Before moving to a presentation of the main themes from the interview data, it is worth noting that chapel, and the idea of spiritual development, are not given any sort of prominence within the school's promotional materials. This might reflect the observation of the head of religious studies that "we are a strangely secular school" (C5), which is another

important idea that will be developed further in this case report. Something that emerged from the data, led in part by the head's comments, is that whilst chapel is a significant feature of school life, it is not valued widely across the school community for its religious contribution. Both the head and the chaplain acknowledge that very few pupils would attend if chapel was optional. As the chaplain put it:

> If chapel was voluntary, it would be empty, I think. I think people are moving further and further away from it, I suppose, and I have to print the Lord's Prayer. The basic understanding is just not there anymore (C2).

A further challenge to the perception of chapel in School C, described by several participants, is the physical geography of the campus and the fact that the chapel building is not centrally located. This might speak to the idea of it as "the space of non-utility" too, being somehow detached from the comings and goings of everyday school life, which also echoes Durkheim's thinking about the role of 'the sacred'. The director of music commented on the impact of this on the diminished role of chapel in the school: "if you wanted to boost chapel here, you would rebuild it more centrally" (C3). Several participants referred to a feeling that chapel is geographically peripheral and that its contribution is equally peripheral in the minds of many pupils. These views will need to be analysed alongside the various positive impressions that also came through in the interview data.

Introducing the participants and their beliefs

I interviewed 15 participants from School C. Whilst I was able to secure most of the participants I wanted, I did not manage to interview any current parents, and only one alumnus, but I did interview 7 pupils, which was more than I managed in the other case-study schools. The grid below shows who the participants were, how they responded to questions about their religious beliefs, and whether they felt that compulsory, whole-school chapel was a practice that should be maintained.

Participant Title		Belief	Compulsory chapel?
C1	Head	2	Yes
C2	Chaplain	1	Yes
C3	Director of Music	1	Yes
C4	Director of Marketing	1	Yes
C5	Head of RS	2	Yes
C6	Houseparent	2	Yes
C7	Houseparent	1	Yes
C10	Alumnus	2	Yes
C12	Current Pupil	3	No
C13	Current Pupil	2	Yes
C14	Current Pupil	3	No
C15	Current Pupil	1	Yes
C16	Current Pupil	4	No
C18	Current Pupil	2	No
C19	Current Pupil	1	Yes

1 = Committed Christian
2 = Believes in 'something higher'
3 = Atheist
4 = Agnostic

Yes: Compulsory whole-school chapel
No: Compulsory whole-school chapel

Figure 15: School C participants & their basic beliefs

Most participants expressed a degree of affinity for Christianity, and most approved of the practice of whole school chapel. The two pupils who described themselves as atheists, and the one pupil who was agnostic about his beliefs, were three of the four who opposed the idea of chapel being compulsory for all. However, despite the broadly positive leaning towards compulsory chapel, there was a tone of negativity that underpinned the data. There

were positive references, and various ideas about the valuable contribution of chapel, but it is important to set these in a context that felt at times oppositional and at other times ambivalent about the value of chapel. One houseparent said:

> I have very few Christian children in house; very few I'd say who genuinely believe, 2 or 3 out of 76 perhaps. There are some who might be a bit like me, which is to say they like the idea of it, they are trying to understand it, but they can't, or don't, or don't want to, and I think that's because chapel is only once a week, and for them it's a waste of their time (C5).

One alumnus said something similar:

> I can't think of any of my close friends that would identify as religious. We had our five-year reunion out in the cricket pavilion, so a different type of religion perhaps. Mostly chapel was viewed as a bit of a ball-ache, more than anything. I can't think of many of my immediate friends who took it seriously or wanted to go. I think it was seen as an obligation. We've got to sit quietly. We've got to listen to these stupid people spout off about stuff we don't care about. The feeling was it was just a bit of a pain, and maybe a bit stupid that we had to do it (C10).

Several of the current pupils revealed a similar view, with one pupil saying "I don't think chapel adds anything. Most of the time, I forget about chapel, and I've noticed that some of my friends have the same view" (C12). Another said, "people are there because they have to be, not because they want to be. Most people don't like chapel because it's a waste of their time. The only reason people put up with it is because they have to" (C16). A further pupil said "It doesn't really contribute at all to the broader life of the school. We don't do it very often" (C18).

Notwithstanding these views, all pupils at School C attend and experience chapel at least once a week, so there is still plenty of scope for exploring my participants' views around the potential contribution that it makes to school life, and to individual pupils. The sense that Chapel is less highly regarded at School C than at the other two case study schools is important to keep in mind though, and possible reasons for this will be explored in the next chapter.

Theme 1: Building community, culture, and identity

		1. Building community, culture, and identity					
		1.1	1.2	1.3	1.4	1.5	1.6
C1	Head	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Green
C2	Chaplain	Green	Green	Green	Red	Green	Green
C3	Director of Music	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green
C4	Director of Marketing	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green
C5	Head of RS	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green
C6	Houseparent	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green	Red
C7	Houseparent	Red	Red	Red	Red	Green	Green
C10	Alumnus	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red
C12	Current Pupil	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
C13	Current Pupil	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
C14	Current Pupil	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
C15	Current Pupil	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green	Red
C16	Current Pupil	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green	Red
C18	Current Pupil	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
C19	Current Pupil	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green	Red

1.1	Community cohesion and identity
1.2	School tradition and history
1.3	National cultural identity
1.4	Moral messages and values education
1.5	Communal singing
1.6	School marketing and promotion

Figure 16: Prevalence of sub-themes within Theme 1 in School C

It is worth noting at the outset that there are fewer green boxes in this grid than there were for the equivalent grid for the other two schools. This does back up the idea that the general attitude towards chapel was less positive in School C. Nevertheless, within this theme, two

sub-themes were far more widely referenced than the others, and to a similar extent as they were in Schools P and A: 'Communal singing' (11 out of 15 participants) and 'community cohesion and identity' (10 out 15 participants). It is notable that these are two largely secular aspects of Chapel's provision. Analysis of these themes forms the largest part of this case report. 'School marketing and promotion' was referenced by 6 out of 15 participants, so this sub-theme deserves some attention too. 'Moral messages and values education', 'school tradition and history', and 'national cultural identity' only had a few references between them, so these will not be presented within this report. Again, in contrast to the other two case study schools, the impact of chapel on the lives of pupils at School C does seem to be less significant.

Communal singing

A helpful place to start this section is with the data generated in my interview with the director of music. Unsurprisingly, he had a lot to say on the potential contribution of communal singing in chapel. He started by suggesting, "hymn singing is the bit in chapel when everyone participates, and actually a lot of children will participate in that, irrespective of their faith position" (C3). He felt that "hymn singing is a real positive here" and "the kids really like it". He also explained that the pupils would often ask for an extra hymn singing practice on the day of a large rugby match, "as part of psyching themselves up" (C3). This comment on its own, coming as it does from the director of music, would not be enough to confirm the idea that hymn singing is a positive part of the chapel experience for pupils, and in fact only 3 of the 7 pupils did refer to it in their interview.

The director of music's reflection on the non-religious aspect of hymn singing was very pertinent to this case study report, especially given the characterization of the school already presented as "strangely secular" (C5). Despite being a committed Christian, the director of music suggested that the religious content of the hymns is not the relevant feature. Rather, it is the simple fact of having a mechanism and a means for communal singing that matters, and which chapel provides for. As the director of music explained:

You probably could achieve this with secular music, but there isn't a repertoire of culturally central, secular songs. There isn't a secular songbook that has that same cultural significance to us as a country. The trouble with a lot of the more evangelical, modern-day hymns, is that they ask you to carry Christianity on your sleeve: 'I believe this', 'I believe that'. I feel that is a very difficult thing to say to the average teenager 'you must sing this', which presents very personal worshipping. I don't believe it's right to force them to sing in that way, whereas the slightly sort of third person, 19ᵗʰ Century Christianity is actually, bizarrely, however old-fashioned, more palatable in the sort of compulsory chapel situation we do (C3).

This comment about the type of hymns sung in chapel at School C creates the impression of Christian beliefs taking second place to the other benefits and contributions of communal singing. Rather than evangelical, modern hymns, which can be quite confessional, the 'traditional' hymns potentially allow for a distancing between the music and the message. One houseparent reflected something similar: "They love, love, love singing, and they will sing all around house, but if you give them choral music to sing, it turns them off straight away, and they hate it, and that's not what we want" (C7). The reference to 'choral' singing was made specifically about those pupils who sing in the chapel Choir, not about the general hymn singing', which this houseparent seemed positive about.

Despite not all the pupils referring to the singing in chapel, some of their comments presented a similar impression about the pupils' enjoyment of singing (C15 & C19), with one who was agnostic about his own religious beliefs, saying:

I think people enjoy the music and hymns. It does enhance chapel. People really enjoy singing Jerusalem because it's the school hymn. It's the camaraderie and companionship, and that's one of the few things at school that generates that kind of vibe (C16).

A rousing rendition of 'Jerusalem' in the morning appears, potentially, to have more to do with uniting the school in readiness for a big rugby match than it does about claiming anything to do with Jesus or God. The chaplain himself also acknowledged the idea of the religious message playing second fiddle to the fun of singing together: "A large part of chapel is about

singing, interestingly; so, people are genuinely disappointed if I have to cut a hymn, because someone's been preaching too long. They're genuinely sad about that" (C2).

The director of marketing was another participant who highlighted the value of chapel as "a chance to sing" (C4) and one houseparent described the singing as "catharsis, community, sharing songs, and singing as loudly as they possibly can, with the 6th Form leading the way" (C6). There was a reasonably consistent sense across the interview data from School C that the pupils enjoy the opportunity to sing together as a community, but that the religious content and context for the hymns was essentially incidental for many. Again, from this emerges a characterisation of the non-utile; singing as a community at School C appears fun and socially binding and can be done just for the enjoyment of it. For many, it seems that there is no further requirement to consider the value and contribution that communal singing brings to the community in School C.

Community cohesion and identity

The second most prevalent sub-theme to emerge from the interview data, which communal singing has already been shown to contribute towards, is the way that chapel supports community cohesion and identity. 10 out of 15 participants described this contribution. The head suggested that a "powerful" feature of chapel is that "it brings the community together":

> Pupils feel a sense of togetherness. Where's the place where they finally burst into tears? It's not the Leavers' Ball, it's the Leavers' chapel, and they realise then that they were connected to something bigger, that chapel did lie as an anchor in their lives (C1).

The chaplain also spoke about this feature of chapel: "It is a time when they are a community and they are together, and there are not many of those" (C2). Again, chapel is presented not in terms of what it produces, nor what the pupils might achieve through attending, but rather in reference to what the space and practice potentially offer, which for many is a sense of 'being together'. The director of music described the contribution of chapel as "community more than anything else" (C3) and one houseparent referred to "that community feel" (C6).

The director of marketing described the "vital effect of all going down to chapel together" (C4). So, even the walk down to the chapel, notwithstanding anything that might happen once the pupils are there, is described by some as a valuable feature of its contribution.

One alumnus said:

> Community is the word that leaps out. You bring everyone together, and it has that emotional weight to it, and that kind of meshing quality, I think. It might make it easier to foster school spirit and collective direction (C10).

Many of the current pupils presented a similar impression, with one expressing this very clearly:

> I feel it's as much a social element as a religious one. You know, it brings things together. It really ties in all the pupils, no matter what the different years or ages, different faiths, things like that. So, I feel it's quite a central element to school (C13).

Again, the strong implication is the religious element of chapel has little to do with it, although of course Durkheim would argue that it is precisely the appeal to the sacred that enhances the community-building aspect of religious practice. A further pupil spoke about "a sense of community" (C15) and another said "chapel brings a sense of community to the school. Without it, the school would feel much more separated; so, I think it's a very important thing" (C19). Even though this pupil was a 'committed Christian', it is the communal nature of chapel that came across as more important to her than the religious aspect. The identity forming and socially binding quality of chapel was its most significant contribution for several participants from School C. For them, just being together, in the 'space of non-utility' seemed a valuable enough reason for the practice of compulsory whole-school chapel to be maintained. This might help to explain why 11 out of 15 participants were in favour of maintaining the practice, even though only 6 of them might fit the description, for this thesis' purposes, as a 'committed Christian'.

School marketing and promotion

Although none of the current or former pupils referred to this potential contribution of chapel, 6 of the 7 adult participants did. However, chapel was not presented as a central feature of the school's marketing and promotion, and several participants said it played little to no part in it. The head said:

> Chapel is not often part of my discussions with prospective parents. I think parents generally just expect to see it there. I don't think we often get asked about it. It tends to be shown as part of a visit, but partly because it's right there at the start of your tour. You know, you've parked your car right next to it (C1).

The chaplain's comments offer a helpful insight on this potential contribution, which reflected a recent conversation he had had about modern school marketing:

> I noticed recently that there weren't many chapel pictures going out in the marketing materials. I spoke to the Director of Marketing and said, "why is this – should I be pushing for this?" And he said "the problem is that the trend is moving away from corporate pictures and corporate images. So, if you look at the website, it's not pictures of everyone together, it's all about the personal experience; you see a child smiling with another child, or you see one person within the orchestra. And the problem with chapel is it's not a one-to-one experience". So, he was saying, if you wanted to have that kind of stuff, it would be me rehearsing someone in the chapel for a reading. You see what I mean? Something like that, where you'd be able to focus on someone learning something or doing something. So, the chapel is used in promoting the school, but I wonder actually, because of the parents that we have, I'm not sure whether they are that traditional, whether they care that much about the tradition of chapel. I think it's far more about 'what can you do for my child?' and I don't know whether chapel would naturally fit within this (C2).

This observation speaks directly to the characterization emerging within this case of chapel as a space of 'non-utility', hence why it does not feature much on the school's website or promotional materials. Chapel for some does not readily translate into 'what can my child get out of this?', which is suggested above as one of the core points of focus for modern school marketing. The director of music said that "chapel sits there as one of the pillars that make up the school, but it's not placed as a core pillar or anything like that, it's one of many different

pillars that make up the smorgasbord" (C3). The director of marketing referred to a slightly different notion of the potential 'marketability' of chapel:

> Parents associate chapel with a bit of formality. Most of our parents coming to a private school will accept there are occasions when students should have formal events, even if they don't necessarily want to attend. I think our parents understand and buy into the fact that there's going to be a formal chapel once a week (C4).

Again, chapel is described by some as important, not necessarily because of its focus on religion, but because it affords certain opportunities. The head of religious studies talked about the hypocrisy of "reducing chapel" and making a selling point out of "the school's supposed commitment to the sacred" (C5). For him, the contribution of chapel is that it is "the space of non-utility", and therefore it sits uncomfortably for him when it becomes part of the marketing process.

One of the houseparents reflected on the contribution of chapel to her tours and conversations with prospective parents:

> It's never a deal-breaker, because most of the schools that parents are looking at will have some sort of chapel. It's about how you explain the use of chapel. I will tell them why the chapel is here, when it was built, and the significance of it. Chapel is a lot more than a place we come to 3 times a week: it commemorates the old boys who fell in the war; it is a very beautiful building; and then I talk about what chapel does. It brings people together, but in more than a religious sense, also in a time of grief, in a time of celebration. It's more than just the building that we sit in 3 times a week. If it was purely about religion, we would face questions about why pupils are made to come. I try to get prospective parents to think about the building in different ways and it will serve different purposes for their children (C7).

Despite a variance of opinions about the 'marketability' of chapel, it certainly seems to play some sort of role in the school's promotional work. However, some of the key players in the marketing of the school seem ambivalent about the nature of this contribution. The idea of chapel as something that prospective parents expect to see, and accept, rather than

something they believe to be an important part of the school's offer, came through from several participants. If the true value of chapel is its non-utility, as the head of religious studies suggested, then it would make sense for chapel not to become a key component in the school's promotional work.

Theme 2: Engaging with the sacred, and taking pupils beyond their everyday and profane experiences

Engaging with the sacred, and taking pupils beyond their everyday and profane experiences		2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5
C1	Head	Green	Green	Green	Red	Red
C2	Chaplain	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green
C3	Director of Music	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green
C4	Director of Marketing	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green
C5	Head of RS	Green	Red	Green	Red	Red
C6	Houseparent	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green
C7	Houseparent	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green
C10	Alumnus	Red	Red	Green	Red	Red
C12	Current Pupil	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red
C13	Current Pupil	Green	Red	Red	Red	Green
C14	Current Pupil	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red
C15	Current Pupil	Green	Green	Red	Red	Red
C16	Current Pupil	Red	Red	Red	Red	Red
C18	Current Pupil	Green	Red	Red	Red	Red
C19	Current Pupil	Green	Red	Red	Green	Green

2.1	Engagement with faith and religion
2.2	Opportunity for calm reflection
2.3	Aesthetics and culture
2.4	Individual and subjective well-being
2.5	Comfort and reassurance

Figure 17: Prevalence of sub-themes within Theme 2 in School C

Very few participants from School C referred to the idea that chapel contributes 'aesthetics and culture' or 'individual and subjective well-being', so these two sub-themes will not be included in this report. The most prevalent sub-theme was 'engagement with faith and

religion', which 13 of the 15 participants spoke about. The other two sub-themes that will be presented are 'comfort and reassurance', which 7 participants referred to, and 'opportunity for calm reflection', which 6 participants spoke about. As with Theme 1, when compared to Schools P and A, there are fewer green spaces on the grid, further confirming the sense that School C's attitude to chapel is less positive overall. That said, the three sub-themes that I will explore here still get enough coverage in the data to provide meaningful insight into them as potential contributions of chapel in School C.

Engagement with faith and religion

As this case report has shown to this point, the contribution of chapel at School C is seen by most participants to be rooted in the way it supports a sense of community. The religious messaging appears to be handled discreetly and not explicitly. However, a significant proportion of the participants did refer to the value of learning about religion and the idea that it is good to know what a life of faith looks like, even if it is then rejected.

The chaplain spoke about the pupils joining School C generally being "very ill-informed about Christianity", and he clearly considered part of his role as educational:

> You know, a lot of it is about dispelling myths. I have a real concern that a lot of people say stuff like 'Christians believe this'; like there's a genuine belief that the Church is very anti gay people (C2).

The recurring impression of School C as a "strangely secular" (C5) institution, despite its compulsory whole-school worship, comes through again in some of what the chaplain says about the educational value of chapel:

> I can't just send out an email and say, 'who wants to get confirmed?', like some Chaplains in more traditional schools. I go around to the year groups, and I speak to every single person, and explain to them what confirmation is, because they won't necessarily know. I then have to meet with them to do the first lesson with them, before they can "come out" to their parents. They need the ammunition to say what it is to their parents,

because I've had e-mails from parents that are like, 'what is this voodoo?', because it's not part of their experience (C2).

When he speaks about "more traditional schools", the Chaplain is alluding to an idea that School C is perhaps more liberal, progressive, and pluralist than many UK private senior schools. This would also account for the way that the attitude to chapel is less positive overall. Whilst this study has not explored the social makeup of the parents at each of the case study schools, there might be something of value to explore here in future studies. The characterization of Christianity as something that would remain deeply foreign to most pupils, were they not to have an experience of it through chapel, was also commented on by the director of music. He spoke about the educational value of chapel "creating generations of kids for whom Church, as an entity, is not a foreign body; its prayers, its liturgy, its songs, you know, these are part of their broader cultural and social experience" (C3). The director of marketing reflected similarly that "so few of the pupils are going to Church with their families that Christian worship is probably an experience they only have at school" (C4). One of the houseparents articulated something similar, saying:

> If we don't expose pupils to it, there is never the experience, so it is never something that they might potentially go back to. If you want to figure this out, how and why the world came to exist, you're going to have to engage with it more (C7).

One pupil also saw chapel as a place to discuss the big questions of the world in "a Christian manner" (C12). Several participants spoke directly about the difference between assembly and chapel, highlighting the opportunity for chapel to provide exposure and experience of religious beliefs and ways of thinking. One pupil said there is "more meaning in chapel" (C19), and another went a bit further, saying the following:

> Chapel can be really impactful, because it uses religious elements to get a point across, and that can really help some people. The spiritual side of it is an important element. I already feel that the Chaplain is almost like a figurehead for the school, alongside the Head, because he appeals to the pupils in a more spiritual sense, rather than just an administrative sense like the Head (C13).

Another pupil also spoke about the way that chapel can help to educate pupils about religious matters, which "might help them when they are older" (C14). Another pupil described herself as a practising Christian and said that chapel helped to remind pupils about what they believe and why. There was a strong sense across the interview data from School C that participants recognised a distinctive tone and content to chapel, in contrast to assembly. The opportunity to learn about and engage with religious beliefs and practices was a key part of this distinction, as described by 13 of the 15 people I interviewed from School C.

Comfort and reassurance

One distinctive contribution described of chapel in School C is reflected in several participants' comments about the role that it played in times of tragedy. In recent years, one member of staff died suddenly in post, two pupils lost their lives in a car crash, and one boy took his own life. Against this backdrop of emotional pain and confusion, chapel clearly played an important role for many as a way of providing comfort and reassurance. This came out in several participants' interviews, with the director of music also recalling these tragic moments "when the pupils poured into chapel" and "chapel became a very natural focal point" (C3). The chaplain had an interesting analogy on this front, and having previously been a military chaplain, he was well placed to make this observation:

> They say in the military that chaplains are a pain until people go into action, and then suddenly, you're needed, and that's how it is I suppose. I think it is the same now people have got concerns about Covid, and they've been on their own a lot, so there's a lot going on in their minds. It is also a place where people go to mourn, deaths of students and things like that. I feel that pastoral support for students and staff tends to be when things go really badly wrong, in terms of you know someone's death, it's touch and go, something like that; that's when the chapel is just filled with people lighting candles, writing notes, and saying their prayers, and stuff like that. I want to give them the tools so that if they lose someone dear to them, and their hearts broken, then they would feel comfortable walking into a church (C2).

As with other sub-themes discussed in this report, the contribution of chapel as a place for comfort and reassurance does not appear to be exclusively felt by those with a religious faith. The director of marketing made this point:

> Some of the pupils who would never have perhaps thought that's how they would react, have reacted in that way. Just to go down, have a space to reflect, to think, which can be hard to find in a boarding house (C4).

Chapel makes a special contribution in times of sorrow and emotional challenge. Both houseparents certainly felt the same way: "chapel does come into its own as a safe place" (C6) and "chapel has really become a place of safety and security for children, whether they are from a religious background or not" (C7).

Opportunity for calm reflection

The final way that participants described chapel as taking pupils beyond the everyday and profane is as a place and time for calm reflection. This did seem more significant for the adults than the pupils though. The head, whilst clearly not an especially religious man, said:

> I think the principle of stillness is important. A place to sit and listen. You know, it's the one place in the day when they're not on their mobile phones, where they're not bombarded. Chapel provides stillness, and listening, and the beauty of music, and calmness. I think it's really important. For me, it's 15 minutes in a day where no one can bother me, and I quite like that (C1).

The director of music, perhaps unsurprisingly, reflected on the role of music in chapel within this contribution:

> I think, if we get it right, it's time to stop and reflect, which is not a feature of modern schooling. For those not actually making music, it's a really good time for everyone just to stop and reflect on what's been said, and put their brain into neutral, and those times for reflection are really good (C3).

Other participants saw chapel as a space to step aside from the rush and demands of everyday school life, including the houseparents and the director of marketing. An environment where things are a bit calmer and more reflective was seen as very valuable, giving the pupils "a chance to breathe" (C4). According to one houseparent, the appeal to the sacred comes partly in the "respect for peace and quiet" (C6) that chapel seems to invite. Again, it is this distinction that is drawn between chapel as a place for its own sake, "the space of non-utility", that seems to provide the basis of this contribution. The rest of the school week is focused on some sort of utilitarian gain, but chapel sits outside of this. As seen across the other schools, and in this case study data, this benefit seems to transcend religious beliefs, and is helpfully captured by one of the houseparents: "even if they are not religious, this is a space pupils can come to in a busy schedule and have some time to themself and their thoughts, and I think they like that" (C7).

Case summary

The head of religious studies, as a former university professor of philosophy, was well acquainted with Durkheim, and his view is worth including in its entirety here because it does such a good job of articulating the character and contribution of chapel in School C along the theoretical lines that have been applied to this study:

> One of the great justifications for chapel, in this sort of institution, in what is increasingly a highly instrumentalized process, is precisely that it is the space of non-utility. And that of course is nothing new, in the sense that it is the space of the sacred rather than the profane. That for me is the great justification for it. And, in a sense, it perpetuates what the institution as a whole ought to be, which is something above and beyond the world of utility and instrumental cost-benefit considerations. That of course is incredibly naive as education has become very instrumentalised, particularly in private schools, where people pay a fortune, so you want results, and you want product, and outcome, and chapel remains that, literally and metaphorically, that sacred space that is actually useless. It's useless, but that's its glory. In lots of people's minds, it's associated with this sort of ecumenical view, the idea of a neutral space, so what in Durkheim's register we might think of being a sacred space, rather than a profane instrumental space. I think

some people think of it as this neutral space, because in the modern school it's a place where you can potentially gather people of all faiths and none (C5).

Chapel in School C feels separate from the rest of the school, physically and in terms of purpose, and yet it remains a vital focal point for the community too. There was an overwhelmingly secular feeling at School C from the participants I spoke to, and yet the sacred space drew evident respect and appreciation. The various ways that chapel at School C contributes to the community are partly the result of it being 'the space of non-utility'. The appeal to the sacred, continuing with Durkheim's distinction, evidently gives chapel scope for contributing in a way that other parts of the institution cannot.

Chapter 5: Discussion & Findings

Introduction

The three cases set out in the previous chapter detail my analysis of the schools and the place of chapel within them, highlighting important areas of commonality, but also some key differences. In this chapter I will discuss these areas of overlap, which underpin a significant portion of my findings, and consider what the differences might reveal. In support of my own data, I will refer to the theoretical account of religion offered by Durkheim and to studies that have explored the impact of religion and collective acts of worship on individuals and communities; I will also refer to studies that help to shed light on the potentially distinctive contribution that chapel makes to UK private senior schools.

Durkheim's sociological account of religion

The head of School A, helpfully characterizes various participants' views on the contribution of chapel by saying that "chapel is about the importance of community and the necessity of the numinous". His comment illustrates the two central themes that have emerged from my data. It also resonates with the influential sociological account of religion offered by Durkheim, who famously proposed that the essential quality of religion is the powerful way in which it offers a unifying force within a social group, through its distinction between the profane and sacred.

For Durkheim, societies utilise the power of religious practices by distinguishing between those things that are considered mundane and earthly or 'profane', and those that are considered elevated or 'sacred'. In most cases, the contributions of chapel described by my participants can be understood in terms of this distinction. On one hand, chapel is shown to contribute towards an enhanced sense of community, culture, and identity, offering other earthly and material benefits to the school, such as a marketing opportunity. However, more significant for many participants was the fact that chapel provides time and space to reflect on the spiritual dimension of life and deeper questions about human existence, such as the possible existence of God, and issues around morality and mortality.

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An opportunity to engage with the 'sacred' seems to be valued by most participants as a unique feature of chapel, which does not readily present itself in other areas of school life. However, the 'sacred', in broad terms, is certainly not an exclusively Christian concept; it is not even necessarily a religious one. Whilst the spiritual quality of chapel appears to frame its contribution, it does not seem to rely on Christian liturgy in any evangelical sense. Assembly might bring a school community together, using a language of shared values and purpose, but it does not appear to provide the elevated quality that chapel does, by virtue of chapel's appeal to the sacred. As Morrison says, religion for Durkheim is nothing more than 'the expression of society in consecrated form' (Morrison, 2006, p. 233). The contribution of chapel can perhaps most clearly be understood in these terms.

Theme 1: Building community, culture, and identity

Durkheim suggested that "if religion has given birth to all that is essential in society, it is because the idea of society is the very soul of religion" (1912, p. 168). Religion can be a powerful mechanism for drawing societies and cultures together, and this seems to be the case in relation to chapel. Durkheim's assertion that religion is a social institution providing social cohesion (1912) has been observed within many social studies; similarly, the contribution that chapel is seen to make to the social cohesion and identity of my three case study schools was significant. Durkheim proposed that people's sense of unity and belonging are enhanced through participation in rituals, ceremonies, belief systems, and orientations and behaviours towards symbols and objects perceived to be sacred. This idea did come through in the way that many participants spoke about chapel.

4 sub-themes are presented here in this section of the discussion on how chapel helps to build a school community, culture, and identity:

- Community cohesion and identity
- Moral messages and values education
- Communal singing
- School marketing and promotion

Community cohesion and identity

One of the most widely referenced contributions of chapel, from participants in all three case study schools, and described within the various schools' promotional and policy literature, was the role that it appears to play in helping to enhance the school's sense of community and identity. Arguably this is unsurprising, given that chapel provides one of the few occasions in the week when the whole school, or as much of the school as can fit within the chapel building, gathers in one place. Interestingly, the head from School P explained that it was an important condition of the school's development plan that the number of pupils should never exceed the capacity of the chapel building. It is worth considering some of the ways in which chapel appears to contribute towards building this sense of community and identity, distinguishing it, and seemingly elevating it in importance, above assembly.

Aside from the physical gathering together that chapel enables, the sacred quality of the occasion was noted by participants in all three case study schools and appeared to play a part in the community cohesion and identity that it generated. This idea fits closely alongside the findings of Parker (2009) in his account of 'theorising sacred space in educational contexts', where a sense of the 'sacred' was clearly seen to strengthen a feeling of belonging and identity across his three case study schools. One of the key findings of the current study is the way that chapel is evidently different from assembly in tone and feel, and therefore in the nature of its contribution to the school. This point came across powerfully, even in School P and School A, where the chapel building is the very space that is used for assembly. This speaks to the apparently different nature and quality of the chapel experience, aligning with Durkheim's claim that something in religion's appeal to the sacred applies a powerfully socialising force to a community. Assembly was repeatedly described as more routine and mundane, allowing for general notices and the business of the school week, whereas chapel was felt to offer something different.

Ammerman (2009) offers something of a template for a typical chapel service when she refers to the idea that "the gathered congregation is very likely to sing together, to read sacred texts, and to listen to some sort of inspirational speech" (p. 565). These elements of chapel emerge strongly from the data, with singing proving particularly important. However, the religious

content of chapel is very rarely described by participants as the primary function of chapel; in fact, even the three chaplains were unable to assert this. One alumnus put this idea most clearly: "I think being with people, not just passing them in school; being with people, you're all there, focusing together on the same thing, singing the same songs, listening to the same voice. I think it brings the community together" (P15).

In their meta-analysis of the effects of religious gathering on subjective well-being, Spencer *et al* (2016) examined 139 closely related studies. By far the strongest correlation found across these studies was between 'social participation' and 'subjective well-being'. My data resonates with their analysis. The particulars of Christian worship and Christian teaching were less prominent in most participants' minds than the benefits accrued by virtue of chapel contributing an opportunity to gather, sing, reflect, and sit in contemplative and companiable silence together. This idea was backed up by the head of School P, when he said that "aside from the religious element, chapel helps pupils to feel part of something" (P1). Many other participants voiced similar views, differentiating between the spirituality and otherness of chapel on one hand, and any reference to its doctrinal content on the other.

Guest (2007), Roof (1978), and McIntosh, Sykes, & Kubena (2002) explore the many ways that religious worship provides a community building experience for people. Membership of the same religious gathering has been shown to rank in importance above all sorts of other potentially unifying characteristics (such as race, age, and gender) in terms of its socialising effect. This same idea is promoted as a contribution of chapel on all three schools' websites, emphasising the intention, at least, that chapel is for pupils of all faiths and none. Here once again emerges the idea that the communal gathering provided by chapel precedes any sense of a specific religious affiliation. The broad assent to a moral and spiritual focus on something of a sacred nature is of greater relevance than doctrine and rituals. However, as mentioned already, the entirely secular nature of assembly seems for most participants to lack something that chapel is able contribute. In its general appeal to the numinous, chapel arguably introduces something extra to the communal gathering, that gives it a stronger socially bonding quality.

The contribution of chapel as a social and community binding experience came across so emphatically from each case study as to be virtually indistinguishable in tone and character from one school to the next. Alumnus A10, Houseparent C5, and Current Pupil P11 all said the same thing about 'a sense of togetherness' afforded by chapel. Personal belief, age, and background seemed to play no part in determining the strength of this sentiment; it was commonly held across almost all participants, even those with no personal faith. Even participant P3, who was the most vocally opposed of all the adult participants to the idea of compulsory whole-school chapel, still agreed that on certain occasions chapel was able to make a distinctive contribution to the school's sense of community:

> You have things like the carol services each year, which suddenly everyone seems much more involved with. When it comes to these larger scale Christian holidays then suddenly there does seem to be a greater sense of community (P3).

Woodward (1986) similarly proposed that religious festivals provide for the corporate nature of community celebration and give shape and meaning to the annual calendar, referring to the "the mystique of purpose and plan that lies behind this cycle, putting pupils in touch with previous generations of celebrants" (p. 271). The head of School A put this in the following terms: "chapel provides a sense of continuity with the past; it's part of the warp and weft of school life" (A1). This clearly resonates with some of the significant annual events in the cycle of the school calendar that chapel helps to facilitate and enrich, such as Remembrance Day, Founders' Day, Carol Services, and Easter. Also, it speaks to the transitional nature of new pupils joining and leavers leaving, which seems to be enhanced by time spent in chapel. There is an effective bookending of one's time within the school community that chapel serves to highlight, as emphasised by A5's comment about the impact on new joiners coming together with the school community for the first time in chapel: "there is a sense that this beautiful building is an important part of belonging to the community". Alumnus C10 reflected on chapel's "meshing quality", perhaps explaining the observation from the chaplain of School P that chapel is the first place that alumni want to go back to when they visit the school in years to come.

Durkheim's (1912) account of religion is that it would not exist without society; society precedes religion. Dennett (2022) explains that religion provides a focus for common cause, of joint activity, and organisation with an infrastructure that makes it possible to work locally to make things better. Chapel does appear to contribute something slightly different within the school communities focused on in this study, perhaps because the community is already defined and established and does not rely on chapel exclusively for its identity. Since pupils do not voluntarily attend chapel, these gatherings do not comprise a religious community as such. The benefits that research literature refers to of participating in a religious community therefore do not apply in quite the same way to my study. However, there is evidence in what participants said to me that the religious quality of chapel does contribute to the socially bonding experience, partly because being together constitutes an end-in-itself. That is an important feature of chapel's purpose. Assembly was described to me by several participants as more functional and transactional, more business-like. In Durkheim's register, it is chapel's appeal to the sacred that enhances its community binding potential, precisely because there is no higher purpose to it.

Spiritual capital can be interpreted as an essential factor not just in individual advancement, but in the emergence and building of communities through genuine commitment to a greater order (Guest, 2007). The community coheres around the collective religious act, like many religious sociologists including Durkheim predict. This was a deeply important feature of chapel for almost all participants, regardless of their religious persuasion or personal faith. One alumnus from School A effectively represented the view of most of this study's participants when he said, "I think chapel really brought a more community flavour to the school that we wouldn't have had without it" (A10).

Moral messages and values education

A large part of any community or institution's identity derives from its commonly held values and moral imperatives. As far back as religion can be studied, it can be seen as an influential source of moral messages and values education. As Geertz (1973) says:

> Religion, by fusing ethos and world view, gives to a set of social values what they perhaps most need to be coercive: an appearance of objectivity. In sacred rituals and myths, values are portrayed not as subjective human preferences but as the imposed conditions for life implicit in a world with a particular structure (p. 92).

Chapel in all three case study schools, as with most private senior school chapels in the UK, comprises a Christian worship service. However broad and inclusive chapel might seek to be, it is nearly always built upon a framework of Christian teaching and therefore upon the core virtues and values of Christian morality.

The call to love your neighbour as yourself is so ubiquitous in Western culture as to almost defy attribution, but of course it has its origins in the New Testament teachings of Jesus and Paul, derived from their reinterpretation of the ancient laws of Judaism. All three case study schools spoke in their promotional literature of their Christian ethos and many participants referred to this as well. Whilst it might be a little nebulous, the impression given by the term 'Christian ethos' is of a school that values the core moral principles of community, empathy, charity, and humility. Pupil P13 explained her view that chapel was a regular reminder to consider the needs of others, within the broader school environment that rightly encouraged and celebrated individual success and the pursuit of one's own goals in life. The head of School A put the same point in a slightly different way: "If you want to try to engender and encourage integrity, rather than entitlement, chapel is a pretty good place to do it" (A1). Across the interview and promotional data, chapel came across strongly in all three schools as a rich repository for moral messages and values education, within a context that appeared to be respected and readily accepted by most people within the school community.

A further feature of Christian ethics that potentially serves a school community well is the implicit notion that the world is a benevolent and meaningful place and that others and the self are good and worthy people (Crawford, O'Dougherty Wright, & Masten, 2006). The positive affirmation of self and others provided by good and clear moral messaging contributes a potentially impenetrable bedrock of values for a school aiming to promote individual success alongside community cohesion. Participants from all three case study schools described a distinctive contribution of chapel in this important regard.

Crawford, O'Dougherty Wright, & Masten (2006) showed in their research that religious involvement offers a particularly well-defined contribution to teenagers towards their development of self-regulatory abilities. Erikson (1968) had previously shown the same thing, suggesting that the ideological platform offered by religious beliefs and moral values helps adolescents to feel empowered to better understand the world and their place in it. By offering a standard for behaviour and a guide for right and wrong that extends beyond the seemingly fallible and subjective injunctions of parents and teachers, chapel's appeal to Christian ethics seems to offer the school community a justification for moral behaviour as established as the hills. As one houseparent from School P described, "it's an opportunity, through the lens of religion, for the shared values of common decency that religions do promote, which can then be put forward to the community" (P5). Zohar and Marshall (2004) conceive this in terms of 'spiritual capital', or 'wealth that binds people together', providing "a moral and motivational framework and engendering an ethos or spirit that nourishes and sustains the human spirit" (p. 34). Whilst my participants might not have worded it in quite this way, the consensus across all three schools was that chapel provides a source of important moral messages and values education. As Segal (2012) suggests, "one needs to know what to believe in order to know how to behave" (p. 514).

In line with the section above on 'community cohesion and identity', the sense that chapel plays an important role by virtue of its appeal to the religious and sacred came through strongly in relation to its contribution of moral messaging and values education in Schools P and A. This was less so in School C, where there was more of a secular feel to the contribution of Chapel. In all three schools however, the doctrinal element and the particulars of Christian teaching seemed less important to participants than the broad and inclusive nature of the values being promoted. Having chapel as a forum for the promotion of these values did come across as significant to most participants, even in School C. In contrast to assembly, chapel's appeal to the sacred often seems to give its moral exhortations much greater weight and authority for pupils. One houseparent from School A put it like this: "I do think that chapel taps into the values of the school and our community in general, which we don't touch on in the same way in assembly" (A7). Once again, the valuable role that chapel seems to play in

building the community and its identity was clearly observable in significant portions of the interview data in relation to the moral messages and values education that it can provide.

Communal singing

As shown in the Literature Review chapter, the act of communal singing has been recognized by many sociologists as a potent means of drawing a community together (Warner, 1997; Ammerman, 2009; MacGregor, 2017). Music evidently connects to something essential and primal in us, and in most instances of music making, collaboration and communication are essential. As Pupil P10 put it: "I think it is rather cool, you know, singing any of those big hymns with 800 kids going for it. It gets the hairs on the back of your neck standing up". MacGregor reports on the physiological reaction of the body to singing, in which: "your breathing is changed, you sometimes are short of breath, you sometimes have more oxygen than normal. So, I think you really do go through some sort of buzz, which is very much physiological" (2017, p. 1). Analysis of my data suggests that hymn singing in chapel can have a very profound effect on the pupils and that it accordingly supports their sense of place and identity within their school community.

The opportunity for communal singing in chapel was mentioned by significant numbers of participants in all three case study schools, with many of these emphasizing the contribution of hymn singing to their enjoyment of chapel and to chapel's ability to build a sense of community within the school. A great example of this was in School C, where several participants referenced the fact that pupils often request additional hymn practice on the morning of big rugby matches. Apparently, there is nothing like a mass chorus of the hymn 'Jerusalem' to prepare the school for an important local derby. This might be another revelation that is unsurprising to those who have experience of these things, but the interesting feature for this study is the way that chapel can be seen as a facilitator of this valuable community building exercise. As with the previous two sections in this chapter, the religious and doctrinal element of hymn singing is very clearly of secondary importance to the benefit and sheer enjoyment of communal singing. As the director of music in School C explained, "hymn singing is the bit in chapel when everyone participates, and actually a lot of children will participate in that, irrespective of their faith position" (C3).

Reicher (2017) explains how communal singing can create "psychological synchronicity out of the physical synchronicity of sitting, standing, and singing at the same time as others" and describes "a sense of we-ness" that this brings about. This finding was evident in all three schools, particularly for the pupils and for the alumni reflecting on their time at the school, as clearly expressed by one pupil from School P:

> I do enjoy the hymn singing. I think it's one of the very enjoyable parts, and we have a great choirmaster who makes us sing properly, and it does bring a sense of community. You know, I think it's just one part of being part of this big community, being part of this big school. It's just a part of it, and it does unite people (P14).

As mentioned already, the suggestion that singing together helps to enhance a sense of community and shared identity is something well documented in research literature (Warner, 1997). Ammerman (2009) adds that these musical events are often experienced in religious terms. In line with Durkheim's account of religion, defined through a society's distinction between what is sacred and profane, hymn singing in chapel is described by participants as occupying an elevated status as a communal activity. This could simply be that no other aspect of school life provides such an opportunity, in the sense described by the director of music at School C, that there is no suitable collection of secular songs that one could reach for in the same way as they do for the New English Hymnal. In fact, the hymn book itself can become a revered item (Clapp-Itnyre, 2018), which was described by participants from School P in the way that it is used by leavers to gather messages from their friends, who traditionally sign on the page of their favourite hymn. However, whilst the words of the hymns might contain religious ideas and Christian teachings, these appear secondary in importance to the powerful effect engendered by the sheer act of singing together as a school community. MacGregor (2017) argues that few things bring people together more effectively than putting meaningful words to a singable melody and suggests that the emotional impact of a whole congregation singing together was one of Martin Luther's great insights.

References by participants to the culture of hymn singing across the three case study schools suggested that some schools are better at this activity than others. The head of school A was very blunt in his assessment that "we sing so badly" (A1). In this he, and a few others from

School A, described a self-conscious and unwilling approach to hymn singing amongst the pupils. This could be for several reasons, but teenagers are naturally prone to self-consciousness, and where a culture of timid singing prevails, it is presumably very hard for anyone to shift this. Interestingly, this did not stop other participants from School A describing the benefits of it as a communal activity, such as one current pupil:

> I do know there is something so powerful about a group of people just singing. It is so good for your mind and soul. Just singing and being together. You know it's hard to explain the kind of feeling that you get, just being a part of something like that. I think it is really, really important that we do continue with hymn singing (A14).

This view is supported in literature, such as the work of Gridley *et al* (2011), describing the way that singing in groups can improve social wellbeing with the following benefits:

> Increased self-confidence, empowerment, wellbeing and interpersonal skills, a general lifting of the spirits and a sense of joy and accomplishment, lowered feelings of social isolation, depression and anxiety, increased social capital through participation in social, cultural and community activities, and denser social and friendship networks (p. 5).

There were strong and consistent comments from participants across all three case study schools that helped to confirm the idea that communal singing is one of the key contributions of chapel, enhancing a sense of community, culture, and identity. This contribution is not felt as strongly in each school, but even where the singing is not very enthusiastic, there are those who appreciate the contribution it can make to community cohesion and identity. As with several other areas of contribution, this benefit seems fairly removed from the religious teaching contained in the hymns. The comments by the director of music at School C help to explain the way in which hymn singing can contribute, even amongst secular and non-religious pupils, and why chapel arguably remains the best place for schools to do this.

School marketing and promotion

The contribution of chapel towards schools' marketing and promotion was the fourth most widely referenced idea by my participants within Theme 1, although perhaps unsurprisingly

it was seldom mentioned by pupils and alumni. I had initially assumed that this contribution of chapel might be more significant than it turned out to be. All the heads said that the role and nature of chapel was very rarely a feature in discussions with prospective parents and even less frequently a significant factor in parents' decisions to send their child to the school. A few participants tried to quantify this for me, with one head saying that in his 17 years as head of School P he could recall fewer than 10 instances of parents saying that chapel played a part in them selecting the school. Similarly, one houseparent from School A said, "in my 7 years there has been one parent who asked about how active Christianity is in the school and what role it plays" (A7). The head of School A described it as "fingers of one hand" in terms of how many times the matter had come up with prospective parents (A1).

Houseparents from School C described the chapel as an important feature of their school tours with prospective parents but explained that this was more to do with the beauty, grandeur, formality, and tradition of the place, along with its contribution to the overall sense of community and identity, rather than its contribution as a place of regular religious worship. The suggestion by the director of admissions at School C, that parents just expect Chapel to be part of the school experience, seems likely; some parents no doubt see Chapel as a proxy for formality and tradition. From the limited sample in this study, it is difficult to disentangle ideas of culture, class, and tradition from parents' perceptions about Chapel.

One of the features of chapel that I was keen to explore in this study was the way that it potentially enhances a sense of prestige and status within elite and expensive private schools. The 'entrenched prestige' referred to by Edwards and Whitty (1995) was potentially something that chapel might reinforce. If it is the case that the presence of chapel in such schools helps to support a sense of elevated social and culture capital, this did not come across very obviously in the interview data. Whilst Bourdieu (1976) famously identified the education market as "one of the most important loci of the class struggle", chapel did not seem to be a major contributor to the 'distinction' that fee paying parents seek for their children. Of course, this does not mean that chapel is not doing a certain amount of marketing work behind the scenes, but just that it seems to escape the notice of most people; perhaps because, as the head of School C put it, "parents generally just expect to see it there" (C1).

One houseparent from School A said that compulsory whole-school chapel was "never a deal-breaker" (A6) in either direction for parents; a houseparent from School C used the exact same phrase, adding that this might be because nearly all the schools that parents would be considering would have a similar chapel offer. A true comparison on this front would be if there were several alternative private senior schools that had abolished chapel, to see if parents might then mention it more in their reasoning. That said, difference in the culture of chapel did emerge from the three case study schools, and School C was described as "strangely secular" (C5) and "less traditional" (C2). From the data I have gathered, it is hard to predict why chapel does not come up more in the marketing of the school to prospective parents. The director of marketing at School C had the idea that parents like 'the formality' of chapel, as if it stands to show that certain things are still done in a smart and proper fashion, like going to church. In line with Bourdieu's thinking, chapel could still be part of the acquisition of cultural capital that confers an important benefit within private schools, but this remains conjecture rather than something directly supported by my data.

One of the features of chapel that was described across all three case study schools was the way that it helps to facilitate a sense of community involvement, with pupils either contributing directly to chapel services, or indirectly through chapel committees. There is an idea from some research literature that adolescents who actively participate in religious activities are afforded many opportunities to improve community and leadership skills (Crawford, O'Dougherty Wright, & Masten, 2006), and this was certainly discernible from some of the interview data. Several pupils across the three schools told me that they valued the opportunity to get involved in chapel services, either reading or presenting talks on issues close to their hearts.

Green, Parsons, Sullivan, & Wiggins (2015) identified that:

> Private school pupils have substantially higher levels of self-esteem, a more internal locus of control, higher job quality aspirations, higher occupational aspirations, and better perceived access to high-valued networks for job search (p. 2).

It is possible that these ideas are connected, and that chapel plays its part in contributing towards, and perhaps maintaining, a heightened sense of social status enjoyed by private school pupils. Certainly, Christian worship still plays a prominent role in some of the elite structures of society. Experience and understanding of Christian worship might very well assist in the sense of status that private education appears to confer. The UK's major national events are often built around a Christian service, such as royal weddings and state funerals, so some familiarity with the make-up of a Christian service might help to enhance a sense of social and cultural capital. One parent from School P did refer to the idea that Christianity is part of our national identity, and therefore she would not want her sons to be denied an opportunity to engage with denominational worship. This view was not voiced by any other participants though.

The head of School A offered a reasonable summary of the contribution of chapel to the marketing and promotion of his school by saying:

> We do not have a large number of prospective parents who are overtly looking for a Christian education; and yet, on the other end of the scale it doesn't seem to really put people off either (A1).

This comment possibly says something about the catchment and demographic for School A, but this study does not have enough data to support a meaningful analysis of this. There was a sense from the data in all three schools that parents like the formality, tradition, heritage, and culture that chapel brings to schools, along with the moral ethos evoked and engendered. As the head of School P said:

> I think what people want to hear is that we are a 'values-led' organization. They want to hear that the children here will learn the difference between right and wrong. I think the idea that we put across a message that there are absolute standards, that can be reinforced with a Christian message, is of interest (P1).

This point speaks to an idea mentioned already in this Discussion chapter, that chapel potentially contributes to perceptions about a moral and social framework more than it does to a religious identity.

One clear and unambiguous reference in the data to the contribution of chapel towards the school's marketing and promotion was from a current parent of School P when she said the following:

> I think it perhaps would have been more part of my husband's decision, because he went to the same school and chapel was a big part of his experience. He loved it, he loved singing the hymns, the experience of being in this beautiful building. So, I think had he had to send his children to a school that didn't have a chapel, that didn't offer that experience, I think it would have probably made him think twice about that school, definitely.

The importance of singing hymns in a beautiful place is something that has already been explored in this Discussion chapter. Once again, it does not seem to be the engagement with Christian worship that is the key selling point to prospective parents. The director of marketing at School P said that the major contribution of chapel in a marketing sense, is that it provides the school with a space to gather in a meaningful way as a whole community: "this seems to be the thing that most of them focus on. The reason why we're in that building seems less important to them" (P4). The implication once again seems to be that the community enhancing aspect of chapel is its key contribution. Descriptions on websites of chapel being integral to the life and ethos of the community reinforce this idea. A houseparent from School A also suggested that parents value the presence of a "peaceful place" (A6) in the middle of a busy school campus, and this contribution will be explored more fully in the next half of this chapter.

The head of religious studies from School C made an interesting point when he observed that chapel is supposed to be "the space of non-utility" (C5). For him the idea of using chapel in the school's marketing and promotion was uncomfortable because the whole point of chapel is that it appeals to the sacred and the "set-apart", and so should not be viewed in instrumental terms. The chaplain from School C commented on the fact that pictures of pupils in chapel had recently been removed from the school's marketing materials because modern school marketing tends to focus more on pictures of individual children in specific moments and instances of instrumental benefit within the school. To his mind, chapel does not offer

the same opportunity for a marketing snapshot as a science experiment or cricket match. The second half of this chapter will consider some of the benefits of chapel beyond its contribution to the community, culture, and identity of the school.

Theme 2: Engaging with the sacred, and taking pupils beyond their everyday and profane experiences

Apart from frequent references to chapel as important for enhancing a sense of community, culture, and identity, the other theme running through this study is that chapel is valued by many people for being a uniquely special place within the school infrastructure. Through chapel, members of the community are provided with the space and time to pause, reflect, and engage with life's deeper questions, in whatever way feels most comfortable and appropriate for them.

All three schools had purpose-built chapel buildings and almost all participants referenced in some way the distinctiveness and otherness of chapel, describing it as a feature of school life that somehow felt different and set-apart from the normal business of the school day. Put simply, the elevated status that chapel is perceived to occupy appears to facilitate an enhanced level of social cohesion, partly by virtue of its appeal to the sacred, as Durkheim's account predicts, but it also seems to confer other benefits. As with all the contributions so far described, there is no assertion here that these are universally applicable; of course, there are dissenting accounts about chapel, and some sub-themes that few participants have mentioned, but the focus for this next area of discussion is on the ideas that surfaced repeatedly, and with a degree of commonality across the case study schools.

Durkheim's account of religion is useful here in helping to frame the potentially powerful pull of 'the sacred' and the way that religion taps into something that appears to be a deep-rooted human need; the drive to understand our place and purpose in the world often leads people towards spiritual and religious conclusions. Importantly, there were frequent references by participants, supported in the promotional literature in all three schools, about chapel being a liberal and tolerant space, free from any pressure to conform to specific religious and doctrinal views. The idea that chapel is generally described as a space for people of all beliefs

and none lends weight to the notion that broad spirituality and sacredness are considered more important by school leaders than the specific tenets of Christian faith or any sort of call to evangelism.

It is notable that the ISI inspection criteria include a focus on how far pupils "develop spiritual understanding and an appreciation of non-material aspects of life, whether religious, philosophical or other" (ISI, 2017). There are plenty of ways in which other elements of the school curriculum might help to offer this understanding and appreciation, but chapel seems to do so in greater abundance, and for many participants this marks its fundamental contribution. As the head of religious studies at School C put it, "Chapel, ultimately, is a link to the sacred, and that's its glory" (C5). The head of School P referred to the sacred quality of chapel by describing it as the only time in the day when pupils are required to think about something outside and beyond themselves, that "transcends understanding and goes beyond our imagination" (P1). Places of worship, whatever the context, can be seen to contribute something distinctive, even to some people who do not hold strongly religious views; chapel appears to do this to a significant degree, at least for a large proportion of my participants in all three case study schools.

Three sub-themes are presented in this next section, focusing on various ways that chapel potentially helps to give pupils an opportunity to explore beliefs and ideas about life beyond the everyday and profane, emphasising its appeal to some of the sacred and spiritual features of human experience. With further reference to Durkheim's terminology, chapel's acknowledgement of the sacred provides a key feature of its overall contribution to life at school. Many participants described chapel as being uniquely positioned to offer the following contributions, even those who did not describe themselves as committed Christians:

- Engagement with faith and religion
- Opportunity for calm reflection
- Comfort and reassurance

Engagement with faith and religion

All three case study schools maintain an inclusive approach to chapel, describing it as offering something of value to all pupils, regardless of their faith and religious background. This is the stated intention, but of course it does not mean that it is achieved. However, there were comments from participants in all three schools to a similar effect, that chapel was generally not too 'preachy' (for want of a better word). The three chaplains that I spoke to, whilst all being ordained ministers in the Church of England, seemed very aware of this requirement of chapel and of their responsibility to deliver their message in an inclusive way. As the chaplain from School A said: "one of the key things for chapel is the moral and spiritual side of life, to get pupils to realise that they must go beyond their bubble and start to embrace the other" (A2). This approach to delivering chapel services, focusing less on preaching the specific doctrine of Christianity, and more on general messages about spirituality and living a good life, was clearly an important feature of chapel in my case study schools, where the student populations are diverse, international, and multi-cultural, and chapel remains compulsory for all pupils. This also fits with the description offered by Parker (2009) of the way in which sacred spaces within schools provide unique opportunities for spiritual exploration, self-reflection, and identity formation.

The "search for the sacred" amongst teenagers is something well documented in religious sociology (Hill, 2000; Ivtzan *et al*, 2011; Oppong, 2013). As one pupil in School P put it, "chapel is the place to discuss the big questions of the world" (P12). The former Head of Eton, Tony Little (2015), refers to the fact that pupils generally consider chapel to be a special place, and the explanation he offers is that teenagers have "a deep desire to delve deeper and explore life beyond the physical" (p. 140). This observation reflects the definitions of religion offered by Tillich (1965), as that which we designate as "our symbol of ultimate concern" and Pecorino (2000) as "the most intensive and comprehensive method of valuing that is experienced by humankind" (p. 3). The broad and inclusive diet of spiritual and religious engagement offered by chapel in all three schools can be seen to contribute something that enriches pupils' everyday lives at school. One of the ways it does this, as described by a significant majority of participants in all three schools, is by providing the opportunity for pupils to engage with

matters of faith and religion. Nearly all of the participants referred to this idea in their interviews, making it the most prevalent sub-theme across all my data.

In many of the participant contributions there was a strong sense that the sacred aspect of chapel, appealing to the 'other', was important to them, irrespective of their personal faith position. This idea fits with what Stringer (2005) identifies in his sociological history of Christian worship as 'the rise of humanistic discourses'. On one hand chapel seems to provide a way of thinking and acting that is removed and different from the rest of pupils' daily lives, and participants said they value this difference. On the other hand, chapel seems to teach pupils something about what it means to engage with religion and faith in one's life. As the chaplain from School P said:

> Part of what I hope is that pupils who are at the 'no faith' end of the spectrum are, at the very least, being informed as to what Christianity is about, and they're at least hearing from me that it's a rational, reasonable, viable, transformational thing for those who embrace it (P2).

Revisiting the expression provided by the head of School A, "the necessity of the numinous", it seems that chapel is valued by many people for its explicit endorsement of the importance of religious and spiritual engagement. Roehlkepartain & Patel (2006) describe their findings that teenaged engagement with religious rituals and practices helps to "build bridges to the sacred and transcendent" (p. 324). This idea also fits with the ethnography done by Stringer (2008), built upon the work of Otto (1917) and Evans-Pritchard (1965), that examined the sense of awe and wonder felt by human beings in the world and saw religious expression as partly a response to these emotions. In line with this, School P's website describes chapel as encouraging pupils to consider questions of spirituality, and School A's ISI report acknowledged the way that chapel provides opportunities for all pupils to reflect one their own beliefs and spiritual thinking.

Sarah Bakewell (2023) is a humanist author and researcher who acknowledges that "religion, like everything cultural, emotional, social, and spiritual, is a part of the human condition and a deeply important part of human life" (p. 1). In this spirit perhaps, participants frequently

described chapel as contributing an opportunity to experience and explore what a religious life looks like, without any overt pressure to convert or conform. Given that most pupils did not describe themselves as committed Christians, and would not attend chapel if it became optional, this aspect of chapel's contribution to school life is significant. One pupil from School A, although not a committed Christian, suggested that "it is definitely important to be exposed to some sort of belief. I think that's definitely a good thing about chapel. You know, you really should consider your beliefs" (A14). The opportunity to explore a life of religion and faith is therefore one of the important contributions that chapel seems to provide, at least to a core group of pupils.

Spencer and Weldin (2012) revealed that 23% of people polled in a survey as atheists nevertheless believed in the existence of a human soul. Most of my participants did not describe themselves as atheists, so the potential of chapel to appeal to some notion of the sacred and transcendent would appear to be reasonably high. As Roehlkepartain & Patel (2006) further suggest, "rituals also socialise both children and adolescents into their tradition's narratives, beliefs, and practices, giving them the language, form, and structure needed to understand experiences of transcendence" (p. 330). The significant contribution does not seem to be that pupils necessarily adopt Christianity because they attend chapel, but rather they can engage with it, and learn a language with which to understand their own beliefs concerning the sacred and numinous aspects of their life.

All three heads said that they valued chapel as one of the only times in the school week when pupils are required to think about life beyond their everyday demands and pursuits. The head of School P said that pupils understand the importance of chapel as "a place of otherness" (P1). This assertion was confirmed by many of the pupils I interviewed in School P and reinforced by interview data from Schools A and C too. Little (2015) suggests that in his experience the defining feature of spiritual engagement for pupils is in their development of a 'sense of wonder', which chapel contributes towards. For Little, as with the 3 Heads from my case study schools, this spiritual engagement develops in pupils "the capacity to experience, accept and take joy in things beyond our understanding" (p. 130). Woodward (1986) proposes that religious festivals in schools ensure that there is some acknowledgement

of power or powers greater than the individual participant. In reference to the chapel at Eton, Turner (2016) describes the fan-vaulted ceiling as providing, "that sense of eternity of which a really grand public school is capable" (p. 11). Again, the emotional reaction of awe and wonder referenced by Stringer (2008) seems resonant in this description. Similar remarks could feasibly be made about the chapel buildings from all three of my case study schools. There is not the scope here to disentangle all the interrelated themes of privilege, power, establishment, culture, and religion, but the concept of 'eternity' has definite spiritual overtones, and it would be consistent with other research literature to propose that a grand building can evoke ideas of the transcendent (Heber-Percy, 2016). These observations help to show how chapel potentially contributes an opportunity for pupils to engage with matters of religion and faith on a level that suits their spiritual and religious beliefs.

Building on the idea of religion posited by the so-called 'emotionalists' (Evans-Pritchard, 1965), it is noted that some of the language that participants used to describe chapel did speak directly to the 'feelings' engendered by chapel. As one Head suggested, "removing compulsory chapel would leave a heart-shaped hole" (P1). Several participants voiced the idea that it was important for pupils to learn about religion and what a religious life entails, so that any decision to pursue or reject this way of life would be an informed one. One houseparent from School P said, "we must give pupils the option of believing in something" (P5). This was echoed in comments from a parent:

> For young people I think it's important that you set them on a road. They can then make their choices, but if you haven't invited them to experience it, then I think you've let them down to a certain extent (P7).

Other parents, from all three case study schools, said very similar things about chapel providing a religious education, through which their children would be equipped to make informed decisions about whether they might want to adopt a religious way of life in the future. This view was clearly expressed by one parent from School A: "It means they can consider Christianity, because I suppose if they are not exposed to it, they can never have the choice to follow it" (A9). One pupil from School C also acknowledged this contribution of

chapel as a place to educate pupils about religious matters, which "might help them when they are older" (C14).

In Yann Martel's (2002) Booker Prize winning novel, Life of Pi the central message relates to the value and appeal of the sacred and mysterious. According to the principal character, the agnostic, committed to his "dry, yeastless factuality", might miss the "better story", for lack of imagination. The argument is that the rational explanation of life only really works when accompanied by the irrational, like the geometry of the circle, which relies on the irrational number π. Whilst philosophers of religion might argue about the rationality of faith, there is something compelling for many people about the 'story' that religion offers, which often seems to defy specific tenets and doctrine.

Houtman & Aupers (2007) argue that the commonly held view that we live in an increasingly secular world is inaccurate. Whilst they recognise the same shift away from traditional Christian doctrines as others, they suggest that spirituality has had a corresponding upsurge. It is not possible from the data in my study to establish whether such a trend is occurring in private senior schools, but it could account for the gap between the number of participants describing themselves as committed Christians (relatively low) and the number expressing support for compulsory whole-school Chapel (relatively high).

The term, "post-Christian spirituality", describes a potentially emergent belief system, and the authors categorise it in the following way: "the belief that in the deepest layers of the self the 'divine spark' – to borrow a term from ancient Gnosticism – is still smouldering, waiting to be stirred up" (Houtman & Aupers, 2007, p. 307). This idea would help to explain why the overwhelming sentiment about chapel from participants in all three schools was that it is a valuable and positive part of school life that contributes a great deal to pupils and the overall community. The opportunity to engage with faith and religion emerges as one of chapel's most important contributions.

Opportunity for calm reflection

Whilst this sub-theme in the data might appear very similar to the previous one, there is enough distinction here to merit a separate discussion. This point still reflects part of the way that chapel contributes an opportunity to take pupils beyond the everyday and profane, but it is less to do with religious and spiritual beliefs and more to do with a need, shared by most people in a busy school environment, to have space and time to "pause and breathe" (A7). Zohar & Marshall (2004) interpret a feature of spiritual capital as "the provision of a space to get out of the noise and rush of daily life; to feel for at least a few moments each day, the reality of our inner lives" (p. 33), and one of the most prevalent ideas raised by participants from all three schools was the way chapel potentially contributes this opportunity for pupils.

Many participants went further, suggesting that chapel provides 'the only' opportunity in the week for this. This same idea is well documented in the literature of Parker (2009), and Stern and Shillitoe (2019). As one pupil from School P put it, "chapel allows you to get away from school for a bit" (P11). This idea seemed especially important at School P, with all 15 participants mentioning it. The idea of getting away from school is also interesting, because of course chapel is still firmly part of school life. Seeing the chapel building as a tranquil space within a busy school campus did come through in all three case study schools though. Perhaps life at School P is particularly hectic, although it is unlikely to be very different from Schools A and C on this front. It is possible that the style and atmosphere of chapel at School P is conducive of calm reflection; maybe this is a particular priority of the chaplain.

Several influential studies have explored the potential for religion to enhance people's sense of subjective well-being (Spencer, Madden, Purtill & Ewing, 2016). One of the widely accepted ways that religion does this is through the opportunity it affords for "rest, meditation, and quiet reflection" (Crawford, O'Dougherty Wright, & Masten, 2006, p. 362). Many participants, in all three schools, proposed this feature of chapel as one of its important contributions to school life, as did the school website description of the chapel at School P. Chapel is evidently a valuable place for calm reflection in all three case study schools. As with other contributions already discussed in this chapter, it seems that the religious aspect of chapel is less significant than the opportunities resulting from it, such as communal singing, and a chance for some

calm reflective time in the busy week. Whilst a school could arguably recreate this benefit in a totally secular context, it is perhaps unsurprising that chapel, both as place and practice, continues to be utilised in this way.

Heber-Percy (2016) describes his school chapel as "a retreat from the world. The silence of the chapel was a resonating chamber; it was the deep hush, the noiselessness of falling manna" (p. 217). It is of interest to me as a former houseparent that most of the houseparents proposed this benefit of chapel. As the members of staff most closely connected to the pupils' pastoral care and wellbeing at school, and therefore most aware of the stresses and strains of school life, the houseparents seemed particularly in favour of chapel's provision to the pupils of a space for calmness and respite in their day. All the following statements came from houseparents, across the three schools:

> It's quiet, and you can guarantee it's quiet. That's their time; 15 minutes form them just to sit and think (P6).

> Chapel gives the pupils some quiet and some peace. In the world in which they live, they're getting pings and notifications all the time, and actually it's a chance for them to just switch off (A6).

> Those who don't really believe, or don't really care about what's being said, I think they still like the fact that it is a calm start to a day. Then the quiet, and the stillness, and the meditation all really contribute to the kids. It's a chance to pause, and breathe (A7).

> Chapel provides a safe, quiet, calm place, where pupils can escape all of the worries they carry around in their heads. Even if they are not religious, this is a space they can come to in a busy schedule and have some time to themself and their thoughts, and I think they like that (C7).

It is notable that this contribution of chapel, as with others already discussed in this chapter, does not resonate exclusively for those participants who described themselves as committed Christians. In fact, many participants made the point of saying that the opportunity for calm reflection offered by chapel was something available to all pupils, regardless of their personal beliefs. The website for School C made this point about chapel, giving pupils and staff, whatever their religious beliefs, opportunities for "quiet, personal reflection" within the

busy life of the school, and this was supported by a comment in their latest ISI inspection report, which referred to chapel as offering "a time of quiet reflection". The head of religious studies at School A said "chapel should be a place for quiet time and very gentle spiritual messages, so anybody can go along and take something from it" (A5). One alumnus from School P was not a committed Christian and yet he described "a moment of stillness to be with your own thoughts" (P9), and an alumnus from School A said something very similar: "regardless of anything to do with Christianity, it's just a time of peace and solace and reflection" (A10). One pupil from School C, even though he was an atheist, said "I feel like I need to be in chapel in order to reflect on something" (C16). As the director of marketing at School C suggests, Chapel seems to provide a unique space and time in the week, away from "the hurly-burly of rushing about" (C4).

The view of chapel as an important space for calm reflection was held across all three schools and by participants of all backgrounds, with very little to differentiate between the culture or ethos of each school in this regard. Parents seemed to recognise the value of this for their children too. One parent from School P said, "I can see the benefits from simply a mental-health point of view: the ability just to learn to stop, and to learn to sit, and to contemplate" (P7). Another parent proposed a similar observation: "It's an intimate position to be in an environment where the pace has gone, where you're contemplative" (P8). Although the head of School C did not describe himself as a committed Christian, he clearly held this to be an important contribution of chapel:

> You know, it's the one place in the day when they're not on their mobile phones, where they're not bombarded. Chapel provides stillness, and listening, and the beauty of music, and calmness. I think it's important. For me, it's 15 minutes in a day where no one can bother me, and I quite like that" (C1).

Whilst this contribution might not appear to have much to do with religion, the spiritual dimension of chapel is arguably what facilitates the opportunity for calmness and reflection. Christian worship does place a value on moments of peaceful contemplation and prayer, which many participants told me they valued. A further benefit was mentioned by a few participants, including a houseparent from School C, that chapel develops in the pupils "a

respect for peace and quiet" (C6) and the value of this practice in wider life. Returning to Durkheim's terminology, the appeal of chapel to the sacred plays a significant role in community bonding, and the ability to provide a sense of otherness is largely what facilitates this contribution. Chapel is a place that stands apart from the rest of school life and can therefore be seen to offer opportunities that take pupils beyond the everyday and profane, which would be hard to recreate in an entirely secular setting.

Comfort and reassurance

Describing the way that chapel invites pupils to consider matters "beyond our mortal reach", the head of School P said, "I think that is really important, because it doesn't matter how atheist or agnostic you are, you will die" (P1). This stark truth brings into focus one of the distinctive ways in which chapel is seen to contribute to the school community: "in times of absolute stress, where do people want to be, where do they turn to? They go to chapel" (P1). Whilst this view is very specific to the private senior school sector, it aligns with literature from many sociologists, psychologists, and theologians, who have examined the role of religion as a source of comfort and reassurance. The atheist psychologist, Howels (1978), suggested that religion can build a 'barrier of fantasy' against fear. Scruton (2000) puts his own view in similar terms: "a primeval horror inhabits all of us – a horror of night and closure and nothingness. The religious rite dispels this horror, uniting us to the community" (p. 8). If religious belief arises from our recognition of human limitations, a fear of death, and our inability to explain some of the mysteries of the world, then for some people at least, there will always be a place for religion when it comes to times of grief and loss. In the specific context of chapel, its connection to the sacred evidently makes it somewhere that pupils gravitate to in times of grief.

It is an unhappy reality for any large and close community that times of distress and tragedy will occur. Most schools are touched by times of bereavement and sadness, if not necessarily on a whole-school scale, then certainly within the lives of individual members of that community. When I interviewed participants from School C, they were reeling from two recent tragedies: the death of two pupils in a car accident and the unrelated suicide of anther pupil. A member of staff had also died in service. In School P, two members of staff had

recently died in service, one at a very young age. These sorts of events are exceptionally hard to bear for people and they can shake the very fabric of a school community; they can also draw communities closer. Many participants explained that chapel played a central role in these times of sorrow. It appears to do so on an individual level too; I heard from participants in all three schools about how chapel had provided a source of comfort and reassurance for them in times of personal difficulty. It is notable that in School A, only the director of music and the chaplain referred to chapel making this contribution. It is possible that no recent tragedies had occurred and so this idea was not in many people's minds, however since no one spoke about any instances of communal grief, it is not possible to know.

In a study by Immerzeel & van Tubergen (2013), data was used from four rounds of the European Social Survey (2002-2008) from 26 European countries. They found strong support for their main hypothesis, that higher levels of insecurity are associated with increasing religiosity. One of the times of insecurity that they identified was bereavement. When a school community suffers a tragedy, this is a distressing and potentially destabilizing event. The draw of chapel and religion is clearly seen in the behaviour of the pupils, as described by the chaplain from School P, who "fill the chapel at times like this" (P2). Crawford, O'Dougherty Wright, & Masten (2006) explained through their research how adolescents draw comfort from religious figures, because they offer the promise of unconditional love. In times of grief, this is something that appears to be especially valuable for people.

As with the other contributions of chapel discussed in this chapter, the benefit seems to be felt across the belief spectrum. One alumnus from School P, who described herself as an atheist, still commented as follows:

> If we'd had a really busy and stressful week, or perhaps something shitty had happened
> in life, like we'd lost somebody, I could see that we might turn around and say, 'hey, do
> you just want to go to chapel for an hour?' (P10).

A houseparent from School P reflected on this point too, saying that "because of some of the tragedies we've had over the years, chapel has really become a place of safety and security for children, whether they are from a religious background or not" (P7). Whilst I had the sense

in all three schools that chapel would be largely empty if the regular weekly services became optional, there had clearly been huge voluntary attendance around certain moments of tragedy: "Chapel becomes a very natural focus point, and yes, the kids do pour into chapel" (C3). Cook & Wimberly (1983) note the "sense of larger purpose" provided by religion, and the promise of reuniting with loved ones in the afterlife is helpful to some people in their time of grief (Pevey, Jones, & Yarber, 2008). People who are not necessarily religiously observant most of the time will nevertheless turn, or return, to the comfort of religious symbolism and ceremony when in grief (Warner, 1953; McIntosh, Silver, & Wortman, 1993). Chapel appears to operate in the same way, certainly in Schools P and C.

Chapel was also described as helping to alleviate the general stresses and strains of life in a busy senior school, not just the moments of extreme tragedy and crisis. One pupil from School P spoke about chapel helping people "forget about their concerns and take things off their mind" (P11) and another pupil echoed this sentiment: "people need something to give them a rock to hold onto in life. That is where religion can be super important" (P14). A further pupil used an expression that seems to helpfully sum up this contribution of chapel, saying that "if something wasn't going right, then chapel would help you to just put it into the universe" (P15). Oppong (2013) suggests that in the social and political milieu that confronts modern teenagers, the viewpoint provided through religious belief can be protective against despair and a sense of disenfranchisement. Schleiermacher (1978) contended that humans yearn for a Being that we believe "has all the answers and solutions to our problems, afflictions, and unanswered questions" (p. 5). There is a sense of mystery implied here that does not bear close analysis, but it does resonate with this particular and distinctive contribution that chapel seems able to offer to pupils and wider school communities.

The restrictions of Covid came out in some of the discussions about this contribution of chapel, especially in cases where Covid prevented pupils gathering in the chapel at a time of sadness. At School C, one houseparent C6 explained "a colleague died suddenly this year, and we couldn't go to chapel, and I really struggled with the fact that the boys couldn't go to chapel and emote" (C6). This reference to the importance of chapel as a conduit for fundamental emotional expression also speaks to the conception of religion offered by Evans-

Pritchard (1965) and Stringer (2008) as that which enables an elementary form of connection to the transcendent and numinous. Also considering chapel's contribution to acts of remembrance, School C had recently held a special service to remember those lost to Covid.

Overall, the sense of chapel as a place for comfort and reassurance forms part of a highly valuable aspect of its contribution, and a unique feature of what chapel seems to provide the community, especially in Schools P and C. The sacred space offers an opportunity to emote in a way that acknowledges the mystery of death and provides a level of comfort that a secular setting would struggle to replicate. The power of this contribution of chapel is potentially profound, especially within the schools where collective grief had been a recent experience.

Discussion summary

A range of other potential benefits and contributions of chapel were raised in interview discussions, but those explored in this chapter are the ones that came up time and time again, across all three case study schools and from participants of all backgrounds, belief perspectives, and positions in the school. The inherent value underpinning its contribution is derived from the fact that it offers space and opportunity to engage with the sacred.

The next and final chapter will draw together the conclusions of my thesis. The sense that has emerged very strongly across this study is that for many people, chapel occupies a special place in the life of the school community. The benefits of chapel, often seen by way of contrast with assembly, frequently follow Durkheim's theory of how religion contributes to communities, appealing to a fundamental distinction between what is profane and sacred. The particular contribution to educational establishments of spaces that are designated as 'sacred' is captured by Parker (2009) when he writes:

> The value of places set aside for these purposes is that they offer children the opportunity to experience an enriched connection with others in any ritual engagement, with themselves in self-reflection, and with the world in what they are given as stimulus and inspiration, that may rarely be found by them elsewhere (Parker, 2009, p. 37).

The contributions of chapel extend to those of all faiths and none, but often in ways that are linked to its appeal to the sacred and mysterious elements of life and human existence. As the head of School A put it, chapel is the place above all others in the school that promotes "the importance of community and the necessity of the numinous". This erudite formulation by a head, albeit one keen on promoting the value of chapel in his school, emerges powerfully as a synthesis of the most significant findings from the three case study schools.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

Questions surrounding the contribution of chapel to UK private senior schools have interested me for the past 30 years. Deeply embedded in my life experiences and world view, this topic represents my enduring fascination with the contribution that religion and worship make at a social level, and within the everyday lives of so many people around the world. As Durkheim (1912) observed, there is no known society that does not include something that can be classified as religion. Such a prominent and powerful feature of human experience deserves all the research and exploration it can get.

However, many sources show the decline in the prevalence of Christianity in the lives of UK citizens over recent decades, and this appears particularly acute amongst teenagers. The phenomenon of shifting patterns of belief away from 'religiosity' towards 'spirituality' has also been well documented. As such, debate continues at the highest levels of UK policy making on the existing statutory requirement for schools to provide daily collective worship of a 'broadly Christian nature'. At the same time, a significant majority of the UK's private senior schools maintain a practice of compulsory whole school chapel. As a distinctive instance of communal worship, chapel in UK private senior schools has provided an appropriate and timely focus for my doctoral studies, with clear relevance for my professional setting.

General conclusions

It is clear from my study that I can make certain analytic generalisations with confidence about the contribution of chapel to UK private senior schools. This confidence comes from the high degree of overlap between the findings of all three case study schools, supported by the sociological account of religion offered by Durkheim and the relevant literature that was explored at the start of this thesis. Despite a few subtle differences in the character and atmosphere of chapel in each school, the central themes and the sub-themes that emerged were very similar in each case study, making it easier to generalise my findings. This is perhaps

unsurprising, given the relatively tight boundaries I set for my case selection, but I did seek schools that could be considered to some extent typical within the sector. A distinction between chapel and assembly felt genuine in every school, with reference to specific contributions arising from the sacred character of chapel. Against a national backdrop of dwindling numbers of people who identify as Christian, and a very low rate of church attendance, chapel still appears to convey meaning and purpose for a significant number of people within schools where the practice is maintained.

The aim of this thesis was to explore the ways in which chapel potentially enhances school communities and the lives of those that comprise them. I am now in a strong position to draw some coherent and valid conclusions about the unique contribution of chapel but also to say something about religion and communal worship more generally. Having adopted a critical realist approach to my methodology, building a rich narrative account from careful analysis of the personal testimonies of my participants, my conclusions are rooted in real-word findings, built upon recognised theoretical foundations and research literature, and are therefore hopefully informative for policy and practice within the private senior school sector.

One of the most important elements of my case selection, apart from each case being a private senior school with a strong chapel tradition, was that chapel needed to be a compulsory part of school life for all pupils. I wanted to explore the tension that exists in a setting where the worshipping congregation is there by obligation and not through choice. I have first-hand experience of the sorts of negative and oppositional views that can be caused by this practice, but I am also aware that for many people this approach underpins the overwhelming strength of chapel. Part of my ambition for this study was to establish whether the continuation of compulsory whole school chapel has enough merits to justify it, or whether this practice, common to so many senior schools across the private sector, might be calling for a radical overhaul.

Against the backdrop of British society's drift away from traditional and established religious practices (McLeod, 2007; Brown, 2009; Green, 2010) and record low levels of teenage adherence to Christian teaching (Francis & Kay, 1995; Lippman & Dombrowski Keith, 2006)

there is a corresponding upsurge in what Houtman and Aupers (2007) call 'post-Christian spirituality'. A desire and drive towards spirituality and the non-material elements of life have seemingly retained a place of importance in the lives of many people in Britain, including teenagers. Some of the contributions raised within Theme 2 can be understood in this context.

A theme common to all three case study schools was that participants described chapel as making a potential contribution to all members of the school community, regardless of whether they had a personal faith or not. This was seen in practice and in the promotional and policy literatures from each school, emphasising the broad and inclusive nature of chapel services. The less denominational, and more 'sacred' or 'spiritual' features of chapel were repeatedly referred to as an important part of this contribution. Weldin's (2012) finding that 23% of atheists still believe in the existence of a human soul perhaps helps to make sense of this finding. Given the low number of my participants who described themselves as atheists (6 out of 40) there was arguably always going to be a high degree of acceptance of chapel's appeal to the non-material aspects of life. It was also a notable feature of my three interviews with the school chaplains that they were committed to reaching out and speaking to all pupils, not just those with Christian faith.

The combined scope of my research questions has enabled me to draw conclusions that suggest various distinctive ways that chapel can be seen to contribute to private senior schools. Durkheim's contention that religion is essentially social in origin has helped to make sense of the various ways that chapel is described as enhancing the sense of community within schools. Further to this, Durkheim's account of how humans distinguish between 'the sacred' and 'the profane' has helped to explain why chapel appears to provide seemingly distinctive contributions that extend beyond the contributions of other school gatherings, such as assembly. Occasional reference to capital theory has enabled me to identify some of the contributions that derive from the inescapably elitist nature of private education.

The presence of 'the sacred', which is so central to Durkheim's definition of religious worship, emerges as the most powerful component of what chapel offers and helps to explain how it

provides this contribution. For the purposes of this study, 'sacred' has been understood to represent the inherent difference and 'otherness' that is referenced in religious worship. Utilising Durkheim's distinction with the 'profane', the 'sacred' is that which invites appreciation of, and participation in, anything relating to the mysterious, numinous, and spiritual elements of human life. The pertinent observation that accompanies this is just how many participants acknowledged a value and contribution of chapel 'for everyone', regardless of their personal faith. A significant number of participants talked in broad terms about the spiritual, sacred, numinous, and non-material nature of chapel worship. By contrast, there was a striking lack of any reference by participants to the specific features of Christian doctrine. The observation by the head of School A remains perhaps the single most succinct summary of my findings when he remarked that chapel contributes "the importance of community and the necessity of the numinous" (A1).

The value of religion that emerges from my study, albeit through a very tightly focused lens, is broadly in the importance of the connections it allows for and the fact that it promotes a concept of the 'good life' based on the inherent sanctity and value of other people's lives. Bakewell's (2023) concept of humanism emphasises the connectedness between people and the importance of cultivating this connection for people to live fulfilled lives. Bakewell (2023) also references the Southern African concept of 'ubuntu', which roughly translates as 'humanity towards others' or 'a person is a person through other persons', and which Archbishop Desmond Tutu explained as meaning, "we belong in a bundle of life" (p. 1). One feature of chapel's distinctive contribution to schools can perhaps be seen as the endorsement and celebration of the idea that humans belong in a bundle of life, and chapel appears to offer a meaningful expression of this belief, alongside the seemingly unique space it provides in schools for engagement with notions of the sacred.

A significant number of participants described themselves as 'spiritual' without being especially religious. This would certainly fit with my professional experience of teenagers' beliefs. Several participants also voiced the view that one can be Christian in a cultural sense without actively participating in worship, or possibly even believing in God. Little (2015) articulates the relevance of this distinction in a school environment:

Creeds constrain. The risk for formal religion is that it becomes a thing in itself, and is seen as such by the young, not a channel for the spirit. Religion can seem formulaic, hidebound, aesthetically pleasing perhaps, but just a form of theatre. Given half a chance, the considerable majority of teenagers would opt out of chapel, not least because it tends to take place first thing in the morning...... the prime significance of these gatherings is community - being together and belonging. The collective presence, taking time out of a busy day, listening to readings and music or simply allowing the mind to wander, creates a quality of experience different from the rest of the working day, and an opportunity for the spiritual dimension to flicker and be renewed.... I am regularly struck by the numbers of former pupils I meet, few of them religious in a conventional sense, who look back on their time in chapel with affection. They say it is a special place. It is special because what they have experienced there removed them from the mundane, briefly but regularly, and took them out of their individual selves as part of a group, particularly in moments of silence. (p. 148).

The most distinctive trait of religious life is the division of the world into the two regions of 'sacred' and 'profane'. Various participants talk about how chapel feels different, is set apart, fulfils a different function to anything else they do in school. Why come in quietly? Why sit in reflective silence? This all has a powerful effect on the socialising force of chapel. The setting aside of the business of the day is facilitated through this distinction of sacred and profane.

The distinction between preaching in chapel and preaching in church is important and was referenced by all three chaplains. As the chaplain at School A said: "In chapel I am preaching the Gospel, but I'm doing it more from the perspective of Paul to the Athenians at the Areopagus, rather than a sermon in a church" (A2). This idea references Paul's teaching to the Athenians, who followed many contrasting religious practices, and who reportedly said to Paul: "You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we would like to know what they mean" (Acts 17:16). Many pupils would seemingly concur with the idea that chapel incorporates some strange ideas, but this does not stop many of them being appreciative of the distinctive opportunities that chapel affords.

My conclusion is that chapel makes a distinctive contribution through its appeal to the sacred. As Durkheim observed, "the idea of society is the very soul of religion" (1912, p. 168).

Something available through communal worship appears uniquely powerful as a tool of social bonding, through the lifting people towards something transcendent. Something that becomes available through an appeal to the sacred gives chapel a means of making a greater contribution to schools than their secular gatherings, and the social bonding occurs most powerfully through appeal to the sacred, as Durkheim predicted.

Implications of my findings for the sector

One of the reasons for embarking on this exploration of the contribution of chapel was to generate new knowledge that might be informative for the sector. I was motivated by a tension between the ongoing practice of compulsory whole school chapel and two unavoidable observations, firstly the national decline in the place of Christianity in the UK and secondly the palpable fact, as expressed by many participants, that if chapel was voluntary, it would be very sparsely attended.

In this context it felt worthwhile to seek to extract any positives nestled in the practice, provided they were there to be found. If no positive endorsement of the practice had emerged, then clearly this would have resulted in a very different thesis. The simple fact is that most participants (33/40), across all three case study school communities, described enough positive contributions of chapel for them to want to maintain the practice. That said, there were some important 'learning points' for schools, and certain ideas came up repeatedly from participants and are worth briefly outlining here. These are presented according to the central themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data.

Theme 1: Building community, culture, and identity

Community cohesion and identity

It is important to get pupils involved in the delivery of chapel. As the chaplain from School A explained, "it is their chapel" (A2). This will help with pupil buy-in, and increase the opportunities provided by chapel to enhance a sense of community cohesion and identity, with pupil ownership of what goes on in this important space. Since one of the biggest contributions of chapel is the community building aspect of it, it is important to openly

acknowledge and welcome this, so pupils understand the potentially unique benefit that the practice of chapel affords. Chapel is also seen to contribute significantly to the power and impact of the big cultural occasions in the school calendar.

Moral messages and values education

The 'moral messages and values education' emerges as most impactful when the pupils hear from a range of interesting speakers, religious and non-religious; interesting and relatable speakers are vital. Values and moral ideals are very well served through chapel, especially current social and cultural issues, since pupils seem to recognise and appreciate chapel as a particularly conducive space for moral messages and values education.

Communal singing

Almost everyone interviewed in this study valued the potential contribution of communal singing, although in some schools this culture is clearly stronger than in others. If there are ways to develop and maintain a strong culture of communal singing, the school community will derive huge benefits from this, in terms of identity and social cohesion, alongside improved subjective well-being.

School marketing and promotion

Modern parents are rarely seeking a school based on the explicit practice of religious worship but are often favourable to many of the contributions that chapel brings. These include a sense of formality, occasion, and a chance for pupils to experience a sense of 'otherness', 'quiet reflection', 'space to consider religion and faith', and an enhanced sense of community identity and belonging.

Theme 2: Engaging with the sacred, and taking pupils beyond their everyday and profane experiences

Engagement with faith and religion

A liberal and inclusive approach to chapel is very important, at least to the significant majority of those who participated in this study. There seems to be no desire for a more denominational and evangelical approach to chapel worship. It is advisable to keep the religious aspect of chapel 'light touch', although it should not be totally disregarded, as this is the whole premise of a chapel service. Pupils do not want to feel they are being preached to too overtly, but plenty of them do appreciate the opportunity provided by chapel to consider matters beyond the everyday and profane. It is fine to relate back to Christianity, but it is more effective when Christianity is not presented as "the only path up the mountain" (P1). It is important to provide language with which pupils can better understand ideas relating to the non-material aspects of life, and to show how religion can provide purpose and value in this regard. Make chapel distinct from assembly, ideally in a different building, although practical limitations in many schools make this impossible. A desire for somewhere to explore spirituality is strong amongst significant numbers of teenagers, even if formal adherence to religion might be fading, especially within this cohort. It is important to have a chaplain who does not feel too evangelical about their role, who can present a more ecumenical message, and who will not take pupil rejection of Christianity personally.

Opportunity for calm reflection

The space to "pause and breathe" (A7) is a huge contribution and chapel can maybe offer more in this regard than some schools currently use it for. Some participants explained that dressing in uniform creates a different feel to home-clothes. The former feels like 'school', the latter does not. This makes a big difference, especially on Sundays in boarding schools, and allows for a significant change of culture, which some schools might consider beneficial. Whilst some parents like the formality of chapel, pupil buy-in could be improved by allowing a change out of formal school wear, and the benefit of a space for calm reflection might be felt more strongly.

Chapel seems to play an important role in times of tragedy, both at the communal and personal levels, and chapel gives space to emote and process sadness and emotional challenges. Schools might do well to think about how they seek to creatively benefit from this potential contribution, especially in times of crisis.

Limitations of this study

It is undeniably the case that my Discussion chapter reads as a description of the positive features of chapel that participants raised, which might appear one-dimensional. However, there was very little in the data that offered a counterpoint to the central contributions that were described. I gave participants space to voice their thoughts about any contributions that chapel makes, and they told me. I tried to frame my questions in such a way that they did not feel compelled to tell me positive things if they did not also believe them. Equally, I made every effort in the interviews never to put ideas in participants' heads with leading questions, which probably accounts for the way in which certain sub-themes are mentioned and others are not.

In my data presentation I selected those sub-themes that had most prevalence in the data (according to how many participants volunteered each of these for discussion). Arguably, I might have been able to find pupil (and adult) participants who were vehemently opposed to chapel, and who might have described it as 'indoctrination' or 'a waste of time', but such voices simply were not contained in the interview data. My sense here is that a meaningful parallel exists with other features of school life, like doing homework. Whilst it would be easy to find pupils who would grumble and groan about having to do it, if the question was asked 'what is the contribution of homework?', a lot of the same pupils would no doubt say something about the way it promotes independent learning and self-motivation.

Potentially, what my participants revealed was their intellectual understanding and interpretation of the contribution of chapel. They perhaps saw the interview as an exercise in giving voice to the benefits of the practice of whole-school chapel. This is not the same thing

as saying that all pupils consistently derive all the benefits mentioned in this thesis. What my study shows is the scope of the potential contributions that chapel can make. A further study would be beneficial, looking into more large-scale views on how valuable and important chapel is.

This study utilises a relatively small sample of voices and views, albeit chosen with every effort to be as representative as possible, whilst also ensuring key figures in the school community were included. Have I paid enough attention to the dissenting voices? Maybe not, but I have never tried to claim that my findings speak of contributions that apply to all corners of the community. I have first-hand experience of pupils who hated chapel and felt they got absolutely nothing from it. This type of sentiment has not been in doubt, or deliberately ignored, but it was not a feature of my interview data. The aim of this study was to give a sense of the prevailing opinion and the ways that chapel is still considered by many to be a valuable part of the provision within certain UK private senior schools. There is still a moral question to be answered about whether it is right to compel pupils to attend who do not wish to, but there has not been scope in this study to explore this.

If the research process is imagined as a chain, between the research question and the eventual findings, there are various points of potential weakness in that chain. I have considered the significant 'links' in the chain of my thesis, to bring to the forefront the areas that could be open to criticism, and hopefully to justify the overall coherence of this project. My project could certainly be criticised against a number of these crucial links. For example, my case selection, which some might argue was biased in favour of my eventual findings. There was also very little attention given to other faiths; whilst this was not in the design, I simply did not encounter any participants who professed another faith apart from Christianity. Since the houseparents selected the pupil participants, I did not have control over this.

My own academic background in theology and philosophy has consolidated my sense that people need to find some expression for the mysterious and numinous aspects of life. I also attended a private senior school with a strong chapel tradition and drew deeply from my

involvement in choral singing, which I carried into my university life as an undergraduate. As a senior school boarding housemaster, I had to ensure the boys in my house attended morning chapel, which generated a certain amount of conflict with those who felt that this was an unreasonable demand on them, especially first thing in the morning. My interest in this study certainly comes out of these various experiences but I am very aware of my positionality and have tried at every stage of this study to recognise and account for it. As mentioned above, the simple fact is that the overwhelming flow of data was positive about the contribution of chapel. It is plausible that if I had gone into the project with a more hostile view of chapel I would have ended in a different place, but equally I might have struggled to secure even three heads willing to give me access to their schools.

Another limitation of this study, which was well beyond my control, was the lack of any ethnography in the data collection due to Covid restrictions and the timing of the various lockdowns. The original research design for this study included visits to chapel services in all three case study schools, to take field notes on the context and construction of the services. This would have certainly added greater depth to the analysis process, and the richness to the eventual case reports. However, it became clear that simply obtaining the interview data was going to be enough of a challenge, given the extraordinary restrictions that we were all living through at the time, and the additional complexities that school leaders were having to navigate.

Further ideas for study and the possible contribution of this study

A further development of the ideas of this thesis would be to explore how far the contribution that chapel makes could be given equal status and value through non-denominational, even humanist underpinnings. This would be a radical departure from current practice for some schools, but it might be more in line with modern teenagers, providing the features of chapel they value and appreciate whilst removing the features they are less positive about. In terms of what I can do professionally with the findings of this thesis, I intend to approach HMC and IAPS in the coming academic year to offer either an article for their publications or to speak at one of their conference events; I have also agreed with the editors of *Independent Schools*

Magazine to produce an article for them, summarising my findings. Whilst access might prove difficult, a large-scale quantitative survey of pupil attitudes to chapel across the sector would potentially offer a fascinating and informative addition to the findings of this study; the prevalent sub-themes from this study would provide a meaningful framework for such a survey.

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Appendices

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Appendix A: Gatekeeper Letter

The School of Education, University of Nottingham

Dearing Building, Jubilee Campus

Wollaton Road

Nottingham

NG8 1BB

anthony.macpherson@nottingham.ac.uk

07779 598 197

[Insert name of school Head and school address]

[Insert date]

Dear [insert name of school Head],

I hope everything is going well for you at **[insert name of school]** and I trust you will not mind me contacting you out of the blue like this. **[Insert something personal in relation to me and specific to the Head and their school.]** I write in the hope that you might be interested in a research project that I am currently working on. My thesis is entitled 'The contribution of chapel to UK senior private schools' and it forms part of a professional doctorate in education (EdD), which I am undertaking through part-time study at the University of Nottingham.

I am fascinated by the changing complexion of national attitudes to religion and spirituality, against which private senior schools seem largely to retain a traditional form of collective Christian worship, called chapel. Several recent surveys into religious beliefs and attitudes in the UK have concluded that the number of adherents to Christianity is in steep decline, with increasing numbers of people identifying as 'non-religious'; interestingly, a high proportion of teenagers still declare a belief in a soul, the spiritual realm, miracles, life after death, and the value of prayer.

My assumption, informed largely to this point by personal experience, is that a traditional culture of whole-school chapel contributes much that is of value, including, but not limited to, the moral and spiritual development of its pupils. I intend to examine this assumption against a theoretical framework provided by ideas of social, cultural, organisational and spiritual capital. As a professional doctorate, my final thesis must make a unique contribution to knowledge and illuminate something of value and interest to my professional setting.

I hope to secure one school within which to pilot my research methods and then three further schools for my subsequent data collection. My research will comprise interviews with the following people from participating schools: The Head, The Chaplain, The Director of Music, The Director of Marketing and Admissions, a few current pupils, current parents and alumni, and a small sample of teaching staff. Data relating to the beliefs and opinions of pupils will be gathered following a one-off PSHE or Religious Studies lesson, led by me, during which I will carefully introduce and outline my project and the pupils' potential role and contribution towards it. This approach will enable me to explore with pupils their valuable beliefs and opinions about chapel, and how it contributes to their lives. I will probably only want one pupil participant per year group, chosen randomly from any who volunteer.

Personal or sensitive data will be handled according to GDPR legislation and my research has been approved by the University of Nottingham's research ethics committee. Strict anonymity and the right to withdraw at any stage will be guaranteed for all participants and I will be pleased to share my broad findings with the Heads of all participating schools. It is necessary at this stage that I should emphasise one important detail. Once in receipt of a Head's permission to proceed, I will need to approach and recruit the further participants myself. It is important for the ethical status of my research that I ensure all participants know they are completely free to decide to participate and also to withdraw at any stage, and that their contribution will be treated with strict confidentiality and anonymity.

I do not intend to start data collection until next academic year (20-21) and if there are still social restrictions in place at this time, because of COVID-19, I will move all of my adult participant interviews to an online platform, most likely Microsoft Teams. The interviews with

pupils need to be conducted in person, for a number of reasons, and so I will delay these until such time as it is feasible for everyone to return safely to the school setting.

I am extremely excited by my research proposal and I hope you might be interested and willing to discuss it further with me. When you have time to meet or talk on the phone, I should be delighted to hear from you. Further down the line, if you agree to **[insert name of school**] being one of my case-study schools, that will be wonderful news indeed.

With all best wishes,

Anthony Macpherson

Appendix B: Privacy Information for Research Participants

For information about the University's obligations with respect to your data, who you can get in touch with and your rights as a data subject, please visit:

https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/utilities/privacy.aspx.

Why do we collect your personal data?

We collect personal data under the terms of the University's Royal Charter in our capacity as a teaching and research body to advance education and learning. Specific purposes for data collection on this occasion are to better understand the contribution of chapel to your school and the lives of its pupils.

What is the legal basis for processing your personal data under GDPR?

The legal basis for processing your personal data on this occasion is Article 6(1a) consent of the data subject.

What is 'special category' personal data?

In addition to the legal basis for processing your personal data, the University must meet a further basis when processing any special category data, including: personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, or religious or philosophical beliefs.

The basis for processing your sensitive personal data on this occasion is Article 9(2a) the data subject has given explicit consent to the processing.

How we process your data?

Your data may be subject to automated processing or profiling, which is intended to help organise and analyse non-numerical data. The significance of automated processing or

profiling is that it allows for the classification, sorting and arranging of information. The results of the processing will allow visualisation of the data and examination of relationships within the data which will ultimately provide an insight into the contribution of chapel to your school and the lives of its pupils.

For how long do we keep your data?

The University may store your data for up to 25 years and for a period of no less than 7 years after the research project finishes. The researchers who gathered or processed the data may also store the data indefinitely and reuse it in future research. Measures to safeguard your stored data include the strict anonymity of participant schools and individual participants.

- Electronic data will be stored in encrypted files on the University of Nottingham OneDrive. Access will be enabled only to the researcher's two research study supervisors. Any hard copies of data will be kept in a locked cabinet. The researcher alone will have access to these sources, although aspects will be disclosed and discussed with the research supervisors.

- Specific details of participant schools will not be included in the study. Instead they will simply be referred to by their Case Study number.

- Individual data will remain confidential. Only generic information will be included with respect to participants, for example 'teaching staff', 'marketing manager'; participant's names will not be used and participants will not be identifiable from the study.

- Data collection methods (interviews and questionnaires) will not include names of participants or their school.

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet for Adults

A Study to Understand the Contribution of chapel within Senior, Private Schools

Before you decide to take part in this study it is important that you understand why the research is being conducted and what it will involve. As such, you are invited to read the following information carefully. You are welcome to ask me about anything that is not clear or if you require further information.

Purpose of the study

This study is being undertaken to understand the potentially unique contribution of collective worship, known as chapel, to your school community and the lives of its pupils. My research will be based on the verbal testimony of a number of specific individuals who will be interviewed during my data collection.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been invited to take part in the research study as one of the following:
- Head
- Chaplain
- Director of Music
- House Parent
- Subject Teacher
- Member of the Marketing & Admissions Team
- Alumnus
- Current School Parent

I want to understand your thoughts relating to the value of religion and collective worship in general. Also, I want to understand your thoughts relating to the particular contribution of chapel within your school specifically.

Do I have to take part?

Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary and you are at liberty to withdraw at any stage without prejudice or negative consequences. No explanation for your decision will be required. If you do decide to participate, you will be given a copy of this information sheet to keep. You will also be asked to sign a consent form indicating your willingness to participate.

What will happen to me if I take part?

As a participant, you will be invited to attend a single interview with me. A mutually convenient time and location for this interview will be arranged between us. The interview will begin with you answering a few brief questions in writing about your beliefs and background before moving on to a general discussion about chapel, which will last no more than 1 hour and will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. You will never be identified by name, but rather by a unique code. You will be sent a copy of the anonymised transcript in order for you to confirm that it is an accurate record of your comments and in case you wish to amend the statement in any way. The transcript will not be used or made available for any purposes other than the research project.

Are there possible disadvantages and/or risks in taking part?

The interview will include questions about your personal beliefs and your attitudes to religion and worship, and your thoughts on the contribution of chapel within your school. Strict anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained in relation to your comments. If at any point in the interview you become uncomfortable with the focus of our conversation, or a particular question, you must let me know and I will move immediately to a new area for discussion. You are welcome to pause or end the interview at any stage and you will not be asked to give any explanation for this.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

The study will enable me to explore the potentially unique contribution of chapel to your school community and its pupils, in the hope of making general observations of interest and value to the sector. You will be kept informed of the progress of the study and I will be happy to share with you my eventual findings.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Any written documents and verbal information obtained will be treated with the upmost respect. I will ensure that all aspects of the study are carried out in line with the Data Protection Act (2018) and GDPR. All the information collected will be stored securely. Electronic data will be stored in encrypted files on the University of Nottingham OneDrive. Access will be enabled only for my two research supervisors. Any data collected will be stored for up to 25 years but no less than 7 years in line with the University of Nottingham policy and will be decided by my supervisors who will hold, retain and archive this after completion of the study. Any hard copies of data will be kept securely for the duration of the doctoral process and will always be anonymised.

Whilst the information gained during the study may be published, specific details of participating schools will not. Instead they will simply be referred to as either School X or School Y. Individual data will remain confidential. Only generic information and job titles will be used with respect to participants in the report: e.g. Chaplain, Head, Current Parent, Pupil. Names will never be used.

To demonstrate GDPR compliance you will be provided with a separate privacy notice.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

I expect to present findings from my research at conferences and through some form of academic writing. All data will be anonymised throughout the study and so it will not be possible to identify participants through any of these activities.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This study is being conducted as part of the qualification of Professional Doctorate in Education with the University of Nottingham. There is no funding attached to the research.

Ethical review of the study

The University of Nottingham Code of Research provides governance and direction about research ethics. This research **[will have been]** has been approved by the School of Education Research Ethics Committee.

If you would like to know anything more about what your participation would involve, please contact me or my supervisors.

Researcher

Anthony Macpherson: anthony.macpherson@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisors

Professor Andrew Townsend: andrew.townsend@nottingham.ac.uk
(01158 467 043)

Professor Andrew Fisher: andrew.fisher@nottingham.ac.uk
(01159 515 840)

Concerns

If you are concerned by any aspects of this information sheet, or you wish to make a complaint at any stage, please contact the University of Nottingham Research Ethics Office:

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator:
educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix D: Participant Information Sheet for Pupils

Project Title: 'The Contribution of chapel in UK Private Senior Schools.'

Hello! On this page, I will tell you a little bit about my research project, what I want to do, and what you will be doing in the project if you agree to take part.

My project

I am exploring the contribution of chapel within private senior schools as I want to see what sort of opportunity it provides for the moral and spiritual development of pupils. I also want to see if chapel contributes to the broader school community in interesting ways.

Activities

During the project, we will discuss your beliefs about religion and worship and what you think about chapel. You do not have to reveal any information about yourself or your beliefs that you do not wish share

Things you need to know

When we have our discussion, I will ask you a few questions and record our conversation with my microphone. I will use this recording to produce a written account of the conversation, after which I will ask you to confirm that you agree it is an accurate account of our conversation.

You can ask any questions to me about the research and your involvement in it.

I will keep a copy of all documents very securely so that no-one else can access them (apart from my university tutors). If I write anything about you, I will give you a "**Code Name**" so that nobody will ever be able to identify who you are. I will never use or refer to your real name, so neither you, nor your school, will ever be identifiable from the report I produce.

You can stop and withdraw from this study at any time. You will not have to give a reason and nothing will happen to you as a result.

If you are happy with this information, and you want to take part in the project, please complete the separate **Consent Form.**

Thank you for looking at this letter and listening to me today, Mr. Anthony Macpherson

Appendix E: Consent Form for Adult Participants

Project title: The contribution of chapel to UK private senior schools?

Researcher's name: Anthony Macpherson

Supervisor's name: Professor Andy Townsend

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been clearly explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.

- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.

- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage without any need for an explanation and no further participation would be requested or required of me beyond this.

- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal opinions will remain confidential.

- I understand that I will be audio recorded during the interview.

- I understand that all data will be stored in such a way that I will not be identifiable from them. An audio file of my interview will be kept only as long as is required for a transcript to be produced, which I will then have the opportunity to confirm as an accurate record of the discussion. Any hard copies or computer files of the interview will not identify me and will be stored securely.

- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed …………………………………………………………………… (research participant)

Print name ………………………………………………………………		**Date** …………………………………………

Researcher: Anthony Macpherson anthony.macpherson@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Professor Andy Townsend andrew.townsend@nottingham.ac.uk

Second Supervisor: Professor Andrew Fisher andrew.fisher@nottingham.ac.uk

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator:

educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix F: Consent Form for Pupil Participants

Project title: The contribution of chapel to UK private senior schools?

Researcher's name: Anthony Macpherson

Supervisor's name: Professor Andy Townsend

I have **read** the Information Sheet and understand the project and my involvement.

I **agree** to take part in the research project.

I have had the opportunity to **discuss** my involvement with a suitable adult.

I **understand** that if I do not want to stay in the research project, I can leave at any time, without having to give a reason, and I will not get into any trouble for doing so.

I **know** that there will be a microphone used to record my comments.

I **know** that I will be identified in all recordings and documentation by a **"code name"** so that nobody except the researcher will ever know who I am.

Signed …………………………………………………………………… (pupil participant)

Name ………………………………………………………………… **Date** …………………………………

Researcher: Anthony Macpherson anthony.macpherson@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Professor Andy Townsend andrew.townsend@nottingham.ac.uk

Second Supervisor: Professor Andrew Fisher andrew.fisher@nottingham.ac.uk

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator:

educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk