

**PROPOSED CURRICULAR FRAMEWORK FOR AN  
EDUCATE TOGETHER SECOND-LEVEL SCHOOL**

**Kathleen Geraghty, June 2008**

## Foreword

From the inception of the Educate Together Second-level Project in October 2007 it was clear that the development of a curricular framework for Educate Together second-level schools would be a central concern. The curricular approach was not perceived in isolation, but as an ongoing process which would develop over time in conjunction with policy on all other aspects of how an Educate Together second-level school would function.

The immediate task was to establish a reference point for discussions as to what type of curricular approach would best embody the Educate Together ethos at second-level. Following workshops in January 2008, tenders were invited for the development of a Proposed Curricular Framework. This initial framework was to be based on the Educate Together Charter and Mission Statements and on the Second-level Feasibility Study carried out by Trinity College Dublin. Views already expressed in meetings and workshops were also to inform the work and it should be developed in consultation with Educate Together members and staff. Finally, the framework should fully reflect current State regulations and policy on second-level schooling in Ireland.

The tender was awarded to Kathleen Geraghty, a retired second-level Deputy Principal, in April 2008. Kathleen set about her task with enthusiasm and industry. Consultation meetings were held with the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Methodologies Working Group\* at the beginning and the end of the process and the Framework was completed ahead of schedule in June 2008.

There are many questions which have been raised during the process of drawing up this Framework which we look forward to exploring further as the Project develops. Whether or not the Junior Certificate Examination is compatible with the type of integrated, project-based approach to learning which is envisaged is one such question. The need to develop practical mechanisms to ensure that the aims and principles of the Second-level Project are fully activated *in practice*, was a recurring concern in discussions and this will be an important task for the Working Groups in the immediate future. It will be vital that as plans for a specific school emerge, the local community, including students, can engage fully with the further development of this curriculum work, and indeed all school development planning work, not just in the initial establishment of their school but on an ongoing basis.

We are extremely grateful to Kathleen for the professional manner in which she approached the task and are confident that this Proposed Framework reflects the both the views of Educate Together members as expressed to date, and sound educational practice, providing an excellent foundation on which to build.

Emer Nowlan, Educate Together Second-level Project Manager, June 2008

\*Curriculum and Teaching and Learning Methodologies Working Group:

Colette Brady, Bridget Collins, David Cunningham, Bob Dowling, Carol Dunne, Angela Higgins, Simon Moore, Emer Nowlan, John O'Reilly

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## INTRODUCTION

This framework has at its core and is informed throughout by the key principles of the Educate Together Charter, 1990.

**The 'Multi-denominational' Principle:** children of all social and cultural groups and of all religious and non-religious backgrounds are equally respected. All children have equal right of access to Educate Together schools.

**The Co-education Principle:** all children are encouraged to fulfill their potential in a school setting that is committed to equal opportunities for girls and boys.

**The Child/ Learner-centred Principle:** the schools promotes a learner-centred approach to the curriculum in which the teacher guides and facilitates the student's learning through both formal and informal methods, while encouraging him/her to be an active participant in his/her learning. Each student's individual needs are considered and he/she is encouraged to learn at an appropriate pace. There is constant striving for excellence in all areas of school life.

**The Democratic Principle:** school Patrons and Boards are committed to working in such a way as to embrace the input of parents, teachers, supporters and students and to enable the highest level of participation and partnership.

The proposed curriculum fulfils the requirements for second-level schools of the Department of Education and Science (DES) according to the Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools 2004/5.

It is informed and guided by the findings and conclusions of the Feasibility Study on the Opening of a Second-level School by Educate Together carried out by the School of Education, Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and completed in November 2007.

It takes into account the goals and objectives of the Educate Together Business Plan 2007/9 and is based on the comments and suggestions made by participants at workshops organised during a planning day for parties interested in the setting up of an Educate Together second-level school.

This curricular framework is also strongly influenced by the latest work of The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), specifically in the following areas:

- The vision and strategic objectives of NCCA for improvement in curriculum and assessment in second-level schools
- NCCA Strategic plan for 2006 -8

- ESRI (Economic and Social Research Institute) /NCCA Review of the Junior Cycle 2003 - Experiences of students in each year of the Junior Cycle in 12 sample schools :
  - "Moving Up": The experiences of first year students" (2005)
  - "Pathways Through the Junior Cycle: the experiences of second year students (2006)
  - "Gearing Up for the Exam": the experiences of Junior Cert students (2007) (all Liffey Press publications)
- Review of the Senior Cycle: Draft Interim Report on Key Skills at Senior Cycle (May 2008)
- Draft Guidelines for Teachers of students with Special Educational Needs

It also takes into account The Department of Education Circular 0051/2007. "The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004 and The Disability Act 2005"

This curricular framework is not designed to be considered in isolation but should be supported by further documentation detailing proposed practices in relation to assessment, teaching and learning methodologies and school management, as well as concrete examples of how the curriculum will be implemented. The realisation of the Educate Together ethos will be achieved not simply through the implementation of this curricular framework but also through rigorous application of the ethos to teaching methodologies, relationships within the school, and to how the business of the school is conducted generally. In this way both the curricular approach and the day to day practice of the school will be what makes this school distinctive.

Furthermore, since an Educate Together school will strive to be a learning organization, curriculum evaluation and development will be ongoing, as part of a structured process of School Development Planning in which all members of the school community will participate.

This document is laid out in three sections. Firstly some contextual considerations are discussed. These should not be viewed as peripheral to the framework, but instead form the basis of it. Issues relating to teachers, methodology and assessment, in particular, are seen as fundamental to the success of this curricular framework. In section two the curricular framework itself is outlined, including the different courses and accreditation options which are likely to be included in an Educate Together school. Finally, reference is made to a number of appendices – with the intention that these can be developed and added to on an ongoing basis in order to enhance the framework and to elaborate further how its overall aims can be achieved.

## CONTEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

### *FEASIBILITY STUDY AND WORKSHOPS*

It is clear from the Feasibility Study that **parents** who subscribe to the Educate Together ethos and are interested in sending their child to an Educate Together second-level school, would place academic achievement high on their list of priorities. They would do this without compromising the importance of the Educate Together values of inclusion and the holistic development of the young person. The surveys of parental attitudes give a clear picture of expectations in this area:

- Parents wish the school to have clearly defined educational goals, a consistent homework policy and a good balance between the academic and social development of the young person.
- They wish the students to be encouraged towards responsibility for their learning and to know what is expected of them academically.
- They want the school to have a clear philosophy which informs teaching and learning.
- They expect teachers to be skilled and well-qualified and teaching standards to be high.
- As parents, they wish to be informed of the school's approach to teaching and learning and to be as involved in their child's education as possible.
- If they have concerns about their child's progress they expect to have them addressed.
- They wish the school to have a clear and consistent policy of assessment of work which involves both the students themselves and them as parents.
- They expect feedback from teachers on a regular basis about their child's academic progress.
- They place a high priority on the importance of the school providing a good education to students of all levels of ability and on good supports for students with special educational needs.

From these findings we can see how, at the curricular level, the Educate Together ethos would apply to a second-level school. Inclusion and parity of esteem are at its core. Students of all levels of ability are included and equally respected. Parents are involved in a partnership with teachers in supporting the young person's learning. Students, from the beginning, are learning to take

responsibility for their own learning. The Educate Together Mission Statement which commits to "enabling and supporting each child to fulfill his/her full potential" will be at the heart of this school.

(The extent to which academic provision is high on the list of priorities for parents of primary school children in Educate Together schools is shown in comments made by parents in the telephone survey aspect of the study where concerns about the quality of teaching, academic standards and facilities for practical subjects in a new Educate Together school were expressed.)

Feedback from the **workshops** echoed many issues raised in the Feasibility Study, including: the importance of keeping Educate Together values at the core of the curriculum; the focus on each child reaching his/her potential; the importance of assessment; the importance of achieving qualifications at a level appropriate to each student; the development of a range of skills in different areas; the focus on encouraging critical thinking rather than rote learning. In the workshops people expressed a desire that teaching methodologies would be in line with the Educate Together ethos and encourage collaboration, critical thinking and personal responsibility for learning. They saw facilities and teaching for students with special educational needs as essential. The quality of teaching was mentioned. Other important issues were raised:

- The importance of ICT (Information and Communications Technology) education
- The need for focus on successful transition from primary to secondary school
- The need for an excellent Principal with good leadership qualities
- Good relationships between teachers and students were seen as crucial for successful learning
- It was recognised that within the confines of the current DES curriculum there was scope for a wide range of teaching strategies and methodologies in line with Educate Together principles
- Extra curricular activities were seen as a very important feature of the school and parental skills and involvement in this area as crucial
- Recognition of achievement in all areas would be necessary
- The size of the school was seen as an issue, in terms of the range of subjects which could be provided. (This point was also made by the Second-level Principals who participated in the Feasibility study)

The Feasibility study provided valuable insights into the **practicalities** of establishing a second-level school from the point of view of the Principals who participated. They saw the size of the proposed school as a crucial issue and felt that an optimum student body would be between 600 and 800, the lower end providing for the best student-centred school and the upper end providing for the best subject choice. They stressed the necessity for detailed planning before the opening of the school and the necessity for focus on the relevant Education and Welfare Acts which now have major implications for all school management bodies. From a curricular point of view a good balance between the sciences and arts subjects was seen as necessary and the use of some teacher Posts of Responsibility (middle management) for curricular development as a good idea. They believe that teachers need to have a holistic view of the student, be flexible, work well in a team and relate well to parents. A Year Head and Subject Head system which operates in most schools was seen to be successful.

From the above, it is clear that there is broad agreement among the parties surveyed on what an Educate Together Second-level school should be like in terms of its teaching and learning. Most of the points made are supported by the findings of the ESRI study into student experiences at Junior Level and it is on this base that the elements of this curricular framework are founded.

## ***TEACHER - PROFESSIONAL ISSUES***

A core principle of the Educate Together ethos is respect, and in an Educate Together second-level school the expertise, professional judgement and experience of the teaching staff who deliver the curriculum will be valued and respected. This will be clearly seen in the everyday life of the school. The principles of democracy and inclusion will be seen in action as teachers are given a clear role in decision-making in relation to curriculum and all major issues. In this climate of mutual respect, the school should be able to recruit and retain teachers who have the highest professional standards and who will seek to develop the potential of every student in the school.

With high teacher morale, it is likely that teachers will have a high level of commitment to the school and will be willing to volunteer time to extra curricular activities outside their contracted teaching hours, something which was seen as a priority by parents interviewed in the TCD feasibility study. An excellent, highly motivated, valued and respected teaching staff will be fundamental to successful learning outcomes in the school. A number of strategies will promote this:

1. A Principal who has excellent administration and personal skills, who is a good leader and who has a commitment to the Educate Together principles of respect, democracy and inclusion.
2. A Deputy Principal who is a good administrator and has a clear vision for the

school as well as a commitment to implementing an agreed and fair discipline policy for the good of all.

3. An excellent middle management team of Assistant Principals and Special Duties Teachers who pursue the highest standards in carrying out their extra duties.
4. A good support staff of secretarial and maintenance personnel to allow teachers the maximum time to carry out their professional duties.
5. An induction process for new teachers who join the staff as the school expands, especially for new graduates, so that they can be supported as they develop their professional skills. A mentoring system might be considered.
6. The promotion of a collegiate model for the teaching staff so that they can share ideas as they help and support each other professionally. In such a climate team teaching and cross curricular work will thrive.
7. Support for professional bodies which encourage innovation and liaison between teachers from different schools --e.g subject teacher organisations
8. A strong focus on and commitment to continuing personal and professional development for all staff
9. A policy for timetabling and school organisation which allows for meeting time for curricular planning and cross curricular work, as well as flexibility, to allow teachers to work in innovative ways
10. The establishment of subject departments within the school as recommended by DES inspectorate, to allow for the co ordination of materials and methodologies and the establishment of learning targets.
11. The allocation of one or more posts of responsibility (Asst. Prin. or Sp Duties Teacher) to areas of curricular planning, development and review.
12. Excellent ICT facilities available to all teachers and up-skilling opportunities provided where needed.
13. Excellent classroom facilities provided for each teacher with the best available materials and equipment so that a top class environment is provided for teaching and learning.
14. A high priority given to the provision of specialist teacher services which support the work of the whole staff e.g. Guidance Counselling and Learning Support
15. A commitment on the part of all staff to collaborative working in an atmosphere of respectful partnership with other members of the school community, and to the process of ongoing school development and improvement.

## **TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODOLOGIES**

In recognition of the different ways in which young people learn, an Educate Together Second-level School will be committed to employing a variety of innovative and effective teaching and learning methodologies within the school. Further guidelines will detail the types of approaches which will be considered most appropriate to the Educate Together ethos and the manner in which expertise and excellence will be built up within Educate Together schools, both primary and second-level.

An Educate Together school will review and assess teaching strategies on a regular basis. This could involve a yearly staff meeting which would focus on success and potential for improvement in the curricular area and would give teachers opportunities to share ideas.

### **Student Perspectives on Teaching and Learning – ESRI/NCCA Research**

The ESRI/NCCA longitudinal research gives very valuable information on what factors are seen by students as contributing to their learning, and on what methods help to make the material interesting and engaging for them. An Educate Together school will seek to promote these positive factors and incorporate them into a curricular plan for the school. The vast majority of second-level teachers will already be accustomed to using a wide variety of teaching strategies and are likely to welcome a whole school focus which will promote a coherence of approach to teaching and learning. This process will be part of the Educate Together approach to staff as a team working together towards agreed common goals. It will be integral to the learner-centred focus of an Educate Together school and will have at its core the development of the potential of every student in the school. There will be a wide variety of clearly presented explanatory material for parents who have expressed a strong wish in the feasibility study to be included in their child's learning and to have their concerns addressed and their questions answered. A Post of Responsibility with duties in this area may be considered.

### **Recommendations arising from the ESRI/NCCA Research**

1. Successful integration for students coming from Primary school is of fundamental importance for learning at second-level. A number of strategies will be put in place to assist this process. These will be detailed later in this report.
2. Issues relating to class grouping will be addressed when the first group of first year students in the new school is formed. In line with Educate Together principles of equality and inclusion all classes will be mixed ability.
3. From first to third year over 70% of students surveyed saw the teacher's

ability to explain the material well as the most important factor in their learning. When second years were asked to name the single factor which most affected their learning, 25% chose this from a wide range of responses. In all three years, teacher issues loomed large and the feasibility study also showed that the parents interviewed expected a high professional standard from teachers delivering the curriculum in an Educate Together second-level school. This is to be expected. An Educate Together school will therefore promote and value excellence in teaching standards at every level.

4. Other teacher attributes were mentioned frequently by students in the surveys. Teachers in an Educate Together school would focus on the points made and would strive towards best practice at all times:
  - (a) There should be variety in teaching methods wherever possible :group and pair work /project work/ research/ games to enhance learning /notes given by the teacher rather than over reliance on reading from a textbook. The above were named by students as methods they liked and found helpful.
  - (b) Students liked being taught by teachers who clearly enjoyed their subject and were enthusiastic about it.
  - (c) Students wanted teachers to progress at a good pace which was neither too fast nor slow for them
  - (d) Third years in particular liked classroom discussion which promoted student interaction and autonomy. They liked everyone to have a voice, not just the vocal few, and they relied on the teacher to ensure that this happened.
  - (e) Students liked to be able ask questions freely and have their questions answered.
  - (f) They liked to be praised for work well done although some found praise in front of peers embarrassing.
  - (g) They liked the teacher to be friendly and have a sense of humour, and a good relationship with the teacher had a very positive effect on their attitude to the subject.
  - (h) Students whose academic ability was below average tend to be happier with more teacher led learning.

## **ASSESSMENT**

The TCD Feasibility showed clearly that while parents had strong wishes about the quality of education which they envisaged for their children in an Educate Together Second-level school, they saw a balance between academic and other areas as crucial and did not wish the school to be "exam points" focussed, they had a strong desire for a school dedicated to academic excellence. They also expressed a wish to be fully informed about their child's progress and to have

regular feedback from teachers. They considered it important that teachers be available to them if they wished to discuss issues around their child's learning.

With these facts in mind, an Educate Together Second-level School will have a variety of means of student assessment. Where possible, students will be given opportunities to gain accreditation from social, community and sporting activities as well as the more traditional academic pursuits. Assessment tools will include:

- A student learning profile on entry to first year.
- A system of self assessment by students which will take the form of a student diary to record class test results and other achievements in the academic area and will include teacher and parent comments. The content of this diary can be discussed by the student with the class tutor at regular intervals and strategies devised to make the student's learning more effective if this is seen as necessary. There will be a high level of parental involvement in this process, particularly with junior students. Ongoing evaluation will take place in the school to produce the best possible system of student self-assessment which will be seen as an essential element of an Educate Together Second-level school. Self assessment will be a feature of every learning experience in the school in so far as this is possible.
- Class tests and other means of evaluating progress will be used as deemed appropriate by teachers. Results of tests and other assessments will be conveyed to parents and they will be invited to discuss them with teachers. Every effort will be made to make time available to teachers for this purpose.

The format for parent/ teacher meetings in an Educate Together school will be decided by a parent/teacher/management team so that the best possible use of time is made and the most successful outcomes ensue. The traditional format is widely seen by both parents and teachers as unwieldy, confusing and often unproductive. Considerable time and effort will be devoted by all parties in a new Educate Together school to devising a more effective means of bringing parents and teachers together in the best interests of students.

Detailed and up to date information on the learning issues of students with special educational needs will be kept by the school management and the learning support teachers. This will include assessments and recommendations by educational psychologists and other professional personnel involved with the students. It will be made available to teachers with the consent of parents and used to plan learning programmes for students based on their individual needs. Parents will be informed of progress at every stage and will be invited to take a proactive role in working with teachers to further the learning of students who need extra support.

Students will prepare for a range of recognised examinations and accreditations

which may include: Junior Certificate, Junior Cert Schools Programme (if available), Transition Year Programme, Leaving Certificate, Leaving Certificate Applied, Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. FETAC awards and/or other awards.

Every effort will be made by the whole school community to ensure that students taking state exams have an opportunity and are encouraged and supported to achieve success at the highest level. There will be a strong focus, particularly at Leaving Cert level, on providing clear information about the exams to parents, on the development of effective study skills for students and on minimising stress for everyone concerned. The essential goal of the school community will be to ensure that every student has an opportunity to succeed at his/her own level and all such success will have equal value in an Educate Together second-level school. The wide range of State Examination options and all the supports available to students with special needs now make it possible for the vast majority of young people to choose a course which suits their abilities and in which they can experience success and achieve excellence. It will be the goal of an Educate Together school to ensure that all its students can have this experience. Therefore the resources and expertise available to the school will be devoted to ensuring that students choose the courses and levels suited to their needs and talents and leave school with the qualifications they need to access further education or to progress in the workplace.

More detailed elaboration of an Educate Together second-level school's philosophy of assessment and evaluation, and how this will link into teaching and learning methodologies in the school, should be undertaken, with reference to the importance of assessment for learning as well as assessment of learning.

## ***MOVING TO SECONDARY SCHOOL***

The ESRI report "Moving Up" gives valuable insights into students' own experiences of transferring from Primary to Secondary school and this information, and other research, can be used to ease the transition and minimise difficulties for first year students in an Educate Together second-level school. The study shows that students have both positive and negative feelings about moving into post primary school. Most feel excited, but nervous. In general students settle in quickly. Most feel that they have settled in by the end of the first week but for a quarter it takes about a month. One in six however takes longer than a month to settle in. Girls take longer than boys as do those from minority groups (e.g. Travellers). An Educate Together school will be aware of these facts and alert to issues which may arise from them.

The ESRI research into second and third year experiences showed that students who integrated successfully into first year had more positive attitudes to school and learning as they got older, so an Educate Together school will prioritise

resources in terms of time and planning for this purpose so that every student can thrive in his/her new environment. In an Educate Together school therefore, extensive planning will take place prior to the beginning of the school year to ensure that every student settles into school life as quickly as possible and that those who are experiencing difficulties can be identified quickly and their needs addressed.

The TCD Feasibility Study showed that parents were also anxious about their child's transfer to secondary school and wished to have that experience managed well. The ESRI report gave more detailed information on this issue and showed that parents and children were reassured by having as much access to information about the second-level school as possible in advance of starting first year. They liked open nights for parents at which issues around subjects, sports facilities, discipline and school rules were discussed. They felt that a class tutor system combined with a good induction programme were helpful to the students and themselves. The majority felt that it was natural for post primary school to be more challenging academically but some perceived a mismatch between standards in the two systems. The ESRI study also showed that parental support is crucial in helping a child to settle into secondary school and that young people from democratic family backgrounds where the child's autonomy is respected tend to be far more positive about the move to second-level. An Educate Together second-level school will have these values at its core and parents will be involved at every level in their child's education, so it is anticipated that early successful transition to second-level will be the experience of the vast majority of students in this school.

Planning for induction of new first years into an Educate Together second-level school will take account of the following issues highlighted by the ESRI study, all of which affect teaching and learning.

Adolescence. The young person is moving to secondary school at a time in his/her life when he/she is experiencing major physical and emotional changes. An Educate Together school will have an extensive support network for students to help them cope with issues arising from these changes.

Peer Issues. The child is moving into a period when the peer group becomes a major factor in how he/she sees his/her place in society. New relationships and friendships are formed and issues around social confidence and belonging in a group become crucial. The research shows that girls tend to stay in primary school groups while boys mix more freely. An Educate Together school will be focussed on these issues and will have strategies in place to ensure that no student is isolated.

Teacher/Student Relationships. The student will move from a close relationship with one teacher who knew him and his parents very well to a situation where he will need to form less personal relationships with a number of teachers. Anxiety around this issue in an Educate Together school will be lessened by having a good tutor system in place so that each student has one teacher to whom he can

relate in a more personal way and who will be a link with his parents.

Preparation for Moving. The research shows that how the school prepares for welcoming in the new students is crucial to successful integration. It needs to be a planned and multifaceted effort by teachers, parents and students. Pre entry contact on an extensive level is essential. An Educate Together school will employ a range of strategies which are seen as successful by students in the study . These include open days at which students meet key staff including their tutor and are familiarised with the school campus and facilities; information leaflets and newsletters; visits to primary schools by key staff; sports camps during the summer prior to entry; mentoring programmes by older students.

Curricular Issues. A major concern for an Educate Together school will be the current lack of curricular continuity between the primary and secondary systems and the different methodologies often used in each sector. An Educate Together school will have in place measures to address these issues, bearing in mind that a large percentage of the students surveyed said that they found the core subjects, English, Irish and Maths difficult in secondary school because they were taught differently. An Educate Together school will foster strong links between teachers from the feeder primary and the secondary schools. Opportunities will be provided for extensive professional liaison between the two so that a smooth transition from one sector to the other, in terms of syllabus and teaching methodologies can be achieved.

Special Needs. An Educate Together school will endeavour to acquire learning profiles for all incoming students prior to entry so that students with special educational needs can be identified and planning for their individual needs can take place well in advance of their entry to the school. Resource and learning support arrangements can therefore be put in place from their first day. This will be done with full consultation with their parents.

Bearing in mind, therefore, the crucial importance of the first few weeks of secondary school for the learning outcomes of each student, an Educate Together school will devote a considerable amount of time and effort to ensuring that every student settles in well and feels comfortable in his/her new surroundings with his /her teachers and fellow students. In this atmosphere he /she will be able to achieve his/her potential. It is also anticipated, due to the high correlation between failure to integrate well in first year and the likelihood of leaving school early and high rates of absenteeism, that an Educate Together school will have an excellent attendance record and very high rates of school completion.

## ***PROVISION FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS***

Education for students with special educational needs is now provided in schools under the terms of The Education for Persons With Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2005, which is being implemented over a five year timeframe that commenced on 1st October 2005. The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has submitted its Implementation Report to the Minister for Education and Science which sets out its views and recommendations on a plan for the implementation of the EPSEN Act 2004. This is now being considered by the Department. In addition, section 8 of The Disability Act 2005 can have implications for a school's educational provision for a child with special needs.

NCSE is an independent body established under statutory legislation to implement the provision of educational supports to students with special educational needs (SEN). It acts in accordance with DES policy in this area. It provides a service to parents and children through the co-ordination and delivery of services between the health sector and schools. It also allocates additional teaching and other resources available to schools to support the special needs of students with disabilities. Among its functions are:

- Planning and coordinating educational and support services to children with SEN
- Disseminating information on best practice in this area
- Assessing and reviewing resources required by children with SEN

It operates through the work of 80 Special Educational Needs Officers (SENOs) who are assigned to specific geographical areas and who work with schools, health services and parents to ensure that students with SEN access appropriate educational resources. The work of SENOs include:

- Processing applications for resource teacher support in respect of students with low incidence disabilities such as moderate general learning disability/ visual or hearing impairments/physical disability or autism and deciding on the level of support appropriate to the school
- Processing applications from second-level schools for resource teacher support in respect of students with high incidence disability such as mild general learning disability and deciding on the appropriate level of support for the school
- Processing applications from schools and deciding on appropriate levels of Special Needs Assistant support

- Examining applications for transport and equipment needs for students with SEN

The NCSE Implementation Report which is extensive and far reaching in its vision for the appropriate provision of education for people with SEN identifies a number of key areas which are necessary for this provision. They include:

- Appropriate education in an inclusive setting
- Provision of skills necessary to participate in society on leaving school
- Opportunities to proceed to third level, training and employment
- Preparation for independent living
- Greater participation by parents

The vision for the future of NCSE is that "children with SEN will achieve outcomes from education which will facilitate them in transferring to the workplace, progressing to further education and lifelong learning, participating meaningfully in economic, social and cultural activity and living fulfilled lives independently in the community. "They will have an enforceable right to appropriate education and will benefit on a par with their peers who do not have a SEN".

In keeping with DES guidelines and international best practice, it is Educate Together's experience that a whole school approach to special educational needs is vital if the complementary goals of equality in education and education for equality are to be achieved. At primary level the focus on the Educate Together core curriculum, the Learn Together Ethical Education programme, is a crucial element of this whole school approach and success at primary level will be built on at second-level. Furthermore, the child/learner-centred principle of the Educate Together ethos dictates that every student's individual learning needs must be considered in all decisions and policies, differentiated teaching and learning methodologies are therefore the norm and support, where possible, is provided in the mainstream.

Parents who are interested in sending their children to an Educate Together Second-level school expressed a strong desire in both the workshops and in the Feasibility Study, that the school would have excellent provision for students with special educational needs. Educate Together would therefore strongly support the vision and work of NCSE and would operate its own special needs provision in close contact with them. It would ensure that students with special needs in an Educate Together school would have access to all the resources available under NCSE provision. It would foster strong links with NCSE personnel and with the assigned SENO in particular. It would support its ongoing research and reporting to DES as it strives to improve services for students with disabilities.

An Educate Together second-level school will include the following elements in its Special Education provision:

- A fully qualified Learning Support teacher who will take overall responsibility for the provision and monitoring of learning support services to the school
- A quota of qualified resource teachers who may be allocated to the school on the basis of NCSE recommendations and who will work on a one-to-one or small group basis with students who have been granted an allocation of additional teaching time by DES
- A quota of special needs assistants who may be allocated to the school on the basis of need
  - All the above personnel would form a team to plan and implement learning support arrangements for individual students and to liaise with all teachers in the school, parents, school management, DES and outside agencies to ensure that optimum provision for all students results. The Learning Support teacher would head this team and chair meetings and where appropriate the special needs assistants would have an input. Parental consultation would be extensive at all stages.
- A designated Special Needs facility in the school to include a room for meetings, appropriate storage for confidential student documentation and reports, a number of teaching spaces suitable for one-to-one and small group work, extensive space for storage of resource material and a comfortable and attractive space for students to sit and read or do other work. (The library in Larkin Community College in Dublin 1 is an example of how an excellent environment can be a hugely motivating factor in the learning experience of all students but particularly those with learning difficulties) (could this be a footnote?).
  - This SEN facility will be designed in consultation with all members of the school community and will be a welcoming place for everybody. School policy will ensure that it will not be a means of segregating students with special needs but will in fact be used for a variety of purposes in the extra curricular area for example. It could also be used as a gallery space for the display of students' work. It can have a kitchen and small dining area similar to that which is usually provided in parents' rooms in schools which have a home/school service
- A Special Needs Policy which will ensure that students with SEN are taught in mixed ability classes and are given appropriate extra support by learning support personnel. This support will be planned for every student on an individual basis and directed at meeting his/her specific needs

Strong links will be made with the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) who provide the services of an Educational Psychologist on a geographical basis to each school. If parents or teachers believe that any student has a significant learning problem and has not had a full psychological assessment, this will be sought from NEPS so that the student may then be able to claim learning support resources from DES through NCSE. In view of the current situation where there is a lengthy waiting list for this service, the school will examine ways in which funding can be raised for private assessments so that no student with special educational needs will be deprived of resources aimed at helping him /her reach his/her potential.

In the case of students with emotional and behavioural difficulties, the school will make every effort to support parents in their attempts to access HSE services and if necessary to obtain clinical psychological assessments for students in need of these. The school will seek to access all supports available for students with behavioural difficulties (e.g. special needs assistants) and will work with parents at all levels to ensure that these students can access an education appropriate to their needs.

The physical environment will be such that all areas of the school are accessible to students with physical disabilities and appropriate special equipment to meet their needs will be to the highest standard. It will be school policy to ensure that all students with physical disabilities will be able to access all the educational opportunities offered by the school.

The school will recognise that students with special gifts and exceptionally high ability may also have special educational needs and will devise strategies to support these students also as the need arises. The needs of each individual student will be addressed and every effort made to ensure that their special talents are given opportunities to flourish in the school.

The school will work towards gaining optimum benefit for the students who receive support from the visiting teacher service for the visually and hearing impaired. Links will also be forged with appropriate outside agencies e.g the HSE.

## ***THE INTERCULTURAL PRINCIPLE IN THE CURRICULUM***

In keeping with DES guidelines and international best practice, it is Educate Together's experience that a whole school approach to intercultural education and multiculturalism is vital if the complementary goals of equality in education and education for equality are to be achieved. Staff collaboration is crucial and the basic principles of equality and respect for individual identities must inform every aspect of school life. At primary level the focus on the Educate Together core curriculum, the Learn Together Ethical Education programme, is a crucial

element of this whole school approach and success at primary level will be built on at second-level.

An Educate Together Second Level school will have the intercultural principle at its core. It will be at the heart of the curriculum and school life generally, and will inform all school policy decisions. The Department of Education has provided guidelines in this area and these will be taken into account in developing policy around multiculturalism. In addition the NCCA document "Intercultural Education in the Post Primary School" will inform this plan.

The DES Guidelines on Traveller Education in Second-Level Schools encapsulates principles of intercultural educational provision which Educate Together sees as fundamental to its ethos. It recognises that Ireland is a multicultural society in which education has a key part to play in preparing students for full and active citizenship. It has as its goal "to make provision in the interests of the common good for the education of every person in the State, to ensure that the educational system is accountable to students, their parents and the State and respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society".

Principles identified by DES include the following:

- Equality of opportunity must exist so as to ensure that Travellers have access to all forms of education
- Acknowledgement of, and respect for cultural diversity and multi ethnicity should inform all educational provision
- There should be full parental involvement in decision making and in the development of educational provision for their children and the principle of integration should be applied
- The guidelines also emphasise that group difference should not be seen as a deviation from the norm and that individual student needs must be recognised

The stated aims of intercultural education are described as follows:

- To foster conditions conducive to pluralism in society
- To raise students' awareness of their own culture and attune them to the fact that there are other value systems and ways of behaving
- To enable all students to speak for themselves and articulate their cultures and histories
- It is concerned with development of skills, attitudes and understandings and is reinforced and supported by the atmosphere of the school

Among the positive values fostered by an intercultural education are:

- Appreciating the dignity of every human being
- Respecting difference and valuing diversity
- Respecting democracy
- Having a sense of personal and shared responsibility
- Fostering equality in all aspects of life

In an Educate Together school diversity will be valued and individual identities of every kind will enjoy equal respect. This is in stark contrast to an approach which aims merely to tolerate or accommodate identities which differ from the majority.

Staff development in this area will be given a strong focus and a post of responsibility (Assistant Principal) will be allocated to the development of the Ethical Education core curriculum and the intercultural principle at all levels in the school.

Discussion among the whole school community will take place on the best use of the relevant additional resources currently allocated by DES. These include:

- Resource teaching time for students whose first language is not English
- Resource teaching time for each student from the Travelling Community
- Enhanced capitation grant for each student from the Travelling Community
- The Visiting Teacher for Travellers Service
- The services of the National Officer for Traveller Education

The curriculum will be seen as central to this area and, in accordance with DES guidelines, all efforts will be made to avoid ethno-centrism and to encapsulate intercultural principles in the coursework for each subject. The following subjects and curricular programmes are identified by DES as areas which provide opportunities for an intercultural focus in the delivery of the curriculum, and suggestions are made about specific strategies in relation to Traveller Education which may be used in planning a curricular framework which fosters an intercultural ethos in the school. Similar suggestions are made by NCCA in relation to particular subject areas.

The NCCA Report makes the point that intercultural education must be integrated across all subject areas and into the life of the school and in an ET Second Level school this will be seen as a central principle, as it is at primary level.

An Educate Together Second Level School will strive to access the best resources for students whose first language is not English, who have recently arrived in Ireland or who belong to an ethnic minority in this country. The school will provide an education for all students which is based on the core principles of an Educate Together Framework.

## **CURRICULAR FRAMEWORK**

In an Educate Together second-level School, the curricular framework will be understood to include extra-curricular or co-curricular activities, as well the formal curriculum, as outlined here. In addition, the importance of the “hidden curriculum” will be recognised and the Educate Together ethos will permeate all aspects of school life.

A post holder will be appointed to take responsibility for coordinating curricular development in the school and school-based curriculum development will be ongoing and will involve all stakeholders. A wide range of cross-curricular projects involving teams of teachers will be carried out. Specific extra-curricular activities will be planned to enhance the formal curriculum, in order to both broaden and deepen learning experiences.

Extra-curricular activities such as field trips and visits to galleries, museums, exhibitions, theatre and cinema will be actively encouraged. Guest speakers, craftspeople, musicians, artists, poets and speakers from the science and business worlds will be invited to the school. Advice will be sought from a number of schools which already have extensive ranges of extra curricular activities on offer to their students.

School trips abroad with an educational focus will be planned. There will be a policy of support for teachers who volunteer to organise and carry out extra curricular work and logistical issues such as supervision and transport will be facilitated. There is a great deal of scope for parental involvement in extra curricular activities and a committee focusing on this area could be established which includes parents, students and members of the broader community which the school serves.

## **FIRST YEAR**

In a second-level Educate Together school, the first year cohort will have been involved in an extensive induction process prior to entry to the school and the first half term will focus on strategies towards helping them to settle in. They will begin first year with their learning profiles from Primary school having been acquired and studied by the appropriate school personnel. Each student's learning strengths and weaknesses will have been identified. All students with special educational needs will have had Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for first year drawn up by the learning support team. Psychological assessments will have been studied, recommendations noted and taken into account in the IEPs and resource teaching time allocated to students on an individual basis. A clear picture of each student's educational needs will have been established. There will

also have been extensive communication and discussion with parents. Both parents and students will have a good idea of what to expect from their new school.

A Year Head for first year and class tutors for each group will have been appointed and relevant documentation about students given to them. Confidentiality will be strictly observed in line with professional practice. They will have met as a group with the Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor and Learning Support Teacher to decide on strategies for the group and particularly to identify students likely to be vulnerable and in need of immediate support. Parents as a group and on an individual basis will have been invited to meet with key staff, particularly if they have specific concerns about their child.

Class groups will have been formed prior to entry, and in line with Educate Together principles and best international practice, all classes will be mixed ability. The ESRI clearly reinforces the arguments against streaming by showing the negative aspects of this practice particularly for students of lower than average ability who tend to have a very poor self image when placed in lower streamed classes and to under-perform relative to students of the same ability in mixed ability classes. It is widely recognised that mixed ability grouping can help all students to become more confident learners. In second year decisions will be made about "setting " class groups in the core subjects if, as is likely, courses at Foundation Ordinary and Higher Levels are taught in Irish ,English and Maths.

Subjects will have been chosen and timetabled in line with DES requirements (see section on Junior Cycle). As wide a range as possible of optional subjects will be offered so that all students can have an opportunity in first year to try out different areas of study and decide where their talents lie. This wide range will be reduced in second and third year so that students can complete courses in the chosen subjects and excel in these areas. ESRI research has shown that students in first year are very positive about new subjects and particularly like those with more practical elements, e.g. Art, Materials Technology Wood, Home Economics, Science and PE. They also like computer classes. An Educate Together school will have a strong focus on ICT education and every effort will be made to allow students to try out as many practical subjects as possible. This approach will also be in line with preferences for a good balance between the academic and creative aspects of learning as expressed by both parents and school principals in the Feasibility Study.

Issues around curriculum which have been identified by students as problematic in first year will be focussed on throughout the year e.g. the mismatch between methodologies and course content from Primary and Secondary school in the core subjects and especially the perceived difficulty of Maths at second-level; the increased pace of learning and volume of work; difficulties with interacting with a large group of teachers etc. Discussion will take place on a frequent basis between students and the class tutor about these issues. Students will be assured that their concerns and suggestions will be heard and treated with respect. Parents will be involved both formally and informally through meetings,

information leaflets etc. The Feasibility Study showed a very strong desire by parents for feedback about their child's progress and for their own concerns to be addressed.

It is envisaged that there will be a high level of extra curricular activity which will help the group to bond and encourage those who may find it difficult to settle in to make new friends in a less formal atmosphere than the classroom. It will also give students opportunities to develop talents which otherwise may not find expression. Sports activities will be as wide-ranging as possible and will include both individual and team activities. There will be a range of opportunities to develop creative talents and a strong focus on the arts at an extra curricular level. The timetabling of one afternoon per week for this purpose has been highly successful in some schools and will be considered as an option. This involves the provision of a wide range of activities with interchanging groups over the course of the year. It enables students to participate in a broad range of activities and to work with different groups of students with all the social advantages involved. It requires a high level of adult support and thus offers parents considerable scope for involvement at a practical level.

The ESRI study shows that while the vast majority of students at the end of first year say that they like school, like their teachers and feel that they are doing well at school generally, a small minority have begun to disengage with school at this early stage. This group tends to consist mainly of boys of lower than average ability who are from poorer socio economic backgrounds. An Educate Together school will take account of these risk factors and will discreetly monitor and give extra support to vulnerable students who may be likely to experience difficulty.

An Educate Together school will make every effort to ensure that First Year is as positive an experience as possible for all students in setting them on their way towards developing their talents and reaching their potential at all levels. Both classroom work and extra curricular activities will focus on this goal. The students will have experienced a broad range of teaching methodologies and learning experiences. They will have worked on their own, in groups and in pairs. They will have worked with teachers on an individual basis and as teams. Parents will have been directly involved in their learning. They will have started a process of self assessment as they monitor their own progress. They will be firmly established in their school and looking forward to second year

## ***THE JUNIOR CYCLE CURRICULUM***

According to Department of Education and Science Regulations, the curriculum of a secondary school must include instruction in a syllabus approved by the Minister in the following subjects:

- Irish

- English
- History and Geography
- Mathematics
- Science or a language other than Irish or English or a subject of the Business Studies Group
- Civic, Social and Political Education
- Social Personal and Health Education

Physical Education should form part of the school curriculum. The programme should be based on the approved Syllabus in Physical Education and teaching hours should be registered on the school timetable (2 hours per week).

All schools should ensure that students have access to appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choices. Guidance and counselling is a whole school activity and schools need to agree a School Guidance Plan for implementation throughout all year groups.

The Junior Cycle must be of three years duration in all schools. The approved course for recognised junior pupils must include the following subjects:

- |                        |          |              |
|------------------------|----------|--------------|
| *Irish                 | *English | *Mathematics |
| *History and Geography | *CSPE    | *SPHE        |

\*Not less than two other subjects from the approved list of examination subjects

The approved list of subjects is:

- French Materials Technology (Wood)
- German Metalwork
- Spanish Technical Graphics
- Italian Business Studies
- Latin
- Typewriting
- Ancient Greek Environmental and Social Studies
- Classical Studies (Restricted to some schools and offered
- Hebrew Studies as an alternative to History and Geography)

- Home Economics Technology
- Music (Restricted to schools approved for it)
- Art, Craft, Design Religious Education

The Minister also accepts the Junior Cert Schools Programme as an approved course for recognised junior pupils in those schools where its introduction has been approved by the minister.

### **The Junior Certificate Examination**

The purpose of the Junior Certificate (Junior Cert) course is to provide a well balanced general education suitable for pupils who leave full time education at the end of compulsory schooling or, alternatively, who wish to enter on more advanced courses of study.

The approved Junior Cert Course for a pupil in a vocational school or a community college must include instruction in each year in the following:

\*Irish                    \*English                    \*Mathematics                    \*CSPE

\*SPHE(Non Examinable)

\*Technical Graphics or Art or Home Economics or Business Studies

\*Not less than two other subjects from the approved list above

### **Exemption from the Study of Irish**

Pupils in the following circumstances may be allowed to substitute any other subject from the list for Irish:

(a) Pupils whose primary education up to 11 years was received outside Ireland or in Northern Ireland

(b) Pupils who were previously enrolled in a primary or second-level school who are being re-enrolled after a period spent abroad, provided that at least three years have elapsed since the previous enrolment in the State and the pupil is at least 11 years of age on re-enrolment.

(c) Pupils with specified learning disabilities as detailed in "Rules and Programmes For Secondary Schools 2004/5" page 20

(d) Pupils from abroad who have no understanding of English, when enrolled would be required to study one language only, Irish or English

## **Junior Certificate Subjects in an Educate Together Second-level School**

Bearing in mind the official requirements of DES and the wishes of Educate Together for a curriculum grounded in the Educate Together requirement for the holistic development of the young person and the fulfillment of the potential of all students, if the Junior Certificate were to be included in the curriculum in an Educate Together school, a basic curriculum would include the following subjects:

- \*Irish
- \*English
- \*Mathematics
- \*History and Geography
- \*CSPE
- \*SPHE
- \*Science
- \*Business Studies
- \*Physical Education

\*A Modern Language (chosen with regard to relevance rather than tradition)

\*Art or Music or Home Economics or Materials Technology (Wood) or Metalwork or Technical Graphics or as many of these subjects as can be approved and staffed with specialist teachers

\*Ethical Education (Course to be developed by Educate Together)

As the school expands, a second or third practical subject could be added as well as a second or third Modern Language. Numbers of students will dictate such provision.

Subject options for Leaving Cert must be borne in mind when deciding on subject provision for the junior cycle as Science and Business for example expand into a range of subjects at senior level and the widest possible choice should be given to Leaving Cert students.

### **Possible Difficulties**

In the school's early years: with the current pupil/teacher ratio, how to provide staff who are fully qualified to teach specific subjects and therefore establish professional standards of teaching excellence.

How to provide excellent teaching in the practical subjects where the teachers are specialists in one area. Their timetables should be full in their own subjects. With small student numbers in the first years, how will this be achieved?

The school will need fully equipped specialist classrooms for specific subjects before it opens so that these subjects can be offered to the first cohort of students

In order to fulfill the requirements of all Educate Together parties, these issues will be explored in advance of timetabling by the Principal and Management of the new school.

## **JUNIOR CERTIFICATE SCHOOLS PROGRAMME**

This Junior Cert School Programme (JCSP) is currently available to approved students in the DEIS group of schools designated as specially disadvantaged by the Minister. These schools fulfill specific conditions for disadvantage and the approved students are targeted under a range of supports as being at risk of leaving school early.

The JCSP programme is supported at every level by The Curriculum Development Unit of the DES. It provides teaching and learning materials, support and in-service for teachers, funding for specific projects and expertise in teaching and supporting vulnerable students.

The Programme is highly structured and based on short term targets which build up to a body of achievement at the end of each year. Every target reached is recorded by the student himself and by the teacher. At the end of third year the entire body of work is certified by the JCSP support service and DES. This practice aims to maximise a sense of achievement in students who may have very little confidence and motivation towards learning. They may have a history of academic failure and very poor self esteem. The purpose of this programme is to help these students to fulfil their potential.

It is envisaged that JCSP students will sit the Junior Cert Examination with their peers and have an equal opportunity to achieve success in subjects with which they can cope. Some will have special arrangements during the exams provided by the State Examinations Board to help students with specific learning difficulties e.g individual exam centres and supervisors, readers, the use of laptops etc. JCSP students are only required to sit Junior Cert exams in English and Maths to fulfill the requirements of the course, but they are encouraged to attempt any other subject they can manage and with the support of their teachers most will take more than this minimum. Certification therefore comes in two forms at the end of the course, the JCSP Certification which details all the targets achieved by the student over three years and the Junior Cert itself in the subjects taken in the exam.

The JCSP certification is presented at a special ceremony in the school near the end of third year. Parents and teachers as well as invited guests are present. The student is also presented with his JCSP folder which contains all his best work over three years, special awards, photographs and mementoes. The student has selected all the material for his folder himself and keeps it as a record of all his achievements to Junior Cert Level.

Students are given certification for each completed year of the course so that even if they have left school before the end of third year their achievements to that point are recognised.

There is a very high teacher/student /management input with this course so DES allows additional teaching hours to the school so that the work can be done. A great deal of administration work is involved. One teacher is appointed as coordinator to the programme and generally a team of teachers is set up to plan it each year. There is a very strong focus on team teaching and cross-curricular work as well as the development of social skills and improvement of self esteem.

It is clear from the above outline that this programme, which was established in its earliest form by DES in the 1970s and which has been constantly developing since then, ties in very well with the general educational principles of Educate Together. Although it is presently available only to particular students in specific schools, much can be learned from the system used and the teaching methods recommended which would enhance teaching and learning in any school, particularly one committed to a differentiated, learner-centred approach.

This area will be explored in detail by the management, staff and all parties involved in an Educate Together second-level school. Every effort will be made to ensure that students who would benefit from the JCSP will have an opportunity to take it. The possibility of offering JCSP to all students should be explored.

The desirability of a more integrated approach to curriculum provision has been expressed in Educate Together working group meetings and in workshops, so as to facilitate a greater emphasis on skills development and project-work. This could also, with extensive use of team-teaching, allow for a greater focus on the development of better quality relationships within the school. How JCSP, or a similar programme, could facilitate this more integrated approach should be further explored.

## ***THE SENIOR CYCLE CURRICULUM***

An Educate Together Second-level school plans to offer as wide a range of learning experiences to its senior students as possible so that they can develop their talents, acquire a wide range of skills at all levels and reach their full potential as second-level students by the end of their time at secondary school. They will then be ready to progress to further study or directly to the workplace and will have the skills and motivation to continue the learning process for the rest of their lives. In accordance with the wishes expressed by parents in the TCD Feasibility Study, they will have had a wide range of learning experiences with a good balance between the academic and other areas. They will be confident, questioning, highly motivated adults with strong ethical and moral principles and a commitment to being active citizens of a democratic society.

It is envisaged that an Educate Together second-level school will offer its senior students all the curricular courses currently being provided by DES. These are:

- Transition Year Programme
- Leaving Cert Applied
- Leaving Cert Vocational Programme
- Leaving Cert Established

In addition, an Educate Together school will have an extensive range of extra curricular activities in the sports, arts and other areas. As far as possible within the confines of the course requirements for Leaving Cert, a range of cross curricular projects will be planned with particular emphasis on the first year of the senior cycle. There will be a very high focus on the school in the community and every opportunity will be used to ensure that learning takes place both inside and outside the classroom, with the involvement of teachers and other personnel including parents and others from the school and outside communities. As the school develops new initiatives in these areas will emerge.

### **Key Skills at Senior Cycle**

The National Council For Curriculum and Assessment has produced a discussion document (May 2008) which lists the key skills identified by their research as being central to teaching and learning across the curriculum at senior cycle. These are:

Information Processing which students need to become more effective learners in an information intensive environment. As well as developing the specific skills of accessing, selecting, evaluating and recording information, students need to develop an appreciation of the differences between information and knowledge and recognise that people need skills to create both personal and shared knowledge from information sources.

Critical and Creative Thinking. Students need to be aware of different forms and patterns of thinking so that they can become more skilled in higher order reasoning and problem solving. They need to understand that thinking is shaped by cultural and historical values. They will find it useful to critically reflect on what forms of thinking and values have shaped their own perceptions, opinions and knowledge.

Communicating. Students need to understand how central communication is for human relationships of all kinds and to become better communicators in both formal and informal situations. As well as developing specific skills in a variety of media, they need to form a deeper understanding of the power of communication in the modern world.

Working with Others. The purpose of this skill is to highlight the role that working with others has for learning and for reaching both personal and collective goals. Students need to appreciate the dynamics of groups and to develop the social

skills necessary to engage in collaborative work. They also need to recognise that working collectively can help motivation and capitalise on the talents in a group. It is also important for social cohesion and for engaging with diverse cultural, ethnic and religious groups.

Being Personally Effective. This skill helps young people to grow as persons, to become more self aware and to use that knowledge to develop personal goals and life plans. It gives young people specific strategies related to self appraisal, goal setting and action planning and helps them to recognise how to get things done and to act autonomously according to personal identities and personal values.

The NCCA sees one of the underlying principles of senior cycle as improving the learning experiences of the learners and encouraging them to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to become more effective and independent learners and to develop a lifelong commitment to improving their learning. This emphasis will assist students to take more responsibility for their own learning as they proceed through their senior cycle education, gradually decreasing their levels of dependency on teacher direction. As students become more proficient in the five key skills they become more effective learners.

The above principles are at the core of how Educate Together sees second-level education and an Educate Together school will have a commitment to fostering the key skills identified by NCCA by every means possible both inside and outside the classroom. Within the confines of the traditional subject syllabi there is ample scope for the development of these skills through specific teaching and learning methodologies. There is further scope in extra curricular activities. An Educate Together school will have detailed policies in this area which will be developed in consultation with all partners in the school community. The development of the five key skills will be at the heart of the senior cycle in all three Leaving Cert Programmes and will have equal focus in LCA and LCVP as it has in the established Leaving Cert. There is also no reason why this skills focus might not be applied at junior cycle.

## **TRANSITION YEAR**

This is a one-year course offered after Junior Cycle. It is extensively resourced by the Department of Education who supply a support service for schools. A team of six teachers who have been seconded from their schools is available for consultation and advice. Each school is required to have a clearly documented programme for Transition Year (TY) which is approved by their Board of Management and which must be available to the Department Inspectorate.

Parents' understanding and support for student learning is a key factor in any TY programme. An Educate Together second-level school would have a highly structured programme for TY parents beginning with information sessions in third year and offering parents opportunities at every level to involve themselves in the

planning and operation of TY in the school. Parents would also have a key role in the evaluation of the programme each year.

The stated purpose of the TY programme is "to promote maturity in studies by making students more self directed learners through the development of general, technical and academic skills; maturity in relation to work and careers by developing work related skills; personal maturity by providing opportunities to develop communication skills, self confidence and a sense of responsibility; social maturity by developing greater people skills and an awareness of the world outside school". Each school devises its own programme using the guidelines provided by DES and using the resources available. The needs of students, parents' views, employers and the wider community are considered. The programme is evaluated each year. An Educate Together Second-level school would develop an excellent TY programme whose aim would be to develop and enhance all the talents of the participating students. It would provide perfect opportunities to cultivate the principles and ideals of Educate Together as wide scope is provided to schools by DES to devise TY programmes which are tailored to their own needs.

### **The Course**

The usual format for a Transition Year course is a balance between the study of core subjects, a tasting of a number of others and a range of modules, projects and activities designed to promote maturity. The course will also involve participation in a mini company and community work as well as trips, visiting speakers and a wide range of other activities organised by the school. It should challenge the students intellectually, give them an orientation towards the world of work and cater for the development of personal and social awareness . Assessment should be varied and ongoing and should include self assessment by students who will be involved in diagnosing their own learning strengths and weaknesses. In an Educate Together school all these areas will be explored by parents and teachers as they devise and assess the TY programme in the school. There will be a strong emphasis on the exhibition of students' work and there will be parental involvement at every level. DES and school certification will be awarded to participating students at the end of the course.

### **Curricular Areas**

Areas of study suggested by DES will provide a wide range of opportunities for an Educate Together school to pursue Educate Together curricular objectives and promote its ethos with the involvement of the whole school community. They include :

Enterprise Education. The establishment of a mini company.

Social Outreach. Placement either weekly or for a period of one week during the year in a hospital, special school, home for the elderly or similar facility. Social

justice as a theme can also run through the whole TY programme and can involve guest speakers and school visits. It can have a global dimension also (racism, child labour etc.) Several agencies support this TY area at present and an Educate Together school would obviously have a very strong focus on it because of its ethos. It would participate in events such as Gaisce, the President's Award and Young Social Innovator of the Year Award; a new venture by Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy.

Cross Curricular Work. A wide range of cross curricular projects will form the core of an Educate Together programme for TY.

History in TY. There are some very interesting modules suggested by DES in this area, including "Early Modern Women" and "History through Pop Music". Other modules could also be devised by the school.

A wide range of support materials is provide by DES in a number of subject areas as well as advice and support for the school in setting up its own courses. An Educate Together school would of course be highly innovative in all areas of the TY curriculum. It would choose from DES suggested areas of study which include Astronomy, Drama, Horticulture, Leisure Studies, Micro Electronics and Scientific Literacy. It may also devise its own courses in chosen areas of study.

In an Educate Together school also, as advised by DES, a CSPE course following that prescribed for Junior Cycle will be devised, possibly in partnership with parents. A Personal/Social Development course following on from the Junior Cycle SPHE course could also be offered. Philosophy will be timetabled, not as a formal course but as a sampling of different areas, as advised by DES. Other areas of study recommended by DES are Aesthetics Education which promotes an awareness and appreciation of the visual arts, Environmental and Social Studies and ICT Education. These would also be considered as options for a TY course in an Educate Together school.

In an Educate Together school there would be a strong focus and a high input of resources on the TY programme. It would be used to foster all the self directed learning skills required for the full development of each student's potential in the Senior Cycle.

## **ESTABLISHED LEAVING CERTIFICATE**

An Educate Together Second-level school will have a high focus on academic excellence, according to the wishes expressed by parents in the TCD Feasibility Study. Students who have opted for the Established Leaving Cert and who are taking subjects to ordinary or higher level for the exams, will be given every opportunity to take those subjects for which they have an aptitude and at which they can excel. This will enable them to qualify for entry to courses of study at third level or to progress directly to the workforce with all the skills necessary to build a successful and fulfilling career in their chosen field of employment. With

this in mind, the school will have an excellent Career Guidance structure and students will leave school having had the benefit of expert advice in the field. There will be an extensive guidance programme for senior students with input from the whole school community and a strong focus on maximising the potential of every student and helping him/her to make wise career choices in which he/she can use individual talents.

With these factors in mind an Educate Together Second-level school will offer as many subject choices to senior students as possible apart from the compulsory subjects of Irish, English and Maths. All subjects will be taught at both Higher and Ordinary Levels and Irish and Maths at Foundation Level also, so that every student can take courses suitable for his/her level of ability. Wide consultation will take place between students, parents and teachers before a decision is reached about the subject levels to be taken for the exams. Every effort will be made to enable students to choose the combination of subjects they wish to take. Since Leaving Cert (LC) courses are recognised by DES to be of a high standard, and since only exam results in any six can be used to calculate points for third level entry, an Educate Together School will recommend that in accordance with DES guidelines a maximum of seven subjects be taken to exam level by all Leaving Cert students. The range of subjects chosen for Leaving Cert each year will be decided after wide ranging student and parental consultation and a large number of factors will influence decisions in this area, but every course will include:

- At least one and up to all three of the science subjects: Physics, Chemistry and Biology
- At least one and probably more than one Modern Language
- At least one and up to all three business subjects: Business, Accounting and Economics
- History
- Geography
- At least one and up to all three of the following: Construction Studies, Engineering and Technical Drawing
- Art
- Home Economics
- Music

Every Leaving Cert Course will also include an Ethical Education element as well as PE. In addition, there will be provision for Health Education and Civic and Social Education to follow on from courses given in the Junior Cycle. There will be a wide range of extra curricular activities from those in the sports and arts areas to community based projects, school trips, classroom visits and

participation in debating and other inter school competitions. It is envisaged that every student in the senior school will participate in extra curricular activities at some level.

## **LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED (LCA)**

The LCA Programme has been developed by NCCA as part of the expanded senior cycle provision designed to cater for the diversity of participants' needs. Its fundamental goal is to prepare participants for transition from the world of school to that of adult and working life. The LCA focuses on the needs and interests of participants, using a variety of methodologies and making optimum use of the resources of the local community.

### **Underlying Principles**

Its primary objective is the preparation of participants for adult and working life and the development of literacy and numeracy skills.

Is intended to meet the needs of those who are not adequately catered for by the other Leaving Cert programmes or who choose not to opt for such.

Consists of three main elements: Vocational Preparation, Vocational Education and General Education.

Places a premium on the personal and social development of participants and aims to develop active citizens who have a sense of belonging to the local, national, European and global communities and can fully participate in a democratic society.

It is very much a student-centred programme which allows for self-evaluation and includes a broad range of teaching methodologies and learning options. It provides access to some forms of further education and training. Courses consist of short, self contained modules and allow for a considerable amount of flexibility within the school. Each school has a programme coordinator who is a teacher who takes responsibility for the operation of the programme in the school.

### **Programme Details**

The required list of subjects for LCA is:

- Vocational Preparation and Guidance
- English and Communications
- Mathematical Applications
- Introduction to IT

- Social Education
- Irish or a Modern Language
- Arts Education
- Leisure and Recreation including PE

Students must also take two full courses of specialisms and do four elective modules from a range of choices over two years. The specialisms include areas such as Agriculture, Childcare and Hotel and Catering. Each student is required to complete seven student tasks which are assessed according to a range of specific criteria.

Assessment and certification cover the following areas:

- Module Completion
- Student Tasks
- External Examination at the end of the second year in:
  - English and Communications
  - Student tasks
  - Mathematical Applications
  - Languages
  - Social Education

An Educate Together school will carefully select students for the LCA programme by extensive consultation with parents and students from the beginning of third year. Full and detailed information about all the implications of taking this course will be given to all third year students and parents through a series of open nights with speakers, discussion etc.

The LCA Course will be carefully planned by a team of teachers under the direction of the LCA coordinator and with extensive consultation with teachers, students, parents and school management. There will be ongoing evaluation of the course and modification where necessary. Strategies will be put in place to ensure that the LCA cohort are not isolated from the students taking the established Leaving Cert and that equal respect is shown to both groups at all levels. The LCA will be given equal resources with the established Leaving Cert and every opportunity will be used to bring the groups together for work and social purposes. Planning in this area will be a high

## **LEAVING CERTIFICATE VOCATIONAL PROGRAMME (LCVP)**

The LCVP is an intervention designed to enhance the vocational dimension of the Leaving Cert. It combines the academic strengths of the Leaving Cert with a new and dynamic focus on self directed learning, innovation and enterprise. It is part of an expanded Leaving Cert provision which aims to cater for the diversity of particular needs at Senior Cycle. The primary goal of LCVP is to prepare young people for adult life by ensuring that they are educated in the broadest sense, with an ability to cope and thrive in an environment of rapid change. Participants are encouraged to develop skills and competencies fundamental to both academic and vocational success.

Among other things they are encouraged to :

- Be innovative and enterprising
- Take responsibility for their own learning
- Work as members of a team
- Evaluate data and devise solutions to problems
- Investigate local community and business enterprises
- There is a strong vocational focus in the LCVP. Subjects are arranged in vocational subject groupings and there are additional courses of study in work preparation and enterprise known as Link Modules.

### **Course Requirements**

At least five Leaving Cert subjects including Irish. Two of the above to be selected from Vocational Subject groupings. Two Link Modules. A recognised course in a modern language other than Irish.

Active teaching and learning are encouraged through activities such as work placement, mini enterprise projects and community visits. Vocational relevance is enhanced by putting in place opportunities for students to plan, organise and engage in active learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom through activities such as presentation of work to adults, inviting visitors to the classroom, working on projects in teams, organising enterprise activities and using ICT to access, store, communicate and present information.

### **Assessment**

Students sit the Leaving Cert subject exams as for the established Leaving Cert. They are also assessed on their work for the Link Modules (40% written exam and 60% portfolio of work). Most students take seven exam subjects and Link Modules.

There is an LCVP support service for schools as with all other curricular

programmes. It offers advice for schools as well as materials for students and teachers, inservice for teachers and promotional material for staff and parents meetings.

An Educate Together school would be an ideal venue for an LCVP course. It follows very closely the expressed wishes of parents in the TCD Feasibility Study for a varied and multifaceted education for their children. It has a high emphasis on individual research, innovation and team work. It fosters independent thinking and problem solving. There is a great deal of team work and students are learning in an adult environment and engaging in meaningful ways with the community and with local enterprise. It employs a wide range of teaching and learning methodologies and gives scope for the development of the students' talents in all areas including the academic. It is dynamic and forward looking. It offers enormous scope for parental and community involvement at several levels and is well supported by DES resources.

An Educate Together school would plan and operate an LCVP course to the highest standards of excellence. It would devote considerable time and resources to planning and evaluating the programme each year. All members of the school community would be involved in this process.

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## **APPENDICES**

### ***APPENDIX I - Suggestions for further appendices to Curricular Framework***

1. Teaching and Learning Methodologies
2. Assessment for Learning and Assessment of Learning
3. Outline of how a specific sample Syllabus would be approached
4. An alternative to the Junior Certificate
5. An Ethical Education Curriculum for second-level
6. Intercultural areas for development in the curriculum
7. Gender issues in the curriculum —with reference to Gender Equality Unit of DES and international research
8. The role of ICT in the curriculum
9. Education for gifted students --see NCCA guidelines on this subject
10. Guidance in the Curriculum –with reference to Whole School Guidance planning by DES and international research
11. Role of the Home/School Service, if available to the school. If not, an alternative based on best practice in the current system.

## **APPENDIX II - EXAMPLE OF A CROSS CURRICULAR PROJECT**

### **Group Profile**

- Boys aged 12 and 13 years in a first year group in a designated disadvantaged school.
- All had learning difficulties with very poor literacy and numeracy skills. Average reading age of 7 to 8 years. Some non readers.
- A wide range of social and behavioural problems e.g. parental and sibling drug abuse in five known cases (One father had died from heroin abuse and another died while the boy was in third year)
- Only one boy of 12 living with both parents in a stable environment. Three living with grandparents with little or no parental involvement. Two abandoned by both parents.
- Several boys with possible ADHD undiagnosed because of impossibility of accessing assessments through state agencies.
- Two boys from travelling community with very poor attendance and family feud issues.
- Class doing Junior Cert Schools Programme

### **Project in First Year**

First class with tutor revealed an interest in fishing among several of the boys. The school is close to both The Royal Canal and the River Tolka and there is a long tradition of fishing in the area.

Contact made by tutor with Eastern Regional Fishing Board who sent an officer to the school to meet boys and plan project.

Fisheries officer set up tank stocked with baby carp in tutor classroom. Information session on care of fish while in tank, life in canal and plan to replace baby carp in canal after two months.

Meeting of class teachers to plan aspects of project in their subject areas. Plan drawn up with Geography, Art and English teachers.

Several return visits by officer to explain about work of fisheries board, fish life in canal and river and to teach fishing techniques.

Ongoing work in Art, Geography and English \_\_learning about the course of the canal and its wildlife, artwork based on visits to the waterway and locks, making stories about adventures on the canal and keeping a log of the progress of the

fish in the tank.

Feeding and caring for the fish, checking the water quality in the tank and cleaning the tank on a roster basis

Fishing trip to Maynooth with two teachers, two fisheries officers who supplied advice and all equipment and four sixth year students who were experienced fishermen. Morning followed by picnic on canal bank

Replacing three carp in canal with fisheries officer and teacher.

Cleaning and returning fishing tank to Fisheries Board

## **Project in Second Year**

### *"Make A Book" project for Junior Cert Schools Programme*

Following a class discussion with the tutor it was decided that the class would prepare a book for this exhibition in April. Books would be made by students from all over the country and it would take place in the Coach House in Dublin Castle. Several suggestions were made and discussed by the boys and a decision was eventually made to produce a book about The Royal Canal because they had learned a lot about it last year.

Several planning classes were used during time timetabled for English to decide on topics to be covered and tasks to be undertaken. All decisions were made by the boys themselves after much discussion. Each boy would do a page. The cover would be a joint venture by the Art class and a stand would be needed to display it as it would be big. The group would make this too, probably in the woodwork class.

Class teachers were invited to a meeting to discuss how different subjects could feed into the project. All teachers would support and encourage the venture and the History, Geography, Art and Woodwork teachers would be directly involved. The Maths teacher would use the opportunity to develop numeracy skills: measuring distance etc. and the I.T. teacher would help with internet research.

The final product was exhibited with great pride by the boys in Dublin Castle at a special function where they met young people of their own age from all over the country, most with learning and other difficulties. The fisheries officer came along.

A special event for parents and guardians was held in the school and was very well attended by extended families. The book was exhibited and praised by family members, teachers, school management and a number of invited guests. The local librarian attended and invited the boys to display their book in the

library during the summer so that it could have wider exposure.

### **Positive Results**

1. The class bonded and worked very well as a group on a common project
2. They began secondary school on a very positive note.
3. Despite their learning and social disabilities they produced excellent work
4. They were able to make suggestions, listen to each other and reach a consensus with minimal adult intervention on numerous occasions.
5. They took on responsibilities in meeting deadlines, keeping work to a good standard and not letting the group down.
5. They learned a great deal in the various subject areas.
6. They saw teachers working together as a group and barriers between subjects being broken down.
7. They were proud of their work and had its excellence acknowledged in a variety of ways over a period of time.
8. Their literacy and numeracy skills improved.
9. They were happy in school and excited about the work. They had a lot of fun
10. They had very positive attitudes towards teachers.
11. Their families had opportunities to help them with the work in some cases and to acknowledge their pride in them. In some cases in particular this was a very important issue as boys had been in a lot of trouble in primary school and families were fearful of a continuation of this pattern.
12. Other students in the school saw and praised the work. This was great affirmation, in particular from older boys.
13. They had an opportunity to meet students from other schools in the country and to see their work at the exhibition. It was noticeable that the behaviour of this large, diverse group of boys and girls, most with difficulties of some sort, was exemplary on this occasion and spoke volumes for the value of work which the students "own" themselves and for the positive effects on their self esteem.