



Educate Together Second-Level Project

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Senator Ivana Bacik launches Second-level Feasibility Study

The report of a Feasibility Study for the Opening of a Second-level School by Educate Together, carried out by the School of Education, Trinity College was launched on Wednesday 23rd July 2008 by Senator Ivana Bacik. At the event, Senator Bacik spoke of the positive contribution that Educate Together has made to Irish society during its thirty-year history.

“It is very important that Educate Together should be registered as second-level patrons. In a modern, diverse and pluralist Irish society, these are the sort of secondary schools that our children need.”

The launch took place in the Atrium, Trinity College and was attended by representatives from Educate Together schools and working groups, academics, public representatives, NGOs and others. Dr Aidan Seery and Dr Andrew Loxley from the School of Education, Trinity College, and Paul Rowe, CEO of Educate Together also spoke at the event, which was widely covered in the media.



One strand of the research surveyed the scale and nature of the demand for Educate Together second-level education among parents of children currently attending Educate Together primary schools. Of these, an overwhelming 90% of parents indicated that if the opportunity existed they would send their children to an Educate Together post-primary school. The feasibility study also provides a ringing endorsement of the education being provided in Educate Together primary schools, showing that 97% of Educate Together parents said that their children were happy at school. In particular parents were happy that their children were treated with courtesy and respect and they felt that Educate Together schools provide a balance between academic development and social well-being.

It is this balance and this respect that parents want to see carried through to second-level. While second-level schools sometimes blame parents for an overemphasis on exams and exam results, here

is a large body of parents who believe strongly that there should be more to post-primary education than merely the memorisation of facts and the acquisition of points.

For more information about this event or to read the Feasibility Study Report, visit:
http://www.educatetogether.ie/2_campaigns/secondlevel_trinity_Launch.html.

Bishop Raises Concerns about Process of Assigning Patronage at Second-level

At the Parnell Summer School in Wicklow last week, Bishop Leo O'Reilly voiced the concern of the Irish Bishops' Conference over the process of assigning of patrons to new second-level schools by the Department of Education and Science.

Bishop O'Reilly was speaking on a panel with Paul Rowe, CEO of Educate Together and Archbishop John Neill, Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin. During this session Paul Rowe spoke about the importance to the education system of "independent patrons with purely educational objectives". Bishop O'Reilly's comments echoed this view and he was quoted on August 14th in the Irish Times as saying: "The patron bodies are the educational providers on the ground. They have served the State well in the past and we believe continue to serve it well. As key partners in education they need to be consulted on the provision of new schools," he said. He said this was "particularly true at second level where there is still no mechanism or protocol for consultation with patrons in relation to the provision of new schools as there is at primary level".

At primary level Educate Together works closely with local parents and the Department of Education and Science in planning for the provision of new schools. This process is guided by the New Schools Advisory Committee, an independent committee established by the Minister for Education and Science in 2002. However, at second-level no such process exists. It is therefore unclear how decisions are made as to what type of school any new second-level school will be.

The absence of such a process leaves parents outside the decision-making loop and can lead to confusion. As an example, it has recently emerged that there are plans for a new post-primary school in the Lucan area to become a County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC) community college. This is despite years of campaigning on the part of local parents for an Educate Together second-level school, the existence of five Educate Together feeder primary schools in the area, and the fact that there is already a VEC-managed community college in the area.

Speaking about this issue, Emer Nowlan, Educate Together's Second-level Project Manager said "There is an urgent need for the development of a transparent process of assigning patronage to new second-level schools. This process must involve consultation with local families and must work to ensure that a diversity of school type exists in every local area".

Advisory Panel of "Critical Friends" Established

A series of meetings with partner organisations is continuing and proving rewarding. So far meetings have been held with the Ombudsman for Children's office, Amnesty International, the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (ASTI), the Teachers Union of Ireland (TUI), the Joint Managerial Body (JMB), An Foras Patrúnachta (patron body for gaelscoileanna and gaelcholáistí) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). A meeting is planned for next week with the National Parents Council, post-primary and organisations of students and young people are also being approached.

Negotiations are also ongoing with the Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA), the representative body for Vocational Education Committees (VECs) to explore how Educate Together second-level schools could be established in partnership with VECs.

A recent initiative is the establishment of an advisory panel of key educationalists and opinion-formers, which, it is hoped, will offer feedback on policy and documentation in relation to the Educate Together Second-level Project as it develops. The aim of assembling an advisory panel is to maximise consultation on Educate Together's plans for second-level education. This will ensure that policy develops in the most informed manner possible, with reference to all key stakeholders, academics and other interested parties in education.

This initiative has met with a positive response and we are delighted that, in addition to long-standing contributors to Educate Together, Professor Aine Hyland and Dr Carmel Mulcahy, Head of Education in DCU, other key figures such as Dr Emer Smyth, ESRI, Dr Fionnuala Waldron, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra and Dr Aidan Seery, Trinity College Dublin, have offered to join the Panel and act as "critical friends".

Membership of this panel offers an opportunity to participate in a ground-breaking project which will contribute greatly to discussion and debate on the future of second-level education in Ireland. If you feel you could make a contribution, or know of anyone else who might, please contact emer.nowlan@educatetogether.ie with suggestions. [Click here to see advisory panel.](#)

School-gate Petition to Advance Patronage Registration Campaign

In the continuing absence of a response from the Department of Education and Science in relation to Educate Together's registration as a second-level patron, and to supplement the online petition set-up over the summer, a school-gate petition campaign day is planned for Thursday 25th September. We hope that all 56 Educate Together primary schools will participate and that this action will show Minister Batt O'Keeffe the huge support that exists for Educate Together second-level education. If you would like to help organise this campaign in your school, please

contact masina.johnston@educatetogether.ie or secondlevel@educatetogether.ie.

As part of this campaign we are also asking people to write to their local TDs asking them to contact the Minister on their behalf. A sample letter is available for download on the Educate Together website: http://www.educatetogether.ie/2_campaigns/secondlevelet.html.

Please sign the petition if you have not already done so and then send it on to others who might be interested.

<http://www.gopetition.com/petitions/educate-together-second-level-campaign.html>



Working Groups begin drafting Blueprint for Educate Together Second-level Education

Working Groups have been meeting over the summer and are beginning to develop a draft Blueprint for Educate Together Second-level Education. This Blueprint will draw together the work of the working groups to date and will reflect the views of members as expressed in workshops, as well as the Trinity College feasibility study and other current educational research. It will provide guidelines as to how Educate Together second-level schools will function, providing a basis for ongoing consultation and further development with members, local school communities and start-up groups.

If you have an interest in ET second-level education and would like to join a working group, or if you (or someone you know) has particular skills which would be useful to these groups please contact Emer at the national office or email secondlevel@educatetogether.ie. In particular we would welcome people with an interest in ethical education, curriculum, teaching and learning methodologies, consulting young people, school buildings, planning and campaigning and lobbying.

Second-level General Members Meeting Planned for October

Following the great success of the General Members Meeting on Second-level Education held last January, a provisional date of Saturday, October 11th has been set for the next meeting. Further information will follow in next month's newsletter.

Educate Together Second-level Project

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