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Blessington ETNS during the cold snap. Our thanks to Maia Romanowska for use of the image.

ETSN

School Newsletter

NOV/ DEC
2010

We Live in Interesting Times...

Paul Rowe, CEO Educate Together



2010 has been a remarkable year for Educate Together. It is the first year of our five year development plan and has seen a substantial

growth in our national resources, continued demand for our schools at both primary and second level and very significant achievements in our network. At the same time, it has been a very challenging year. Although facing rising demand, government policy on opening new schools limited our expansion and cutbacks are threatening many of the advances we have made over the past years. The crisis of the State's finances has deepened by the month and at no stage during 2010 were we ever sure that we had reached the bottom of chasm that has opened up underneath the public finances.

That said, for me, 2010 had some memorable moments. Our 97% mark in the technical evaluation of our application in Gorey was hard fought and is a remarkable achievement for the Gorey campaign and

our national team of staff and volunteers. The Tánaiste's announcement of a partnership between Educate Together and Co. Dublin VEC in the patronage of the new college in Clonburris, Lucan has opened another door into second level for our movement.

The endorsement of the main political parties for our second level initiative and a formal commitment from the Labour Party to open an Educate Together Second-level school was a great day bringing new hope for children attending Educate Together schools.

Visiting the two new vibrant Educate Together primary schools in Portlaoise and Holywell (Swords) on the days they opened were, as always, special occasions.

As well as these public moments, there were more that may be less known. The success of our new on-line courses in the "Learn Together" curriculum for teachers, the growth of course content in colleges of teacher education and the tremendous response to our volunteering initiatives have all dramatically exceeded their targets and inspired our efforts. For the first time, we have a properly resourced national team which is delivering enhanced supports for our school communities and addressing the substantial demand for our model of

education at home and abroad.

I look forward to 2011 with determination. We have to stand up for this generation of children in schools and for long-overdue reforms in our education system. We must insist that a new government instigates substantial reform - superficial change will not suffice. In working ourselves out of this crisis we must emerge with lessons learnt and new systems embedded. A key issue will be the strategic importance of a high-quality, learner centered education system that equally respects the identity of all. Another will be the enormous value of independent voluntary initiative in Irish education. The whole team in the national office, the board of directors and all our members are determined to push onwards in 2011 to make this happen.

In conclusion, a big "Thank You" to all of you who have supported our schools and movement this year, in any and every way, large or small. Together we have made a difference and this difference is something that is valuable, worthwhile and important to the future of our society. I know that we will continue to make this difference in the New Year. I hope you all have a great winter break with plenty of festive fun and good company and that 2011 brings us all progress and happiness.

School Closures due to Adverse Weather

A number of schools have been asking about whether they must make up days missed due to closures. According to the DES, schools must make a "reasonable effort to recoup the days". This is particularly true for schools that have been closed for longer periods. This is a decision that must be made at a local level by the board of management and with regard to the board's obligation to the education of the children at school. Some schools are considering options such as coming back earlier after Christmas, taking a shorter mid-term (for example, if 5 days off had been planned, taking only 2 or 3 instead), taking shorter Easter holidays or working Friday July 1st. It must be stressed that this is a local decision for schools to make themselves.

VOLUNTEER ISSUES

1. Volunteers are a valuable resource for the organization and should be included in any discussion of resource development. If cash is obtained by "fund-raising," volunteers result from "people-raising." Volunteers do not "save" money but involving them effectively can stretch the budget beyond what it might otherwise cover. Volunteers should therefore be considered as one of the options available to support your organization's efforts.

2. It is possible and desirable to take a proactive stance in planning for volunteer involvement. The ways volunteers can help your organization are limited only by your vision for that involvement. The volunteer world is changing and evolving. The organization that can tap into emerging sources of community involvement will find support of many kinds, but it won't be "business as usual". Is your organization poised to take advantage of today's volunteer force? Have you articulated what you want to achieve through volunteers?

3. Volunteers are influential agents of the organization. Volunteers have credibility in the community because they are perceived as supporting an organization without personal vested interest. They therefore can play key roles in public relations, fund-raising, public education, legislative advocacy, and other community outreach functions.

4. Volunteers are a source of valuable information for planning and evaluation. Volunteers are "insider/outside" - they are familiar with the organization but not fully integrated into its daily activities. They are knowledgeable, but they have a unique perspective. They may also have access to consumer or client opinions in a different way than employees do.

5. Volunteers are your "unsalaried personnel." The board discusses policies that affect paid personnel, even though implementation is the role of the chief executive: new project areas that require funding, major personnel policies, affirmative action statements, and ethical considerations. In some organizations, volunteers far outnumber employees. Wouldn't the volunteer staff benefit from the same types of guidelines?

6. Because volunteers are agents of the organization, their work poses potential risk management questions and insurance needs. Anyone acting on behalf of an organization can put others at risk or can be at risk. Volunteers are not inherently more or less likely to have accidents or make mistakes. However, the board should make sure that the organization has taken all the necessary steps to protect the client, the volunteer, and the paid staff.

Excerpted from The Nonprofit Board's Role in Maximizing Volunteer Resources, by Susan J. Ellis, National Center for Nonprofit Boards, copyright 1999.

Second-level GMM



Held in the IFSC Clarion Hotel on December 11th, this GMM dealt in the main with the second level campaign and working groups. This was a productive meeting with constructive commentary and interested, motivated participants.

Head of Education & Network Development Emer Nowlan opened proceedings with a summary presentation of actions and achievements to date and future progress paths. She was followed by Sarah Anderson of the Gorey Second Level Action Group who delivered a powerful report on the Gorey campaign. Her insights into the group's operational procedures and methods were of great interest to the members. Sarah offered to make the groups files available for review by other groups and Educate Together will facilitate this.

Professor Àine Hyland addressed the group and raised spirits generally with her look back to the success of the 1977 campaign and the lessons learned therein. She also complemented the current campaigning groups and marked their professional organization and approach.

Two Second-level Working Groups sessions were held:

a) Second Level Working Group: Members from the four working groups (Leadership, Management and Structure, Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, Ethical Education Curriculum, Campus and Built Environment) came together to share information about their work. The importance of cross-referencing between groups was discussed, as well as the need to embed the ethos in all aspects of the working groups' work and of all policies, plans and practices being discussed.

b) Second Level Start Up Groups: A vibrant session with good input from members of Second Level Start Up groups from around the country. More detailed discussion of the Gorey campaign took place. The session also discussed coordination and cooperation between groups and the National Office. There were also good insights into the wider promotion of Educate Together issues into the business sector and the marshalling of accrued support there to achieve local and national lobbying goals.

The meeting closed with an open discussion session hosted by CEO Paul Rowe and Head of Communications John Holohan. A broad engagement strategy for Educate Together's approach to the 2011 Election was raised and discussed. Much discussion was held in relation to the raising of local issues with politicians and how to engage them on national issues. A series of suggestions were made and will be circulated to members in the new year.

Better Together Awards

Many many thanks for the huge amount of support from across the network for our entry into the recent Better Together video competition, run by The Wheel. Although we weren't the eventual winners, the campaign illustrated the level of support out there for our organisation, and the huge amount of votes received shows what we can do when we work together.

Congratulations to the winners- Blarney Community Council in the Volunteer Only Category, Dublin Youth Theatre in the Medium-sized Organisations Category and Longford Women's Link in the Large Organisations Category.

Filling Teaching Vacancies

New procedures for filling teaching vacancies that arise during the remainder of the 2010/2011 school year (Circular 0067/2010)

The Department of Education plans to achieve savings (as part of the Government's National Recovery Plan 2011-2014) through successfully redeploying existing teachers in the system before creating more permanent positions. Due to the potentially large numbers of teachers who will qualify for redeployment to permanent positions for the 2011/2012 school year (through permanent teachers going on the Main panel and temporary teachers qualifying for Supplementary panel rights) the DES have decided that vacancies that arise between 1 December 2010 and the end of the 2010/2011 school year may only be filled in a temporary capacity.

This means that if a vacancy would ordinarily be permanent, a school may only advertise and appoint a fixed term teacher for the remainder of the year. When the panels for 2010/2011 are formed in March/April 2011 schools will have to offer permanent position (for September 2011 or immediate vacancies) to teachers who require redeployment first- thus freeing up the panels faster than last year. Once the panels are emptied it is unclear whether schools will then be able to advertise permanent positions once more.

Formerly if a school had a permanent vacancy whose start date was before 1 May they could advertise and appoint a permanent teacher straight away, without offering it to those on the panel.

Revision of Salaries

Revision of Salaries of all staff paid directly by a recognised school or VEC who have not already been affected by the pay reductions imposed in accordance with the Financial Measures in the Public Interest (No. 2) Act 2009 (Circular 0070/2010).

The DES have released a circular (now available on their [website](#)) which has implications for the pay of a number of school employees who were not previously thought to be included by the above Act- including, among others: School Secretaries, Caretakers, Cleaners and School Transport Bus Escorts. These staff members are often not on the Department's payroll but funded indirectly through grants paid to the school by the Department. In some cases the salaries of these staff are supplemented through local fundraising. The legal advice obtained by the DES determined that **all staff** employed by a recognised school come within the definition of 'public servant' solely for the purposes of this Act – despite the fact that these staff were not subject to the pension levy imposed.

The Act came into effect on 1 January 2010, but as the DES sought legal advice to see if it included the staff members mentioned above, the actual reductions in salary will not come into effect until 1 January 2011.

The reductions according to the Act, to be applied from 1 January 2011 are as follows:

- 5% on the first €30,000 of salary;
- 7.5% on the next €40,000 of salary;
- 10% on the next €55,000 of salary;
- This formula produces overall reductions in salaries ranging from 5% to 8% in the case of salaries up to €125,000.

It should be noted that there is a minimum wage exemption. This means that an exemption from the pay reductions should apply 'where those reductions would reduce the pay rate of those staff to, at, or below the statutory minimum wage'.

Educate Together has sought legal advice on the matter and this has shown that a BOM that declines to implement the circular could face serious consequences. The following is an excerpt from advice received from Mason, Hayes and Curran on the matter:

“Should a Board decline to comply with the 2009 Act, the Minister could seek a report under Section 19 of the Education Act 1998 or set about dissolving the Board under Section 17 of the same Act. More seriously from the perspective of individual members of a Board of Management, by refusing to implement an Act of the Oireachtas, Board members would be placing themselves outside of the protection afforded them by Section 14 of the Education Act which provides:

S.14 (7) Except as provided by this Act, no action shall lie against a member of a Board in respect of anything done by that member in good faith and in pursuance of this Act or any regulations made by the Minister under this Act.

The Minister for Finance could also take action under the 2009 Act. The Minister for Finance could direct a school to recover the relevant amount and could thereafter deduct any continuing shortfall in grants payable. The same caveats would apply to any actions taken by a Board of Management with the intention of circumventing the requirements of the 2009 Act.”

It is clear that Boards of Management have no option but to implement the cuts. For reaction from IMPACT – the union that represents many school secretaries, cleaners and caretakers click [here](#). In its statement, IMPACT says that it will challenge this cut, which hits at those who are most vulnerable. As many staff affected do not have pensions, paid sick leave, paid holidays, etc., this pay cut is perceived as being particularly unfair.

Coming up in 2011...

We know that a homework journal is an essential bit of kit for every pupil, teacher and parent in the network. At National Office, we are currently developing a standard homework journal for all Educate Together schools. We're going to be able to offer it at the same price or cheaper than your current homework journal, and the good news is that if we all work together and get on board, it could generate money for the network, which will be used to provide support to Principals and Boards of Management everywhere.

2011 will also see the launch of a brand new social networking space, designed especially for the Educate Together network. It will provide a platform for members of the network to come together, learn from each other's experiences and share knowledge. Watch this space for more information on both projects over the coming weeks and months.

Enrolment Appeals

Updates on case relating to Section 29, Education Act 1998

Under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 the parents of a child or a child themselves (if they are over 18) have the right to appeal a decision of a school Board of Management if the Board refuses to enrol that child (e.g. if the school is full etc) or if the BOM decides to exclude that child (e.g. for behavioural issues). If parents decide to make a Section 29 appeal, the appeal is heard by an Appeals Committee set up by the DES. For the last year and a half, the Appeals Committee have had a limited role in overturning a BOM decision. This is set to change again soon following a successful appeal by the DES to the Supreme Court. The Department of Education have not issued any updated instructions yet however so we can assume that the current procedures are still in effect.

In 2008 the BOM of St. Molaga's NS, Balbriggan refused to enrol two girls on the basis that the school was full to capacity. The school also refused to enrol another 41 children on this basis. A DES Section 29 Appeals Committee heard the appeal by the girls' parents and overturned the Board's decision- thus forcing them to take in the two girls. In February 2009, the BOM of St Molaga's successfully appealed the decision to the High Court. In the High Court Ms. Justice Mary Irvine ruled that the direction by the Appeals Committee was 'irrational' and unlawful. Ms. Justice Mary Irvine ruled under Section 29 of the Education Act 1998 that the Appeals Committee was entitled only to review the BOM decision on grounds of its reasonableness/ lawfulness, and was not entitled to reverse management decisions. This was hugely significant for schools facing Section 29 appeals. Since February 2009, when a Section 29 appeal was heard, the Appeals committee have examined whether the school's enrolment policy was lawful and whether the BOM have followed the procedure laid out in the policy. If a BOM is found to have both a lawful policy and followed their own procedure fairly then their decision has not been overturned- thus leaving management decisions to the BOM.

The DES appealed the High Court judgement to the Supreme Court and in November the Supreme Court panel of judges found that the Appeals Committee remit is not limited to reviewing the lawfulness of the policy procedures. It was found that the Appeals Committee has in fact jurisdiction to conduct a full hearing of an appeal under Section 29 of the Act. The Appeals Committee may make recommendations to the Secretary General who may direct the BOM to act in line with these recommendations.

It remains to be seen how this judgement will affect Section 29 Appeals in the future. It would appear that the system may now revert back to the pre-February 2009 status. It seems likely that the Department will soon be issuing updated procedures for BOM and parents.

Upcoming Conference- Re-imagining Learning

A two-day conference entitled "Re-imagining Learning: Curriculum integration in the early secondary years" is being organised by Educate Together in partnership with the NCCA and the University of Limerick, for May 2011.

The time for innovation in second-level education in Ireland is now. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) announced a review of junior cycle (early secondary schooling) earlier this year. It is developing a new framework which will provide for "dramatic development in new directions by schools". Its consultation document, Innovation and Identity, outlines pathways towards change which suggest a renewal of learning and teaching, a broader approach to qualifications and a more flexible and integrated approach to curriculum development and delivery. Educate Together launched Taking the Next Step – a Blueprint for Educate Together Second- level Schools in 2009. It is planning to open a brand new type of second-level school, building on the successful equality-based, democratic, learner-centred primary school model it has developed over the past thirty years. Educate Together will be the first new entrant to second-level education in Ireland since the 1930s and this presents a unique opportunity to reflect on current practice and to pioneer important innovations in the context of the organisation's learner-centred and democratic ethos.

This conference will explore current ideas for innovation in early secondary education, focussing in particular on more integrated, relevant and applied approaches to delivering the curriculum. This will take place in May 2010.

Several speakers have been confirmed to date with further speakers, including schools who are currently engaged in innovation at junior cycle, and social, industrial and technological entrepreneurs with involvement in education, currently being approached. An open call for papers will also be issued so that all the key researchers, practitioners and innovators in this area can participate.

More information will be made available over the coming months. To learn more please contact secondlevel@educatetogether.ie or call 01 4292500.



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Second Level Fighting Fund

Educate Together has established a second-level fighting fund so that we can make sure that parents have the option of an Educate Together second-level school as soon as possible. Your support can make this ambition a reality. We are asking all of our friends to donate just €10 to this fund. If you donate, we can generate the initial €50,000 we need in the New Year to accelerate this campaign in a rapidly changing political and social environment. This money will be vital for the lobbying job that Educate Together has to do in the weeks and months ahead and to support a growing number of second-level start up groups nationwide. [Donate here](#) and [visit our website](#) to find out more.

2010 Roundup Special!

Carlow ETNS was shortlisted in The Best Web Site Category of the Eircom Junior Spider Awards on the 17th December at the Helix... Conor Neville and Kate O'Malley of 5th class at **North Kildare** Educate Together were crowned First Place winners at the Intel Mini Young Scientist Competition. They will go on to the Young Scientists Exhibitions in the RDS in January... The After School Club at **Navan** ETNS has been a run-away success. The club runs daily from 1.40 until 6pm, offering a huge amount of flexibility to parents and has proven very popular with pupils. The school is now hoping to start a Breakfast Club to facilitate parents in the mornings... Parents at **Newbridge** ETNS showed some team spirit when they came together with parents from the adjoining Gaelscoil to clear ice and snow from the schools' joint yard so pupils could get to school safely... Parents at **Balbriggan** had a once-in-a-lifetime experience back in October when animator and film-maker Jimmy Murakami visited the school for a screening of a biographical documentary as part of the school's 5th Annual Human Rights Month... Everyone at **Greystones** Educate Together NS is looking forward to celebrating an Eastern European Christmas this year, with parents teaching the pupils traditions from Poland and Russia... Congratulations to 6th class at **Donabate/ Portrane** Educate Together NS who are operating the Peer Mediation Service, helping others resolve conflicts and dealing with some disputes previously dealt with by staff... Pupils at **Gorey** and **Skerries** Educate Together schools took part in a Christmas concert at the RDS Simmonscourt, singing as part of a choir of hundreds, accompanied by conductor Gearoid Grant and the RTE Concert Orchestra... **Portlaoise** ETNS recently held a very successful International Cuisine Evening, the first event since the school opened in September. The event brought together local parents and international dishes... The other new school in our network, **Holywell** ETSN, is staging its first production "Billy No Buzz", a play based on bullying, reinforcing elements of the Ethics Programme... The Winter Fair at **Cork** ETNS was a roaring success, with over €3,000 raised for the building fund... Pupils at **Tralee** Educate Together NS visited Tralee town last week to sing carols to raise money for purchasing books for the Learn Together programme- well done to everyone!

Your Snow Day Pictures!



Clearing the snow at Newbridge

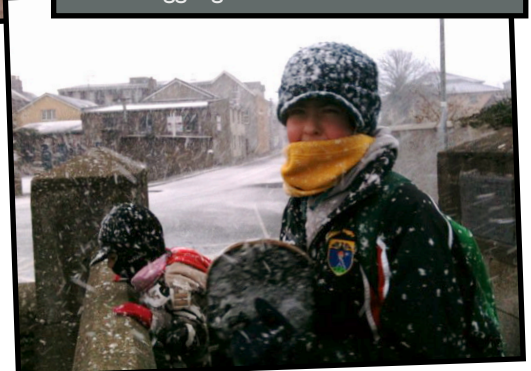
Staff at Carlow did their best to get to school!



Pupils at Navan enjoying the snow!



Struggling to school in Wicklow



Parents got stuck into clearing the yard at Castaheany

