

Basic Information on Educate Together for Public Relations

Educate Together schools are set up and developed by groups of parents in a local area, who wish to send their children to a national school that is multi-denominational, child-centred, co-educational and democratically run. The schools are recognised by the Department of Education & Science, are non-fee paying and operate under the same rules applying to all national schools.

Multi-Denominational

Educate Together schools from the outset respect all ethical and religious traditions. The schools are legally obliged to cherish and respect the religious, cultural, social identity of every child and family that attends the school. The Board of Management cannot promote or favour any particular religious persuasion. The school organises a comprehensive programme of education about the major religions and faith systems in the world but does not teach any particular faith or creed. However, the school facilitates any group of parents who wish to do so to organise religious instruction for their children outside the main school programme. The religious education programme of an Educate Together school does not avoid issues of ethics and morality. It teaches children core values of appreciation and respect of social, cultural and other human difference; health and safety; social responsibility and rights and other features necessary to inform a child's developing mind to live in our rapidly changing society.

Child Centred

While covering the curriculum set out by the Department of Education for all National Schools, the educational programme of an Educate Together school is developed creatively through genuine dialogue between teachers and parents for the common good of the children.

Co-educational

All Educate Together schools are co-educational and have active programmes to counter gender stereotyping and inequity in all aspects of school life.

Democratically Run

As all Educate Together schools are set up by groups of parents, parents have unparalleled access and involvement in the running and development of the school. The ethos of the school is to promote the fullest participation by parents, teachers and students in decision-making processes and to promote a genuine creative partnership between parental involvement and the professional role of teachers. The role of the patron (a structure that is insisted upon by the state) is either carried out by Educate Together nationally or by a local company limited by guarantee. In both cases, this role is governed by a legal constitution, decisions are controlled by general meetings and officers are regularly elected.

Partnership in Education

With their unique ethos and democratic structure, Educate Together schools deliver a tremendous opportunity for parents, teachers and children to develop an educational community which provides an optimal environment for children to develop their intellectual, academic, social, cultural and physical life. Because they are so rooted in a living community, the schools can and do become important community resources making their facilities available in an appropriate way outside school hours.

Educate Together

There are currently 56 Educate Together schools in Ireland, with two more to open in 2010. 25 are in the greater Dublin region and one of the schools is a gaelscoil. Educate Together is the national representative body of these school communities. It is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. This company acts as the patron of new Educate Together schools and represents all its members in negotiations with the Department of Education and Science and other national organisations. Educate Together receives minimal government assistance and is dependent on charitable funding. It has a small national office in Dublin with paid staff and volunteer workers. The Board of Directors of Educate Together all work in a voluntary capacity and are elected annually from the school communities.

The Press Release

- A press release is a notification to a media organisation that something is about to happen or has happened.
- The media is the middleman between you and its audience.
- The press release should be faxed or e-mailed to all daily, weekend and local papers, and radio/TV as appropriate, two days before and on the morning of your event.
- Include the date of the release and mark it "For Immediate Publication" or "Embargo: time and date".

Guide to Writing a Press Release

- Keep it short - one page if possible, 1.5 spacing, short paragraphs
- In order to attract attention, a press release needs an interesting relevant headline
- Aim to make a number of key points. These include brief details on the event such as who, what, when, when, where all of which should be answered in the first paragraph then expanded upon in subsequent paragraphs.
- If appropriate put it in the context of the wider developments in the sector
- Prioritise two or three points you want to get across. Use quotes
- It is very important to include a contact point with name and phone number, for further information.

A good press release headline is:

- Short and to the point
- In vivid language
- Active
- Has human implications
- In the present tense
- Imaginable, something we can visualize

Note: When you are writing a headline remember there is no obligation on the reader to pay any attention to it. The obligation is on you to attract the reader. It is pointless to think the mass media should be interested in your issue. There are no "shoulds" in mass media. You have to attract and persuade people to read your story. The onus is on the writer, not the reader.

The first paragraph needs to answer key questions:

- If your story gets into a paper and another, bigger story comes along before it goes to print, they will edit your story. Under pressure, a sub-editor will simply chop off the end of it. So your story must be understandable if what follows the first paragraph is chopped off.
- Readers are busy and distracted. They may not have the time to read every story to the end. Deliver the information to them as early as possible.
- Keep it simple.
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The key questions are:

- What (is happening)?
- Who (is involved)?
- Where (is it happening)?
- When?
- Why?

A good press release uses active verbs and first-degree words:

This sentence uses the passive form of the verb:

"The town hall was occupied by protesters".

This sentence uses the active form of the verb:

"Protesters occupied the town hall".

Remember if it's a headline don't just go for a present or future tense verb:

Protesters occupy town hall,

Protesters to occupy town hall

First-degree words are the words we use automatically use:

Boat

Book

Face

Second-degree words are the words we use when we wish to be more varied or impressive

Vessel

Volume/Tome

Countenance

In order to understand second-degree words we almost have to relate it to its first-degree equivalent in news stories and in press releases - first-degree words are better because they don't make the reader work.

Embargo

In the upper left hand corner of your press release, you put an indicator to the recipient stating when it can be used.

For example, if you were releasing a major report, you might send it to a journalist on Tuesday 1st, but embargo it for Thursday the 3rd. That would give the journalist sufficient time to read through the report, master the detail and write a story, while ensuring the story did not appear until Thursday.

By contrast, it might suit you to distribute a press release in the morning, but in order to ensure that the evening paper does not use it; you might put, in the upper hand corner:

Embargo until 9 p.m. Thursday 3rd

Be warned however, newspapers have been known to break embargos. If you have a story that must be kept secret until a particular day, you may be better advised not to send it out in advance under an embargo, but keep it safe until the last moment.

Margins

- Your margins should not look crowded. Make sure margins are at least an inch on either side.
- Leave a blank of two inches at the top and an inch and a half at the bottom.
- Remember that a sub-editor may need to pencil notes or sub-headings into your text, so leave room for this purpose.

Paragraphs

Broken up text is much easier to read than text that is presented in long, uninterrupted blocks. Use paragraphing: one paragraph for each new idea - a new paragraph for each quotation. If you find a paragraph running more than three sentences, examine the possibility of breaking it in two.

Dates

You put the date of the release along the line "For Immediate Release", bearing in mind that a press release might go missing and be retrieved later. If the news staff don't know when it arrived "For immediate release" is meaningless, whereas...

For Immediate Release Friday, 3rd April, 2004

...makes perfect sense

In addition try to get the dates of what you are writing about into the first paragraph.

Quotations

There is much more to quotations than meets the eye.

- When you see quotation marks in a story, we know there is a human being, a voice, in the story. This adds to its interest.
- Quotation marks, properly used, pull the eye of the reader, so that someone who might otherwise stop reading after the first paragraph is more likely to continue reading if there are quotations in the remainder of the text.
- Putting some of the data in the mouth of a speaker gives greater variety to what would otherwise be a straight presentation of details.

Guidelines for using quotations

- Don't dribble half a quotation onto the end of a sentence
- Make sure you have enough words in front of the attribution

10 DON'TS for Press releases

- Don't type your press release in capital letters
- Don't type your press release in italics
- Don't type your press release on both sides of a page
- Don't fail to proof-read your release - or better still, have it proof read by someone else
- Don't use clichés
- Don't use padding ('with regard to' 'in the context of')
- Don't send it late (some provincial papers might stop taking copy much earlier in the week than you might think - check with them.)
- Don't send it to the wrong person - or to the right person with their name misspelled
- Don't use bold type to emphasise points
- Don't open quotation marks and forget to close them