



Educate  
Together

# Reconfiguration Information Pack

*for schools considering patronage  
transfer*

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EDUCATE TOGETHER

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







Educate  
Together

*Thank you for your interest in exploring the possibility of Educate Together patronage for your school. We realise that this is a major decision about the future of your school, so we've put together this information pack to make the process a little easier.*

*Remember that if you need advice or further information, you are free to contact Educate Together's Schools Development Officer ([schooltransfers@educatetogether.ie](mailto:schooltransfers@educatetogether.ie) / 01 429 2500).*

*We would also ask that you please keep the Educate Together national office and Schools Development Officer informed about any important information or decisions that may arise.*

*Thanks,  
Edward Platt  
Schools Development Officer  
[schooltransfers@educatetogether.ie](mailto:schooltransfers@educatetogether.ie)  
01 429 2500*





# Table of Contents

To make sure that this information pack is as useful as possible to you, the pack is broken up into four sections. This will allow you to access the information you need more easily, although it is advised that you read through the information in full if possible! Each of these sections focuses on the key questions that school communities often ask when considering patronage transfer, and is colour coded for convenience.

## **What is a 'school patron' and how does it impact how the school is run?**

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# What is a school patron?

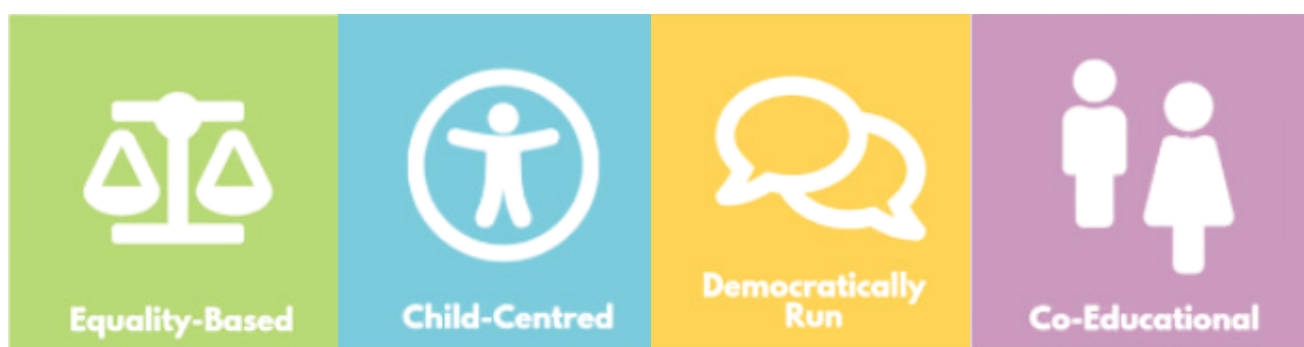
The specific role of a patron is laid out in the [Education Act 1998](#). In simple terms the patron of a school has two main functions;

1. **Defining and promoting the ‘characteristic spirit’ of the school** (setting guidelines so that the school lines up with the values, priorities and ethos of the patron)
2. **Appointing the school board of management**

In the Irish national school system, every school has a patron. The patron has an ongoing relationship with the school and individual schools are managed by boards of management on behalf of the patron. For historical reasons, almost 90% of Irish primary schools are currently under Catholic patronage. This means that the ‘characteristic spirit’ of the school is rooted in the teachings, values and principles of the Catholic church.

Educate Together is an Equality-Based patron. This means that the ethos of the school is based on the [Educate Together Charter](#). This document outlines the values, principles and practices that make Educate Together schools safe, welcoming places for all children. Every school within the Educate Together network is unique, and is reflective of the local community, but they are all connected by fundamental values that come from Educate Together, as the school patron.

Although every school is different, all Educate Together schools are;



The role of the patron is not to directly manage every school under their care. The people best suited to run local schools are local communities, which is why boards of management have such an important role to play in Educate Together schools. As a patron, Educate Together hopes to offer support, guidance and leadership so that school staff and management can provide the best education possible, rooted in values of equality and fairness, for all children in their care.

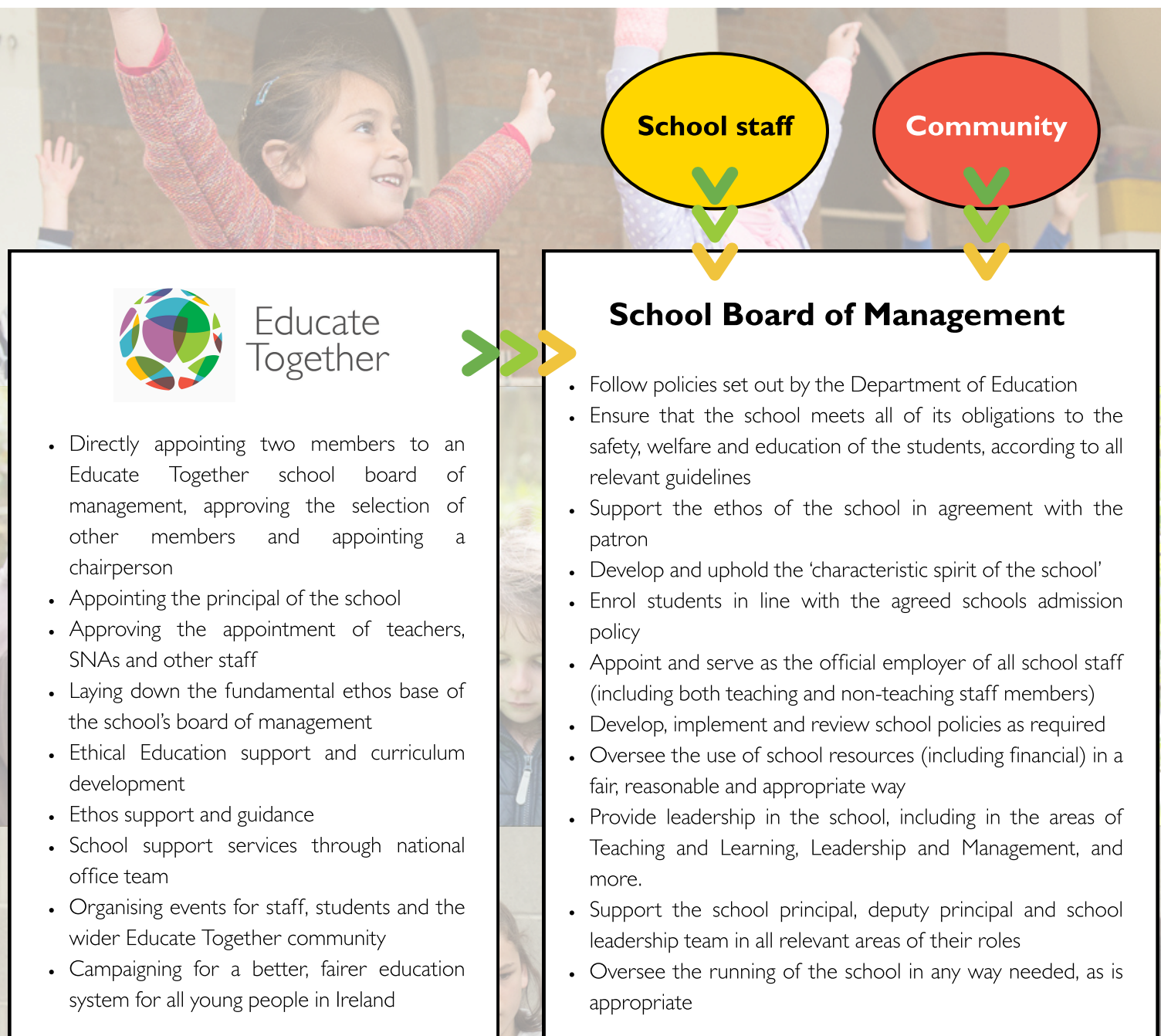
For more details, see the section “What is an Educate Together school?” and the [Educate Together Patronage Manual](#).



# Boards of Management in Educate Together schools

Voluntary boards of management are hugely important in the running of Educate Together. Below is a flow chart showing the responsibilities of Educate Together (as a patron), and the responsibilities of the school board of management. A typical school board of management consists of the school principal, a teacher representative, two parent representatives and two patron nominees.

Although Educate Together directly appoint two patron nominees, as well as appointing the chairperson, they do not appoint the entire board of management. This means that the board of management exists as a collaborative team, representative of the local community, to oversee the running of the school and ensure the highest standards for the students.





# Boards of Management in Educate Together schools

Not all patrons will staff their boards of management in the same way. In Educate Together schools, having parent, staff and patron representation is important, as it allows schools to be reflective of the communities they serve.

Educate Together is a membership organisation. This means that the actions and objectives of the organisation are guided by the motions passed at the organisation AGM each year. Members of the network may submit a motion for discussion at the Educate Together AGM, followed by a members' vote. This ensures that the work of the organisation is structured in a way that meets the needs, demands and ambitions of the wider membership of Educate Together.

Most importantly, joining the Educate Together network does not mean that you are 'controlled' by Educate Together or the national office. Our aim is to ensure that every school is reflective of the community that it serves, and having a representative, voluntary board of management for each school is a centrally important part of that!





# Educate Together primary school admissions

Educate Together primary schools welcome all students, ensuring that no child is treated less favourably in any way due to their background, beliefs or worldview. This approach reflects the child-centred and equality-based principles of Educate Together's Charter. Our admissions policies reflect this charter, as well as adhering to the Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018.

Please note that none of these admission criteria would affect children already in the school. The new admissions policy would only apply to families hoping to enrol children after patronage transfer is complete.

Educate Together schools do not give priority to past students, or to siblings of students no longer in the school. Many schools have enrolment policies which prioritise siblings of children already attending the school, and/or families living in the school planning area, followed by children who live further away. If your school currently serves a School Planning Area defined by the Department of Education, this area will remain unchanged.

Applications open annually, anytime from the October one year before the commencement date, with most children starting Junior Infants when they are either 4 or 5 years old. Children who meet the admissions criteria and submit their application within the designated timeframe will be offered places in accordance with the school's admission policy.





# What is an Educate Together primary school?

Educate Together primary schools are inclusive spaces where all children are encouraged to explore their talents and interests in a positive, supportive environment.

Educate Together schools teach the national curriculum, however they also focus heavily on personal development, informed by Educate Together's equality-based ethos. This includes supporting children to develop skills like empathy, respectful relationship building, critical thinking and self-reflection in a child-centred learning environment.

Teachers in Educate Together schools use child-centred teaching and learning approaches to allow all children to achieve to the best of their abilities, regardless of their ability level, strengths and challenges.

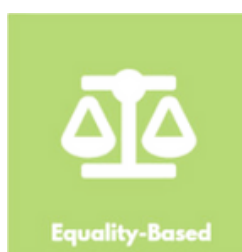
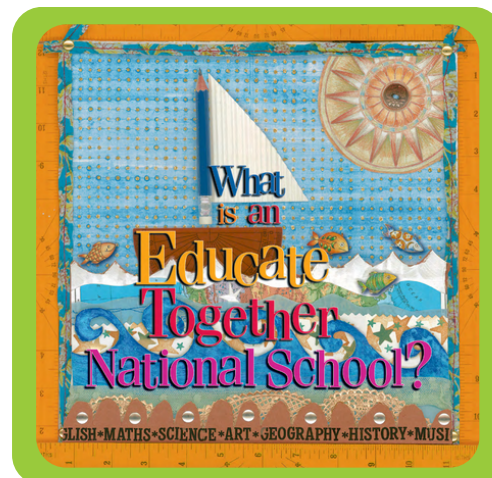
Our equality-based ethos serves as a basis for children to learn in an environment that is founded on respect, inclusion and understanding. Educate Together schools do not ignore the differences that make every child unique, rather we embrace these differences in a way that treats everyone with dignity and respect.

Educate Together schools welcome all children, and strive to ensure equal access to education for families of all social, cultural and economic backgrounds. No child will ever be asked their religion as part of the enrolment process. While in school, no child will be separated or treated differently in any way due to their religious or philosophical beliefs.



# Core Principles

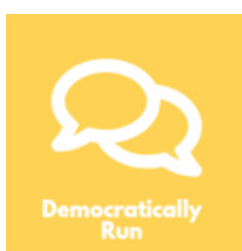
The document 'What is an Educate Together National School?' outlines the vision for Educate Together primary schools and provides more details on how these schools are run. At primary level, schools are guided by the four principles of the Educate Together Charter:



**Equality-Based:** All children have equal access to the school and no one religion or worldview is given priority over another within the school. This applies to both enrolment and school life.



**Child-Centred:** The child-centred approach means that children are put at the heart of all policies and practices and involve them in decision-making where appropriate. The welfare of all children is the first consideration in all aspects of school life.



**Democratically Run:** We run schools on a democratic basis, encouraging active participation by parents and students in the daily life of the school whilst positively affirming the professional role of the teachers.



**Co-educational:** All children are encouraged to explore their full range of abilities and are provided with equal opportunities regardless of their gender or identity.

These 4 principles, the basis of the Educate Together Charter, underline the commitment to a holistic educational experience where the development of the children's academic, social, sporting, artistic and musical skills is supported and encouraged through the school curriculum, co-curricular activities and cross-curricular teaching approaches.



# Background to Educate Together



Educate Together has its roots in the Dalkey School Project, founded in 1978 by a committed group of educators and parents. The school opened at the start of the 1978-79 school year in temporary premises. Bray School Project was set up in 1981, followed by the North Dublin National School Project in 1984. These first three schools formed a national umbrella organisation in 1984, under the banner of 'Educate Together' – a term which had been in use in Dalkey School Project since its origins. The organisation became a company limited by guarantee in 1998 and from the year 2000, all new Educate Together schools operated with the patronage of the national company.

Six years into the existence of Educate Together as an organisation, the Educate Together Charter was formulated in 1990, and unanimously agreed by all member schools at that time. The Charter is the fundamental statement of aims that is endorsed by all members of the movement. The Charter states that children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds are equally respected at school, that Educate Together schools are co-educational and child-centred in their approach to education, and that they are democratically run with active participation by parents and children in the daily life of the school.



Today, Educate Together operates a small national office which provides professional representative and support services to existing schools and start-up groups. The directors and members of the company work in a voluntary capacity. Educate Together has charitable status in Ireland.

**As of 2024, Educate Together has expanded to a nationwide network of 118 schools (97 primary and 21 second-level schools).**

# Learn Together

In every school in Ireland, time is allocated for the 'Patron's Programme' during the school day. In many schools, this time is dedicated to a faith formation program which aligns with the ethos of the school patron, with the Grow in Love programme being a common example. In Educate Together schools, teachers deliver the Learn Together ethical education curriculum at all class levels, from Junior Infants to 6th class. This is a wide ranging ethical education programme, which focuses on helping children to develop a sense of themselves, their community and a well-rounded understanding of faiths and cultures from around the world, without prioritising any single faith or viewpoint over another.

It is important to note that the Learn Together programme is the only area in which the curriculum in Educate Together schools differs from other schools in Ireland. In all other curriculum areas (Arts Education, Primary Language, Mathematics, S.E.S.E., P.E., and S.P.H.E.) the mainstream primary curriculum is delivered, according to Department of Education guidelines.

**The Learn Together programme is structured around 4 strands.**



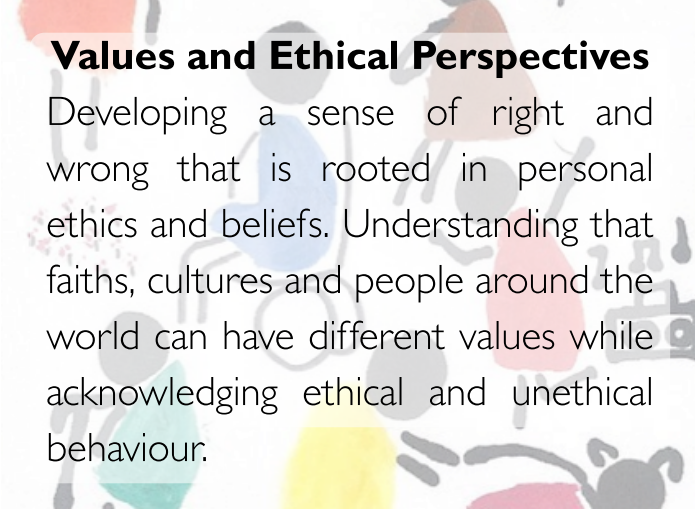
## **An Ethical Approach to the Environment**

Learning about the environment, the impact of pollution/climate change and the role that people play in maintaining healthy, clean natural ecosystems.



## **Equality and Justice**

Developing an awareness of human rights, issues around equality and how society can support people or groups facing discrimination.



## **Values and Ethical Perspectives**

Developing a sense of right and wrong that is rooted in personal ethics and beliefs. Understanding that faiths, cultures and people around the world can have different values while acknowledging ethical and unethical behaviour.



## **Belief Systems**

Becoming aware of faiths and cultures from around the world. Developing an understanding of the tradition, history and meaning of festivals from different world religions through curiosity and respect.



# Learn Together

If you have any questions about the Learn Together curriculum or its content, please do not hesitate to reach out. Our national office team would be delighted to speak to you about how the curriculum is delivered in our schools, how phased transition of the curriculum has been achieved in other transfer schools and the range of supports that are available for teachers who may be delivering the curriculum for the first time. These include support materials, as well as a comprehensive resource bank for every stage, theme and element of the curriculum.

You can view the Learn Together curriculum on the Educate Together website, [available here](#).

Teachers can also find a range of Learn Together resources and support materials online [here](#).



# Patronage Transfer to Educate Together

Every school in Ireland, including every Educate Together school, is a unique reflection of the communities, families and children the school serves. If schools decide that they wish to become part of the Educate Together network, we are committed to facilitating this transfer of patronage in a way that celebrates and strengthens this individuality, in line with our inclusive and equality-based ethos. The Department of Education's reconfiguration project outlines the procedures that should be followed by a school, as well as both the existing and prospective patron body, where interest in the possibility of reconfiguration exists.

## Key steps in transferring to Educate Together patronage

The central goal of reconfiguration is not to compromise or eliminate the culture, history and unique values of a transferring school. However, it is important to note that there are some changes that would be seen as essential for a school hoping to join the Educate Together network. These include:

- Transferring faith formation classes outside of school hours.
- Co-educational classrooms.
- Adopting the Learn Together ethical education curriculum as the patron programme of the school.
- Phased removal of school uniform.
- Phased transition to use of first names for teachers and other school staff.
- Making reasonable accommodations to provide a suitable physical space for equality-based education (e.g. removal of iconography linked to an individual faith, like crucifixes).
- Consideration of changing the school name and crest, especially where the name is linked to an individual faith (e.g. Holy Family N.S. or St. Mary's N.S.).





# Patronage Transfer to Educate Together

## Democratic ethos

The future patronage of your school is an important decision, that will have a tangible impact on how the school is run for years to come. As a democratic organisation, Educate Together knows it is vital that decisions regarding reconfiguration and school patronage are made in a way that aligns with these democratic values.

A plan for engagement with the wider school community can be developed by the principal, board of management and the Educate Together transition team. This **must** include parents, teachers and board members being given more information and afforded the opportunity to ask questions. Pupils should also be engaged in the process where possible, in age appropriate ways. Major decisions regarding patronage and reconfiguration should **never** be made by a small group within the school without consultation with the wider school community.



# What changes would happen within our school?

|                                                                                                            | What would stay the same?                                                                                                                                           | What would be different?                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>Curriculum</p>        | <p>The vast majority of lessons would remain exactly the same. This would include curriculum content, classroom materials, additional support for students etc.</p> | <p>Religious education would be replaced with the 'Learn Together' ethical education program. This would be taught for about 30 minutes per day, just as religion is now.</p>                                     |
|  <p>Faith Formation</p> |                                                                                                                                                                     | <p>No prayers or religious instruction would take place during the school day. Religious instruction in specific faiths (e.g. preparation for Communion/Confirmation) would be moved outside of school hours.</p> |
|  <p>Day-to-day</p>      | <p>All aspects of the day-to-day running of the school would remain the same. This would include the school timetable, calendar, staffing, funding etc.</p>         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |



# What changes would happen within our school?

|                                                                                                                 | What would stay the same?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | What would be different?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  <p>Staffing and Governance</p> | <p>The staffing rates and personnel of the school will remain exactly the same. If teachers wish to move to a school which is remaining under the Catholic ethos they will be supported to do so, but no staff members will be removed due to patronage transfer.</p> | <p>A new Board of Management will be appointed. This will have the same structure as the current Board of Management, but the patron nominees will be appointed by Educate Together. Outgoing board members are welcome to volunteer and seek reelection.</p>                                                                        |
|  <p>Special Occasions</p>     | <p>Children will still be able to learn about festivals and celebrations which take place in school currently. This includes Christmas, St. Patrick's Day and other important cultural holidays.</p>                                                                  | <p>Children will also learn about festivals celebrated by faiths and cultures around the world. This may include festivals like Diwali, Eid, Chinese New Year, Hanukkah and more. These festivals will be explored in a spirit of respect and curiosity for the origins, traditions and cultural meaning to those who celebrate.</p> |
|  <p>School Culture</p>        | <p>The school culture will remain exactly as it is now. Each school is a unique representation of the community it serves and your school will remain a place where your values and input are respected and valued.</p>                                               | <p>Some visible aspects of the 'branding' of the school may change over time. This will include things like the removal of school uniforms and using first names to address staff within the school. All of these changes will be made in a manner and at a pace agreed upon with the wider school community.</p>                    |

# Next Steps

Hopefully this information will be useful to you and will help you to get a better sense of whether exploring reconfiguration further would be right for your school.

If you have any further questions about Educate Together, our schools, or patronage transfer, please do not hesitate to reach out to us.



In the meantime, **here are some suggested actions that will help to progress the reconfiguration exploration process:**

1. Discuss the possibility of reconfiguration further among school leadership (principal, board of management) in light of the new information you have received. It is particularly important that you discuss the key changes detailed above, which will be essential for any school hoping to change patronage. If school leadership is not open to these changes, transferring to Educate Together patronage is unlikely to be viable. The essential changes include:

- Transferring faith formation classes, including sacramental preparation, outside of school hours.
- Co-educational classrooms.
- Adopting the Learn Together ethical education curriculum as the patron programme of the school.
- Phased removal of school uniform.
- Phased transition to use of first names for teachers and other school staff.
- Making reasonable accommodations to provide a suitable physical space for equality-based education This may include removal of religious iconography (e.g. crucifixes and statues).
- Consideration of changing the school name and crest, especially where the name is linked to an individual faith (e.g. Holy Family N.S. or St. Mary's N.S.).



# Next Steps

2. Think of ways in which the wider school community can be involved in the decision-making process. The Educate Together national office transition team will support you in developing a school community engagement plan, however you will have unique insights into your school community which could help in this process. Please remember that the wider school community must be engaged in any major decisions regarding patronage transfer. Although large 'town hall' style meetings are often a popular way of engaging parents, some schools have found these to be intimidating to some parents, which may not illicit honest input or feedback. Small group discussions and 'workshops' should also be considered, as these might better suit your school community.

3. Inform your existing patron that you are engaging with Educate Together and have requested more information regarding patronage transfer. Educate Together will also have made contact with your school patron at this stage. Transparency in the process is an incredibly important part of considering reconfiguration, and it is important that the process is conducted openly.

4. Set a time and date to meet with the Schools Development Officer to develop a school community engagement plan which meets the needs of school leadership, the wider school community and Educate Together national office.

I hope this document is helpful to you and I look forward to discussing this with you more in the future.

Sincerely,

**Edward Platt (Schools Development Officer)**

**Edward Platt**

**Schools Development Officer**

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