



# Educate Together's Strategic Plan 2022 - 2026

**Stronger Together**





no child  
an outsider

# Leading change

In 2022 Educate Together is a diverse network of 117 schools across 21 counties in Ireland, ranging from small rural primary schools to large urban secondary schools with a shared vision and mission.

Our network has grown out of a movement for change which began in the 1970s, led by parents seeking schools where children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds learn together and are equally respected.

For more than 40 years Educate Together has pioneered equality-based education in Ireland; challenging inequalities and striving to ensure that every child reaches their full potential. We have developed a unique Ethical Education curriculum that focuses on questions of equality, justice, sustainability and active democratic citizenship, and supports students to meaningfully and critically reflect upon the world around them.

Demand for equality-based education has grown rapidly in recent decades and Educate Together has led the way in meeting that demand. As a school patron, we have opened more than 50 schools across Ireland in the past 10 years, growing the number of students in the network to more than 35,000.



# Innovation and opportunity

Creativity and innovation have always been central to Educate Together's development; our primary Ethical Education curriculum, Learn Together, is acclaimed in Ireland and abroad. Our groundbreaking second-level model has proved both popular and successful since the first schools opened in 2014. Research has shown that our schools are leading the way in promoting inclusion, collaborative and student-centred approaches, and the development of global competencies.\*

A key challenge for Educate Together now is to meet growing demand. The current pace of change is too slow and a new approach is needed to re-balance our education system, especially in areas of stable population. Educate Together is pioneering new ways of expanding access, for example through innovative school partnerships. Reforms are also required to ensure that new and developing schools have the resources they need to support every child in reaching their full potential; from physical infrastructure to staffing, leadership and other supports.

This plan sets out Educate Together's goals for the next five years; to support quality and build capacity across our organisation and school network, to lead on important system reforms, and to increase access to equality-based education so that this model is available to more children and young people, whatever their background and wherever they live. To achieve these goals, we look forward to working with supporters and partner organisations who share our vision.

[www.esri.ie/news/study-of-educate-together-second-level-schools-provides-a-positive-outlook-for-the-sector](http://www.esri.ie/news/study-of-educate-together-second-level-schools-provides-a-positive-outlook-for-the-sector)



# Educate Together in 2022

Today Educate Together is a modern, dynamic, independent charity that is redefining standards in inclusive, learner-centred education. Our schools are state-funded, child-centred and democratically run. As a school patron and membership organisation, Educate Together has responsibilities in relation to the governance and management of schools, which include school ethos.



Through a unique Ethical Education curriculum, our schools develop students' knowledge, skills and attitudes in equality, human rights and sustainability. This supports children and young people to develop as critical thinkers and nurtures creativity and respect for others.

Educate Together strives to continuously improve the quality of the delivery of our equality-based ethos. This means ensuring our schools are evolving to meet the changing needs of every student and actively supporting all to develop as competent, emotionally literate global citizens.

35,000

Students in Educate Together schools

95

Primary schools

1,700

staff in Educate Together schools

850

volunteer board members

21

second-level schools

50

developing schools in temporary accommodation

20

new schools opened since 2019

50%

of schools have specialist classes for autistic students

- Educate Together second-level school
- Educate Together primary school



# Our core values

The Educate Together Charter commits the organisation to support the establishment of schools which are:

- **Equality-based** i.e. all children having equal rights of access to the school, and children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds being equally respected
- **Co-educational** and committed to encouraging all children to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities
- **Child-centred** in their approach to education
- **Democratically-run** with active participation by parents in the daily life of the school, whilst positively affirming the professional role of the teachers

- in areas where the demand for such a school exists.

**The Charter also commits us to:**

- Promote fuller awareness and recognition of the identity of the Educate Together sector at all levels in Irish society and abroad.
- Participate in appropriate structures and activities concerned with the future development of education in Ireland and abroad.
- Promote a future where equality-based education will be as freely available to parents as any other educational option they may choose.



# What we stand for

## Our vision

Educate Together is working towards a future in which all people have access to an excellent education that is inclusive of all, irrespective of belief system, race, ethnicity, class, culture, gender, language and ability.

## Our mission

Educate Together is an agent for change in the Irish education system seeking to ensure that parents have the choice of an education based on the inclusive intercultural values of respect for difference and justice and equality for all. In Educate Together schools, every child will learn in an inclusive, democratic, co-educational setting that is committed to enabling and supporting each child to achieve their full potential, while at the same time supporting them to develop as caring and active members of a culturally diverse society.



“There can be no doubt that, as a society, we have travelled far from the Ireland of 1978 when the Educate Together movement first took root... Today, that pioneering vision has taken its rightful place in our education system, growing, flourishing and enabling a further generation of citizens to benefit from the generous and participative ethos which defines Educate Together.”

**Michael D Higgins, President of Ireland\***

[\\*www.president.ie/en/media-library/speeches/speech-at-educate-together-agm](http://www.president.ie/en/media-library/speeches/speech-at-educate-together-agm)

# Educate Together's impact

## A network of nurture schools

Educate Together launched the Nurture Schools project in 2020 and now has 35 schools (27 primary and 8 post-primary schools) participating. The project aims to support students with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in primary and second-level schools to get them back on track and engaged with their education. The concept of Nurture in education recognises that students' wellbeing is critically linked to their engagement with school and resulting academic outcomes. This innovative project brings together Educate Together's most disadvantaged schools and is the first of its kind in Ireland to adopt the nurture approach across a network of primary and second-level schools. Evidence gathered through schools' engagement with Nurture will also illustrate and support the link between the approach and improved social and academic outcomes for students experiencing educational disadvantage.

[www.educatetogether.ie/campaigns/nurture-schools](http://www.educatetogether.ie/campaigns/nurture-schools)



## An ethos quality framework

Providing equality-based education in an unequal world is not easy. We have collaborated with Dublin City University to develop an Ethos Quality Framework, which sets high standards for equality-based and democratic education and provides tools and guidance for our member schools to evaluate their progress and innovate in this space. The ethos quality framework gives our school communities the confidence and the language to stand up and say exactly what Educate Together's equality-based schools are, and it gives us the tools to support quality as our network grows into the future.

[www.educatetogether.ie/news/ethos-quality-framework](http://www.educatetogether.ie/news/ethos-quality-framework)

# Educate Together's impact

## Student voice

Educate Together schools are democratic environments where all community members - students, parents and teachers - have a voice in how the school is run. This objective has been at the heart of the Educate Together ethos since the 1970s.

Educate Together schools are actively committed to listening to and raising student voices. Debate, deliberative dialogue and discussion are nurtured. Schools have student councils or assemblies which contribute to school life and the wider community. At second-level, Educate Together students are welcomed on boards of management and invited to participate in shaping school policy. Students from Educate Together schools have led initiatives on climate action advocacy, demonstrations and rallies in recent years.



## Advocacy

Educate Together actively seeks changes that will improve school experiences and outcomes for generations of young people in Ireland. Our objectives are aligned with forward-looking strategies and reforms at national and international levels:

- Our Charter is closely aligned with Human Rights objectives and UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 4 - ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education.
- Our work to establish a national network of equality-based schools supports the target of 400 multi-denominational primary schools by 2030 in the Programme for Government.
- Our focus on equity and supporting every child to reach their full potential is in line with Goal 2 of the 'Department of Education Statement of Strategy 2021-2023'.
- Our Nurture Schools project supports student well-being, develops social and emotional skills and contributes to a range of the outcomes set out in 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures'.
- Our commitment to raising students' voices is aligned with the 'National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making.'
- Our new second-level schools are pioneering student-centred and inclusive approaches to curriculum development that can inform and support vital reforms at Senior Cycle.
- Our Ethical Education curriculum is aligned with national and European strategies for Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education.

# strategy 2022 - 2026



# Developing and implementing our strategy

This plan has been developed collaboratively over three years. The process included:

- Engagement with our network of member schools
- Consultation with external stakeholders and partners
- Review of the demographic, educational and policy context
- Reflection on our Values, Constitution and Charter

We are very grateful to all the boards of management, school staff, volunteers and partners who assisted with and contributed to the development of this plan.



In order to achieve our goals, we will:

- Partner with organisations and funders who share our values and goals
- Set clear targets and monitor progress towards our objectives
- Connect our school communities with each other and our national office so we can work together to effect change
- Develop structures to meaningfully engage volunteers, supporters and alumni in our national-level objectives
- Reflect on and evaluate our actions regularly, taking care to listen to all perspectives
- Review our strategy annually to take account of our changing context and resources

# 2022 - 2026: resilience & renewal

In recent years, schools have been deeply affected by Covid-19, which has impacted the wellbeing of students, school staff and communities, and increased educational inequalities. Progress towards vital system reforms has stagnated and Educate Together's equality-based ethos is needed more than ever.

There is growing awareness of the need for change, and greater recognition than ever of the importance of children's rights, inclusive practices and sustainability. Leaving Certificate reform is finally on the agenda.

Educate Together has led on Junior Cycle reform, pushing boundaries on student-centred learning and integrating critical thinking skills across the curriculum. Our second-level schools are perfectly placed to extend this reform to senior cycle and build momentum for meaningful system change.

Recent decades have seen significant social reforms in Ireland against a backdrop of changing attitudes and beliefs. This shift is reflected in huge and growing demand for equality-based education at primary and second-level, but the system has been slow to respond.

Educate Together has led the way in equality-based education for 40 years, supporting communities to establish schools and pioneering student-centred and democratic approaches to curriculum, teaching and learning and school management.

Parents now have a say in the patronage of new schools, with the result that most schools that open in urban areas are now equality-based. However, these schools quickly become oversubscribed. Successive governments have set targets for 400 'multi-denominational' schools by 2030, but there is no coherent plan to reconfigure provision and no transparent mechanism for change in areas of stable population, so parents continue to have no choice in many areas.

The time is right for a new approach to achieve change on a wider scale and Educate Together is well-placed to lead that change. By supporting parents and communities seeking this option, sharing our experience and working constructively with all stakeholders, together we can shift the log-jam and develop a clear roadmap to a future where all families can access equality-based education, wherever they live.



strategic  
goals

# Our vision for 2026



quality & capacity



leadership



growth

organisational  
strength



Through increasing the number of students we reach, improving supports for our schools to thrive and innovate, and targeting our advocacy to enable equality-based, student-centred and democratic education across all levels, we will maximise our impact in education and society.

## In five years:

- Educate Together will be a stronger, sustainable network of equality-based schools in which more than 45,000 students are directly engaged and supported.
- School communities will be accessing high-quality ethos guidance, resources, training and supports through a dedicated online Hub.
- Key school staff and volunteers will be engaged in relevant communities of practice that nurture creativity and innovation.
- Students will increase their involvement in decision-making which will be evident across the network.
- Communities seeking equality-based schools will be supported with an agreed national roadmap for school transfers.
- New and developing schools will benefit from targeted advocacy which will result in improvements in conditions.

# Goal 1

## Quality & capacity



**Strengthen the network and shared values across Educate Together schools.**

In the past ten years the Educate Together network has grown and diversified rapidly. Our primary school enrolments have more than doubled and second-level schools now make up nearly 20% of our network. This growth is vital to meet the demand for equality-based education.

As we grow we need to ensure that every student in our network is fully included and supported, and that every school has a shared understanding of what it means to be an Educate Together school. To implement and embed a school ethos that is equality-based, child-centred and democratic requires strong school leadership and outstanding teachers, as well as support and guidance.

### Objective

### Actions

**Improve the processes and systems in place to support quality in schools**

- Provide high quality supports to all member schools
- Enhance recruitment, training and networking for boards of management
- Ensure the best possible staff through robust recruitment and selection practices
- Represent and support our primary schools as their management body

**Support and continually develop Educate Together ethos**

- Implement agreed Ethos Quality Standards
- Promote and develop Ethos Guidance Platform
- Support schools to engage in ethos self-evaluation
- Nurture and promote democratic student-centred school cultures

# Goal 1

## Quality & capacity



### Objective

### Actions

**Enhance Continuing Professional Development (CPD) across our network**

- Ensure comprehensive induction and supports for school leaders
- Provide targeted Continuing Professional Development for teachers in Ethical Education
- Increase school staff uptake of ethos-related CPD (eg: Nurture and Trauma-Informed practice)

### Outcomes

- High-quality information, guidance and support is available to school leaders and boards of management via an online members' Hub
- Robust induction supports are in place for new principals and chairpersons
- 80% of all new Educate Together teachers are engaging in induction CPD
- Strong representation at national level as a Primary Management Body
- All Educate Together schools are enhancing school ethos using our Standards & Guidance Platform
- 50% of Educate Together schools have engaged in Ethos Self-evaluation
- 50% of all primary teachers have completed CPD in the Revised Learn Together curriculum
- Active student involvement in decision-making in schools is evident across the network



# Goal 2

## Leadership



**Be a leading voice for innovation and reform in education, continually striving for wider system change.**

The Educate Together movement has been a driving force for change in Irish education since the 1970s. Yet today, families and teachers still face many barriers as they strive to access or provide equality-based education.

As well as supporting creativity and innovation in our schools, we need to seek systemic reforms that will reduce inequalities and promote inclusion. Addressing the imbalance of school types is central, but there are many other issues to be tackled; resourcing new and developing schools, reforming curriculum and teacher education and including children with additional needs - the list can seem endless and our resources are limited. A systematic approach is required so that campaigns are efficient and effective.

### Objective

### Actions

**Continue to support and pioneer innovation in education**

- Share innovation and good practice through communities of practice
- Promote and further develop Ethical Education
- Support schools to develop democratic cultures

**Advocate for systemic education reforms**

- Agree a national roadmap to reconfigure primary provision
- Secure improvements in staffing levels and supports for new and developing schools
- Advocate for the timely provision of high-quality permanent school buildings

# Goal 2

## Leadership



### Objective

Work with partners to enhance teacher education

### Actions

- Conduct a review of provision for Ethical Education in Initial Teacher Education (ITE)
- Enhance the capacity of newly qualified teachers to work in equality-based schools

### Outcomes

- Conditions for new and developing Educate Together schools have radically improved
- Momentum for change in school patronage is established and a national roadmap for scalable change is agreed
- Teacher graduates have the knowledge & skills to teach Ethical Education
- 50% of Educate Together teachers have availed of specialist CPD
- 50% of Educate Together schools are engaged in sharing innovation via communities of practice
- School staff can access an easy-to-use Ethical Education resource bank
- A Nurture-schools approach is fully embedded across one-third of Educate Together schools



# Goal 3 Growth



## Increase the number of Educate Together school places

Recent growth of the equality-based school network has been steady, with the addition of 28 primary schools and 21 second-level schools since 2014. The total number of students in Educate Together schools has doubled in seven years, reaching 35,400 in 2021.

However, this constitutes just 5% of students at primary and 2% of students at second-level. In 2022 there are still six counties without an Educate Together primary school, four with only denominational primary schools, and our second-level schools are located in just eight counties. Furthermore, most of our schools are heavily oversubscribed, meaning that even where schools exist, growing demand for equality-based education is not met.

### Objective

### Actions

**Develop pathways to choice in areas of stable population**

- Support community campaigns for change
- Advocate for community consultation in areas where choice is needed
- Develop tools to support schools wishing to transition to Educate Together
- Develop and review partnerships in areas of demand

**Increase access to Educate Together schools in areas of growing population**

- Increase equality-based school places by establishing new schools
- Support existing schools to grow to meet demand

# Goal 3 Growth



## Outcomes

- 45,000 + students accessing education in 125 + Educate Together schools in Ireland
- Clear process in place for schools wishing to transition to Educate Together
- Families in every county have access to an Educate Together (or similar) primary school
- New Educate Together schools will see a 50% reduction in the time they spend in temporary accommodation
- Robust agreements and supports in place for effective partnership schools



# Goal 4

## Organisational strength



**Strengthen our organisation through continually reviewing and improving our systems and practices**

Educate Together has achieved compliance with the Charities Governance Code. To maintain the highest standards of governance, and ensure our work is efficient and effective, we need to build on our strong foundations and develop a culture of organisational improvement. In accordance with the core values of equality and democracy set out in our charter, we will strive to develop policies and practices that are transparent and inclusive.

### **Objective**

### **Actions**

**Strengthen company and charity governance**

- Maintain high standards of charity governance
- Strengthen school patronage procedures
- Review structures to ensure a democratic approach to policy development

**Ensure effective systems that enhance our ethos**

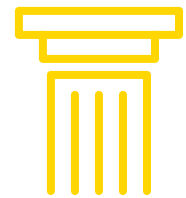
- Develop a members' online information hub
- Nurture student participation across the network
- Review recruitment procedures to prevent bias and promote inclusive practices
- Enhance technology use to support our work

**Build financial sustainability**

- Continue to grow our membership to ensure long-term sustainability
- Develop and implement a robust fundraising strategy to achieve our strategic goals

# Goal 4

## Organisational strength



### Outcomes

- 60% of members actively participating in forums and general meetings
- Enhanced student involvement in decision-making in the organisation
- Educate Together Patronage Manual fully implemented and regularly updated
- Agreed procedures in place for management of leased school buildings
- Time saved through automated processes for vetting and approvals
- Relationships with funders and partners strengthened through closer engagement and enhanced use of a CRM database
- High standards of governance and ethical fundraising demonstrated through triple-lock self-certification



# Achieving our goals

Collaboration and partnership with like-minded organisations are important to Educate Together. In 2022 we are a member of the following organisations:



Organisations we work with include:

- Educate Together Academy Trust (Bristol, UK)
- Ethical Education Teacher Professional Network
- Department of Education and other government departments
- Other voluntary school patrons and trust bodies
- Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and Integrated Education Fund (IEF)
- Education and Training Boards (CDET, DDLETB, KWETB, LMETB, WWETB)
- Primary and second-level school management bodies
- Teacher unions, parent organisations and the Irish Second-level Students' Union
- Colleges of Teacher Education and other HEIs and research bodies
- RCE Dublin: Regional Centre of Expertise in Education for Sustainable Development (with Dublin City University, ECO-UNESCO, Dublin City Council, Fighting Words, Exchange House, An Taisce and Just Forests)
- Other educational and equality-focussed charities, NGOs, projects and networks (e.g. Irish Traveller Movement Yellow Flag Programme, Kids Against the Cuts, Education Equality, Migrant Teacher Project, the Ubuntu Network)

We would like to acknowledge the support of organisational and individual donors and funders, who enable us to do our work. Our supporters include:



Educate Together would like to acknowledge in particular the support of the O'Connor Family, the Haskins Family and Clement Wilson.

[www.educatetogether.ie/donate](http://www.educatetogether.ie/donate)



# Key terms

## **School patron**

In the Irish education system, each school has a patron or joint patrons. The patron typically sets up the school and defines its characteristic spirit, or 'ethos'. Individual schools are managed by boards of management on behalf of the patron(s). Sometimes the patron also has a role in school buildings.

## **Equality-based ethos**

School ethos generally refers to the core values, beliefs, attitudes and practices of an educational community. In Educate Together schools, the ethos of the school is 'equality-based'. This reflects a commitment to equity and children's rights, whereby children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds have equal rights of access to the school and are equally respected, and every child is supported to reach their full potential.

## **School management body**

As a recognised school management body at primary level, Educate Together represents school boards of management in national negotiations and stakeholder forums, and supports boards to carry out their management functions.

## **Board of management**

The board of management is the body of persons appointed by the patron to manage the school on behalf of the patron. As patron, Educate Together offers training and support to boards of management, helping schools maintain high standards of leadership and governance.

## **Educate Together national office**

Educate Together is a school patron, an educational charity and a company limited by guarantee. The national office is responsible for carrying out Educate Together's role as a patron, a school management body and a membership organisation, with the oversight of the Board of Directors (the charity's trustees). It appoints and supports school boards of management, oversees the appointment of school staff, and supports, articulates and develops Educate Together's equality-based and democratic ethos.

## **Ethical Education**

Ethical Education is a central component of the Educate Together model. As a curriculum that is living in Ireland's equality-based schools, it focuses on questions of equality, justice, sustainability and active citizenship, and seeks to support students to meaningfully and critically reflect upon the world around them.

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