

Annual Report from the Board of Directors and National Office of Educate Together Jan 1st 2005 – Jan 1st 2006

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1. Introduction

The year 2005 was a crucial twelve months for Educate Together. From the outset the national organisation faced huge challenges to continue providing a quality service to its expanding sector in the midst of financial uncertainty and a negative political climate. Thankfully we not only managed to cement our place as a mainstream partner in Irish education but also welcomed four dynamic new schools to the sector and gained a much needed three-fold increase in our State funding. These achievements came about through the dedication of the Board of Directors, contributions from kind donors, and the hard work of the National Office staff. However final credit must go to the parents, teachers and children of Educate Together who came to the rescue in our hour of need and lobbied politicians and media on our behalf. More importantly however, it is our schools communities whom everyday embody and enhance the Educate Together ethos and reputation. We couldn't have done it without you. From us to you, thank you.

2. Growth of the sector

Figures

The results from the 2005 Annual Survey of Educate Together Schools show impressive evidence of sustained and dramatic growth. The sector on a whole increased its capacity by 1,031 pupils, 52 classes, 110 classroom staff and 4 schools from September 2004 to September 2005. There are now 6,631 children, 281 mainstream teachers, 234 additional classroom staff and 39 schools in the sector, making this the fastest growing movement in Irish education.

The rate of growth is substantially accelerating and is expected to continue to do so for a considerable number of years. This year's increase in pupils is 330 more than the 2004 increase. It has broken the 1,000 new pupils per year level for the first time. The growth profile is underlined by a stark increase in the ratio of Junior Infants to Sixth Class. This has risen above 2:1 for the first time. This means that the planned capacity of existing Educate Together schools has risen above 10,000 also for the first time. Twenty-three of our schools now have Administrative Principals.

3. Core Funding Campaign

Early in 2005 it was apparent to the Board of Directors that Educate Together could not continue its existing services and would have to severely curtail its plans for expansion, without a significant increase in funding from the State. Despite some generous contributions under the “Friends of Educate Together” programme initiated in December 2004 and the ongoing donations made via the website, the Board of Directors still had to increase State funding to secure the future of the organisation. Fundraising would therefore have to be a priority in 2005.

United Nations Recommendation

Our negotiations with the Department of Education and Science led us to conclude that, regardless of the rights or wrongs of the situation, only by creating a “political climate” favourable to Educate Together could the Minister consider increasing our funding. The first step towards this end took place in March when we presented our case to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in Geneva. This Committee supported our case and recommended that the Irish State “promote the establishment of multi-denominational schools.” With this backing from the UN, the National Office began an intensive series of targeted meetings with leading professional, academic and legal figures, and other influential persons to gather their support for our case.

Asking our members for help

In June 2005, we decided to approach our members for help. We were initially reluctant to do this given the tremendous amount of voluntary work that goes on in local school communities already and the fundraising pressures that Boards of Managements are under. However we came to the conclusion that we couldn’t deny our members the chance to help us in these dire straits. Our first newsletter in June contained an appeal to all our subscribers to lobby their local councilors, TDs and Senators, and to write letters to newspapers highlighting the need for action. A letter was also sent to every Board of Management asking schools to do what they could before the end of the year to generate political interest in their area. Many schools and parents responded positively to this appeal. Meanwhile the National Office concentrated on meeting national politicians from all parties to ask them to raise Parliamentary Questions in the Dáil in respect of increased funding for Educate Together.

“We need a hand!”



We need
a hand!

In October 2005 every TD and Senator returned from summer recess to be greeted by a “We need a hand!” postcard from Educate Together. This action marked the official launch of our Core Funding Campaign with the objective of securing an increase in State funding in Budget 2006. A week later the National Office followed up the postcards with a letter to each TD and Senator setting out our case in detail. The response from politicians was quite unprecedented as many replied immediately and agreed to raise our case with Minister Hanafin. Meanwhile the Board of Directors initiated a Roadshow whereby they visited a number of Educate Together schools to meet the local communities and explain first-hand why Educate Together needed State funding and what parents could do to help. These Roadshow visits were very positively received and parents began emailing the both the Minister for Education and the Minister for Finance and the Taoiseach to register their support for Educate Together.

Pre-Budget Submission and National Forum



Delegates at the National Forum, November 12th, 2005

In the first week of November, Educate Together published its Pre-Budget

Submission calling for a) Funding for Primary Education b) Support for Boards of Management c) Funding for new schools and d) Core Funding for Educate Together to develop multi-denominational education. On November 12th the National Forum meeting was held in Ranelagh Multi-denominational School and the members present decided that the time was ripe to take urgent action in support of the Campaign. It was agreed to hold a Candlelit Show of Support outside the Dáil in advance of the publication of the Budget Estimates. The next two days were the busiest of the entire campaign as the National Office and Directors scrambled to organize a successful demonstration in 48 hours. Several school communities rallied behind us getting petitions signed and emails sent to the Minister by the minute. These emails were passionately yet powerfully written and most definitely were a crucial factor in creating the necessary “political climate.”

Show of Support



Two of our younger supporters at the Show of Support, November 15th, 2005. At 6pm on a Tuesday 15th November, over 250 supporters from across the sector and beyond gathered outside the Dáil holding candles and “We need a hand!” posters. Despite the cold weather, there was a terrific feeling of community, optimism and excitement amongst everyone present. Several TDs and Senators came out to meet the parents, teachers and children present and to hear first-hand of Educate Together’s funding crisis. After an inspirational hour, the Show of Support was brought to a close and everyone was invited to regroup at a nearby hotel for a reviving cup of tea.

Result

The next few weeks were something of a twilight zone as we awaited the State’s response. Finally on December 12th 2005, Minister Hanafin announced a threefold increase in Core Funding for Educate Together, from €42,000 to €120,000 per annum. She also announced a new grant of €10,000 for new schools to allow Boards of Management members to undertake training and development and the

early appointment of Principals for new schools. She also announced plans to set up a Working Group to examine how the Learn Together curriculum can be developed and supported. Educate Together warmly welcomes these measures as the first step in the right direction. We are now working with the Minister and her Department to ensure the fullest and most effective implementation of these measures. We will be renewing our campaign for adequate State funding in future budgets and in the run up to the General Election as the National Office requires a minimum of €500,000 per annum to carry out its work at the existing level. For now however, we are most grateful to our supporters at home and abroad who responded to us in our hour of need and made the Core Funding Campaign a success.

4. New schools opened during the year

Four new Educate Together schools opened in September 2005. Combined, they have an enrolment total of 199 children, and very high numbers pre-enrolled for second and subsequent years. Educate Together is thrilled to welcome these new school communities to the sector and congratulates the principals and Boards of Management on their achievements to date. We are delighted to see that the new schools have become active participants in the national movement.

Balbriggan Educate Together National School

Balbriggan Educate Together N.S. opened its doors on September 6th, in Church Street Balbriggan. There are currently 53 pupils enrolled in the school with three mainstream teachers and three additional classroom staff. Pre-enrolment enquiries for next year and subsequent years are being made daily. The Balbriggan Educate Together Association first met in June 2004 and in the spring of 2005 they received official recognition as a national school. As with all Start-Up associations, the group were faced with major challenges from the beginning in relation to accommodation, however they were very happy to secure temporary accommodation rented from the St. Vincent de Paul for 2005. (Negotiations between Fingal County Council and the Department of Education to provide accommodation on their desired site in Moylaragh came to fruition in early 2006). The school community are delighted to have Fintan McCutcheon as their principal. Originally from Cootehill in Co. Cavan he has been living in the Fingal area for over twenty years and, while he may be new to Educate Together, he brings a wide range of experience to this role.



First pupils at Balbriggan Educate Together N.S., September 2005

Tyrrelstown Educate Together National School

After long negotiations and a summer of rising stress levels, Tyrrelstown Educate Together N.S. opened its doors on Monday September 5th with 91 pupils enrolled from Junior Infants to Third Class. The school had been due to open on a site in Tyrrelstown, however due to unforeseen building delays the school was located in prefabs recently vacated by Mary Mother of Hope N.S. in Clonee. This location is also temporary home to Castaheany Educate Together N.S. which opened 2004. Educate Together would like to formally thank the Principal, staff, Board of Management and parent body of the Mary Mother of Hope N.S. and their Patron the Archbishop of Dublin for their goodwill and assistance to both Educate Together schools. (In early 2006 Tyrrelstown ETNS

moved to temporary accommodation at their desired location in Tyrrelstown). Nicola Wilson is the principal of Tyrrelstown Educate Together N.S. and she brings a wealth of national and international experience to her new role.



First pupils at Tyrrelstown Educate Together N.S., September 2005

Galway North Educate Together National School

Galway North Educate Together N.S. is the second Educate Together school to open in County Galway. The school is based in Claregalway, an expanding suburban area with 29 pupils from Junior Infants to Sixth Class. The costs of setting up a school was one of the greatest challenges facing this group and this is an issue that urgently needs to be addressed by the Minister for Education and Science. The principal of this school is Terri Claffey, who was formerly Deputy Principal of Galway Educate Together N.S. Although reluctant to leave her fantastic colleagues and the excellent resources at Galway ETNS, Terri couldn't resist the challenge of a new Educate Together school and both the local community and National Office are delighted to be working with her.



Galway North Educate Together N.S.

Gorey Educate Together National School

Gorey Educate Together opened its doors on the 5th September 2005 to 26 pupils and two mainstream class teachers. The school is located in St. Walerans, an old estate house just outside the town of Gorey, County Wexford. It took over 10,000 hours of entirely voluntary work by a very dedicated Start-Up group to get to the point of opening this wonderful new school. Gorey

ETNS is the first Educate Together school in County Wexford thus offering real choice in education to many families in this large and growing town. It has received broad support from local public representatives and the media from the outset and a number of children have been pre-enrolled for subsequent years. The principal is Raymond Swan and as a native of County Wexford he is enjoying his exciting new role very much.



Pupils and Teachers at Gorey Educate Together N.S., opening day September 2005

5. Accommodation and Buildings

Building work on a permanent school for Castleknock Educate Together N.S. got underway in June 2005. There was joy all round when parents, staff, children and local community leaders saw the diggers move in as, for the past six and half years, the school community have been looking forward to this day. The school first opened its doors in the Laurel Lodge Community Centre in September 1999. Appeals against its planning permission to erect prefabs on this site led to the school being housed for 18 months in renovated dormitory accommodation in St. Joseph's School for the Deaf on the Navan Road. It then moved to its current large prefabricated building on a site owned by the Department of Education and Science on Beechpark Avenue in Castleknock. There are now 336 pupils representing 45 different nationalities and 19 teaching staff at Castleknock Educate Together N.S. With hundreds of families wishing to access this school, it is hoped that the provision of a purpose-built school will alleviate some of the pressure this school's waiting list.



Architectural drawing of proposed Castleknock Educate Together N.S. new building

While we are delighted to see that a building is finally being provided for Castleknock ETNS, overall we were disappointed with the progress of the Department's building programme in 2005.

- Only one third of the Educate Together schools nationwide have their own permanent buildings.
- Despite the opening of 4 new schools, not a single Educate Together school moved to a permanent building in 2005 and Castleknock ETNS is the only school currently involved in a building project with a completion date for September 2006.
- The number of Educate Together schools waiting for permanent accommodation is now at a record 24 schools out of 39 schools in total, almost two-thirds of the sector.
- Of the 21 new Educate Together schools opened since 2000, only one is in permanent accommodation.

In the first week of September, in advance of our meeting with the Building Section of the Department, Educate Together called an emergency meeting of all

principals and chairpersons who were being affected by accommodation issues. Despite the short notice and busy week, 12 school principals made the journey up to our National Office to give first-hand testimonies of the realities of the situation on the ground. Many Principals and Chairpersons described how they had to work right through the summer to ensure that necessary, Department-approved work – be it the delivery of an extra prefab, electrical wiring, or the securing of the play area – was done correctly and on time. Were it not for the selflessness of the Principals and Boards of Managements in forgoing their time off, many of our schools would not have opened on time in September. Educate Together is exploring a number of ways to ensure that this situation does not recur in summer 2006 and we are, together with other Education Partners, in on-going negotiations with the Department of Education and Science to improve the school building situation nationally.

In January 2006, the Minister announced that four Educate Together schools are included in the 2006 Capital Building Project: Balbriggan Educate Together N.S., Castaheany Educate Together N.S., Newbridge Educate Together N.S. and Gaelscoil an Ghoirt Álainn. This means that these four schools should be moving into permanent accommodation in 2007. Balbriggan ETNS, Castaheany ETNS and Gaelscoil an Ghoirt Álainn are due to get new buildings while Newbridge ETNS will have their desired premises refurbished. Educate Together warmly welcomes this announcement and congratulates the Boards of Managements of all four schools who have worked extremely hard to secure permanent buildings. We are especially pleased for Gaelscoil an Ghoirt Álainn as this school have been in prefab accommodation for 12 years. We will continue working with the Department to ensure that all four projects get underway in a promptly and professionally manner, and that the buildings are ready for occupation in a timely fashion.

6. Learn Together and Incareer Development



In August 2005, Educate Together was delighted to be awarded a grant of €10,000 from Development Cooperation Ireland, under the auspices of the Department of Foreign Affairs, to assess the support needed by teachers to develop the Learn Together programme. Carmel Mulcahy, Chris Lennon, Frieda McGovern and Paddie Murphy immediately undertook to become the project team and to put this money to the best use possible. In October they wrote to all principals in the sector asking them to complete a Needs Analysis survey. Armed with the information provided in this survey, the team then organised three Incareer Development Days for all principals in the sector, held in Dublin and Limerick. The aim of this Incareer Development was to provide information and share experiences regarding the delivery of the Learn Together curriculum in the classroom. As the curriculum is just over one year in existence, these were initial exploratory sessions but proved to be extremely lively and full of great ideas for all involved, including the project team themselves.

Throughout 2005 sales of Learn Together continued apace. Many people appeared to find out about the curriculum firstly and then discover Educate Together as a movement. Learn Together was designed to be an accessible document to anyone with an interest in education and this has been borne out by the diverse range of people who bought copies during the year. It is planned to extend Incareer Development to all teachers in the sector as 2006 progresses. All information relating to Incareer Development will be published on our website in good time.

There is an open invitation to any experienced teachers to become trainers and work with the project team in designing and delivering Incareer Development on Learn Together. We also hope to feature the curriculum on the national website with interactive discussion boards so that teachers can exchange ideas, thus developing the curriculum on a continuing basis.

7. New Schools proposed for 2006

Letterkenny Educate Together N.S., Co. Donegal

The Letterkenny Educate Together Start-Up group consists of about 10 members from a wide variety of backgrounds, including a couple of Donegal/Irish members, as well as members from New Zealand, Australia, the US, Spain and England. Letterkenny has experienced huge growth in the last ten years, and is rapidly becoming a multicultural environment. As a border county, Donegal is also home to people who moved here to avoid religious intolerance in Northern Ireland, especially the children of parents who come from different/mixed religious traditions. Many schools are already filled to capacity with the influx of children that has accompanied the doubling of local population. Some local schools have done excellent work at embracing their multi-cultural student populations, however, they do so while operating from a particular Christian ethos. From the beginning the idea of a new Educate Together school has had very good responses from parents, teachers, and other members of the public in Letterkenny and it is clear that a well of enthusiasm exists. The warm-hearted support of local religious leaders at the group's official launch was especially appreciated. There was a huge turnout at the pre-enrolment day in November. Based on current figures, Letterkenny Educate Together N.S. will open as a two-teacher school with one Junior Infants class and a Mixed Class of older children. A number of quality accommodation options are available and the Start-Up group are in the final stages of negotiation with a local landlord.



Pre-Enrolment launch for Letterkenny Educate Together N.S., November 2005

Galway East Educate Together N.S.

The Galway East Educate Together Start-Up group have been meeting on a regular basis and working hard since the Autumn to set up a new Educate Together school in Doughiska, an area of East Galway which has seen rapid housing expansion but no corresponding primary school provision in recent years.

This will be the third Educate Together school in County Galway. Since their formation, the Start-Up group have enjoyed wide endorsement from local councillors who were quick to recognise the initiative and community spirit of this voluntary group of parents and supporters. The Start-Up group held a pre-

enrolment day in early December and were overwhelmed with the response they received. Approximately 70 children of all ages have been pre-enrolled for 2006 and very healthy numbers were registered for subsequent years. The Start-Up group are now engaged in a number of fundraising efforts to enable them to make a confident application to the Department for recognition as a new school in 2006. They are working with the Department and Galway City Council to secure accommodation.



Public Meeting to set up Galway East Educate Together N.S., June 2005

Blessington Educate Together N.S.

Tigh na nÓg school was founded in 1967 to teach the full primary curriculum through the Montessori method and has been sustained by parents since then. In late Autumn representatives of Tigh na nÓg approached Educate Together to explore the possibility of becoming an Educate Together national school. Educate Together found Tigh na nÓg's ethos to be very similar to ours and after careful consideration agreed to make an application to the Department of Education and Science for a new school in Blessington. The school community at Tigh na nÓg is fully committed to transforming to a national school with the patronage of Educate Together and both parties believe that this will continue to provide the Blessington area with a genuine alternative to the existing denominational primary schools. Indeed the school will cease to be fee-paying which will make it more accessible to a wider range of families in the area. The school itself is a well-maintained, purpose-built school with three classrooms with integrated computer and library facilities, a resource room, a music room and extensive outdoor play and sports areas. It is expected that there will be upwards of 60 pupils across all classes when

Blessington Educate Together N.S. opens in September 2006.



Pre-enrolment launch for Blessington Educate Together N.S., January 2006

8. Relations with other partners and external bodies

Department of Education and Science

Our relationship with the Department progressed well in 2005. In January we had a meeting with the Minister Hanafin as the newly-appointed Minister for Education and Science. This meeting was very engaging but challenging, and would come to characterize much of our subsequent interactions with the Department and the Minister's office throughout the year.

In April, after years of persistent requests by Educate Together, the Department finally abolished the Local Contribution to State-owned school buildings. Previously school communities themselves had to pay up to €63,500 euro for their building. The Department has said it will make repayments to those schools who paid a Local Contribution as there was never any statutory basis for this payment.

In May we were delighted that Minister Hanafin responded to our invitation to address our AGM. This was the first time that any Minister for Education had attended our AGM and as such was a historic moment for everyone involved with Educate Together. Accompanying the Minister on the day was the Secretary-General, Ms. Brigid McManus; Policy Advisor, Ms. Averil Power; and the Principal Officer of the Building Unit, Mr. Tony Dalton who also hosted a workshop at the AGM. This was a very obvious sign of our improving engagement with the Minister and her Department and was a wonderful opportunity for teachers and principals in our sector to meet the Minister and her associates personally.

Later that month a seemingly major step forward in the new school process was made when, for the first time, the Department agreed to take responsibility for the accommodation of two of the proposed new Educate Together schools from the outset. This move came about through good co-operation between the Educate Together National Office, the Start-Up groups, the local authority concerned and key individuals within the Department. The schools chosen were those proposed for Balbriggan and Tyrrelstown; two areas of rapid housing development yet scarce community facilities. Educate Together hoped that this initiative would mean a hassle-free summer in the run up to the opening of the new schools in September. Alas that was not to be the case and much of the National Office's workload throughout the summer involved increasingly fraught phonecalls, letters and emails to and from the Department in an effort to find premises for both of these new schools to sort out developing schools' accommodation needs. We are very anxious that this situation does not recur in summer 2006.

In December 2005 Minister Hanafin finally responded to the some of funding issues we had raised at our January meeting (as detailed under Core Funding Campaign p. 2). This was the first time since 2000 that the Department engaged with us on this central issue and as such is a pioneering step in the right direction. Hence it may have been a challenging year with the Department but it most certainly ended on a high note and we are optimistic about further progress in 2006.



Minister Hanafin addressing the Educate Together AGM 2005, May 2005

Management Bodies and Patrons

Educate Together is deeply appreciative of the warm working relationship we have built up with other patron and management bodies over many years. In July Educate Together, along with Gaelscoileanna and the Church of Ireland Board of Education addressed the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science on the need to invest in training for members of Boards. We are delighted that our combined voices were heard on this occasion - evidenced in the Minister's announcement of a new grant for Boards of new schools in 2006.



Jane McCarthy and Paul Rowe of Educate Together with Clare Walsh and Nora Ní Loinsigh of Gaelscoileanna, and Canon John McCullough of the Church of Ireland Board of Education, at the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science, July 2005

Colleges of Education

In May, Educate Together was invited to address student teachers at Mary Immaculate College of Education and St. Patrick's College of Education. Paul Rowe, Carmel Mulcahy, ex-Director and Áine Sotscheck, Principal gave the first lectures which were made optional to the students but were very well-attended nonetheless. Paul Rowe has continued to give lectures about Educate Together to student teachers throughout the year and will continue to do so in 2006. This new venture marks the increasingly significant role that Educate Together plays in the education system, our raised profile and our growing relationship with the colleges of education nationwide. The increased awareness of Educate Together was evident in the huge numbers of student teachers applying for positions in Educate Together schools throughout the summer, many of whom made reference to hearing first-hand about Educate Together when Paul gave lectures at their colleges.



Paul Rowe, CEO Educate Together with Anne Hessian, St. Patricks College, Carmel Mulcahy, Dublin City University and Ray Toperly, St. Patricks College

Intercultural Guidelines

In May the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) published long-awaited Intercultural Guidelines for national schools. The stated aim of these guidelines “is to contribute to the development of Ireland as an intercultural society based on a shared sense that language, culture and ethnic diversity is valuable.”¹ Educate Together welcomed these guidelines as they contained some very practical and workable ideas for classrooms. But overall we were disappointed that the guidelines did not seek to address the intercultural needs and rights of children who are not of the same religious background as the ethos of the school. The guidelines do not give any indications on how to respond to the intercultural deficit whereby many children are removed from their class for at least half an hour every day to facilitate the religious instruction of their classmates. The guidelines completely shied away from addressing this very real and growing issue in Irish primary schools stating that “audits of religious education curricula are not included in

¹ *Intercultural Education in the Primary School*, published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Page 5

these guidelines.” Educate Together thus feels that a major opportunity to open debate on religious diversity in the Irish primary education has thus been lost. Currently Educate Together is the only primary education body not represented on the NCCA. We have addressed this issue and look forward to progressing matters next year.



8. Office changes

We were very sorry to say goodbye to Kate Morris, Foundation and Media Officer in December 2005. Kate worked with Educate Together for three years and it is impossible to list all the contributions that she made to Educate Together in that time. Kate was responsible for the building up the organisation's profile in the media and public eye, a task which she accomplished handsomely. With her artistic flair and eye for detail, Kate planned many events and meetings, and looked after the design of the "What is an Educate Together School?" booklet. Kate also worked intensively on the Friends of Educate Together programme and many other fundraising proposals. We will miss Kate very much but wish her much success in her new role with the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism.

During the year we were very pleased to welcome Catherine O'Brien, a former Chairperson of Educate Together, who joined our office as a Fundraising Volunteer. Catherine has initiated an Alumni Fundraising project and we very much enjoy working with her. We were also delighted to welcome Marion Billet to our office on an internship. Marion came to Ireland from France on the Leargás programme to learn English. Marion spent 10 weeks in our office and during this time conducted the annual survey on our behalf, which involved visiting schools and administering questionnaires. We are indebted to Marion and hope she enjoyed her time with us. As our schools work so well with voluntary support we hope to be in a position to take on more volunteers and interns in the National Office in 2006.



Launch of 'What is an Educate Together School?' booklet, April 2005

9. Challenges ahead in 2006

Educate Together is faced with the challenge of making the most strategic use of limited resources. We have very much enjoyed being the fastest growing sector in Irish education for the past few years but as we approach 2006 we also strongly feel that we need to ensure our role as promoters of excellence in education by providing a quality service to all our members. To this end, training for Boards of Management members in different aspects of running an Educate Together school will begin in early 2006. It is planned to publish a Patron's Manual in 2006 which will describe how Educate Together operates in this legal role and how we see this role developing given the discrepancy between State support for Educate Together and religious Patrons.

We are also very eager to get the in-career development for all teachers in the sector on the Learn Together curriculum fully up and running. We have submitted a number of applications for specific funding for Learn Together and it is hoped that the programme will kick off in mid-2006. The Education Subcommittee of the Board of Directors have been working tirelessly on this throughout 2005 and will continue to do so in 2006. In response to our Pre-Budget lobbying, a Working Group on the Learn Together curriculum, made up of representatives from Educate Together, the teacher training colleges and the Department will begin its work under the auspices of the Minister for Education and Science next year. We are very much looking forward to developing, enhancing and widening the reach of Learn Together in the year ahead.

In 2006 we will be maintaining our efforts to speed up the Department's acquisition of sites and buildings for schools. In this challenge we will be working with the other education partners and for the mutual benefit of all national schools. Almost two-third of the schools in our sector are in temporary accommodation of varying degrees of suitability. We hope to improve matters considerably in the coming year.

The existing Start-Up groups in Blessington, Galway East and Letterkenny will require support and guidance through the Department's labyrinthine New Schools' Process this coming year and demand for further Educate Together schools is now stronger than ever. Public meetings are already scheduled for early 2006 in Carrigaline and Carlow with a view to opening new schools in those areas 2007. Other areas the National Office will be looking at in 2006 are Midleton; Leixlip; Naas; Dublin 13; and Leitrim.

Educate Together schools now cater to a wide variety of families and communities right across the social spectrum and all indications point to increasing diversity within and between our school communities. This presents an exciting challenge for us as a national organisation in how we respond to the differing needs of each school yet guaranteeing that our ethos remains paramount.

Finally, in March 2006 we will be initiating a new National Campaign amongst our entire sector. A General Election is on the cards for summer 2007 but could possibly be called sooner. This is a time therefore when government politicians are most likely to be generous and opposition politicians are most likely to make promises. It is thus a window of opportunity for Educate Together to lobby for the necessary level of State funding to guarantee the organisation's future. We will be distributing Lobbying Toolkits to schools and calling on all our supporters to lobby for adequate State Support for multi-denominational education.

In short it is going to be a busy, challenging but exciting year.

11. Conclusion

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the school communities in the sector for their patience with us during a year, which in many ways was dominated by serious financial challenges and stubborn political mindsets. However given our against-the-odds-achievements of last year, we now have every reason to start 2006 on a positive note. Our State funding has been increased threefold and while this doesn't solve our money worries, it does give us something to work with and is very much a step in the right direction. Symbolically, it is the first time the State has ever engaged with our argument that they have a duty to support parental choice for multi-denominational education and as such is a milestone in the history of Irish education. We are also delighted that from now on, new schools will receive a specific sum for training their Boards of Management members. Educate Together has devised a programme of training for school communities, the first phase of which has been planned for Spring 2006. Combined with the Incareer Development planned for teachers on the Learn Together curriculum, 2006 should see the Educate Together ethos enhanced and blossoming throughout our schools nationwide.

We hope that this Report gives an interesting, balanced and honest account of Educate Together's work during 2005. We are very proud of Educate Together's progress in 2005 and while it was sometimes very frustrating and exhausting, the end results were more than worth the effort. We hope that the movement continues to flourish in 2006 and beyond.

Appendix

In January 2006 we wrote to every school in the sector inviting them to submit a short report of no more than 400 words on the year that was 2005, outlining the highs, lows and in-betweens. This was the first time we asked for individual school reports to include in the overall Annual Report and we are delighted that so many schools responded. We wanted to gather accounts of activities and daily life rather than facts and figures. We have included all the reports we received here as appendices. They are included as they were received, i.e. unedited and in the schools' own words. We hope that in this way they will portray a true and positive picture of what Educate Together is all about. We hope you enjoy reading them.

Balbriggan Educate Together N.S.

Balbriggan Educate Together NS opened its doors for the first time on Tuesday September 5th 2005. The local foundation committee experienced all of the accompanying highs and lows that such a venture brings. Of particular assistance to them, ultimately, was the hugely changing demographic of Balbriggan which over the past couple of years has almost doubled in size. A consequence of this has been a serious shortage of primary school places. In anticipation of this, and in due recognition of the Educate Together mandate and the competence of the school's own BOM, the DESS have included the school in the current capital expenditure programme and a state-of-the-art sixteen teacher school is being planned for a 2008 opening. An envious position for such a young school to be in, you will agree!

Frank Mongey, who chaired the Foundation Committee, has taken up the reins as Chairperson and Fintan Mc Cutcheon came from St Patrick's College, Drumcondra to take up the Principalship. Currently the school caters for three classes of Junior and Senior Infants and the school's Enrolment Policy envisages a single-cohort per annum roll-out with the school reaching sixth class by the year 2010. The school enjoys a substantial religious and ethnic mix with seventy-five per cent of the children not of Irish origin. The school management has made provisional application for disadvantaged status, but is frustrated with the fact that the current DEIS initiative is based on data collected over the school year 2004/05, before this school came into existence.

The school currently has six teachers who in addition to their teaching duties have also embarked on a comprehensive and thorough Policy Development programme. In particular the school is working towards best-practice in the Intercultural and Citizenship fields of education and would, hopefully, have expertise and experience to offer future Educate Together schools in this regard. A Parent Association is up and running and meeting the challenges presented by such diversity amongst the community of the school. Educate Together head office, especially in the persons of Deirdre O'Donoghue, Paul Rowe and Jane McCarthy have been endlessly informative, supportive and motivating. Our local network of ET schools, and their Principals Maeve Corish, Micheal Garvey, Gerard Kelly, Áine Sotscheck and Marie Moreau have been of huge help and support. The dedicated members of the Foundation Committee have continued to give voluntarily to the school.

Castaheany Educate Together N.S.

One of our greatest attributes at Castaheany Educate Together School is our huge diversity in nationality, religion and culture. Having over thirty nationalities and many religions represented in the school has led to a deeper understanding of other cultures and beliefs. The children are encouraged to talk about their religious traditions and backgrounds and all belief systems are equally respected. Parents are often invited in to speak to the students about their family's faith, for example, at Eid, a Muslim parent gave a talk to one of the classes about the festival and shared traditional treats with the children, while at Christmas, a Christian parent told the children of another class the story of the Nativity. This involvement has the added benefit of making parents active partners in their children's education and strengthening home-school relations.

Ethical education is given priority at our twice weekly assemblies, particularly the areas of personal development and family, group and community. Topics such as sharing, forgiving and resolving conflict are discussed with the children and praise and prizes rewarded for effort and responsible behaviour. Our motto at Castaheany is "Kind Hands, Kind Words, Kind Feet" and all children and teachers subscribe to this approach in everyday school life.

With such a variety of linguistic backgrounds it has been of special interest to Castaheany Educate Together to encourage the continuation of the children's first languages while teaching and supporting the acquisition of English and Irish. Each week the children in the older classes learn how to say 'hello' in another language of their choice. On entering a classroom, you may be greeted with 'Sanu!' (one of the Nigerian languages), 'Czesc!' (Polish), 'Asalaam Alaykum!' (Arabic) or 'Dia Dhuit!' The children all really enjoy this multi-lingualism and it plays a great part in promoting equality and cultural diversity.

Castleknock Educate Together N.S.

Another busy and very productive year for CETNS. A significant increase in enrolment and consequently staff increases resulted in many changes. Improved provision for learning and language support has significantly assisted the children who encounter difficulties of one kind or another. New posts of responsibility for teachers in curricular areas has led to a more planned approach to teaching and learning.

A WSE (Whole School Evaluation) took place in March. All concerned were delighted with the inspectors report. Our newsletter the CETNS News was re-launched and considerable effort was put into writing up new policy documents and reviewing some of the older policies.

This was a year of transition for our BOM. Unfortunately we lost some members during the year. The PA was 'reformed' and already has done great work in organising parent information evenings and in fundraising activity. There were many memorable events:

- Seachtain na Gaeilge - Science Week - Friendship Week - A Day of Celebration for children in 2nd class and a very successful Latin American Week in November.

Planning Permission for the building of our new permanent building was finally granted and construction work began in May only to end abruptly in June. The usual bureaucratic delays!

However we're looking forward to a completion date in mid-2007.

Dublin 7 Educate Together N.S.

Dublin 7 Educate Together (D7ET) opened in September 2000 with 52 pupils. We have flourished and now have 250 students. We are located temporarily in ST. Joseph's School for the Deaf on the Navan Road. The School is rooted in Dublin 7 and our population base centres around Grangegorman/Stoneybatter -

D7ET has a very strong involvement with Assisted Learning for children within Autistic Spectrum Disorder, our Learning Support groups for children with “high incidence difficulties”, our Resource Teaching groups for our international children who are learning English as a second language. Apart from our ALC all of these children are in mainstream classes. Other areas we are involved in include pilot schemes in SLD (Dyslexia) screening in conjunction with Trinity College, English language exemplars through the NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, NAER (National Assessment in English Reading), with the Educational Research Centre, St. Patrick’s College, various approaches to communication with and education of children with Autism, pilot programmes with the Health Promotion Section with the Department of Health and others.

Last year we had a very successful three-day Science event. Every child in the school participated and a bonus was that two of our pupils became the overall national winners for the Junior Engineer of the year. It is intended that this science event becomes a regular one in expanded form. We also hope to have a similar Arts event in the future. We print a weekly newsletter which is circulated to parents and interested parties. As well as items directly related to school it contains information and suggestions for local community-based activities, eg library, museum, sports, etc.,

We engage in a range of extra curricular activities: A committee organizes after school classes at reasonable cost - at present these are Art, Drama, Football and Judo. We always use our immediate neighbourhood for educational purposes. Children are brought to the library, park, Trinity College (science workshops), local exhibitions, museums and other places of interest, ie Farmleigh House to meet the Taoiseach and plant a tree. In our temporary location we are privileged to have a small farm area on site which we visit regularly and participate in a range of planned activities. There is also a swimming pool and our children swim weekly during school hours.

Galway North Educate Together N.S.

September 5th was a lovely sunny day. Photographers, journalists and politicians were invited. The school buzzed with excitement. "A great day for democracy and equality in education" our chairperson John Bradshaw said proudly. It was a tremendous struggle for all involved to reach this stage and there were tears and smiles as everyone saw a school at last.

Our Junior and Senior Infant class wasted no time. Parents came in over a three week period to help construct a gigantic friendly monster. Fabrics were chosen. Concertina fans and pom poms were glued on. Then Juniors and Seniors joined forces to plant our little garden- stones were picked, bulbs were sown and a tree, kindly given to us by a local garden centre was planted with a sun of crocuses around it. Parents helped and we all got really mucky.

Both classes came together for a shared lunch and some dramatic events at our spooky party before mid-term. Swimming began in the new pool in Tuam. Every Friday we lock up and all 31 children, parent volunteers and staff board the bus for Tuam for our weekly swim. We share the pool with another local school and its lovely to meet up every week. Bus buddies has worked out wonderfully with older pupils taking care of the little ones.

Our school bus route was mapped out and is up and running.

Yard time is really special. With so few children it is possible to bring out skipping ropes, chalk and balls.

Show and Tell happens in both rooms. Circle Time is very special. A Student Council and a Green Committee have been elected. The Student Council organised a coin jar to buy maize for a village in Malawi. They are now trying to get games painted onto the tarmac in the yard. The Green Committee are coming up with slogans and ideas.

Our staff has swelled to four. We now have two teachers, Hilary and Terri, Anne who also looks after ESL and SEN and and Katriona our SNA.

We had a logo competition and designed our tea towel which is selling well. Fundraising is ongoing with a very active committee working hard. We've had a Cuthathon and a Race Night already and many other ideas are emerging.

Our sixth class are getting ready for Entrance Tests and looking to the future, though their offer to help out at next year's Activity Week indicates they will miss us a tiny bit.

So much has been achieved and the future is bright with offers gone out for next September. Galway North Educate Together National School is on the map.

Glasnevin Educate Together N.S.

We are now a 9 teacher school with 130 pupils including children from Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Czech Republic, Russia, Norway, Germany, the Philippines and the UK. There is a very healthy waiting list for coming years. Unfortunately we are still awaiting permanent recognition from the Department of Education and Science. Our Parents' Association have arranged a number of very successful fundraising events. Chief among these was our Autumn Fair which raised much needed and appreciated funds.

Parents and staff have organised several extra-curricular activities for the children including music, arts and crafts, knitting, chess agus Club Gaelach. We are now part of the Green Schools Initiative, with the Green Schools Committee working on the Action Plan, leading toward achieving the Green Flag.

We are currently developing and implementing many policies from curricular matters to student safety. Among these is an Anti Commercialism Policy. A member of our staff – Joseph Fogarty – is involved in a campaign to deal with marketing advertising in Irish school. www.commercialfreeeducation.com

We have made a major investment in Information Technology with the upgrading of classroom facilities and the establishment of a dedicated computer laboratory. This was facilitated by a very active group of parents with IT skills who volunteered their time and expertise to assist us.

We are most fortunate in that our school is located close to many amenities, such as the Botanic Gardens, Albert College Park and the Helix. We have made regular use of these in support of curricular studies; Music in the Classroom in the Helix, Tree Week in the Botanic Gardens. Local buses serve to bring our students to city centre amenities such as ENFO, the Ark and the National Museum.

We have established a connection with our local community radio station – NEAR FM 101.6. Several of our students have taken to the airwaves to review favourite books, read their own written work and perform songs and drama as Gaelige.

The parents in our school have been helpful in accompanying students on outings, assisting Art in the classroom and especially in helping to organise our annual Art Day which is always a great success. This day is further supported by a DIT Art Lecturer and his students.

We have developed an Anti Bullying Policy and an Anti Harassment Policy following information evening for parents and teachers facilitated by the Anti Bullying Unit of Trinity College. All classes have participated in this programme which is aiming towards our school becoming a 'Telling School'. This is where children are encouraged to tell teachers about incidents of bullying and to appreciate the difference between telling to help the bully and victim and 'telling tales'.

Our **Assisted Learning Class** which is a unit for children with **Autistic Spectrum Disorder**, now has a multi sensory room, which helps to calm and comfort the

students through visual, auditory and other senses. We are working with a PhD student from Trinity College on an inclusion programme. This enables children with A.S.D. to be integrated into mainstream classes. Children from mainstream classes also attend classes in the A.L.C. for reverse integration.

Visitors to the school include An Garda Siochàna (safety), a member of Dog Trust (pet care) and the Science Bus from D.C.U.

We raised funds for **Amnesty International** through the sale of friendship bracelets. At Christmas we donated gifts to local children in need.

We emphasise the importance of participation of all pupils in all events both sporting and cultural. We have had 3 medal winners during the year, one for the **Texaco Art Competition**, one for the **high jump** and one for the **long jump** in “Cumann na mBunscoil” Santry Sports.

<p>Our newly developed website is www.get.ie Our e-mail address is: school@eircom.net</p>
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Kilkenny School Project

The Kilkenny School Project NS (KSP) has had a very fulfilling and eventful year in terms of events and projects at the school. The Core Curriculum Development Group continues to keep the ET ethos to the forefront of all projects, assemblies and events at the school. Our assemblies in 2005 took the themes of 'Spring in Celtic and other Traditions', Judaism, and Summer Festivals.

KSP took part in the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Kilkenny. Our float had the theme 'recycling'. We were awarded a prize, the judges being particularly impressed by our St Patrick – 'the eco warrior',! made by the students on their 'art for all day' the previous week. We were also awarded our third Green Flag in 2005 and continue to monitor our recycling and waste management policy.

Our annual May Day celebration explored the theme 'Ethics and the Environment' and sought to heighten our appreciation of our precious environmental resources, including water. Individual classes were involved in projects on the theme 'Caring for our World' which included topics such as 'Mini-beasts – Hurt no Living thing', 'Rainforests' and 'Cleaning up'. We had the official launch of the schools new drinking fountains which not only provide drinking water in both playgrounds but have included inlaid art works from children at the KSP. We are very proud of the fountains and invite all of you who are passing to drop by to look at our wonderful works of art.

Another major project in 2005 was our garden project which consists of a vegetable patch and herb area. We have established links with the local SOS centre (centre for people with disabilities) and were involved in a joint project with SOS and other community groups in the 'Pride of Place' competition. The project involved KSP pupils working alongside SOS trainees in planting and caring for vegetables. The lettuce and vegetables we planted were used in the school lunches that we provide. The garden continues to flourish with regular visits from SOS.

Besides our 'in house' fundraising we have been involved in fund raising for earth quake survivors in Pakistan and also towards providing resources for a school in a South African township. The 'Pyjama and Popcorn' day involved the pupils of 4th class making popcorn that went on sale at the school.

The Student Council continues to fulfil an important function in the democratic ethos of the school. Elected representatives from classes carry out research on what the students would like to see happen (or changed at the KSP). Feedback from the classes is brought to Board of Management and Executive levels. The student council has played a part in writing up the Healthy Eating & Waste Management Policy. Their annual fundraiser raises money for a charity of their choice. In 2005 the proceeds of their fundraiser went to 'get up, get out, go' programme (follow up to the Special Olympics). They have also purchased a TV/DVD, outdoor benches and board games for the school.

The KSP Gaelic Football team reached the Kilkenny Schools county final in December 2005. There is a strong culture of involvement in local GAA

competitions where the KSP, in latter years, have reached the final stages of school tournaments and competitions.

All in all 2005 has been a great year for the KSP, we continue to thrive and offer child centred education with enthusiasm and commitment from both the children, parents and staff.

Monkstown Educate Together N.S.

The New Year opened with the marvellous news from Minister Mary Hanafin that we were included in the new school building programme and that our site would be on the campus of the Institute of Art Design and Technology, Dun Laoghaire. The Minister stated that she would like to see the new school up and running within two years. In the midst of all the excitement we realised that there was a lot of work still to do and that we would need all hands on deck to make this into the best school we could for our children. The Site Committee stepped down having completed their task and suggesting that we should organise ourselves into three groups i.e. User Group, Fund-Raising Group and Technical Group. At the PTA EGM on 26 January many thanks was expressed to all on the Site Committee for their hard work, energy, and unflagging enthusiasm in taking us thus far.

Our conference, Forward Together, which took place on 20 November 2004, was seen as a milestone event. The issues focused on were: Ethos, Equality, Participation and Partnership, Child Centred Education, and Planning for our new school. The first follow-up event was a Whole School Planning Day on 9 March 05. Staff, parent representatives and Board of Management engaged in discussions on how to translate conference proposals into action.

The Board of Management adopted a Mission Statement drafted at the conference. Exploration of what we understand by ethos took place in all classes in May 05. Each class responded to the topic in different ways e.g. through drama, film, visual arts, poetry, discussion and music. Sports Day was re-designed to be more inclusive and to allow more time for social interaction and parent participation. Our extra curricular policy is more inclusive and facilitates automatic provision of support for children in need. A timetable for Student Council meetings was organised for the year and class information evenings took place in the autumn.

A sub-committee was set up to develop after school sports with a view to putting out teams of hockey, soccer and basketball and a full programme of activities was provided in September. Children, parents and staff are truly delighted with the growth of sports activities both in and after school. Many thanks to DSP for all their support in helping us get our hockey off the ground.

The Green School Committee is up and running and the first aim of the Committee was to change our attitude so that we re-use, reduce, and re-cycle. Junior and Senior Infants are the Green Policemen and are very good at checking the bins to make sure that the right rubbish is in the right bin! The Committee plan to have our first green flag before the end of 2006.

The whole school enjoyed many celebrations over the year. We celebrated the Chinese New Year on 9 February. Many classes made decorations, and demons and dragons were seen lurking in dark corners. Children took home a fortune cookie and a few red envelopes were seen about the place. There was great fun and celebrations for St. Patrick's Day in all classes and lots of Irish dancing in the schoolyard throughout the day. We held our traditional Easter Bonnet Parade and grand draw on last day of spring term. The children visually recorded the various activities and celebrations throughout the year.

Our school applied for the Discover Primary Science Award of Excellence. It is an award for schools that excel in their level of participation in science. This is a way a school can build on its science achievement from year to year. The children were engaged in many science activities over the year. They kept a school log and in May we held a science fair. We were really amazed and delighted to hear in June that the school had received the Discover Primary Science Award of Excellence 2005. The fifth class film went forward to the Fis National Finals in the autumn and was awarded High Achievement in the Art of Film Making. Children from fourth, fifth and sixth classes were delighted to be winners of Dublin Bus and Carrickbrennan Credit Union Picture/poster competition. Ben Naughton, sixth class took the prestigious Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) prize for County Dublin for his poem I can, You can.

This report is only a snippet from a very busy year of learning by all members of the school community. Please visit our web site www.metns.ie to find out more about us.

Navan Educate Together N.S.

2005 was something of a rollercoaster year for Navan Educate Together National School, but we definitely ended the year on a high.

The lease on our temporary premises was due to expire at end of term in June, and we had substantial groundwork done, in partnership with DES, on securing an alternative for the new term in September. Then, at the eleventh hour, the alternative disappeared, and as we closed for the summer holidays, we had no guarantee that we would open again in September.

But our confidence and self belief remained intact, and there was no panic-stricken exodus of pupils or teachers. Everyone pulled together, and thanks to some exceptional work by some exceptional people, we secured an excellent new premises offering us 5 years of security, had it completely renovated and kitted out, and we opened in September. Much of that "kitting out" and resourcing of the school involved, and continues to involve, a vast amount of voluntary input by parents and friends, for which we are eternally grateful. We maintained our pupil numbers, we have a very high rate of enrolments, and great plans for the future.

Some of the projects during the year of which we are particularly proud include the Proverbs Project. This involved families of children in the school, from as many ethnic backgrounds as possible, selecting a proverb from their country/culture, translating it - if necessary - into English, and then the children in the school doing artistic interpretations of the proverbs. We secured a grant from the local Council to frame the works of art, which are now hanging on the walls throughout the school. The grant is multi-annual, and the project will continue to run.

One of the big "hits" over the past months has been the Latin American drumming classes, which happen both during school hours, and thanks to the huge demand, there are now also classes after school.

Under the Leargas East-West programme that was set up under the Belfast Agreement, we have formed a partnership with a small Scottish school, and hope to also establish a partnership with a Northern Irish school as soon as possible.

We have also been entered in the Pride of Place competition run by MeathCo. Council, and 12 senior pupils will be receiving training at the Botanic Gardens.

We had some great fundraising initiatives by the Parents Association over the past year, for example the Women's Mini Marathon, and a benefit concert by Anne Harrington and the EgoManiax.

North Bay Educate Together N.S.

North Bay has lost its principal teacher of many years. Frieda retired at Christmas. We are at the moment in the process of recruiting a replacement. In the meantime Paul King is holding the fort very ably and we are grateful to him.

We had a great night in early January to say thanks to Frieda and to wish her well. All sorts of people showed up, many of whom we hadn't seen for years. Past parents, teachers and friends from the last sixteen years came.

We have got our Green School status again this year thanks to the dedication of pupils and staff, especially Kathleen O'Meara.

An application has been made to the department of education for funds, under the Summer Works scheme, to upgrade all the toilets and to provide wheelchair access to the building. We wait in hope.

North Dublin National School Project
(note: this school requested that the homepage from their website
<http://www.iol.ie/~ndnsp/> be placed in this section instead of a report)

NDNSP
Ballymun Road

Dublin 9

Telephone:00353 1 837 1620

Welcome to Our Homepage

The NDNSP is a child centered, co-educational, multi-denominational,
democratically run school, located on the northside of Dublin

The History of Our School

Moving to Our New School Building

Fundraisers

NDNSP Fundraiser that helps the Environment - Oak Glen Forest Park

The School and the Internet

Videoconferencing

Subject by Subject Index - we have poetry, stories, art, geography, shared projects
with other schools, environmental studies, history, core curriculum and much more
on our web pages

Lynn McKenna's Beautiful Poem

2005/2006 School Year

Core Curriculum Update

We are continuing are links with Gilnahirk Primary in Belfast

Some lesson themes based on the Celebrations,Beliefs, Religion, Spirituality and
Thought Systems part of our Core Curriculum

North Kildare Educate Together School

The year 2005 was a busy one in the NKETS. As a school which moved from portacabins to a new building in June 2003, we are still in the process of developing our new surroundings. Although we had the space for a football pitch on our site, we had no money to level or seed it. The DES finally gave us a grant and this was developed over the summer of 2005. We will be able to use the pitch in April or May. We also acquired a sound system with the help of a parent in Castleknock ET, and this allowed us to run concerts for the school as part of our annual music week, ranging from traditional Irish music to a participant in You're a Star! Later in the year, second class put on a performance of Roald Dahl's "Jack and the Beanstalk". The giant and the beanstalk from the musical now greet visitors to the school in our entrance lobby.

The networking of our computer room was completed in 2005 and we launched our school website in October, at www.nkets.ie. Our most recent acquisition is a stackable staging system which we haven't used yet but which will allow us to get even more use out of our school hall. Every year we get the graduation class to work on a project which they will leave behind to enhance the school in their memory. The class of 2005 worked on our most ambitious project to date, the construction of a school pond. This was a great success and can be seen in all its glory on the website! 2005 also saw our first entrants in the Primary School Sports at Santry and this came about as part of a collaborative venture between the NKETS and the Celbridge Athletic Club which has a track adjacent to our school.

As for all Educate Together schools, fundraising remains a big priority and at the end of the year we held a very successful fundraising concert involving all 240 children in the school and the Liffey Valley Orchestra. This took place in the Setanta Hotel in Celbridge and was attended by over four hundred people. We recorded the concert and presented every family in the school with a complimentary CD as a Christmas gift from the school to acknowledge their support. It was a pleasant ending to what has been a typically busy year in North Kildare.

Ranelagh Multi-denominational School

Early in 2005 we held our School Development Planning day to which all members of the Board of Management, the Parents Association and the Executive were invited along with all members of staff. Professor Kathleen Lynch gave a keynote address on the theme 'Equality and Inclusion – The Challenge for RMDS'. This provoked much debate and reflection and served as a springboard for a workshop on 'Our Vision For RMDS'. Arising from this workshop the school developed a vision statement – Learning And Living In The World Together – and a new logo that incorporates this. The whole process has been a very useful one and will continue into the future as the logo is gradually embedded into the life of the school.

The second part of our SDP day involved the teaching staff in examining the 'Learn Together' document and looking at the practicalities of implementing it in our school. Over the year we have looked at ways of better communicating to parents the work that is done in our Core Curriculum classes. This has resulted in, amongst other initiatives, parents being formally invited in to see exhibitions of work carried out, and Core Curriculum copies being sent home with a brief explanatory note from the teacher.

The school has been working over the past few years towards building an extension that will appropriately accommodate the teaching of children with special educational needs. At present some of this teaching takes place in corridors, which is obviously unsatisfactory. The extension will also include versatile spaces, which will facilitate the effective implementation of the revised curriculum. These spaces will also be used for school age childcare, an important service that we will be able to offer to families. This element has also resulted in our having secured significant funding from the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme. We hope to begin construction in summer 2006 and have the facility completed by summer 2007. This represents an important step in the development of the RMDS community.

Finally, 2005 closed with our Christmas concert – always a highlight of the RMDS calendar. This year's theme was 'Festivals Of Light' and included presentations by classes on Christmas, Diwali, Hanukkah and the Mid-Winter Solstice. The energy and creativity that was displayed by children and staff on the day, and the warmth and enthusiasm from the packed audience, were eloquent testimony to a vibrant and thriving school community.

Rush and Lusk Educate Together NS*

2005 has been a year of growth, challenge and exciting curriculum projects. Our pupil numbers increased from 39 to 65 and we were happy to appoint our second mainstream class-teacher. We also welcomed the appointment of our learning support teacher, a post shared with Donabate/Portrane ETNS. As we awaited the results of our planning application for prefabs, it was necessary to relocate our senior class to Turvey Golf Club, a situation that is ongoing into 2006 and has presented considerable challenge to us.

Our main focus for 2005 was on the environment, as we worked towards acquiring our first Green School Flag. Our senior class visited the Recycling Centre in Ballealy, we hosted a talk on composting given by Trevor Sargent and participated in National Tree-Planting Endeavours and National Clean-Up Action Week in Kenure Park, where our school was located in its start-up year. We participated in Operation Conservation Ireland's programme for Primary Schools and explored our beautiful rural environment with new eyes and ears. We developed our organic garden with the help of parents on our Environment Committee and proudly accepted a prize for best new entry in the Fingal Cleaner Schools Competition. As the year ended, we underwent our assessment for our Green Flag.

We worked hard to put our Vision Statement and our Positive Behaviour Policy in place, through the collaboration of parents, staff and children, with our Policy Committee overseeing the process.

Towards the end of 2005 we felt ready to undertake a new project and joined the Lift Off Pilot Project, an Amnesty/INTO Human Rights programme for junior classes. This work continues into 2006 and gives us an opportunity to work with other primary schools, including schools in Northern Ireland.

The year ended with a charity cake-sale, organised by the children, in aid of the Pakistan Earthquake Relief Fund and a school project on the theme of New Year, a worthwhile end to a busy year.

Swords Educate Together N.S.

Like every year since our school opened in September 2001, 2005 was an energy-consuming year for our school community. We succeeded in maintaining an active presence and input at national level, coupled with ever-increasing demands as our school entered its fifth year in temporary accommodation. Our school had representation at all ET meetings, training sessions, forums and AGM, a highlight of the year being an inspiring school presence at Dail Eireann on November 15th, 2005 to highlight the inadequate State funding for Educate Together.

September 2005 was a watershed month for our school. With the introduction of General Allocation for Learning Support, the sanction of a full-time Resource post, a full-time EAL post and the enrolment of sixty additional pupils our teaching staff increased by 8 teaching posts and our SEN support team by one additional SNA.

The establishment of a dynamic SET team has been a priority for our school. All SEN teaching staff participated in the INTO on-line in-service course and Learning Support was prioritised for whole-staff planning time, as part of the School Development Planning initiative. The SEN team documented the establishment of SEN provision in our school as a reference point and history document.

Like all Educate Together schools, we are dedicated to making our unique ethos a daily experience and learning for all who are associated with our school and all who visit. We await much needed in-service training for our teaching staff on the Learn Together Programme, following on from the excellent in-service day for Principal Teachers. On an on-going basis, we plan our Educate Together Programme at our monthly staff meetings and communicate this to the wider school community. We find this whole-school approach works really well for us and it provides an ethos-building focus for weekly assemblies. We have forged close links with DICE, which is based in CICE and our school is involved in piloting Lift-Off for junior classes.

Thanks to Fingal County Council support, we have entered the third year of our **Wisdom of Age and Youth (WAY)** project, an inter-generational project involving our third and fourth class and Swords Senior Citizens. Focusing on drama, music and visual arts, this inspiring project is a joy and a celebration for the entire school community. The number and choice of After-School Classes has grown, thanks to the commitment and dedication of our PTA.

The year ahead, like years previous, will require focus, energy and continued good management. As we await planning permission for a new 'decanting' building to allow construction of our permanent school building on our present site, we draw on our experience of success when faced with unpredictability and uncertainty regarding the provision of accommodation – temporary and permanent. With the continued support of our Patron, Educate Together and Head Office staff, we know we can take the next step!

Wicklow Educate Together N.S.

WETNS has been an outstanding success during 2005. The school has grown from strength to strength thanks to the commitment of parents, staff, BOM, PTA and all the committees.

On St. Patrick's Day parents, children and staff put on a wonderful pageant for the Parade in Wicklow Town. The theme was Tír Na nÓg and everyone dressed up in Celtic costumes portraying the ancient Irish characters. All the hard work paid off when to our delight we won the cultural award. We received a crystal glass trophy and €100 at a ceremony in the Town Hall.

Parents generously sponsored our outings to the theatre, Sea World and bowling and they continue to provide yoga, cookery and sewing classes for the whole school each week.

Sports Day was held in the local Rugby Club grounds and we had a huge attendance although it was a rather wet day.

The end of the school year saw everyone involved in organising a Treasure Hunt. We all dressed up as pirates and searched for treasure on the sea front. We arrived just in time as the ship took off having hidden the treasure. Our map however led us to the treasure – a large suitcase of gold chocolate coins. A great feast awaited us when we arrived back at school thanks to the PTA.

The new PTA has been working very hard at fundraising since September. They have had bag packs in the local supermarkets, Salsa nights, Quiz nights and Raffles to fund our weekly swimming lessons and our new Interactive Whiteboard.

The BOM and Premises Committee had the enormous task of converting the whole Marine House building from a hostel to a school in one week last August. They did a magnificent job and we went into 4 large, newly decorated classrooms on the 1st of Sept. They also managed to have a staff room, assembly room and computer room available.

This year too saw the appointment each week of a Safety Sheriff and a deputy from amongst the children themselves to help with supervision in the yard.

Drama has taken on a new life in our school since Sept. We put on a performance of The Snow Queen at Christmas with all 87 children on stage and the whole community involved in the staging of the play.

Both parents and children have received the Educate Together Curriculum very positively.