



Second-level push by Educate Together schools

by Niall Murray
Education Correspondent

CAROL and Peter Dunne are among thousands of parents seeking their own choice of multi-denominational second-level education for their families.

Their seven-year-old daughter Eva is in first class and Mia, aged five, is a junior infant at Griffeen Valley Educate Together school in Co Dublin, and their one-year-old twins Anya and Phelim will begin classes there in a few years.

It is one of five schools under the multi-denominational group's umbrella in Lucan but parents of pupils at the schools fear there will

not be enough room for them in the area's existing two second-level schools when they finish their primary education, unless the Department of Education grants an application to register Educate Together as a second-level patron.

"The 16 pupils who finished at our girls school last year all went on to different schools because there were no second-level places locally. The VECs are being made patron for primary schools, so why can't Educate Together become patrons at second-level," she said.

"It's not just the multi-denominational element, but the general

ethos of parental involvement and children being more involved in their learning that makes the Educate Together model what we want," said Ms Dunne.

By next year, as many as 150 pupils from the five Lucan Educate Together schools could be looking for second-level places and the local task force claim numbers could double by 2014.

The Lucan group are just one of a number of parent and school communities

hoping to have an Educate Together second-level school in their area, with a group in Waterford already having a potential site selected.

The plan is to open a number of such schools in areas where some of the 56 Educate Together primary schools teach more than 10,000 pupils.

The demand for second-level provision was highlighted in a petition with more than 6,000 signatures brought to the Dáil for Education Minister Batt

O'Keeffe yesterday. It has the support of many education experts in universities and officials of the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and Amnesty International.

The Department of Education said the broader question of patronage in second-level schools is being considered by Mr O'Keeffe, and Educate Together's application is being examined in that context. Department officials will be

in contact with South Dublin County Council in the coming weeks in relation to various sites identified for the medium-term need for another second level school in Lucan.

Educate Together chief executive, Paul Rowe, said that, far from creating an extra cost to the system in allowing the organisation proceed to second-level schooling, it would bring significant added value to a system in need of serious reform.

"Over the past 30 years, we have proved our capacity to open high-quality primary schools in a highly efficient manner," he said.



Marwa Ali, from Griffeen Valley Educate Together, Lucan, Dublin, outside the Dáil yesterday when Educate Together handed in a petition with over 6,000 signatures.



Carol Dunne with a petition outside the Dáil.