

Briefing on Partnerships between Educate Together and Education and Training Boards (ETBs)

Motion 2022/03

This AGM calls on the Board of Directors to open discussions with the Education and Training Boards to extend their co-patronage relationship at second level to primary schools with a view to working together in the future to open and manage primary schools in Ireland.

Board of Management Carlow ETNS

Rationale:

There are now 23 CNS schools and they are expanding more quickly than our own schools. While we celebrated opening 7 primary schools in 2019, they had opened 10. It appears that almost all divested schools are being taken on by the ETB. Rather than waiting for the inevitable when they become bigger than our own network, we have an opportunity now to get involved so that if we were to join forces, we could ensure that certain conditions, precious to ET, can become central to any future relationship.

The briefing below was prepared by national office to provide members with background information about Educate Together's work with ETBs.

Background – primary

Educate Together has long advocated for increased state involvement and support for equality-based education. In 2006 Educate Together approached the Irish Vocational Education Association (now Education and Training Boards Ireland) with a view to exploring a partnership approach between Educate Together and Vocational Education Committees (now Education and Training Boards) at primary level, and a series of meetings ensued.

When it was announced in 2007 that a state model of primary school was being introduced with VECs as patrons, Educate Together offered the Learn Together curriculum for use in these schools. This offer was declined, meetings between the two organisations ceased, and a new model of primary school was developed. The Community National School (CNS) model initially aimed to provide faith formation during the school day for children of different religions. As a member of the Reference Group for the development of this model, Educate Together, along with others, advocated for an equality-based approach. In 2017 the [Community National School model changed](#) so that faith formation was no longer provided during the school day. A multi-belief and values programme "Goodness Me Goodness You" is now taught. This is similar to the Learn Together curriculum in some ways, although there are some differences in the curriculum and in the model more broadly. For example, Community National Schools have uniforms, and teachers are not usually called by their first names.

[Learn Together \(Educate Together\)*](#)

[Goodness Me Goodness You \(CNS\)](#)

**This is the 2004 curriculum. Following a review, a revised version of Learn Together is now being piloted across the network, and will be published in 2022.*

An analysis of new school processes over the past ten years shows that Educate Together has continued to be the preferred patron among parents. Educate Together has been selected as patron in 60% primary processes since 2012, whereas ETBs have been selected in 20% of areas. Despite this, the Department of Education has prioritised ETBs in the [new arrangements for reconfiguration](#), referencing the current programme for government.

Since the first Community National School opened, no VEC or ETB has expressed any interest in partnering with Educate Together at primary school level. However, Educate Together has developed a strong partnership with Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) in its teacher education work. After a number of years of collaboration with each other and with third-level Initial Teacher Education providers, Educate Together and ETBI established a more formal strategy group in 2021. This group is exploring ways of enhancing teacher education to ensure NQTs are fully prepared to teach in Educate Together and CNS schools. As part of that work funding has been secured jointly with ETBI and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education for [an action research project](#) which will provide important data and support improvements in teacher education.

Background – second-level

Since the first campaigns developed for Educate Together second-level schools during the 2000s, the question of school type and patronage has been explored extensively at local and national level. Since the 1970s there have been three main models of school patronage at second-level in Ireland:

1. Voluntary secondary schools have one voluntary patron and boards of management are appointed by the patron (similar to most primary schools). Around half of all second-level schools are voluntary secondary schools, most of which have religious orders or trusts as their patron (see Appendix). 4% of voluntary secondary schools (17 schools) have Educate Together as sole patron.
2. Community Colleges have an Education and Training Board (ETB) as sole patron, and the board of management of the school is a sub-committee of the ETB. Around one third of all second-level schools are community colleges. Around one third of community colleges are 'designated' and have another patron as a 'trustee partner'. Educate Together is the trustee partner in two community colleges. All other trustee partners are religious organisations.
3. Community schools have joint patrons. The board of management is independent and includes representation from all joint patrons. Usually patrons include the local Education and Training Board as well as one or two voluntary organisations (usually religious organisations). Educate Together is joint patron of two community schools with ETBs and there are 96 community and comprehensive schools in the country. (comprehensive schools have a slightly different structure)

Community Colleges

When the project to open the first second-level schools was established in the national office in 2007, active efforts were made to partner with individual VECs (ETBs) and with the IVEA (ETBI). At the time, most VECs opposed Educate Together's involvement at second-level and were not interested in partnership. However, in 2010 Minister Coughlan sanctioned the establishment of a new school in Lucan as a Co. Dublin VEC school 'in formal partnership with Educate Together'. Following two years of negotiations, a ['Model Agreement' was signed in 2013](#) and Kishoge Community College opened in 2014.

Following a long-standing second-level campaign by parents, City of Dublin VEC (now CDETb) agreed to consider partnership with Educate Together in 2012. Negotiations led to the sanctioning of Clontarf Community College, which [opened in 2016](#) with the ETB as patron and Educate Together as 'trustee partner.' The success of Clontarf CC led to discussions between Educate Together and CDETb about potential for further partnerships. In 2019 [an MOU was signed](#) with a view to two existing community colleges transitioning to become CDETb / Educate Together partnership schools. Following two years of development work, Clogher Road CC and Cabra CC are now actively engaged in the Educate Together network.

Following a long-standing second-level campaign in South Kildare, Educate Together entered into discussions with Kildare Wicklow ETB and held meetings between 2018 and 2021 with a

view to establishing a partnership. Minister McHugh sanctioned a new building for an ETB community college in 2019 and it was understood that [Educate Together would become a trustee partner](#) in the school. However, in 2022 the ETB advised Educate Together that it did not wish to proceed with the partnership.

Aware of demand for an Educate Together second-level option in Wexford, in 2020 the Department of Education requested that Educate Together work with Wexford Waterford ETB (WWETB) to explore a partnership in respect of a community college in the town. Having established that there existed parental demand for such a partnership, Educate Together and WWETB [signed an MOU](#). Educate Together is now seeking further engagement with WWETB in relation to this potential partnership.

Community Schools

In areas where it applied to open second-level schools from 2013 onwards, Educate Together approached the local VEC / ETB to explore the possibility of joint patronage. Louth VEC were the first to agree, and this led to the establishment of Ballymakenny College, a community school with Educate Together and Louth VEC (later Louth Meath ETB) as joint patrons in Drogheda in 2014.

In 2014 Kildare Wicklow ETB agreed to partner in an application for a new school and Celbridge Community School opened in 2015.

Since 2015 no ETB has agreed to a joint application, and all new Educate Together schools have therefore been voluntary secondary schools.

Membership of Educate Together for ETB Partnership Schools

There are some unresolved issues relating to membership of Educate Together for partnership schools and as yet, these schools are not paying members of the organisation. Work is currently ongoing with our two community schools, our ETB patron partners in these schools, and the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools (ACCS) to clarify the membership status of these two community schools in the Educate Together network. Discussions are also ongoing with CDET to develop an agreed mechanism through which community colleges can become members of Educate Together.

Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI)

Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) is the national representative body established to collectively represent the sixteen Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and promote their interests. Educate Together sought a meeting with ETBI in 2021 to discuss current and potential future partnerships. The General Secretary of ETBI and the Chair of the ETB Chief Executive Forum attended. They stated clearly that they are not in favour of partnerships with Educate Together or any other organisation, and would prefer the ETB system to be left 'undiluted'. They referred to the ETBI patron's ethos framework for second-level schools, which is nearing completion, and indicated their intention that all ETB community colleges, including any designated or partnership schools, should be guided (but not constrained) by that framework.

When asked about the potential for further community schools, they were entirely against this, and described the partnership community college model as the 'least worst option'. They acknowledged that individual ETBs were autonomous, and that all ETBs were required to comply with government and Department policy. The question of primary partnerships was not raised at this meeting, but it is unlikely, given their attitude, that ETBI would support them.

Appendix - Current Breakdown of School Types (2021/22 DE provisional figures)

Primary (3,101 schools total) – by Department designation of ‘ethos’:

(Irish and English medium)	Pupils	%	Schools	%
Educate Together	27,799	5.09%	95	3.06%
CNS	4,994	0.91%	22	0.71%
Catholic	487,503	89.27%	2,748	88.62%
Church of Ireland	15,900	2.91%	170	5.48%
Presbyterian	779	0.14%	16	0.52%
Methodist	90	0.02%	1	0.03%
Muslim	669	0.12%	2	0.06%
Jewish	90	0.02%	1	0.03%
CNS Steiner	232	0.04%	2	0.06%
Multi Denominational	4,018	0.74%	26	0.84%
Inter Denominational	3,927	0.72%	17	0.55%
Quaker	120	0.02%	1	0.03%

Second-level (735 schools total) – by Department designation of ‘ethos’:

Educate Together	7,628	1.9%	21	2.9%
Catholic	193,618	49.4%	346	47.1%
Church of Ireland	12,027	3.1%	22	3.0%
Methodist	930	0.2%	1	0.1%
Presbyterian	1,008	0.3%	1	0.1%
Jewish	159	0.0%	1	0.1%
Multi Denominational	85,551	21.8%	192	26.1%
Inter Denominational	89,885	22.9%	149	20.3%
Quaker	897	0.2%	2	0.3%

Second-level – by school types

Educate Together VS	4,340	1.1%	17	2.3%
Educate Together CC	1,623	0.4%	2	0.3%
Educate Together CS	1,665	0.4%	2	0.3%
Voluntary Secondary (VS)	210,190	53.7%	387	52.7%
Community Colleges (CC)	118,262	30.2%	252	34.3%
Comprehensives	7,974	2.0%	14	1.9%
Community Schools (CS)	55,277	14.1%	82	11.2%
All through Irish	14,100	3.6%	50	6.8%
Some through Irish	8,205	2.1%	14	1.9%
Fee Paying	26,914	6.9%	51	6.9%
Boarding	803	0.2%	3	0.4%