



# Educate Together

Towards an Ethical Education Curriculum Framework for Second-level Schools

## Final Report

### Consultation and Research Report

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### Literature Review

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AN ROINN DLÍ AGUS CIRT AGUS COMHIONANNAIS  
DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

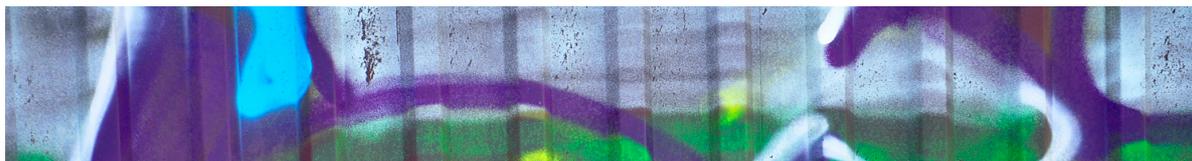


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## Foreword



Educate Together is delighted to publish this research report, which has been written following extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, our Education and Training Board (ETB) partners, other education and community organisations, curriculum specialists and other individuals and groups.

Educate Together commissioned this research to inform the development of an ethical education curriculum framework for its new second-level schools. The aim of an ethical curriculum is to provide learners with both knowledge and a range of dispositions and skills to enable them to participate in and contribute to the democratic process and become informed, socially responsible and fair-minded citizens of the world.

The research was planned as a focussed literature review and in depth consultation process, ensuring that the curriculum framework to be developed would be grounded in evidence and address the needs of our constituency, who are seeking access to a learner-centred, multi-denominational second-level education in Ireland.

The report provides significant insights into stakeholders' views on ethos and ethical education. It adds much of value to the body of knowledge on ethical education, for example its exploration of the value of students and parents having input into curriculum development. The voices of students in the research, who emphasised the importance of respectful relationships at school and highlighted their preferences for active, practical learning are expressed strongly, as is the voice of parents, who expressed their desire to be welcomed into second-level schools as partners.

The report includes recommendations and an emerging ethical education curriculum framework which will inform the further development of the ethical education curriculum framework for those second-level schools in which Educate Together is involved as patron, co-patron or as formal partner. The report will be of great interest to all those interested in the development of ethical education at second-level in Ireland.

I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Second-level Education Officer, Ann Ryan, who has managed this project and has worked closely with consultant Maureen Bassett throughout the consultation process.

**Ruth Doggett**

**Second-level Programme Manager, Educate Together**

## Acknowledgements



This research project has been kindly funded with assistance from the European Integration Fund (EIF). It has involved an extensive consultation process with a wide range of stakeholders, including primary and second-level students, parents, teachers, our ETB partners, education and community organisations, curriculum specialists and others.

We would like to thank the author, Maureen Bassett, the independent education research consultant who carried out the extensive consultation process thoroughly and professionally, and whose report is clear and comprehensive. Thanks also to Dr Jones Irwin, St Patrick's College of Education, who wrote the literature review in the first phase of this research project.

Thanks are due to the members of our project steering group: Dr Carmel Mulcahy, DCU & Educate Together; Dr Jones Irwin, St Patrick's College of Education; Fionnuala Ward, Primary Education Officer, Educate Together; Ruth Doggett, Second-level Programme Manager, Educate Together.

We are grateful to the representatives of the following organisations, who participated in our extended steering group during the second phase of the research: Edel McGinley, Migrant Rights Centre Ireland; Mbemba Jabbi, Africa Centre; Jessica Farnan, Separated Children's Service, CDETB; Azucena Bermudez, Latin American Solidarity Committee.

Thank you to all the students, parents and school communities who participated in focus groups in Dublin 15, Drogheda and Lucan; and to those school principals who supported us in our engagement with parents and students. In particular we would like to thank Mary Healy, Eddie Fox, John Kelleher, Rosemary McGonagle, Maurice Hurley, Tomás O Dulaing, Aedin Ní Thuathail, Fergal Collins. Thanks also to our three new second-level school principals: Niall Hare, Bernie Judge and Alan Mynes, for their participation and engagement, and to Kevin Sullivan at Bridge21 and Jessica Farnan from the Separated Children's service, CDETB, who helped us recruit young people for our second-level student focus group.

Our National Office staff have provided invaluable administrative support during this project: thanks especially to Jarlath Costello, Jessica Simpson and Niamh McGarry.

Finally, we would like to extend our gratitude to all those individuals and groups who participated in the research and gave their time so generously, and without whom this research report would not have been possible.

**Ann Ryan**  
Second-level Education Officer, Educate Together

# Executive Summary



## Background

Educate Together has been involved in multi-denominational primary education for almost 40 years. The original schools were established as a response to the fact that all primary schools in Ireland were denominational at that time. The first Educate Together school, the Dalkey School Project was founded by a group of parents in 1978 who wished to have their children educated in a multi-denominational school. The decision to establish a multi-denominational rather than non-denominational school is explained by Mulcahy in her analysis of the Dalkey School Project. She makes it clear that while there was significant state unease around multi-denominationalism in the late 1970s, there was absolutely no possibility of a non-denominational school being countenanced (Mulcahy 2006).

As the number of Educate Together Schools increased, the core principles underpinning the schools became enshrined in a legally binding Educate Together Charter (1990). The Charter

**‘affirms that children of all social, cultural, religious and non-religious backgrounds have a right to an education that reflects their individual identity whilst exploring the different values and traditions of the world in which they live.’ (Learn Together Curriculum, 2004)**

The four core principles outlined in the Charter are that Educate Together schools are multi-denominational, co-educational, child-centred and democratically run.

Educate Together is now becoming involved in second-level education in response to demand from parents and students in Educate Together National Schools as well as others involved in education. (Taking the Next Step: A Blueprint for Educate Together Second-Level Schools, 2009). A Second-level Project was set up in 2007 to campaign for the establishment of Educate Together second-level schools. Three schools are opening in 2014, and a further five will be opening in 2015 and 2016. The three schools include a voluntary secondary school with Educate Together as sole patron, a community school in which it is co-patron with Louth Meath Education and Training Board (ETB) and a community college in which Dublin /Dún Laoghaire ETB is the patron working in formal partnership with Educate Together.

Educate Together places a strong emphasis on ethical education and adopts an ethical approach to all aspects of school life. The ethical education curriculum at primary level aims to support the development of students ethically, morally spiritually and socially in the context of inclusive schools (Educate Together, 2004 and 2011). It includes the study of main world religions but in line with

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Educate Together's core principle of multi-denominationalism, it does not engage in 'faith formation'. There is a strong emphasis in the *Learn Together* curriculum on preparing students to become 'caring members of a multicultural society' (Educate Together, 2004 and 2011).

Educate Together wishes to place a similar emphasis on ethical education in the second-level schools in which it is involved, as patron, co-patron or as formal partner with another patron. It has been developing its approach to the Ethical Education Curriculum for some time (Blueprint for Educate Together Second-Level Schools, 2009). To further inform this development, it embarked on a research project, which included a literature review and a consultative process with a wide range of stakeholders. Students and parents were prioritised and within these groups, and a specific emphasis was placed on including the voices of Third Country Nationals (TCNs). This report is an outcome of the research project and includes a Case Study in Chapter 3 that captures the views of TCN students and parents who participated in additional focus groups that were carried out. As a way of ensuring that their voices would be heard in the research.

## Key Findings

Educate Together adopts a broad and integrated approach to ethical education at primary level. The curriculum is delivered through the school ethos, is integrated across the curriculum and is allocated discrete school time. Taking account of this, the consultations also took a broad focus, for example, primary level students were asked what would make new second-level schools welcoming places, while other stakeholders were asked to identify the values that should underpin the Ethical Education Curriculum.

### **Welcoming Schools – Primary level Students (in both the original and in the case study focus groups)**

The most important things to both sets of students were:

- Being welcomed personally by Principal and staff and being shown around
- Respectful relations between teachers and students and between students
- Being able to talk to a teacher if needing help
- Having a 'buddy' system
- Positive school atmosphere and school building reflecting a wide range of cultures and religions
- Strong anti-bullying policy and practice
- Not being put under too much pressure and not too much homework
- Learning supports when needed
- Ways that students can have a say
- Good facilities including cafeteria, lockers, technology and good quality books in the library
- Sports and PE and after school clubs and activities
- Equality of access to sport and use of playground/yard for girls

The students from TCN backgrounds placed a greater emphasis on liking the diversity of different religions and cultures in their current primary school and of learning about them. They also placed a

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greater emphasis on the need for anti-bullying policy and practice in the new schools as well as the need for learning supports including language supports.

### **What they liked to learn and how**

Both sets of students particularly liked art and other creative activities as well as Sport and PE. As stated, TCN students placed more emphasis on enjoying learning about different religions and cultures.

Students placed significant emphasis on active and interactive learning, 'learning by doing', and by 'going out to learn'. They liked group work and most liked team teaching. The teaching and learning methods they enjoyed included projects, research on the Internet, using computers, a games approach such as Maths4fun, and creative methods such as drama and art. They suggested a 'Maths4fun' approach to the teaching of Irish. They wanted less homework to allow more time for physical activity and doing things they enjoyed.

### **Ways of improving learning – views of second-level students**

This group of students were far more interested in the *process* of learning rather than the *content*. Many were unhappy with the current teaching and learning approaches they had experienced. They were particularly critical of 'reading from the book', studying 'to the exam' and being told what to think. They proposed ways of improving learning as follows:

- Involvement in decision-making about what they learn
- Learn how to learn and learn critical thinking skills
- Learn from their peers as well as from teachers
- Greater use of peer mentoring
- Express opinions on topics that may differ from those of the teacher
- Less emphasis and value placed on academic learning and more on applied learning and learning by doing
- More emphasis on creativity and creative subjects
- Greater and more creative use of technology
- More opportunities to 'go out' and learn
- Greater use of active and participative learning
- More opportunities for physical activities
- More group and individual projects
- Use of individualised learning plans
- Mix students across ages, based on interests and capacities.

They also wanted less emphasis on examinations, more ongoing assessment and more opportunities for giving and receiving constructive feedback to and from teachers.

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### *Case Study TCN Parents*

A focus group was held with TCN parents as part of the second stage of the research. Their children attended an Educate Together Primary School. The aspect they liked most about the school was that it was multi denominational, where religions were explored and respected but children were not 'formed' into any religion. They also liked the atmosphere and felt welcome in the school.

In terms of the proposed new second-level school, they said that the most important thing was that :

**'The school should have a clear policy on diversity, inclusion, respect. It needs to be there from the start'.**

They wanted students to learn respect for all and develop an awareness of the dangers of bullying and stereotyping. They highlighted the need for teacher training to assist in creating a respectful and inclusive school.

They wanted 'an open door policy' for parents and events to facilitate parents from a range of backgrounds to meet and get to know each other. They also wanted supports for students, including access to a supportive teacher and or a counsellor. They also wanted support for the transition from primary to second-level, which they saw as particularly challenging for students.

### **Ethical Education**

They wanted it to stress diversity, cultures and religions and build respect for these. They also wanted it to support 'home' values and beliefs linked to their culture(s). They indicated potential challenges to some of these, as their children become teenagers, for example, 'appropriate dress codes for girls'.

They thought ethical education was important because it would support students to:

- Understand family background and ideology
- Be prepared to face the real world, maintain dignity and respect in community and society
- Learn to respect others, be tolerant and have more harmony in the community
- Know their own identity
- Be able to stand up for themselves
- Know that all beliefs and non (religious) beliefs are respected
- Consider others.

They supported the proposed values outlined by Educate Together to underpin the Ethical Education curriculum but suggested a more explicit focus on anti- bullying and anti-racism.

They wanted Ethical Education integrated throughout the school and embedded in the ethos. They wanted it be taught, not just through books and in class, but through the community and through festivals and seasons.

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## *All Other Stakeholders*

### **What is Ethical Education?**

Participants gave a wide range of definitions of Ethical Education. Most saw it as developmental and as forming young people into an ethical and or moral code based on a specific set of values. They stressed that students should explore various and different understandings and approaches as opposed to being told which one is right. Most felt the values would be the underpinning and guiding aspect. They also saw it as going beyond learning about aspects such as ethics, morality, religions and cultures, secular belief systems, environmental sustainability and global citizenship and believed that it must include elements of learning and development across all learning dimensions. These can be linked to UNESCO's four pillars of learning. These are: learning to know, to do, to be and to be with others. Educate Together (drawing on Makrakis) also favour adding a fifth pillar, that is, learning to transform self and society. Many elements mentioned by participants had this transformative aspect.

A number of themes emerged as to what participants thought Ethical Education is about, with the following outlining the strongest themes:

- Values and a values system
- Morals, morality, moral codes and notions of right and wrong
- Ethics, ethical perspective and ethical living
- Religions
- Cultures
- Belief systems including secular beliefs (and beliefs that predate Christianity)
- The environment
- The wider world
- The interconnectedness of human beings and the natural world
- Active local and global citizenship

Participants also mentioned, but less frequently, spirituality, philosophy and wellbeing.

Some saw challenges in the formation of students into certain values, on the basis that the specific values or the interpretation of them may conflict with home values. Most people who raised this did not suggest that values-based education should be avoided but that it required detailed communications with parents on the content and approach of ethical education proposed.

### *Why is it important?*

There was very strong support for the inclusion of an ethical education curriculum, as distinct from religious education. Participants saw it as essential to the full and integrated development of students and particularly important at their stage of development.

This is summed up in this statement:

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**'It is an essential and necessary component for fully integrated human development, for the individual and for societal and cultural contexts. Education without it would be impoverished.'**

### **Ethical Education, values and a lived ethos**

There was support for the values proposed (in the Draft Values Statement). It was suggested that a number of additional values be included, with a strong emphasis here on human rights, inclusion and care (linked to the value of respect already included). It was also suggested that the accompanying explanations needed to be expanded and deepened. It was suggested that equality should emphasise outcomes as well as access and that diversity should encompass a wider range of diversities.

The living of the values through the school ethos was seen as central to Ethical Education and that this was a key way to implement the ethical education curriculum. It was envisaged that the lived ethos would span all aspects of school life and be evident in them. The key aspects emphasised were recruitment of students as well as teachers; all relationships; school atmosphere (positive, respectful, caring, inclusive and free of bullying); teaching and learning approaches, curriculum development and a meaningful ways for a diversity of students and parents to input into the development and running of the schools.

It was also stressed that students and parents at school level needed to be involved in defining the values and ethos.

### **Curriculum Space**

As well as being embedded in the ethos most participants thought that Ethical Education should be integrated across the curriculum including into specific subjects, as ethical questions arise in all aspects of human knowledge and activity. They saw challenges to an integrated approach because of the subject orientation of second-level schools. They also emphasised that teachers see themselves as subject specialists and may not be willing or have the capacity to include an exploration of ethical questions into their subject area. Most thought that teacher recruitment, teacher education and ongoing CPD as well as the provision of guidelines, resources and supports could address these challenges.

Most participants also wanted Ethical Education to have a discrete space to ensure it was visible and valued in the school. Many thought the best way to do this was through the development of a short course based on the NCCA template. (The inclusion of short courses is part of the current proposed Junior Cycle Framework.) A number of participants emphasised the importance of ensuring the short course would be sufficiently different from other courses that students may be studying, such as CSPE, SPHE and the current Junior Cycle Religious Education Syllabus. (studying the State RE Syllabus is only likely to arise in schools where Educate Together is not the patron.) Overall, participants believed that the reformed Junior Cycle, when implemented, could offer great opportunities for Ethical Education.

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## *Teaching and Learning*

### **What to learn**

The areas of knowledge and understanding mentioned by participants relate to the areas highlighted as being at the core of Ethical Education (see above). They also put particular stress on skills, with a strong emphasis on critical thinking skills. They also highlighted skills in communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, based on a reflective ethical position informed by care for self and others as well as skills in coping and dealing with adversity and problem solving. They also wanted students to develop the skills required to be active global citizens. They wanted students to become confident, respectful, empathetic and compassionate young people who are self-aware, who appreciate diversity and the environment, and who are empowered and prepared to take action for justice and human rights, both locally and globally.

### **How to learn**

As outlined above, very strong messages came from students on what approaches to teaching, learning and assessment they preferred. Most of the adults in the research also emphasised similar ideas.

These ideas stressed learning to learn, self directed learning, learning that takes account of the needs of individual students, active and participative learning, peer mentoring and student –to-student teaching and learning; as well as teachers as learners and as facilitators of learning. They favoured methods that promoted active and participative learning, such as group work, action projects, creative use of technology, use of games, art, drama, music, video and film. It was also proposed that students be given opportunities to learn by doing and by engaging with the community.

The need for CPD and support for teachers in the use of a wide range of active teaching and learning methods was emphasised. The need for learning supports for students was also highlighted, to ensure that all students could benefit from participating in the Ethical Education Curriculum as well as in learning in general.

### **Assessment and Review**

As with the students, there was a strong emphasis on an ‘Assessment for Learning’ approach. Participants felt that this was more in keeping with ethical education. They favoured ongoing, school - based assessment, using a range of methods rather than end of term, end of year terminal examinations. Most felt that the proposed reformed JC approach would be positive for student learning and development if implemented. It was acknowledged that some teachers would need support to implement these approaches, as would students to participate in them.

Some felt it was important to carry out whole school reviews to assess the degree to which the Ethical Education curriculum was being implemented. It was envisaged that the impacts on students learning and development would also be captured through this approach.

### **Some Challenges**

Challenges relating to values based education; integration across the curriculum and the use of different forms of assessment have already been mentioned. Another challenge concerned the

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question of who would teach a short course, should this be offered. It was suggested that teachers with subjects such as philosophy, sociology and politics in their primary degree could be considered, as well as teachers with a background in CSPE and or RE. Overall, it was suggested that a commitment to Ethical Education as envisaged by Educate Together should be the prime determinant. It was agreed that opportunities for CPD in Ethical Education drawing on Educate Together's experience at primary level should be offered to teachers in the new schools. Educate Together is already aware of challenges to the delivery of the Ethical Education Curriculum at primary level, these are outlined in the literature review. Ongoing work to address these challenges can also inform second-level developments.

## **Implications of findings for the development of an Ethical Education Curriculum Framework**

Overall, there was significant support for an ethical education curriculum at second-level. Most saw this as a distinct and autonomous curricular area although with linkages to other areas. Parents especially those from TCN backgrounds saw it as central to building respect for different cultures and religions. Others valued this aspect, but also saw it encompassing areas such as moral and ethical development, secular belief systems, environmental sustainability and active and ethical global citizenship. From the point of view of the stage of development of students, parents in particular, placed an emphasis on wellbeing and self-care.

The following summarises the key implications. These are framed as recommendations.

### *Defining Ethical Education and Naming and Embedding Values*

- Include a clear definition of ethical education taking account of the emphasis highlighted by participants as well as drawing on Educate Together's knowledge and experience in this area and the research literature. This definition should forefront ethics and should specify the theorists that inform it and include radical, critical and feminist theorists.
- Ensure accessible communications with parents about the ethical education curriculum, the values underpinning it and the approach proposed, including that it will be embedded in the ethos.
- Take account of the potential impact of different patronage models on how the curriculum is shaped and implemented at school level and the implications of this including for teacher support. Also, take account of greater diversity in parents' reasons for school choice.
- Further, develop the values to underpin the curriculum and agree with co-patrons and partners so that the values can be used as a framework for discussions at school level. Involve parents and students in the process at school level. Take account of the values in all aspects of school development. Ensure that the school ethos, where Educate Together is patron or co-patron or partner, embodies the ethical education curriculum.

### **Teaching and Learning**

- Take account of the fact that students placed more emphasis on *how* they learn as well as on the learning experience, over and above *what* they learn. They want learning to be enjoyable, meaningful and reflective.

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- Ensure the approaches contained in the framework reflect those outlined in the research. This will entail going beyond the use of active and participative methods to include more radical shifts in approach. Above all the approach should aim to support students to become self-directed learners as well as empowering and equipping them with critical thinking skills and other skills and dispositions needed to become reflective ethical individuals and global citizens.
  - Ensure that sufficient learning supports, including language supports, are provided to ensure a diverse range of students (including those with language and learning difficulties) can fully participate in and benefit from the Ethical Education Curriculum.
  - Take account of aspects particularly emphasised by students including interest in creative areas, as well as the use of creative approaches to learning and the use of technology. Also take account of younger students' emphasis on physical activity and sports.
  - Provide supports and CPD to teachers to support them to deliver ethical education.

### **Assessment**

- Take particular account of the approaches proposed by students who emphasised the importance of on-going, constructive feedback to support their learning and development.
- Adopt an Assessment for Learning approach and include on going school-based assessment using a range of assessment methods. Minimise the use of end of year and terminal examinations.

### **Implementing Ethical Education**

- Develop an implementation strategy in conjunction with the curriculum framework which outlines in detail how it is to be embedded in the ethos, integrated across the curriculum and delivered as a discrete curriculum area.
- Provide support to schools to develop a school level plan. Also provide guidelines, resources and CPD. Include support for the conduct of whole school reviews to assess the degree of implementation and its impact on students.
- Develop a short course to assist the delivery of the discrete aspect of the Ethical Education Curriculum. Use the NCCA template to assist this process and link the learning and learning outcomes to the Statements of Learning proposed for the reformed Junior Cycle.

### **Review and Evaluation**

- As well as the whole school reviews mentioned earlier it is also proposed that an externally assisted formative evaluation process be put in place to inform the development of the Ethical Education Curriculum as well as monitoring its effectiveness.
- Draw up, in consultation with school level stakeholders, a set of performance indicators against which schools can measure progress. These need to reflect the depth and scope of the Ethical Education Curriculum. These are needed for the periodic school based reviews. The identification of the performance indicators could be part of the formative evaluation process.
- Discuss and agree with school-level stakeholders the purpose and aims of the evaluation, its structure, approach and scope as well key evaluation questions, key stakeholders, data

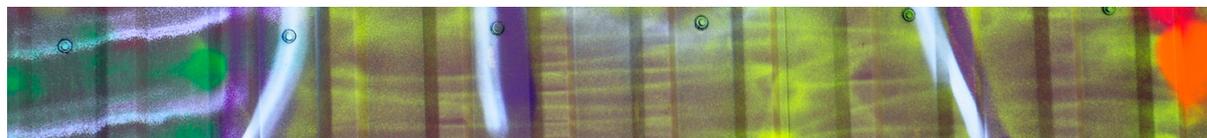
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collection methods and the overall timeframe and key stages. It is suggested that the formative evaluation should cover the three years of the Junior Cycle.

### **Next steps**

- Use the research report to inform the final development of the Ethical Education Curriculum Framework (an initial framework is included in the report).
- Expand the steering group to include local level representatives of co-patrons and partner.
- Involve school level stakeholders in the process of curriculum development, including students and parents.
- Develop an implementation strategy, including plans for teacher CPD and development of a resource bank
- Discuss and agree the externally assisted formative evaluation
- Develop a Junior Cycle Short Course

# Introduction



## 1. Background to the Research

Educate Together has been involved in multi-denominational primary education for almost forty years. The original schools were established as a response to the fact that all primary schools in Ireland were denominational at that time. The first Educate Together school, the Dalkey School Project, was founded by a group of parents in 1978 who wished to have their children educated in a multi-denominational school. The decision to establish a multi-denominational rather than non-denominational school is explained by Mulcahy in her analysis of the Dalkey School Project. She makes clear that while there was significant state unease around multi-denominationalism in the late 1970s, there was absolutely no possibility of a non-denominational school being countenanced (Mulcahy 2006).

As the number of Educate Together Schools developed the core principles underpinning the schools became enshrined in a legally binding Educate Together Charter (1990). This

**‘affirms that children of all social, cultural, religious and non-religious backgrounds have a right to an education that reflects their individual identity whilst exploring the different values and traditions of the world in which they live.’ (Learn Together Curriculum, 2004)**

The four core principles outlined in the Charter are that Educate Together schools are multi-denominational, co-educational, child-centred and democratically run.

It is now becoming involved in second-level education in response to demands from parents and students in Educate Together National Schools as well as others involved in education. (Taking the Next Step -A Blueprint for Educate Together Second-Level Schools, 2009). The Educate Together Second-level Project, established in 2007, is also informed by a Feasibility Study, conducted by academics at Trinity College, Dublin (Seery, Loxley and Limond, 2008).

**Educate Together has been working on its second-level project for over five years. Its first application to open a second-level school was made in 2008. At present there are 14,000 pupils in Educate Together primary schools. Research conducted by Trinity College in 2007 found that over 90% of parents whose children attend Educate Together primary schools would send them to an Educate Together Second-Level school if available. Demand for this innovative model extends far beyond those in Educate**

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**Together schools. <http://www.educatetogether.ie/media/national-news/educate-together-second-level-project-forges-ahead>**

In May 2011, at the Educate Together Annual General Meeting, Minister for Education and Skills Ruairi Quinn announced that Educate Together was now recognised as a second-level patron. Educate Together is currently establishing three new schools either in its own right as a full patron, as a co-patron or in partnership with others. The three schools are Ballymakenny College, Drogheda, Hansfield Educate Together Secondary School, Dublin 15 and Kishoge Community College, South Lucan. Ballymakenny College is a 'new type of community school' in which Educate Together is co-patron with Louth/Meath Education and Training Board (ETB). Hansfield Educate Together Secondary School is a voluntary secondary school where Educate Together is sole patron. Kishoge Community College is an ETB school under the patronage of Dublin/Dún Laoghaire ETB and in which Educate Together is a formal partner. A Model Agreement is in place to underpin the formal partnership approach, which includes an agreement to honour and embed the four core principles of Educate Together's Charter. This means that the school will be multi-denominational, co-educational, child centred and democratically run.

The new schools will open in September 2014 and a further five schools will open in 2015 and 2016. Educate Together's Blueprint for second-level education proposes a new approach to the delivery of the second-level curriculum.

**The approach is learner-centred rather than exclusively focused on teaching to a test. It also encourages and fosters the development of key life skills such as critical analysis, problem solving, independent research, leadership, teamwork and innovative thinking. Educate Together second-level schools will build on the values of democracy, equality of esteem, cultural awareness and parental participation which have been tried and tested for over 30 years in its primary schools.**

**<http://www.educatetogether.ie/media/national-news/next-stop-educate-together-second-level>**

Educate Together also places a strong emphasis on ethical education at primary level and adopts an ethical approach to all aspects of school life. The ethical education curriculum at primary level aims to support the development of students ethically, morally, spiritually and socially in the context of inclusive schools. The curricular manifestation is called *Learn Together* and this proposes that the curriculum be delivered though 'a caring and inclusive school ethos', through an integrated cross-curricular approach as well as through the allocation of discrete time ( Educate Together, 2004 and 2011). This means that all students experience the ethical education curriculum. Professor Kathleen Lynch in 2004 stated:

**[The Educate Together ethical curriculum] demonstrates that spiritual and ethical education does not have to involve separate education. It identifies the common values that we share in our humanity and offers a pathway for educating our children to live in a pluralist Ireland. It integrates theory and**

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action in spiritual and ethical education. What is important about the curriculum is its truly holistic approach to ethical education. Children will not just be educated about spiritual values or ethical principles emanating from their own belief or religious tradition. They will learn about the values, cultures and lifestyles of those who are different to them. They will learn to name difference with a language of respect. (Quoted in *A Blueprint for Educate Together Second-Level Schools*, 2009)

The Learn Together curriculum at primary level is structured in four strands:

- Moral and Spiritual
- Equality and Justice
- Systems
- Ethics and the Environment

It includes the study of main world religions, but in line with Educate Together's core principle of schools being multi-denominational, it does not prioritise any religion and does not engage in 'faith formation' during the school day. There is a strong emphasis in the *Learn Together* curriculum on preparing students to become 'caring members of a multicultural society' (Educate Together, 2004 and 2011).

Educate Together wishes to place a similar emphasis on ethical education as a core element in the second-level schools in which it will be involved as either patron, co-patron or as formal partner with another patron. Educate Together also envisages a similar embedded approach at second-level (Educate Together 2009).

## **2. Purpose of the Research**

Educate Together now intends to develop an Ethical Education Curriculum Framework which will guide the delivery of Ethical Education at second level. The design of this framework will be based on 'a two-pronged approach, consisting of a literature review and in-depth consultation process'. The consultation process was envisaged to include students, teachers, academics, volunteers and parents 'in order for it to be widely adopted and to have lasting impact' (Educate Together Tender Document 2013).

Educate Together states that:

**'This will ensure that the framework developed following this process will be grounded in evidence and addresses the needs of our constituency who are seeking access to a genuinely multi-denominational second-level education in Ireland' (Educate Together Tender Document 2013).**

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Educate Together issued a tender for the conduct of the consultation and preparation of a Report. An independent Education Research Consultant was contracted to complete the work. A Steering Group guided the research process and Educate Together's Second-level Education Officer worked in close liaison with the Researcher throughout the project.

The literature review was carried out by Dr Jones Irwin and attempts to draw together some of the most important existing resources (both theoretical and practical) for the development of a curricular framework for Ethical Education at second-level.

The main purpose of the consultative research was to facilitate a wide range of stakeholders to have an input into the development of the Framework. In particular, input was sought into the development of a 'values statement, a rationale, aim, key strands, learning outcomes and teaching, learning and assessment approaches' (Educate Together Tender Document 2013). In addition, the research sought to clarify research participants' understanding of ethical education.

### **3. Methodology**

This section outlines the methodology involved in the consultative research. The consultation involved two phases. The original research tender and proposal envisaged ten to twelve focus groups and a number of interviews. Twelve focus groups and seven individual interviews were conducted as part of this original phase. In December 2013, Educate Together received funding from the European Integration Fund (EIF) to ensure Third Country Nationals (TCNs) were actively encouraged to participate in the consultation process. The first phase of the research targeted TCNs as part of the larger group of students, parents and community leaders. However, it was decided to carry out a second phase of the research to increase the numbers of TCN students and parents participating in the research. This second phase involved seven focus groups specifically focussed on encouraging participation by TCNs.

The focus group method was chosen to facilitate dialogue and maximise participation and input. Parents and students were prioritised in the focus group process. Educate Together considers that the input of students and parents is vital. Historically, consultation on curriculum with these groups has been insufficient, although more recently, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) adopts an inclusive approach. The focus groups were complemented with some individual interviews with key people involved in second-level education in Ireland.

## 1. The Focus Groups

**Table One: Number of Focus Groups–Original Phase**

<b>Number of focus groups</b>	<b>Who is involved</b>	<b>Held between late November 2013 and late January 2014</b>
3	Primary school students—one in each of the three areas in which new schools are being established	Mid January to early February 2014
1	Second-level students	End of January 2014
3	Parents—one in each of the three areas in which new schools are being established	Mid January to early February 2014
1	Educate Together – Teachers and Principals from Educate Together National School network	Late November 2013
1	Second-level Teachers	Early December 2013
1	Members of Interim Boards of new second-level schools	Mid January 2014
1	Principals of the three new second-level schools	Late January 2014
1	Reps. of organisations with an interest in Ethical Ed.	Mid December 2013

Educate Together’s Second-level Education Officer, in liaison with the Researcher, recruited participants for all the focus groups. In line with Educate Together’s commitment to diversity, every effort was made to recruit as diverse a group of students and parents as possible. An extract from an email sent to school principals highlights this commitment:

**We want to achieve balance and diversity in the workshops in terms of gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity, race, disability and religion. We also have a key requirement to include students who are 'third country nationals' from outside the EU. This relates to our funding from the European Integration Fund (EIF).**

Sixth class students and their parents who had registered for the new schools were prioritised. The Education Officer carried out a selection process using the registration list. She used criteria in making the selection including type of school (to ensure inclusion of students from a range of types of primary schools in the area), children identified as being Third Country Nationals (TCNs) and gender. The Education Officer made the selection for the purposes of issuing invitations. She also conducted a number of follow-up recruitment processes following the issuing of the initial invitation to encourage participation. Ethical research practices and child protection procedures were adhered to in the recruitment and conduct of the focus groups (See Appendix 1 for more details on the recruitment process).

The student and parents’ focus groups were held separately but on the same day and at the same location. It was decided to have a maximum of 20 in the student groups and to run them in workshop format. An upper limit of 12 was placed on the parents’ focus groups.

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### **Student attendance**

In total 45 students attended the three focus groups. This was comprised of 22 females and 23 males. 14 students were from Third Country backgrounds. A further 13 students were either born in another EU country or had another EU country family background. The remaining 18 were born in Ireland and had an Irish family background.

### **Parent attendance**

In total, 26 parents attended the three focus groups. The vast majority were female (21), 5 males attended. 6 parents were born in Third Countries, 6 were born in other EU countries and 14 were born in Ireland.

### **Second-level student- attendance**

The second level students were recruited mainly through Bridge21. This is an education programme based in Trinity College Dublin. It offers a new model of learning, that can be adapted for use in Irish second-level schools. Information on its website is as follows:

Designed to support an innovative 21st Century learning environment within schools, we have developed a learning model for second level education that is:

- Team-based
- Technology-mediated
- Project-based
- Cross- curricular

<http://www.bridge21.ie/about-us/about-bridge-21/>

Bridge21 has three core strands:

- A schools programme to scale and adapt our learning model for use in Irish second-level schools nationwide.
- The Bridge21 Transition Year programme, based in Oriel House, is a team-based experience for young people to explore learning through technology.
- A learning and research centre in Oriel House, Trinity College Dublin, to innovate, evaluate and refine 21st century learning methodologies.

The students who attended the focus group were involved in the Bridge21 Transition Year Programme and included students from a number of schools. 20 students (11 girls, 9 boys) attended the focus group in all. This also included two Fifth Year students from a nearby school and four TCN second-level students involved with the Separated Children's Service.

### **Other stakeholder focus groups**

Primary Teachers - Educate Together hosts an Ethos Conference each year for Educate Together teachers, principals, board members and others. A focus group was held at this conference on 23 November 2013 and was attended by 11 teachers and principals.

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Second level Teachers - A total of 7 teachers attended. These teachers were selected on the basis of their prior involvement with Educate Together in second-level working groups, for example, and who had demonstrated an interest in the Second-level Project.

Interim Boards -7 people attended including representatives from all three new second-level interim boards of management.

Principals - the principals appointed to the 3 new second-level schools, due to open in September 2014, attended a focus group in early 2014.

Organisations with an interest in ethical education - a wide range of organisations were invited. These included organisations involved in human rights education, development education, citizenship education, environmental education, anti-racist education. It also included organisations working on issues of equality, rights and inclusion as well as those involved in denominational education. Those concerned with non-denominational and secular based education were also invited. In total 13 representatives attended (See Appendix 2 for list of organisations represented).

### **Format**

Information on the format of the student focus groups is included in Chapter Three, which outlines the findings for these focus groups. The focus groups for stakeholders other than students, followed a structure which facilitated input on:

- Participants' understanding of Ethical Education and its importance
- Response to Educate Together's draft Values Statement and its suitability to underpin the Ethical Education Curriculum and schools
- Discussion on how the values can be reflected in a lived ethos
- Teaching, learning and assessment approaches
- Learning outcomes
- Possible structure to shape the curriculum
- Challenges and supports required.

The Educate Together Second-level Education Officer took detailed notes at the focus groups.

### **1.3.2 The Interviews**

Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with key people working in areas such as curriculum, initial teacher education and continuous professional development (CPD), ethical education and denominational education. Representatives of the partners involved in two of the three new second-level schools were also interviewed, as was a representative of a teacher union (Appendix 3 outlines the organisations included in the interview process). The interviews were conducted either face-to-face (4) or on the telephone (3). The researcher prepared an interview

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schedule and provided this to the interviewees, in advance of the interviews. The schedule covered the areas already outlined above under the focus groups. The researcher took detailed notes. The face-to-face interviews were also recorded. The recordings were used as an 'aide memoire' but not transcribed.

### *1.3.3 Case Study: Students -TCN Backgrounds*

The new second-level schools are opening in rapidly developing areas, where many of Educate Together primary schools are also located. These are areas of significant diversity and migrant populations. Educate Together is committed to embedding interculturalism in the school ethos of the new schools. To this end, it wanted to ensure that the voices of young people from Third Country National (TCN) backgrounds were included in the research. As highlighted above, these voices were included in the Focus Groups in the original phase of the research, with just over 30% of all students being from TCN backgrounds. It was decided to strengthen this further and to include specifically as many Third Country National students.

This aspect of the research is part of a wider project to embed interculturalism in the ethos of the new second-level schools as well as in existing Educate Together primary schools. This includes in-service teacher education/CPD for:

**150 Educate Together teachers in 8 targeted primary schools in these areas, 15 school leaders and teachers recruited for our 3 second-level schools in these areas, opening in 2014, and 15 ancillary staff in the 12 Educate Together feeder primary schools (Educate Together, European Integration Fund (EIF) Funding Application, 2013).**

An evaluation will also be conducted in Hansfield Educate Together Secondary School by the end of the school's first term. The research project is co-financed by the European Commission under the European Integration Fund and is supported by the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration in the Department of Justice and Equality and Pobal.

Educate Together invited representatives of a number of organisations working in the area of Migrant Rights to attend an extended Steering Group meeting to advise on this aspect of the Research.

As part of this phase of the consultation process, the Researcher conducted six additional focus groups with students, and one with parents.

#### **Student focus groups**

On this occasion, the students were attending a specific Educate Together National School in each of the three areas where the new second-level schools are situated. Two focus groups were held in each school and they included both fifth and sixth class students. In one of the three schools, fifth and sixth students were mixed in the focus groups. The focus groups were held during the school day.

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57 students attended. 37(65%)<sup>1</sup> were either born in a Third Country and or had a TCN family background. A further 11(19%) were either born in another EU country or had another EU country family background. 9 (16%) students were born in Ireland and had an Irish family background. The majority of the latter group of students were in two of the 6 focus groups where they accounted for 33% of the participants in one focus group and 27% in another. 31 females and 26 males attended this set of focus groups.

It was decided to recruit the students within specific Educate Together schools for a number of reasons. These included high numbers of students from TCN backgrounds; an existing emphasis in these schools on hearing the voice of students; existing intercultural approaches in the schools as well as students feeling comfortable in their own school context. Also, relationships between Educate Together National Office and school principals allowed more input into the process and allowed the focus groups to take place within the timeframe for completing the research. (See Appendix 6 for more information on the recruitment process).

### **Parent focus group**

Some TCN parents had been included in the original phase of the research. 6 participated; this represented 23% of all parents. With the extension of the research to include greater numbers of students with TCN backgrounds, it was also decided to hold one focus group comprised just of TCN parents. The parents who attended this focus group were recruited through one of the same Educate Together schools. 7 parents attended including 6 females and 1 male.

## **4. About the Report**

This report aims to capture the findings from all the consultative processes and to assess how these might shape an Ethical Education Curriculum Framework. This Framework is to guide Ethical Education in the second-level schools in which Educate Together is involved as sole patron, co-patron or partner.

Considerable care was taken to capture all the main ideas shared by participants in the consultation process. The ideas were transferred to Excel sheets organised around each question and or area covered in the research. Each sheet was reviewed to identify common themes and these were used to develop simple coding frames. These were then applied to the data and the data was sorted on this basis. This allowed the researcher to analyse the data more closely and to draw out commonalities and differences.

Informed by advice of the extended Steering Group, it was decided to present the findings from the research with TCN students as a case study. This is incorporated into Chapter Three of this report.

The findings from all the participants are presented as much as possible without comment or discussion. The findings are discussed in Chapter Five and the implications are drawn out for the development of an Ethical Education Curriculum Framework.

The report also encompasses a literature review carried out by Dr Jones Irwin as a first phase in this research project.

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<sup>1</sup>16 of this group were born in a Third Country.

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The report is structured as follows:

- Chapter One: Introduction
- Chapter Two: Literature Review
- Chapter Three: Student Voices–the findings from all the student consultations including the case study
- Chapter Four: Findings from all other stakeholders
- Chapter Five: Discussion of the Findings
- Chapter Six: Towards an Ethical Education Curriculum Framework

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## 2 Literature Review (Written by Dr Jones Irwin)

World is crazier and more of it than we think  
Incorrigibly plural. I peel and portion  
A tangerine and spit the pips and feel/  
The drunkenness of things being various'

(Louis MacNiece, 'Snow')



### 2.1 Introduction

This Literature Review attempts to draw together some of the most important existing resources (both theoretical and practical) for the development of an ethical education curriculum framework for the second-level schools in which Educate Together is involved as patron, co-patron or as partner.

Some of this material has emerged from theorists and activists working within the Educate Together movement in Ireland (Mulcahy 2000, 2006; Rowe 2000; Lalor 2013; Educate Together 2009, 2011a, 2012). Some of the material comes from theoretical discussion, in Ireland and internationally, concerning best practice in multi-denominational schooling, as well as in education more widely (Norman 2003; Gutmann 1994; Mc Laughlin 2008a, 2008b; Banks 2006; Irwin 2010, 2012b). The theory underpinning the Educate Together ethical curriculum is informed and influenced by major theorists in the area of philosophy and psychology of education such as Freire, Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner, Gardiner, Kohlberg and Gilligan (Educate Together 2009: 24). The curriculum also draws on the work of sociologists and, in particular, critical theory, in the areas of equality and justice (Willis 1981; Freire 1992; McLaren and Leonard 1993; Hall 1996a, 1996b, 1996c; Giroux 2000; Hooks 1994; Banks 2006).

The four core principles as laid down in the Educate Together Charter (1990) of its schools being multi-denominational, co-educational, democratic and child-centred - are the foundation upon which a school community builds an inclusive and intercultural learning environment (Mulcahy 2000, 2006; Rowe 2000). The core Educate Together principles inform the culture and ethos of all Educate Together schools and guide the delivery and content of an Ethical Education curriculum (Educate Together 2009). The ethical education curriculum, *Learn Together* is the curricular approach to delivering school ethos and a concrete expression of Educate Together's inclusive values.

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In this Literature Review, we will explore some of the main challenges and opportunities facing the development of an ethical education curriculum framework at second-level, in those schools that have Educate Together as patron, joint patron or as partner. We will do this under three main headings.

In the first case, we will look at some of the specific aspects of the Irish situation that provide the context for the emergence of a multi-denominational approach to the teaching of ethics and religion in schools (Irwin 2012b). Here, we will distinguish clearly the Educate Together approach at primary level from denominational approaches of faith-formation (which remain dominant in Irish education), the ‘multi-faith’ approach of the ‘community national schools’ (the VEC/ETB model) and the more recent possibility (Forum on Patronage and Pluralism 2012) of a ‘non-denominational’ perspective in schooling. In this context, the concept of educational ‘ethos’ is central (Norman 2003; Rowe 2000; Lalor 2013) and the conflicting understandings of this concept are at the heart of the current debates in Irish education.

Having set the context of the ‘ethos’ debate in Irish schooling, we will go on to explore the development of this notion of ‘ethos’ from a multi-denominational perspective in Ireland under the rubric of the notion of ‘Ethical Education’ (Educate Together 2009, 2011a). Traditionally, in Irish education, any notion of ethical or moral education has come under the remit of religious education (Coolahan 1981; Mulcahy 2006; Irwin 2010). What marks out the approach of Educate Together has been its attempt to define an autonomous domain of ‘Ethical Education,’ which sees itself as clearly distinct from any conception of a ‘confessional,’ faith-based moral education. This more autonomous approach to ethical education is very much in line with approaches internationally to religious and ethical education, which have similarly moved away from confessional to more ‘comparative’ approaches (Almen et al 2000; Smart 2000; Askling 2000; Irwin 2012b).

As Askling notes:

**Despite different national contexts, there is one striking similarity - the identified tension nowadays in religious education between the formerly self-evident linkage to Church and confessionalism and the increasing respectfulness to democratic values of pluralism in modern society. (Askling 2000).**

Or as one of the seminal figures in the critical or comparative study of religion and values, Ninian Smart, notes: ‘

**Much of the study of religion goes beyond or ought to go beyond the absorption of one’s own faith (if any).. it ought to sensitize us to the beliefs, feelings and rituals of others. (Smart 2000).**

While there are significant advantages to such an approach, highlighted, for example, by the *Report of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism* (Forum 2012), there are also significant challenges posed by the evolution of this alternative multi-denominational perspective. Research from within the Educate Together sector (Mulcahy 2000, 2006; Lalor 2013; Moore 2012), and findings from the first phase of an evaluation of the *Learn Together* curriculum undertaken in 2012 by a DCU Education working group (McNamara, G., Mulcahy, C. and O’Hara 2012) have highlighted significant tensions

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and complexities (as well as great opportunities) at the heart of the practice of *Learn Together* as an Ethical Education curriculum at Educate Together primary level schools.

The Includ-ED report on the *Learn Together* curriculum (Includ-ED 2012), of which Lalor's work especially was an integral part (Lalor 2013), similarly highlights the significant strengths and challenges of such a pedagogy and curricular method. We will thus be concerned with some of the very interesting dilemmas raised from this research as to the overall coherence of the theoretical and curricular framework underlying the *Learn Together* curriculum, as well as questions concerning the application of this framework in practice in schools.

Not the least interesting question here will be to what extent these theoretical and practical tensions can be seen as an example of a very healthy diversity of school approach within the Educate Together sector, or whether, rather, it is a symptom of a confusing ambiguity which needs to be worked against, through a greater centralisation of planning and control (McNamara, G., Mulcahy, C. and O'Hara 2012).

While these issues can be seen as specific to the Educate Together context, they can also be seen as related to similar issues raised in practice and theory on an international educational level, for example in the UK (McLaughlin 2008a, 2008b), Sweden (Almén et al 2000) and further afield (Craft 1997). Whilst dealing with the specifics of the intra - Educate Together discussion concerning the evolution of the *Learn Together* curriculum, we will also seek to relate these issues and questions to comparative research in education internationally.

The evolution of the Ethical Education curriculum in Educate Together schools has, so far, taken place at primary level only. The above research, and the issues it raises, thus corresponds more directly to a primary level of schooling. However, the Ethical Education curriculum is to be developed at second-level and this raises distinct issues of context, curriculum, resourcing, and educational politics (Educate Together 2009; NCCA 2002, 2004, 2005).

In the last section of the Literature Review, we will explore the specific demands that the second-level context of Irish education will place on the Ethical Education curriculum. How will this curriculum have to change from primary level to second-level? How will it relate to the other aspects of the curriculum in second-level schools from the point of view of cross-curricular integration? (Educate Together 2009). And how will an Ethical Education curriculum framework for second-level schools relate to the wider demands and frameworks of changing second-level educational policy in Ireland? (NCCA 2005; NCCA 2012).

## **2.2 Educate Together as an Alternative Multi-denominational Ethos in Irish Schooling**

### **2.2.1 *The Hegemony of Denominationalism***

The history of the Irish education system exemplifies some key moments of conflict and subsequent resolution across the last two hundred years (Coolahan 1981; O'Sullivan 2005). In 1831, a state controlled primary school system was introduced in Ireland, which was multi-denominational. Children of all denominations, it was then envisioned, would be educated together in 'secular' subjects. Separate arrangements would be made for doctrinal instruction and teacher education

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would also be ‘mixed’ across the two main religious traditions of Catholicism and Protestantism. However, in practice, each of the denominations resisted this *de jure* multi-denominationalism, seeing the schooling process as ‘an extension of pastoral care’ (Coolahan 1981): ‘This conflict between State and Church...the State’s retaining the concept of a *de jure* mixed system which became increasingly denominational in fact’ (Coolahan 1981).

By the time of the Irish Free State and further on, with the writing of the 1937 Constitution, this denominationalism had become not simply *de facto*, but *de jure* (Coolahan 1981; Mulcahy 2006; Lalor 2013). We should also note, however, that there are ambiguous aspects to the rights enshrined in the Irish Constitution, which is an unresolved amalgamation of Republican ideals with the tenets of the contemporary Catholic social policy and philosophy. The rights to freedom of conscience and freedom of religion in schools, for parents and children (but not for teachers) are just one example of this ambiguity (Coolahan 1981; O’Sullivan 2005). The residues of this ambiguous situation in Irish schools and Irish law continue to bedevil attempts at school reform, as the Forum Report clarifies (Forum 2012; Irwin 2012b).

Jumping ahead to our current educational context, while certainly there have been noteworthy changes in curriculum, culture and Irish society (O’Sullivan 2005), nonetheless it is significant that statistically at least, this denominationalism maintains a powerful hegemony in Irish schools (Irwin 2010). At the time of writing, 96% of Irish primary schools remain denominational with 4% multi-denominational, and there being no non-denominational schools (Irwin 2012b). To put this in historical context, 100% of state primary schools were denominational up until the late 1970s and, even by 2001, only 1% of schools were multi-denominational (Irwin 2010). There has thus been a 3% change in the last ten years but the Irish situation remains unique in a European, and even global context (Craft 1997), where a far more significant number of state primary schools would be either multi-denominational or non-denominational (Almén et al 2000; Smart 2000; Askling 2000).

At second-level, however, the situation is somewhat different. There had been a strong majority of religious schooling at post-primary level (Norman 2003; Furlong and Monahan 2000) but the balance has shifted somewhat in recent years, so that just over 50% of post-primary schools are voluntary secondary schools, mostly owned and managed by religious patron bodies (Educate Together, 2010). The two other types of second-level school in Ireland include schools managed by the VEC (now ETB) sector, vocational schools and community colleges. Many of these schools have a religious ethos to a greater or lesser extent, although they cannot discriminate on the basis of religion in their admissions policies. In addition, since 2007, a number of ‘non-designated’ community colleges have been established. These are formally described as multi-denominational community colleges. The third broad school type incorporates community and comprehensive schools. Comprehensive schools are managed by: representatives of the diocesan religious authority, the local VEC (now ETB) and the Minister for Education and Skills. Community schools are managed by: boards of management that include representatives of local interests, as well as a Catholic religious authority.<sup>2</sup>

At teacher education level in the primary sector, the dominance of denominational religious ethos is especially strong, with 100% of colleges of education remaining denominational (Donnelly 2011). A denominational religious ethos aims as a matter of policy to foster in young people a commitment to

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2 There are 721 state-aided post-primary schools in Ireland comprising 383 voluntary secondary schools (53% of total), 253 vocational schools and community colleges (35% of total), and 93 community and comprehensive schools (12.9% of total). (DES Key Statistics 2012/13. [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) )

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a particular religion. This involves (at least in Ireland) the teaching of religion as faith formation in school time, preparation for sacraments by the class teacher as well as a foregrounding of the symbolism of the particular religion throughout the school (Norman, 2003). This historical legacy and tradition has been well documented (Coolahan 1981) but it is a helpful place to begin an analysis of emerging alternatives to such religious based schooling in Ireland, especially in terms of the teaching of religion and ethics to children and teenagers (Williams 2003; Dunne 1991; Mulcahy 2006; Educate Together 2009; Lalor 2013).

However, while initial teacher education in the post-primary sector includes a small number of colleges with a religious ethos, the majority of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) courses are postgraduate diplomas delivered by non-denominational universities.

There are no non-denominational schools in the Republic of Ireland, that is, schools that do not address the topic of religion in their curricula whatsoever (Irwin 2012b). This has been the result of a dominant interpretation of the 1937 Irish Constitution, which saw it as requiring some level of 'religious formation' in all schools, although this constitutional interpretation has recently been rejected (Forum 2012). This constitutional interpretation, however, was also a reason behind the development of a distinctive approach to multi-denominational schooling in Ireland, which has been primarily associated with the Educate Together movement (Rowe 2000; Mulcahy 2000, 2006; Lalor 2013).

In her analysis of the Dalkey multi-denominational school, for example, Mulcahy makes clear that while there was significant state unease around multi-denominationalism in the late 1970s, that there was absolutely no possibility of a non-denominational school being countenanced (Mulcahy 2006). In multi-denominational education, in direct contrast to denominational education pedagogically, the truth claims of religion and other belief systems are explored as part of the school's ethos, but truth is not associated with a particular view. Students study a comparative religious and ethics programme, where belief systems are critically explored without the assumption of any one faith. Sacramental preparation does not take place in school time and the symbolism of the school must represent a diversity of perspectives (Rowe, 2000). This latter approach to multi-denominationalism can be seen, more holistically, in the context of the commitment to the four fundamental principles of the Educate Together schooling movement, as elaborated in the original Educate Together Charter.

The four core principles as laid down in the Educate Together Charter (1990) – that is, the principles of being multi-denominational, co-educational, democratic and child-centred (Mulcahy 2000, 2006; Rowe 2000) - are the foundation upon which a school community builds an inclusive and intercultural learning environment. These four core Educate Together principles are seen as informing the culture and ethos of all Educate Together schools and guide the delivery and content of an Ethical Education curriculum (Educate Together 2009). In this context, the ethical curriculum *Learn Together* is the curricular approach to delivering school ethos and a concrete expression of Educate Together's inclusive values.

### 2.2.2 *The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism*

We can identify, in brief, some of the main categories of criticism outlined by the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism (Forum 2012) in relation to the more denominational approaches to the teaching of ethics and religion in schools. The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism (Forum, 2012) made its final recommendations in April 2012. These recommendations have significant implications for all schools. They also have specific things to say about the need for change in Initial teacher

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education in an Irish context. These criticisms help us to pinpoint some of the weaknesses of the current dominant pedagogical approaches in Ireland, while also highlighting some of the key strengths of the multi-denominational model of pedagogy and school organisation. In the measure to which these strengths are already visible at Educate Together primary level schools, they can be built on successfully and creatively at second-level, through the Ethical Education curriculum but also more generally in relation to school organisation and politics (Educate Together 2009; Lalor 2013).

By the same token, we should be aware of some of the challenges and deficiencies of the approach to Ethical Education and schooling in Educate Together primary schools to date (McNamara, G., Mulcahy, C. and O'Hara 2012; Mulcahy 2006; Mclaughlin 2008a, 2008b; Lalor 2013; Irwin 2012b). These criticisms come from both within and outside the sector and need to be addressed directly, especially in the context of the challenges of radical curricular and school change at second-level, as envisaged by the NCCA (NCCA 2002, 2004, 2005, 2010, 2012; INCLUD-ED 2012).

The kernel of the criticisms of existing denominational approaches to the teaching of ethics and religion in Ireland can be summed up in a concept employed by the political philosopher, Eamonn Callan, that of 'chauvinism'.

**Many people believe that their culture is the core of the one life worthy of human beings or that those belonging to supposedly inferior cultures count for little or nothing. I call such beliefs and the conduct they motivate "chauvinism". The word names a familiar evil, at work not only in the horrors of ethnic cleansing but also in the pettier bigotries that fuel so many conflicts around the world' (Callan 2005).**

Although it is often denied that such 'chauvinism' exists in denominational schools (which claim to be genuinely pluralistic [Hogan and Williams 1997]), the findings and recommendations of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism suggest that very significant problems and dilemmas remain for denominational schools in Ireland. In brief, we can categorise these issues under the headings of 'children's rights', 'parental rights' and 'teacher rights' (Forum 2012).

In relation to children's rights, there is no alternative curricular provision for children who do not come from the dominant faith tradition of the school, in relation to the teaching of religion and ethics (Forum 2012; Irwin 2012b). The Forum report also indicates the impossibility of 'opting out' of religion (despite this being a Constitutional right since 1937) because of the integrated nature of religion teaching and symbolism in schools (Forum 2012). Second, in relation to parental rights, the Forum report foregrounds the positive bias in enrolment policies (which is legally justifiable) towards children and families who come from the dominant faith tradition, and negative bias towards minority parents and children. Finally, in relation to teacher rights, the Forum highlights the difficulties which 'non-theistic' teachers face under current arrangements, insofar as their 'freedom of conscience' is neither legally, nor in practice, respected or protected. This last point is also related to the predicament of 'non-theist' teacher students in colleges of teacher education (Forum 2012; Irwin 2012b).

In each of these cases, the alternative approach of multi-denominational schooling can be seen as a direct response to these dilemmas, in terms of the triangular relation of teachers, students and parents as they participate in the matrix of schooling. As Minister for Education Ruairi Quinn notes in his preface to the Forum Report:

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'This report outlines the history and evolution of patronage in Irish society. It also shows the need for the... school system to now adapt to the needs of a more diverse society' (Forum 2012: 4).

Let us now look to the vision of Ethical Education and the *Learn Together* curriculum to see how such a multi-denominational approach seeks to address the dilemmas raised above in relation to denominational schooling. Key here is the sense that this curriculum cannot be understood in isolation but must be seen as working in the context of a whole school approach, which is 'cross-curricular', and which fuses the elements of curriculum with teaching and learning, alongside the structures of leadership and management, as well as the 'built environment' and environmental sustainability of the school community (Educate Together 2009, 2012).

As the Blueprint outlines,

**Within the school week time will be set aside to deliver the ethical education curriculum. However, the teaching of the curriculum will also be integrated and interdisciplinary in nature (Educate Together 2009: 24).**

## **2.3 From Ethos to Ethics – What Does Ethical Education Mean?**

**the creation of multiculturalism; thus it calls for a certain educational practice. It calls for a new ethics, founded on respect for differences, a unity in differences (Freire, 1992: 137).**

### *2.3.1 The Creation of Multiculturalism*

The above epigraph from Paulo Freire indicates that the attempt to create an authentically 'multicultural' society, a place where different individuals, cultures, ethnicities and religions can co-exist harmoniously, is not something we can assume or simply hope to discover without effort. Rather, Freire suggests, 'multiculturalism' is a reality that must be *created*. It is not insignificant that Freire immediately connects this creativity to the need for a 'certain educational practice', for it is often in our educational institutions that we see the greatest challenges to, and opportunities for, the fostering of dialogue between diverse cultures and peoples. It is in just such a context that we can make sense of the meaning of an ethical education curriculum as understood by Educate Together. *Learn Together* already exists at primary level in Educate Together schools, School communities will draw on this as well as the consultative research to develop an ethical education curriculum for second-level schools (Educate Together 2009, 2011a, 2012).

As clarified above, in multi-denominational education, in direct contrast to denominational education pedagogically, the truth claims of religion and other belief systems are explored as part of the school's ethos but truth is not associated with a particular view. Students study a comparative religious and ethics programme, where belief systems are critically explored without the assumption of any one faith. Sacramental preparation does not take place in school time and the symbolism of the school must represent a diversity of perspectives (Rowe 2000). Finally, as is reiterated in the most recent Educate Together documents, this Ethical Education curriculum must not be seen in isolation but rather must be operationalised, first, in an interdisciplinary manner and second, in a

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whole school approach which seeks an integration of curriculum with teaching and learning, leadership and management, and the built environment (Educate Together 2009, 2011a, 2012).

The Ethical Education curriculum focuses on the ethical, moral and spiritual development of children and young people in an inclusive school environment. It encourages children to explore their own spiritual identities in a safe and supportive environment while also being aware of and respecting the notion that other people may think differently to them. It enables learners to appreciate, be informed and be comfortable with those of differing faiths to themselves and empowers them to critically interact across viewpoints within a common language of human rights and respect (Mulcahy 2000).

The *Learn Together* ethical education curriculum at primary level, is divided into four strands:

- Moral and Spiritual
- Justice and Equality
- Belief Systems
- Ethics and the Environment (Educate Together 2011a)

The four strands are complementary, interlinked and of equal value, and there is also consideration of a fifth strand being developed.

Educate Together, in its discussions to inform the development of an Ethical Education curriculum framework for second-level have considered the development of other strands. This could include Philosophy (which is seen as especially linked to critical and higher order thinking pedagogically) [McNamara, G., Mulcahy, C. and O'Hara 2012; Educate Together 2009]. Additionally, there has been significant work done in Educate Together second-level working groups on the possibility of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as an overarching theme or as a specific curricular strand (Mulcahy 2006; Lalor 2013; Educate Together 2013a), and making connections with the Earth Charter (Educate Together 2013a, 2013b).

In the next section, we will explore some of the issues that arise in relation to such an approach being developed in a specific second-level educational context in Ireland (with reference to considerable curricular and structural change taking place currently in this domain [NCCA 2002, 2004, 2005, 2010, 2012]. Here, in this section, our focus will rather be on the clarification of the exact nature of 'Ethical Education' as such, as envisaged by Educate Together.

Carmel Mulcahy's (Mulcahy 2000, 2006, 2012) work has been particularly progressive with regard to this complex problematic of 'Ethical Education', developing as it has done from within the context of Educate Together itself. Her work can also be seen in a wider context of research, both nationally and internationally, which has sought to foreground the possibility of a domain of ethical or values education which might be seen as distinct from the more traditional remit of moral education as confessional or religious faith formation. In this, it can be said that the Educate Together approach is more congruent with international approaches in education (in ethics and religion), while the dominant Irish models of denominationalism remain considerably out of step with comparative perspectives (Askling 2000; Smart 2000).

Mulcahy's PhD work especially looked at 'the role of Educate Together in a pluralist Ireland, the challenges presented by the accelerated growth of the Educate Together sector, the values that

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underpin the schools in the sector and in particular the relevance of what is termed the Core Curriculum' (Mulcahy 2006). Our particular interest is on the latter focus, the original Core Curriculum (in religion and ethics), which makes the Educate Together schools distinct from other schools, and which has now evolved over time from more individual curricula (in Dalkey, the Sligo School Project, the NDSP, Kilkenny Project etc. [Mulcahy 2006]) into what has become known as the *Learn Together* curriculum, an Ethical Education curriculum.

As this curriculum has evolved from the original Dalkey School Project approach to religious education (this early approach was pluralistic but still allowed for some faith formation within school time [Mulcahy 2006; Lalor 2013]), it has become less defined by religious thematics and more focused on a broader construal of the 'ethical'. As, for example the INCLUD-ED (INCLUD-ED 2012) report highlights, this broader ethical education approach has been significantly successful in fostering 'inclusion' in Educate Together schools, in a manner which has not been replicated in denominational schools (Forum 2012). Indeed, Mulcahy rightly suggests that *Learn Together* might also serve as a model for denominational schools faced with increasingly pluralist school communities (Mulcahy 2006). This recommendation is particularly relevant given the current NCCA process of developing an '*Education About Religion and Beliefs*' curriculum (ERB) for all state-funded schools, on the basis of the findings of the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism (Forum 2012).

It is also clear that the teacher education programmes in multi-denominational education in Ireland, both those developed and in the process of being developed, continue to take their cue from the *Learn Together* curriculum (Donnelly 2011; Irwin 2012b). Similarly, some of the significant difficulties experienced by the new VEC Community National school model, when it comes to the teaching of ethics and religion (in their 'Goodness Me, Goodness You' programme) might be seen as being partly the result of their not taking account of best practice models in existing multi-denominational schools. Here, we can make a distinction between what is being termed a 'multi-faith' (VEC) model and a 'multi-denominational' model of pedagogy (Forum 2012; Irwin 2012b).

Despite clear and significant evidence from varied sources that *Learn Together* is a curriculum with great strengths, both in terms of content and delivery, the existing literature also highlights issues that require serious consideration in the further evolution of the curriculum and its relation to the 'whole school' context (McNamara, G., Mulcahy, C. and O'Hara 2012).

We might categorise these issues for development in terms of two distinct strands:

- a) The question of clarification of what are the 'fundamental' (as well as secondary) values that underlie the Educate Together curriculum and school system?
- b) The question of how these values (through the curriculum and the school culture) can be implemented, and teachers and school communities be supported in this process, and how such a process can be evaluated by Educate Together schools and educational communities?

Each of these questions is addressed in different ways in the existing literature, but let us explore each thematic in turn.

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### 2.3.2 *What are the ‘fundamental’ (as well as secondary) values which underlie the Educate Together curriculum and school system?*

The White Paper on Education published in 1995 identified pluralism as an underpinning principle in the formulation and evaluation of educational policy and practice. One of its stated aims of education was to ‘foster an understanding of and critical appreciation of the values - moral, spiritual, religious, social and cultural - which have been distinctive in shaping Irish society and which have traditionally been accorded respect in society’ (quoted Mulcahy 2006: 109). This conception of pluralism is at the heart of the value system in Educate Together schools, as successive studies have found (Mulcahy 2000, 2006; Rowe 2000; Lalor 2013; McNamara, G., Mulcahy, C. and O’Hara 2012). As, for example, the INCLUD-ED report clarifies, there has been a difficulty in Irish education with seeing the discussion of values and values education as something distinct from religious education (INCLUD-ED 2012). But in a multi-denominational setting, in an authentically pluralist manner, ethical education can be viewed as something autonomous of religious faith and tradition, which includes many different kinds of non-religious and philosophical perspectives, as well as religious perspectives. One of the most recent examples of progress in this area has been the attempt to give some curricular space in *Learn Together* to ‘non-theistic’ approaches, such as humanism, atheism and agnosticism (Lalor 2013).

The Fit For Purpose report also concludes that this more explicit inclusion of non-theistic values is crucial to the success of the curriculum, and connects this issue to a more meta-level need for a stronger philosophical and critical thinking approach:

**There was a widespread agreement among respondents that this ‘gap’ needs to be counteracted in some way such as, for example, by explicitly including non-religious belief systems in the strand and introducing some work around the questioning of the assumptions and alleged truths underpinning religious belief. A possible way of achieving this suggested by a couple of respondents was a much greater emphasis on logical and philosophical thinking in the *Learn Together* curriculum (McNamara, G., Mulcahy, C. and O’Hara 2012: 26).**

This is interesting not simply from the perspective of *Learn Together* at primary level but also in relation to one of the aforementioned recommendations that *Learn Together* at second-level develop a new strand, possibly of Philosophy or Critical Thinking regarding Sustainability (Educate Together 2009; Mulcahy 2006).

The discussion of values and ethical education internationally in education and in philosophical debate is too complex to deal with in any great detail here. Nonetheless, it can be said, in brief, that many of the issues raised through the *Learn Together* curriculum, and especially the various possible interpretations of the values behind it, cohere with similar debates internationally. Mulcahy refers to the basis of *Learn Together* being a ‘pluralism’ (‘a consensus pluralism’ [Mulcahy 2006; Lalor 2013]) but also refers to the problem of a perception of ‘moral relativism’ in the curriculum, due to their being no absolutist faith foundation. This difficulty of clarifying (and giving more substance to) the philosophical perspective underlying Ethical Education remains a key issue for education across the globe, but also for Educate Together specifically (McNamara, G., Mulcahy, C. and O’Hara 2012). Again, it might be said, in brief, that there are many different approaches to ethical education to choose from, as distinct or as used in overlapping ways in an Ethical Education curriculum. For

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example, one can refer to ‘character education’ (associated with Aristotle’s ethics), ‘child-centred liberal education’ (Kantian models), ‘education for care’ (Gilligan and Noddings) and more critique-based radical approaches (Marx, Foucault etc) [Noddings and Slote 2003; Freire 1992; Irwin 2012b]. Significantly more work needs to be done in this area of theoretical approaches to Ethical Education and *Learn Together*, both at theory level but also in terms of the application of this theory by schools on the ground (the research points to significant differences in interpretation here and some confusion) [McNamara, G., Mulcahy, C. and O’Hara 2012].

Moore’s work is also significant in this regard, foregrounding the need for an integration of what she refers to as ‘philosophical’ and ‘practical’ values in schools:

**The ethos of the proposed second- level Educate Together school will be imbued with the values of democracy, respect, and inclusion but if these values are realised in practical actions, in the classrooms, in the decision making forums and in staff, pupil and parent interactions, these values will become embedded in behaviour (Moore 2012).**

One of the key principles of the Educate Together Charter was child-centredness (Educate Together 2000; Rowe 2000). Any discussion of values in Educate Together schools must ground this approach to values in ‘children’s voices’. Here, for example, the existing literature refers crucially to Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: *The child’s right to express an opinion and to have that opinion taken into account in any matter or procedure affecting the child*. Articles 13 and 14 refer to the rights of the child to freedom of opinion and to freedom of thought, conscience and opinion. As one of the 5<sup>th</sup> Class respondents to Mulcahy’s research observes poignantly:

**‘I don’t have a religion but I do know about lots of religions and I respect people who have a religion. We are all individuals. Respect people, no matter what his or her religion is and I should also be respected as someone who has no religion. Respect is what is important’ (Mulcahy 2006).**

Again and again, in the existing literature, the value of ‘respect’ (self respect and respect for others) comes through as the fundamental cornerstone of the Educate Together ethos (Mulcahy 2000, 2006; Lalor 2013; Moore 2012).

**2.3.3 How can these values (through the curriculum and the school culture) be implemented, and teachers and school communities be supported in this process? How can this process be evaluated by Educate Together schools and educational communities?**

*Learn Together* is, thus, a curriculum with great strengths, both in terms of content and delivery, but as said above, the existing literature also highlights issues that require serious consideration in the further evolution of the curriculum and its relation to the ‘whole school’ context (McNamara, G., Mulcahy, C. and O’Hara 2012).

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Key issues here relate to:

- a) Lack of consistency in terms of the interpretation of the Learn Together
- b) Lack of support for teachers both at teacher education third level and in schools
- c) How the practice of *Learn Together* as an Ethical Education curriculum, day-to-day and week to week in schools, can be evaluated and improved upon in terms of its implementation.

As the Fit For Purpose Report on Educate Together makes clear (2012), the overall success of the *Learn Together* Curriculum in schools is quite extraordinary. This perception of a strong curriculum and ethos in the Educate Together school network is shared by parents, teachers, children and other key stakeholders. But the evolution of the curriculum from the first Dalkey Religious Education Policy (Mulcahy 2006) has also put significant strain on educational practice. A curriculum which began in one school (with very little state or teacher education backing over 30 years) evolved into an overall set of guidelines for all Educate Together schools and then finally into a centralised *Learn Together* Ethical Education curriculum (Lalor 2013). However, despite this curriculum now being established, its interpretation across individual schools and classrooms varies significantly.

Concerns are expressed in different parts of the research literature on Educate Together schools concerning the range of different curricula, the lack of support for new schools in developing curricula and the complete lack of continuing professional development for teachers in the design, development, delivery, assessment and evaluation of such an important part of the school programme (McNamara, G., Mulcahy, C. and O'Hara 2012). With regard to pre-service, progress has been very slow as a result of the teacher education colleges at primary level remaining 100% denominational. At the time of writing, for the first time in the history of the state colleges of education, modules on multi-denominational education have become mandatory for undergraduate teacher students. At postgraduate in-service level, again for the first time in the history of the state, a Certificate in Multi-denominational and Ethical Education has been developed and is running successfully into its second term in St Patrick's College, Drumcondra. But again, these initiatives highlight the historical lack of provision for teacher education in the area of either multi-denominational education or ethical education (outside a specific faith perspective) [Donnelly 2011].

Another finding from the research concerned the amount of direction and structure provided by Educate Together at an organizational, sector-wide level and concerning different aspects of the school's work and this ties in with the observations regarding Teacher Education. An example of this would be in the area of a clearly defined and articulated curriculum *implementation* framework. Principals spoke about a lack of direction at this level with regard to applying such a framework. They felt that such an approach would help to identify more clearly what Educate Together schools offered to parents and to the broader society. Such an initiative would be a support to new and existing teachers by offering guidance, direction and a bank of resources (already in place for primary level), experience and expertise that the school community could draw upon (Mulcahy 2006; Lalor 2013; McNamara, G., Mulcahy, C. and O'Hara 2012).

In terms of developing such a curriculum implementation framework and strategy, several examples in the literature foreground James Bank's '5 Stage approach to inclusion' (Banks 2006), with specific reference to his understanding of the dynamics of 'multicultural education':

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1. Content Integration
  2. The Knowledge Construction Process
  3. Prejudice Reduction
  4. An Equity Pedagogy
  5. An Empowering School Culture and Social Structure

(Banks 2005; Lalor 2013; Mulcahy 2006)

## 2.4 Conclusion - Multi-Denominational Ethical Education at Second-level

‘a school is engaged in a practical enterprise of great complexity which calls for many forms of practical knowledge’ (Mc Laughlin 2008b: 204)

### 2.4.1 Taking the Next Step

The development of an Ethical Education Curriculum for second-level schools must build on the insights and success of the primary school curriculum described above, while also taking account of some of the challenges that the implementation of this curriculum has faced. As *Taking the Next Step: A Blueprint for Educate Together Second-level Schools* (Educate Together 2009) describes it:

‘An Educate Together second-level school will [seek] to develop a curricular framework that has the key principles of the Educate Together Charter (Educate Together 2000) at its core, while fulfilling the requirements for second-level schools as outlined in the *Rules and Programme for Second-level Schools*’ (DES, 2004).

The curricular approach will be an ongoing process (rather than fixed or static) and will develop over time in conjunction with all other school policies that aim to provide an approach to education based on the core values of mutual respect, dignity and critical awareness. The specific ways in which these values find expression in an individual school will be guided by dialogue between the school and its community.

Here we can mention Áine Hyland’s evocative phrase regarding schools: ‘every school differs’. Nonetheless, the overall approach will remain consistent and well grounded. The curriculum at second-level will celebrate difference and provide the knowledge, skills and values and attitudes that young people need to enable them to make informed moral decisions and live in a pluralist society, which embraces diversity (Educate Together 2009).

The question of what type of curricular approach would best embody the Educate Together ethos at second-level has been explored in detail and systematically over the last several years through working groups, member meetings and research. From the Trinity Feasibility Study (Seery et al 2008), it was clear that parents who were interested in sending their child to an Educate Together second-level school would place academic achievement high on their list of priorities, but they would do this ‘without compromising the importance of Educate Together’s inclusive values and the holistic development of the young person’ (Educate Together 2009). Internationally, in recent years, there has been a refocusing of issues regarding curriculum, amidst the attempt to improve the quality of education generally. This refocusing and reconstruction of curricula and education has also been a feature of the Irish educational landscape and is an important and constitutive context for the

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evolution of a new multi-denominational Ethical Education curriculum for prospective second-level schools in which Educate Together is involved as patron, co-patron or partner.

#### 2.4.2. Junior and Senior Cycles

At Junior Cycle, the NCCA Framework for Junior Cycle (NCCA 2012) provides for the development of new short courses alongside existing subjects. There is a renewed focus on key skills, intended to create a better balance between knowledge and skills, as well as promoting a variety of learning strategies that enable learners to participate in a 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge society. Here, we can delineate some of the key aspects of the new Junior Cycle framework as they relate especially to the possibilities for the development of Ethical Education in second-level schools.

- a) Allowing schools the flexibility to design their own Junior Cycle programme in order to meet the needs and interests of their students. These include subjects and short courses for mainstream students and priority learning units for a small group of students with special educational needs (NCCA 2012: 7)
- b) The need for fundamental changes in our approach to curriculum and assessment if we are to improve the learning experiences of students. The Junior Certificate Examination will be replaced with the Junior Cycle Student Award (JCSA) and will move towards a school-based model of assessment. This will include formative and summative assessment and involve schools and teachers in the on-going assessment and reporting of students' progress and achievement (NCCA 2012: 9)
- c) The Eight Principles that underpin the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (Table 1). These principles will inform the planning for as well as the development and the implementation of Junior Cycle programmes in all schools. They are: Quality; Well Being; Creativity and Innovation; Choice and Flexibility; Engagement and Participation; Inclusive education; Continuity and Development; Learning to Learn (NCCA 2012: 12)
- d) The comprehensive implementation of the Junior Cycle Framework will improve the quality of the learning experiences and outcomes of all students. This will require leadership and support not only from the DES, the NCCA and the SEC but in particular from school management and other education partners. It will also require the commitment of teachers, the support of parents and high expectations for all students (NCCA 2012: 37)

The initial proposals from Educate Together on the development of an Ethical Education Curriculum at second-level very much align with this new progressive and student-centred mood in education, nationally and internationally. They also clearly develop the called for integration of primary and second-level education in Ireland (NCCA 2012: 7). The integrated approach adopted at primary level will inform the development for second-level. As already outlined, the primary Ethical Education curriculum, *Learn Together*, is structured around four strands. Consideration is being given to adapting these strands and possibly adding additional strands, for example Philosophy and Education for Sustainability (ESD). The final decision on this will be informed by the extensive consultative research phase of this project. One of the key questions relates to how this ethical curriculum will be integrated into the current (and future) evolution of Junior and Senior Cycles of those second-level schools in which Educate Together is involved. Two key points can be highlighted at this juncture:

- a) In relation to the Junior Cycle, an Educate Together second-level school, as well as schools in which they are involved as co-patrons and partners, will follow the Junior

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Cycle programme, while each school community will make decisions on whether to enter students for all or any of the Junior Cycle examinations (Educate Together 2009; NCCA 2012). Moreover, in September 2014 when the new Framework is introduced<sup>3</sup> begins, Educate Together schools will seek to embrace the opportunities provided for curriculum integration, key skills development, Learning to Learn, more flexible timetabling, fostering independent learners, critical thinkers etc.

- b) In relation to the Senior Cycle of study and assessment, schools will offer Transition Year and Leaving Certificate programmes and will simultaneously draw out the key skills embedded within the curriculum and provide other opportunities for the development of lifelong learning skills through the systems and structures available to students, such as peer mentoring and teacher/student curriculum planning. (Educate Together 2009, 2011a)

Whatever the programmes of study available at Senior Cycle in the new second-level schools, lifelong learning skills that enable a responsible citizenship will be embedded in the teaching and learning opportunities provided and will be underpinned by notions such as democracy, participation, advocacy, inclusion and equality.

### 2.4.3 Concluding Thoughts

**Learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.**

We might here remember the words of Tom Collins:

**They [second-level students] think like Powerpoint; they find it difficult to construct a narrative; they rerun exam scripts in bullet points; second-level education is not training them to link their ideas, to tell a story; they come to university singularly unprepared for the intellectual challenge of adult life (quoted Educate Together 2009).**

It is in this context that we can see the immense challenges facing the development of a successful Ethical Education curriculum at second-level. But it is also precisely in such a context that we can see the great contemporary need and hunger for just such a student-centred and multi-disciplinary approach to schooling and curriculum. Moreover, as already developed at primary level with such success, the second-level curriculum is brilliantly placed to also address one of the key issues in Irish education - the disjuncture between students' experience at primary and their experience at second-level schooling, both from a curriculum perspective and from an existential, well-being perspective (Irwin 2008; O'Brien 2008). In this, the *Learn Together* primary curriculum brings us back to the original meaning of 'ethics' and 'ethos', as a matter of learning how to live one's life, both as an individual and in relation to others, as a set of communities and a society. This is also expressed powerfully in the UNESCO International Commission for the 21<sup>st</sup> century suggestion that curriculum should be restructured around four pillars of learning; "learning to know, learning to do, learning to

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<sup>3</sup> The introduction of the Junior Cycle Framework is set to commence in Sept 2014; however, the pace of change will be slower than previously envisaged, as per DES Circular 20/2014 issued to schools in March 2014

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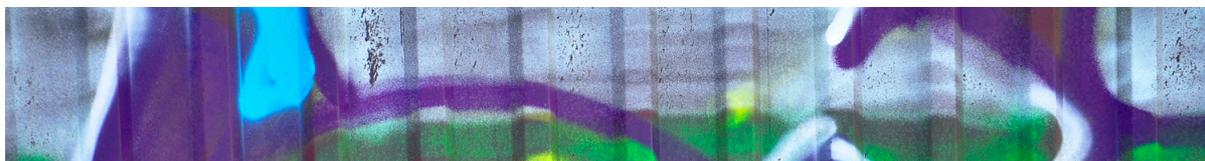
live together and learning to be.” (Delors 1996). It also connects the Educate Together approach faithfully to the very critical and progressive theorists who have provided the influence (alongside teachers, parents and children) for the ethical approach to curriculum in the first place, from Freire through to bell hooks (Willis 1981; Freire 1992; McLaren and Leonard 1993; Hall 1996a, 1996b, 1996c; Giroux 2000; hooks 1994; Banks 2006).

As Kathleen Lynch put it very forcefully at the launch of the *Learn Together* primary curriculum in 2004:

**The Educate Together Ethical curriculum demonstrates that spiritual and ethical education does not have to involve separate education. It identifies the common values that we share in our humanity and offers a pathway for educating our children to live in a pluralist Ireland; it integrates theory and action in spiritual and ethical education. (Educate Together 2009).**

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## 3 Findings - Student Voices



### 3.1 Primary level students (Original Research Phase)

In line with Educate Together's approach to ethical education as a lived ethos as well as having a curricular manifestation, students were asked: What would make the new second-level schools welcoming and inclusive places?

#### 3.1.1 *Making schools welcoming and inclusive places*

Students were asked to consider what they, as students, could do to make a proposed new second-level school a welcoming and inclusive place for all students. They were also asked what the school could do.

##### **What Students Can Do**

Students placed an overwhelming emphasis on being friendly, making new friends and actively engaging with new people. This included talking to them and asking questions about themselves. For some it also included 'hanging around' with them. Students also emphasised being nice, polite, helpful, welcoming and including everyone.

A number also highlighted the importance of respect and spoke about this in different ways.

**'Treat everyone the way you would like to be treated'**

and

**'Respect everyone's differences'.**

For some it also extended to 'respecting' facilities. Others stressed the importance of students keeping the school tidy and of cleaning up.

**'Students have responsibility, (they) are part of school'**

They also wanted to be actively involved in welcoming other students through decorating the school.

**'Have a decorating team, a big banner made by the children saying welcome'.**

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**‘Have a multi-coloured ribbon opening ceremony’.**

### **What the School Can Do**

Students placed considerable importance on being welcomed individually and in person by the principal and teachers. They also placed a lot of emphasis on teachers being kind, nice and friendly. They also wanted teachers to:

**‘ Treat us appropriately for our age’.**

Another strong theme was the importance of being shown around the school, shown where to go and given information, including on school times, break times and so forth. Students again emphasised the importance of the look of the school and that it should be colourful, have welcome posters and be kept clean.

They also wanted to have a say in the new school, a number wanted a student council and class presidents. They also wanted bullying to be addressed. Some referred to wanting ‘no bullies’, the need for an anti-bullying policy and others wanted to:

**‘Talk about bullying more’.**

Students made suggestions, which are grouped here as about being about ‘learning and supports’.

Students suggested that the school needed to:

**‘Be clear on what students can do’.**

**‘Don’t overpower students’ and ‘don’t pressure students.’**

They wanted learning supports, stated in one case as ‘many things to help you through’. They also wanted homework and study clubs. Other supports were also mentioned:

**‘A buddy system- once a week people can talk /check in on how they are’**

Some also mentioned wanting access to a nurse and a dentist.

Homework was an issue highlighted by many students. Some wanted no homework or less homework, others wanted no homework on Fridays and others wanted none during the first week of school.

Students also placed a strong emphasis on facilities and resources. These included:

- Own (separate) desk
- Own locker with a combination lock
- Cafeteria and vending machines (food to be free or ‘cheap’)
- Space for students to meet

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- Age appropriate yard equipment
  - Nice toilets (not smelly)
  - iPads for everyone
  - Learning resources e.g. such as maps and ‘things to help us for geography’.

Students highlighted the importance to them of activities and fun events. These included:

- Sports teams
- After school clubs and activities
- Half day once a week
- Fun days
- Party every Friday
- Trips

### 3.1.2 *What we like to learn and how*

#### **What We Like To Learn**

Educate Together were interested to know what students learned and liked in *Learn Together*, the Ethical Education Curriculum for Educate Together Primary Schools. The researcher used prompts to support students to reflect on this. The prompts also included reference to programmes, which students from other types of schools may have covered. Slightly different prompts and methods were used in the three focus groups, for example, verbal prompts were used in the first one. Visual prompts, including video clip and slides were used in the other two. The outcomes were broadly similar, although the prompts and methods used did influence outcomes somewhat. For example, when students were given photos to make a poster as a way of capturing what they liked to learn, this appeared to shape what students talked about, but only to a limited extent.

In all three focus groups, students placed significant emphasis on the following two areas as the ones they most liked:

- Sport and PE
- Art and other creative activities such as Music, Drama and Choir.

Some gender differences were observed<sup>4</sup> here. Boys were more likely to emphasis sport and girls more likely to emphasis PE as well as Art and other creative subjects. It is important not to over

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<sup>4</sup> This work was done in small mixed gender groups but these were ‘visited’ by the researcher. In this way, it was observed that gender differences regarding preferences did manifest themselves.

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generalise on this issue as in the case study focus groups, some girls specifically mentioned that they wanted more opportunities to be involved in sports.

The other areas that students mentioned were:

- Learning about religions and cultures
- Topics like racism – one student wrote that ‘I would like to change (it so) that people that have different coloured skin have just as much rights as white people’
- Nature walks
- Doing fun activities - one group commented on why they chose a photo of children playing as something they liked to do; ‘these are the things that are good in life and should stay that way’
- Break-time
- Trips and after school clubs
- Using technology and computers
- A few mentioned specific subjects such as Home Economics, Maths, Science and science experiments and History.

### **How We Like To Learn**

Students placed significant emphasis on learning by doing, use of visual materials, creative methods, interactive learning and group learning.

They mentioned the following:

- Projects
- Drama, role play and story telling
- Use of visual material e.g. watching videos and films, looking at photos and images
- Art
- Debates.

### *3.1.3 What we would change to make school and learning better*

Not surprisingly, students suggested an increase in the things they liked and a decrease in what they did not like, as a way of making school better. As well as including what they wanted more (or less) of in terms of subjects, activities and facilities they also mentioned aspects relating to school ethos, although they did not use the language of ‘ethos’.

Students wanted an increase in:

- Sport and PE- the latter, at least twice a week
- Art
- Languages
- Projects with a specific reference to projects on countries

- 
- Trips
  - Education in use of technology, more time on and use of computers, integration of technology across the curriculum; iPads and tablets were mentioned by all three groups, including a suggestion that they be used for doing homework and that they be used instead of books
  - Length of breaks.

They wanted a decrease or change in:

- Less or no homework
- Less or no Irish (one group suggested making the learning of Irish easier).

These two aspects were included in feedback from all three focus groups.

Students mentioned the following although less often:

- No religion subject but learn about different religions
- No history
- No junior Certificate.

Some students mentioned improvements that were required in facilities. These referred to their current schools but have relevance to the development of new schools. These included:

- More up to-date computers, better looked after computers and a console room
- Better quality books in the library and greater choice of books (the remark on quality was qualified by a comment that students should respect books and school property)
- New textbooks-should not be passed down as they are 'shabby'.

School uniforms came up in two of the three groups; in both cases, students did not want uniforms.

One group mentioned that essay and letter writing should not be used as punishments but that detention should be used instead.

Finally, a number of suggestions were made regarding teachers, these included that teachers should be less strict, should not shout and that there should be no substitute teachers. Also that: 'you should be able to talk to a teacher if you're in trouble'.

### 3.2 Second-level students

Most of this group were Transition Year students. The emphasis in this focus group was mainly on the content and process of learning. As a lead into the session students were shown a video clip of young people actively engaged in social issues through involvement in Young Social Innovators. They were also shown a set of slides, which outlined the *Learn Together* Curriculum with additional brief mention of Civil, Social, Political Education (CSPE), Social, Personal Health, Education (SPHE) and Religious Education (RE) at second-level. The latter three were included to contextualise the discussion in their own experience of second-level school. They were also included because most of the students had not attended Educate Together primary schools.

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They were then asked to think about programmes like Learn Together, RE, CSPE and SPHE and indicate what they liked learning about and what they would change.

In the main, the students were most interested in talking about what they would change to make learning and school better. They were far more interested in the process of learning rather than the content.

### *3.2.1 What we like to learn and how*

#### **What We Like To Learn**

Students outlined the sort of topics they covered in the subjects mentioned above. These included:

- Rights and responsibilities
- Equality
- Democracy, government and politics
- Morals and morality
- Christianity, Jesus and the bible, pilgrimages and the origins of other religions
- Environment and stewardship
- World around us, fair trade, racism, community work.

They also referred to drugs and addiction, health and safety, the body and sexual awareness, feelings and emotions.

Students gave a general sense that they liked the foregoing topics with some qualifications, (see below regarding Christianity). Students made specific mention of liking to learn about ‘the political side – sort of’, rights, religions-other than Christianity, humanism, atheism and agnosticism, fair trade and racism.

#### **How We Like To Learn**

While many of the topics outlined above were of interest to students, a number of students highlighted that how they learned about these was a problem.

**‘sit in class and read from a CSPE action project book’.**

This approach of ‘reading from the book’ or the teacher reading from the book was confirmed by a number of students. Another student mentioned being ‘talked at about right and wrong’. Students emphasised, in a very significant way, their ideas on approaches to teaching and learning, when asked ‘what they would change’, see these outlined below. At this point in the session, students mentioned specifically that they liked action projects, debates and class discussion, speakers, trips and days out.

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### 3.2.2. *What we would change to make school and learning better*

Students became very animated at this stage in the focus group and put forward many ideas on how to make school and learning better.

The ideas fell under four headings as follows:

- Teaching and learning
- Content of learning
- Teacher and student relationships
- System change at both school and wider levels.

#### **Teaching and Learning**

Students placed a significant emphasis on teaching and learning approaches. They stressed the importance of being taught how to develop critical thinking - 'how to think and not what to think' and also to learn 'how and why, not just learn things off'. They also stressed that they 'should not be told what to write down'. They wanted to be taught ways of thinking creatively and that 'creativity should be promoted in schools'. They believed that education should 'empower students'.

They wanted teaching to be more student-centred and to recognise individual learning needs and progression. They wanted more say in deciding what to learn. One student raised the question of 'why sort students by age rather than ability?' Another stated: 'we are not just numbers'.

They also recognised the value of praise and that 'failure is OK' as fear of failure can block learning. They stressed the importance of making topics interesting and that learning should be about 'waking students up, not putting us to sleep'. They also emphasised that learning should not be to the exam, its 'not just about getting an A-but doing it our way'.

Students highlighted the ways they liked to learn. They put a particular stress on peer learning. They wanted more peer-led projects and that this would mean that:

**'Students should be allowed talk in class to exchange knowledge'.**

One student emphasised that he would be more likely to ask a friend in class if he did not know something rather than ask the teacher. He felt that the rule about not talking in class is a block to learning. A number of students emphasised that they learn a lot from their peers and that this needs to be recognised. They also talked of the value of peer facilitation and group work was mentioned many times.

Learning by doing and or seeing was also emphasised, as students wanted:

- More visits out
- More charitable work

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- More practical projects and ‘a lot more practical work’
  - ‘Doing things not just writing about it’.

They also wanted more use of video, animation and technology with greater access to computers. Students emphasised the importance of technology:

**‘Introduction of technology at school is very important - allow students the opportunity to explore technology’.**

### **Content of Learning**

As already mentioned students were less focused on the content of learning. A number expressed a wish to have a choice in what to learn:

**‘Freedom to explore anything you want and study what interests you’.**

A number referred to learning about religion; one student said it should not only be about one religion, another proposed that there should be ‘equal time for each world religion’ whilst others did not want the focus to be only on main world religions. Some students had an interest in learning about ideas and beliefs of a secular nature also.

Other topics and areas mentioned were:

- Diversity
- Rights and responsibilities
- Life skills

### **Student-Teacher Relationships**

Students wanted a more equal relationship with teachers.

**‘Students should be allowed give opinions even if they disagree with teachers’.**

They also suggested that there should be student-teacher meetings and not only parent- teacher meetings. Generally they wanted more communications between students and teachers. They also wanted to be allowed to evaluate teachers. One student commented that ‘teachers should have more faith in students’.

### **The System**

A number of student comments could be seen as referring to changes they wanted in the system at school and or wider education system level. The author acknowledges that the ideas outlined earlier particularly under Teaching and Learning would also involve changes at system level.

The comments have been grouped under curriculum and examinations.

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### *Curriculum*

Students believed that within the school system some subjects had more status than others. They believed that 'academic' subjects such as Maths are valued more than creative subjects and also more than

**'subjects like CSPE, SPHE - no attention, no status, no value'.**

They did not want academic subjects to 'be end of all' and they wanted:

**'A level playing field for all subjects'.**

Some wanted a very open curriculum with much more choice left with students.

**'Have a choice in what you learn, make the curriculum flexible and integrated - subjects not in their own boxes'.**

A few students wanted no set curriculum or timetable but suggested each student had an individual timetable. Another student stated this as:

**'Don't have a fixed curriculum - give students choices - more student input on what you learn'.**

### *Examinations*

Another key theme highlighted by students was the focus in the current system on tests and examinations. They spoke about this in a number of ways. They did not believe ability could be assessed by one exam. Some wanted exams dropped all together, others wanted more oral examinations or assessment based on action projects. They also wondered why creative areas they were involved in, (either in school or after school as a hobby), could not be taken into account as a qualification. These included playing a musical instrument and dancing.

**'Should get qualification for what you like doing, are good at e.g. dance'.**

A number did not want standardised testing to be used 'to judge students' intelligence'.

As already stated, the second-level students were predominantly interested in the process and approach to teaching and learning as well as assessment and in teacher-student relationships. This has implications for the development of an ethical education curriculum framework. This will be discussed in Chapter 5.

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### 3.3. A Case Study - Voices of third country national children and parents

#### *Introduction*

This section outlines the findings from the 7 focus groups conducted to strengthen the input of children and parents with Third Country Backgrounds. The background and rationale as well as the numbers attending are outlined in the Introduction to the Report.

#### 3.3.2 *What we like and would change about our current schools*

##### **What We Like About our School**

Students were asked what they liked about their own school (and what they would change), as a lead in to asking them what would make their new second-level schools welcoming and inclusive places. This was discussed in plenary and generated a lot of engagement and interest. In fact, it is what students most wanted to talk about so more time was given to this aspect than originally intended. Students' ideas and views fell broadly into four categories as follows:

- Multicultural, multi-denominational and co-educational nature of the schools
- Overall approach in the school
- What they do and or learn
- Building and facilities

##### **The Multi-cultural, Multi-denominational and Co-educational Nature of the Schools**

Students referred to this aspect in all six focus groups. In most cases it was the first aspect mentioned. In addition the students predominantly emphasised that they liked that people from different cultures and religions were in their schools. The following outlines some of the ways students talked about this aspect.

**'I feel comfortable wearing my hijab in this school'**

In some cases students talked of the difference between students and saw this as a good thing:

**'People are from different places - it's good that people are different'.**

**'You don't know what to expect because everyone is different'.**

**'All sorts of nationalities and that's good'.**

Others stressed the learning aspect:

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**'Different religions and cultures, you meet new people and learn about their culture'.**

A number spoke specifically of the religious mix:

**'I like the way religions are mixed'.**

**'I moved here because I went to a Catholic school before'.**

The co-educational nature of the schools was mentioned on a number of occasions.

**'Boys and girls together is better than all girls-I like football and felt that there was not much like that in my previous school'.**

**'Boys and girls together—they can play together'.**

### **Overall approach in the school**

The key themes mentioned here were uniforms; being able to express yourself; relationships with teachers as well as teacher approach and how learning was organised. One comment that seems to summarise the overall sense of what students liked:

**'I like the atmosphere, everyone is happy and friendly. It makes you want to come here every day'.**

In general, students seemed to share a sense of satisfaction with the approach taken in their schools. None the less, the focus groups did differ somewhat in levels of satisfaction with this aspect, with two in particular being less satisfied. This is discussed further under changes students wished to have made to make their schools better.

In the main students liked that they did not have to wear uniforms as it allowed them to be individuals and express themselves through what they wore.

**'We can wear our own clothes and express our individuality'.**

**'You can show the way you are through no uniform'.**

Students' expressed more varied views on this issue when they talked about they would change, see below.

Many students spoke of relationship with teachers and the approach of teachers. Many liked that they could call teachers by their first names.

**'We can call teachers by their first name-everyone is equal'**

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A few students did not agree. They felt it shows ‘more respect’ to use a surname. A few others mentioned that they ‘would have gotten into trouble if they used a teacher’s first name in schools they went to previously.

Students also liked that teachers were friendly, kind and fair. They particularly emphasised that in the main, teachers listened to them and that they were encouraged to express their opinions. Once again, some students referred to differences in this regard between their current school and ‘other schools’; where, in their view, ‘teachers are more strict’.

Whilst not mentioned as often as the themes outlined above a number of students mentioned that they liked the way learning was organised. One referred to a good mix of ‘own teacher and team teaching’ and that this keeps it from ‘getting boring’. They liked that if they finished their work they got free time. Students also liked the learning supports including for language learning.

### **What we do and learn**

Many students mentioned liking the various sports they did in and after school as well as PE. This came up in four of the six focus groups. Other popular areas included: learning about religions, other countries and nationalities; international food days and also after school clubs including art, cookery, science and homework clubs. A number also liked trips and visits to the library. One student mentioned liking to ‘learn about yourself’ and another to liking to do meditation, everyday.

One group mentioned that they liked the committees they had in the school including Yellow Flag, Active Flag and the Student Council.

**‘I like them because I’m in it and because we get to change school for the better’.**

### **School building and facilities**

To a lesser extent, students referred to the school building and facilities when talking about what they liked. This aspect is more school specific. Things they liked included: design of the layout of the building; ‘spacious’ classrooms; vending machine and computers and smart-boards.

### **What We Would Change to Make School Better**

Students were then asked what would make school even better. This discussion continued in plenary. Both questions - What they liked and What they would change-were put in an open-ended way. What emerged is what students really wanted to talk about.

Students highlighted a number of issues and themes that fell broadly into the following themes:

- Teaching and learning
- Codes of dress and behaviour
- Activities
- Facilities

Students were particularly interested in highlighting issues relating to the first two areas.

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## Teaching and learning

Students placed particular emphasis on learning supports. Sometimes the support related to support they needed.

**'We need more help from teachers, for instance, if we fall behind in maths we can't catch up'**

A related view here was:

**'...29 pupils in my class, the teacher doesn't have time, the teacher needs more help'.**

Sometimes students referred to help required by other students and these seemed to refer to language issues.

**'We translate for new pupils, we would like more support for them. They need to get more help'.**

**'Some people need more help and maybe don't get it'.**

**'If people don't understand they should have more time to explain'.**

A number of students talked of teaching approach and methods. Some referred to a need for more one-to-one and team teaching.

**'Team teaching is used for English and should also be used for Maths and Irish'.**

**'Like "maths 4 fun" games-should use these for Irish as well'.**

This was further elaborated by highlighting the need for:

**'Extra help with Irish - change how its taught'.**

Others wanted more preparation and support for transfer to second-level.

Students talked of wanting different types of approaches and methods of learning.

A number placed an emphasis on 'learning outside', both in terms of literally moving the class outside to learn in the fresh air and also in terms of trips.

**'We should go outside more often - work outside - make it more interesting'.**

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Also students wondered why they could not use technology more in learning, for example tablets instead of textbooks or copybooks.

A number suggested bringing people in to the school 'to speak about different countries'. A number of students stressed that they wanted to learn about 'other countries'.

**I want to learn about other countries - we've never learned about my country, for example'.**

In this case, the student wanted to learn more about the country he was born in and where his extended family was still living. In other cases students wanted to learn about the differences between Ireland and some other countries, for example, countries that 'lack electricity'. It was suggested that the school should have a day without electricity to help students understand what it would be like.

A number of students wanted more art and creative subjects and activities. Some students also talked of the need for 'a balance between homework and physical exercise'.

### **Codes of dress and behaviour**

Students talked about the issue of uniforms and expressed different views on this. This has also been highlighted under what students liked about their current schools.

**I'd like a uniform because it's easier for washing clothes - you can spend too much time choosing clothes.**

**I should have the freedom to make my own choice in what I wear, I have to wear a hijab and other clothes anyway so I have a dress code myself.**

A few students associated wearing a uniform 'with more discipline' and preferred this.

One group of students<sup>5</sup> emphasised class behaviours and the need to enforce the code of behaviour. They felt that there were too many disruptions in class and that it interfered with their learning.

**A few don't behave, most people are good but the few try to ruin it for everyone.**

**'Teachers can be a bit soft and that affects our learning and it's not fair'.**

**'We get lots of chances but some people misbehave'.**

**'Needs to be more consequences for bad behaviour'.**

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<sup>5</sup> The majority of students of in this group were from the same class.

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Later in the discussion students talked of what they termed ‘slagging’ in class and this was also associated with the disruptive behaviour. Because this issue was brought up by students in, the context of discussing potential bullying at second level the researcher asked for clarification of what was happening at present in current school. Students said there was no bullying but ‘slagging–lots of slagging’. It was also explained that there was a ‘ringleader’ who then gathered a group around him.

Students stated that the ‘slagging’ could relate to almost anything, and specific examples given were:

- What you say you like e.g. a particular cake - can give rise to comments such as: ‘are you stupid?’ ‘where are you coming from?’
- Your name-‘they think they are funny’
- Your opinions and answers to teachers’ questions-calling you ‘stupid’
- What you wear
- Saying things about your parents and where they or you are come from
- Calling people animal names (accompanied by the observation that ‘this is not a nice position to be in’-this referred to hearing others called such names).

Students linked the ‘slagging’ to the need ‘to build respect for everyone’

Students believed that not enough was being done to deal with the situation or that the efforts made were not sufficiently effective. The researcher raised the issue with the principal (taking care not to divulge the identities of the students) and the principal advised that this issue is already being dealt with in a comprehensive way, through an externally facilitated process. The process will continue to the end of the school year.

Some students mentioned what they saw as a lack of ‘fairness’, in some cases. On occasion this related to whether everyone’s views were listened to and or acted on. Another issue related to having ‘a bad reputation for talking’ which led to (in the view of the student) being singled out for reprimands whilst the behaviour of others was ignored. In one school context, specific issues were raised about the degree of integration of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> classes for out of class activities and trips. Many 6<sup>th</sup> class students stated that they did not want this. Others raised questions about the fairness of some punishments, one student suggested that:

**if you get in trouble - not fair that you have to miss PE or sport as that’s important for health.**

Another stated that ‘you should not get extra homework’.

Other issues under ‘fairness’ related to ‘fairness and safety in the yard’ and elaborated ‘don’t exclude anyone from games’ and that there should be fairness on who does ‘jobs like cleaning’.

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## Activities

Students stated that they wanted change in how much sport and PE is provided (see also the section below on what students like to learn and what they want more of) This included wanting more swimming, PE and football teams.

There was a specific suggestion:

**'I'd like the girls to have more space and opportunities to play football.'**

A number of students talked about the use of the yard. Sometimes this referred to competition for space between different classes and ages. In other cases it related to the playing of football and other sports in break time. It was felt that this did not leave space for other activities and people. On some occasions, this also had a gender dimension.

**'Boys play football and basketball at lunch and others don't have space to do anything else'.**

## Building and facilities

Finally, in this section students referred to facilities that would make school better. These included: a cafeteria; a swimming pool; bigger PE hall, more PE equipment; better-equipped library, with new and better quality books and books in different languages; better computers, iPads and more smart boards.

They also suggested that classrooms could be more colourful, including with murals and that displays could be more interesting.

### 3.3.3. *What would make new schools welcoming and inclusive*

#### **What Students Can Do**

Students wrote their ideas on post-its. They worked in pairs. In some cases, each student wrote an idea and in other cases they shared a collective view(s). The main themes included in the post-its were: being friendly and helpful; being respectful and against bullying and observing codes of behaviour and rules.

Most students emphasised the need for students to be friendly, nice and helpful. They talked of the need to be proactive in meeting and talking to others, emphasising 'introducing yourself' and 'making new friends'. They also suggested seeking out others who may not know anyone.

**'You could make sure that anyone new has someone to talk to. You could ask them questions about their old school'.**

They suggested a number of practical things students could do to welcome other students. These included: making a welcoming banner; have a party for new comers; 'bring food from your country on your 1<sup>st</sup> day and put out 'a red carpet' and stand and welcome all new students.

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They also stressed being helpful.

**'If someone needs help I would help them'**

**'Help them in whatever way necessary'.**

They also suggested seeking help if they needed help themselves. For instance, they suggested asking 'for help with learning'.

A number of students spoke about the need for respect:

**'Respect each other'; 'respect each other's culture'; 'respect each other's names'**

Another student phrased this as:

**'Don't make fun of peoples' names'**

Whilst another stated:

**'Treat them as you want to be treated'**

Some students spoke of the need for students to be conscious of bullying and to

**'Stop bullying by telling teachers'**

Not all students agreed on this and this led to a discussion on bullying which is outlined below under heading- What Schools Can Do.

A few students stressed the importance of students respecting the rules, staying out of trouble, starting off with a good reputation and having a good attitude and behaviour.

### *What Schools Can Do*

Students' responses to 'what schools can do' fall into the following themes: creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere; codes of behaviour; learning and activities and facilities.

#### **Creating welcoming and inclusive atmosphere**

Students placed a large emphasis on the importance of the Principal and teachers welcoming students in person. Some wanted this done on an individual basis suggesting that the 'staff and Principal welcome everyone individually'.

They also suggested that the school organise ways for students to meet each other. They suggested that the school organise 'get to know you' activities. They proposed that there would be no

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schoolwork on the first day but that something different (fun) would be done so that everyone could get to know each other. They also suggested that the school be decorated with welcoming banners and posters, and a 'board that includes everyone's culture'.

Another suggestion was:

**'A globe outside with all the countries of the students marked'**

In addition, that refreshments be provided on the first day.

**'Have tea and biscuits - can you smell that it smells like a welcome'**

Students going to pre-existing second-level schools suggested that 'everyone should have a school buddy'. They also suggested that there should be an honour wall of students who have done well and that new students should be told about 'good pupils so that they will attempt to be like them'.

Students also stressed the importance of maps, directions and information on where they had to go, as well as a tour of the school, to ensure that they did not get lost.

They wanted teachers to treat students with respect, to listen to their ideas and take these on board. They wanted calm, kind and nice teachers. Students also stated that they should have a say and that the school should have a student council. One student wanted the school

**'To improve on religion - where I could pray or do my religion'.**

### **Codes of dress and behaviour**

Another set of ideas fall into the category of 'codes of dress and behaviour'. Students suggested that students call teachers by their first names as in their current schools. There was some difference of opinion here as already indicated earlier. Students also had different views regarding uniforms. Those who favoured a uniform gave a range of reasons including; 'don't have to think what to wear' and to avoid competition. One student summed this up:

**'Every few months there is a new hit on what to wear – if don't have it, it can lead to ....'**

This student had earlier talked of 'slagging' in terms of what students wear so it is not making too much of a leap to conclude that this is what is intended here. In other words that not having the 'right' clothes might lead to 'slagging' or bullying.

In fact bullying was another issue named by students in this part of the session. It emerged in five of the six focus groups. Students felt schools should ensure this does not happen and should deal with it, if it does. They wanted schools to 'stop bullying', 'make people safe', and 'make sure you don't get bullied'. They also suggested anti-bullying workshops.

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**'If bullying is going on, the school can help to make it stop'.**

They appeared to believe that there was considerable bullying at second-level and on clarification they talked of the experiences of brothers, sisters and friends. One student stated that schools 'should make sure 6<sup>th</sup> Years are nicer to 1st years'. They also suggested that there should be CCTV cameras to monitor children's behaviour.

In terms of teachers' management of classroom behaviour, one group of students suggested that teachers should 'stop disruptions and don't give too many chances'. They wanted teachers who were calm and did not shout, but some suggested that 'strict teachers are good' because you learn more.

### **Learning and activities**

Many students talked of wanting lots of sports, PE and clubs in their new second-level schools. In relation to both of the former, some students linked these to keeping students healthy. They also emphasised the importance of play and having fun. They suggested competitions and a talent show as well as a place or space in the school to have fun and play leisure activities.

Students did not place a strong emphasis on specific areas of learning (other than PE and sport). The range of specific areas mentioned (in some cases these were mentioned only once) included: learn about different religions and cultures, Music, Drama, more Technology and Computers and Languages. Section 3.3.4 below outlines what students say they like to learn.

Students did make suggestions about learning supports. They wanted help with learning as well as study tips. They also suggested that students with difficulties should get particular support.

They stated this in a number of ways:

**'Have more time with students that don't really understand**

**'If someone came from a different country and did not have a lot of English maybe teachers could help them learn English'**

In addition, they suggested that the school should help students understand why 'they have to go to school'. They proposed other supports such as 'peer mentoring', 'group reading' and group projects. They did not want the work to be 'too hard' and many wanted less or no homework. They also saw the value of awards and certificates as well as 'student of the year' awards.

### **Facilities**

Students also made suggestions in this part of the session on facilities they would like. The ones most often mentioned were sports facilities, PE and play equipment, a gym with showers, lockers (individual ones) and a cafeteria as well as snack and vending machines. A number also mentioned computers, tablets and iPads. In one case, a student suggested that they would not have to buy schoolbooks each year if they could be accessed on a tablet. Other suggestions included: a kitchen

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‘where students could cook whatever food they want’, and ‘a nice place to relax like a garden, a library’.

### 3.3.4. *What we like to learn and how*

Many students highlighted considerable interest in areas that could fall within the framework of ethical education. The areas that students said they liked to learn about have been organised as follows:

- Religious, cultural, environmental and personal and social development
- Creative areas
- ‘Practical’, technical and applied areas
- Physical education and activities
- ‘Traditional’ subjects ‘

#### **Religious, Cultural, Environmental and Personal Development**

- Learning about different religions and cultures, nationalities and countries (some aspect of this was included in 9 of the 16 sheets<sup>6</sup> completed by all students). It was included least often in the sheets completed by the two focus groups, which included a considerable proportion of students who were Irish born and with an Irish family background<sup>7</sup>.
- Environment, nature and animals was included in 5 of the 16 sheets.
- References to personal development areas e.g. SPHE, Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) and learning about how we grow and about anger, was included in 4 of 16 sheets.

#### **Creative**

Students highlighted a considerable interest in creative areas including Drama, Art, Music and Dance, with some reference to these areas included in 9 of the 16 sheets.

#### **Practical, Technical and Applied Areas**

Students mentioned ‘practical’ technical and applied areas in just 4 sheets. This included references to IT. It may be that students see computers and technology as tools rather than something they learn about. There was considerable emphasis on use of computers and technology in other parts of the student focus groups.

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<sup>6</sup> Students worked in sub groups of 3 or 4 students for this exercise. Each focus group generated 2 -4 sheets depending on the total number of students in the group overall.

<sup>7</sup> These two focus groups were the largest of the six student focus groups conducted in this phase and so produced more feedback sheets. They accounted for 7 of the 16 sheets, which emanated from all the groups. A reference to liking to learn about religions, cultures etc. was included in only one of the seven sheets from these two groups.

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### **Physical Education and Activities**

Sport and PE was included in 6 of the 16 sheets. Again, there was a greater emphasis on these aspects in other parts of the focus groups, so once again students may not consider that they learn about these so much as do them.

### **'Traditional' Subjects**

Students included 'traditional' subjects in 11 of the 16 sheets, with the most popular subject being History, which was included in 9 sheets. This was followed by Geography and Science with 4 mentions each, Maths, English and Languages with 3 mentions each; Irish was mentioned twice

### **How We Like To Learn**

Students placed considerable emphasis on active and interactive learning. The methods they cited most often were: projects; research on internet and using computers; games-(these were mentioned a number of times in relation to Maths) and through creative methods such as doing drama and art. They also liked what one student called 'up close learning' that is by going out and seeing and doing things. 'Going out' to learn was a recurring theme on many sheets (7 out of 16). There were also a number of references to liking to learn by 'trying things out'. Some students also mentioned that they liked working in groups and pairs as well as classroom discussion (6 sheets). There was a couple of mentions of having speakers in and only one reference to liking to read books and a counter view on this: 'not wanting to look at boring books'.

### **What We Would Like More of**

Not surprisingly, what students said they want more reflects what they like to learn as outlined above. However, there were also some differences.

A significant difference arose in relation to Sport and PE, between what students said they like to learn and what they wanted more of. Student placed considerable emphasis on wanting more of these, and it was mentioned in 12 of the 16 sheets.

There was an emphasis on learning about religions and 'personal development' but these were less prominent in this part of the exercise. Creative subjects were still very popular and were mentioned in 10 of the 16 sheets. In the more 'traditional' subject areas, students placed a particular emphasis on wanting to learn more Science and Maths, with 6 mentions each of these. Students also said they wanted more: play time and yard time; clubs; trips and tours; and projects. There were individual mentions of the following:

- Food from your own country
- Friendship Friday
- Reading for younger children
- More communication with younger students
- Library - twice a week
- Do more group reading
- Communicate with the community
- Competitions

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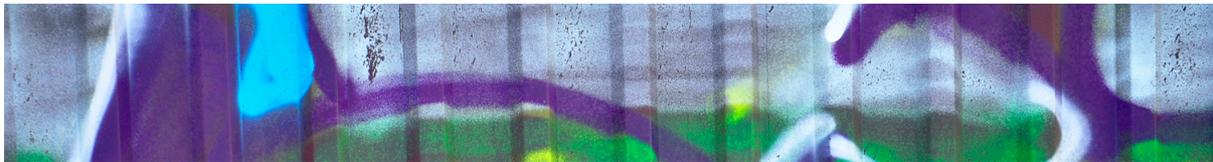
### **What We Would Like Less of**

The most significant aspect here was that Irish was mentioned in 13 of the 16 sheets as something that the students wanted less of. This is far greater than any other subject or aspect of school mentioned by students in this part of the exercise. The next most often mentioned subjects were Geography and Maths; Geography was mentioned 6 times and Maths appeared 5 times. The latter shows a difference in preference between students who wanted more Maths and those who wanted less.

Students also wanted less homework, this was mentioned in 5 sheets. There were a few references to teaching methods, but no significant emphasis on one in particular, as each one was mentioned just once. These included wanting less writing, use of more modern songs and less team teaching. One group mentioned behaviours and wanted less disruption and 'slagging'.

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## 4 Parents' Views



At the beginning of the focus group parents were asked what their reasons were for attending the focus group. Many of the comments are relevant to the development of an Ethical Education Curriculum. A number related to their reasons for choosing an Educate Together School:

**'Religions, multi- denominational but also the atmosphere is very different'**

**'Very happy at this school - always welcome here'**

**'Religion is important – 'no specific religion is taught- and I like that'**

Others had an interest in diversity. Some linked this to current areas of study, for example, community development. Another stated 'want to drive things on - help out'.

### 1. A welcoming and inclusive school

#### *Respect for Diversity*

The first thing most parents stressed was the importance of respect for diversity.

**'School should have a clear policy on diversity, inclusion respect. It needs to be there from the start'.**

They saw this clearly related to the ethos and wanted this reflected in the building with:

**'Visibility of symbols - you should see the ethos displayed in the school'**

They wanted children taught respect for all. They wanted the new school to use an approach that would ensure all students would get the opportunity to develop:

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**'Awareness of bullying, stereotyping, inclusivity - maybe kids from other schools might find it more difficult'**

The latter point relates to a concern that students from primary schools other than Educate Together schools may not have been given that opportunity in their current schools.

However, another parent highlighted that this was not her experience and felt that respect for diversity did exist in the area where she lived. She pointed out that her children played with children from a range of schools.

**'Children are playing outside - all nationalities, not just from this school so this is very positive'.**

However, she still favoured a strong emphasis on diversity in the new school and suggested that students do projects on diversity.

Participants appeared implicitly to emphasise an intercultural approach as defined in the *NCCA Guidelines on Intercultural Education in the Post Primary School (2006)*

**'While the term 'multiculturalism' is sometimes used to describe a society in which different cultures live side by side without much interaction, the term 'interculturalism' expresses a belief that we all become personally enriched by coming in contact with and experiencing other cultures, and that people of different cultures can and should be able to engage with each other and learn from each other.'**

One participant referred to the situation in the country of her birth, which has three distinct ethnic groups who co-exist, but who do not necessarily understand and respect each other. Other participants also referred to the fact that this also applies in their countries of birth. Parents also highlighted the implication for teacher education in creating a respectful and inclusive school. A number emphasised that teachers should receive equality or intercultural training.

### *Parental Involvement*

They liked that the current school promoted understanding and respect for diversity amongst parents also, through:

**'Diversity programmes, culture night, food, coffee mornings; it helps build relationships, you feel part of the school, open door policy...Friendship Friday, you can mix across the year groups.'**

Parents stressed the importance of an 'open door' policy to parents in general and wanted the new school to be open to parents in the same ways as the current school. They felt 'welcome' there.

They also stressed the importance of the role of the principal

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**‘The principal’s approach is important, should not only see the principal when your child is in trouble; principal should be visible and involved.’**

They referred to the availability and visibility of the principal in the current school.

### *Supports for Students*

They stressed the importance of supportive teachers.

**‘Teenagers want to be listened to, they need to have someone to talk to; they need to feel welcomed by the teachers; friendly and prepared to listen teachers**

Availability of a counsellor was also mentioned but in the absence of such as person they stressed again that students need to have at least one teacher they can go to. Another parent, whose children have been through second-level, pointed out that a year head or class tutor can offer this support.

Parents also wanted guidance for students in how to navigate the second-level system. ‘

**‘Transition from primary to second level - an induction programme is needed’**

## **2. What ethical education is and why it is important**

Parents stressed that ethical education is about:

**Incorporating good values into the curriculum- respect, honesty, fairness and equality’.**

Overall there was also a strong emphasis on diversity, culture and religions, the points included:

- Respect for other cultures; cultural and family differences; respect for how others dress
- Respect for ethnic backgrounds
- Learn from other cultures
- Learn about other religions and beliefs

A specific point was raised related to the need for students to learn about dress codes related to their own culture and that ‘some clothes for girls not acceptable’. The participant who raised the issue related this to the fact that ‘teenagers want more choice in what they wear’. Overall, it was suggested that a dress code be adopted for the new school that allowed for cultural dress codes as well as respect amongst all students for these.

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They also wanted Ethical Education to:

**'Build confidence in their own identity - be able to stand up for their own beliefs - prepared to face real world e.g. when go to university, may face comments - be able to defend their beliefs'**

As with other adult research participants (outlined in Chapter Four) this group's understanding of why Ethical Education is important is closely linked to their understanding of what it is.

The emphasis in this group was on diversity and identity and the areas spanned UNESCO's four pillars of learning (See Chapter Four for more information on this).

They stressed the following:

- To understand family background and ideology
- To be prepared to face the real world, maintain dignity and respect in community and society
- Important as learn to respect others; to be more tolerant, to have more harmony in the community
- To know their own identity
- Be able to stand up for themselves
- Need to know that all beliefs and non (religious) beliefs are respected
- To consider others.

One participant also wanted the 'green school' approach in the current school to be part of Ethical Education.

### *3.4.3 Values to underpin the Ethical Education Curriculum*

Broadly participants endorsed the five values in the Draft Values Statement. They suggested some elaborations to the accompanying explanations.

Participants particularly liked the inclusion of community.

**'Community - make children and parents feel like they belong, that they have solidarity in the community ; it is about us, where we are, our home, our community; school is part of the local community; respect one another in a community'**

They suggested 'respect' can be interpreted differently, that it can be subjective and needed to be spelled out more. The issue of calling teachers by first names was given as an example of something that needed further thought and explanation. Also it was suggested that it might be confusing for students not from Educate Together schools.

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They also liked the inclusion of democracy and suggested that a Student Council would be a good way of promoting democracy for students.

When asked if there were any gaps in the values statement, it was suggested that:

**‘Maybe anti-bullying, anti-racism needs to be named explicitly’.**

Issues relating to a ‘lived’ ethos had been covered in the part of the session that focused on creating welcoming and inclusive schools.

### **3. Curriculum space and teaching and learning**

Participants placed a strong emphasis on Ethical Education being across the curriculum and embedded in the ethos. They were less sure when asked if it should be also a subject or short course:

**‘Tricky, should not be only that, not just confined to one time - needs to be approached differently’.**

They suggested that if a short course was developed that the course should be ‘an option not compulsory’.

They wanted students to learn from each other, not just from books and also out in the community as well as in class. They also suggested learning through festivals and the seasons. They concluded that ethical education is essential at second-level, and that it would be supported by parents.

**‘Children from migrant backgrounds need balance - need to know their identity’.**

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## 5 Findings - All Other Stakeholders



All stakeholders welcomed the opportunity to be involved in the research and welcomed Educate Together's commitment to Ethical Education.

### 5.1 Understandings of Ethical Education and its importance

#### 5.1.1. *Understanding of Ethical Education*

The views of focus group participants are presented first and the views of the people interviewed are then outlined. These are separated for two reasons: the methods used to elicit the responses and because the individual interviewees facilitated participants to talk about their understanding in a more detailed way. Many were also drawing on their involvement in curriculum development.

#### **Focus Groups**

Participants in the eight focus groups filled out post-its outlining their understanding of Ethical Education and ones which outlined why they thought it was important for second level students.

This open-ended question elicited a very broad range of responses. An initial review, however, shows that there were strong common themes and or emphases.

Most participants related Ethical Education at some level to:

- Values and values system
- Morals, morality, moral codes and notions of right and wrong
- Ethics, ethical perspective and ethical living
- Religions
- Cultures
- Belief systems including secular ones (and ones that predate Christianity)
- The environment
- The wider world
- The interconnectedness of human being and the natural world
- Active citizenship

Participants also mentioned but less frequently, spirituality, philosophy and wellbeing.

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A more in-depth analysis highlights that participants talked about these aspect or themes in different ways. It was decided to use UNESCO's four pillars of learning (1996), referred to in the literature review chapter of this report, with the addition of Makrakis and his emphasis on learning for transformation, in analysing the responses further. This framework was used in a presentation made by Educate Together, in 2011.

#### **4 Pillars of learning UNESCO (1996)**

- Learning to know
- Learning to do
- Learning to be
- Learning to live together
- +(Makrakis, 2010) Learning to transform oneself and society.

Source: Presentation to Co Dublin VEC, 28 February 2011,  
Carmel Mulcahy and Angela Higgins

To assist analyses each idea was allocated a code based on the above framework. It was not always possible to be definitive in this process as the responses often linked ideas associated with the different pillars of learning, in one core idea rather than talking about them in isolation from each other. This is in line with a holistic notion of learning and indeed a number of participants referred to holistic approaches to ethical education. Some participants thought about it as building on young peoples' innate' values'.

**'Children born with an innate sense of fairness, a desire to be treated fairly and to reciprocate in kind. EC (ethical curriculum) can deliver this to all children (irrespective of cultural and religious background)'.**

Others saw ethical education as forming these values and notions of right and wrong with the aim that young people will act from these.

**'A curriculum that is underpinned by ethical values, e.g. human rights or particular religious values, that aims to ensure students understand and act on an ethical perspective'.**

**'Allowing students explore ethical issues, to develop own sense and understanding of right and wrong which will influence their current and future behaviour - themselves and towards others'.**

Others stressed the combination of development of understanding and skills leading to action as global citizens:

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**‘A curriculum that equips students to make moral decisions; equips them with an understanding of key ethical issues in the world; equips them to act as informed responsible citizens in their local community, in Ireland and as a global citizens’.**

In some cases, teachers as well as students were seen as the key learners in this form of education:

**‘A holistic education, which develops pupils and teachers consciousness and abilities in a range of areas’.**

Others emphasised the ‘whole school’:

**‘Guides schools in ways to explore values and the realities of living these values in our daily lives’**

**‘Permeates through entire school community, in teaching and learning, in all interactions’.**

Teachers who already work in Educate Together schools saw it:

**‘At the core, central to what we do in ET schools’**

**‘Application of core principles of ET in real terms’**

Whilst many participants saw Ethical Education spanning all of the pillars, there was a somewhat stronger emphasis on the first three. However, in the ‘learning to be’ category there was considerable emphasis on learning to be respectful and open to others and to diversity as well as to different religions and cultures. This could be understood to relate to hopes that students, through being engaged in Ethical Education, will be able to live together in respectful, inclusive and equal communities, societies and world.

### **Learning to know**

Participants emphasised learning about the following areas: values, races, cultures and religions, morals and ethics, and to a lesser degree, philosophy. They also mentioned more specifically that students should learn about racism, same sex relationships and areas that would assist personal wellbeing such as drugs and addictions and mental health. This latter aspect of personal wellbeing was particularly emphasised by parents. In this context the importance of caring about and supporting others was acknowledged but it was also emphasised that young people, taking account of their stage of development, also need to be supported to take care of themselves. It was suggested that there is a need to keep a balance between care of self and others.

Within the values category participants placed considerable emphasis on respect and diversity particularly in the parents’ focus groups. Parents also included an emphasis on rights, equality, social justice and democracy but somewhat less often. The latter values were strongly emphasised

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by the representatives of a range of organisations concerned with human rights, equality, global justice and citizenship. Other values and/or dispositions mentioned were inclusion, compassion, empathy, cooperation reciprocity and fairness. While participants talked of learning about values, many linked this to the development of ways of being based on these values so that the values became the framework for living. They also wanted students to have space to explore and critically engage with these values in a way that was meaningful to them. This aspect is also outlined in the section of this Chapter that deals with values to underpin the Ethical Education Curriculum.

Many participants emphasised the importance of supporting students to understand the wider world and the interconnectedness of all parts of the world as well as the interconnectedness of humans, animals and nature. This aspect could also relate to learning to transform as envisaged by Makrakis.

It was stated that Ethical Education should:

**‘(Be) based on human rights, equality, social justice and recognition of our interdependence with the world around us.’**

**‘Enable students to develop an understanding of how social animals including human beings live together and the impact of our actions on the suffering and wellbeing of other living sentient beings’**

Many participants stated that they felt Ethical Education was about ethical and moral questions and dilemmas and that it also involved an understanding of ‘the implications for others of our actions and motivations’. The emphasis in this set of ideas was on students gaining an ‘understanding’ of these areas. There was an implication that they would then act from an ethical and moral position. This would then relate to learning for self-transformation as envisaged in Pillar 5. This highlights the interlinked nature of the ‘Pillars’ of learning.

Most participants wanted students to learn about different religions but not in an ‘indoctrinating’ way. There was a minority view in one of the focus groups that students should not learn about religions at all. A number also stressed that students should learn about secular beliefs with a particular emphasis on humanism and atheism. They also wanted students to learn about different cultures and nationalities.

### **Learning to do**

Many participants placed a strong emphasis on developing critical thinking and questioning skills as being core to Ethical Education. They wanted students to be able to ‘question what is right and wrong’ and question assumptions and biases. They also wanted them to critically engage with different and sometimes conflicting perspectives.

They also emphasised the development of judgement skills and of being able to make moral and ethical decisions. This also included developing an ‘ethical vocabulary’.

Another strong emphasis was placed on developing the ability to look outside ‘own worldview’ and ‘to look at things differently’ and to develop ‘broader thinking- socially, culturally and psychologically’.

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Participants talked about the need for students to be able to express their own opinions and examine their own beliefs. They wanted them to have the ‘ability to engage in discussion on the values espoused by the school community’.

A number of participants stressed the importance of the development of the skills necessary for active citizenship.

**‘Equip them to act as informed responsible citizens in their local community, in Ireland and as global citizens’.**

In some cases this also referred to learning ‘how to care for the environment.’

Parents in particular hoped their children would develop skills to take care of themselves as well as others. The importance of a young person centred approach to Ethical Education was emphasised. A number of participants stated this as:

**‘Affirming young people’**

**‘Empowering learning including youth led learning- embracing their abilities, cultures and beliefs ’**

**‘Enabling learning and development’**

### **Learning to be**

At its simplest level some participants saw it as being about:

**‘How to become a good person’**

Participants placed considerable emphasis on students learning to respect and to be respectful of ‘self, others, staff, family and community’ and also to:

**‘Respect each other even if don’t agree with each other’s beliefs.’**

They also placed considerable emphasis on students being respectful of other religions and cultures as well as of people who had values and beliefs of a secular nature (although this aspect was emphasised less often). Some participants broadened the idea of respect for diversity and hoped that Ethical Education would:

**‘Engender respect for everyone-of all ethnic groups, religions, social class, mental status and sexual orientation’.**

Some also wanted students not only to respect but to appreciate different religions and cultures and to be inclusive and celebrate diversity. Others wanted students to go beyond respect and to be emphatic and compassionate.

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A number hoped students would develop their own inbuilt value system(s) and act in ethical and moral ways, guided by an informed and reflective sense of right and wrong.

Some hoped that they would 'be comfortable' to be themselves and 'not always conform' and that they would make informed decisions regarding their own well-being.

### **Learning to live together**

Many of the 'ways of being' highlighted above also relate to 'learning to live together'. This was summed up by many participants in a number of ways:

**'Coming together to learn how to live together, respect each other'**

**'Foundational values of living with others'**

**'Integration to other cultures and human values'**

Participants also stressed the importance of positive relationships and having consideration for others.

### **Learning to transform self and society**

As already highlighted, many participants placed an emphasis on the role of Ethical Education in the development of students as active, concerned and responsible citizens.

They wanted students to have a sense of 'the greater good', to be 'socially aware' and to play an active role in society and to be 'agents of change'. Also they saw it as being about 'social responsibility and citizenship'

**'If want to see change - do something about it'**

**'How to take actions to develop individual, environment and society'**

**'...respects the diversity of experience but also fosters it (in)  
creating ethical communities'**

Others saw it contributing to 'global justice' with many emphasising the global reach of change required. Others stressed the potential contribution to creating more equal and inclusive societies as well ones based on human rights.

To a somewhat lesser extent, participants placed an emphasis on young people transforming themselves. This included through the development of their own moral code and values system which would guide actions, decisions and how they live. Participants stressed the importance of being aware of the implications of actions on others. Some stressed self-respect, self-knowledge and self-care.

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## Interviewees

Many of those interviewed emphasised similar themes to participants in the focus groups. These common themes included: emphasis on values, looking at ethical rather than religious assumptions, development of ethical and moral code, rules of behaviour, moral dilemmas and discernment and moral decision-making, actions and consequences as well as motivations and spirituality with 'a small s'. Some also included an emphasis on care for the environment, sustainable development and active citizenship.

The following captures some of the more detailed discussion of the nature of Ethical Education, which in most cases is over and above what was highlighted in the Focus Groups.

One participant outlined what they believe to be five vital dimensions of Ethical Education. These were: It promotes the human person 'as an active ethical agent who is free, rational and relational'; aims 'to inform, form and transform'; takes account of stages of ethical development both psychological and social and is grounded in the realities of the human condition and the struggle between 'good and denial of good (or evil)'. Finally, it was stressed that Ethical Education should be integrated across the curriculum, reflected in the ethos, integrated in all subjects and be a distinct area of study. The importance of fore-fronting ethics as a branch of philosophy within Ethical Education was also stressed.

Another person also emphasised the belief that Ethical Education is about 'forming students' world view' and 'gives tools to do this'. The person was supportive of Ethical Education but went on to state that 'this is challenging'.

This challenge related to forming young people in a set of values and related perspectives that may not fit with those of their parents – 'how then will school embrace diversity'?

It was suggested that there will need to be early and clear communications with parents on what the school will be doing in this regard.

**'...Constitutional protection- parents can ask for children to be excused from RE (at second-level) - can they also ask to be excused from ethical education? Parents need to know in advance'.**

Another participant who was less supportive of the notion of Ethical Education also raised points about the danger of what they saw as 'indoctrination,' particularly if Ethical Education is integrated across the curriculum rather than being a stand-alone subject such as Religious and Moral Education in the UK. They also stated that in their view, students who study the State Religious Education Syllabus at Junior Cycle or Senior Cycle, are not asked to adhere to the beliefs but simply learn about them.

A number of participants talked about how they understood Ethical Education in relation to Religious Education (RE).

**'Ethical education is often in a 'faith formation 'context'. Education Together has a different approach. It should not just be a substitute for faith formation. It is essential for all and is not dependent on a religious context. In the absence of an emphasis on religious education it is essential'.**

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**‘Ethical education should not be seen as a non-religious or secular version of RE - should be a thing in itself.’**

Another participant queried why it was necessary as it potentially covers much of the same ground as religious education. This person referred in particular to the State RE curriculum which includes a study of world religions. Others also saw overlaps but also differences. The latter included the need to study ethics and ethical questions from a philosophical and secular perspective. In addition, they saw gaps in the State RE curriculum related to secular belief systems and an imbalance between Christianity and the other major world religions.

Another participant broadened the discussion to the need for informed discussion on ethics in education and the need for ethically-oriented education. This, in their view is under developed in an Irish context. They felt that Educate Together’s commitment to the development of ethical education has the potential to open up and contribute to this debate.

### *5.1.2. Why Ethical Education is important*

The following outlines the views of all participants including the people who were interviewed. Participants’ views on why Ethical Education is important for second-level students showed a considerable overlap with their views as already outlined above, on what it is.

In its broadest sense, participants saw it as important because of the stage of development of students and also because of its importance for human and social development.

**‘Important time for students – intellectual, emotional, spiritual and social development- so leave with a well developed ethical compass-schools have a tremendous role -one of the few places this happens.’**

**‘It is an essential and necessary component for fully integrated human development, for the individual and for societal and cultural contexts. Education without it would be impoverished.’**

This section will just highlight the main themes and any significant additions. Overall applying the pillars framework outlined earlier, revealed that there was more emphasis on ‘learning to be’, to live together and learning to transform.

Participants placed a strong emphasis as before within the ‘learning to know’ pillar on learning about and exploring values (with more emphasis on the latter), ethics, notions of right and wrong, understanding of human motivation e.g. Glasser’s theory as well as learning about religions and cultures and interconnectedness.

**‘Enable students to understand why they believe that certain actions are good or bad right or wrong - as opposed to being told that something is good because someone else says so’**

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**‘To facilitate /enable young people to explore the values of their society, their home, themselves ‘.**

In a few cases, parents stressed that students need to be guided by the values of the home or family so has a behaviour code and reinforce the basic family concepts’. Other participants were more likely to talk about the need for schools to be sensitive to potential differences between the values underpinning the Ethical Education Curriculum and those of the home.

Within the ‘learning to do’ pillar, there was again a strong emphasis on critical thinking and decision-making skills based on a reflective moral code.

**‘Should be about challenging assumptions e.g. history from different perspectives and with critical thinking involved’**

**‘To create a deeper understanding of “actions have consequences” and question our own motivations’**

**‘Get people to look at motivations and behaviours - RSA (Road Safety Authority) shifted thinking about drink driving from fear to ethical’**

Participants also emphasised the need for young people to learn:

**‘How to use social media /look after themselves/ethical use of social media’**

There was also a strong emphasis on learning skills for self-care including mental health.

Within the ‘learning to be’ pillar, many stressed the importance of:

**‘Preparing children for life and not just to fit into boxes’**

**‘Helping them to be confident stand up for own beliefs and those of others’**

**‘To be given a voice-be able to express ideas confidently- (have) experiences of the wider world.’**

The overall development of the person was stressed, linking the development of skills with the development of positive attitudes and an empathic disposition.

**‘Holistic development of person -life skills, belief in self, confidence, empathy and understanding.’**

As before, there was a very strong emphasis on students having a well-developed moral code and set of values. There was also an emphasis on being ‘well rounded good people’ who are tolerant, open and respectful.

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With the learning to live together' pillar there is a strong emphasis on wanting students to be respectful of and celebrate diversity, to be tolerant and open and committed to equality.

**'To live respectfully and positively in the world'**

**'Need to live effectively and harmoniously amongst that diversity'**

**'It is to guarantee we don't discriminate regardless of race colour or beliefs'.**

Finally, in relation to the 'transforming self and society' pillar, participants placed a particularly strong emphasis on this aspect. This included an emphasis on developing young people who care about others, want to change things and 'make the world a better place':

**'Strong values developed that promote agency and transformation and engagement'**

**'Empowerment to promote and defend human rights, equality of each person and the protect the world around us'**

**'Transformative education is essential to address global inequalities'**

**'To better understand their place in society and in the world and to build a framework of values and a way of engaging fully in society locally and globally'.**

Many participants used the words 'social responsibility' and 'active citizenship' in the context of this question and in this context the concept of 'care' and 'caring' was also used.

**'To support the development of caring knowledgeable responsive citizens'**

**'... Responsible people living not just for themselves but for others.'**

## **5.2 Values to underpin the Ethical Education Curriculum**

Participants were given a copy of a draft Values Statement (Appendix 5) developed by Educate Together over a period of time and through a consultative process. Educate Together hopes that these values or an adapted version will underpin the Ethical Education Curriculum Framework and the second-level schools with which it is involved.

Most participants agreed that it is important to have an explicit set of values to guide both the schools and the Ethical Education Curriculum. There was also broad agreement with the values presented. However, a number of others were suggested. In addition, participants believed that it

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was necessary to further develop the explanations of the values as currently contained in the Draft Values Statement. A number also referred to the need to consider how the values will be used in the context of the schools and particularly how students will be supported to engage with them.

A number of challenges were raised in relation to the Values and these are outlined later in this section.

### *5.2.1 Additional values*

A number of participants suggested that a value related to education, learning and achievement should be included. This was stated in a number of ways, for example, 'quality and excellence in education' was suggested. Some parents suggested that there needed to be something about 'hard work,' 'achievement' and reaching one's potential such as 'to develop personal potential as well as social and academic'. Another view on this was that this was part of the 'mission' or purpose of the new schools rather than a value. Whilst 'quality and excellence' could be, values related to the purpose of the organisation.

Some suggested the inclusion of a value that indicated a more proactive approach. Some suggested 'solidarity' and others 'social responsibility'. It was felt that without this, the other values such as equality, may not be realised. A number also suggested the inclusion of human rights. 'Human rights should be upfront -a core standard and a core value'. Others believed that the value 'inclusion' with its proactive emphasis needed to be added. They recognised that 'diversity' might imply inclusion, but felt that it was not explicit enough.

### *5.2.2 Expand the explanations of the values*

There was a general sense that all the explanations of the values needed to be expanded. Participants made a number of specific suggestions to strengthen the current explanations outlined in the Values Statement.

#### **Respect**

One participant proposed that:

**'The current debates around the value of Respect have broadened and favour the inclusion of the ethic of Care - Respect on its own may not be enough'.**

The inclusion of the ethic of Care with respect could also accommodate the concerns expressed by some parents that there needed to be more emphasis in the values on 'self care' and 'a caring supportive environment'. They also suggested that there needed to be an emphasis on balance between 'help and be helped' 'self and others' and between 'school and life'.

Another suggestion was that respect also needed to emphasise a two way process:

**'Respect and be respected - give and take.'**

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It was also suggested that there needed to be an emphasis on ‘disability including physical and intellectual’

### **Diversity**

Many liked the inclusion of the value of diversity and the emphasis as stated in the document:

**‘Celebrates the unique religious, cultural and ethnic identities’ (Values Statement, Educate Together, 2013 )**

They felt that this needed to be expanded to include other diversities. Specific suggestions included ‘sexual and gender diversity,’ ‘sexual orientation,’ ‘students with special needs’, and ‘nationality’. The suggestion above under ‘Respect’ regarding the inclusion of people with disabilities would also fit here.

### **Community**

It was suggested that community be expanded and given more definition. It was suggested that it should be expanded to include a wider set of named communities to ‘include an emphasis on ‘local, national and global’.

Quite a number suggested that it needed a clearer definition, as communities are not always positive.

**‘More nuanced about what is our understanding of community’ and how inclusion and exclusion takes place in communities’, ‘communities can be ‘authoritarian, paternalistic’**

**‘Students will have experience of communities, may not all be positive e.g. sport - good for some, not for all.’**

### **Equality**

It was suggested that the nine grounds in the current legislation should be named and that the explanation ‘needs more meat and include examples of what it would mean in the context of the schools. Another participant suggested that equality should be replaced by equity in recognition of pre-existing inequalities.

### **Democracy**

Most participants agreed that the inclusion of democracy as a value was vital in the context of schools as historically ‘students experienced little of this in schools’. It was suggested that the democracy be expanded and linked with ‘active citizenship’.

**Needs a greater emphasis on active and democratic citizenship, building on Dewey’s foundation but bringing this into a contemporary context, for example, as specified by the Council of Europe.’**

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Another suggestion was to emphasise that democracy should include both 'being asked' and also being 'listened to'.

### *5.2.3 Student engagement with values*

A number of participants stressed the importance of engaging students in shaping the values to underpin the Ethical Education Curriculum Framework and schools. This would model an ethical and democratic approach and help to get 'buy in'. It was also to ensure that they were meaningful and accessible to students. It was suggested that students be supported to engage with and explore the relevance and meaning of these values in a school context as well as in their lives generally. It was also suggested that a commitment to this engaged approach should be made explicit in the Values Statement.

**'Has to make sense to students - meaningful and guide behaviours, language they relate to e.g. fairness is a big one -reactive to unfairness -use images, also recognise that not all students from Educate Together schools, these maybe used to (fit) some of the language, others won't - must accommodate all.'**

### *5.2.4 Fit of values with values of partners*

Educate Together is working with partners in two of the proposed three new second-level schools to open in September 2014. The interview process clarified that the values as proposed in the draft Values Statement could be suitable for the Ethical Education Curriculum Framework. The school values would draw on the values of the partners as well as those of Educate Together. On this basis, each school will develop its own values statement. Educate Together also envisages that schools will develop their own set of values.

**'This is a 'banner' statement of Values... Each school community, once established, will develop their own values statement.'** (Values Statement - Educate Together, 2013).

Participants also agreed that there needed to be an inclusive process and that every effort be made to build consensus amongst the key stakeholders on the values at school-level. This issue also arose in relation to 'living the values' as outlined in the next section.

### *5.2.5 Fit of values with values of families*

The issue of how any set of agreed values can be lived in a school context is dealt with in more detail in the next section. In responding to the content of the Values Statement, a number of participants raised questions about the challenges associated with naming a set of values to underpin the EEC. The questions related to the nature of the values as well as to the nature of ethical education.

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**'The values advocated are western humanist values -how will they sit with respect for diversity, that is, people coming from different sets of values to these?'**

**'What ethical framework is allowable?'**

**'How to design and be acceptable to all faiths - this is very hard - certain religious groups may have objections... need to consult all faiths and keep a balance with family values'**

One participant suggested that the approach adopted would need to:

**'Balance tension between informed reflection on inherited (family and community) beliefs and values and respecting and caring for existing beliefs and values'**

Another participant highlighted that the issue of 'opting in' or 'opting out' of an area like ethical education was more complex at second-level than at primary level:

**'Children may want to attend, parents may not want this - at teenage level students may attend anyway, may want to be with peers, don't want to be different , want to stand up to parents; may not tell parents'**

Some participants appeared to assume all parents chose Educate Together schools based on its values and ethos and on this basis that there should be no conflict between home values and school values. Most of the parents who participated in the Focus Groups did appear to support this view. It is not possible to know whether the parents who attended the Focus Groups were representative of the wider body of parents whose children attend Educate Together schools.

However, some participants pointed out that the situation will be even more complex at second-level. They stressed that parents are often motivated by a different set of motivations when considering which second-level school to choose. It was suggested there is usually more emphasis on academic achievement. In addition, they may choose on the basis of the backgrounds of the children in the school, the notion of wanting their children to be with children 'like themselves'. This may mean that they chose not to send their child to a school with high numbers of children from 'disadvantaged backgrounds and or with special learning needs.'

**'Middle-class choosing not just on academic grounds but want their children to be with kids "like them" '**

A similar view was that some parents could be 'opting out of something rather than opting in'. In addition, it was emphasised that in the case of the new schools in which Educate Together is a co-patron or partner, but not a patron, that parents may choose the schools because of geographic location or because they want their children to go to a local community college or 'community school.'

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This issue will be discussed more fully in Chapter 5.

### 5.2.6 *Other values-related issues*

The four core principles in the Educate Together Charter were also included in the Values Statement. These are that: Educate Together schools are multi-denominational, co-educational, child-centred and democratically run. Participants were not necessarily asked to respond to these, but in a few cases participants did raise questions regarding these principles. The most significant issue here was a proposal that the core principal ‘multi denominational’ should be changed to ‘non-denominational’.

**‘Change multi-denominational to non-denominational - ET leaving secular parents out by the most enlightened patron body in Ireland.’**

It was also recommended that the wording in the Educate Together Charter<sup>8</sup> should change from ‘*reflects* individual identities to *respects* them’. It was pointed out that the ‘education system is obliged to respect not necessarily reflect identities’.

## 5.3 **A lived ethos**

Many participants stressed the importance of embedding the values and ensuring that they are ‘lived’ and are evident within the school.

**‘The values would be evident in a living, reflective, values based educational community that actively and critically engages with local, national and global issues and initiatives.’**

They also placed a strong emphasis on the fact that values had to permeate everything:

**‘Through all interactions even to the lunch queue – relationships - teaching and learning - pedagogy-must be here - this must take account of diversity including students with special needs, for example, not allocating children with special needs to finger painting - also must be in assessment methods.’**

The focus of discussion moved from values to a discussion of the importance of the development and implementation of an ethos based on the values.

### 5.3.1 *Developing an Ethos*

Participants with a strong connection to Educate Together stressed the importance of the explicitly named ethos which they felt was shared and known by all members of the school community.

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<sup>8</sup> The Educate Together Charter is a legally binding document, which underpins all their schools as well as agreements entered into with co-patrons and partners.

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**‘Has to be a feeling, a culture in the school, developed by people in the school.’**

Many parents indicated that the reason they had chosen Educate Together schools for their children was because of the ethos. Many said that they wanted this ethos to carry on into the new second-level schools. The aspects of the current Educate Together ethos that were mentioned most often were: its multi-denominational and intercultural aspects including the fact that children learned about religions but were not ‘formed’ in any one religion. They also mentioned that they liked the emphasis on respect, inclusion and diversity as well as openness to and involvement of parents.

A number of participants referred to the challenges of developing an inclusive and shared school ethos and that this needed to happen at school level. Others felt that some patrons of denominational schools set out their ethos and staff, parents, students and others have to buy into this.

A representative of one denominational patron group highlighted that in their case the values and ethos were developed at school level and that values were not prescribed. He did clarify that the process was informed by tradition, ‘collective will, and a shared identity as a community’.

**‘Each school takes ownership and builds the ethos-reflective element, what people want.’**

It was also stated that although parents did not have to be members of the faith community they were expected to support the ethos of the school. This participant also emphasised that:

**‘Ethos is a living thing always changing - built on something tangible - tradition and collective will’.**

This dynamic aspect allowed for different emphases in different schools but within agreed parameters.

Others stressed the importance of parents in the development of the ethos as they felt that some schools did not make the ethos explicit enough particularly to parents. Others felt that in some schools the ethos is not sufficiently lived.

Participants placed considerable emphasis on the need for an inclusive process to develop and build the ethos. In the values section of this Chapter it has already been outlined how students need to be included in agreeing values.

The other key ideas put forward by participants in this regard were:

- Include as many stakeholders as possible, including parents
- Underpin the ethos with an agreed set of values
- Build a consensus (it was agreed that this can be a challenging process)
- Ensure a strong focus on developing a student-centred ethos
- Learn from good practice elsewhere e.g. Educate Together primary schools, human rights oriented schools, ‘Green’ schools
- Consider the challenges of delivering on the values of equality and human rights.

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Many participants suggested that school Principals play a key role in leading the development of the ethos and that they should adopt a facilitative and inclusive approach, not one that is perceived as 'autocratic'. Principals saw themselves as 'builders of consensus'. Some concern was expressed about the difficulty of reaching consensus in some cases. It was suggested that the process and mechanisms used for the development of a values and or ethos statement are important and that 'good dialogue is critical'. It was also hoped that the fact that the schools are new would assist the process.

**'A mechanism for building consensus around the values - new schools - energy-founders- pioneers; hold discussions, set up a process'**

Some participants pointed out that the process of developing the ethos statement may vary from area to area.. The representatives of the ETB partner and ETB co-patron stressed that the process will involve a negotiation around the core values<sup>9</sup> to underpin the statement. It was pointed out that both ETBs have sets of values guiding their schools and these will be considered alongside those suggested by Educate Together.

**'School partners will have to develop a joint ethos statement - be informed by ETB (Education and Training Board) current values, this involved a long process to develop, as well as Educate Together values'**

### *5.3.2 Implementing the ethos*

School Principals were also seen to have a key role in leading the implementation of the ethos and ensuring that what it is, and how it will be 'lived' is communicated by everyone.

Participants stressed the importance of teachers and all staff in implementing the ethos. It was suggested that it was essential that teachers and staff are committed to the ethos and 'buy into it'. It was emphasised that this had implications for recruitment of teachers and other staff as well as for induction and Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Some challenges were also pointed out in this regard. These include the following:

- Teachers in second-level are subject focused
- Some teachers may come from schools with less of an emphasis on the type of values and ethos envisaged for the new schools
- Teachers' understanding of values such as democracy, equality and human rights may not be sufficiently developed
- May need to reflect on own values and how they fit with the ethos

Many participants felt that these challenges can and should be met through recruitment policy, induction and ongoing CPD. However, it was also pointed out that Department of Education and

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<sup>9</sup> The reference here is to a set of values and not to the Educate Together four core principles. A Model Agreement, which includes agreement on these principles, has already been entered into between Educate Together with the ETB partner (DDLETB). In the case of the ETB co-patron (Louth/Meath ETB, negotiations on an agreed Deed of Trust/Articles of Management are ongoing.

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Skills' policy on teacher redeployment may give rise to challenges, as schools have less control of recruitment.

Participants also pointed out the key role of the school boards in implementing and living the ethos. It was suggested that they should be visible and engaged in the school and that they should 'actively promote the ethos'.

**'(Boards) should not be remote, be visible and build relationships with school community -need to be known in the life of the school.'**

It was also suggested that the way boards worked should also reflect the values and ethos and that they should take time to reflect on this aspect. The inclusion of students on interim boards was felt to be significant in promoting and living the value of democracy.

Some other specific ideas about implementing the ethos have been organised around some key themes as follows:

- Relationships
- Processes and mechanisms for inclusion
- Policies and practices

### **Relationships**

Participants suggested that all relationships should be grounded in the ethos and particularly demonstrate the value of 'respect'.

**'How teachers treat the children, how children treat each other -all interactions – parents, families**

There was a particular emphasis on relationships between teacher and students:

**'Break the approach which sees students as a problem, talking about students in staff room and at staff meetings, these should be about teaching and learning'**

Participants suggested that teachers model the behaviours they are asking students to have:

**'Teachers: "live the message that you're preaching" in classroom on a daily basis'**

They also suggested that teachers should be prepared to take constructive feedback from students.

Participants also emphasised the necessity for respectful relationships with parents. It was suggested that it is important to build trust between Principals and parents in particular. Most of the parents in the focus groups were very positive about Educate Together's approach to parental involvement at primary level. It was observed by a number of participants, that both in the past and

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in the present, parents have not always been fully welcomed in second-level schools. It was felt they were often kept at arm's length, only communicated with when there is a problem or when they are needed for fundraising. It was also stressed that parents need to be seen as full partners and not as 'helpers.' The majority of participants reinforced this view of parents as partners.

### **Processes and Mechanisms for Inclusion**

**'Involve parents especially at early stage, pioneering schools so important to come up with good practice and policies'**

**'Importance of parent's involvement in policy, including curriculum.'**

A number of participants stressed the importance of involving parents in as wide a range of areas as possible and as early as possible in the development of the new schools. A number suggested that they would like to be more involved in the stage of development already under way at the time of the research.

It was suggested that different mechanisms be put in place to facilitate the input of parents. These included the use of a range of two-way communication methods particularly new technologies but also strong face-to-face mechanisms also, for example, working groups with real potential for influence and which draws on specific expertise and skills.

It was also observed that in the context of the new schools, which potentially will have a greater mix of parents, that the full diversity of parents' voices are heard and not just those based on nationality, culture or religion, although these are very important. It should include the whole range of diversities including based on socio-economic background.

**'Most vocal heard - needs to reflect the Nine grounds and social class - danger of becoming cosy middle-class enclaves - danger ET will replicate notion of 'successful schools' - housing policies are exclusionary so schools mimicking exclusionary policies - subtly exclude communities, danger of mainstreaming exclusion.'**

It was also suggested that processes and mechanisms need to be put in place to support the real input of students into a whole range of areas including the development of codes of behaviour including how breaches will be dealt with, curriculum and so forth.

A number of participants suggested that student councils are an important mechanism for student involvement but also stressed that these should not only include those 'with the loudest voices.' They also emphasised that the processes involved in setting them up and in how their operation should reflect the ethos. In addition it was emphasised that they need a real role and that their recommendations need to be seriously by Principals and staff. In addition it was proposed that a more 'radical' approach would be the establishment of a parent, teacher student council.

It was highlighted that living the democracy value can be difficult:

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**'Democracy in school - this can be harder in second-level, can be different sets of 'wants ' for example, between students and parents - principal may have to take a decision based on teaching and learning.'**

### **Policies and Practices**

As already noted, it was stressed that all policies and practices need to reflect the ethos. A number of specific areas were mentioned as follows:

Recruitment policy – the importance of policies in teacher recruitment has already been outlined. A number of participants also stressed the importance of 'student recruitment policy' in demonstrating a lived ethos. It was suggested that the policy should seek to ensure socio-economic diversity in addition to other diversities.

Codes of behaviour – it was suggested that in addition to being negotiated with students that these should not only apply to students but to teachers also. Some participants highlighted an example from the UK, where:

**'A code of behaviour is displayed in each class - for students and for teachers including regarding timekeeping.'**

Allocation of teachers - others suggested that the quality and experience of teachers allocated to specific students and areas should reflect the ethos, for example, 'allocating most experienced teachers to "weaker" students'.

Timetabling – some participants highlighted that the construction of timetables should also reflect the ethos - where subjects are placed implies a status or value. The timetabling of Ethical Education and related areas such as SPHE, CSPE and even PE need to be given careful consideration.

Transparency of internal practices – it was suggested that these be made manifest particular to parents, this can include the criteria used to decide whether students can progress to different levels within subjects.

Accountability – it was also proposed that schools and teachers be held accountable for students' learning and progression.

Local community- it was suggested by a number of participants that the school should develop strong links to the local community, ensure that the schools are fully embedded in them, draw on expertise and resources of local groups and organisations and generally be open to the community including facilitating the use of school facilities.

Teaching and learning - it was emphasised that the teaching and learning approach should also reflect the ethos not just through respectful relationships but in other ways also.

**'Allow time for students to reflect on what they are learning - stop rushing students - marshalling and monopolising'**

**'Curriculum is about process not content - not about what we teach but how we teach'.**

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Teachers as learners- it was suggested that teachers should be open to self evaluation; peer work, including observation and mentoring; team teaching; collaborative work and professional collegiality.’

Building and facilities - many suggested that the ethos should also be evident in the environment and building, the points raised here included:

- A green and sustainable approach in the building and environs
- Diversity reflected in the decoration of the school building
- Areas for students to mix and to relax

**‘Have a student room for use at lunch time - give them a sense of responsibility - visible but not on top of them - give them space to do things creatively.’**

Reflective practice - finally it was suggested that the schools need to reflect on and review how well they are doing in living the ethos and that this should be an open, inclusive and ‘honest’ process.

## **5.4 Curriculum space**

Participants broadly agreed that Ethical Education would be embedded in the whole school experience and evidenced in a lived ethos. However, the caveats expressed by some participants and already highlighted at 4.1.1 and 4.2.5 need to be kept in mind.

### **5.4.1 Integration**

**‘Has to be integrated across the curriculum - reflected in the ethos, integrated in all subjects and be a distinct area of study.’**

#### **Support for Integration**

Most participants favoured integrating Ethical Education across the curriculum because they believe that ethical questions need to be considered in all areas of learning.

**‘In subjects like geography- environmental issues’**

**‘ Ethical issues brought into all subjects-subjects don’t exist in a vacuum’**

**‘Address ethics in citizenship, economics, science, IT etc. – ethical questions embedded in every aspect of human life. There is a particular ethical deficit in Ireland caused by the restriction of a discussion of ethics to the sexual domain – we have paid a price - need to broaden ethics to all aspects.’**

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Others favoured this approach so that Ethical Education did not end up being seen as the domain of one teacher, they suggested that potentially this could result in other teachers leaving aside ethical questions altogether. It was also pointed out that if a subject or course were to be developed, it may have to be optional.

### **Challenges to Integration**

Most of the challenges outlined by participants were of a 'practical nature' relating to the nature of the second-level system. This is with the exception of the view highlighted earlier which objected to integration as a matter of principle, based on a belief that values teaching potentially constitutes 'indoctrination', likened it to the old approach to teaching Religious Education (RE) and argued that values teaching needs to allow 'for opt-in and opt out'.

It was felt that the system-based challenges were embedded in the nature of the second-level system itself.

**'Integration and cross-curricular hardest to do - some want to in a school, others don't'**

The challenges identified referred to the very strong subject focus of second-level and the fact that teachers are 'subject specialists'. Others related the challenges to teacher's potential lack of willingness and or capacity to include an ethical perspective into their subject areas. A few participants also raised the question of whether teachers would have a right to 'opt out' of values teaching. It was also pointed out that other attempts at integration have not been successful in any systematic way. Individual school level examples may well have been achieved, but in this view, these did not spread across the system.

Another type of challenge was highlighted relating to the form of patronage involved in the proposed schools. It was felt that this could impact on the integration of Ethical Education. It was felt that in the cases where patronage is shared or where Educate Together is not the school patron, that it could be more difficult to secure.

### **Actions To Assist Integration**

Some participants highlighted approaches that could assist integration, these included:

- Detailed guidance to schools and tools on how this can be done – one participant felt that the current Educate Together approach 'did not give enough assistance to principals and teachers'. Some teachers also suggested that more guidance is needed, even at primary level where the system is more open to integration.
- Dedicated time for developing and implementing this approach - 'put it on the time table-plus planning time – 'could have shared learning events, one per term, make them high points - team teaching- little use of this at present'.
- Provision of teacher support and capacity building-'where sole patron could opt for integration - but still need a standalone specialist - not all teachers are equipped to handle different world views and controversial issues'.

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- Model integration of Ethical Education on the current approach in the new literacy and numeracy strategy- in this approach all teachers have to attempt to progress aspects of literacy and numeracy within their subject teaching.

#### 5.4.2 *Subject or school-developed course*

Many participants who favoured integration also favoured a discrete subject or school-developed course. Many of them stated that Ethical Education needed a discrete space and needed to be visible in the timetable. There were different views on whether a school-developed course should be optional. A few felt it had to be, linked to the idea of students and parents having a choice. Most felt that this would be the case anyway because of current proposed reforms provided in the Junior Cycle Framework. Much of the discussion on whether or not a subject or course was desirable was interwoven with the current proposed Junior Cycle reforms.

Some raised questions as to how an Ethical Education Short Course will co-exist with the current State RE Junior Cycle Syllabus, should that arise. This is relevant in just one of the three schools, that is, the school in which Educate Together is working with in formal partnership, but is not the patron. It was indicated during the research that the State RE Syllabus will be offered as an optional subject at this school.

It was also indicated that in the case of the school where Educate Together is sole patron that it is unlikely that the state RE syllabus will be offered, while in the case where Educate Together is joint patron, it was indicated that this will be decided at school level.

A number of participants wanted Ethical Education to have its own identity and did not want it to be a secular version of RE or a substitute for RE. They wanted it to be seen as a valued and discrete area of learning with a particular emphasis on specific areas such as ethics and moral decision-making.

**‘Develop a distinctive brand to replace Learn Together – e.g. Education about Ethics, Beliefs and World views’.**

#### **Duplication and or Linkages**

Some participants suggested including emphases that would potentially overlap with CSPE and or SPHE, for example, Politics on one hand and Well-being and Psychology on the other. Others wanted links to CSPE and SPHE but did not want it to duplicate these. One linkage to CSPE was suggested, which would involve looking at ‘ethics and citizenship’.<sup>10</sup>

#### 5.4.3 *Ethical Education and Junior Cycle Reform*

Some participants raised the issue of whether an Ethical Education subject or course should be examined given the current examination focused nature of the three year cycle and the lack of status allocated to non-examined subjects. Others stated that they did not agree with examining it on

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<sup>10</sup> Ethics and citizenship, tools for decision making: Institute for Global Ethics UK Trust, 2002 reprint 2008

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principle. Many others highlighted that the proposed reforms to JC could potentially alleviate this issue if and when implemented, as the emphasis would then be on school-based assessment.

It was also observed that the new schools have the option of adopting the reforms in the school year 2014-2015 even if the implementation of these happen at a slower pace in already established schools.

Based on the current proposed reforms for the Junior Cycle, a number of participants favoured the development of 'a short course' using the template proposed by the NCCA. It was pointed out that seven such courses have already been developed, including one for CSPE, for which a draft specification has been developed.

It was also suggested that Educate Together could consider using the model of the CSPE short course, although without duplicating its content. Some participants pointed out that the proposal to end the mandatory nature of CSPE from school year 2015 could place Ethical Education in competition with it when students are choosing short courses.

It was also highlighted that in the school in which the State RE Syllabus will be offered there is also potential for overlap. It was indicated that the RE course, is the one developed by the NCCA, which is examinable at present at both Junior and Senior.

If it were the case that RE is not being offered, a number of participants pointed out that aspects of the state RE syllabus at Junior Cycle could be incorporated into a short Ethical Education course for Junior Cycle. One section of the existing syllabus explores world religions and includes an emphasis on social justice. It was acknowledged that the emphasis on secular belief systems needs to be strengthened and was highlighted that there will be a review of the Junior Cycle RE syllabus to update it.

A few concerns about the new approach to short courses were raised, including their status within the system. Overall, most people saw them as a significant opportunity whilst pointing out that greater clarity is needed from the Department of Education and Skills (DES) on the balance between short courses and subjects, and also on what depth of achievement will be required against the Junior Cycle Framework Statements of Learning.

Many participants emphasised the great opportunities offered by the proposed Junior Cycle reforms and hoped that Educate Together would embrace the proposed changes.

**'Good getting away from mile wide curriculum - it is more ethically oriented.'**

**'New JC, great ops-best year possible to start, learning statements and other learning experiences, key skills and principles underlying it.'**

A number of participants highlighted how Ethical Education could deliver on the achievement of quite a number of the learning statements (Appendix 6).

It was also believed that 'other learning experiences' offered great scope for school wide events linked to Ethical Education. Some participants suggested that it was worth considering whether Ethical Education needed a weekly slot or could be done more creatively in blocks spread over the school year. The importance of linking Ethical Education with extra-curricular activities was also stressed, such as Amnesty groups, community engagement and so forth.

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#### 5.4.4. *Senior Cycle and other Programmes*

Participants focused mainly on Junior Cycle in their exploration of how Ethical Education might fit into the taught curriculum. However, a number of points were made relating to other programmes.

A number of participants highlighted that the challenges at Senior Cycle will be even greater than at Junior Cycle because of the strong examination orientation. It was suggested that opportunities may be offered by the recent announcement to implement the long awaited new subject: Politics and Society.<sup>11</sup> It was also suggested that Educate Together should advocate for a subject focused on ethics and philosophy, which is already under consideration. Some participants hoped that the Junior Cycle Framework, when implemented, will have a 'knock on' effect into Senior Cycle.

**'SC further down the line, it will also diversify when JC is shown to work it will build on strengths like applied maths, physics etc.'**

It was also suggested that Transition Year offers great scope for Ethical Education and that EducateTogether schools should offer Transition Year.

Participants also emphasised that whatever was offered at Junior Cycle level that it must take account of all students' learning needs and styles, including those following FETAC levels 1 and 2.

**'Need to keep in mind some students following FETAC levels 1 and 2 in priority learning units - small numbers but will need to suit them also.'**

### 5.5 Structuring the learning

Educate Together was interested to find out if participants considered the current structure of the *Learn Together* Curriculum useful in structuring an Ethical Education programme for second-level. This issue was covered in some of the focus groups, including those with teachers, interim boards, principals and organisations with an ethical education interest as well as in the interviews.

One participant suggested that before the *Learn Together* is considered as a model for second-level that there should be an in-depth evaluation<sup>12</sup> of it.

**'Strong evidence based needed on the *Learn Together* including implementation and impacts on students, throughout the whole school and all years - draw on inspector reports<sup>13</sup>.'**

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<sup>11</sup> No details have yet been provided on how this will be implemented.

<sup>13</sup> It was pointed out by Educate Together teachers in the Focus Group, that it is not inspected and therefore 'can be diluted'. It was subsequently clarified that 'within Inspectors' reports it is just referred to as *Croi na Scoile* or *ethos*. As it is seen as RE replacement the DES do not monitor its progress'.

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(A preliminary evaluation of Learn Together was carried out in 2012 by DCU - 'The Learn Together Programme 2012 - Fit for Purpose?' Educate Together, 2012; this is discussed in the literature review).

Overall, there was no consensus on retaining the current strands: these are Moral and Spiritual; Equality and Justice; Belief Systems and Ethics and the Environment.

A number of participants emphasised that it was necessary to review the strands for age and stage of development appropriateness. It was also suggested that more emphasis be placed on ethics within the programme:

**'Drawing on the academic / scientific study of ethics - in an age appropriate way'**

Other suggestions included:

- Review the linking of 'moral and spiritual' and suggested these be separated
- Include ethics in all the strand titles
- Rename the environment strand as education for sustainable development

Some suggested not having strands at all but rather structure a programme around the core values of the spiral of 'self, family, and community, national and global'

Finally, one participant suggested:

**'Earth Charter may provide a structuring mechanism, 4 core areas -**

- **Respect and Care**
- **Ecological integrity**
- **Social and Economic Justice**
- **Democracy, non-violence and peace'**

This person also pointed out that 'A lot of work has been done on this internationally'.

## **5.6 What and how students might learn and modes of assessment**

### **5.6.1 What to learn**

Participants' ideas in relation to the specifics of what students might learn showed considerable overlap with their understanding of Ethical Education and why it is important. The areas mentioned in response to the questions about what and how to learn are simply listed below. This is not exhaustive, as many participants felt that had already covered this aspect under the what and why Ethical Education questions, so these sections need to be read in conjunction with those earlier sections.

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The ideas are organised using the framework outlined at the beginning of the chapter.

### **Learning to know**

- Religions and cultures
- Spirituality - ‘understand can be spiritual and not be religious’
- Secular belief systems (central not marginal)
- Ethics and ethical practices
- Values including human rights –realisation of rights
- Earth Charter and environment
- Morality- ideas about right and wrong; consequences of actions- own and others e.g. politicians and governments
- Draw on philosophy, sociology, psychology, politics

### **Learning to do**

- Skills in applying acquired knowledge; apply ethical tools; apply skills in community context
- Critical thinking, analysing, processing information
- Skills to discuss and debate; communication skills
- Social skills- mixing, integrating
- Coping and independence skills and skills to deal with adversity
- Learning skills – learning to learn
- Be able to deal with emotions

### **Learning to be**

- Confident
- Respectful of diversity including of those with secular beliefs
- Fair
- Sensitive in using language
- Empathetic, compassionate
- Make informed choices
- Self-aware ; reflective ; mindful
- Empowered to take action
- Appreciate environment, nature, humanity
- Celebrate cultures
- Responsible human being

### **Learning to live together**

Many of this aspects outlined under Learning to relate also to learning together

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## Learning to transform self and society

- Active citizenship
- Emotional and social intelligence
- Self awareness
- Having a moral conscience

## Related learning issues

Some participants suggested drawing areas of learning from programmes such as NCCA - RE courses; others suggested drawing on the *Learn Together* curriculum but that it would need to be reviewed and would need to take account of age and stage appropriateness.

Most participants emphasised the importance of taking account of the stage of development of students at second-level. They emphasised that they are moving from parents as role models to peers, they are shaping their identities and making critical decisions. They are also conceptualising and engaging with 'grey areas'. It was suggested that Ethical Education had the potential to support them in all of this.

Others suggested that Ethical Education needed to start with 'where students were at' and build on aspects they have already covered at primary level.

**'Could take the opportunity for real curriculum development involving parents, teachers, students - start with the framework and develop it from there.'**

### 5.6.2 *How to learn*

Throughout the Focus Groups and interviews process, many participants stressed that Ethical Education must adopt an ethical approach to teaching and learning and be based on respectful relationships. They also emphasised that the process of learning was as important as the content and the students should be supported to develop skills in how to learn and in becoming self-directed learners. It was also stressed that learning should include all the learning domains, including the cognitive as well as the practical or 'pragmatic' and the affective ones. Participants also placed a strong emphasis on interactive and active learning.

## Teaching and Learning Approach

**'Get away from writing on the board and asking students to take it down'**

**'Break down barriers of teacher standing at the top of the class'**

- Respectful, non-authoritarian, non-judgemental and safe learning environment
- Student-centred and inclusive of all learners
- Teacher as co-learner
- Teachers as facilitators

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- Modelling values
  - Building learning power – reference to Cluxton – resilience and reciprocity
  - Student-led learning
  - Peer mentoring and buddy systems
  - Parent and the local community involvement
  - Take account of different learning styles

### **Methods**

- Active methods e.g. role play, drama
- Discussions
- Using life narratives
- Historical investigation
- Conflict resolution
- Calendar approaches e.g. Human Rights day
- Use opposing and or multiple viewpoints
- Use philosophical methods, that is ‘open ended questions’
- Project work

Some participants suggested that students should also learn through doing, for example, being on committees, student council etc. They also stressed that these roles should not be allocated as rewards or to the more articulate few. Participants also emphasised that students need to be supported to participate in all learning activities and methods.

Whilst most participants supported the approaches and methods outlined above, many also highlighted challenges. The latter mainly related to teacher commitment and capacity to use these approaches. It was pointed out that while these methods are already advocated in the current second-level system, particularly within CSPE and SPHE, they are not necessarily applied in any widespread way.

**‘It’s about dialogue and empowerment - it’s implicit - has to permeate - will be difficult as teachers don’t necessarily understand that’**

Some felt that CPD could tackle this challenge while others felt that it was the exam-oriented nature of the system that resulted in teachers ‘teaching from the book’ and ‘to the exam’. Some hoped the proposed new Junior Cycle Framework would help address this, others wondered if this would happen as long as the end game was the Leaving Certificate as currently constituted.

**‘Exam still all important - in teachers’ interest to prepare students - intention is not to hurt the child - LC is still the target -nothing will change as long as that is the case.’**

Others were more optimistic and saw the establishment of the new schools as offering:

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**‘An opportunity for new school to create a school embodying learning to learn as well as literacy and numeracy’.**

Others mentioned progress in changing teaching and learning approaches, albeit slower than hoped, and believe that this will continue especially in light of the current reform agenda.

### **5.6.3 Assessment**

This issue was not covered in depth due to time pressure in the Focus Groups and interviews processes but there was fairly broad agreement amongst participants who expressed a view.

They mainly suggested that school based assessment should be adopted using an ‘assessment for learning’ approach.

**‘Assessment for learning should be part and parcel of what Educate Together is about- reflect the ethos.’**

It was suggested that within this assessment for learning approach that a key success criteria should be:

**‘Effective questioning - study has shown that in school 75-80% are lower order questions v higher order questions i.e. evaluative, analysing’**

Another area suggested for assessment was students’ ability to use an ethical vocabulary to articulate their own understanding of ethics and ethical behaviour.

It was also suggested that the approach should include:

**‘Teachers giving constructive feedback, self-assessment and peer assessment’.**

Participants also pointed out that it will be necessary to ‘build competence and confidence’ in this approach both with teachers and students.

Some of the other assessment methods suggested were:

- Use of portfolios and case studies
- Use of multi-media including social media
- Reflective journals

A few participants raised the issue (mentioned earlier) of lack of status of non-externally examined subjects within the current system. They felt even with the proposed changes at Junior Cycle (stressed implementation still a matter of dispute) will still raise the issue at Senior Cycle level.

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Those who did not envisage a separate subject felt therefore there should no individual assessment. They suggested instead that a whole school assessment be carried out to assess the extent of integration of Ethical Education and the learning arising from it.

## 5.7 Challenges and supports required

Many of the challenges mentioned by participants have already been outlined throughout the sections in this chapter.

They related to:

- Values education, issues of 'opt out' and parental choice
- Fit of values education with values of families
- Challenge to inclusion and acceptance of diversity when conflicts around core values arise
- Different models of school patronage and fit with Educate Together approach to Ethical Education
- Nature of the subject and exam-oriented second-level system
- Teachers' capacity and willingness to integrate Ethical Education into their subject areas
- Resource demands of integration including planning time, CPD etc
- Achieving balance between Ethical Education as lived ethos, integrated approach and a discrete subject, course, programme – ensuring 'does not get lost'
- Avoiding duplication with CSPE, SPHE and RE
- Ensuing all diversities reflected in the curriculum and that secular beliefs systems given equal space and value
- Ensuring use of active and participative learning methods as well as appropriate assessment approaches
- Ensuring teaching, learning and assessment approaches meet the needs of all students

Participants suggested ways of meeting some of the above challenges; these are included in the relevant sections of this chapter. They will be drawn on and highlighted in Chapter 5.

Another challenge identified by participants related to who would teach a specific course. It was suggested that teachers would need a background in philosophy including ethics, sociology, politics and possibly psychology. A few suggested that within the current cohort of second-level teachers the teachers most qualified in relevant areas and methods are Religious Education teachers.

**'RE teachers - Mater Dei trained - would be best placed but coming from a religious world view – may not preclude them- but would have to talk about religious ethics'**

Others mentioned that teachers with a postgraduate qualification in CSPE could be considered. It was suggested that all potential teachers of Ethical Education would need to attend a course in ethics. It was also suggested that Educate Together should develop a course for teachers on the lines already provided to primary teachers, but suited for second-level, possibly as part of initial

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teacher education (ITE). It was also proposed that the Ethical and Multi-denominational Certificate course currently provided by St Patricks College of Education in partnership with Educate Together for primary teachers, could be adapted as a model and developed for teachers at second-level.

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## 6 Discussion and Implications of Findings



At a very general level, the findings as outlined show considerable support for the inclusion of an Ethical Education Curriculum at second-level. They mainly support the approach already adopted by Educate Together at primary level and outlined in the Introduction to the Report and the Literature Review. This approach is embedded in the ethos, integrated across the curriculum and also as a discrete area. In line with Educate Together's commitment to multi-denominationalism, there was also considerable support for engaging with religious and secular beliefs in order to develop a respect for a diversity of beliefs. This approach also does not include formation into any particular religion.

### 6.1 Understanding of Ethical Education and its Importance

In the view of many participants, the whats and whys of Ethical Education were very interlinked. This related to the fact that most people placed an emphasis on it being education *for* something and not only *about* something. They emphasised that it was holistic and encompassed the full development of young people. They said it was about formation and transformation.

The key themes are outlined in Chapter Four, these included:

- Involves the four main pillars of learning and in addition transformation
- Based on values and the development of individuals and societies based on these values
- Morals and concepts of right and wrong
- Human motivations, actions and consequences
- Interconnectedness of human beings across places and with animals and nature
- Cultures, races, nationalities and multiculturalism/interculturalism
- World views and belief systems including religious and secular beliefs
- Secular ethics drawing on philosophy and also other disciplines including psychology sociology etc
- Environment, sustainability and the impact of human behaviour on animals and the planet
- Wellbeing and self-care
- Citizenship
- Global justice

Many also emphasised that Ethical Education is about the whole school, about the lived ethos and therefore encompasses everything. The vast majority favoured this understanding of Ethical

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Education and supported this approach and its introduction into the second-level schools in which Educate Together is involved.

This understanding of both the scope of Ethical Education as well as its embedded nature is in line with Educate Together's own understanding as outlined in the literature review in this report.

**'The Ethical Education curriculum focuses on the ethical, moral and spiritual development of children and young people in an inclusive school environment. It encourages children to explore their own spiritual identities in a safe and supportive environment while also being aware of and respecting the notion that other people may think differently to them. It enables learners to appreciate, be informed and be comfortable with those of differing faiths to themselves and empowers them to critically interact across viewpoints within a common language of human rights and respect.'** (Mulcahy, 2000).

### **Differences and Implications**

The main difference in perspective and or emphasis that emerged in the research argued that the introduction of Ethical Education as all encompassing and as about values formation potentially could result in conflict with parents who hold different values. It was suggested that the values proposed were 'western humanist' values and may be in conflict with the values of some parents based on their religious and or cultural beliefs. It was also seen as a challenge to fully embracing cultural diversity, that is, how to reconcile different sets of values and or beliefs that, potentially, may be in conflict. This view was expressed by a small number of people, most of whom were involved in the field of second-level education in different capacities, and who supported a values-based approach to Ethical Education but felt that it was important to flag the potential for conflict. It is included here, as this perspective has value in encouraging consideration of how the values of students, particularly those formed in the family and related to family, cultural and religious beliefs can be respected within the form of Ethical Education envisaged by Educate Together. It also flags the importance of engaging with parents in the formation and the delivering of the Ethical Education Curriculum. It is worth noting that the Third Country National (TCN) parents' focus group placed significant emphasis on Ethical Education being about different cultures and religions and about building respect for these. They pointed out that they had chosen an Educate Together primary school because it adopted this approach. They also wanted Ethical Education to be embedded throughout the new schools as it is at primary level. Likewise, those student focus groups comprised mainly of students with TCN backgrounds (see case study) placed significant emphases on liking their schools because they included different cultures and religions, and because they learned about different cultures and religions as well as learning respect for them.

The issue of whether it would be possible to 'opt out' was raised by just a few participants in the context of an embedded approach to delivering the curriculum. This was compared to the rights of parents (on behalf of their children) to request an 'opt out' of religious education. Educate Together understands that it is not possible to opt out of Ethical Education as it is and will be embedded in the ethos. They also believe that as its approach to Ethical Education involves exploration of a range of religious and secular beliefs in a non-formation way that this should remove the need for 'an opt out'. As highlighted earlier, Educate Together schools were established to offer a form of multi-denominational education, which does not include faith formation and therefore removes the need to 'opt out'.

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Once again, whilst the issue was raised by a very small number of participants, it is included because it has implications for the degree of choice parents and students have: whether or not they 'opt in' to the new schools in question. It also has implications for communications with parents about the ethos of the schools and the role of Ethical Education in them. This will be even more important in the areas where Educate Together is either a co-patron or not a patron but a partner. The research highlighted that in these cases some parents may choose these schools for a more varied set of reasons. Their decision to choose a particular school may be based on reasons other than the involvement of Educate Together. Also, it was pointed out that the ethos question is more complicated because it involves a more complicated patronage structure.

Another difference in perspective related to the fact that the new schools are multi-denominational rather than non-denominational. It was pointed out that the inclusion of teaching about religions and embedding a multi-denominational perspective into the ethos did not allow parents who are atheistic to request an 'opt out' on behalf of their children. It was also pointed out that this group of parents currently have no choice of second-level schools (or primary level) and that the new schools under discussion here offer a limited choice. The historical factors behind Educate Together's decision to establish multi-denominational schools are outlined in the literature review. The multi-denominational principle is one of the core principles in the Educate Together Charter. It is beyond the scope of this report to go further into the issues raised about the need for non-denominational schools. Such schools do not exist at either primary or second-level in Ireland. However, a clear implication for the development of the Ethical Education Curriculum is the need to address gaps identified in *Learn Together* (including in the evaluation 'Fit for Purpose?' referred to earlier) and strengthen the focus and value placed on secular beliefs, for example. This issue is also highlighted in the literature review, and Educate Together is currently attempting to address this in the primary level *Learn Together* Curriculum.

Overall, the implications of the foregoing is that the new schools should make clear the values it is promoting and what form of Ethical Education it is proposing. All education is value laden. The difficulty in many cases is that these values are implicit rather than explicit. Currently subjects such as Business Studies and Economics are taught as if they are value free rather than based on particular beliefs and values such as 'consumerism,' 'free trade' and 'the operation of a dehumanised market,' as well as an underpinning belief in the capitalist system.

Another implication is that Educate Together should involve a diverse group of parents in the development of the curriculum framework as well as clear communications on the curriculum when it is drafted. It should develop policies and procedures to deal with potential conflict between family and school in relation to Ethical Education and have these in place before a situation arises. This could include dealing with a scenario in which the student wants to embrace the values and approach of Ethical Education but the parent or guardian does not. This scenario was highlighted in the research as something that happens at second-level as students strive for greater autonomy. In addition, handling values and perspectives in class, which potentially conflict with the values of the home, will mean that teachers need to be equipped with skills to do this sensitively. This will require capacity building and support for teachers.

Other implications associated with the spectrum of understandings and emphases raised in the research are as follows:

- Include a clear definition of Ethical Education in the curriculum framework
- Incorporate the different emphases in a balanced way

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- Ensure a balance between self-care and students' wellbeing with care for others
  - Adopt a philosophical ethical approach and embed ethics throughout the curriculum
  - Ensure a balance between religious and secular beliefs
  - Include an approach to culture and cultural identity suited to second-level that goes beyond consideration of cultural identity only in terms of religious identity and includes a consideration of how cultural identities cross cut with other identities, for example gender, social class and sexual orientation
  - Include an understanding of diversity which embraces diversity based on gender, social class, sexual orientation and disability as well as based on religion and culture
  - Incorporate active citizenship in a way that differentiates it from CSPE, for example, built around ethical dimensions of global citizenship and include local and global links
  - Embed an ecological perspective rather than an environmental one and draw on the approach and work to-date on Education for Sustainable Development under the remit of UNESCO and the related Earth Charter.

## 6.2 Values and a lived ethos

There was considerable agreement that a clear set of agreed values should underpin both the Ethical Education Curriculum and the new schools. Two sets of caveats were expressed, one related to fit and agreement with partner values and the other to the need to extend the named values and to expand the explanations associated with them.

### 6.2.1 *Educate Together and partner values*

One set related to Educate Together's proposed values and those of the ETB partners. It was pointed out that the values to underpin the schools have to be worked out with the co-patron and the other ETB partner as well as with others involved at local school level.

Educate Together does envisage that the values will be shaped at school level. It also proposes that a 'banner' values statement currently in development and which will be informed by this research, would act as a basis for this school-based development. The view of the partners that the values to underpin the schools will have to be an outcome of a negotiation between them and Educate Together, implies that a further process is needed.

The four principles outlined in the Educate Together Charter have already been agreed with the partners. The research indicated that a further working out with partners of how these are understood and how they will be put into operation within the schools would be useful.

These principles are also relevant to the Ethical Education Curriculum. A specific example here, relates to the fact that the Religious Education (RE) Junior Cycle (NCCA) course will be offered in at least one of schools, where an ETB is patron and Educate Together is partner. A number of participants stated that this course takes a comparative approach to the study of religion and does

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not advocate adherence to any one religion. However, the introduction to the NCCA syllabus<sup>14</sup> states:

**As part of a programme of preparation for the responsibilities of citizenship, the course makes particular reference to the Christian tradition, acknowledging the unique role of this tradition and its denominational expressions in Irish life.**

[http://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/c0c1f394-79c8-4455-bea5-c9e014a9945d/JCSEC22\\_religion\\_syllabus.pdf](http://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/c0c1f394-79c8-4455-bea5-c9e014a9945d/JCSEC22_religion_syllabus.pdf)

A number of participants highlighted this emphasis on Christianity as a critique and also emphasised a lack of a focus on secular belief systems. Some of the second-level students also referred to these issues. Most parents in the focus groups did not want any specific religion to be given priority over another and many others wanted more emphasis on secular beliefs.

The study of religions is only one possible component of Ethical Education and in the current Educate Together approach no one religion is given priority and no faith formation takes place. The reason for including an emphasis on the NCCA - RE syllabus here is that the research established that it would be offered in one of the three schools as outlined above. The implication of this is that at a minimum, if the existing syllabus is to be offered, then efforts need to be made to address the issues above. Educate Together could consider offering specific guidelines and materials to support this adaptation. Also, the school needs to inform parents on the NCCA - RE syllabus as it is currently constructed, to inform their choice about whether or not they wish their children to study it.

Another issue with relevance to the Ethical Education curriculum that needs to be resolved is the suggested distinction between values to underpin the schools and another set to underpin the Ethical Education Curriculum. Given the approach to Ethical Education being considered this does not seem viable.

### 6.2.2. *Which values?*

Another set of ideas related to the named values as well as the explanations of these.

There was no fundamental disagreement with the values named but additions were suggested. Consideration should be given to the inclusion of some of these in reformulating the values statement.

*Inclusion* - many observed that while it is implied it should be specific. It has the advantage of implying a dynamic process 'of including', which a number of people felt the values lacked. Care could be taken in the explanation of this value that it is about inclusion of a whole spectrum of groups and not simply the ones specified by the DES

*Human rights*- also proposed by many. The language of rights has considerable traction internationally, it also had the added advantage of being legally based and of involving the possibility

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<sup>14</sup> The Syllabus will be reviewed in 2017 as part of current plans for the Junior Cycle Framework and the development of new subject specifications. [www.ncca.ie](http://www.ncca.ie)

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to vindicate rights. An emphasis on human rights is included in *Learn Together* but participants felt it should be fore-fronted in the values statement.

*Respect* - align this with 'care'. This proposal related to the focus on this value in international literature. The concept of care has also been central to Kathleen Lynch's work for some time, she links it to equality especially women's equality and to citizenship

[http://www.acpireland.com/uploads/1/5/3/7/15370432/the\\_relationship\\_between\\_affective\\_equality\\_and\\_gender\\_equality\\_presentation.pdf](http://www.acpireland.com/uploads/1/5/3/7/15370432/the_relationship_between_affective_equality_and_gender_equality_presentation.pdf)

In addition, the addition of care was felt to add a proactive dimension and allows for an emphasis on self-care as well as care for others

*Social responsibility or solidarity* - again participants felt that this should be a core concern of Ethical Education and should be reflected in the values

Another set of suggestions related to the need to expand the explanations associated with the values. These expansions were seen as important in reflecting a deeper and more inclusive understanding of the values. These are outlined in Chapter Four and should be taken into consideration in redrafting the values statement.

### 6.2.3 *Students and values*

Students were not asked to respond to the values statement. They did talk of values in an applied way when talking about a welcoming an inclusive school as well as what they liked about school. The primary school students placed a big emphasis on relational values such as friendship, being friendly, welcoming, kind and helpful. Respect also figured often. They talked about the need to respect others, including their cultures. They also wanted to be respected by classmates and teachers. It was also implied in the importance they placed on 'treating others the way you wanted to be treated'.

They also talked a lot about fairness, This included being treated fairly in the development and application of codes of behaviour. In a sense they wanted 'fairness' spread across all aspects of the school, including in the use of school spaces such as the yard as well as equal and fair access to activities such as sport for girls.

Consideration should be given to the inclusion of fairness as a value. Some adult participants also highlighted that students relate really relate to this concept.

An important implication of how students talked about values is that they need to be included in developing the school level values statement so that it reflects their emphases and language.

Many participants stressed that values such as equality and human rights are very important in ethical education. They also stressed that students need to be given an opportunity to explore these values and work out what they mean in the context of the life of the school, as well as in their own lives and the lives of others.

### 6.2.4 *Building and living the ethos*

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## **Building the Ethos**

Many highlighted that before 'living an ethos', the ethos had to be built and that this requires an inclusive process involving as many members of the school community as possible. It also involves a 'consensus building' process with all the challenges involved in that. The need to balance the different 'wants' of different stakeholders, as one participant put it. It was considered that Principals had a key role in this process and it was suggested that a facilitative leadership be adopted. Many participants believed that the newness of the schools offered great opportunities in the formation of an ethos that fits with an Ethical Education Curriculum Framework.

Further, work to agree values and a values statement to underpin the ethos, has already been outlined. This will act as a framework for the work required at school level on agreeing school specific values as well as on building an ethos. It is likely that the three models of school development and patronage will impact on the ethos. Therefore, agreement between the partners on a framework of values would be useful. Clarity on how these relate to the school level values as well as the school ethos is important. Work is ongoing between the partners on these issues. Each board at local level will play a key role in deciding the school level values and ethos.

Parents need to be sufficiently informed about the different models of patronage and the potential impact of these on ethos. Some of the parents who participated in the consultation did not appear to be sufficiently informed. Most of the parents attending appeared to assume that Educate Together was the patron and assumed and wanted the Educate Together ethos to permeate the new schools. This may relate to the fact that most of them had children in Educate Together primary schools, and were choosing the new schools on this basis.

This may have implications for parents of children who don't currently attend Educate Together primary schools. Educate Together and the co-patron or their partner need to clarify what is communicated to parents as well as to engage them in building the ethos of the new schools on an equal footing. Parents with children in Educate Together schools were very comfortable talking about the ethos. It was something they talked about without prompting. Many pointed out that it was because of the ethos that they had chosen the particular schools. This may not be the case for other sets of parents who may be more focused on other issues or simply may not understand or use the language associated with ethos. The schools need to use outreach, capacity building and support for parents to ensure that a diverse range of parents are involved in the ethos building process as well as other processes connected to the school. Mechanisms to involve a diversity of students also need to be considered.

## **Living the Ethos**

All those who supported a values based curriculum supported the fact that the values have to be evident and lived in all aspects of the life of the school. Many specific suggestions were made to ensure this process. These are outlined in Chapter Four.

All agreed that students are central to the process of ethos building as well as ensuring that the ethos is lived. Students placed considerable emphasis on the feeling of school as a lively, welcoming, supportive and safe place. They also emphasised the desire for a positive enjoyable experience rather than an emphasis on what they learned. Respect and fairness figured significantly in how they talked about school.

Even when discussing learning explicitly, they were more interested in talking about how they learned as well as the other type of activities which were important to them including PE and sport. They

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placed a lot of emphasis on friendship, free time, fun and on physical and creative activities. The second-level students placed considerable emphasis on ‘having a say’ in what and how they learned. These different emphases need to be taken into account when building and living the ethos as well in curriculum planning and structuring timetables. This should also include involving students in these processes.

Both sets of students emphasised respect and the need for this amongst students and very importantly between teachers and students. Second-level students emphasised ‘being listened to’ as an important element of respect and many were dissatisfied with their experience of this in their specific school contexts. Most of the primary level students (most of whom were attending Educate Together schools) felt respected by teachers. They also felt that they were listened to, with the exception of a number of specific instances, which have already been outlined in Chapter Three.

The core implication here for the living of the school ethos within an Ethical Education framework is the need for a commitment to respectful relationships across the whole school community. Particular thought needs to be given to the nature of respectful teacher- student relationships which take account of the different stage(s) of development of students as they progress through second-level. This aspect will also have implications for processes and mechanisms to facilitate meaningful input from a diverse range of students.

Another implication of this desire for respectful relationships is the need to develop policies and procedures to ensure ‘bullying free’ schools. The primary school students placed a lot of emphasis on this aspect. This was particularly the case in the focus groups comprised mainly of students with TCN backgrounds. The DES now makes it mandatory that all schools develop and implement an anti-bullying policy and have published a set of ‘Anti-Bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools’ (DES, 2013). The implications for the new schools are to ensure the policy is fully implemented and reviewed on a regular basis.

As highlighted in Chapter Three, issues of ‘slagging’ were highlighted in one focus group. The literature on bullying highlights (HSE 2002) how this can lead to bullying, so this aspect also needs to be addressed in the policy and procedures outlined above.

The DES procedures highlight the close links between a positive school culture and prevention of bullying.

**These procedures recognise that a cornerstone in the prevention of bullying is a positive school culture and climate that is welcoming of difference and diversity and is based on inclusivity and respect. These procedures outline key elements of a positive school culture and climate and also provide schools with some practical tips for building a positive school culture and climate. (DES, 2013)**

Students talked about codes of behaviour, most recognising the need for them. They wanted them to be fair as well as fairly and consistently enforced. Involving students in developing and reviewing these should be part of building a lived ethical ethos.

A code of behaviour for teachers was mentioned by a number of adult participants. This included the suggestion that both codes should be displayed in every classroom and both should be reviewed regularly.

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Most also acknowledged that the ethos needed to be evident in the building and its environment. If the ethical education curriculum is to include an emphasis on environmental sustainability then this needs to be reflected in the design and building of the schools as well as how they are run. Diversity also needs to be evidenced in the building, including in displays, images and posters. In line with participants' suggestions about the breadth of diversities, this should include a full range of diversities including those based on secular belief systems, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities and social class as well as cultural and religious diversity.

## 6.3 Curriculum Space

Most participants understood that an ethical education curriculum had to be underpinned by and embedded in the values and lived ethos of a school. Most participants also believed that it should be integrated across the curriculum. Second-level students also emphasised the need to break out of compartmentalised subject focused learning.

### 6.3.1 Integration

Participants identified many opportunities for integration into specific subjects, whole school events cross-curricular projects and extra-curricular activities. Many thought it was essential to adopt such an approach as all subjects relate to human knowledge and activity and as such have an ethical dimension. Many pointed out that at present many key areas such as Economics, Business Studies and Science appear to lack this perspective. It was also noted that even if a course were offered, it would possibly have to be optional (see below for more discussion on this) so an integrated approach ensures that students are given opportunities to deal with ethical questions and perspectives.

Many suggested that the new Junior Cycle Framework offers considerable opportunities for the integration of ethical education. It was highlighted that the underlying principles, the focus on learning statements and skills development, learning to learn and school-based assessment fit with Educate Together's approach to Ethical Education.

Many challenges to an integrated approach were clearly outlined. Many of these related to the nature of the second-level system including its subject and exam orientation. Teacher's roles as subject specialists and the current form of initial teacher education were also seen as challenges.

The following outlines the implications for the development of an Ethical Education Curriculum Framework drawing on participants' inputs regarding challenges and possible responses.

#### **Developing a Strategy for Integration**

- Include a clear definition of what is meant by Ethical Education
- Define integration and the different forms this may take
- Outline how integration and a specific Ethical Education subject or course will work in tandem
- Carry out a detailed analysis of core content and required learning outcomes in key JC subjects and highlight how incorporating aspects of Ethical Education will assist teachers achieve JC statements of learning requirements

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- Propose a detailed implementation strategy for JC which includes integration into specific subjects, cross-curricular approaches, whole school approaches such as Green Schools, Yellow Flag etc., whole school events and extra-curricular activities
  - Consider how it can be integrated into programmes offered to students in Level 2 Priority Learning Units
  - Align the strategy with the Junior Cycle Framework and link to specific Statements of Learning
  - Include sufficient 'meat' in the framework and strategy to really assist principal and teachers at local level whilst retaining space for school-based autonomy and flexibility – participants directly involved at primary felt that this was not sufficient at present, this is also referred to in the literature review
  - Include guidance on approaches and methods for assessing learning achieved through the integrated approach
  - Outline supports needed and available, particularly from Educate Together
  - Suggest school level mechanisms to support integration, for example, a coordinator to support and oversee integration

### **Teacher CPD and Support**

All agreed that implementing an integrated approach to ethical education at second-level had implications for teacher CPD and support. It was suggested that Educate Together and partners should work closely with the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) support service in relation to CPD for teachers in the new schools.

- Provide CPD in Ethical Education - draw on CPD provided for Educate Together primary level teachers but adapt to suit a new curriculum and for second-level, in so doing draw on models developed nationally
- Work with the JCT and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)
- Include a range of options for CPD including short courses, on-line courses as well as postgraduate courses. TCN parents specifically mentioned the need for equality or intercultural training
- Work with Education Departments in universities to develop postgraduate courses
- Influence initial teacher educators about the inclusion of ethical education in initial teacher education (Draw on the learning from the successful work done in this regard for primary teachers)
- Develop an online bank of resources drawing on the extensive resources which already exist at primary level, for second-level teachers, including in development education, human rights education, citizenship, environment, Earth Charter, equality including gender equality, multiculturalism and interculturalism, diversity, disability and poverty and social exclusion
- Identify any specific gaps in the existing resources for example, specific resources dealing with ethics.

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## School-level Issues

- Ensure ethical education is prioritised in the recruitment and induction of teachers including a commitment to it and to an integrated approach ( this was emphasised by most participants)
- Ensure planning time is built into the timetable
- Encourage team teaching (students particularly liked this approach)
- Support each school to develop a plan for implementing the strategy
- Support schools to review how the integration strategy is being implemented and to take on board lessons and possible changes required. This review should also assess the impacts on students learning and development and should include feedback from students both on learning and on their experience of ethical education.

### 6.3.2 *A subject or school-developed short course*

In addition to the approaches already outlined most participants felt that Ethical Education should also have a discrete curriculum space in the form of a subject or short course.

The main reasons emphasised included:

- Could 'flow under' if only an integrated approach was adopted
- Challenges to integration might weaken its implementation
- Ethical Education is important and should have a visible and valued space
- Aspects of Ethical Education may not be amenable to integration, for example, a study of ethics as a specific body of knowledge as well as development of skills in using ethical tools and vocabulary

TCN parents were more ambiguous about a course. It may be, that they were concerned that a course would be the only opportunity students would get to experience Ethical Education. They very strongly favoured an embedded and integrated approach.

Many participants did support the idea of a short course using the NCCA template. It was felt that short courses offered students more choice in what they could study. This view, also took account of the long lead in time for the development and recognition of new subjects by the DES. Whilst a question was raised about the status of short courses within the new Junior Cycle Student Award (JCSA), most participants did not think that this would be a problem.

Educate Together should take account of the following when considering the development of an Ethical Education short course.

- Use the NCCA template and draw on examples already developed
- Show how the course will link with the integrated approach discussed above
- Consider who will teach the course - which teachers are best qualified? This question could inform recruitment policy. This could include consideration of teachers with philosophy, sociology or politics in their primary degree, postgraduate qualifications and experience in teaching subjects with shared areas of interest as well as methodologies such as CSPE. Most participants suggested that Ethical Education should include, amongst other things, a study of different religions as well as secular belief systems. Based on this, some thought

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that qualified RE teachers could be considered to teach Ethical Education, but with some caveats, including the need to commit to deliver a course which includes secular beliefs in a balanced way with religious ones, as well as a balanced approach to world religions which does not prioritise any one in particular. Some participants highlighted that the allocation of experienced and committed teachers to an Ethical Education course will ensure a quality experience and outcomes for students and give a message as to the value placed on it within the school

- Identify what additional training and CPD teachers will need (see earlier on teacher CPD)
- Consider timetabling issues to ensure that the course is seen as valuable
- Develop a clear statement on the teaching, learning and assessment approaches to be used, again this will have implications for the recruitment of teachers with a commitment and experience in the approaches envisaged
- Ensure resources available (see above)
- Consider how the specification will be developed; most participants favoured an inclusive approach. The newness of the schools was seen as a great opportunity for innovative and inclusive school based curriculum development. The inclusion of students and parents was emphasised
- Consider how the specification can be delivered to a range of students taking into account different learning styles and capacities, including students studying Level 2 Priority Learning Units should this arise
- Take account of the needs of students with literacy and or numeracy difficulties as well as the requirements of the Literacy and Numeracy strategy
- Consider how the course will avoid overlap with RE, CSPE and SPHE

It will also be necessary to consider the degree of choice envisaged in the take up of the course. Many participants favoured that it should be optional as they felt it was important for students and parents to have a choice. In the case of an optional course, others emphasised that the Board and Principals will need to consider how the course will be promoted with students and parents to encourage take up. It also has implications for ensuring that the Ethical Education course is sufficiently different from other subjects and short courses and that it has a unique and distinctive aspect.

## 6.4 Teaching learning and assessment

### 6.4.1 Key Areas of Learning

These have been outlined at 5.1 above. See Chapter Four for a full list of the suggestions made by participants under the adapted UNESCO 4 Pillar Framework. These included a considerable emphasis on learning to do, to be, as well as learning to live together and to transform self and society. The development of the curriculum and associated syllabus should reflect this emphasis.

There was no consensus on how the key areas of learning should be organised. The four strands of the *Learn Together* Curriculum were put forward for consideration. Some favoured retaining them as is or with additions such as the concept of sustainability with environment or adaptations such as

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separating moral and spiritual into two separate strands. Many did not favour retaining the existing four strands.

Some felt that ethics was not fore-fronted enough (it is only included explicitly in the title of the Ethics and Environment strand). Others suggested using the values as the organising mechanism as in CSPE, or organise around the spiral of personal, family, community, national and international. Another participant suggested using the structure proposed in the Earth Charter.

Some participants took the opportunity to suggest that it was important to take an evaluative and reflective approach to the *Learn Together* Curriculum. It was suggested that a strong evidence base, both in terms of implementation and learning outcomes, was required before consideration is given to adaptation of *Learn Together* for second-level. It was also felt that the differences between the primary and second-level systems as well as the different stage of development of students, necessitated a fresh look. The overlap with Junior Cycle RE, CSPE and SPHE were noted. The overlap with RE was not an issue at primary level but will be in those second-level schools where the state RE syllabus will be offered. CSPE also was not an issue at primary level although SPHE was and the latter was noted by some of the primary teachers.

Therefore, this implies that there is a need to construct a programme for second-level that that is more distinctive, that forefronts ethics to a greater extent and that includes a far greater emphasis on secular world views. The inclusion of a strong focus on ethical perspectives on areas such as citizenship and wellbeing could also be considered.

It was also suggested that the programme should have a different name and that ethics should be part of this. In addition, within the current structure, students are asked to engage with the values of equality and human rights in the Social Justice Strand. It was suggested that they should be integrated across the strands also.

#### 6.4.2 *Teaching and learning approaches*

Students placed much more emphasis on how they learned compared to what they learned. Second-level students in particular were often dissatisfied with current approaches.

The key messages included:

- Involvement in decision-making about what they learn
- Learn how to learn and learn critical thinking skills
- Learn from their peers as well as from teachers
- Greater use of peer mentoring
- Express opinions on topics that may differ from those of the teacher
- Less emphasis and value placed on academic learning and more on applied learning and learning by doing
- More emphasis on creativity and creative subjects
- Greater and more creative use of technology
- More opportunities to 'go out' and learn
- Greater use of active and participative learning

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- More opportunities for physical activities
  - More group and individual projects
  - Use of individual learning plans
  - Mix students across ages based on interest and capacity

The primary school students emphasised many of these aspects also.

The Curriculum Framework should propose teaching and learning approaches that reflect these messages. It should also take account of students' emphasis on the learning experience. Recognise that learning has to be enjoyable and meaningful as well as useful. It should also allow time for reflection on learning, and move away from '35' minute classes with no space in between for reflection. An emphasis on active and participative learning is important but more radical shifts are required.

This approach could include:

- Sharing power between students and teachers -students as the subjects of their learning and not the objects of it
- Teachers as facilitators of learning
- Teachers as co-learners with students but also with other teachers
- Team teaching and cross-curricular approaches
- Change in classroom set up, for example, teachers not always at the top of the room, chairs in circles; student as teacher
- Greater range of types of learning spaces-different than classrooms, less structured that allow for more individual work and group work, creative work
- Greater use of the community as a learning space and resource
- Acceptance that students talking to each other does not mean they are not learning
- Opportunities for students to give feedback to teachers on the teaching and learning experience

Many adults in the research also emphasised these approaches to teaching and learning. They felt that these were vital for student learning and development as well as for a form of Ethical Education that was truly meaningful. Some also emphasised the challenges associated with a greater emphasis on these approaches. However, it was felt that many of these could be dealt with through recruitment, induction, CPD and support as well as appropriate resources. It was also emphasised that students need support to be able to participate fully in these different teaching and learning approaches. The supports provided need to ensure that a diversity of students are enabled to participate, including those with special learning needs.

The findings also indicate that schools need to offer other learning supports to students who need them. This was emphasised particularly by primary level students and to an even greater extent by those in the focus groups where TCN students were in the majority. In many cases, students emphasised English language supports but also referred to the need for support with Irish. Almost all the feedback sheets in these focus groups highlighted they wanted less Irish, which may be relate to difficulties being experienced in their learning of Irish. A small number suggested changing the approach to teaching Irish and referred to team teaching and the model used in Maths4fun.

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### 6.4.3 *Assessment*

Most people felt that school based assessment would best suit Ethical Education, with a few exceptions. The latter included those who did not favour an individual subject or course. Some suggested school wide assessment or evaluation to see the degree to which the programme is being implemented and what impacts it is having on students. These two approaches are not mutually exclusive. It was also suggested that the individual assessment should be based on ‘an assessment for learning’ approach. This is in line with an increasing acknowledgment of the value of this approach for student’s learning and development and it also coincides with the emphasis placed by students on wanting fewer examinations and more ongoing and interactive assessment. The implementation of this could draw on the guidelines and resources to support teachers, developed by the NCCA. The commitment and capacity of teachers to implement school-based assessment has implications again for recruitment and induction of teachers. It also has implications for teacher education, development and support.

The choice of assessment methods should reflect the approaches favoured by students as well as others in the research, including projects, portfolios, reflective journals, oral presentations, performance and the creative use of technology and social media. The approach to the use of projects needs to reflect the teaching and learning approaches proposed. Some of the second-level students referred to teachers reading about action projects ‘from the book’. Self-directed projects done on an individual or group basis and with support and guidance from teachers are more likely to be satisfying for students and result in more learning outcomes achieved. Projects linked to actions for social change drawing on the model adopted by Young Social Innovators would also be in line with the understanding of Ethical Education as education for transformation. Teachers and students could draw on resources developed for CSPE, the Young Social Innovators, The Earth Charter, as well as a wide range of organisations involved in education for social change and citizenship.

In addition, an assessment for learning approach could also include the suggestion made by second-level students that they be given the opportunity to give constructive feedback to teachers on their learning experiences, including feedback on the teaching and learning approaches, content and resources.

### 6.4.4 *Senior Cycle*

The main focus in the research was on Junior Cycle. Participants felt it was important to focus on this as the schools are just starting and are in the process of developing a whole Junior Cycle Programme. It was also suggested that it would be important to see how the proposed Junior Cycle Framework is implemented. However, a number did talk about Senior Cycle (SC). This mainly referred to concerns that the terminal exam orientation of the Senior Cycle could have negative knock back effects to Junior Cycle and potentially undermine the proposed reforms. Others had the opposite view and felt that the proposed changes at Junior Cycle could have a positive impact into Senior Cycle. They also felt that some of the innovation at Senior Cycle, like Project Maths, may result in shaping a change agenda at that level also.

A number did refer to the need for a Senior Cycle subject to be developed in which ethics would be embedded, for example, philosophy. It was indicated that some progress has been made in advocating for a subject and it was suggested that Educate Together should work with others to continue to advocate for this development.

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It was recently announced by the Minister for Education that the long awaited Politics and Society course will be implemented although it still lacks a clear implementation plan. [http://www.ncca.ie/en/file/post\\_primary/Politics-and-Society-Syllabus.pdf](http://www.ncca.ie/en/file/post_primary/Politics-and-Society-Syllabus.pdf)

This offers opportunities for Ethical Education. It will cover areas such as democracy, culture, conflict, globalisation, equality, human rights, diversity and sustainable development. The long lead in time for the development of a new subject is demonstrated by the Politics and Society course. Many organisations have been advocating specifically for the development of such a Senior Cycle course since at least 2000. [http://www.combatpoverty.ie/publications/submissions/2000\\_Sub\\_NCCA.pdf](http://www.combatpoverty.ie/publications/submissions/2000_Sub_NCCA.pdf)

The NCCA began work on developing a course in 2006, and a syllabus was adopted in 2011. Implementation was announced in 2014 but the lack of an implementation plan has raised concerns. Educate Together with others should advocate for an implementation plan.

As with Junior Cycle, a Senior Cycle Religious Education examinable course is also available. It is likely that the new school, in which an ETB is the patron, and Educate Together is the partner, will offer this course as an optional subject. The difficulties already highlighted in relation to the Junior Cycle Syllabus also apply here. Discussions will be necessary with the partners to see how these can be addressed.

The NCCA is also developing short courses for Senior Cycle. The Psychology course has particular relevance for Ethical Education:

[http://www.ncca.ie/en/Consultations/Short\\_Courses/Short\\_Courses.html](http://www.ncca.ie/en/Consultations/Short_Courses/Short_Courses.html)

This development of short courses may be worth exploring in relation to Ethical Education although more information is needed on their status within the Established Leaving Certificate and how implementation has proceeded with those already developed.

The Leaving Certificate Applied Programme already includes modules relevant to Ethical Education including six mandatory modules on social education. [http://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/d9cc0686-b0d2-402a-9573-a3bd3977b00f/SCSEC\\_Leaving\\_Cert\\_Applied\\_programme\\_english\\_1.pdf](http://www.curriculumonline.ie/getmedia/d9cc0686-b0d2-402a-9573-a3bd3977b00f/SCSEC_Leaving_Cert_Applied_programme_english_1.pdf)

Transition Year offers great opportunities for Ethical Education and work could begin on developing an Ethical Education module using the NCCA template. It would also be worth reviewing the potential of those already developed. [http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum\\_and\\_Assessment/Post-Primary\\_Education/Senior\\_Cycle/Transition\\_Year/Transition\\_Units/Sample\\_Transition\\_Units.html](http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Post-Primary_Education/Senior_Cycle/Transition_Year/Transition_Units/Sample_Transition_Units.html)

## 6.5 Conclusion

Participants in the research process had a great sense of excitement and opportunity around the establishment of the new second-level schools. Participants wanted Educate Together and its partners to seize the opportunity to do things differently at second-level. Most wanted Educate Together to build on its approach at primary-level in its provision of an inclusive, multi-denominational and intercultural education. They emphasised the crucial role of the principals and teachers in ensuring the schools are inclusive and embracing of diversity as well as having a lived ethos that models and supports Ethical Education.

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They also recognised that the schools will need considerable support in the development and implementation of an Ethical Education Curriculum. They saw an important role for Educate Together in the provision of these supports, with others.

They also emphasised the challenges facing the development and implementation of an Ethical Education Curriculum in the context of the second-level system but felt with planning and supports this can be overcome. They also suggested that a unique set of challenges may face the new schools with more complex patronage systems, suggestions on how to meet these have outlined.

Considerable efforts were made to make the consultation process as inclusive as possible. The strong emphasis on the inclusion of students and parents demonstrates Educate Together's commitment to truly inclusive schools. This also added a great richness to the process and to the findings. All those who participated said that they appreciated the opportunity to be involved. None the less it is important to note that a small number of gaps occurred, particularly in relation to the full range of diversities. The two groups most visibly under-represented in their own right were Travellers and people with disabilities<sup>15</sup>. With regard to the latter group, a number of people did highlight the need to ensure that the Ethical Education Curriculum Framework and the schools were fully inclusive of students with disabilities. Implicitly, the focus on inclusion of cultural diversity should include Travellers but it is important that this is explicit. Also, the specific challenges facing Traveller children in participating in education did not come to fore. It is important when considering the findings that these gaps are kept in mind and also in the development of the Ethical Education Curriculum Framework.

Finally, consideration could be given to extending the steering group, which will progress development of the Ethical Education Curriculum Framework to include a range of diversities, as well as representatives of the ETB partners in the new schools.

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<sup>15</sup> It is not possible to know to what extent parents from economically disadvantaged backgrounds were represented in the focus groups.

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## 7 Emerging Ethical Education Curriculum Framework for Second-Level



### Introduction

This is an initial as opposed to a definitive framework. It is hoped that it will inform Educate Together's development of the final framework. It is envisaged that the formulation of the final framework by Educate Together will take account of the overall research findings. It is also envisaged that it will draw on Educate Together's previous work and research to inform developments at second-level particularly *Taking the Next Step - A Blueprint for Educate Together Second-Level Schools* (2009) as well as *Piloting Integration at Educate Together's Second-level Easter Camps: Student Perspectives* (2013).

This development can also be informed by Educate Together's extensive experience of Ethical Education at primary level, including taking account of the challenges identified in the evaluation of the Learn Together and referred to in the Literature Review in this Report.

The focus here is on Junior Cycle although aspects of what is included could also inform developments for Senior Cycle.

### 7.1 Definition(s) of ethical education

The consultative research did not ask participants to give a definitive definition of Ethical Education; rather it tried to get a sense of their understanding of this area of education.

As outlined in Chapters 4 and 5, some very strong themes emerged. In addition, a number of participants suggested that Ethical Education should be distinctive and autonomous and not a secular version of religious education.

This is in line with Educate Together's approach as outlined in the literature review.

**What marks out the approach of Educate Together has been its attempt to define an autonomous domain of 'Ethical Education', which sees itself as clearly distinct from any conception of a 'confessional' faith-based moral education.**

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It is also argued in the literature review that this is in line with international perspectives and approaches to religious and ethical education. Educate Together adopts such an approach in *Learn Together* at primary level. This encourages learning about and respect for different religious, cultural and secular beliefs. It was found that there is less focus on the latter in practice. This approach to religions and cultures was the aspect most mentioned and liked by parents and students, particularly parents and students with TCN backgrounds.

However, this is just one aspect of the Learn Together curriculum. The Curriculum document emphasises that it is about the ethical, moral, spiritual and social development of students. (*Learn Together*, 2004).

### **Defining ethical education and theoretical underpinnings**

It was agreed that a clear definition of Educate Together's understanding of Ethical Education in the context of second-level is needed and should be included in the Curriculum Framework. It was also stated that the theoretical approaches proposed to underpin this definition and the curriculum should be outlined. Some suggested that this should include a strong focus on philosophical theory and theorists. It was also suggested that the theorists should include those concerned with stages of ethical development, such as Kohlberg and Gilligan. It was also proposed that it take account of 'radical' and 'critical' theorists such as Marx and Foucault.

The need for this definition is also emphasised in the literature review Chapter.

**Again, it might be said, in brief, that there are many different approaches to ethical education to choose from, as distinct or as used in overlapping ways in an Ethical Education curriculum. For example, one can refer to 'character education' (associated with Aristotle's ethics), 'child-centred liberal education' (Kantian models), 'education for care' (Gilligan and Noddings) and more critique based radical approaches (Marx, Foucault etc) [Noddings and Slote 2003; Freire 1992; Irwin 2012b].**

The need for clarification of theory and its application at school level is also emphasised in the literature review.

**Significantly more work needs to be done in this area of theoretical approaches to Ethical Education and Learn Together, both at theory level but also in terms of the application of this theory by schools on the ground (the research points to significant differences in interpretation here and some confusion) [McNamara, G., Mulcahy, C. and O'Hara 2012].**

Both the literature review and the consultative research concur on the need for a greater emphasis on philosophy and critical thinking.

In addition, whilst not as strong a theme in the research, some participants did emphasise the importance of ensuring that gender equality and feminist perspectives should inform the development of the curriculum. Some female students noted aspects of school life that they felt were not fair from a gender equality perspective, for example, use of schoolyard and access to sporting opportunities.

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Feminist literature, for example, Butler on identity (in 'Feminist Contentions', 1995), Cornell on ethical feminism (in 'Feminist Contentions', 1995), Daly -eco-feminism ('Gyn/Ecology' 1984) and Dinnerstein (in 'Healing the Wounds', 1989), Gilligan-ethics of care (Mapping the Moral Domain, 1996), hooks - race and multiculturalism, (Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Practice (1991) and Okin (Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women? 1999), Mitchell -psychoanalysis (Psychoanalysis and Feminism, 1974) and Young on citizenship (in Feminism and Politics 2004) amongst many others, could inform the theoretical approaches adopted by Educate Together to ethical education.

### **Scope of ethical education**

The scope of ethical education also needs to be specified. Most people in the research saw it relating to areas such as values formation, morality, ethics, religious and secular beliefs, spirituality, cultures, environmental sustainability and active citizenship with local national and global dimensions. A number also linked it to personal well-being. These reflect many of the areas that *Learn Together* encompasses. It was felt that ethics should be more fore-fronted in the second-level programme as should secular belief systems. It was also emphasised that the environmental focus should stress environmental sustainability and link to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)

There was also strong support for the idea that Ethical Education be integrated in many subject areas as well as in a range of school and after school activities. Above all, it was seen as being embedded and manifest in the school ethos, which should be respectful and inclusive and promote diversity, equality and human rights. These values as well as being embedded in the ethos should also be embedded across the Ethical Education curriculum.

For the purpose of curriculum planning, guidance is needed on how the distinctive aspects of Ethical Education can be brought to bear on other parts of the curriculum as well as on the ethos.

## **7.2 Values to underpin the curriculum and the development of a 'lived' ethos**

It is proposed that the current five values outlined in the Values Statement be retained. These are: Respect, Equality, Diversity, Community and Democracy.

The following is also proposed:

- Add care and solidarity to respect (see Lynch's discussion here [http://www.wide-network.ch/pdf/presentations\\_JaKo/Lynch.pdf](http://www.wide-network.ch/pdf/presentations_JaKo/Lynch.pdf))
- Expand the current explanations associated with Values in the Statement – see below for suggestions
- Add human rights and inclusion to the list of core values

Possible expansions:

**Equality** - frame equality within an equality framework which emphasises more than equality of opportunity or access, for example, the framework developed by Baker and others and adopted by the National Economic and Social Forum (2001). This emphasises equality of participation, outcomes and condition. These will have implications for school policy and practice, for example, the first two will flag the need to adopt approaches and provide supports to contribute to greater equality of

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participation and outcomes for those affected by pre-existing inequalities. Baker, Lynch et al (2004) also emphasise the importance of a recognition of equality of condition. This recognises the deep-rooted nature of inequalities related to social class as well as to race and ethnicity and which result in certain groups of students also experiencing deeply unequal educational outcomes

Many of the causes of this inequality lie outside any individual school and need to be addressed through economic and social policy as well as national education policy. However, it also flags the need to ensure that school policies make efforts to address aspects of this also. They can do this through an inclusive admissions policy, avoidance of ability groupings and through curriculum design and planning which is not biased towards one type of learning and a narrow range of intelligences.

Also, acknowledge the nine grounds embodied in current equality legislation and add inequality based on social class. The naming of the nine grounds will facilitate an emphasis on Travellers as a specific ethnic group who experience considerable inequality within the education system.

**Community** - community is a contested concept and not all communities are benign. Many can be deeply unequal and or paternalistic or authoritarian. Draw on the concept of community development to frame this concept in the values statement. This emphasises empowerment, participation and collective decision-making.

<http://www.cwc.ie/resources/community-development/>

**Diversity** - expand to include other diversities including gender, sexual orientation, students with special needs, people with physical and intellectual disabilities and so on.

**Democracy** – expand and include an emphasis on active citizenship and how this could be developed through the implementation of the democracy value within the school. Also, add some specifics on how the democratic value would be evident within the school particularly for students and parents.

Further development of the values statement:

Consider how the concept of fairness with which many students relate, could be incorporated in the values statement

Consider (with partners and co-patrons where this applies) how the reworked values statement can be a living document in the establishment of the new schools. In addition, how students and parents in particular can be supported to engage and input into the formulation of the values statement at school level. This will have implications for the use of accessible language perhaps through the use of plain English [www.simplyput.ie](http://www.simplyput.ie).

### 7.3 Rationale

The final rationale should emphasise the importance of Ethical Education to (the):

- Holistic development of students ethically and morally, spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, socially and culturally. Spiritually is understood here in its broadest sense as a search for meaning not necessarily linked to a religious belief system although not precluding this. This broader understanding of spirituality is important to support students who may no longer be

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coming from or interested in a search for meaning in a religious context. The emphasis on a holistic approach is particularly important at second-level with its subject orientation.

- Challenge the predominant influence of global capitalism and consumerism as well as concern for self over concern for others. Linked to this is the associated challenge to values such as solidarity, equality and human rights. This gives rise to the need to provide opportunities to students to develop an ethical understanding as well as ethical language and skills, which can inform and shape decision-making, behaviours and actions.
- Ensure that students can be part of and contribute to building respectful, caring inclusive and equal communities and society based on human rights (in the national context of growing diversities, including religious, cultural and ethnic diversity)
- Promote global environmental sustainability by embedding education for sustainable development
- Overcome sense of fatalism and support young people to become ethically oriented active citizens concerned with and equipped to act to contribute to local, national and global justice
- Promote the potential of education as a transformative process at personal, societal and global levels and offer a counter balance to increasing emphasis in national and international policy on education as education for the labour market and to meet the needs of the national and global economy
- Promote the development of a range of skills attitudes and behaviours which contribute to development of young people as self directed learners as well as having transferability to other parts of the curriculum
- Contribute to the achievement of many statements of learning within the proposed Junior Cycle Framework

## 7.4 Aim and Learning Outcomes

### Aim

The Ethical Education Curriculum aims to develop students as ethically orientated, critically engaged and reflective young people committed to human rights and the achievement of respectful, inclusive, equal and sustainable communities, societies and world.

### Learning Outcomes

To develop:

- An understanding of ethical theories, language and tools (drawing on philosophy)
- An understanding of culture, cultural identity and interculturalism
- An understanding and respect for a range of belief systems both religious and secular
- An understanding and respect for the breadth of diversities which exist in own community, the wider society and world
- An understanding and commitment to environmental sustainability which draws on Education for Sustainable Development and the Earth Charter
- An understanding and commitment to human rights and equality as overarching principles

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- A sense of care for others and a respect for and a valuing of diversity in all areas of human life within the parameters of human rights principles<sup>16</sup>
  - A capacity to think independently and critically and apply this in all spheres of learning and life
  - A capacity to make decisions and take action based on a reflective ethical or moral framework
  - A commitment and capacity to act as ethical global citizens

## 7.5 Possible Key Strands

It is suggested that an ethical approach is embedded in each strand and that human rights is interweaved through them. The following are suggestions for the focus in the strands, not strand titles.

- Thinking and Acting Ethically - Ethical Theories and Tools
- Belief systems - Religious and Secular
- Diversity including Interculturalism
- Environmental Sustainability
- Ethical Global Citizenship

## 7.6 Emerging learning outcomes

It is not desirable at this point to nominate definitive learning outcomes. (See Appendix 7 for a set of emerging learning outcomes associated with each strand proposed above). Final learning outcomes need to be developed when other parts of the framework have been decided. The understanding and knowledge outcomes will link to the core aspects of the Ethical Education curriculum and relate to areas such as ethics, belief systems, diversity, interculturalism, environmental sustainability and global citizenship.

It would be useful to link the skills related learning outcomes to those specified in the proposed Junior Cycle Framework. These skills are categorised as follows: Managing myself; Staying well; Communication; Being creative; Working with others and Managing information and thinking. [http://www.juniorcycle.ie/NCCA\\_JuniorCycle/media/NCCA/Documents/Key/Key-Skills-Overview-Feb-2013.pdf](http://www.juniorcycle.ie/NCCA_JuniorCycle/media/NCCA/Documents/Key/Key-Skills-Overview-Feb-2013.pdf)

All of these are relevant to Ethical Education and could be specified as overarching core skills that span all strands. These can be supplemented with more specific skills related to the Aim and broad Learning Outcomes of Ethical Education. These could include those of particular relevance to the development of students as ethical, engaged and reflective individuals and citizens. A particular emphasis could be placed on developing critical thinking and analytic skills, as this was fore-fronted throughout the research. Others could include those related to communications, conflict resolution, and ethical decision-making, taking account of motivations and consequences of actions. Emphasis

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<sup>16</sup> This is included as a learning objective in SC Politics and Society

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could also be placed on skills of active global citizenship including analytical, planning, and evaluative skills.

Learning outcomes related to attitudinal and dispositional development could place particular emphasis on the development of self confidence, self belief and self awareness, respectful relationships, care for self and others, appreciation of diversity, commitment to environment sustainability, commitment to equal and inclusive communities and world.

## **7.7 Teaching, learning and assessment approaches**

The approach proposed to teaching and learning has been outlined under 5.4.2 and is copied here. This takes account of the key messages heard during the consultation phase particularly from students. The proposals for a teaching and learning approach flowed from these messages.

### *7.7.1 Teaching and learning approaches*

Students placed much more emphasis on how they learned compared to what they learned. Second-level students in particular were often dissatisfied with current approaches.

The key messages included:

- Involvement in decision-making about what they learn
- Learn how to learn and learn critical thinking skills
- Learn from their peers as well as from teachers
- Greater use of peer mentoring
- Express opinions on topics that may differ from those of the teacher
- Less emphasis and value placed on academic learning and more on applied learning and learning by doing
- More emphasis on creativity and creative subjects
- Greater and more creative use of technology
- More opportunities to 'go out' and learn
- Greater use of active and participative learning
- More opportunities for physical activities
- More group and individual projects
- Use of individualised learning plans
- Mix students across ages based on interest and capacity

The primary school students emphasised many of these aspects also.

The final Ethical Education Curriculum Framework should propose teaching and learning approaches that reflect these messages. It should also take account of students' emphasis on the learning experience. Recognise that learning has to be enjoyable and meaningful as well as useful. It should also allow time for reflection on learning, and move away from '35' minute classes with no space in

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between for reflection. An emphasis on active and participative learning is important but more radical shifts are required.

This approach could include:

- Sharing power between students and teachers - students as the subjects of their learning and not the objects of it
- Teachers as facilitators of learning
- Teachers as co-learners with students but also with other teachers
- Team teaching and cross-curricular approaches
- Change in classroom set up, for example, teachers not always at the top of the room, chairs in circles; student as teacher
- Greater range of types of learning spaces-different than classrooms, less structured that allow for more individual work and group work, creative work
- Greater use of the community as a learning space and resource
- Acceptance that students talking to each other does not mean they are not learning
- Opportunities for students to give feedback to teachers on the teaching and learning experience

Many adults in the research also emphasised these approaches to teaching and learning. They felt that these were vital for student learning and development as well as for a form of Ethical Education that was truly meaningful. Some also emphasised the challenges associated with a greater emphasis on these approaches. However, it was felt that many of these could be dealt with through recruitment, induction, CPD and support as well as appropriate resources. It was also emphasised that students need support to be able to participate fully in these different teaching and learning approaches. The supports provided need to ensure that a diversity of students can be enabled to participate, including those with special learning needs.

The findings also indicate that schools need to offer other learning supports to students who need them. This was emphasised particularly by primary level students and to an even greater extent by those in the focus groups where TCN students were in the majority. In many cases, students emphasised English language supports but also referred to the need for support with Irish. Almost all the feedback sheets in these focus groups highlighted that they wanted less Irish, which may relate to difficulties being experienced with learning Irish. A small number suggested changing the approach to teaching Irish and referred to team teaching and the model used in Maths4fun.

### *7.7.2 Assessment and evaluation*

#### **Student assessment**

The key messages from students and others in the research, as well as the current literature relating to assessment approaches [http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum\\_and\\_Assessment/Post-Primary\\_Education/Junior\\_Cycle/Assessment\\_for\\_Learning\\_AfL/](http://www.ncca.ie/en/Curriculum_and_Assessment/Post-Primary_Education/Junior_Cycle/Assessment_for_Learning_AfL/)

would indicate that an ‘assessment for learning’ approach would best suit Ethical Education. This could include ongoing school-based assessment using a range of assessment methods. It also

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indicates a minimal use of end of year and terminal examinations. If a short course based on the NCCA template is introduced, such a short course can be included as part of the Junior Cycle Student Award. It is understood that the latter approach has to be contextualised within current discussions between the Education partners, as the current situation of non-co-operation with the Junior Cycle Framework.

Students wanted ongoing feedback on their learning generally, not necessarily only specifically related to Ethical Education to facilitate their learning and development. They also wanted to be able to give constructive feedback to teachers. This would indicate that some form of assessment is required so that students can capture and reflect on their learning as well as input into shaping the content, methods and teaching approach through provision of constructive feedback to teachers. This would be desirable, regardless of the ultimate approach adopted to the teaching of Ethical Education, that is, as lived ethos, integration across the curriculum and /or as a short course.

Whilst it is suggested above that learning outcomes related to knowledge-understanding, skills and attitudes and behaviours be developed for each overarching statement of learning, it would also be useful to include learning outcomes that relate to the additional pillars of the UNESCO approach as outlined in Chapter 4. This would facilitate assessment of the above three aspects which are linked 'to learn to know', 'to do', 'to be' pillars but also allow for assessment of 'learning to live with others' and to transform self and society.

Given the holistic nature of student learning and development as well as the envisaged all embracing nature of Ethical Education it will be challenging to distinguish between what is learned specifically from the Ethical Education Curriculum and what is learned from other aspects of the taught and lived curriculum. This would indicate that as well as capturing what has been learned it will be important to support students to reflect on and capture how they have learned these things. This will assist in knowing what is most effective in contributing to the ethical development of students.

### **Whole school review and evaluation**

It is also suggested that internal whole school reviews should take place to assess the degree to which the Ethical Education Curriculum is being implemented and in what ways. This would also include an assessment of impacts on students learning and development as well as on whole school development.

It will be necessary for Educate Together, in consultation with school level stakeholders, to draw up performance indicators against which schools can measure progress. As the approach envisaged by Educate Together is one that is based on a lived ethos as well as other routes, such as integration and possibly a short course, the performance indicators will need to capture this breadth of approach.

The areas to be reviewed could include (these are indicative and not exhaustive of all possibilities, with most relating to areas highlighted in the research as being integral to the implementation of a school wide Ethical Education Curriculum):

- Student recruitment – does it reflect a full range of diversities and what efforts were used to ensure this?
- School atmosphere—is it positive, welcoming, respectful, inclusive and transparent?

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- Relationships within the school community – particularly (although not exclusively) between students and teachers, between students and between management- staff and parents - are they respectful, caring and open?
  - Implementation and ongoing review of anti-bullying policy
  - recruitment, allocation and support of teachers particularly related to Ethical Education - do these include sufficient levels of experience, commitment and capacity?
  - Supports for students to ensure all can fully participate and develop, taking particular account of those with specific learning needs including learning difficulties, language needs, literacy and numeracy difficulties and behavioural support needs. This could also include an assessment of how fully the diversity of students can participate in specific areas of the Ethical Education Curriculum
  - Teaching and learning approaches, looking at how well these facilitate a diversity of students' learning and development? To what extent do they reflect the approaches recommended by students and included in the Ethical Education Curriculum framework?
  - Scope and balance in the overall curriculum - does this reflect sufficient focus on those areas particularly emphasised by students in this research - in creative areas physical education and sports as well as opportunities for external engagement
  - Mechanisms to facilitate diverse, inclusive and meaningful student and parent input into school and curriculum development- what are they and how effectively are they working?
  - School contribution to environmental sustainability both in terms of the operation of the school as well as student engagement in this area
  - Levels of learning outcomes for students across the spectrum of potential learning outcomes as outlined in the final Ethical Education Curriculum Framework

The identification of areas for review could also draw on the DES Whole School Evaluation Guidelines: [http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/insp\\_wse\\_pprimary\\_guide\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/insp_wse_pprimary_guide_pdf.pdf)

### **Formative Evaluation**

In addition to internal review processes (which are envisaged as periodic and ongoing at school level) it is also recommended that a formative external evaluation be put in place. The development of the Ethical Education Curriculum and its implementation in the three schools offers great opportunities for learning. The inclusion of the three schools in the evaluation will facilitate the capture of learning regarding the Ethical Education Curriculum in the context of three different patronage models. This will offer rich insights, which can help shape further development of the Ethical Education Curriculum Framework.

The key stakeholders in the three schools, especially the Boards and Principals should be involved in discussing and shaping the proposed evaluation. This would include refining the purpose and aims of the evaluation, the evaluation structure and approach, the scope of the evaluation, key evaluation questions, key stakeholders for the purpose of the evaluation, data collection methods and the overall timeframe and key stages. It is suggested that the formative evaluation should cover the three years of the Junior Cycle.

The identification of performance indicators for the evaluation as well as the internal reviews could form part of the tasks of the formative evaluation. These would also include periodic review sessions

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and processes with subsequent feedback from the evaluator. These can help shape the implementation and ongoing development of the Ethical Education Curriculum in an ongoing and formative way.

The evaluation would also capture feedback on the Ethical Education Curriculum Framework itself as well as on the adequacy and effectiveness of supports and resources provided by Educate Together and others to support the implementation of the Ethical Education Curriculum. It would also capture educational and other national policy implications relevant to the implementation of Ethical Education.

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## Appendix 1



### Recruitment of parents and students to focus groups in original research stage

“We want to achieve balance and diversity in the workshops in terms of gender, socio-economic background, ethnicity, race, disability and religion. We also have a key requirement to include students who are 'third country nationals' from outside the EU. This relates to our funding from the European Integration Fund (EIF).”

- 6<sup>th</sup> Class pupils in each area who had submitted applications and were included on the enrolment lists for each of the new second-level schools that Educate Together is involved in as patron, co-patron or partner (Kishoge Community College, Hansfield Educate Together Secondary School and Ballymakenny College)
- Letter invitations and accompanying info and reply slip were posted to approx 30 parents in December 2013.
- Aim was to invite pupils and their parents to participate in both focus groups (parents and pupils on same day)
- 30 letters were posted in first round in each area in to get enough positive responses for a focus group.
- Pupils were selected on the basis of including the full range of local primary schools in an area, both Educate Together NS and local denominational schools
- Balance of girls and boys (50/50).
- Where children identified on the form as being TCN (from outside the EU) they were specifically included.
- Following these letter invitations addressed to parents, a small number of reply slips were received in early January 2014.
- A second round of engagement was undertaken early Jan via the schools
- Contact was made with local Educate Together school principals in order to engage more directly with families.
- Contact was also made with selected ETNS Parents Associations in each local area to engage parents.
- Additional letter invitations (approx. 20 per school), written in plainer English, were posted to parents c/o individual ETNS schools in the local areas.
- Key difference in this second round of letters was to allow for additional parents to

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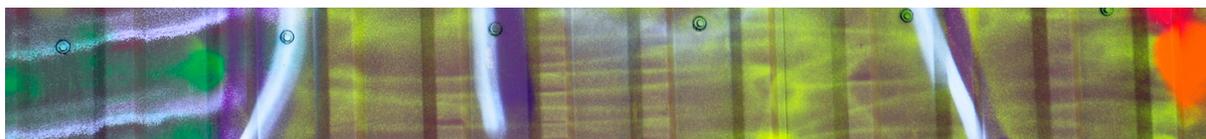
participate in the parent focus groups – including those who may have had younger children, and who did not necessarily have 6<sup>th</sup> Class pupils going to the new second-level school.

- School principals/class teachers also distributed letters to 6<sup>th</sup> Class pupils.
- The aim was to achieve a good mix of pupils from both Educate Together schools as well as other denominational schools.

Summary prepared by second-level Education Officer – Educate Together

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## Appendix 2

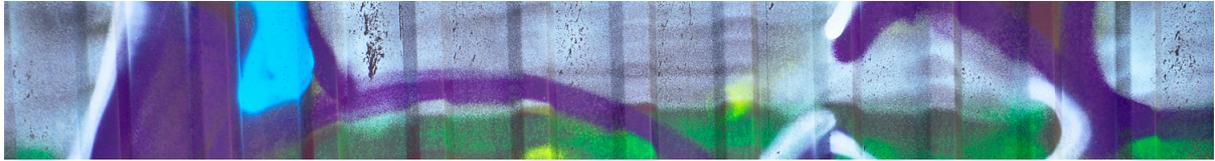


### List of organisations represented at focus group

Atheist Ireland X 2  
Concern Worldwide x 2  
Green Schools  
Humanist Association  
IDEA (Irish Development Education Association)  
Irish Humans Rights Commission  
NWCi - the Y Factor (National Women's Council of Ireland)  
Society of Saint Vincent de Paul  
Trocaire  
Ubuntu  
Young Social Innovators

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## Appendix 3



### List of organisations from which representatives were interviewed

Association of Secondary Teachers, Ireland (ASTI)

Church of Ireland Education Department (This interview was somewhat more 'informal' and arose out of contact being made to request attendance at a focus group, agreement was obtained to include the ideas shared in the report)

Dublin –Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (ETB)

Louth - Meath Education and Training Board (ETB)

Mater Dei Institute of Education

National Council of Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)

Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST)

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## Appendix 4



### Details on Recruitment Process for Case Study Focus Groups

For the Case Study the approach was more focused on engaging with TCN participants.

- Drawing on the advice of the Steering Committee, it was decided to hold additional focus groups, directly targeting TCN pupils and families.
- It was agreed to approach only Educate Together schools, as we would be able to engage more directly with them via school principals.
- Principals of a number of schools were contacted by email and phone and we explained to them that we wanted to hold further focus groups to ensure that the voices of TCN parents and students would be heard in the research, a key requirement of our EIF funding.
- Only 1 ETNS school per area was chosen – each had identified their school as being willing to participate in this further round of focus groups and also had significant numbers of TCN background families.
- Letters were again drafted and selected ETNS principals in each of the 3 local areas were asked to distribute them to 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Class pupils in their school.
- We explained that these new focus groups would take place during the school day, and we specifically requested that pupils from TCN backgrounds should be invited
- Parental consent forms were enclosed with letters of invitation.
- We also stated that a maximum of 15 pupils per focus group would be allowed.
- We agreed dates and times for the 2 focus groups to take place at each of the 3 schools, each group to take an hour plus 5 – 10 minutes settling time.

### Parents Focus Group – Case Study

- Following advice from the Steering Group, an email was sent to a community development worker in one of the local areas in an attempt to engage with TCN parents, however no reply was received.
- Decision was then taken to undertake a parents focus group in another of the 3 areas, this area was chosen because of willingness from the local ETNS school principal to engage with the process and make the school available in the evening, as well as good knowledge from national office staff of some of the parents in this school community.

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- A meeting took place between national office staff (Education Officer) and school principal and a list of potential parents drawn up, chosen on the basis of their being TCN parents, a mix of male/female, and with likelihood of evening availability.
  - 20 letter invitations were drafted and delivered by hand by national office staff as well as via the school principal/class teacher, and RSVPs were received in advance of the focus group.

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## Appendix 5



### Educate Together Draft Values Statement for Second-level Schools



#### DRAFT Values Statement for Educate Together Second-level Schools

This is a 'banner' statement of Values for Educate Together second-level. Each school community, once established, will develop their own values statement.

This values statement draws from different pieces of research undertaken with working groups, start-up groups, parents, national office staff and Educate Together students, including:

- Include Ed research
- Results of the Values workshops run at a working groups' meeting Sept 2011 including start-up group members and working groups
- Results of Values workshops with parents' groups as well as National Office staff
- Second-level National Forum 2013 participants
- Student Voices research

#### Rationale

The Educate Together Charter of 1990 'affirms that children of all social, cultural, religious and non-religious backgrounds have a right to an education that reflects their individual identity whilst

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exploring the different values and traditions of the world in which they live.’ (Learn Together Curriculum, 2004) p.9

The Blueprint for Educate Together Second-level (2009) brings the mission, values and commitments of Educate Together, as laid down in its Charter, into the context of second-level education. The core principles of Educate Together - that schools are multi-denominational, co-educational, child-centred and democratically run – underpin and guide education policy in all Educate Together schools, including at second-level.

Accordingly, Educate Together second-level schools are: learner-centred, co-educational, multi-denominational and democratically run, with values of Respect, Equality, Democracy, Diversity and Community guiding all decisions.

These values are made explicit and are truly ‘lived’ in the school context.

Management is democratic, relationships are respectful and the school community works hard to ensure that everyone feels included and enabled to reach their full academic and social potential.

The value of **Respect** is shown through the establishment of an explicit culture of respect that nurtures positive relationships between all members of the school community.

The **Equality** value is shown through learners having equal rights of access to the school, and that learners from all social, cultural and religious and non-religious backgrounds are equally respected.

The **Diversity** value celebrates the unique religious, cultural and ethnic identities of everyone in the school, while also striving to achieve shared values so that everyone has a sense of belonging to the school community.

The **Community** value is expressed by the school community being actively involved in and at the heart of its local community.

The **Democracy** value is expressed through the decision-making policies and practices at the school, which are carried out in a participatory, inclusive and democratic way.

The school does more than promote equality and inclusion: learners and teachers engage critically with difference, and analyse and challenge inequality.

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## Appendix 6



### **Junior Cycle Framework Statements of Learning identified by participants as being particularly relevant to Ethical Education**

‘Offers huge possibilities including the development of short courses’

Many of the 24 learning statements relate to ethical education; 5-14 are the most relevant, within these there are two groups.

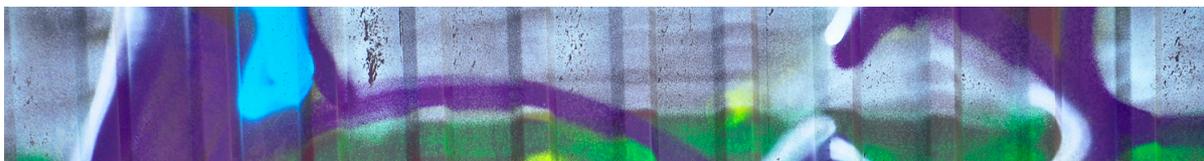
5, 6, 7, 10 and 11 are most relevant to a distinctive ethics subject

8, 9, 12, 13 and 14 offer great opportunities for integration with other subjects.

Others also mentioned 20, 21, and 22

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## Appendix 7 - Emerging Learning Outcomes



The following are presented as tentative and emerging learning outcomes associated with each proposed strand. They may be helpful in informing discussions by the Steering Group when further developing the Curriculum Framework.

### Thinking and Acting Ethically - Ethical theories and tools

Students will be able to:

Explain the terms- ethics, ethical thinking and ethical decision-making
Explain why considering ethics and ethical approaches is important to themselves and others on a daily basis
Compare different ethical frameworks and approaches, for example, utilitarian, rights, justice and common good approaches and point out strengths and weaknesses of each
Apply these frameworks to everyday situations, for example, making decisions about- what food to eat, how to act if witness someone being bullied, how to treat people with different opinions and beliefs
Describe which framework(s) student finds most useful and why
Discuss and resolve ethical dilemmas
Give examples of the importance of thinking and acting ethically in the following contexts: school, at home, the local community, in Ireland generally and in the wider world
Investigate specific issues from a rights based ethical approach, for example, homelessness, poverty, racism, equality between women and men, same sex marriage, global hunger, climate change, consumerism, use of internet and so on (issues named here are simply indicative not exhaustive of possibilities)
Make a connection between ethics, respect and care for self and others
Design and carry out an action with others which demonstrates a rights-based ethical approach
Demonstrate respect and care for people who come from different ethical perspectives

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## Belief systems - Religious and Secular

Students will be able to:

Explain what role belief systems play in everyday life
Analyse how belief systems are formed including the role of the family, schools, institutions such as churches and secular organisations, business corporations and media
Give examples of the influence of belief system(s) on own thinking and behaviour
Discuss major world religions and associated belief systems
Discuss secular belief systems such as atheism and humanism
Discuss other historical and contemporary religions and belief systems, for example, Celtic world view, world views of indigenous peoples from around the world
Explain the different basis for religious and secular belief systems
Identify the influence of belief systems on day-to-day life, for example, who we believe we are, what we eat, clothes we wear, how girls and boys are expected to behave, how we celebrate significant events
Identify similarities and differences between belief systems
Critically reflect on belief systems in terms of how they promote human rights and justice
Investigate the lives and thinking of inspirational people in terms of positive social change from both religious and secular contexts
Demonstrate respect and care for people who have different belief systems whether religious and or secular
Challenge in a constructive way disrespect, prejudice and discrimination based on a person's belief system within the parameters of human rights principles

## Diversity including Interculturalism

Students will be able to:

Explain the concept of diversity with reference to a broad range of diversities including those based on social class, gender, nationality, ethnicity, religion, disabilities, sexual orientation, age, family and marital status
Identify the range of diversities reflected in school, family and community
Explain how their own identity is shaped through membership of a specific group(s) for example a social class, gender ethnicity, religion and so on
Critically reflect on how specific diversities may influence their own and others life chances
Demonstrate an understanding that we all belong to a culture and how this shapes our identity
Investigate differences within cultures, for example, how female and male identities can be different within the same culture

Investigate similarities and differences between cultures for example how children and young people are understood and expected to behave
Show how people from different cultures learn from each other
Challenge stereotyping of people based on their membership of a specific group
Make a connection between diversity and human rights and equality
Design and carry out an action which promotes equality and human rights for a specific group (local and or global)
Demonstrate respect for and celebration of diversity
Show empathy for those who experience inequality because they are members of a specific group, for example, Travellers, people with disabilities, people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, people affected by poverty in Ireland and in countries of the South

## Environmental Sustainability

Students will be able to:

<p>Explain the Earth Charter and its four core principles in an age appropriate way</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect and Care</li> <li>• Ecological integrity</li> <li>• Social and Economic Justice</li> <li>• Democracy, non-violence and peace</li> </ul>
<p>Make connections between the Earth Charter and everyday life, for example, how we treat each other, how we show care for the environment and ecological integrity such as biodiversity, how we use and share the earths' resources with all species as well as with all peoples now and in the future, how war and conflict endangers the planet</p>
<p>Make the connection between the Earth Charter, a sustainable environment and an ethical way of living</p>
<p>Explain the concept of interdependence of all life on the planet</p>
<p>Show appreciation for the beauty and diversity of the planet</p>
<p>Demonstrate how members of the school community as well as the local community can contribute to a sustainable environment and ecological integrity</p>
<p>Investigate how Ireland as a society contributes to and or hinders a sustainable environment and the achievement of the Earth Charter</p>
<p>Critically reflect on the connection between environmental sustainability, human rights and gender equality locally and globally</p>
<p>Reflect on the lives and actions of individuals and communities in different parts of the world who are working for environmental sustainability</p>
<p>Engage with organisations working for a just and sustainable Ireland and world</p>
<p>Demonstrate respect and care for all species and peoples</p>

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## Ethical Global Citizenship

Students will be able to:

Explain the terms citizen and citizenship taking account of a range of perspectives which go beyond legal definitions and which emphasise the local, national, European and global
Investigate and compare different forms of citizenship, for example, national legally based citizenship, active citizenship committed to human rights, global ethical citizenship
Relate the concept of citizenship to own lives and give examples of how they are citizens with rights and responsibilities
Show how people throughout the world are interconnected and interdependent including through a shared planet and humanity as well as through global trade, international aid, multinational corporations, multinational institutions such as the EU, the UN and the IMF as well as global media and technology
Make connections between citizenship and ethics through examination and discussion of case studies of local, national and global actions taken by active citizens
Make connection between global ethical citizenship and human rights and demonstrate how a denial of rights limits citizenships
Examine and discuss how gender inequality including violence against women limits citizenship for women
Critically examine how governments and multinational institutions including the EU, the UN and the IMF can protect or hinder the achievement of human rights and citizenship locally and globally
Consider and discuss the concepts of 'capabilities' and 'flourishing' and whether this approach might promote more just and equal societies
Plan an action with others which will help promote the achievement of rights for a specific group locally and or globally

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