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## Second-level push by Educate Together

EDUCATE TOGETHER will step up its campaign to establish schools at second level, after a new study signalled strong parental support for greater school choice.

Some 90 per cent of parents with children in the multi-denominational schools say they would transfer to a school based on the same model, if available.

The study, conducted by the School of Education at Trinity College Dublin (TCD), shows great enthusiasm for a new type of second level offering which would be multid denominational, coeducational, and democratically run.

The report recommends that Educate Together be facilitated in opening second-level schools.

Educate Together applied to the Minister for Education and Science to be registered as a patron of second-level schools in December 2007. This report will add to the pressure on Minister for Education Batt O'Keefe to confirm this registration.

More than 3,000 of the 3,200 primary schools in the State are controlled by the Catholic Church. Demand for the Educate Together model has increased dramatically in recent years.

There are now 44 Educate Together primary schools in the Republic and another 12 are due to open in September - taking the number of pupils attending its schools to nearly 10,000.

Demand for its schools have been strong in expanding areas of Dublin. By next year, Lucan in west Dublin will have five Educate Together primary schools. The organisation has come under pressure from parents to establish a similar model at second level.

While the second-level sector has seen the growth of vocational, community and comprehensive schools, the Catholic Church is still the dominant force, controlling

over 400 of the 700 schools at second level.

The TCD study - commissioned by Educate Together - finds strong support for a new model which it says would "surpass anything on offer from the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) where single-sex schooling is still permitted and democratic management is far from assured either within schools or in the relationships between schools and their patrons".

The proposed new schools, it says, would also be "even more democratically responsive to parents', and pupils' needs than the various comprehensive and community schools, which operate independently of the VECs but which are not necessarily any more learner-centred in their teaching" than other second level schools.

Educate Together says it has not ruled out co-operation with the VECs or other trustees.

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