



## WHERE TO NEXT?

The Second-Level Destinations of  
Educate Together Pupils

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# Introduction

## Educate Together

Educate Together is an educational charity which has its origins in the multi-denominational education movement which began in the 1970s. It is the representative organisation of the 58 Educate Together National Schools (ETNS) across the Republic of Ireland, and is patron of 45 of these schools. While all Educate Together schools are National Schools, the network reflects the diversity of primary school types in Ireland, including urban and rural schools, disadvantaged (DEIS) schools and schools that cater for pupils with specific Special Education Needs (SEN) in assisted classes. Educate Together is currently the leading provider of new primary schools and the fastest growing sector in Irish education.

Educate Together schools operate under the same regulations and funding structures as all other national schools in Ireland and are fully recognised by the Department of Education and Skills (DES). They differ from other national schools, however, in their ethos or characteristic spirit. Educate Together schools reflect the view that it is 'educationally, socially and morally desirable to deliver equality in education and education for equality.'<sup>1</sup> They are obliged, under the Educate Together charter, to 'deliver equality of access and esteem to all children irrespective of their social, cultural and religious backgrounds.'<sup>2</sup>

Educate Together schools are grounded in the four principles outlined in the organisation's charter. They are multi-denominational in character, ensuring that children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds have equal access to, and rights within the school. They are co-educational and committed to encouraging all children to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities. They are child-centred, and this principle underlies not only the curriculum but also the management of the school. Finally, Educate Together schools are run on a democratic basis, encouraging active participation by parents in the daily life of the school while affirming the professional role of teachers.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Rowe, Educate Together CEO, speaking at the Parnell Summer School in August 2008

<sup>2</sup>What is an Educate Together School? Educate Together, Dublin 2006

<sup>3</sup>The Educate Together Charter (last amended 1999), <http://www.educatetogether.ie/about-2/charter/>

These principles permeate daily life in the school and are brought to life through the ‘Learn Together’ ethical education curriculum which is taught in an age-appropriate way through all classes in the school. This curriculum consists of four strands:

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

It is through this curriculum that Educate Together schools aim to prepare children to live, learn and work in today’s complex and diverse world.

The popularity of the Educate Together model of education is growing, as evidenced by the increasing pressure on places in Educate Together schools. Most Educate Together schools cannot cater for the demand for this type of education. Many of the parents who lobbied for an Educate Together primary school to be established in their area are now looking at post-primary options for their children. Educate Together parents, traditionally, have made a choice to seek out and/or establish an Educate Together school, consciously choosing this model of inclusive education for their children. Recently, however, changes in population have seen a large increase in the numbers of children entering school at all levels and a significant shortage of places.

Historically, the Irish education system has been dominated by denominationally-run schools and these schools make up 98% of primary and 50% of post-primary schools.<sup>4</sup> Denominational schools also enjoy an exemption from equality legislation, which allows them to discriminate between applicants for admission in order to uphold the religious ethos of the school.<sup>5</sup> As a result, it is possible for a child not to gain access to a school because of their family’s religious identity, especially in areas where there is a shortage of school places.<sup>6</sup>

Children who do attend denominational schools but who do not share the school’s denomination can, in theory, be exempt from religion classes. The State, under European law, is obliged to provide for exemption from classes which do not conform to parents’ religious or

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<sup>4</sup> See Department of Education and Skills website for list of all schools - [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

<sup>5</sup> The Equal Status Act, 2004

<sup>6</sup> This first gained attention in the media in 2008 when two Catholic schools in Dublin 15 changed their enrolment policy to accommodate a quota of non-Catholic pupils. See <http://www.rte.ie/news/2008/0123/schools.html>

philosophical convictions. The State is also obliged to ensure that such exemptions should not be 'stigmatising' or 'discriminatory'.<sup>7</sup>

In practice, however, the dominant ethos of a school permeates the entire school experience, and it can be argued that the very act of separating pupils from each other is itself discriminatory. Ireland is a signatory to a number of UN treaties which provide for freedom of conscience, thought and religion. Each of these treaties has a supervisory body, which issue 'concluding observations,' highlighting any failings on the part of the State. Three such sets of concluding observations have recommended that the Irish State support the establishment of non/multi-denominational schools, and to revise existing legislation which may allow for discrimination with regard to the admission of pupils of all religions to schools.<sup>8</sup>

Educate Together, which has pioneered multi-denominational education in Ireland, offers a genuine alternative to denominationally-run schools at primary level and is working to establish its first post-primary schools.

A recent study carried out by Trinity College Dublin into the feasibility of opening a second-level Educate Together school<sup>9</sup> found that 90% of parents who currently sent their child to an Educate Together primary school would send their child to an Educate Together second-level school if it was available. The study also explored the reasons why these parents, in such resounding numbers, would choose an Educate Together second-level school.

## **Types of Second-Level Schools in Ireland**

The Irish second-level school system consists of three broad school types. The largest in number are voluntary secondary schools, which are mostly owned and managed by religious patrons or trustee bodies. Voluntary secondary schools historically provided academic education, though most have now incorporated technical and practical subjects. Of the 394

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<sup>7</sup>The European Convention of Human Rights (Art 2 of protocol no 1),

<sup>8</sup> Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination on Ireland: UN Doc: CERD/C/IRL/CO/2, para.18  
Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child: Ireland, 29 September 2006, UN Doc: CRC/C/IRL/CO/2, para.60  
Concluding Observations of the Human Rights Committee: UN Doc: CCPR/C/IRL/CC/3 para. 22

<sup>9</sup> Seery, Loxley & Limond (2007) The Feasibility of Opening a Second-level Educate Together School, Trinity College Dublin.



voluntary secondary schools in the country in 2006/7, 55 were fee-paying.<sup>10</sup> A recent development is the establishment of three Irish language voluntary secondary schools, or Gaelcholáistí, under the patronage of An Foras Patrúnachta, the patron body for many of the primary Gaelscoileanna around the country. The first of these gained permanent recognition from the Department of Education and Skills in July 2010.<sup>11</sup>

The second most common school type is the vocational school or community college. There were 247 of these in 2006/7. These are run by Vocational Education Committees (VECs); statutory bodies set up under the Vocational Education Act, 1930 (as amended). Although VEC schools were initially established to prepare young people for careers in trades, most now provide a wider range of second-level courses, including a range of academic options. Many of these schools have, to a greater or lesser extent, a religious ethos, although they are prohibited from discriminating on the basis of religion in their admissions policies.

The third broad school type incorporates community and comprehensive schools, of which there were 77 community and 14 comprehensive schools in 2006/7. Comprehensive schools are managed by representatives of the diocesan religious authority, the VEC for the area and the Minister for Education and Skills. Community schools are run by boards of management who are representative of local interests, as well as a Catholic religious authority. While community and comprehensive schools may not discriminate on the basis of religion in their admissions policies, most have a Roman Catholic or Church of Ireland ethos.

Under the Education Act (1998) schools are responsible for their own admissions policies. Schools may not have a place for every applicant and a selection process may be necessary. The Education Act (1998) requires schools to publish their enrolment policy, and to “ensure that as regards that policy principles of equality and the right of parents to send their children to a school of the parents’ choice are respected and such directions as may be made from time to time by the Minister, having regard to the characteristic spirit of the school and the constitutional rights of all persons concerned, are complied with.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> DES Education Statistics 2006/7 [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) (note – 2006/07 statistics were used because at the time of data analysis, in 2008, data for 2007/08 were not available).

<sup>11</sup> *Good news at last for Gael Choláiste Chill Dara as it is officially recognised*, Leinster Leader, 7 July 2010, <http://www.leinsterleader.ie/news/Good-news-at-last-for.6406255.jp>

<sup>12</sup> The Education Act, Dublin (1998)

Although there have been campaigns to establish Educate Together second-level schools for some years, none have yet been sanctioned. Therefore, families who chose an Educate Together primary school currently have no option but to send their children to a school with a different ethos at second-level.

## School Choice

As discussed above, Ireland has seen a large increase in population over the last number of years. This, along with the global phenomenon of the marketisation of schools, has put a strain on existing school places in some areas. There are large waiting lists for many primary and post-primary schools and it may be the case that many people are now in the position of placing their child in any school that will take them, rather than having any real choice or alternative.

According to recently published Department of Education and Skills projections on post-primary enrolments, the total numbers at second-level are projected to grow by 3.8% in the five years from 2009/10 to 2014/15, an increase of 10,300 students. These projections also point to an ongoing increase in the second-level population to a peak of 373,400 students in 2024/25, an increase of 61,200 from 2009/10.<sup>13</sup>

Parental choice of second-level school is based on a complex web of factors ranging from social, economic or practical to religious or traditional motives. One of the difficulties in analysing school choice is the fact that we can only measure which schools are chosen from those available, and can only hypothesise as to which schools would be chosen if different options were available. Another difficulty is that there are often differences between parents' stated preferences, as offered in opinion or attitudes surveys, and actual choice, as "revealed" by actual enrolment data.<sup>14</sup>

A feasibility study conducted by Trinity College Dublin into the opening of a second-level school by Educate Together<sup>15</sup> investigated whether there has been a shift in the motives of parents sending their children to Educate Together primary schools. In recent years, a majority of new

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<sup>13</sup> Department of Education and Science (DES) (February 2010) *Projections of Full Time Enrolment in Teaching Institutions aided by the DES at Primary, Second and Higher Level 2009 – 2030* [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) Statistics/Projections of Enrolment, accessed July 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Burgess, S., Greaves, E., Vignoles, A. & Wilson, D. (2009) *What Parents Want: School Preferences and School Choice*. CMPO Working Paper no. 09/222.

<sup>15</sup> Seery et al., 2007

Educate Together schools have been opened in areas with rapidly developing populations, where there are many parents who need to establish new local schools because of insufficient school places for their children. It had been thought that many parents may have been choosing an Educate Together school for reasons other than its specific equality-based ethos. However, the Trinity study shows that of Educate Together parents in rapidly developing areas, 82% chose the Educate Together school because it reflected their values, while only 17% said they chose it because it was local.

However, location has been internationally recognised as one of the most important factors in school choice. A 2001 study<sup>16</sup> found that the main reason given by parents for rejecting a particular school was transport / distance, with over half citing it as a factor. Many parents in this study cited not only the cost and inconvenience of sending their child to a school that was further away, but also the safety of their child when coming home during dark winter months. Another study identified a link between the social class of parents and the importance they placed on locality, linking it with concepts of community, including security, belonging and connectedness.<sup>17</sup>

In Ireland, research from the 1990s has pointed to half of all second-level students not attending their nearest (or most accessible) second-level school, and some evidence of a preference for single-sex education by parents.<sup>18</sup> However, school choice is geographically variable, and parental 'preferences' for particular types of school may also be linked to the available (and sometimes limited) types of post-primary school in a particular area.

Other studies have ranked academic results as the main deciding factor for parents choosing a second-level school.<sup>19</sup> In Ireland, there is great pressure on pupils to perform well in the Leaving Certificate, through which students acquire 'points' which count for entry to third level institutions. 'Grind' schools or schools with a reputation for pupils attaining high points may, therefore, be more important to some parents than the ethos of a school. Academic

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<sup>16</sup> Bagley, Woods, Glatter: (2001). *Rejecting Schools: Towards a Fuller Understanding of the Process of Parental Choice*, The Open University.

<sup>17</sup> Reay, D. & Ball, D (1998) *Making their Minds Up: Family Dynamics of School Choice*. *British Educational Research Journal*, 24/4. p431–448.

<sup>18</sup> Hannan, D, Smyth, E, McCullagh, J, O'Leary, R, McMahan, D (1996) *Coeducation & Gender Equality*, ESRI (Oak Tree Press) p 87

<sup>19</sup> Bilfulco, Ladd & Ross, (2008) *The Effects of Public School Choice on Those Left Behind: Evidence from Durham, North Carolina*; *Peabody Journal of Education: Issues of Leadership, Policy and Organisations* – Vol 84, No 2

expectations overlap greatly with expectations of the school itself, its reputation, resources and physical state of the building. Many parents hold the reputation of the school to be a major factor in school choice.<sup>20</sup>

In the Trinity college study,<sup>21</sup> which surveyed parents of children attending Educate Together primary schools, it was found that having a good quality school building was very important to parents when choosing a second-level school for their child. In contrast to aforementioned studies of general parental attitudes, this study found that Educate Together parents placed a high value on balancing academic results with personal and social development in considering second-level schools.

A 2005 study<sup>22</sup> of Educate Together parental attitudes in Lucan also reflects this view. Only 31% of the parents surveyed in this study stated that a school's academic record was most important when choosing a post-primary school, while 34% stated that a school's commitment to extra-curricular activities was the most important factor. In the Trinity study there was a noteworthy lack of emphasis on academic or sporting success, and a focus instead on the respect and equality both shown to the students and included in their learning.

Teacher qualifications, professionalism and experience were also found to be key factors for Educate Together parents, who specified that they wanted teachers to treat children with respect, provide meaningful feedback on children's progress and make parents welcome in the school. This is in contrast to the reality as described in some Irish research which has found that many parents feel excluded from taking part in decision-making in the school.<sup>23</sup>

These concerns are reflected in the international literature also, with accessibility to teachers and rapport being held as some of the key stumbling blocks for parents.<sup>24</sup> The attitude of the teachers, most importantly the school principal, has also been reported as being an important

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<sup>20</sup> Jackson, C. & Bisset, M. (2005) Gender and School Choice: Factors Influencing Parents when Choosing a Single-sex or Co-educational Independent School for their Children, Cambridge Journal of Education, 35/2

<sup>21</sup> Seery, et al, 2007

<sup>22</sup> Devereux, P (2005) An investigation into Parental Attitudes and Preferences Regarding the Development of an Educate Together Post-Primary School, p 97 (M.Ed Thesis, NUI Maynooth)

<sup>23</sup> Hanafin, Joan; Lynch, Anne. (2002) Peripheral Voices: Parental Involvement, Social Class, and Educational Disadvantage. British Journal of Sociology of Education. Vol 23(1), Mar 2002, pp. 35-49.

<sup>24</sup> Reay, D. & Ball, D. (1998). "Making their Minds Up": Family Dynamics of School Choice. British Educational Research Journal, 24/4, 431-448.

choice factor for parents<sup>25</sup> with some reporting an aversion to to highly dominant principals and an awareness that in such schools, Boards of Management may be only token bodies.<sup>26</sup>

Class differences have also been highlighted as an important factor in school choice,<sup>27</sup> with some parents feeling deskilled from making the decision.<sup>28</sup> Other research has indicated that parents tend to choose schools that have children of similar background, social class and status to their own.<sup>29</sup> This stems from a number of factors, one of which is a desire that their child not feel different or uncomfortable.<sup>30</sup> However, in the Trinity study,<sup>31</sup> only 14% of Educate Together parents felt that it was important for children at school to have the same social background.

The Trinity study also reported a number of other important factors in school choice for parents. These included good special education needs (SEN) provision and an effective means of dealing with bullying and racism. They expressed the necessity for an awareness of and sensitivity to the transition from primary to post-primary. They also wanted the school to have a distinctive philosophy or ethos in teaching and learning. They noted the need for a good code of discipline, a topic that has had a long history in school choice decision-making.

There is a popular notion in Ireland that single-sex schools benefit girls (academically), while co-education has advantages for boys (socially), despite an absence of evidence to this effect.<sup>32</sup> A great deal of research internationally has indicated that the reputation of the a school and its examination results are still the key factors for most parents in school choice, whether co-

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<sup>25</sup> Bagley, Woods, Glatter. (2001). *Rejecting Schools: Towards a Fuller Understanding of the Process of Parental Choice*, The Open University.

<sup>26</sup> Hanafin, Joan; Lynch, Anne (2002) *Peripheral Voices: Parental Involvement, Social Class, and Educational Disadvantage*, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. Vol 23(1), pp. 35-49.

<sup>27</sup> West, A., Hind, A. *Selectivity, Admissions and Intakes to 'Comprehensive' Schools in London, England*. *Educational Studies*. Vol 32(2), Jun 2006, pp. 145-155

<sup>28</sup> Hanafin & Lynch, 2002

<sup>29</sup> Crozier, G., Reay, D., James, D., Jamieson, F., Beedell, P., Hollingworth, S. & Williams, K. (2008) *White Middle-Class Parents' Educational Choice, and the Urban Comprehensive School*, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 29, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Bagely et al, 2001

<sup>31</sup> Seery et al, 2007

<sup>32</sup> e.g. Smithers, A & Robinson, P. (2006) *The Paradox of Single-sex and Co-educational Schooling*, Centre for Education and Employment Research, University of Buckingham.

educational or single-sex.<sup>33</sup> However, Trinity's initial study found that 85% of Educate Together parents believed that co-educational schools were better for their children's development.<sup>34</sup> In the 2005 study of Educate Together parental attitudes in Lucan, 64% of parents surveyed stated that they would prefer a co-educational post-primary school for their children, but interestingly, 80% of the foreign national parents in the same study stated that they would prefer a single-sex option.<sup>35</sup>

The question of religion in schools, particularly in Ireland, can also be a factor in decision-making. The traditional notion of a racially and culturally homogenous nation, dominated by Roman Catholicism, is no longer accurate, if it ever was, and currently the largest and fastest growing minority religious identity in Ireland is that of 'no religion.'<sup>36</sup> In this context, the current over-representation of denominational schools, especially at primary level, is outdated.

Not surprisingly, 72% of Educate Together parents interviewed for the Trinity study felt that having a potential second-level school affiliated to a religious denomination was of no importance. Ireland's post-primary school system also seems behind the times, with its traditional reliance on the single-sex, denominational school. The prevalence of primarily didactic teaching and externally enforced, as opposed to self-imposed discipline, can also be described as outdated.<sup>37</sup>

There are clearly numerous issues that affect parents when they are making decisions about their child's post-primary education. From the research, it appears that parents who have sent their child to an Educate Together primary school have somewhat different priorities than (literature would suggest) the broader body of parents have traditionally held. Educate Together parents share a desire for a school with good resources, a solid building, excellent standards of teaching and a good rapport with teachers. In addition to this, Educate Together parents expect their children to be treated with respect and to learn both in and about equality in a diverse, co-

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<sup>33</sup> e.g. Jackson, C. & Bisset, M. (2005) Gender and School Choice: Factors Influencing Parents when Choosing a Single-sex or Co-educational Independent School for their Children, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 35/2.

<sup>34</sup> Seery, A., Loxley, A. & Limond, D. (2006). Initial Feasibility Study for the Opening of a Second-Level School by Educate Together. Unpublished.

<sup>35</sup> P Devereux, P (2005) An investigation into Parental Attitudes and Preferences Regarding the Development of an Educate Together Post-Primary School, p 84 (M.Ed Thesis, NUI Maynooth)

<sup>36</sup> Central Statistics Office, Ireland 2007

<sup>37</sup> Seery et al, 2006

educational environment. Importantly, they seem to value their child's social development and life-skills development as much as their academic performance.

As no Educate Together post-primary schools are currently available to these parents, this study aimed to explore which second-level schools they in fact chose for their children, by examining which schools Educate Together pupils graduating in June 2008 went on to attend. In particular, the research was keen to establish whether there was a pattern of Educate Together pupils choosing particular school types.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

37 out of 44 Educate Together primary schools had 6th Class pupils in the 2007/08 school year and these were targeted in this research, with the aim of achieving a census of all 6th Class pupils in the network. These schools varied considerably in their location, age (years established) and pupil composition.

### **Design and Tools**

A questionnaire was selected as the most appropriate research tool. A draft questionnaire was designed which included a table tailored to the size of each school's 6th Class, based on Educate Together's annual survey 2007/08. Details included were demographic data about all 6th Class pupils as well as their chosen post-primary school. The questionnaire also included two questions which aimed to investigate further any perceived patterns or trends in post-primary school choice.

### **Question 1**

Do you notice any specific patterns of particular children attending particular post primary schools?

### **Question 2**

We are interested in any further comments you would like to make about the choice of post-primary schools available to your school community.

The data collected was collated and coded with the help of Maxqda, a program developed for this purpose. All responses to the questions were first coded and these codes were clustered to form categories. This aided the identification of themes and later analysis.

SPSS, Excel and Maxqda were used to collate, code and analyse the overall data. 'Google maps' was used to estimate the distance between Educate Together schools and post-primary schools; exact locations were used where possible.

### **Procedure and Return Rate**

The surveys were piloted first with three Educate Together Principals, with only one response received. The feedback was positive and the survey required no amendments.

The questionnaire was then sent to all Educate Together schools with a current 6th Class by post and e-mail, and follow-up phone calls were made to increase the response rate.



A full census of all pupils was achieved as 100% of schools returned the questionnaire. One school e-mailed their response, eight faxed and the remaining 28 posted their completed surveys. 30 of the 37 schools completed some form of qualitative response in addition to the statistical responses.

Pupils were excluded if it was not known which post-primary school they were going on to attend (11), or if pupils were repeating 6th Class (3) or emigrating (1).

Given the huge demands on principals' and teachers' time, and the frequency with which they are asked to return surveys, the 100% response rate can be taken as evidence of a high level of interest in the destinations of Educate Together pupils. The high proportion of comments made in response to the optional open questions also serve to suggest that this is a 'hot topic' in Educate Together national schools.

### Limitations

Since this survey only elicits views from school staff on matters relating to second-level destinations, the views of parents and pupils as to why certain schools were chosen are not accessed in this study. While views are put forward by school staff as to what parents' perspectives are, this cannot be taken as anything but the staff members' own views. While these views are valid and of interest, they should not be taken to represent accurately the views of parents. Parents' and pupils' perspectives could usefully be researched in a follow-up study.

The absence of any national data on the destinations of 6th class pupils from any other primary school types - and indeed a dearth of data on second-level school choice generally in Ireland - are limiting factors in interpreting the data collected here. While proportions of Educate Together pupils going on to different school types are compared here to proportions of the general school population in each school type nationally<sup>38</sup>, it was not possible to compare different school type destinations at local level.

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<sup>38</sup> Data used for this purpose are Department of Education and Science (sic) statistics 2006/07 obtained at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

## Results and Discussion

The question asked in this study is: in 2008, what type of post primary school did 6<sup>th</sup> Class pupils from Educate Together schools go on to? The results show that the Educate Together pupils in this study went on to attend a range of types of post-primary school, and that there are no significant patterns on a national level.

### Destinations

The following table provides information about the pupils and schools in the survey. The study includes a total of 642 pupils leaving 37 Educate Together primary schools and going on to a total of 162 post-primary schools.

Table 1

Numbers of pupils leaving each Educate Together school in 2008 – number of post-primary schools attended and average distance between Educate Together primary school and post-primary destinations.

#### 1.A Educate Together Schools in Dublin

Educate Together School No.*	No. of pupils leaving 6 <sup>th</sup> class	No. of destination post-primary schools	Average distance to pp school (km)
1	26	13	3.9
2	30	13	3.1
4	29	11	7.2
6	28	10	4.3
9	31	9	7.8
12	29	8	4.5
13	28	7	6.4
14	21	7	6.3
19	7	6	4.9
21	42	5	6.2
23	28	5	4.7
24	7	5	12.9
25	11	5	3.4
26	16	4	4.4
30	8	3	5.2
31	6	3	4.4
33	16	2	1.9
35	4	2	5.6

\* School names are not used in order to preserve anonymity of participants.

#### 1.B Educate Together Schools outside Dublin

Educate Together School No.	No. of pupils leaving 6 <sup>th</sup> class	No. of destination post-primary schools	Average Distance to pp school (km)
3	29	11	8.6
5	28	11	7.1
7	23	10	15.1
8	27	9	3.5
10	30	8	8.0
11	30	8	5.1
15	15	6	3.6
16	20	6	5.7
17	10	6	12.9
18	11	6	19.8
20	10	6	7.3
22	28	5	4.4
27	21	4	1.4
28	5	4	39.4
29	7	4	18.0
32	4	3	3.1
34	3	2	7.4
36	2	2	12.0
37	3	1	2.0

Amongst the 13 post-primary schools in the country to which more than 10 Educate Together pupils progressed, the full range of school types are represented, as the following tables show:

**Table 2**

Post-primary schools most frequented by graduating Educate Together pupils in 2008

**2.A Schools in Dublin**

Destination School No.*	No. of Educate Together pupils going on to school	Destination School Type (schools are co-educational and non fee-paying unless specified)
1	51	Comprehensive School (Church of Ireland)
2	36	Comprehensive School (Church of Ireland)
5	18	Vol. Secondary School (Church of Ireland, fee paying)
6	15	VEC Community College (non-designated)
7	12	Vol. Secondary School (Catholic, Boys only, fee paying)
8	12	VEC Community College (interdenominational)
10	11	Community School (Catholic)

11	11	Voluntary Secondary School (Catholic, Girls only, fee paying)
12	11	Vol. Secondary School (Catholic, Girls only, fee-paying)
19	7	VEC Vocational School (non-designated)
20	7	Vol. Secondary School (Catholic, Girls only)
21	7	Vol. Secondary School (Church of Ireland, fee-paying)

\* school names are not used in order to preserve anonymity of participants. Instead the number indicates ranking, i.e. 1 is the school which is the destination for the highest number of Educate Together pupils.

## 2.B Schools outside Dublin

Destination School No.	No. of Educate Together pupils going on to school	Destination School Type (schools are co-educational and non fee-paying unless specified)
3	33	VEC Community College (non-designated)
4	22	Voluntary Secondary School (Catholic, Boys only)
9	12	VEC Community College (non-designated)
13	11	Community School (Catholic)
14	10	Comprehensive School (Church of Ireland)
15	10	Voluntary Secondary School (Catholic, Boys)
16	9	Voluntary Secondary School (Church of Ireland, Fee-paying)
17	7	Voluntary Secondary School (Fee-paying)
18	7	Voluntary Secondary School (Catholic, Girls)

**Table 3**

Comparison of the distribution of Educate Together 6th class pupils in 2008 to the general school population<sup>39</sup> across second-level school type, fees, denomination and gender mix.

<b>School type</b>	Educate Together 6th Class pupils 2008		2006/7 post-primary population	
Voluntary Secondary	318	49.5%	182,802	54.8%
VEC	158	24.6%	98,444	29.5%
Comprehensive	116	18.1%	7,886	2.4%
Community	50	7.8%	44,427	13.3%
<b>Fees</b>				
Non fee-paying	524	81.6%	307,373	92.1%
Fee-paying	118	18.4%	26,189	7.9%
<b>Denomination</b>				
Roman Catholic	252	39.3%	173,620	52.1%
Church of Ireland	175	27.3%	12,380	3.7%
“multi-denominational”	210	32.7%	147,067	44.1%
Quaker	3	0.5%	349	0.1%
Jewish	1	0.2%	146	0.0%
<b>Gender Mix</b>				
Co-educational	420	65.4%	205,263	61.5%
Boys only	87	13.6%	53,995	16.2%
Girls only	131	20.4%	74,304	22.3%

\* VEC here represents schools managed by Vocational Education Committees, including Vocational Schools and Community Colleges.

± The Department of Education and Science classifies community schools as “multi-denominational” despite the fact that they are under the management of one denomination and/or have a specific denominational ethos.

Table 3 shows that 6th Class pupils leaving Educate Together schools in 2008 attended comprehensive schools at a greater rate than the general population of school pupils, with voluntary secondary schools having similar levels of popularity. VEC schools and community schools are less well attended by Educate Together graduates.

Educate Together graduates attended more fee-paying schools, and over six times more Church of Ireland schools, proportionally, than the general population of second-level pupils.

<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately 2007/08 data were not available at time of analysis, so general school population data used throughout are Department of Education and Skills Statistics from 2006/07, retrieved from [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)

**Table 4**

Post-primary school destinations of 6th Class pupils, categorised by age of Educate Together (ET) school.

Year ET School Established	1978-1994 (358 pupils)		1995-2002 (227 pupils)		2003-2007 (57 pupils)	
<b>School Type</b>						
Voluntary Secondary	206	57.54%	84	37 %	28	49.12%
VEC	43	12.01%	92	40.53%	23	40.35%
Comprehensive	78	21.79%	38	16.74%	0	0.00%
Community	31	8.66%	13	5.73%	6	10.53%
<b>Fees</b>						
Non fee-paying	281	78.49%	191	84.14%	52	91.23%
Fee-paying	77	21.51%	36	15.86%	5	8.77%
<b>Denomination</b>						
Roman Catholic	157	43.85%	68	29.96%	27	47.37%
Church of Ireland	121	33.80%	53	23.35%	1	1.75%
“multi-denominational”	77	21.51%	105	46.26%	29	50.88%
Quaker	2	0.56%	1	0.44%	0	0.0%
Jewish	1	0.28%	0	0.00%	0	0.0%
<b>Gender Mix</b>						
Co-educational	218	60.89%	164	72.25%	40	70.18%
Boys only	55	15.36%	29	12.78%	5	8.77%
Girls only	85	23.74%	34	14.98%	12	21.05%

Table 4 shows that there is a greater distribution of Educate Together graduates across all school types in older/longer-established Educate Together schools.

Those leaving newer Educate Together schools transfer to a narrower range of post-primary schools – in this case voluntary secondary and VEC schools. They also attend more Catholic, non fee-paying and ‘multi-denominational’ post-primary schools, in contrast to the overall results.

**Table 5**

Distance between Educate Together national schools and post-primary school destination of 6th class pupils by post-primary school type.

School Type	Mean Distance (km)	SD (km)	Range (km)
Voluntary Secondary School	6.44	14.26	151
VEC	6.31	5.98	27
Community School	6.89	9.81	30
Comprehensive School	6.21	4.78	27

The table above illustrates that although there is a greater number of Educate Together pupils going on to attend comprehensive schools they are not travelling any further than if they choose to attend another type of post-primary school.

## Schools' Perspectives

### Question 1

Do you notice any specific patterns of particular children attending particular post-primary schools?

### Question 2

We are interested in any further comments you would like to make about the choice of post-primary schools available to your school community.

30 of the 37 schools in the survey completed some form of qualitative response in addition to the statistical responses.

In answer to Question 1, schools provided both yes (14) and no (8) answers. Most schools that responded 'no' are newer Educate Together schools, some of which had 6<sup>th</sup> Class for the first time at the time of the survey. These schools had no previous data to reflect on and therefore no observed patterns could be reported. Other 'no' responses came from longer-established Educate Together schools, who reported that as their pupils were widely distributed across post-primary schools, there were no clear patterns of opting for particular post-primary schools.

Some clear themes emerged from schools that responded 'yes' to Question 1. One theme was where a majority of pupils in an Educate Together school moved on to the same post-primary school. Two distinct reasons were identified where this was the case. In two newer Educate

Together schools, new local community colleges were the only schools offering places, and in the case of a number of long-established Educate Together schools, two particular popular post-primary schools, which included Educate Together primary schools on their feeder school lists, were reported as attracting pupils.

The other issues that emerge from responses to Question 2 are the difficulties reportedly encountered by parents/pupils in obtaining a place in a post-primary school. Many different obstacles were identified as barriers to gaining entry, such as schools' catchment areas, priority given to feeder primary schools which had a denominational ethos or were longer established, and limited places available at over-subscribed post-primary schools.

## ***National Trends***

### **School Type**

Initial viewing of the overall data suggests there is a "preference"<sup>40</sup> above that of the national population for the comprehensive school model, with approximately 18% of Educate Together pupils going on to comprehensive schools, compared to only 2% nationally. However, this preference is only found in parts of Dublin, and includes several long-established Educate Together schools, most of which are listed as feeder schools for the two comprehensive schools in the capital.

Similarly, the apparent preference for Church of Ireland schools that also emerges, with 27% of pupils transferring to such schools compared to only 4% nationally, is partly explained by the fact that the Church of Ireland also manages 3 of the 4 comprehensive school destinations in the study.

### **Gender Mix**

The data also suggests that there is a preference for co-educational schools. 66% of Educate Together pupils in the study transferred to co-educational schools at second level, which is slightly above the national trend of 61%. This preference is consistent in Dublin and outside

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<sup>40</sup> Use of the word "preference" does not necessarily imply that the school type "preferred" is in reality the type most desired by a family. It should be recognised here that while a "preferred" school *may* be the ideal school for a family, it could instead be "the best of a bad lot" or even the only school on offer in some cases.



Dublin. This preference may be influenced by a number of factors. Firstly, it may be the case that there is a real preference for co-education on the part of Educate Together parents. Co-education is one of the four core principles of the Educate Together ethos and the Trinity College feasibility study indicated strong support for co-educational schooling among this group.<sup>41</sup>

One principal of an Educate Together school outside Dublin commented in this study that increasingly parents from that school were travelling to access co-educational schools. The data suggests that parents favour co-educational and multi-denominational schools. However, there seems to be a lack of such schools in many areas, and many pupils are attending single sex, denominational schools, some reportedly out of necessity. These schools also frequently have long waiting lists, further limiting the choice available to parents. The responses also highlighted the importance of religion in gaining entry to post-primary schools. It is also possible that the enrolment policies of some single-sex denominational schools may discriminate in favour of feeder primary schools of the same denomination - and thus against those in Educate Together schools - so that even if parents did want to choose a single-sex secondary school, they would find it more difficult to do so than those in denominational primary schools. Comments made by participants in this study suggest that, at least in some areas, it is difficult for Educate Together pupils to access local Catholic second-level schools.

*We have had some difficulties getting second-level places for our children in community schools and Catholic second-level schools because they are based on being in the Parish.*

*All of our non-Catholic children had huge difficulty getting into local secondary (Catholic) schools, with no other option... Very upsetting for children and parents.*

It is also possible that limited choice of school type in a given area and/or a shortage of school places may affect this - or indeed any - apparent preference. The following comment illustrates the frustration for parents who may have a preference for a particular school:

*This [school] serves a huge area and is oversubscribed. Students in 2006 were told not to even fill in an application form as there was no hope of getting a place.*

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<sup>41</sup> Seery et al, 2007

## Fees

Another “preference” appears at first to be clear from the overall data: 17% of Educate Together pupils in the survey went on to fee-paying schools, compared to only 8% nationally. Again, this may be for a number of reasons. Many longer established Educate Together schools are located in more affluent areas, where there is a tendency to opt for fee-paying education.

Notably, there are five long-established Educate Together schools located within the catchment areas of South Dublin, where the dominance of fee-paying schools is well-documented<sup>42</sup>. It is likely that the significant numbers of 6<sup>th</sup> class pupils represented in the study from these schools would skew the data. In fact, when the data is broken down by age of school (see Table 4), the percentage of pupils going on to fee-paying schools is clearly higher in longer-established schools, with the figure in newly established Educate Together schools approaching the national average (9% as compared to 8% nationally).

However, fee-paying schools outside Dublin also feature, and there may be other factors at play; the limited choices available in some areas to parents who wish to choose schools other than Catholic schools may also be relevant.

## Comprehensive Schools

There are four comprehensive schools included as destination schools for Educate Together pupils in 2008. They are all long-established, popular schools, and all are co-educational. With the exception of one of these schools, which is Catholic-managed, they are Church of Ireland schools. There are two comprehensive schools in Dublin: one located on the north side of the city, and the other located in south county Dublin.

The results of the survey show that in 2008 one Dublin comprehensive school accepted a total of 64 pupils from six different Educate Together primary schools. While the three more local Educate Together primary schools are included on the comprehensive school’s feeder list, pupils from three other Educate Together schools also gained places at this school. These include 14

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<sup>42</sup> see e.g. Flynn, S., *School numbers: who has more pupils and who has less?*, Irish Times, April 27 2010

pupils from one school, despite it being a significant distance away, and reportedly, “awkward for public transport.” The numbers of pupils from this particular school have reduced in recent years, owing to the public transport difficulties, but the comprehensive school remains a popular choice for parents. Although under Church of Ireland management, this school has a reputation for being somewhat multi-denominational in ethos. As such, it is likely that this school’s ethos is seen to be in keeping with the ethos of an Educate Together primary school. One Educate Together teacher commented that:

*We are very happy with (this school) as a natural follow on for our children.*

In 2008 the other Dublin comprehensive school accepted 35 pupils from five different Educate Together schools. This school’s admissions policy also includes pupils who have completed their education at an Educate Together school, and lists five Educate Together feeder schools in its enrolment policy. Pupils from four of the five feeder schools went on to this comprehensive school in 2008. However, one long established Educate Together school from the list of feeder schools had no pupils transferring to this comprehensive school in 2008. This may be because of the significant travelling distance involved (the Educate Together school is located more than 12 kms from the comprehensive school), but could also be because currently, other post-primary schools are more popular with parents.

From the class of 30 pupils at this particular Educate Together school, 10 girls transferred to a Catholic girls’ voluntary secondary school less than two kilometres away. Another seven pupils opted for a fee-paying, co-educational, Church of Ireland-managed school, less than four kilometres away. Fee-paying voluntary secondary schools were a popular choice for pupils from this Educate Together school, with a total of 14 pupils transferring to eight fee-paying schools. The following comments from two Educate Together principals offer possible explanations for these choices:

*Children often enter denominational/single-sex post-primary schools for reasons of availability and in some cases, reputation.*

*The ethos seems less important to parents when choosing a post-primary school next to the location and reputation of a school.*

Despite the above, parents are still opting to send their children to the comprehensive school in south county Dublin, highlighting both its popularity, and also, as one Educate Together school principal noted, the limited choice of co-educational non fee-paying schools in the area.

Significantly, in both Dublin comprehensives, some Educate Together schools are currently included as feeder schools on their respective enrolment policies, making it easier for Educate Together pupils from those named schools to gain places. However, while the enrolment policy of one of these comprehensive schools states that other Educate Together schools not already included on the feeder list, “may apply to be recognized as feeder schools...” anecdotal evidence suggests that as pressure builds up on places in this school, there might be some difficulty if pupils from additional Educate Together schools in fact applied for admission.

Outside Dublin the seeming preference for comprehensive schools changes. Of the 28 6<sup>th</sup> Class pupils from one Limerick Educate Together school, only four went on to the city’s only comprehensive school. In Limerick itself there is huge competition for places at second-level, with many popular schools in the city over-subscribed, including its comprehensive school. Possibly influenced by this, the Educate Together school pupils ‘scattered’ to 11 different schools in Limerick city and county, as well as to schools in Co Clare. Other longer-established Educate Together schools have also reported that as their pupils were ‘scattered’ across post-primary schools, no clear patterns of opting for particular post-primary schools had developed. One principal from a long-established Educate Together school describes the situation thus:

*[Name of School] pupils go on to attend a range of 12 or 13 second-level schools (including boarding schools in Dublin and elsewhere). Proportion of class attending each varies greatly from year to year. No consistent pattern except that at least 8-10 schools will be attended in any one year.*

However, while they ‘scattered’ to a number of post-primary destinations, the majority of pupils from the Limerick school’s 6<sup>th</sup> Class (18) did opt for co-educational schools, despite the distances involved. One Educate Together school principal in Limerick commented that:

*We find increasingly that pupils have to travel outside the city to get their choice of co-ed school.*

In Cork, out of 29 pupils from one 6<sup>th</sup> class, 10 opted for a comprehensive school in Cork city, while several other students transferred to co-educational schools outside the city. Of the other pupils who went to schools in the city, eight girls went to single-sex Catholic schools, while four boys went to boys’ Catholic schools. There is a limited choice of co-educational post-primary schools in Cork city, as most second-level schools there are single-sex. The remaining pupils from the class of 2008 went on to co-educational post-primary schools. It would seem,

therefore, that as in Limerick, parents in Cork are opting for co-educational schools at second-level for their children, despite their locations being further away.

## **Shortage of School Places; Lack of Choice**

The results of the survey also indicate that as well as the limited availability of school type, there is also a shortage of school places of any kind in some areas, particularly those where there are newer Educate Together schools, often in rapidly developing areas.

In Lucan, West Dublin, there are five Educate Together schools, four of which had 6th Class pupils leaving in 2008. The longest established school (11 years) had the highest number of 6th Class pupils leaving, with 43 moving on to second-level schools. The four newer Educate Together schools in the area had a total of 17 pupils leaving 6th Class. When these schools reach their full capacity there will be over 250 pupils leaving Educate Together 6th Classes in Lucan each year.

In terms of the availability of second-level schools in the Lucan area, in 2008 the choice for parents was limited to four schools, including a community college and Gaelcoláiste, both of which are operated by the VEC, and are co-educational. There are also two Catholic voluntary secondary schools in Lucan, both of which are single-sex schools. A new community college in Adamstown, also run by the VEC, did not open until September 2009.

Of the 60 pupils who transferred from 6th class Educate Together primary schools in Lucan, only 16 went on to one of the post-primary schools in the Lucan area. Six boys went to the local boys' voluntary secondary school, while seven girls opted for the girls' voluntary secondary school, and only three pupils transferred to the local community college.

One Educate Together principal commented:

*It is very disappointing that the choice in the area is predominated by denominational schools that are not of the same ethos.*

The remaining 44 pupils enrolled at schools outside the Lucan area. In particular, a community college in Co Kildare was popular with pupils from the longest established Educate Together

school in Lucan, with 31 pupils transferring there. A possible reason for this is cited by the teacher who completed the survey:

*It is felt among the parents that this school's ethos matches closely the Educate Together ethos.*

An informal arrangement between the VEC community college in Co Kildare and the Educate Together school in question has existed in recent years to facilitate admission. This arrangement has existed because it had spare places to offer to pupils who live a significant distance from its catchment area. However, as competition for places increases from the growing population in its own catchment area, the community college may not be able to accommodate as many pupils from outside the area in the future. Pupils from Educate Together schools in Lucan may find it increasingly difficult to gain places at this particular post-primary school.

There is a possibility that the local community college in Lucan, to which only three Educate Together pupils went on to in 2008, will increase its intake of Educate Together pupils from 2011. The community college's revised enrolment policy for new entrants will include an Educate Together school on its list of feeder primary schools. However, given the growing pressure on all post-primary school places in the Lucan area, it seems likely that not every pupil from its local feeder schools will be successful in gaining places at the local community college.

Other schools outside Lucan are also mentioned as destinations for pupils from the Lucan area Educate Together schools. These include a VEC community college in Clondalkin, which took three pupils, as well as a fee-paying Catholic boys' school in Dublin 15, which took seven pupils.

One of the newer Educate Together schools in the Lucan area reported that the small number of pupils who transferred from its 6th Class gained places in one of the two Catholic voluntary secondary schools in Lucan.

*All students are attending single-sex secondary schools but this is out of necessity, not choice.*

Competition for places at second-level schools is also reported as difficult for parents who are new to the area. Families who have lived in the community longer have been able to access

school waiting lists at an earlier stage, thus giving them a better chance of gaining a place in one of the two Catholic voluntary secondary schools in Lucan. One teacher commented:

*Many of our students are new to the area, even Ireland, they have not had much choice. Popular schools in the area...have waiting lists which must be applied to two plus years before 6th Class.*

It seems clear that there are not enough second-level school places for all the children in Lucan, and that there is an urgent need for more post-primary schools in the area. Parents at Lucan Educate Together schools were reported in the survey as asking if a similar model exists in second-level education, and indeed parental campaigns to establish a second-level Educate Together school in the Lucan area stretch back 10 years.

Outside Dublin, choices of post-primary school can be limited, and Catholic, single-sex voluntary secondary schools dominate in many areas. In Navan, Co Meath the choice for parents has been limited to three Catholic voluntary secondary schools, all of which have been established for many years. Two schools cater for girls; the other is for boys. There is also a newer VEC post-primary school in Navan, to which the two Educate Together 6<sup>th</sup> Class pupils transferred in 2008. An Educate Together principal commented that:

*There is no choice in ... Co Meath for children who are not Catholic or children whose parents have no religion. Two schools are not Catholic-managed but charge fees – thus rendering them closed to parents who cannot afford the fees.*

In Waterford's Educate Together school 10 pupils transferred from 6<sup>th</sup> Class in 2008 and they 'scattered' to six different post-primary schools. As it is only the school's second 6<sup>th</sup> Class, no specific patterns of pupils opting for particular schools have yet emerged. However, it is clear that several pupils have opted to travel significant distances to their post-primary schools. Four transferred to single-sex Catholic voluntary secondary schools in Tramore, several kilometres away. Interestingly, both of these schools in Tramore are due to be amalgamated in the near future to become a co-educational community school. Two more pupils from Waterford opted for co-educational schools - one a fee-paying school outside the city, another a VEC community college in the city. The remaining three pupils went on to single-sex, Catholic voluntary secondary schools in Waterford. It is clear that there is no 'natural' follow-on for Educate Together graduates in Waterford.

### **Nationality, Ethnicity, Home Language, Special Education Needs**

Data were tested for any significant differences in school type destinations of pupils of different nationalities/ethnicities, different home languages and pupils with Special Education Needs. No significant differences were found at a national level.

Across the survey no specific groups of children were reported as moving on to attend a particular post-primary school, with the exception of one established Educate Together school, which did report that children of the same ethnic group went on to attend the same post-primary school.

*All children from the same ethnic group going on to attend the same secondary school (i.e. Roma children going to [local] community college).*

This Educate Together school seems to be the exception, as the survey investigated the effects of nationalities/ethnicities on post-primary school choice, using a correlation. The results showed no significant relationship between either number of nationalities/ethnicities in a 6<sup>th</sup> class or number of home languages in 6<sup>th</sup> Class and post-primary school type chosen.

### **Rapidly Developing Areas**

During the 1990s ‘boom’ years Ireland experienced a substantial increase in population, an increase which continued to the time of this survey. While successive years of record high birth rates are partially responsible for this, Irish emigrants returning home, and migrants from other countries moving to Ireland with their families have also influenced this increase.<sup>43</sup> The corresponding increase in the school age population has led to an unprecedented need for new schools. The impact of this led to the establishment of the Rapidly Developing Areas Unit in the Department of Education and Skills. The purpose of this unit was to assess which areas required new schools and which existing schools required additional facilities. Schools have been built in rapidly developing areas to provide for children who cannot be accommodated in longer-established primary schools. DES projections of primary school places needed show that the projected figure for total enrolment at primary level for 2010/11 is over 510,000. Enrolment at primary schools would increase by 9.3% over the next 5 years (from 2009/10 to 2014/15). Based

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<sup>43</sup> Central Statistics Office (CSO), Population and Migration Estimates, April 2009, <http://www.cso.ie/releasespublications/documents/population/current/popmig.pdf>



on this information, projections for future enrolment needs at primary schools are not expected to fall to below the 2009/10 level until 2026/27.<sup>44</sup>

There are a number of new issues which emerge in this context. First of all, the huge increase in primary school age children has increased the demand for school places. Secondly, as an area grows and new housing developments are built, traditional school catchment areas do not always include newer estates. Thirdly, as people move into newer areas they are often unaware of enrolment procedures.

The Dublin 15 area is one of the most rapidly developing areas in the country. As a result there has been a marked increase in the demand for primary and post-primary school places. In 2008, of the three Educate Together schools in this area, only the two longer-established schools had 6<sup>th</sup> Class pupils transferring to post-primary schools.

In 2008, 31 pupils from 6<sup>th</sup> Class left the longest established Educate Together school. Their destination schools involved a total of nine post-primary schools, with some a significant distance away. However, 21 pupils found places at one of two local schools, one of which is a VEC community college (12 pupils) and the other a community school (nine pupils). Both schools are very popular in the area.

However, an Educate Together teacher also commented that three more pupils wished to go to the local VEC community college, but were not offered places. This particular community college is heavily over-subscribed, and also has stringent criteria in its enrolment policy. Along with nine other local primary schools, the longest established Educate Together school in Dublin 15 is on the feeder list for this VEC community college. However, there is also a residential requirement whereby families have to live in the catchment area of particular parishes for several years prior to admission. As a 'designated' community college, Church of Ireland pupils who attend their local denominational school are also eligible for places at this school, but it is not clear from the enrolment policy if Church of Ireland pupils at Educate Together schools (or any other local primary school) are eligible in the same way.

The majority of pupils from this Educate Together school transferred to co-educational schools, though some were outside the Dublin 15 area. Only two pupils opted for single-sex voluntary

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<sup>44</sup> Department of Education and Science (DES) (February 2010) *Projections of Full Time Enrolment in Teaching Institutions aided by the DES at Primary, Second and Higher Level 2009 – 2030* [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) Statistics/Projections of Enrolment, accessed July 2010

secondary schools. One pupil's destination school was unknown at the time of the survey, and the 6<sup>th</sup> Class teacher also noted that two of the 31 pupils were on a waiting list for a fee-paying school.

At the newer Educate Together school in another part of Dublin 15, a much smaller cohort of 6<sup>th</sup> class pupils transferred to second-level in 2008. Out of 12 pupils, six transferred to the new 'non-designated' VEC community college, which opened in September 2008, while three other pupils found places at community schools in Dublin 15. An Educate Together teacher reported that:

*A lot of parents have commented about the difficulty finding places anywhere other than (new community college) as there is nowhere that includes (local area) as their catchment area.*

Another VEC-run 'non-designated' community college has since opened (September 2009) in a different part of Dublin 15, to cater for the increasing numbers of pupils in the area. However, only one of the Dublin 15 Educate Together schools has so far been included on this new community college's feeder school list, and its position is also lower than other local primary schools in the catchment area. This will clearly create difficulties for Educate Together pupils who want to gain places at this school.

Speaking at a meeting attended by parents of pupils of this new community college, Minister for Finance and local TD Brian Lenihan responded to questions raised by parents about the different enrolment policies of VEC-run schools in the area. These included issues regarding religion and length of time living in a catchment area. The Minister acknowledged the problem faced by parents, and commented:

*'The admissions policy will have to be addressed, if not by the schools themselves then the VEC will have to encourage it to be addressed'.<sup>45</sup>*

## **VEC Community Colleges**

Where new post-primary schools have been opened to cater for the growing number of pupils in these areas, the majority of them in recent years have been VEC community colleges. This school type is often the only choice for parents, who discover that the new VEC community

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<sup>45</sup> Community Voice Newspaper 16 – 29 October 2009 Issue 145 [www.communityvoice.ie](http://www.communityvoice.ie)

college is the only school in the area that includes their child's Educate Together primary school as a feeder school in its enrolment policy.

As well as Dublin 15, another rapidly developing area of Dublin has experienced similar issues. Of the 16 pupils who transferred to post-primary in 2008 from a local Educate Together school, 15 of the 16 pupils transferred to the new VEC community college that opened in temporary accommodation that year. A teacher commented that almost all parents were willing to try the new VEC community college, but expressed disappointment that the new school was not an Educate Together model.

The review of the Irish second level education system in Trinity College's initial feasibility study<sup>46</sup> highlights that the most significant growth in second-level schools in recent years has been in VEC community colleges. Indeed, the vast majority of new second-level schools that have been opened around the country in the last 20 years have been VEC community colleges. This development has led other patrons to claim that there is a de facto policy to open schools of this type only, and that such a policy is in violation of parents' constitutional rights to choose the type of education their children receive.

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<sup>46</sup> Seery, A., Loxley, A. & Limond, D. (2006). Initial Feasibility Study for the Opening of a Second-Level School by Educate Together. Unpublished.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

The research has shown that pupils who attend Educate Together schools transfer to all types of post-primary school across the country. Long-established Educate Together schools in Dublin which are on feeder lists for the two comprehensive schools in the capital sent a large number of pupils to these schools. One of the reasons offered by schools as to why this occurs is that these particular schools are perceived to have a similar ethos to that of an Educate Together school, despite their denominational management. However, there is no one existing school type “preferred” by Educate Together families nationally.

The study provides evidence of a slightly higher frequency of co-educational destination schools than the national average, with some pupils travelling significant distances to attend their choice of co-educational post-primary school. This apparent preference is in keeping with previous research of Educate Together parental attitudes which suggest strong support for co-educational schooling. However, in many areas distances travelled to post-primary schools are low, suggesting that many parents opt to send their children to local post-primary schools.

While data suggest a higher proportion of Educate Together pupils go on to attend fee-paying schools nationally, this is affected by the location of many long-established Educate Together schools in South Dublin, where fee-paying schools are popular. When the 19 schools outside Dublin only are considered, the proportion is in keeping with the national average.

Some Educate Together schools experienced a significant scattering of pupils to a large number of post-primary schools, and many report no natural follow-on school in their area. Difficulties in accessing some Catholic second-level schools are also reported because of enrolment policies that favour those attending denominational primary schools.

Indeed, there are many challenges for Educate Together parents who are looking for suitable post-primary schools for their children. In rapidly developing areas, where many newer Educate Together schools are located, there is often significant competition for places. Sometimes the enrolment policies of longer-established schools (of all types) are based on traditional parish boundaries and often do not include newer Educate Together schools as local feeder schools.

Most new post-primary schools that have opened in recent years have been VEC community colleges. While schools expressed a willingness to support these colleges, they reported their disappointment that an Educate Together option is currently not available at second-level.



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