

# Educate Together

Submission to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism,  
June 2011

## Educate Together

Educate Together is the representative body for multi-denominational schools in Ireland. There are currently 58 primary schools in the Educate Together network with 2 new schools due to open in September 2011. Educate Together also represents parents campaigning for access to its model of education in areas where it currently cannot meet this demand.

This is a national network of schools, serving families from diverse backgrounds. 20% of Educate Together schools operate within the DEIS scheme for disadvantaged communities, and 20% have assisted learning classes or autism units - in both cases very high proportions compared to schools of other patronages. 50% of Educate Together schools are located in rapidly developing areas and 60% have significant numbers of children receiving English as an Additional Language (EAL) support.

The schools that make up this diverse network - and the volunteer boards that manage them - are supported by a professional national office team which includes Regional Development Officers, Education Officers and specialists in Leadership and Governance, Volunteering and Ethos. The organisation's ability to leverage voluntary and community initiative and private fundraising means that this professional support is provided at minimal cost to the State.

Member schools of Educate Together are obliged to uphold the Educate Together ethos as defined in the Company's Articles of Association, its Charter and other relevant policy and curriculum documents. This ethos is equality-based and centres on four key principles. Schools are:

- Multi-denominational, i.e. all children having equal rights of access to the school, and children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds being equally respected
- Co-educational, and committed to encouraging all children to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities
- Child-centred in their approach to education
- Democratically run, with active participation by parents in the daily life of the school, whilst positively affirming the professional role of teachers

The Educate Together ethos and values are given concrete expression through the 'Learn Together', or 'core' curriculum taught in the schools. This ethical education curriculum has four strands:

- Moral and Spiritual

- Equality and Justice
- Belief Systems
- Ethics and the Environment

The values expressed in the Learn Together curriculum and the Educate Together charter are integrated across the curriculum and throughout the school community. In recent years an Ethos Self-evaluation Tool has been developed so that schools can evaluate the extent to which the core values are reflected in the everyday running of the school and in the experiences of those in the school community.

It is important to note the definition of multi-denominational provided in the Educate Together Charter and the way in which this principle is understood and lived out in the schools. The onus on schools to guarantee equality extends beyond just religious or non-religious belief; it embraces social, cultural and other facets of identity.

In Educate Together schools, all members of the school community are encouraged to share their religious and non-religious beliefs with the whole school community. In this way children develop the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to interact critically across different viewpoints within an atmosphere of equal respect. School facilities are often made available to families wishing to organise faith formation classes, such as those which prepare children for the Catholic sacraments. These classes operate on an 'opt-in' basis outside the compulsory school day.

This model is also distinct from the common perception of a non-denominational or secular model. In such a strictly secular model, religious symbols or practice are sometimes restricted or prohibited in a school, and there is not always an explicit moral and ethical curriculum. In Educate Together schools, Moral and Spiritual development is actively taught through the Learn Together curriculum. Different religious and non-religious festivals are regularly celebrated by the school community to develop understanding and respect for different traditions.

Educate Together has been operating a professional national office since 1995. During this time, it has amassed significant evidence of demand for its schools and the infringements of the human rights of families where this demand has not been met. It has made a number of significant representations on this issue both to the Department of Education, the Oireachtas and to the United Nations and Council of Europe.

Educate Together will be happy to make these available to the Advisory Group.

## **THEME ONE - Establishing Parental and Community Demand for Diversity**

### **Question One - What should be considered in establishing the demand for diversity, taking account of parental wishes, in areas where the existing scale of school provision/ infrastructure is adequate?**

The logical place to start in establishing the demand for diversity is with parents who are already voicing strong preferences for particular school types. There are parents already campaigning for different types of schools around the country, including Educate Together schools and Gaelscoileanna. While there used to be a mechanism to register applications on behalf of these parents, via the New Schools Advisory Committee, no such process is currently available. This means that important information is not being systematically gathered.

The process managed by the New Schools Advisory Committee had many strengths. The body was independent and had the support of all stakeholders in the primary sector. Applications included pre-enrolment information, thereby providing concrete evidence of the preferences of actual parents with children.

Alternative means by which demand might be measured, such as surveys or plebiscite, are problematic. Issues include difficulties around whose views should be taken into account - existing school communities, parents of pre-school children, members of the wider community and children themselves. A process is required to ensure validity, authenticity, transparency and confidentiality; how to regulate promotion of different school models; how to provide accurate and descriptive information about models which do not yet exist in the locality in question; cost and so on.

Serious consideration needs to be given to how to accommodate parents around the country whose preference is only shared with a minority of people. For example, if a simple 'majority rules' approach is taken, without regard to existing provision in the area, it could conceivably happen that 49% of parents would never achieve the school type of their choice, because the result of surveys conducted in different areas all result in a 51% majority opting for a different type of school. In this situation, all schools would be of the type that 51% of the parents want.

There is a great deal to be learned from the trial process conducted in Gorey, Co Wexford last year to select a patron for a new post-primary school for the town. There, 957 families expressed a preference for an Educate Together school, but because twice that number expressed a preference for a VEC school, this type of school was established, even though other VEC schools were already available to parents in the wider locality.

In Educate Together's experience, pre-enrolment processes offer concrete evidence of demand. Educate Together has opened a considerable number of schools on the basis of this information and these schools have grown and proved sustainable. Historically this information has been gathered by groups of parents themselves or prospective patrons. There is no reason why this information could not be gathered by an independent local body. For example, an independent body could invite parents to register a school type preference when their children reach a certain age. This would allow for cross-checking of information and would provide a more robust and complete data set.

Finally, it is worth noting that the state is already in possession of data which may be useful to the process of assessing or predicting demand. Census data, as well as data gathered by the HSE and other bodies can be used to track patterns and predict demand across areas. The Department of Education and Skills Geographic Information System (GIS) planning tool uses existing data to good effect in building up a picture of numbers of children needing places in different areas. This data could be further refined to include information about indicators such as home language and religious belief. While these data should not be taken as indicators of parental school type preference, they may be of some use in recognising patterns and predicting demand.

**Question Two - Where the existing scale of school provision is adequate, how can school(s) be identified to be transferred/divested/amalgamated so as to allow for diversity?**

It is Educate Together's experience that such situations generally exist in areas where there is existing under-utilised or vacant provision. In these areas, it is necessary for the State to make a full review of provision and identify potential for rationalisation and re-use of existing premises. This review should be presented to existing patrons and those representing parents seeking other school types. This review should take into account demographics, school sizes, school types, ownership and configuration. Critically, this review would include the result of an independent register of the school type preference of parents of pre-school children.

Ideally, Educate Together would like to see a situation in which schools could self-identify for change. This may be attractive to denominational school leaders who see the benefit of 're-branding' to access demand for multi-denominational or other school types and the information gathered by the review suggested above could be made public to enable the broad engagement of parents and teachers in school communities.

Care must be taken to ensure that schools considered for 'divestment' are not simply the least desirable or failing schools and that the change process creates as equal a choice to parents as possible. A critical restraint on this change process is the current ownership of schools and the legal environment in which school patronage exists.

Educate Together is firmly of the view that all new school buildings and sites should be the property of the State which can then allocate facilities according to community demand, and that the current legal terms in which the State grant aids school buildings on privately owned sites should be reviewed. This review should ensure that the State is able to insist that unused space is re-allocated to address changing educational demands as they emerge in the community.

Educate Together also considers that the terms and conditions under which a body is recognised as a patron of schools must be reviewed to enable the State to regulate and to insist that, in return for the considerable privilege bestowed by the status and the huge sums of State grants provided to support schools, there are appropriate controls and standards. Educate Together considers that an obligation to release under-utilised State funded facilities would be a reasonable element of such regulation.

Finally, there is a great deal to be learned from the process of transformation which is currently in use in Northern Ireland. While a useful model, this process has been criticised for being overly

bureaucratic and inflexible. Educate Together recommends that the Forum consult with the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education to learn from experiences there.

### **Question Three - How might competing demands for diversity be considered and accommodated?**

If the independent register of the preference of parents of pre-school children proposed earlier is adopted, the State will have a reasonable profile of parental demand for differing school types in an area. This should form the basis of allocation of facilities and resources. Numbers from this register should be public and should be used to generate local consensus on such allocations. For this to happen, it is essential that the body undertaking the survey has no interest in the running of schools and is - and is seen to be - impartial and fair.

If the review proposed in our answer to Question Two is undertaken, this would provide a forum in which the State can seek agreement from existing patrons for pragmatic solutions to address the profile of demand in an area.

Educate Together considers that it is reasonable to work from the basis of a 'single viable stream' i.e. a viable demand for one class per year or a single 8-classroom unit which accommodates approximately 225 children. It is our experience that many large schools of more than 24 classrooms routinely separate into 'junior' and 'senior schools'. This suggests that there are many large schools that can be sub-divided to accommodate differing school types without any change to costs to the State.

It will be important that the State takes steps to ensure that property issues are not used to frustrate such solutions and that no preference is given to any provider in the allocation of resources.

Educate Together is strongly of the view that 'campus-sharing' solutions are possible in many areas and can be achieved at minimal additional cost to the State.

### **Question Four - In addressing "demand for diversity", how can it be ensured that schools are socially and culturally inclusive?**

Striving for inclusion and equality should be an ongoing task of any state and of all stakeholders in education. It may assist if the State were to require all school patrons to demonstrate their practical commitment to this through a new patron regulation process. The establishment of a register such as that proposed earlier, and the active dissemination of accurate information about schools in an area, may also be of use.

We know from sociology that in any society, privilege tends to preserve itself in certain social groups, unless challenged and consistently checked. Education itself is a tool in this task. Educate Together schools aim to teach through and for equality - equipping children with the critical knowledge, skills and attitudes to challenge inequality and to work for a more inclusive society. This is an explicit aim of the Educate Together ethos and a specific responsibility of Educate Together school communities.

Educate Together rejects the contention that providing school choice will produce social segregation between schools. It is abundantly clear that in Ireland, social segregation between schools takes place irrespective of the fact that in most areas there is only one type of school available.

Social segregation of schools generally takes place as a result of the spread of a perception amongst parents that a child will be better served by a particular school, rather than a particular school type<sup>1</sup>

In this regard, it should be a State objective to ensure that there is a balanced choice of school type available in as many areas as possible and that it should take action to ensure that:

- all schools are of a similar high quality and are seen to be resourced on an equal basis, thus limiting any undue advantage which might be gained by attending one school over another,
- all parents have equal access to the information, resources and opportunities necessary to make informed choices about their children's education. This requires active outreach to marginalised communities and those without strong educational traditions,
- all unfair discrimination on social, cultural or religious grounds in enrolment processes is eliminated.

Educate Together believes that this is an issue that transcends the current forum, involves a much wider discussion of government policy towards social disadvantage and integration and needs to take place irrespective of any changes in the patronage of schools.

Educate Together is particularly concerned that this issue should not be used to prevent long-overdue action in relation to school choice and the human rights of families in Ireland.

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<sup>1</sup> see e.g. Burgess, S., Greaves, E., Vignoles, A. and Wilson, D. (2009a), *Parental choice of primary school in England: what 'type' of school do parents choose?*, CMPO working paper series, no 09/224. The Centre for Market and Public Organisation, available online at: [http://www.ntu.ac.uk/nbs/document\\_uploads/99207.pdf](http://www.ntu.ac.uk/nbs/document_uploads/99207.pdf); McAllister Hart, N. (2008), *'Newcomers' and integrated education provision*, Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE)

## **THEME TWO - Managing the transfer/divesting of Patronage**

### **Question 1 - Where changes of patronage are to be advanced, what practicalities need to be considered?**

Please note that Educate Together has in place published policy for the transformation, or transfer of patronage of schools. This has been implemented in five successful transfers in the last three years. It is attached as an appendix to this submission.

#### *Existing (and future) pupils of schools*

Educate Together believes that a phased process of change starting with Junior Infants and working through a school over an eight-year cycle is possible and may result in a faster change if the parents of children 'further up the school' agree at any stage of the process. Changes typically involve enrolment policies and the handling of faith-formation classes in the school. The board of management, school leadership and staff must be committed to implementing the change. If a quicker process of change is widely agreed by a school community, there should be some provision for families who may be left as a small minority and whose needs may be better met in a different school.

#### *Parental choice*

It is Educate Together's submission that parental choice will drive all proposals for change and that the wide community of parents outside the established power structures of a school must be engaged in the process. If the phased approach taken above is implemented, this should minimise the number of families alienated from the process. However, provision needs to be made for a small number of parents who may seek to change school.

#### *Enrolment including local co-operation between schools in a community*

It is a central element of this submission that an independent register of parental school type preference is maintained by the State at local level. This will remove the responsibility for enrolments from the individual school and the independent body will - as far as possible - allocate places to schools of differing types according to this register. This body would also be empowered to bring local school management and patrons together on an annual basis to discuss changing demand and any arising issues such as trends towards social, ability, religious or cultural polarisation between schools.

#### *Employment of teachers*

This remains a critical issue. The willingness and ability of the school principal to lead the change process is essential and if this is not forthcoming, there will need to be a mechanism to allow sideways movement. Educate Together is, regardless of this Forum, recommending the introduction of open competition for all posts of responsibility in schools, and this would greatly assist the movement of senior staff to other schools. The new patron must be satisfied that the school principal can lead the process. Additional professional development courses will be required for all staff so that they can quickly adapt to the new school ethos, approach and the Learn Together curriculum. It is our experience that few teachers will be unwilling to work in an Educate Together school but in the event

that there may be some, provision must be made to place them on the redeployment panel of the former patron.

### *Teacher education*

Educate Together is working with colleges of education to ensure that all student teachers are informed of the ethos and approach of Educate Together schools. It also offers on-line and face-to-face courses for this purpose. It is envisaged that the board of management of the school would support staff in taking such courses. There is an opportunity for colleges of teacher education to work with Educate Together to produce special courses for such transformation and to do so within their current budget allocations.

### *Maintaining a student population that is inclusive and reflective of the school's community*

In many urban areas, families routinely send their children to different schools without this causing division or exclusion. This is possible where the balance of school types suits the demand in an area and where all schools are perceived to be of good quality. Educate Together believes that its proposal for a local independent register of pre-school parental preference, carried out by a body with the authority to bring school managers and patrons together to address changing community demands, will address this issue. This body will be able to highlight emerging trends and could be empowered to ensure that certain minimum standards for the inclusion of marginalised communities are adhered to by all schools. This body could also ensure that accurate and impartial information is widely available for prospective parents.

### *School transport*

Educate Together considers that it should be an objective for all concerned that school transport should be kept to a minimum. The greater diversity of school type available in localities, the less will be the need for school transport. It is Educate Together's objective that every family in Ireland should have access to a school that meets their educational preference within 30 minutes travel time from their homes. Consideration for safe cycle and walking routes to school should be included in the review of local provision mentioned elsewhere in this document.

### *Ownership considerations and transfer of properties*

Educate Together is firmly of the view that the State should assume ownership of as much of the school infrastructure as possible and then lease this to patrons under the terms of the recently negotiated lease for new State-owned schools. In reality, the State will need to negotiate pragmatically in relation to school property involved in potential 'divestments'. In these negotiations, Educate Together believes that far greater legal weight than ever before should be given to the State grant aid involved in the building, maintenance and daily operation of schools that are privately owned. We believe that it is reasonable for the State to seek assistance in meeting changing community needs in return for the continuance of such comprehensive support.



## Question 2 - How can these changes be implemented in a cost neutral manner?

It is the intent of this submission that changes in patronage can be achieved at considerable benefit to the state and at minimal cost. The costs that Educate Together envisages in such a process are in the following areas:

- The establishment of an independent register of the school preferences of the parents of pre-school children.

It is our suggestion that such a register could be maintained by a local authority, possibly in conjunction with the health services. It may be considered as part of the integrated approach of the new Minister for Children. In either case, we suggest that the work involved could be carried out by local authorities and could be incorporated in the reform of such bodies under the Croke Park agreements. It is essential that such work is not carried out by any body involved in the direct provision of schools, such as the VECs, since such a body would not be perceived as independent.

- The work to make local reviews of provision and to bring patrons and management of schools together to address changing community needs.

It is our suggestion that this work is already being carried out by the Forward Planning section of the Department of Education and Skills and the holding of such meetings is properly the function of an independent regional educational authority or, in the absence of such a body, the local authority.

- The introduction of new legislation to:
  - regulate the privileges of patrons of schools and to require that these privileges are exercised with full regard to changing community needs.
  - amend equal status legislation in relation to school enrolments.

It is our suggestion that this work should be incorporated in the normal legislative programme of the government.

- The need to provide additional continuous professional development (CPD) and courses for teachers engaged in the change process in a school.

It is our suggestion that this should be made possible through the re-allocation of existing provision in the colleges of teacher education and CPD mechanisms.

Having made these points, Educate Together would like to say that there may indeed need to be some additional supports to a change programme - especially in the early or pilot phase. However, we do not expect that such additional supports will be such that they will outweigh the potential savings achieved by rationalising and maximising the full and proper use of existing facilities.

## Question 3 - Are there other ways to address diversity using existing school accommodation?

Educate Together considers that there are ample opportunities to address the need for greater diversity of school type in creative ways. Some details of the transformations undertaken by the

organisation over the past 25 years are included as an appendix to this submission. In summary there are three main classes of transformations

### *Type One transforms*

This involves the transformation of a school 'as a going concern'. This is the most complex and challenging method which involves a series of layered negotiations with management, staff, parents, supporters and the wider community

### *Type Two transforms*

This process involves the moving of a school out of a facility by merging it with another school, installing it in another building or closing it down. This releases the original facility for use by another school body or group of schools.

### *Shared facilities*

This involves allocation of unused space within an existing school to a new school thus creating a new shared building.

### *Joint campus*

Many instances of shared facilities offer the opportunity to create a joint campus between schools of different types and in some cases community facilities that are open to the public all year round.

Educate Together believes that such opportunities should be welcomed as they have the potential to produce very positive community environments when well-managed.

### **THEME 3 - Diversity within a school or small number of schools**

#### **Question 1 - If there are only one or two schools in an area, how can diversity be accommodated where there is not sufficient demand to justify a separate school?**

Educate Together was founded 36 years ago as a voluntary effort by parents and teachers to address the challenge of diversity in the Irish school system. Over many years of trial and error the contemporary 'Educate Together Model' has been developed. It is now a tried and tested model that has proved its ability to deliver equality of esteem to children and their families irrespective of their backgrounds and to do so in a wide variety of social contexts.

There are well-documented difficulties in providing equality for children in an environment where one religious ethos permeates the school programme, controls the power structure and has 30 minutes of each compulsory school day devoted to its world outlook. Educate Together believes that it is impossible to provide for diversity unless there is at least one school in an area which provides the same level of equality as is provided in the Educate Together Model.

In a case in which there is only one denominational school and there is coincidentally an increase in diversity in the community, then the only path open to the State is to encourage that school to operate increasingly according to the broad principles of the Educate Together model. That is, it should commit itself to respect and cherish all children and their backgrounds equally. It should move to avoid any pressure for adherence to denominational norms during the compulsory school day, such as prayer or religious worship, and should creatively engage in the rich ethical concepts that are common to all theistic and non-theistic backgrounds. It should welcome the equal participation of parents of different traditions in the management of the school and concentrate on delivering the very best education possible. Educate Together would like to acknowledge that this is indeed the practice of many principals in small rural schools.

However, we believe that this problem can only be properly addressed if every family in the country has access to an Educate Together model school within a 30 minute journey of their home.

#### **Question 2 - How can parental choice be respected in a multi-cultural, multi-faith society taking account also of the two official languages?**

Educate Together believes that the religious and cultural issues discussed in this submission transcend issues related to the language of instruction. The Irish language is a major part of the national school curriculum and this is delivered by schools of all patrons. A significant minority of parents seek a total immersion approach to the teaching of the Irish language in primary schools. Educate Together believes that this can be successfully delivered in an Educate Together model school. The success of the first school of An Foras Pátrúnachta, Gaelscoil an Ghoirt Alainn, and the other multi-denominational gaelscoileanna demonstrate this. Educate Together believes that - wherever possible - Irish medium provision should be available to parents if they so wish.

**Question 3 - What are the particular implications for enrolment policies, religious education and religious practice in a school, religion as part of an integrated curriculum in the short to medium term and the longer-term**

Educate Together believes that for a school to be properly configured to meet the needs of a diverse community in both the short, medium and long-term it must:

- Have a clearly stated, binding statement that obliges the school to treat all children in the school equally irrespective of their ability or their social, cultural or religious background.
- Operate enrolment policies that reflect this obligation

Within the statutory school day it must,

- Provide a broad programme of ethical education in which moral, ethical and spiritual concepts are explored and a child's identity supported
- Provides an opportunity to learn about, critically engage with, celebrate and explore the main belief systems of the world (theistic and non-theistic).
- Ensure that the fundamental principles of respect, participation and equality permeate the whole school programme

Outside the statutory school day

- Facilitate any group of parents who so wish to use the school premises for voluntary faith formation classes or culturally specific classes free from pressure or compulsion.

This statement is made with due regard for the rights of parents to choose denominational schools if they so wish. However, in today's society, the free choice of a denominational school can only take place if an alternative option based on the principles above is available to those who do not have this preference.

## Concluding section

In summary, Educate Together proposes the following key elements to the forum:

### Register of Parental School Preference

The introduction of an independent local body that maintains a register of the school type preference of parents of pre-school children and has authority to call patrons and managers of schools in their area to discuss and act to ensure that local school provision is matched as closely as possible to community demand. This register should be maintained in the form of a graded preference of each family (first, second and third choice for each child). This local body should allocate places and resources in schools according to this register and should have the authority to ensure that minimum standards of inclusion are attained by all schools. The independent body must not have any involvement in the patronage or management of schools. It is recommended that it could be properly part of the functions of a reformed system of local government or educational authority.

### Introduce effective regulation of patrons of schools

The privileges granted to patrons of schools under the Education Act (1998) should be balanced by a set of regulations that ensure appropriate accountability to the public for the exercise of these powers and the considerable amount of State funds that flow to the patron's schools. Included in these should be an obligation to make available to other educational uses, any education facilities that are under-utilised or vacant that have been funded by or grant aided by the State.

### Introduce an agreed, supported procedure for the transformation of patronage of schools

As Irish society continues on its generation on generation change of parental preference for schools, there will be increasing demand for change of school types in communities. It is essential that an agreed procedure for transformation of school patronage emerges and that this procedure is actively supported by the State. This process should be driven in the first instance by existing demand and the register of parental preference detailed above.

### Provision of Educate Together model schools in all areas of the country

Genuine choice of school type that is compatible with the constitutional and human rights of all families can only be achieved if an equality-based school such as that provided in the Educate Together model is available in all areas of the country. This is also the only way in which the State can discharge its obligation to provide for the education of all children in the country and to do so without religious discrimination. It is also the only way in which the State can satisfy itself that those who choose religious schools do so without pressure or compulsion.

The State should therefore allow the timely processing of the many applications for new Educate Together schools that are currently lodged with the Department of Education and Skills.

## Appendices

### Appendix One -Demand for Educate Together schools

Educate Together has opened 19 primary schools since 2007 and is the fastest-growing patron body in Irish education. Demand for places in Educate Together schools far outstrips supply and in some areas ten times as many applications are received than there are places available.

There are currently 73 outstanding applications for Educate Together schools awaiting response, as confirmed by the Department of Education and Skills in July 2010. Despite this demand, and these applications, there are still areas of the country where parents have no choice but to send their children to a denominational school.

To illustrate the level and nature of the demand for Educate Together schools around the country, we offer six current examples:

#### *Tallaght / Dublin 24*

Dublin 24 is a highly populated developing area in West Dublin. In similar areas there are three, four or even five Educate Together schools on offer to parents who wish to choose them. However, in Dublin 24, no Educate Together school has been sanctioned, despite applications having been lodged since 2008. Parents in the area have been actively campaigning for 3 years and some currently travel as far as Lucan to access an Educate Together school. There were 136 children on the group's pre-enrolment list in April 2011

#### *Sandyford/Ballinteer*

The start-up group for an Educate Together school in the Sandyford / Ballinteer area has grown rapidly since its establishment in 2010, and 157 children have been pre-enrolled in just over a year, indicating huge demand for choice in the area. This is an area with a growing population in need of additional primary provision.

#### *Portobello*

Pressure on places in Educate Together schools in the area surrounding Portobello / Dublin is such that some schools receive ten times more applications than there are places on offer. A group of parents was formed last year to campaign for an additional Educate Together school and 225 children had been pre-enrolled by April 2011. Educate Together has opened a conversation with the Archdiocese of Dublin and Roman Catholic trustees in the area to explore whether denominational provision in the area might be re-configured to allow for the establishment of an Educate Together school in existing facilities.

#### *Dundalk*

Dundalk is the largest town in Ireland, with a growing population of nearly 30,000 people. In 2003 it was one of the nine national gateways named in the National Spatial Strategy. It is the only one of those nine gateways not to have an Educate Together school available for families to choose. Parents

in the area began a pre-enrolment for an Educate Together school last year and nearly 100 pre-enrolments had been registered by April 2011.

### *Tramore*

During the period between 1996 and 2002 the population of Tramore increased by 27% and the highest proportion of the population falls within the 25-44 year old age bracket. The local authority projects that the population will reach 12,605 by 2013. There are currently three primary schools in Tramore, including a Gaelscoil, all under the patronage of the Bishop of Waterford and Lismore. Although local parents only began campaigning for an Educate Together school in late 2010, 65 children had already been pre-enrolled by April 2011.

### *Kenmare*

Kenmare is primarily a tourist centre with a population of about 1,700 and would service a hinterland with about 5,000 inhabitants well-dispersed over quite a large area. Kenmare's population is relatively diverse, with a reasonable proportion being national and international migrants along with some returned emigrants. The two primary schools in the town of Kenmare, a boys and a girls school, are due to be amalgamated in a new building. Parents have developed a strong campaign for an Educate Together school in Kenmare over the past 3 years and to date over 50 families have pre-enrolled 78 children. The nearest Educate Together school is in Tralee, 66km away. There is no non-Catholic school in the whole of South Kerry.

## Appendix Two - Educate Together's Experience of School transformations

Educate Together has experience of meeting parental demand for its model through the establishment of new schools, through the re-configuration of existing infrastructure, and through the transformation of existing schools. We offer three examples of successful re-configuration or transformation solutions:

**North Bay Educate Together National School** - amalgamation of existing schools with Catholic patronage (Type Two transform creating a joint campus)

North Bay Educate Together NS was established in 1990, the 8th Educate Together school to open. Parental demand for an Educate Together school in the area emerged in the late 1980s. When the Boys' and Girls' Catholic National schools in Kilbarrack were amalgamated, this enabled one of the schools to become available for other school types. This site is now occupied by an Educate Together school (North Bay) a special school and a Gaelscoil (Míde). The three schools have been co-operating successfully on this site for 21 years.

**Ranelagh Multi-denominational School** - transformation of existing school with Church of Ireland patronage (Type One transform of an existing school as a 'going concern')

Ranelagh Multi-Denominational School was the 10th Educate Together National School to be established. When a decision was announced that St. Columba's Church of Ireland National School was due to close in 1991, parents of children attending the school decided to work together to create a new multi-denominational primary school on the site.

In May 1988, in view of the planned closure, a public meeting was held at which the Ranelagh Multi-Denominational School Association, (R.M.D.S.A.), was formed, with the aim of becoming patron of the proposed school. The Church of Ireland was supportive and agreed to transfer its title to the site and its buildings to the R.M.D.S.A. The Association negotiated with the Department of Education for recognition of the new school.

In September 1988, the former two teacher school was expanded to three teachers. Children were enrolled in the school on the understanding that, rather than being closed, it would be transformed into a multi-denominational school. After prolonged negotiations, the Department of Education in December 1989 granted provisional recognition to the school backdated to September 1988. The school quickly reached its full capacity and is now heavily oversubscribed, with demand regularly reaching at least ten times the number of places available.

The original contracts of the teachers were honoured in the transfer. The Principal worked in the new school for a short while until her retirement and the deputy principal became a long-standing key staff member for many years until her early retirement due to ill-health.

**Rathfarnham Educate Together National School** - transfer of educational facilities from a religious order. (Type Two transform creating a joint campus with a community facility)

Rathfarnham Educate Together National School was established in 1990 as South City School Project. In 1993, following extensive consultation and negotiation by the school's management, it moved into its current premises, which had previously been the property of the Loreto Order and a



successful Catholic school. The Order donated this premises to the Department of Education and Skills for the purposes of accommodating the Educate Together school. It resulted in a joint campus between an Educate Together school and a community facility

### Other examples

Other examples of school transformation undertaken by Educate Together include:

- Ardee Educate Together National School, formerly St Mary Church of Ireland NS. The board of management of this school initiated the transfer when its patron sought permission of the Minister for its closure. The school retained its pupil base during the transfer but new staff were recruited. Educate Together entered a change management process with the board which included the appointment of a senior Educate Together staff member as a member of the board for the initial period of the transfer. (Type One transform)
- Cork School Project was formally a Catholic school in the Cork diocese. It was transferred to the Educate Together association on the direct intervention of the then Bishop of Cork.(Type Two).
- Dublin 7 and Castleknock Educate Together National Schools were both located for a number of years in a refurbished building in the St. Joseph's School for the Deaf, Navan Road. This relocation was at the direct intervention of the then Archbishop of Dublin, Desmond Connell.

### Conclusions

These cases demonstrate that where parents wish for the provision of a new school type in an area, creative solutions can be found which meet with the agreement of existing patrons and the Department of Education and Skills. Important learning gained through these processes includes:

Any change process should be fully supported by parental demand and, ideally, wider community consensus

Parents, children and teachers must be fully involved in any proposals and developments

Change of ethos of an existing school can be a lengthy and difficult process. Where this is proposed, significant support must be made available to the whole school community to guide this process. Transitional arrangements may be necessary and the rights of members of the existing school community must be protected within these arrangements.

If an existing school is to change ethos, teachers' rights must be considered carefully. Where appropriate, teachers should be offered redeployment, continuing professional development and/or other support as appropriate.

Patrons should enter any change, move or transfer process in a spirit of partnership and cooperation, with a view to engaging constructively and seeking creative solutions which best meet the needs of communities. If there is a proposal that an existing school may change ethos, the rights and wishes of the school community should be central to all discussions.

### Appendix Three - Extract from Educate Together's Patronage Manual.

**Note:**

This policy has been implemented in the transfer of the patronage of five schools to the national patronage of Educate Together. All five schools were previously operating with independent patrons.

**Extract:**

#### Proposals to transfer patronage of schools

In the event of a formal request from a patron of a school to transfer its duties as patron to Educate Together, Educate Together will adopt the following approach.

The guiding principle of this procedure is that transfers will only be undertaken where there is clear and substantial evidence that such a transfer is supported by the school community, that that school community is properly aware of and understands how the Educate Together model operates and how it will operate in their own school. In this case, the term school community includes, parents, children, staff and board of management.

<b>Policy P017 - Transfer of Patronage</b>		
<b>Applies to</b>	<b>Effects</b>	<b>Authority</b>
Patrons of schools seeking transfer of patronage, Boards of Management of such schools Regional Development Officers CEO Board of Directors	Schools seeking transfer of patronage	CEO Board of Directors
Review By:	Board of Directors	Annually
Approved/Last Review:	November 2009	

*In the event of a informal contact from a patron of a school seeking transfer, the CEO will instruct the relevant RDO to hold informal discussions with the relevant officer of the patron and, through him or her, the Chairperson and Principal of the school as appropriate.*

*If the RDO is satisfied that there is substantial interest in the transfer, a meeting of the school community will be requested at which an officer of Educate Together will a) ascertain the level of support from parents and staff for the transfer and b) explain clearly what such a change will entail.*

*If further meetings with patron, board of management, staff and parents confirm support for the transfer, the RDO will invite the patron to formally apply to the Board of Directors of Educate Together for such a transfer.*

*The Board of Directors will consider a report from the CEO on this matter and may decide to reject the proposal, agree to progress the application or to defer consideration until further information is available.*

*In the event of a decision to proceed, the CEO will be required undertake a process of due diligence on behalf of the board.*

*The information requested must include documentation providing evidence of the following:*

- 1. Patron's approval of the appointment of all staff employed in the school*

2. *Patron's appointment of independent assessors to selection boards for such appointments*
3. *Patron's appointment of nominees and Chairperson of the current board of management*
4. *Patron's oversight of the procedures for establishing the Board of Management and its composition*
5. *Patron's appointment of the Board of Management, undertakings signed by members of the board and its notification of same to the Department of Education and Science*
6. *Patron's approval of the Enrolment Policy of the school*
7. *Minutes of any dealings the Patron has had with the Board of Management of the school during the past year.*
8. *Minutes of the meetings including financial reports of the Board of Management of the school during the past year*
9. *Accounts of the Board of Management for the previous year and the most recent financial report for the board*
10. *Any current contracts, leases or other legally binding agreements entered into by the patron in relation to the school.*
11. *All policies approved by the Board of Management of the school, especially the following:*
12. *Enrolment Policy*
13. *Ethical Education Curriculum ('Religious Education Core Curriculum', 'Core Curriculum' ) Policy*
14. *Child Protection Policy*
15. *Confirmation that there are formal contracts in place for all staff of the school (teaching and non-teaching)*
16. *The list of seniority of teaching staff and SNAs*
17. *Confirmation that all posts of responsibility have been made according to the regulations and information concerning any appeals*
18. *Summary details of any Section 29 Appeals against decisions of the Board of Management*
19. *Details of any legal or administrative challenge to decisions of the Board of Management of the school in the past 5 years.*

*In addition, the CEO will provide a report on the viability of the school and its enrolment, the standards of education delivered, the quality of management, staff, parent and child relationships, any outstanding issues of accommodation or resources, the general atmosphere of the school and the attitude of the DES and other education partners to the transfer.*

*The board of directors will then decide whether to proceed with the transfer, reject the transfer or defer the transfer pending further information.*