



Educate  
Together



Teachers and Pupils from Waterford Educate Together NS with CEO Paul Rowe at the RDS Primary Science Fair.

ETSN

## School Newsletter

JANUARY  
2010

# Election 2011

### Five Priorities for our Education System

Educate Together is calling on all parties contesting the election to commit to five policy priorities if elected to Government. 'Education is one area where new policy initiatives can make a critical immediate difference to the future prospects of our society' says Paul Rowe, Educate Together CEO. 'In Educate Together we feel there are five policies the new government can commit to immediately that will have significant effect.'

'Prioritising these policies will benefit every child in our education system – particularly a commitment to protect expenditure on education. We have to stop talking about education being the foundation of future prosperity and start implementing the policies that will make it happen, namely...'

#### GIVE PARENTS CHOICE AT PRIMARY LEVEL

Multi-denominational education needs to be made available to all children in Ireland. Our education system can no longer ignore parent's rights to choose the type of education they want their child to have.

#### PROTECT EDUCATION BUDGETS

Ensure the education budget remains a strategic priority in government spending and funds allocated are fully spent on services & infrastructure.

#### STOP TARGETING MARGINALISED AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Cutting services and supports to vulnerable minority groups is unfair and impacts upon every child in the classroom. Lift the cap on SNA, EAL and Educational Psychologist recruitment and ensure those that need support, get it.

#### OPEN EDUCATE TOGETHER SECOND LEVEL SCHOOLS

Bring new thinking to second level education and embrace curriculum and structural reform. Educate Together has developed innovative approaches to delivering second level education - allow them to be implemented.

#### BUILD PERMANENT SCHOOLS AND PHASE OUT PREFABS

We should prioritise the building of permanent school buildings. Too many prefab schools, which are expensive to

lease, heat and maintain have become semi-permanent fixtures in our communities. Let's get our builders working again and get proper well designed, cost efficient schools built!

#### HOW WE CAN PUSH THIS MESSAGE HOME

These five policy priorities are key to Educate Together's development programme and will be of benefit to our whole network. Of course we have a media strategy to push these policies but this is something we are inviting all our supporters – parents, teachers and children, to get behind. We have developed these policies into a series of questions that are available on [www.educatetogether.ie/election-2011](http://www.educatetogether.ie/election-2011). **We would like you to put these questions to every candidate in your constituency and let us know what they say!** Post the candidate's name, party and answers to Educate Together's Facebook page. We will collate the responses each week and post them online.

Let's grab the opportunity this election presents to really push for the long overdue changes our education system needs!

## Homework Journal

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. Your school will soon be receiving an email from Aoife Murray, Communications Officer, surveying your current homework journal use and interest in a cross-network version, so keep an eye out for it in Principal's and Schools' inboxes!

## SCIENTISTS OF TOMORROW

Eager young scientists from five Educate Together National Schools exhibiting their projects this month at the RDS Primary Science Fair. Although Educate Together pupils make up just 2% of the overall primary school population in Ireland, their work is regularly selected for inclusion. This year 8% of the projects chosen for inclusion at the fair are from Educate Together schools. The schools in question included Castleknock, Balbriggan, Griffeen Valley, Waterford and North Kildare Educate Together National Schools. With projects ranging in topic from school cleanliness to green motors, all eight projects display the range of scientific endeavours undertaken by young, inquiring minds nationwide.

## ETHOS CONFERENCE

An Educate Together Ethos Conference is taking place on March 26th from 10am to 3.30pm. The conference will cover both the Learn Together Curriculum and the 'lived' ethos in the school. Teachers and Members of Boards of Management are all welcome. Venue to be confirmed. Watch this space, our website and the facebook page for more info.

## FLORA WOMEN'S MINI MARATHON

Come and join us on June 5th for the Women's Mini Marathon in Dublin! The development and reform of second-level education in Ireland is critical. Run for Educate Together, raise money and be part of the change! If you are interested please email [masina.johnston@educatetogether.ie](mailto:masina.johnston@educatetogether.ie) and you will be contacted with all the information you need!



## Remembering Roisín Connolly

The entire family of Educate Together schools would like to express the deepest sympathy and condolence to the husband and family of Roisín Connolly and her unborn daughter Catherine who tragically lost their lives in a road accident in Monaghan during the Christmas break.

Roisín was highly regarded and much loved in the Educate Together teaching community. She was a rising star who had enormous potential in her profession. She was an outgoing and vivacious person with wide professional experience at home and abroad. A brilliant teacher, colleague and friend in Balbriggan Educate Together National School, Roisín was also an activist for Educate Together's Learn Together curriculum. She played an important role as a cuiditheoir (trainer of teachers) for the Muralistas project in 2009. This was a joint project that engaged children from the Educate Together schools in Balbriggan, Bracken (Balbriggan), Rush/Lusk, Donabate and Le Chéile (Drogheda). It brought noted mural painters (Muralistas) from Nicaragua to work with the children of the schools to design and produce large public paintings around the themes of Equality and Justice. Roisín was a key member of this team. These paintings are displayed in the grounds of Ardgillan House in County Fingal.

Roisín's commitment and professionalism, her passion for the children in her care and her sense of fun and friendship will be greatly missed. Pupils and staff at Ballbriggan Educate Together NS have chosen to honour Roisín's memory with a simple tribute, a single rose and photograph of Roisín inside the main door of the school.

May she and her baby Catherine rest in peace.

Paul Rowe  
CEO, Educate Together

## Changes Online

Some of you may have noticed that our website [www.educatetogether.ie](http://www.educatetogether.ie) has undergone some changes recently. We now have a brand new homepage which we hope will make finding the information you need online a lot easier. It's got a bright clean look with several new buttons to get you where you want to be a lot quicker.

In addition, we are delighted to present a newly developed brand new social networking space, designed especially for the Educate Together network and located at <http://educatetogether.ning.com>. It provides a platform for members of the network to come together, learn from each other's experiences and share knowledge. The plan is to provide closed, confidential groups where members of the Educate Together community can gather online, chat and discuss issues relevant to their role or involvement with the movement. We currently have 11 groups up and running. Membership is by invitation only so should you wish to join up please email [aoife.murray@educatetogether.ie](mailto:aoife.murray@educatetogether.ie)

## Aid Award

Congratulations to pupils from Ennis Educate Together N.S. who have been shortlisted from a total of 17,000 primary school students nationwide for an Our World Irish Aid Award! Eleven primary schools from Dublin, Louth, Kilkenny, Monaghan, Kildare, Donegal, Westmeath and Clare have earned a coveted place on the shortlist for the annual primary schools initiative, which aims to promote awareness and understanding of global development issues and Irish Aid's work in partnership with developing countries. All in all 1,200 projects from 700 schools took part in the competition, so this is a major achievement for Ennis Educate Together NS.

For their project, entitled "Education is the Key", pupils at Ennis Educate Together N.S. produced project and a short DVD, inviting the world into their classroom. The entire school community at Ennis Educate Together N.S. is now eagerly awaiting the Our World Irish Aid Awards ceremony!

## Recruitment of Teachers

1. If a permanent post becomes available in your school (if someone leaves or if you are sanctioned a post by the DES) then you should check with the Educate Together National Office to see who is on the Main and Supplementary panels. (Currently there is 1 teacher on the Main and 2 on the Supplementary panels.) The DES will be issuing a new updated panel list later on this term. There will also be some changes to the way the panels operate in order to cope with the larger number of teachers who will be entitled to panel rights. If no one on the panels wish to take up the position in your school (and you have written confirmation of this from them- email is fine) you may then only advertise a temporary position. You may only appoint in a permanent capacity for the remainder of this school year if you take someone from the panels.
2. If you have a temporary post you may proceed (at the moment) without consulting those on the panel.
3. Notify the patron (Educate Together in many cases) and send the advertisement to [info@educatetogether.ie](mailto:info@educatetogether.ie) so that it may go on the Educate Together website. As well as on [www.educatetogether.ie](http://www.educatetogether.ie) you should also post the ad on [www.educationposts.ie](http://www.educationposts.ie).
4. Suggest an Independent Assessor to the patron- contact Louise Daly in the national office for this ([Louise.daly@educatetogether.ie](mailto:Louise.daly@educatetogether.ie)). This should ideally be an Educate Together principal, deputy principal or experienced Educate Together chairperson, although other candidates will be considered.
5. If Educate Together agrees, it will appoint the suggested Independent Assessor to the selection panel. Confirmation of this will be sent by email.
6. The selection panel should devise criteria for the post and agree on these collectively. These MUST be agreed BEFORE the envelopes containing applications are opened.
7. The selection panel should see ALL applications for the post.
8. Shortlisting begins based on agreed criteria.
9. Applicants who meet the criteria are selected and called for interview (by letter, including criteria and members of Selection Board)
10. Applicants who were not short-listed are informed that they are not being called for interview.

11. Applicants whose applications arrived late, and therefore not considered, are informed.
12. References are checked thoroughly- Garda Vetting alone is not an appropriate safety measure and it is the responsibility of the selection board and the board of management to ensure that a reference check is done by an appropriate person. Remember- this potential staff member could be a member of your school community, they could be entitled to panel rights at the end of the year and could end up a permanent member of staff. This is not the time to cut corners.
13. Interviews take place. A suitable person is present on day of interviews to meet and greet potential candidates- remember they are interviewing your school as much as you are interviewing them!
14. Selection panel decide on successful applicant, if any.
15. Board of Management MEET (agreeing to appoint by phone or email is no longer acceptable and in the event of a dispute the entire process would have to be redone) and approve (or not) the appointment.
16. Patron Approval for Appointment form is filled out and signed by the Chairperson who records on the form the date of the Board meeting.
17. Form is submitted to Educate Together for patron approval\*.
18. Educate Together satisfies itself that the procedures have been followed. If it considers that there have been irregularities, Educate Together may conduct an investigation and may refuse approval. If approval is refused, Educate Together will instruct the Board of Management of the school on how to recommence the process.
19. Patron gives approval, in writing, on the understanding that the above procedure has been followed.
20. Position is offered to the successful candidate. *The Selection panel (all members of it) has a responsibility to ensure that procedure is followed. The Board of Management must be satisfied that the selection panel has followed procedures before approving the appointment. The Chairperson of the Board of Management, by signing the approval form, indicates this to the patron.*
21. Appropriate contracts of employment are put in place for the successful candidate.

\* Educate Together may approve the appointment verbally, before the form is received, by prior arrangement.

## Circular 007/2011

### Public Health Advice to Schools from the HSE on the Seasonal Influenza

The HSE has advised the Department of Education and Skills that the predominant flu virus is the H1N1 virus, more commonly known as swine flu.

Schools are advised to monitor information released on this through the website of the Health Protection Surveillance Centre- [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie). There is also a link to this website on the Department's website at [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) which can be accessed through the Public Health Alerts option on the homepage. If your school experiences a cluster of Influenza like illnesses you should seek advice from your local Department of Public Health of the HSE.

## Employee Assistant Service

Figures just released show that the EAS received more than seven hundred calls from teachers during the last academic period from September 2009 through to the end of June 2010, seeking help on how to deal with stressful work, personal, health, family or financial issues.

The Employee Assistance Service (EAS) is a free and confidential counselling and support service that was established in 2006 exclusively for teachers and their family members to provide them with assistance in coping with a variety of issues. The purpose of the service is to provide easy access to confidential counselling support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. During 2010 there is evidence that emotional health issues have increased in number particularly due to financial concerns, transition, ill health, family issues such as bereavement, and anxiety about the future.

"The service has now been extended to provide help to all Special Needs Assistants", said Joe Duddy of Vhi Corporate Solutions, the company contracted to provide the service to over 66,000 Teachers and Special Needs Assistants throughout Ireland.

He added, "Given that we are living through a period of economic change and uncertainty, the EAS is now, more than ever, proving to be a beneficial resource offering completely confidential guidance and support in coping with these changes".

### Who can access the service ?

The EAS is available to Teachers and SNA's whose positions are funded by the Department of Education and Skills, their spouses or partners, their dependents above the age of 16 and mother/father where appropriate and can be accessed by a dedicated freephone number or email address.

The EAS is provided by VHI Corporate Solutions who follow strict ethical guidelines and codes of practice which means that any contact with Teachers, SNAs and their families remains confidential and no information about them is available to anyone without their written consent. Any feedback provided to the Department is purely in general terms and is anonymous in nature.

### What kind services are available?

Telephone Counselling – single sessions or short term structured counselling.

Face to Face counselling – up to six counselling sessions.

Counselling is provided on issues such as health, relationships, addictions, bereavement, stress, conflict, critical incident and trauma.

### How do I contact the service?

Couldn't be simpler. The EAS is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year through: Freephone 1800 411 057 or Email : [eas@vhics.ie](mailto:eas@vhics.ie)

For additional information on the EAS just click on to the Department of Education and Skills Website, [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) and follow the link provided.

## Update on Snow Days

### From the Department of Education and Skills: Guidance for schools in relation to making up for time lost due to unforeseen closures.

The DES has released guidance for Boards of Management in relation to making up for time lost due to unforeseen school closures – in light of the many closures caused by the adverse weather conditions in December 2010.

The Department feel that schools should make all reasonable efforts to recoup time lost but the final decision in relation to how to make up for lost time is a matter for each individual Board of Management. The Department have issued the following number of steps to assist Boards who are figuring out how to recoup some of the time lost in the remainder of the 2010/2011 school year.

1. The Board of Management should, in the first instance, quantify the number of school closures that have occurred.
2. The Board of Management should, in consultation with the Principal and teachers, assess the effect of the loss of tuition and identify any shortfalls that have occurred as a result of the unforeseen closures.
3. The Board of Management should consult with the Principal and teachers with a view to ensuring that the curriculum for each class/year group can be completed before year end. Subject to consensus at local level, any changes to normal practice that can be made to facilitate such work should be put in place. A non exhaustive list of possible examples of how this might be achieved include:
  - Prioritising tuition over other non-tuition activities
  - Reducing where possible the length of mock/house examinations
  - Consideration of whether learning in the classroom should be prioritised over school tours etc.
4. If necessary, the Board of Management should review the school calendar with a view to identifying any discretionary

days or half days that the school had planned to close that could be made available to make up the loss. In this regard, the Board of Management should take into account the need to provide adequate notice of any changes to the school calendar to pupils, parents and staff.

5. In cases where a school has been affected by extensive or prolonged school closures and where the Board of Management considers that the above measures will not adequately address the loss in tuition involved, the Board of Management may, subject to consensus at local level and having established what arrangements for school transport may or may not be feasible if other schools are remaining closed, identify and utilise any such other days that it considers appropriate and necessary to address the shortfalls.
6. The Board of Management should consider the implications of any measures identified for pupils, teachers, parents and other staff and also other parties such as school transport, bus escorts, traffic wardens, visitors to the school etc.
7. The Board of Management should consult and communicate with the school community as early as possible on this matter.

### Changes to the Standardised school Year 2011/2012 onwards

The Standardised school year arrangements are currently due for review. The need for greater flexibility and to provide contingency arrangement within the standardised school year to deal with unforeseen school closures will be dealt with in the context of this review.



## European Year of the Volunteer

The European Union has designated 2011 as the European Year of Volunteering in recognition of the important role voluntary work plays in European society. The year is about celebrating the work of volunteers and encouraging people who do not currently volunteer to get involved! In the words of William James, "Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does"

Ireland needs an education system which respects the rights of all children and parents irrespective of their social, cultural or religious backgrounds. The potential benefits to society and to future generations of children in Ireland are immense. Our sector and all Educate Together schools have been created by voluntary community initiative. Ireland today would be without a multi-denominational sector of education without the enormous efforts of thousands of volunteers and their supporters.

EYV2011 is an opportunity for us to recognize and celebrate the thousands of volunteers who dedicate their time and skills with a strong belief in a multi-denominational education system. Volunteers in the Educate Together movement achieve things from the ordinary to the extraordinary across a wide variety of roles. Educate Together volunteers are involved in Campaigning and Awareness Raising, Fundraising, Management, New Schools Development, Office based internships, Working and Advisory Committees, Research, School Support and even Virtual Volunteering.

Now more than ever we need to continue to recognise and encourage the remarkable contributions volunteers make in our school communities, the National Office and new school areas. EYV2011 is an opportunity for us to continue to build on our strong volunteering culture across every aspect of school life and the work of the National Office.

We would love to hear from you if you are planning anything to celebrate the European Year of Volunteering in your own school community.

Here are just a few ideas for how you can celebrate the European Year of the Volunteer!

- Invite a volunteer / the Volunteer Officer from Educate Together to your school to talk with the students about volunteering, share ideas about why active citizenship is important and what the benefits are for the person, the community and the country.
- Host a Volunteer Fair in the school to promote EYV2011, raising awareness about local volunteer programmes.
- Do a team volunteering activity in the local community
- Start your own volunteer school initiative
- Have a Volunteer Appreciation Day - Get to know the volunteers in your school and learn about the ways they make the school great!

On a final note, we wish you a very happy European Year of the Volunteer!!

## Ethos Self-Evaluation

Educate Together schools make a commitment to being multi-denominational, co-educational, democratic and child-centred. While the general thrust of these principles are clear enough, members of school communities often have different interpretations of what they mean in practice in terms of the day-to-day running of the school.

Very often when the term "ethos" is mentioned it is perceived to refer to the Learn Together Programme. This programme is a key aspect of the ethos, since it is designed to teach the children mutual respect, social justice and environmental sustainability. But Educate Together schools aim not just to teach these principles, but to live them. The Educate Together ethos implies a

particular way of running the school and of managing relationships, which is, at the same time a modeling of the taught ethos.

This explicit commitment to running the school in a way that respects all identities and all perspectives is the hallmark of an Educate Together school. But in the hustle and bustle of running a school, with the myriad responsibilities that Boards of Management, principals and staff face on a daily basis, is there a need to devise measures to ensure that the Educate Together ethos is not relegated and neglected? With the expansion of the Educate Together network and the development of different paths to the establishment of Educate Together schools, this question becomes even more pertinent.

This is the question that prompted Educate Together to develop a self-evaluation tool for schools, providing a methodology that would enable schools to periodically stand back and examine whether the Educate Together ethos is still at the centre of school life.

Three schools offered to pilot the tool: Carlow ETNS, Galway ETNS and Gorey ETNS. The process has finished in Carlow and in Galway, and is getting underway in Gorey. Simon Lewis, principal of Carlow ETNS states that "We found it a very useful tool for assessing the way we do things around here. It gave us targets to focus on to improve the way we work".

The subject of the self-evaluation is the ethos of the school. This covers the taught ethos, or Ethical Education Programme (Learn Together) and also the lived ethos, in other words, how the principles of Educate Together permeate school activities and are experienced by all members of the school community. The process is promoted and facilitated by Educate Together in the spirit of supporting schools to carry out ongoing-self evaluation. It is not a vehicle for monitoring schools' ethos, or judging and comparing schools.

The process aims to

- Involve self-evaluation by schools
- Evaluate the extent to which the Educate Together ethos is lived out in a school
- Be ongoing and regular
- Not add unduly to schools' existing workload
- Be clear and transparent
- Consider the perspectives of all members of the school community
- Listen to schools' concerns and takes them seriously

- Recognise strengths and identify areas for improvement

The process is totally confidential and the information emanating from it is the exclusive property of the school. Educate Together's interest in the process is to ensure that schools place the Educate

Together ethos at the centre of their work through a continual process of self-evaluation. For this they need a rigorous tool. The pilot phase of the initiative has led to a serious re-appraisal of the tool and throughout 2011 it will be continuously evaluated with a view to improving the clarity, usefulness and agility of the process.

The process involves a written questionnaire to all members of the school community, followed by facilitated sessions with pupils, staff, parents and members of the Board of Management. It culminates in a review by the school community of the findings of the process and the development of an ethos plan.

Educate Together intends to support ten schools per year to engage in the process and is currently looking for expressions of interest from schools for 2011. This is an opportunity for schools to collectively interrogate what the ethos means to them and how it can be better enshrined in the day-to-day running of the school. It is hoped that each year schools with different characteristics – big, small, urban, rural, established, developing, DEIS etc., will be included among the participating schools. Schools not included this year will have an opportunity to participate in the future. We hope that the development of the self-evaluation tool will put ethos firmly on the agenda of staff, parents' associations and Boards of Management. Interested schools should contact Molly O' Duffy, Ethos Development Officer, for further information, at [molly.oduffy@educatetogether.ie](mailto:molly.oduffy@educatetogether.ie) or 01-4292500.