

A Report on the Transition to Faith Formation Outside School Hours in Early Educate Together Schools

Prepared by: The Educate Together National Office
For: “The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector”

Authored by: Phillips Hogan and Brianna Nofil
Assisted by: Chelsee Farrell

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A. Purpose of the Report and Relevant Background Information

In the context of increasing demand for Educate Together schools, and the impossibility of meeting this demand only through the provision of new schools, there has been increased interest in recent years in the possibility of denominational schools “transforming” to become Educate Together school. Among those expressing interest have been: parents campaigning for Educate Together schools in areas where none exist, staff and parents in existing denominational schools, politicians, officials of the Department of Education and Skills, representatives of religious organisations and journalists. In response to this interest, Educate Together presented a position paper to the Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills, Mary Coughlan, and her officials in October 2010. This expressed the organisation’s willingness to transform schools where communities wished this to happen, and provided a brief outline of the organisation’s experience of transforming schools, and its recommendations for any future transformations, based on this experience (see Appendix B).

Specifically, as part of the investigations of Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn’s “Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector,” in June 2011, Forum Chairman Prof. Coolahan expressed an interest in learning more about the transition from providing faith formation classes in school hours (FFISH) to faith formation out of school hours (FFOSH). This was in order to inform the Forum’s recommendations to the Minister on the feasibility of transitioning some portion of Catholic¹ schools towards a new model.

When the early Educate Together School Projects first opened, the Department of Education and Science granted the executive committees of the original Educate Together schools rights of patronage under the assumption that the schools would offer denominational instruction for students within school hours. Provisional recognition for the schools was contingent upon each school furnishing the Department with “a statement of policy on religious instruction...in which the Board undertakes to arrange for denominational instruction on the premises within school hours for pupils for whom it is requested.”

Later Educate Together schools negotiated with the Department to remove the requirement for in-school religious instruction from their policy documents and instead only require that schools facilitate the provision of denominational education. However, even the early Educate Together schools today have transitioned to denominational instruction exclusively through the use of FFOSH. This report examines that transition in terms of the motivations for switching to FFOSH, the role of various stakeholders in the schools in this process, and the practical implications of the decision.

¹ Here and throughout this report, the term Catholic can be understood to represent Roman Catholic

B. Methodology

The Educate Together National Office assigned the research and initial report to a pair of interns from Duke University in the United States, under the supervision of Emer Nowlan, Head of Education and Network Development at the National Office. The authors of this report (Brianna Nofil and Phillips Hogan) along with another intern from Colorado State University (Chelsea Farrell) interviewed individuals who held leadership roles – parents, teachers, principals, and board of management members – in the first three Educate Together schools (Dalkey School Project National School, Bray Schol Project National School, and North Dublin National School Project), all of which undertook the shift from FFISH to FFOSH, in order to gain insight into the practical and ideological considerations such a transition demands.

Paul Rowe, CEO of Educate Together, and Emer Nowlan provided the authors with an initial list of potential participants made up of thirteen individuals representing the three different schools. Beginning the week of July 11th, the National Office contacted all of the potential participants regarding their availability and willingness to be interviewed. Per the recommendation of Emer Nowlan, Paul Rowe initially contacted the participants, at which point the authors followed up to arrange meetings at a time and place of convenience to the participants. Ideally the authors would have interviewed at least two members of each school, but due to time constraints and the availability of participants, interviews were only arranged with three members of the North Dublin National School Project, two representatives of the Dalkey School Project National School, one representative of the Bray School Project National School, and one member of the Educate Together National Office. Two interns attended each interview in order to ensure proper documentation.

The final list of interview subjects was:

- Paul Rowe, a parent, board of management member, and representative to Educate Together National Organization from North Dublin National School Project and current CEO of Educate Together;
- Sally Sheils, the principal of North Dublin National School Project;
- Donie O’Shea, the chairman of the executive committee at North Dublin National School Project;
- Chris Lennon, the principal at the Dalkey School Project National School;
- Aine Hyland, a former chairperson of the executive committee at Dalkey School Project National School and former chairperson of Educate Together Board of Directors
- Colette Kavanagh, a teacher at Bray School Project National School and current principal of Esker Educate Together National School;
- Deirdre O’Donoghue, Head of Leadership and Governance at the Educate Together National Office.

The authors attempted to interview participants who held a number of different roles within the subject schools.

The interviews were based on the following list of questions, although each interview developed organically according to the responses of each participant:

- What school were/are you affiliated with and what position did you hold? What was your role in the process of moving FFOSH?
- What were the reasons for deciding against providing FFISH in different schools?
- Is there any evidence to illustrate how FFISH was satisfactory / unsatisfactory for pupils teachers, parents, school communities, religious groups?
- How was the decision made to move FFISH? Who was involved in the decision-making process?
- Was there resistance or backlash from faith formation being moved out of school hours? From whom? How was this dealt with?
- What practical steps were taken in transitioning faith formation from in-school hours to out-of-school hours? Was there a planned approach or did the process evolve? Who was involved in this work?
- How helpful were the local religious communities (i.e. the local Catholic parish) in providing FFOSH?
- Did the content of faith formation classes change with the transition to out-of-school hours? How did the repositioning of faith formation classes affect the school as a whole?
- Were there any difficulties with the new FFOSH set-up? How were these dealt with?
- Is there any evidence to illustrate whether FFOSH was a better approach?
- Upon reflection, what do those involved think could have been done differently?
- What recommendations would those involved make to schools undertaking this move today?
- Is there anyone you would recommend for us to speak with in compiling this report?

The interviews were conducted over the course of two and a half weeks and the initial report compiled over the subsequent two weeks. The report summarizes the subjects' experiences, identifies common themes (challenges, successes, motivations, etc.), and offers recommendations for future transitions from FFISH to FFOSH. The experiences, conclusions, and recommendations contained in this report are all drawn from those interviews, the transcripts of which are included in Appendix A. The report is designed to describe the different ways in which this process was managed in the past, so as to inform schools looking to undergo a similar process, as well as those overseeing this process in schools.

C. Case Studies of the Transition to FFOSH at Three Schools

The following case studies describe the transition process, in brief, of the first three Educate Together schools studied in this report. The summaries highlight both the similarities and the differences amongst the approaches adopted by the different schools during the transition process. The information is based on the experiences related by participants in the interviews:

1. The Dalkey School Project National School

The Dalkey School Project (Dalkey) was the first of the Educate Together schools, opening in 1978. For the first decade and a half of the school's existence, faith formation was included in the school day, but classes were informally moved in and out of school hours throughout the 1980s, depending on teacher availability, parent demand, and access to facilities. The final push to move faith formation outside of school hours took place between 1991 and 1996, and the school has maintained faith formation outside school hours since this date. Dalkey never undertook a formal decision-making process with regards to the transition, and the decision was instead made largely by the principal at the time. Beginning in 1991, due to concerns surrounding loss of instructional time, Dalkey offered faith formation classes at the beginning of the school day during the school's assembly time. The principal at the time, Chris Lennon, gradually pushed back the start time of the faith formation classes by ten minutes each year, until the classes were being taught in the early morning, largely before school hours. Upon hiring a new Catechist who was not available before school hours, Chris Lennon proposed the classes be held after school hours, and was met with little resistance.

2. The Bray School Project National School

The Bray School Project (Bray) opened in 1981 as the second Educate Together school in Ireland and was the last of the original three schools to move faith formation classes outside school hours. Discussions on faith formation classes began in 2001, following parent complaints about students who felt left behind or excluded, as well as the executive committee's concerns that, as one of the few remaining schools with in-school faith formation, Bray was out of sync with the wider practices of Educate Together. In 2001, the executive committee set up a Religious Education Advisory Committee (REAC) in order to evaluate the ethos of the school and the implementation of its religious education program. The REAC was composed of two teachers and four parents, including the Chair of the Catholic Parents Committee. The Committee initially surveyed school parents on the issue of faith formation during school hours, and based on the responses of the survey decided to move forward with the transition process. Over the next year, Bray facilitated a series of both formal and informal meetings in which submissions from parents and teachers were discussed. Rather than putting the final decision to a vote, which the executive committee feared could be too divisive, they took a show of hands at the 2003 Annual General Meeting (AGM). The show of hands indicated that patron committee members were about 75% in favor of moving the classes outside the school day. The

REAC then recommended to the executive committee that the policy be changed, and the executive committee approved the transition. Faith formation classes were transitioned out of the school day over the next nine years; students who were already enrolled at the time of the policy change continued to receive in-school faith formation classes, while each incoming group of pupils could take faith formation only in its after-school format.

3. North Dublin National School Project

The North Dublin National School Project (NDNSP) opened in September 1984 and was the third Educate Together school in Ireland. Founders recall that NDNSP initially offered faith formation classes within the school day in order to align with Department of Education policy, as well as to accommodate bus schedules and student transportation after school hours. After teachers, parents, and students raised concerns about in-school faith formation, the Board of Management motioned to begin a formal inquiry into the practice at the 1987 AGM. Over the next three years, NDNSP undertook a series of workshops, focus groups, and meetings that allowed parents and teachers to voice concerns and discuss the merits of moving faith formation classes out of the standard school day. NDNSP envisioned a decision-making process that would “enable maximum participation” on behalf of all stakeholders, and placed a high priority on facilitating debate and exchange over the three-year period. The final decision was made by a vote of the patron body, composed primarily of school parents, in 1989. The vote was said to be “overwhelmingly in favor of moving it out of school hours.” Following the vote, the policy was immediately implemented across all grade levels.

D. Motivations for the Transition to FFOSH

The interview participants for this report identified no fewer than ten separate motivations for moving to FFOSH across the three schools studied. These were:

- The exclusion and isolation of children on the basis of religion;
- The difficulty of fully adopting and teaching the Core Curriculum when time had to be taken out of school day for faith formation classes;
- The lack of sufficient space to accommodate faith formation classes for every denomination or faith group; the inability to find a Catechist available to teach during the school day;
- The teachers' disinclination to "police religion," or force students to attend or not attend the faith formation classes;
- The uncertainty as to what should be done with students not in faith formation classes during school hours;
- Not wanting parents to feel pressured to send their children to faith formation classes;
- The belief that separation of students for faith formation classes did not fit with ethos of Educate Together schools;
- The fact that the schools had never wanted FFISH, but had to adhere to the policy in order to get approval from the Department of Education to gain approval for the school;
- The general feeling that the schools were out of step with the larger Educate Together practices as some of the last schools to still have FFISH.

Broadly speaking, these ten separate motivations can be grouped into three broad categories examined in greater depth below:

1. Timetabling, Scheduling, and Curriculum Concerns

Across all three schools, teachers and administrators expressed an overwhelming sentiment that faith formation classes during school hours caused great difficulties when attempting to create lesson plans or schedule the school day, and that the need to work around the time-table for faith formation classes damaged the integrity of the religious education Core Curriculum. The Department of Education traditionally set aside thirty minutes of each school day for denominational instruction or instruction in the ethos of the patron body of the school. Therefore, the first Educate Together schools developed a religious and moral education Core Curriculum – the precursor to the current Learn Together curriculum of Educate Together – to encapsulate their ethos of inclusion and human rights-based education. However, the Department required that Educate Together schools devote the daily thirty-minute window to Catholic faith formation classes. The requirement forced teachers to either limit and reduce instruction in the Core Curriculum or reduce the amount of time reserved for instruction in core subjects such as maths, English, or Irish to offset the lost time for the Core Curriculum. Sally Sheils noted "the

only time you could logically facilitate children leaving classes was during Core Curriculum time” and that teachers and administrators “felt it was damaging that program.” Paul Rowe also noted that the provision of religious instruction meant schools were “actually losing two and a half hours of teaching time per school week, which meant everything else had to be crammed into the rest.” He stated that “if you were going to teach the Core Curriculum to all children, you would have to keep the half hour free.”

Many teachers and administrators noted similar scheduling and timetabling difficulties that arose given that not all students at Educate Together schools chose to attend the Catholic education classes. At each of the three schools studied for this report approximately 60 to 70% percent of the students were Catholic and attended the in-school faith formation classes. The division in the student body forced teachers to draft lesson plans for the remaining 30 to 40% of students who did not attend Catechism classes and remained behind. However, teachers could not base the lessons around academic subjects, as that would disadvantage the students who chose to attend the faith formation classes, and the teacher would later have to cover the same material again. Collete Kavanagh stated that

“the teachers’ problems would be the timetabling. It used to come up regularly at the staff meetings – should we timetable our religious education program against our...? I mean 70% of the class would be gone, what do you do with the 30% that are left behind? You can’t go ahead with maths or go ahead with anything, really. So you were either catching up with the particular children who were behind or who had been left behind.”

Sally Sheils again expressed a similar sentiment that “you either did less with the rest that day or else something you considered very important and core to the school was going to be missing for that group of children who left.” Chris Lennon expressed the further reservation that

“there was never any clear indication of what you were supposed to take that time from. Because the time for religious instruction is half an hour per day that in Educate Together schools should be for the religious education, the ethics program... No one wants to take time from that so then what are you going to take time from? Are you going to take it from English, are you going to take it from Gaelic, are you going to take it from maths?”

Ultimately, the provision of religious education during school hours led to increased and nearly untenable scheduling problems for teachers at Educate Together schools.

Therefore, teachers were essentially left with two options: they could either center lesson plans on non-academic subjects like art or set up structured study halls for the children to complete homework assignments. Neither option proved satisfactory to parents or children. If the teacher chose to offer more recreational activities such as art, many parents believed the school was anti-religious and discouraging participation in faith

formation classes by offering children who opted out of Catechism classes more enjoyable activities. Paul Rowe recalled that

“there would be this absurd situation where the teacher got criticized for a situation when the Catholic children went out to do their religion classes... all the children who stayed behind got to do extra art. And the teacher got criticized by the Catholic parents because their children didn’t want to go to religion class because they were missing art.”

Colette Kavanagh noted a similar trend, stating that “often [teachers] tried to do something really nice with those children because it was a kind of nice, small group and you could do artwork, but that sometimes caused tension with the children who left and came back and said ‘Oh, I didn’t want to be at Catholic education, I’m stuck here, I didn’t get a chance to do this, that, or the other.’ So there was always a little bit of tension there.”

The converse was also true. When schools instructed students not attending Catholic religious education classes to do homework or attend study hall, many parents believed the teachers were pushing Catholicism on the students by offering undesirable alternatives. Paul Rowe noted, “the parents of the children who didn’t go to religion class were saying, ‘Well, it looks like the children were feeling they had to do extra homework because the didn’t go to religion class.’” It was a no-win scenario for teachers confronted with multi-denominational classrooms.

Finally, many schools encountered problems attempting to schedule the faith formation classes themselves. During the early years of the school projects, many Educate Together schools were housed in either temporary buildings or leased space from established schools. They had limited access to extra classrooms or public spaces on school premises, yet had high numbers of different faith groups represented – from Baha’i to Jehovah’s Witnesses to Buddhists – each of which required a separate faith formation class. As such, many schools did not have sufficient classroom space to offer faith formation classes for all denominational groups represented. Sally Sheils recalled that “in terms of where they’d be facilitated would be another issue, because we wouldn’t have had space for a number of them going on together.” Colette Kavanagh also claimed that “when [she] looks at our school now, we would have so many faiths represented in our school that it just, the practicalities of it would be ridiculous.” Aine Hyland noted the difficulty in the initial transitions at Dalkey where administrators received

“a request from a Baha’i group and from a Jehovah’s Witness group, and from a biblical, Bible group for denominational instruction within school hours... it was simply not possible to facilitate different groups, we simply didn’t have the space... Once another group asked for it, there was no more space so then we had to stop it completely. Because we were very clear we could not discriminate against any group. We could not give to one religion what we could not give to another.”

The three schools studied also reported difficulty finding teachers for the different religions' faith formation classes. Principal Chris Lennon of Dalkey, in particular, noted that it was difficult for her school to find even a Catechist willing to come during the school's regularly scheduled, morning Catechism classes. Chris Lennon noted that "at the later date then, was a change again in the teacher and the new teacher couldn't do the morning time." She further stated that "it was always difficult for the subcommittee to get teachers, people who would come in maybe two or three days a week and just do an hour's work. You don't get too many people who want to do that."

2. Concerns over Teachers Policing Religion in the Classroom

Teachers and administrators at the schools also noted uncomfortable and difficult situations that arose in classrooms where teachers were forced to police the religious views and education of their students. Oftentimes, students refused to attend faith formation classes against the wishes of their parents, and it fell to the teachers to enforce student attendance. Paul Rowe stated that "there were real cases in which children said, 'No, I don't want to go'" and teachers "felt they were in a morally indefensible position, and they also felt that it wasn't their job to police who went to religion." Similarly, teachers were often confronted with situations where students from different faith groups as well as atheists, agnostics, and humanists wanted to attend the Catholic faith formation classes, either because they felt left out or because they were genuinely interested in the material or ceremony of the classes. Again Paul Rowe claimed,

"There were a number of cases in which children of atheist families said they did want to go, right. There's singing, candles, ceremony, all that type of stuff and they wanted to find out. And the teachers felt it was an unethical position for them to be in, essentially telling, on behalf of parents, telling children what they could or couldn't believe in terms of religious faith."

Sally Sheils also noted that NDNISP "sometimes had children whose parents wished them to attend but who didn't want to leave core curriculum class to go. So literally you'd be talking about a child kicking and screaming not wanting to go." When these situations arose, teachers possessed no recourse other than the exercise of their own authority in the classroom. Teachers could notify the child's parents, but even the parents could not necessarily alter the behavior of their children in the classroom.

Many parents also expressed concerns that their children felt pressured to attend faith formation classes and they themselves felt pressured to send their children to the classes. Sally Sheils noted that "you might have children who wanted to go, and may have felt very pressured to go, as they saw half their class or more in certain years going... And they put a lot of pressure on their parents to go because it was seen as part of the school day." Because the classes were taught during the school day, a general perception existed amongst both parents and students that the classes were part of the everyday school curriculum. Similarly, many children felt they should attend the classes when they saw the majority of their classmates leave for faith formation classes during the school day. Colette Kavanagh stated that the movement of faith formation classes outside the school

day indicated to parents that the “religion education program is the core program” and concluded that since the transition, “I think the parents who attend our school are clearer about the role of the school than they were when there was faith formation within the school day.”

3. Conflict with the Educate Together Ethos and Exclusion

In general, there was a perception among parents, administrators, and Board of Management members at all three schools that the provision of faith formation classes during the school day conflicted with the Educate Together ethos of inclusion and multi-denominationalism. Several individuals noted that the schools had never wanted to include faith formation classes during the school day, but at their inception the Department had demanded they do so in exchange for recognition of their patronage. Paul Rowe recalled, “It was a requirement. All our early schools were required, as part of the recognition process from the government, had to supply a statement of religious education...the original letter of recognition which requires that the school must make...Up until 1987 there’s a specific paragraph which says the school must provide for religious education with the school day.” He further noted that the founders “were in a position where they had to compromise on a couple of things in order to get the school started.” The schools were forced to either include faith formation classes during school hours or find ways to work around the Department’s requirement. Aine Hyland reported that in the initial years at Dalkey, the school’s administration took advantage of the vague language used in Department policy. The Department stated that there must be denominational education “within school hours for pupils for whom it is requested,” however, Aine Hyland notes that at Dalkey the administration

“deliberately misinterpreted that. We knew of course what they were looking for; they were looking for us to *provide* denominational instruction within school hours for all those who sought it. We did not accept that and our policy was that we would *facilitate*; we would provide religious education Core Curriculum for all children within school hours and then we would facilitate the provision of denominational instruction for all those for whom it was required.”

By teaching the religious education Core Curriculum within school hours, and only implementing FFISH when parents lodged specific requests, Dalkey technically complied with Department policy without compromising the school ethos. Aine Hyland stated that the Department’s school inspectors were aware of Dalkey’s practices but that they “fully respected the policy of the school and the principal” and “didn’t make an issue of it” so long as parents did not complain to the Department.

The schools’ ideological opposition to faith formation in school hours stemmed from a belief that separating children based on religion for the purposes of instruction was at odds with the basic Educate Together ethos. Faith formation classes required students to publicly exhibit their religious beliefs and differentiated amongst students in a way that created clear divisions within the classroom. Donie O’Shea claimed

“The main reason why we looked at this issue was two-fold. One we were conscious that this was having a detrimental effect on children who were not Catholic and who did not partake in denominational education. And it was having a detrimental effect in a number of areas, i.e. that in some cases it became divisive in the sense that children were being left while the others were being taken off to another room for religious education within the school day. It was also impossible for any consistency or coherent way of the school actually providing for what we described as the Core Curriculum program, for the school itself. And ultimately it was an issue that, I would say, fundamentally impacted the kind of ethos we had responsibility for as a patron body.”

Paul Rowe also suggested that every employee of Educate Together had to ask “Were we comfortable with children being divided on this basis? Everybody knew who went to religion and who didn’t...and, you know, this started a division of schools.” Nonetheless, not everyone involved in the transition fixated on the ideological challenges FFISH posed to the Educate Together ethos. Chris Lennon articulated a different perspective, saying:

“I didn’t particularly encourage the idea on an ideological basis. To my mind, I do see the ideological point, that especially when there’s such a large number of children being taken out of class it can make other kids feel different. But there’s always differences in children anyway, and that has to be dealt with...so from my point of view, I always saw it as being much more of a practical thing than an ideological thing.”

Finally, Bray in particular expressed that they felt out of step with the greater Educate Together ethos given that they were the last of the three original schools, and one of the last Educate Together schools anywhere to comprehensively move faith formation classes out of school hours. Colette Kavanagh recalls, “The other two [schools] had successfully removed religious instruction outside the school day. All the new Educate Together schools were opening, each time they opened they no longer had faith formation inside the school day, so the executive committee decided they were kind of out of sync with the other Educate Together schools and they decided to look at the process.”

E. Role of different Stakeholders in the Transition to FFOSH

The interview participants at all three schools identified a number of different key stakeholders involved in the transition to FFOSH within the Educate Together Schools. Most notably, participants stressed the roles of parents, teachers, administrators, Boards of Management, and the patron bodies of the schools. Interestingly, all three schools stressed the lack of direct involvement or backlash from the Catholic Church. The following section details each stakeholder's role:

1. Role of Parents

In all of the interviews conducted, participants identified parents as the primary stakeholders in the faith formation debate. At NDNISP and Bray, parents brought forward concerns about the practice of faith formation within school hours. At both schools they presented an ideological case for the discontinuation of in-school religious education, namely they feared their children would be excluded or stigmatized for not attending the classes, and that separation of students along religious lines contradicted the ethos of Educate Together. Donie O'Shea remarked that NDNISP went to great lengths to facilitate dialogue between parents and the patron boards to ensure parents "felt they had an opportunity to be heard, they had an opportunity to be listened to, and there were reasonable accommodations made" throughout the decision making process.

Representatives of both NDNISP and Bray acknowledged that the lengthy timeframe for deliberations and consultation was used primarily to create as much consensus as possible among the parents. However, both schools acknowledged the impossibility of reaching a full consensus on the issue, and only NDNISP gave parents a formal vote in the decision-making process through membership in the patron body. Both schools reported minimal backlash after the transition was made, and attributed this to the extensive process of engagement with parents to present the case for transition in an objective and rational manner. Nonetheless, parents were the only group to oppose the transition in any of the schools. At Bray and NDNISP some Catholic parents voiced opposition to the removal of faith formation from the school day. As Colette Kavanagh of Bray stated, "they felt philosophically that the multi-denominational aspect was being taken away and [the school] was now becoming more non-denominational which they hadn't signed up for... (FFISH) becomes like a right to parents and then it's very difficult to take it away." At Dalkey, parents were notably absent from consultations over removing faith formation classes, yet the administration encountered minimal resistance from parents who came to view the transition as the only practical solution at the time.

2. Role of Teachers and Administrators

The role of teachers in the transition process varied notably across the three schools. At both Dalkey and NDNISP, teachers strongly opposed in-school religious education as "unethical," "morally indefensible," "disruptive," and "impractical." Regular Educate Together teachers did not teach the faith formation classes at any of the three schools—the school or a Catholic Parents Committee hired outside Catechists to do so—but many

teachers voiced concerns over lost time for the core curriculum, the difficulties of having fluctuating numbers of students in class, and the ethical difficulty of having to police who did and did not go to faith formation classes. As opposed to the teachers at Dalkey and NDNISP, Colette Kavanagh noted that there “seemed to be more support amongst the staff [of Bray] for faith formation in the school” than at the other Educate Together schools, and that despite time-tabling issues teachers “largely supported” parents’ perceived right to faith formation classes in the school day. Colette Kavanagh recalled that many teachers “felt [the school] was truly multi-denominational if people were entitled to have their faith formation within the school day.” Nonetheless, the teachers ultimately supported the decision of parents and did not stand in the way of the transition. At both NDNISP and Bray, teachers actively participated in the decision-making bodies: at Bray teachers made up a third of the REAC and many teachers were members of the patron body at NDNISP, either in their capacities as teachers or as parents. Colette Kavanagh notes that at Bray, staff were viewed as “not having a pivotal role...but everybody’s voices were heard” whereas at NDNISP, Paul Rowe recalls teachers as a key group in moving the debate forward and “arguing from a point of view of how this affected children.” While the teachers at Dalkey did not play a direct role in the decision-making process, Chris Lennon noted that the transition had a “positive impact” on the staff and that they were “very happy about [the move].”

At NDNISP and Bray, the principals and administrators who oversaw the transition remained generally objective and did not actively campaign for either side. Several interview participants acknowledged the importance of maintaining that objectivity: Donie O’Shea noted the importance of “those that are leading...not to have predetermined outcomes as to where this is actually going to end up. Because otherwise you’re not seen as an honest broker or you’re not seen as objective, so it is critical to have some kind of independence in facilitating that process.” Kavanagh corroborated this view, stating that at Bray, neither the Principal nor the Educate Together representative “went one way or the other. They left it open to parents.” She explained that the Principal reinforced the fairness and democratic nature of the system by “not allowing his views to color [the process].” In contrast, at Dalkey the principal was almost solely responsible for lobbying and removing faith formation classes.

3. Role of the Board of Management and Patron Body

At NDNISP, the Board of Management (BoM) maintained primary responsibility for overseeing the transition to out of school faith formation classes. Paul Rowe described the Board as discussing the issue “from a managerial point of view” and his own role as “to try and facilitate as much as possible a consensus” among the parents and various interest groups. The BoM, more so than any other participant in the debate, chose to view the issue from an implementation and practical perspective, as many of the pragmatic considerations for moving faith formation outside school hours would eventually fall under their purview. At NDNISP, the BoM was responsible for sponsoring and organizing the workshops and discussion groups that facilitated discussion between parents and teachers about the process. At Bray, the BoM delegated responsibility for measuring parental support and facilitating discussion to the REAC, and ultimately relied on their

evidence and recommendations to make a final decision. From 1978-1991, the Dalkey BoM routinely evaluated parents' expressed concerns and decided whether faith formation would be offered as part of the regular school day in any given year. In the final move away from FFISH, beginning in 1991, the BoM offered support to Chris Lennon as she gradually faded faith formation classes out of the school day. The BoMs of the three schools also held responsibility for interpreting the Department of Education's policy regarding religious education, and determining how this would impact decisions on whether or not to proceed with the transition.

4. Role of the Roman Catholic Church

At all three schools, the local Catholic parishes played no formal role in the process of moving faith formation classes out of regular school hours. Paul Rowe stated that in 1987, there were seven Educate Together schools, out of approximately 3,300 schools nationwide, and the Catholic Church "wasn't interested" in what this small minority of "experimental" or project schools was doing. Nonetheless, all three schools had Catholic Parents Committees, which were responsible for hiring the Catechist, and later for collecting registration fees for the new Catholic education classes. Donie O'Shea stated that at NDNSP the Catholic Parents Committee "may have been supplied with teachers or supports from the institution of the Church, but the Institution of the Church were not formal stakeholders in the process." Maintaining denominational instruction during school hours in primary schools was particularly crucial to Catholic parents because, unlike other faith groups with established Sunday school or other out-of-school meetings, Catholic education had always been conducted in schools. Colette Kavanagh noted that for the Catholics in Ireland "it had always been done through the schools, there was no mechanism for them to do it outside, they would have had to reinvent the structure to do it outside school." Catholic Parents Committees at the different schools expressed both support for and opposition to the concept of religious instruction out of the school day, and each school made a concerted effort to win their support as a key step in the negotiation process. For example, at Bray the Chairperson of the Catholic Parents Committee was also a member of the REAC and was in favor of moving faith formation outside of school. Colette Kavanagh concluded that the Chairperson's support "was very helpful in the whole process...[because] if she had been against it, it would have been much more divisive...she brought a lot of the Catholic community with her."

F. Implementation

Across all three schools surveyed, Boards of Management and administrators faced similar implementation issues while facilitating discussion on religious education and implementing the transition to FFOSH. While the schools developed differing solutions and strategies depending on their particular circumstances, each school faced a similar set of questions and issues, including:

- Should the school frame the move to FFOSH as a practical or ideological concern?
- Over what timeframe should schools implement the transition – immediately or over several years?
- What practical steps should schools take to ensure religious groups do not perceive the change as anti-religious?
- How can the school ensure equal access to faith formation classes across all religious groups?

The following section details many of the practical steps administrators took when addressing these common themes, and their motivations for doing so when participants related different approaches:

1. Framing of the Discussion

Every respondent addressed the framing of negotiations as one of the most delicate and critical aspects of garnering parent support for the transition to FFOSH. Past discussions became problematic when discussions over in-school denominational education became too personal and antagonistic. Sally Sheils stated that during previous motions to remove faith formation classes from the school day at NDNISP “there had been things that sounded very anti-religion, or in particular anti-Catholic” and that this led Catholic parents to feel the move was “an ‘out to get you’ scenario, as opposed to being practical and looking out for the core curriculum.” Chris Lennon adopted a unique approach to this problem by essentially eliminating ideological argument and discussion altogether, to ensure the move was seen as “a practical issue more than a principled issue.” Since Dalkey’s new Catechist could not schedule faith formation classes during the traditional morning time-slot, moving faith formation classes outside the school day was viewed as the only logical solution. Moreover, Chris Lennon made a concerted effort to separate the move from ideology, as she believed such a framing could only lead to division within the school. She reflected,

“The issues around curriculum...I think they’re the most compelling ones. I know there’s an issue around the difference thing but I think you could argue against that, as well, right? There’s an argument that goes do you hide difference or do you confront it? ...And you could go round and round the garden with that argument and you’d have people on both sides of it and both of them would be right. So I don’t think that’s going anywhere. So I actually think the most compelling

argument for taking this out is the practicality; say you cannot manage another subject within school hours.”

Boards of Management and administrators devoted great energy to ensure parents viewed the transition not as a condemnation of religion, but as a more effective way of managing the school day. Donie O’Shea noted,

“I think one of the ways of looking at this is, irrespective of the issue you’re trying to address, it is really about facilitating change. And when you look at it within a change kind of model, it takes on a different kind of dimension, as opposed to ‘this is a religious issue.’”

O’Shea argued that the pragmatic, change-centered framework allowed stakeholders to view the issue in a more objective light and pay greater credence to the full range of views on the topic. Appeasing Catholic parents often meant assuring them that faith formation would be fully supported and sustained by the school, even if it were now outside school hours. Sally Sheils contended that NDNISP experienced relatively little backlash following the move because “(NDNISP) did guarantee people that support...it meant that parents who were saying ‘Oh this is anti-Catholic or anti-religion or whatever’ all the other parents were saying ‘Oh do you not realize the office is doing this for free and they’re doing that and look at the support’ and that just knocked that on the head, straight away.”

Deirdre O’Donoghue of the Educate Together National Office acknowledged the benefits of utilizing both pragmatic and ideological frameworks for the debate. O’Donoghue stated that a practical perspective may be advantageous in that “you can’t divide a camp by saying the teachers can’t do it and we are moving it outside for pragmatic reasons. It’s hard to argue against that.” She also argued that an ideological frame can be useful because logistical issues (such as lack of an available teacher) can often be resolved in the short-term, meaning that schools must eventually rely on the ideological, ethos-based arguments for moving it outside the school day, but acknowledged that administrators “have to be careful not to say to people I’m right and you’re wrong.” Both Bray and NDNISP ultimately employed a combination of pragmatic and ideological arguments for the transition to FFOSH.

2. Timeframe of Transition

The timeframe for the complete removal of denominational instruction from the school day was the most significant difference in implementation across the three schools. At NDNISP and Dalkey, the transition took place immediately: in-school faith formation was no longer offered to any families after the decision. Bray took a more nuanced approach to the transition, which Colette Kavanagh claimed was a great asset both in the negotiation process and in minimizing discontent following the decision. The REAC at Bray decided that parents who had enrolled their child at the school while in-school faith formation was the accepted policy still had a “reasonable presumption to have it in the school day.” Therefore the committee decided it would be unfair to the school’s current parents to immediately implement the new policy, and decided to phase faith formation

classes out over a number of years, so only incoming students would have denominational instruction out of school hours. Colette Kavanagh explained that the REAC

“decided that they would not just blanketly remove it...so the children who were already in the school, they continued to have faith formation classes in the school day until they left. And children coming in were informed before they came in that no longer was faith formation classes going to be offered in the school day but that the school building would be made available to them for faith formation classes afterward. I think that helped as well, I think that helped a lot. Catholic parents that were in the school at the time knew ‘Well at least my child will be going through with formation during the school day’ and new people coming in knew that wasn’t going to be the case. So they made their choice fully informed to that when they were coming on.”

Deirdre O’Donoghue agreed that a gradual transition could be a beneficial way to “satisfy both sets of parents coming in” but argued it could also create difficulties due to the extended timeframe of the move. Challenges could arise in that “teachers have to deal with two-streaming it” or having some students participating in in-school faith formation while others participated in religious instruction out of school hours. Deirdre O’Donoghue notes that employing the gradual transition of Bray means “taking eight years to change the ethos of schools” and this is often not the optimal solution for stakeholders who are eager for policy change. Chris Lennon argued that schools must accept that they cannot accommodate everyone’s preferences and that it is sometimes necessary to say “This is the way we do it here. You like it or you don’t’...I do think people should have a say, but you can’t run an institution and everybody has a say on absolutely everything.”

3. Accommodations for Faith Formation

NDNSP, Bray, and Dalkey encountered a variety of anticipated and unanticipated challenges in implementing the transition to FFOSH. When asked about challenges arising from the transition, interview respondents reported a range of practical obstacles including:

- The difficulty of scheduling numerous classes outside the school day
- Finding someone to lock up the school
- Finding quality teachers
- Locating space for a growing range of extracurricular activities
- The financial challenge of having to hire more teachers for fewer hours
- And having to work around bus and transportation schedules

Participants most commonly identified scheduling teachers and classes as the major challenge, as schools now had to accommodate eight levels of faith formation classes after school. If schools had access to only one Catechist, schools could not practically offer all eight levels of classes on the same day of the week, as students had nowhere to go while waiting for later classes. Most often, schools offered faith formation classes for different grade levels on different days of the week, but as Colette Kavanagh noted, it was

“difficult to get someone who’ll come in to teach for one hour every day.” NDNSP chose to hire multiple faith formation teachers, in order to divide the workload. Sally Sheils stated that the school “would have been getting three teachers to do the different days” thereby “employing more teachers for less hours.” However, multiple teachers meant higher costs for Catholic parents, particularly when compared to parents at Catholic schools where religious education classes were provided for free by teachers at the school.

As previously noted, schools made every effort to accommodate religious groups as an integral part of the negotiation. NDNSP, in particular, facilitated religious groups to the best of the school’s ability. Sally Sheils explained that the school

“Guaranteed the out of school time for classrooms being prioritized for any religious grouping and we also said we would give any support that was needed. So for example, we photocopied for free for all of those classes. If they needed booklets made, we provided the administrative support for all that. We’d do anything we can to be helpful because a lot of the people who voted were directly affected so they were doing it for the greater good so we wanted to feed back into that, to do something for them as well. And it could have been extraordinarily contentious but it wasn’t because of the way it was handled.”

Sheils also noted that if families couldn’t afford the costs associated with faith formation courses, the school would “help to subvent their fees.” She believed these actions helped convince parents that the school was “taking it as this was a very important part of our school, not something we were shoving to one side.” Donie O’Shea supported this view of NDNSP, stating “we made all sorts of provisions to make sure it worked well. For instance...we facilitated the particular denomination in having the first call in resources outside the school hour, so we facilitated that transition to the optimum for that grouping.” Donie O’Shea suggested that these gestures were ultimately a key to the transition’s success: “people felt they had an opportunity to be heard, they had an opportunity to be listened to, there were reasonable accommodations made and at the end of the day the school moved on.” Colette Kavanagh articulated a similar view regarding the need for schools to be supportive of faith formation classes: “I think to be as facilitating as you can to the faith formation groups using your premises and to be celebrating with them when they’re having their celebration and to be totally behind faith formation groups within your school. To be seen to do that is very important.”

4. Ensuring Equal Access among Faith Groups

The transition to FFOSH affected not only the Catholic community within Educate Together schools, but also other religious groups within the school that now had to choose whether to offer denominational education classes within school hours. While all three schools had a variety of religious faiths represented within their student bodies, at the time of the transition Bray was the only school that had multiple religious groups (Catholic, Church of Ireland, Jehovah’s Witness, and Baha’i) offering faith formation classes within the school day. Colette Kavanagh explained that the different religious groups “were very pleased to be offered it within the school day because they felt they were being

recognized. It was recognition within the educational system for their belief and they thought ‘Oh this is really nice, thank you very much, we will do it.’”

Representatives of all three schools clearly stated that the school administration offered each religious group the option of conducting faith formation classes within the school day at the beginning each new school year. Sally Sheils explained that at NDNSP, the school “send[s] a letter out inviting parents to request it if they want it and the parents are responsible for getting the teacher.” Chris Lennon reported that if parents expressed an interest in denominational instruction during school hours that school administrators would then “go to the local representative of whatever that church was and say that this is what was happening and did they want to meet with parents...and discuss means of bringing it in.” Several groups expressed initial interest in offering religious instruction after school hours, but after conducting the classes for a short period of time each religious group, except for the Catholics, deemed the classes redundant given their existing Sunday school or instructional framework. Respondents from each of the three schools attributed this to the infrastructure of religious education already in place for other faith groups. Colette Kavanagh summarized:

“all of those faith communities looked after faith formation in their own religious communities...Church of Ireland had Sunday Schools, the Jehovah’s had weekly meetings where they taught their children about their religion and similarly with the Baha’is.”

Thereby, parents ultimately deemed it unnecessary to continue offering faith formation in connection with the school. Chris Lennon said that when representatives from Dalkey approached the local Church of Ireland director about parental interest in creating faith formation classes they were told “if (parents) are anxious to have their children brought up in the faith to tell them to come to Sunday School. End of conversation.” Since the Catholic Church had long offered faith formation in conjunction with Irish schools, they did not have a similar outside-school system in place and continued to offer faith formation classes at the school outside of school hours.

G. Aftermath of the Transition

Throughout the interview process, participants reflected on how the transition to FFOSH impacted the school as a whole and if, in hindsight, they would have undertaken the process differently. Overwhelmingly, respondents at all three schools reported that removing denominational instruction was extremely beneficial to both students and teachers. As Paul Rowe stated, “If you’re trying to run a school that provides equality to children irrespective of their religious background, [removing faith formation] is an elegant way of resolving all the problems.”

1. Positive Impacts of the Transition to FFOSH

Removing religious instruction from the school day led to several unanticipated positive effects, beyond the practical benefits. Several participants actually reported improvements in the quality of faith formation and denominational education after the classes were removed from the school day. For example, Sally Sheils noted that requiring students to stay after school “gave other children appreciation for the fact that they had to work that much harder for their faiths.” She argued that separating denominational education from academic education gave participating students “a real sense of this was different from school and this was special to them... They really felt these classes were special for them.” Paul Rowe argued that out of school religious instruction actually allowed for a better faith formation experience because it ensured flexibility for teachers and students and allowed the parents to have more input. He stated:

“After a while some Catholic parents said to the Board of Management they felt that the system was better because the children came to the class, there wasn’t a bell ringing that they had to get out at a particular time, if the class had to go on a bit to cover the content it could do it. It was much more flexible because it was after school hours and the parents could be more involved than if it was in the school day.”

Sally Sheils agreed with the flexibility aspect of FFOSH and added that since students now went home after faith formation class that there was “much less pressure of it coming into class because they weren’t coming back discussing issues raised in Faith Formation. They had the evening to let that dissipate a bit and I feel that was much healthier.”

Similarly, a number of participants noted the improved quality of the Educate Together Ethos once the schools removed transitioned to FFOSH. Colette Kavanagh highlighted that the mission of the school and its ethos is now much clearer to parents, and that they now know from the start that “faith formation is not what we do in Educate Together schools, and people coming in understand that.” There is a clear division between religious education and the school day that benefits both students and the Educate Together schools where the transition took place.

2. Potential Changes to the Process

When asked what could have been done differently in the transition to FFOSH at their respective schools, all of the participants strongly supported the choices that had been made. They noted only small changes to the overall process that might have enhanced the transition. At NDNSP, Paul Rowe said that the process “might have been able to be done quicker,” while Sally Sheils said the process “could’ve been done sooner.” However, both Paul Rowe and Sally Sheils noted that NDNSP knowingly chose a lengthy, democratic decision-making process in order to maximize participation and understanding. Sally Sheils speculated that NDNSP “had to reach a certain maturity level” before the school could effectively undertake the process, and therefore the delay in removing denominational instruction may have been necessary. Chris Lennon stated that while her unconventional methods proved effective at Dalkey that she wouldn’t necessarily recommend them and instead suggested that schools “open a conversation about [FFOSH]” and “not just impose anything.” She maintained that the advantages of her approach lay with minimizing the ideological debate and allowing for a quick transition “without too much force.” All respondents considered the transition process highly successful. Colette Kavanagh described it as “very, very well dealt with. I don’t think it could’ve been dealt with better...people’s voices were taken very seriously and people’s voices were heard...(it) was a very, very fair way to deal with it.”

All of the participants agreed that since the removal of faith formation from school day, the issue has never again arisen and there have been no proposals to move it back. Donie O’Shea stated that “It’s not even discussed as an issue now,” and Paul Rowe noted that FFOSH “very quickly became the accepted way that things happened. I don’t think there was any move to reverse the decision in the past thirty years.” Regardless of any backlash incurred in the discussion process, there appears to be little resistance once the measure was in place; representatives of both Bray and NDNSP confirmed that no students left the school as a result of the policy change.

H. Conclusions and Recommendations

This section collects the final conclusions about a transition to FFOSH in a Catholic school; as well any final recommendations garnered from the interview participants.

1. Feasibility of Transitioning to FFOSH in a Catholic School

In general the participants believed that the process of removing denominational instruction from the school day could be undertaken at a transformed Catholic school without incident, so long as administrators chose schools after careful consideration of where parents would most readily accept the transition and ensured the rationale was explained properly. Sally Sheils argued that “it would be best to pick schools where there would be at least a core support for this [transition] to happen.” She further noted that “if it’s explained properly to people that the Core Curriculum covers a lot of the basic ethics you would be covering in religion anyway, just not necessarily with the God part, and then that extra time for the [faith formation] lesson is really focused on what is the theistic part” of denominational education, many Catholic parents would see the benefits of removing religious instruction from the school day. Donie O’Shea also noted that “what’s fundamental in all of that process is not to make assumptions about how people view the world... That, in fact, you actually had people who had Catholic instruction within the school, actually advocating that this would be a good thing, to have it in a changed environment.” Therefore, it would be possible to find Catholic schools where parents would have some level of support for the transition to FFOSH even before the process began.

Once a school has been selected, the most important factor in the transition process is communication between administrators and parents. As Deirdre O’Donoghue noted,

“if you have a group of Catholic parents in a Catholic school that is transforming I think you are back down again to communication. Talking to them asking them what their expectations are and explaining what our expectations are as an organization. How the expectations or how our schools run and how that happens. Then sitting down and saying to them look, this is where you are at the moment. This is where we want to be, how do you see us traveling from here to there? They have to buy into that journey.”

According to Deirdre O’Donoghue the entire situation would demand delicate handling. She argued that “you as a parent would find it pretty hard if someone said, ‘Well we are all changing. Now it is going to be outside school hours, you are going to have to pay for it, and find the teachers.’ I think that kind of thing would have to be dealt with very carefully.” But so long as administrators actively seek input from parents, the transition has potential to be effective. However, Donie O’Shea also cautioned against establishing a dichotomy between Catholic and Educate Together schools in the course of the negotiations. He argued that he

“wouldn’t make the starting point ‘We’re going to convert a Catholic school into an Educate Together school’ but [he] would actually start and say ‘What we’re trying to do is have a child-centered school that recognizes diversity of various things, of which people, of who comes from various traditions, or whatever, they are respected in an equitable fashion’”

By not framing the debate in terms of an opposition, Donie O’Shea believes administrators can better convince Catholic parents to buy into the transition.

Finally, teachers at the former Catholic school would need additional training once the transition took place. Deirdre O’Donoghue claimed that

“I think that there will be a perception that there will be a problem. I think that the teacher will need training, because it is a different way of doing things. It is not just teaching children particular beliefs, it is teaching them to think around for particular strands. Yes there would be an issue with that. Having said that I would imagine that most people when they look at the Learn Together curriculum would see that there is not a lot of controversy in it. There is nothing dogmatic in it. It is very much exploratory and it’s very much coming from a way of thinking.”

Once teachers had sufficient training in the Learn Together curriculum, Deirdre O’Donoghue believed that the school day, and in particular the new Core Curriculum would run smoothly.

2. Final Statement of Participants Recommendations

After reviewing the seven interviews conducted for this study, the following themes stand out as the core recommendations to be taken away from respondents’ collective experiences in moving FFOSH.

- The negotiation process regarding FFOSH should be overseen by objective leaders who do not possess predetermined outcomes.
- FFOSH should be established as early as possible in the development of the school.
- Schools should make a concerted effort to accommodate and aid faith formation classes outside of school hours.
- Parental support for moving FFOSH should be evaluated before the formal negotiation process is initiated.
- Schools should select an ideological or pragmatic framework, or a combination of both, based on the issues viewed as most critical to their specific institution.

- The process of negotiations should encourage participation from all stakeholders, including member and non-member parents.

Appendix A – Interviews

For all interviews: BN denotes Brianna Nofil, PH denotes Phillips Hogan.

1. Interview with Paul Rowe – July 7th, 2011

BN: First if you could just tell us what your official position was within the North Dublin National School.

PR: I was, at the time, I was a member of the board. I was on a patron's nominee to the board of management.

BN: And what was your role in the process of moving the faith formation?

PR: I would have been somebody who would had a collective responsibility for implementing any decision taking place. I wasn't a major player in terms of advocating for. To be perfectly honest, I remember, in a number of the meetings I felt like my role was to try and facilitate as much as possible a consensus, of the voting of consensus in the process. I wasn't one of the people who was sort of going in there gung-ho, wanting this to change. So my role was as part of the management team. Then I was also the school's representative at the national organization of Educate Together which was at that time was a voluntary umbrella organization and my job was to go and represent the school, so I was aware of the same discussion taking place at the schools. So I suppose my job was also to report back what was going on at the schools, and particularly the Bray School Project, at this time.

BN: Was the BOM divided over this issue?

PR: No I remember the BOM being pretty strongly in favor of the principals view which was the teachers view which was that it was wrong to divide children on this basis. I would've had two kids in the school at the time, in class, and I would be very aware in my older son's class there would be this absurd situation where the teacher got criticized for a situation when the Catholic children went out to do their religion classes, it was called, all the children who stayed behind got to do extra art. And the teacher got criticized by the Catholic parents because their children didn't want to go to religion class because they were missing art, missing the extra art. So the teacher then sort of changed the thing and said okay, we'll just have free time and children could just do their homework during this free period. And then the next thing was, the parents of the children who didn't go to religion class were saying, well, it looks like their children were feeling they had to do extra homework because they didn't go to religion class. I'd be very well tuned in to the difficulties the teachers were having. And also the fact that it was only the Catholic children. All the Protestant or Jehovah's Witness or other faiths had their bible classes or their Sunday school, it was only the Catholic parents who were looking for this facility within the school day. All the other religion's parents were saying no, no we're quite happy with what the school is doing, which was an early form of the Learn Together

curriculum. But they were very happy with it. So from my point of view and the BOM's point of view, generally we discussed it from a managerial point of view, it was just a massive headache for the teachers at the school, and were we comfortable with children being divided on this basis? Everybody knew who went to religion and who didn't. And some children had to leave and thinking "you go to religion and I don't" and, you know, this started a division of schools. So that would be my perspective. The people who argued against it, and for the protection, was this guy called Fergus Clancy, who was an architect. He was on the executive committee and the executive committee was...is, actually still, the patron of the school. So it's a local patron, like a local Educate Together, a corporation limited by guarantee. So he would've been on the executive committee and I remember him arguing very strongly, "well it's our right." But the argument was just always it was their right, that they had the right to have it. But they didn't really, as I remember it, really engage with the problem at the school. There was quite a difference with people arguing at a sort-of high level policy thing on the executive committee and people from the BOM and the teachers who were arguing from a point of view of how this affected children; so that would've been my perspective.

BN: Were there any other reasons they decided against keeping it in the school hours?

PR: As I remember it, and the useful thing would be to look at, there were some documents produced, of the whole thing. As I remember it, the scenario where I'm explaining integration to children in my class, was echoed throughout the school. And the main drivers for the change came from the principals and teachers.

PH: And their main reason then was that it was sort of untenable from a policy basis within the classroom rather than, opposed to, an ideological opposition to it?

PR: They would say it was unethical. It was against everything we were trying to achieve as a school and that was to teach children together and not separate them according to religion. It meant that in the core curriculum, there was a time for the core curriculum to be taught and then if you were going to teach the core curriculum to all children, you would have to keep this half hour free. You're actually losing two and a half hours of teaching time per school week, which meant everything else had to be crammed into the rest. It wasn't just the practicality of it, they felt that they were in a morally indefensible position and they also felt that it wasn't their job to police who went to religion. There were no real cases in which children said "No, I don't want to go." There were a number of cases in which children of atheist families said they did want to go, right. There's singing, candles, ceremony, all that type of stuff and they wanted to find out. And the teachers felt it was an unethical position for them to be in to, essentially telling, on behalf of parents, telling children what they could or couldn't believe in terms of religious faith. So it was much more than just the practical thing. It was very deeply felt by a number of teachers, they just felt this was unethical.

BN: When the school had initially opened was there ever any consideration towards moving it out of the school day, or was that just not a practical option?

PR: It was a requirement. All our early schools were required, as part of the recognition process from the government, had to supply a statement of religious education. And we will be able to find you some of these files, of the early schools, the original letter of recognition which requires that the school must make...you'll have to dig out one of the original letters. Up until 1987 there's a specific paragraph which says the school must provide for religious education within the school day.

PH: So then did the Dept of Education issue a different letter of recommendation around this time that allowed for...

PR: That's actually an interesting thing for you to find out because I don't know. What's very interesting is this coincides with Mary O'Rourke, who's now on the Board of Directors, being Minister of Education. We know that in 1987, she sanctioned the fourth, fifth, and sixth Educate Together schools after a hiatus of three years. The first was in 1978, then 1981, then 1984. And there were a whole number of projects, as they were called, trying to open and the department refused to let them open. And Mary O'Rourke came in and insisted they overruled her other officials. It's around the fact that this debate takes place around 1987, 1988, I'm pretty sure that that paragraph was not in the letters in 1990, the schools that opened in 1990. Or certainly the schools that opened in 1989, that's the Limerick School, and we don't know if someone just left it out or whether it was deliberate or if the Minister said leave it out. It might be an idea to see what Mary O'Rourke herself says, if she remembers that. When I've talked about this publicly in the past I've had to say, well we don't actually know, but in 1987 the requirement was no longer implemented or enforced. So it's from 1987 until 1989, the Cork Educate Together School still has a bit of religious education within the school days. It's one of our independents and you can't tell them to change. And the Sligo School Project, the three schools that opened in 1987, Sligo, Cork, and Kilkenny...and Sligo sort of moved in and moved out, didn't have a very strong Protestant base. From then all the Educate Together adopted the model that we have now.

BN: After you had the teachers' opinion and the board started moving toward this, what was the decision-making process like? Was it a vote and who was involved in the decision making process?

PR: It's a democratic structure, so there's an annual general meeting. Most of the parents, most of the teachers, and quite a number of potential parents voted in the general meeting. So in 1987 there was a motion passed at the AGM. I think the motion in 1987 was to explore it, or else it may have been a motion to change it which was then sort of amended and deferred and said no, we need to discuss this further. But as you've seen from the records there then was a consultative process by which the whole thing was debated in November of that year and the final decision, my recollection is there was almost a three year process. It started being discussed in 1987, it was discussed in 1988, and my feeling is the actual decision wasn't made til 1989.

PH: Was the initial motion presented in 1987 presented by a parent or a teacher?

PR: I don't know. I suspect it might have been a teacher.

PH: Okay and within the consultative groups, were those made up of BOM members or teachers or parents or some combination of them?

PR: It says here...(consults records) It doesn't say how many people were there....(reading) "three groups of workshop sessions"...let's see there may have been about thirty people there., as I remember it was about 30 people there. There were a lot of parents who weren't represented though. Who would've been sort of key people and that they would've been a cross section. There would have been mainly parents. When I was on the BOM, every member including principals was a parent of a child in the school. And the teacher rep, everybody had children in the school. And so they knew, even the teachers that were there were sort of there in the due capacity.

BN: So as this proposal was being dealt with, did you encounter substantial backlash? You mentioned the one man but were most of the parents supportive of this idea?

PR: There was a lot of vocal opposition. There was a lot of soul searching about whether this was the right thing to do. One thing which came up very strongly, which I think is very relevant, was that this school started, it was no longer Catholic and Protestant. We had some Mennonite communities, we had Jehovah's Witnesses, we had Buddhists, there was a significant increase in the number of religious groupings. And the idea that the program should be adjusted for just one particular one of those, even though it was a majority, seemed to be...people felt that was against the principles the school had been set up. So I think that was the general feeling. There were people that thought the school was becoming non-denominational rather than multi-denominational, there was that whole discussion. So the fact that it took two and a half to three years, the executive committee who had to take the decision in the end realized that this had to be proceed carefully. They had to demonstrate the fact that they had really considered the options given by everybody over a period of time. As a result, when the decision was made, there wasn't any, there was no backlash at all. Nobody left the school as a result.

PH: What about from outside the school? From the Catholic parish or media coverage or anything like that that was negative?

PR: I don't remember anything like that. There was a very small number of these schools at the time. In 1987 there were seven Educate Together schools, they were all small schools in a sea of 3,400 schools. I'd say about 3,300 schools. So 6% of schools, experimental schools, projects, wouldn't have...only people with a particular interest in education would've. Right about that time, the head of the religious education department of St Patrick's College of Teacher Education actually volunteered to take the Catholic religious education instruction classes which were outside the school. So there were some pretty high level Catholics who were interested in exploring the concepts...so no I don't remember any negative comment about it all.

BN: So you did have some input from the Catholic Church when developing the outside of school hours curriculum?

PR: No not from the Church it was through the college. From an individual that was interested. The Catholic Church at that time was pretty hostile towards Educate Together. I mean, in the main. Certainly wouldn't be in a position where they wanted to show. I've described it in the past as this was a phase in which we were fighting for the right to exist. That was our focus. Just to be out exploring. All schools were called projects, it was almost an assumption that these were experiments and everybody thought "well you're allowed to experiment." The Catholic Church in the main, I mean they'd have prominent Catholics who were very supportive but the Church as an institution weren't interested at all, I would say.

BN: After the faith formation classes were moved outside of school hours were there any difficulties or were there any difficulties in the transition?

PR: The type of things that came up was that who is going to open the school and lock the school up. Right, so it was after school hours. At the time there were lots of after school things going on, extra art classes, stuff like that. As I remember that was the only question that arrangements had to be made for. Someone to hand back the key to the caretaker but that was it. After a while some Catholic parents said to the BOM they felt that the system was better because the children came to the class, there wasn't a bell ringing that they had to get out at a particular time, if the class had to go on a bit to cover the content it could do it. It was much more flexible because it was after school hours the parents could be more involved than if it was in the school day. So there was general, as far as I remember, you can ask Sally Sheils, it very quickly became the accepted way that things happened. I don't think there was any move to reverse the decision in the past thirty years.

BN: And the regular teachers were also teaching the after-school classes?

PR: No. I don't know whether it was a requirement in the school, its generally in our guidelines, but no, the teachers in the school shouldn't. Now they're not contractually...because it's after school, there's nothing to stop them from taking the contract. But if they do it's a separate contract. But we don't recommend that teachers in the school, teaching a class in the school, actually do the catholic religious instruction because we think that's...as I said we can't stop it...it's mainly teachers from another Educate Together school come in to do it or another school come in to do it, they have to be qualified Catechists. They have to have qualifications from the Catholic Church to do it. The teachers in the school certainly don't.

PH: And there was no support from the local parishes or the Catholic Church in organizing these classes?

PR: No, not really. There was none, at least not in those days. Sally Sheils, the principal, had very good relations with the College of Teacher Education and that's where this guy called Raymond Topick, he's the chaplain, did it.

BN: Is there any concept of how many students participated in the FFOSH classes?

PR: You'd have to ask Sally that. In my son's class it was over half the class was out. And as I remember there were occasions, there were 34, 35 in a class those days, much bigger classes those days, and I can remember there being a reference to 28 out of 35 kids in a certain class being out. By my son's class it was around half and half.

BN: Looking back, do you think there's anything that could have been done differently or better in the process?

PR: I was very comfortable with the way it was done. It was done very carefully. It was done in a very considered way. The only thing, it might have been able to be done quicker. But the executive at the time decided to handle it in such a way as to make sure there was the least controversy over it as possible. Which did prolong it a bit. And in the main the discussions were, I can't remember anything being very...no, there wasn't any, no one left the school as a result. It's tough when you have this kind of participatory democratic structure, you can have awe have, very strong differences in opinion, and people really feel that this is right, that's right, if I don't get my way I'm leaving. It wasn't that type of dispute.

PH: When the plan was initially enacted was there a definite plan from the outset of the discussion or was it a process that evolved as it was being implemented?

PR: I'm not too sure about that, you'd probably need to talk to Donie and Sally about that because they would've been the people who designed the process. I think, and this is my opinion, but I think that right from the get go there was a realization that this was an issue that had to be resolved and it was something the original Educate Together founders didn't want to have to do, but were compelled to do by the department. So they were in a position where they had to compromise on a couple of things in order to get the school started. So my impression was that faith formation being provided within the school day was never part of the original concept, it was a compromise that they had to accept it. So I would suspect there was a substantial body of opinion right from the start that we've got to sort this out. The solution was very, very simple; it's an elegant solution, it solves all the problems. So once it was presented it was a sort of obvious thing, this is the way. And the only people that were put out were the Catholic parents who had to stay back. And even that problem, most of them were staying back anyway for art classes and other things, so even that, it wasn't a showstopper for anybody except for a couple people who wanted to argue the point.

BN: Would you have any recommendations for schools that are undertaking this move today?

PR: Well essentially there aren't any. All our schools apart from Cork. All our schools now adopt the...The only people who are doing this are the New Community School National Model who are trying to go back into this space and that's why this particular discussion is significant. If you're trying to run a school that provides equality to children irrespective of their religious background, this is an elegant way of resolving all the problems in the sense that you teach children about religion, about things. But if there is a

space where parents want them to be taught the truth, that this is the way WE think about things, then that really should be an opt-in facility that's free and available to parents who want it. But no child should be forced into it or put under any pressure. So if a Catholic School or a Church of Ireland school wants to...what's interesting is that the Church of Ireland schools have now adopted this approach. They don't try and do faith formation within the school day, they have all of that in the parish and Sunday School so they've adopted this approach as well. As I said it's an elegant solution which satisfies the rights of children in the school, primarily, and their parents and it provides facility for the rights of families for faith formation classes if they wish. And one of the big things is that it ensures that you don't put teachers in a position that they effectively have to either police children's religious views or that they have to teach as truth something that they might not necessarily...it respects the rights of teachers as well, which is another element to it.

2. Interview with Sally Sheils – July 14th, 2011

BN: Could you first tell us what school you were affiliated with and what position you held.

SS: North Dublin National School Project and I'm principal

BN: And what was your role in moving FFOSH?

SS: I was involved with the patron committee and particularly the chairperson of the patron committee and the chairperson in the BOM in helping to get workshops going so parents could discuss the issues. And we both spoke and gave the issues as we saw them, to explain to people, and then they broke into groups to discuss all of that. And then we came back with notes from their groups, each group presented what they had thought and discussed, and then we came back with a summary, if you like, of all of that and then we did that process again. And then in terms of offering people to be able to submit in other ways, as well, views that they had. The patron committee then made a decision that it should move out of school hours. But we had done a couple of presentations on it as well, so that people understood the issues, I suppose, was the most important thing.

BN: And what were the main reasons for deciding against providing FFISH?

SS: Mainly because the only time you could logically facilitate children leaving classes was during core curriculum time, which would be the same as the Educate Together Learn Together program, and we felt it was damaging that program. So that would've been one reason, because you had to plan your program on the assumption that children would be missing one day a week from it. Which meant you either did less with the rest that day or else something you considered very important and core to the school was going to be missing for that group of children who left. There was also the consideration that if one faith was being accommodated then any faith that needed to be accommodated should be allowed to. And in terms of where theyd be facilitated would be another issue, because we wouldn't have had space for a number of them going on together. It also meant that students were very obviously affiliated with one grouping or another which seemed

counterintuitive to the idea of the school being, cherishing every child equally and together and doing things together and not having to disclose, if they didn't want to, their belief. They had that entitlement as much as they had to declare their beliefs. And then I suppose the other aspects were we sometimes had children whose parents wished them to attend but who didn't want to leave core curriculum class to go. So literally you'd be talking about a child kicking and screaming not wanting to go. And then you have the converse of that, where you might have children who wanted to go, and may have felt very pressured to go, as they saw half their class or more in certain years going, it was okay when it was a very small group. And they put a lot of pressure on their parents to go because it was seen as part of the school day, so all of those issues were being addressed. And also I think that where it was during school hours, parents felt more pressured for their children to attend it than they might have if it was out of school hours, and that has proven to be the case as well.

BN: Was the concept of moving FFOSH first proposed by teachers or parents?

SS: Both, and children.

BN: After this was proposed, how was the final decision made to move it?

SS: Ultimately the decision rested with the patron committee and I think with an Annual General Meeting where there was a vote on it. And the only people who could vote on that were people who were signed-up, paid-up members. Which would not be all of our school parents, and not everybody who's a signed up member is a parent either. So not only are not all our parents members, but there would be people who aren't parents who are members of the patron body. So that brought another dynamic into the vote, I suppose, but the vote was overwhelmingly in favor of moving it out of school hours. And so that was a democratic decision and we moved it then, with that. But we agreed certain things that we addressed when we were speaking, like we agreed any denomination instruction, grouping, whatever it was, would be prioritized for space in after school hours, and they would be given first choice for days on which it would be run. That was the other problem they were encountering during school hours. It was like a whole day where the teacher would come in sometimes, and they'd be going from class to class, but that meant every teacher had to change their core curriculum time to change their religion class, it dictated what time their core curriculum class would be at in order to facilitate the two things and that caused complications. We guaranteed the out of school time for classrooms being prioritized for any religious grouping and we also said we would give any support that was needed. So for example, we photocopied for free for all of those classes. If they needed booklets made, we provided the administrative support for all that. We'd do anything we can to be helpful because a lot of the people who voted to move it out of school hours were directly affected so they were doing it for the greater good so we wanted to feed back into that, to do something for them as well. And it could have been extraordinarily contentious but it wasn't because of the way it was handled. And I have to say, a lot of credit was due to Donie O'Shea for that, which is why it'd be good if you could talk to him.

PH: How long did the process take from when it was proposed to when it was implemented?

SS: It was actually proposed years and years and years before it happened, and there were motions which were very contentious, I should've said that earlier. And I couldn't date those back but they were probably from about 1990 onwards? But when this process took place, I think it took about two years. Now Donie is probably more accurate on that, but I would say about two years. And it was quite an exhausting process.

BN: Were there any groups that were critical of this decision?

SS: There would have been some people that were annoyed about it. But originally, the only reason it was during school hours was that, I know the department said it should be, but the Catholic parents at that time were very committed to the children getting all the core curriculum and they were the only group when the school started first, that had a need for denominational instruction. We facilitated Church of Ireland Sunday school, for example, they used our building every Sunday. And later on other groups ran religious instruction, they were always happy to do it outside of school hours. But the original Catholic group would have been happy to do it outside of school hours except that we had six school buses running and it would have disenfranchised some of the children from attending because they had no other way of getting home. It isn't like now where everyone has some form of transport. So it was only for pragmatic reasons that group asked for it to be in school hours in the first place. There would have been a core cohort, I suppose, who had an understanding of that as a philosophy but there were other people who had always had it in school hours since their children had started the school and didn't see why their children should be discommoded, which is fair enough because it is a hassle for people to come at a time that is not the normal school finishing time. Other people saw it as quite handy as their children were in school an hour long so it depended on where you were coming from. But because some of the previous motions, there had been things said that sounded very anti-religion, I suppose, or in particular anti-Catholic, by individuals and they would have been one or two individuals, but that was kind of there as a lingering race memory for some people. They felt it was an 'out to get you' scenario as opposed to being practical and looking out for the core curriculum. I think the discussion process helped to move that along and change that view. But there were one or two people, yes, who weren't happy.

BN: The discussion process, most of it took place in the small groups which you talked about?

SS: Yeah, people would come to a meeting and would break into small groups and that worked very well and it showed a lot more consensus than we might have presumed would be there. As I said, it was literally down to a couple of people who felt very cross about it, and then other people who felt for practical reasons it was difficult. It did get carried and moved on from there and now nobody would question it. Once you establish something it's fine but it's that process of doing it without splitting a school community, I suppose.

PH: Was there resistance from the Catholic parish or Church at all to the move?

SS: No they didn't get involved at all, that I'm aware of anyway. I don't think they would, once the children were getting the instruction it wasn't their worry really. And we've had a good relation with them anyway.

BN: Did any new challenges arise after the faith formation had been moved out of schools?

SS: The only challenge was that it meant employing more teachers for less hours because they were now able to do it three days a week or four days a week, which had a lot of pluses in terms of the children because they were only there an hour after school. And in the end, one class waited here and did homework in my office and then went to the faith formation class at 3 o'clock instead of at half past 2, so that class were here, but it was always sixth class so they didn't leave here til 4 o'clock or half past four on those days. But all the others were accommodated across, so the difficulties would have been getting three teachers to do the different days. What they did was they tried to put some classes on the same day together in that hour after school so students could come and go together. And that was the main problem, just the logistics of getting teachers and nothing else was really different because there were still fees...everything else was the same.

PH: Where did the teachers come from?

SS: They were appointed by the Catholic Parents Committee. The only criteria we had was that they should be qualified teachers and it was up to them after that.

BN: Was there any evidence to illustrate that moving the FFOSH was a good idea?

SS: Well it certainly improved core curriculum. It made core curriculum planning much easier and it meant it so that it could run seamlessly all week. And I think for the children, they had a real sense of this was different from school and this was special to them. And it kind of ring-fenced it for them a little bit, which was good. They really felt these classes were special for them. At one state we had four different faiths, all using the school after school hours. Other than that, I think it gave other children appreciation for the fact that they had to work that much harder for their faiths. For some children they recognized that other children didn't really. But it meant there was much less pressure of it coming into class because they weren't coming back discussing issues raised in faith formation, they had the evening to let that dissipate a bit and I feel that was healthier.

BN: Do you think there's anything that could've been done differently?

SS: I think it could've been done sooner, if that process was being used. But just using simple motions saying it should move, I wouldn't have liked to see. But that process, if you have somebody like Donie who you could work with to do that, that would have been excellent. But it really, I think the school maybe had to reach a certain maturity level for that to happen as well. So no, I don't think so. I can't think of things that would have been

different. Simultaneously with all of this, the Church of Ireland who had been doing the Sunday School decided to make it multi-faith, so children actually came to that Sunday School and some of the local Catholic community that were involved in faith support got involved in that as well. And some of our children who weren't Christians chose to go to that to see what it was about as they felt it was less doctrinal. Now since we've moved up here that's kind of disappeared because it's suitable to do it beside their church. But it was a very interesting development that happened, as well. At the moment only the Catholic children do faith formation classes, none of the others do. But they may again, it comes and goes.

BN: So they would have the option if they wanted to...

SS: Yes, every year we send a letter out inviting parents to request it if they want it and the parents are responsible for getting the teacher and being happy about that teacher, and we Garda vet everybody. And other than that there's no issue.

PH: Are there any other specific recommendations you'd make to a school that is undergoing this transition or moving FFOSH?

SS: Well personally I would recommend they do it through a process, bringing people with them. I wouldn't just decide to move it. Now I know that some schools have done that successfully, but I know it can cause fallout that some people might not be aware of even. And I think what our school's about anyway is communication so that you're discussing it. The children saw it as much more obvious as the adults, I think, as being a sensible thing to do. Because they saw the reality of what it was like when it was during school hours and I think it's quite good that they're involved that way because they can explain to their parents, as well, the difference it makes for them. But I would use consultation like that in making sure people were brought with them and that people actually understood what was happening, like what their children were missing by going to faith formation classes. I know some schools run it against core subjects like English, Irish, Maths, as well, and parents understand that, that this is an opportunity. I also think that it's very important that the schools are supportive of it afterwards. Because I think that was the big plus we had here was that we did guarantee people that support. And that diffused, it meant that parents who were saying 'oh this is anti-Catholic or anti-religion or whatever' all the other parents were saying 'oh do you not realize the office is doing this for free and they're doing that and look at the support' and that just knocked that on the head, straight away. And it was worth, we offered if there were children who couldn't afford to go to the instruction classes that we would help to subvent their fees, which I think also helped because they realized we were taking it as this was a very important part of our school, not something we were shoving to one side. That we saw it as important that we would facilitate faith formation classes but just not during the school day, and I think that worked well. And I would advise people to do that because there is a perception that our schools don't want to facilitate it, and I think it's important that we're seen to be supportive, I think that's what the schools are about—just a personal opinion.

BN: Do you think a Catholic school that was, as the government has said, trying to convert to an Educate Together model with faith formation outside of school, do you think they'd face significantly different challenges than your school did as an Educate Together school?

SS: I think they would to this extent, that at the moment, first of all it's free in Catholic schools because the teachers do it. So you first have the hurdle of paying the instructors which is not insignificant for people particularly in the current financial climate. You have the issue of it would be one day a week instead of five days a week, and some parents might find that challenging. If it's explained properly to people that the core curriculum covers a lot of the basic ethics you would be covering in religion anyway just not necessarily with the 'God' part, then that extra time for the lesson is really focused on what is the theistic part of the faith formation. But I think whatever people are doing, it's always hard to move them to a different point and probably it would be best to pick schools where there would be at least a core support for this to happen. And I don't think people could assume in a Catholic school it would necessarily be the non-Catholics that they would get the most support from either; I think there'd be other people that might feel stronger about. I could take Clontarf area as an example. There's been three attempts to set up a school in Clontarf that's an Educate Together school. Our school was formed from that, it's here. And Glasnevin Educate Together was formed from that and it's down the road, and Clontarf still doesn't have an multi-denominational school. So I think there'd be space in an area like that for boys' and girls' Catholic schools to be amalgamated and an Educate Together school to come into the other building and you would have both side by side. So you'd have one school for Catholic children, specifically, and one Educate Together school and both vertical because at the moment there's a boy's school and a girl's school and no other choice in the area. So I think there could be a lot of looking at logic like that. I can think of other areas around the country where that could be done. And gradually then it may be that some of the schools would get smaller. If you're converting a complete Catholic school over, it is a case of selling it to people and saying this is important and how are you enshrining the faith formation, but the biggest challenge would be the money. In real terms, I think that would be the biggest issue for a lot of parents. And I think there'd be a lot of parents relieved if their children weren't doing faith formation classes because they feel like they have to do them at the moment. But that would be about canvassing a school population to get a genuine sense of where parents are at, and that would have to be very sensitively done because obviously they wouldn't want it going through the authorities in the school because they might feel they or their children were vulnerable.

3. Interview with Donie O'Shea – July 15th, 2011

BN: What school were you involved with and what was your official title at the time of the transformation?

DO: The school I was involved in was NDNISP, North Dublin National School Project and at the time of my involvement I was the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, the patron body.

BN: What was your role in the process of moving FFOSH?

DO: I suppose I took a lead role along with the patron body, in designing a process that would enable maximum participating in moving, as it was, Catholic instruction outside of school hours.

BN: What were the main reasons at that time for deciding against providing FFISH?

DO: The main reasons were that when the school was originally established, it's my understanding was, that this was a requirement made by the Department of Education at the time that denominational instruction, ie Catholic instruction, would be provided within the school hours in order for parents to establish the school in the first instance. And this was done. The main reason why we looked at this issue was two-fold. One we were conscious that this was having a detrimental effect on children who were not Catholics and who did not partake in denominational education. And it was having a detrimental effect in a number of areas, ie that in some cases it became divisive in the sense that children being left while the others were being taken off to another room for religious education within the school day. It was also impossible for any consistency or coherent way of the school actually providing for what we described as the core curriculum program, for the school itself. And ultimately it was an issue that, I would say, fundamentally impacted on the kind of ethos we had responsibility for as a patron body. Now the other thing was, about the timing we did it, this was an issue that some parents had raised, the sense of isolation and all the rest, the thing about the timing was that we were also in the process of securing a new site for a new school. For a new building, rather. And we felt it was better time wise to try to resolve some of these issues prior to actually moving into a physical environment, as well. But the primary motivating thing was the impact on the children themselves, that sense of isolation, and it was turning out to be something that was fundamentally divisive in terms of delivering on that core curriculum focused on the ethos we were trying to establish within a child-centered approach.

BN: Did the initial idea of moving FFOSH come from parents or teacher or the Board?

DO: I think it was, it came from a number of, it was primarily from parents. And listening to the children as well and children feeling that, you know, oh they're being taken out and I'm being left behind. And we actually found that in the profile of children who were attending the school, it was predominately, significantly at that time, a higher percentage were Catholic of Catholic denomination. And therefore the impact on minorities is really hard, it was a significant impact on the children at the time. We also, I suppose, in the process that we devised at the time, would have engaged with all the partners in education and listened to the issues so it was quite a long, drawn out process of engagement and consultation and trying to address the various issues that emerged at that time.

BN: Could you tell us a little bit about the decision making process, once this was proposed. How this was officially decided and who was involved with that?

DO: Well officially it was the patron body and I chaired that committee and we would have brought that, I suppose, to the members. The members of the NDNSP because that's who we were responsible to. And this would have been initiated, if I remember correctly, we would have held specific meetings. But we would have also, at that time, had a whole school approach because we were conscious as well that, in fact, while I suppose under the Constitution of the school at the time we could've stuck to members only if I could put it that way, but you have to bring people with you and not everyone was necessarily a member who had children in the schools.

BN: And how was membership declared?

DO: Membership is deterred through a small subscription, renewed annually. We would have had membership beyond the parents that were currently in the school at that time. Some of our membership would have been drawn from parents who were historically there for a number of years, as well, who still supported the ethos of the school even though they no longer had children in it. And we would have also had membership from people who didn't even have children in the school who actually supported the type of school that NDNSP was and its aims and objectives. But the consultation at the time would have been offered and engaged with anyone who wished to partake in it. But primarily those who engaged in it were, certainly all the parents of children in the school at the time would've engage with it, and teachers would've had a process as well. So we tried to take a whole-school approach in relation to it.

BN: Did you encounter much resistance or backlash after the faith formation classes were moved out of school hours?

DO: No, it was a very detailed process we engaged with and it was worked through over, you know we gave it a number of months to work this through, and we looked at the various options and explored the options and the various things like that. And eventually it came to decision time and again people brought forward arguments for and against the move. Ultimately it was decided through a meeting and ultimately it came to a vote because, while ideally you would like to reach the thing through consensus, there came a stage where in fact there were varying views on it but we have to put it to a vote at the end of a day. Now the question is, was there much hassle afterwards?

BN: Or within the process itself. Were the parents unhappy with it, how did that effect it...

DO: I think some parents would have liked to still see denominational education retained but I actually think by and large, I suppose like any decision, there was certainly a strong support even from those who wished it to be retained within school hours. At the end of the day, having explored all the arguments, people heard all the arguments and information and that, that in fact it worked well. And we made all sorts of provisions to make sure it worked well. For instance, an example of that, there was a range of outside of school hour activities, of which denominational education was one of those. And we facilitated the particular denomination in having the first call in resources outside the

school hour, so that we facilitated that transition to the optimum for that grouping. I think looking back on it, of course it was a highly charged situation and debate and all the rest, but I think because of the process we engaged in, people felt they had an opportunity to be heard, they had an opportunity to be listened to, there were reasonable accommodations made and at the end of the day the school moved on.

BN: Do you think that because this was an Educate Together school, that parents were more inclined to accept this sort of change than in the current situation if they tried to convert a Catholic school into an Educate Together model?

DO: I'm not sure that is necessarily true. I actually think like a lot of things that when you're engaging in a process of dialogue and people listen to the thing that they realize that, in fact, it really depends on the nature of the ethos of that school and how people support that ethos. And I think the ethos of the school is the critical element and how people understand that ethos and what that school will look like when, in fact, you have equity and participation and so on and, in fact, diversity is accommodated. And that it's not only accommodated but that people have a choice in terms of participation within that diversity. So that I think that in many cases it really has to do with... I suppose I wouldn't start with... I wouldn't make the starting point "we're going to convert a Catholic school to an Educate Together school" but I would actually start and say "What we're trying to do is have a child-centered school that recognizes diversity of various things of which people who come from various traditions or whatever they are respected in an equitable fashion. As opposed to converting a Catholic School. If that was the kind of starting point, you're immediately creating a kind of parallel, you know, you're either a Catholic or you become an Educate Together. It then creates an either/or situation as opposed to a both/and if I can put it that way. I think what's fundamental is that in all of that process is not to make assumptions about how people view the world. And that is one of the things that I discovered through that process as well. That, in fact, you actually had people who had Catholic instruction within the school, actually advocating that this would be a good thing, to have it in a changed environment. Of course you had people on the extremes of that discussion but in fact you had a cohort of people who equally saw it from a variety of viewpoints and who welcomed the opportunity to have something in which people chose and had choice in that decision. And in fact had choice in shaping the education and input to it and all the rest.

BN: Was there any engagement from the Catholic Church while this transition was happening?

DO: No because in the school structure we had the Catholic Church was not a stakeholder. It was the Catholic parents who organized Catholic education within the school hours. Now they may have got, in fact they may have been supplied with teachers or supports from institution of Church, but the institution of Church were not formal stakeholders in the process. I think that may be a difference in the dialogue if where the institution of Church is the patron of schools.

BN: So after faith formation moved out of school hours, were any difficulties encountered with the new setup?

DO: No. In fact most of that would've been driven through the Office of the Principal and the Accommodations and all the rest and we had maintained it until that date, certainly. There were no issues that I can remember that became problematic afterwards. And in fact you had more kinds of participation of children in a variety of activities so when it came to what our office described...there became more celebration of a diversity of days, as well, within the school. So children had opportunity to actually partake in a very different way in things like, you know, where there was a significant faith day for a child like a communion or a christening or whatever that was, certainly other children were invited along to parties and those kind of things. But all of it took place outside of school hours, as it were.

BN: Do you have any evidence to illustrate that moving FFOSH was a better approach for NDNSP?

DO: I think, yes, in terms of having a much more consistent approach to the kind of core curriculum. And in fact there was a better buy in to core curriculum and more parent involvement in the core curriculum and delivering on that as well. And I think that is one of the critical things that, in fact, we moved on to actually focusing on, I suppose, in a very real way the values, the principles underpinning our school and things like that. It's not even discussed as an issue now. My memory was that, this is going back a few years now, when we actually moved up to the new school, it never became an issue as to why is this outside school hours or anything like that.

BN: In hindsight, is there anything you think should have been done differently in this process?

DO: I think what, looking back, nothing stands out to my mind should have been done differently. I think one of the ways of looking at this is that, irrespective of the issue you're trying to address, it is really about facilitating change. And when you look at it within a change kind of model, it takes on a different kind of dimension, as opposed to 'this is a religious issue.' You get people to look, in any kind of process, to actually hear the diversity of views, the pro's and con's. Now it was a slow process. But I think you have to have a process that A, is meaningful, is reasonable, and that, in fact, people understand and that you can take people with you on that process.

BN: Would you have any recommendations for schools looking to undergo a similar transition today?

DO: Well I think the most important thing is to have a process that people can engage with, that people can understand, and that people are willing to participate in. I think it's important to have those that are leading on this as well, not to have predetermined outcomes as to where this is actually going to into. Because otherwise you're not seen as an honest broker or you're not seen as objective, so it is critical to have some kind of independence in facilitating that process and allowing people equity of space to express views and all the rest. And, I think, sharing of information. It's nearly like, people are fed

up here with getting information and updates from you. But I think the most important thing is communication, communication, communication. Because then people can hear the issues. But also make people part of the solution, I think is critical. I remember thinking back on it, when people raised issues, saying ‘well what’s going to happen in relation to this.’ You don’t always have to have the answers. There’s a way of looking at that and saying ‘What do you think should happen in relation to that?’ or ‘What do you think would be a good outcome in relation to that issue?’ as opposed to putting people off and stuff. I think certainly for any process to work, it has to make sense for those engaging with it, that in fact this is fair, this is transparent, this isn’t predetermined.

4. Interview with Colette Kavanagh – July 19th, 2011

BN: So the first thing you could tell us is the school you were affiliated with and your position.

CK: I was a teacher for twenty years in the Bray School Project, national school in Wicklow. And that was the second Educate Together school that was formed in Ireland, the first was the Dalkey School Project and in 1981 the Bray School opened its doors as a result of parental pushing, basically, for a different type of education, for an Educate Together school. So the Bray School Project opened in 1981 and I joined it in 1984, so I was there for all that time until I became Principal here in 2007.

BN: And what was your role in the process of transitioning FFOSH?

CK: Well I didn’t actually have a pivotal role in it. I was the class teacher and the executive committee in the early schools took the place of what Educate Together does for our types of schools, they’d be responsible for the buildings and for the ethos and the executive committee had felt there were rumblings amongst parents about children being removed from the class to have faith formation classes during the school day and they also felt that the other two Educate Together schools that were around the room, there was the Dalkey School Project and the NDNSP, and Bray, were the first three basically. The other two had successfully removed religious instruction outside the school day. All the new Educate Together schools were opening, each time they opened they no longer had faith formation inside the school day, so the executive committee decided they were kind of out of sync with other Educate Together schools and they decided to look at the process. So in terms of my personal involvement, I was just a class teacher at the time so it would’ve come to lots of discussions about it, it would have come from the executive to the staff room to our staff meetings and there would have been lots of discussions about it there, at the time. The executive committee set up a REAC committee, which is a Religious Education Advisory Committee. They set that committee up I think in about 2001, 2002 and their role was to look at ethos in the school and to look at the implementation and religious education program and this then this whole issue became part of their remit. I wasn’t actually on this committee but I have spoken to people over the last few days who were on those committees so they’ve told me a few things about it.

PH: Was the committee made up of parents or teachers or a combination?

CK: There (were) two teachers and it was chaired by a parent who had been on the executive committee, but was no longer on the executive committee as far as I know. And the REAC committee, the chairperson of the Catholic Parents Committee was also on that committee. So there were parent representatives on it as well as teachers. So I think there were probably five or six people on it, it was two teachers and three or four parents, I'm not sure exactly how many.

BN: And as a teacher, did you encounter any issues with having FFISH?

CK: There were time tabling issues, that was the biggest issue for us really, in that. As a teaching group we were quite in favor of it actually, at the time, of having faith formation in the day. We felt, or some people felt anyway, on the staff, that it was truly multi-denominational if people were entitled to have their faith formation within the school day. We knew that parents, particularly the Catholic parents, who were a large portion of the group—I think we probably had 60 or 70% of the children in the school were Catholic—and they all attended these classes. So I think parents felt that it was their right to have this faith formation classes in the school day. And they were largely supported by the teachers. But the teachers' problems would be the timetabling. It used to come up regularly at the staff meetings—should we timetable our religious education program against our... I mean 70% of the class would be gone, what do you do with the 30% that are left behind? You can't go ahead with maths or go ahead with anything, really. So you were either catching up with the particular children who were behind or who had been left behind or else you were trying to do, often we tried to do something really nice with those children because it was a kind of nice, small group and you could do artwork, but then that sometimes caused tension with the children who left and came back and said 'oh I didn't want to be at Catholic education, I'm stuck here, I didn't get a chance to do this, that, or the other.' So there was always a little bit of tension around that. So that was first, the timetabling thing was an issue for us, but that was the biggest issue. We kind of supported the other groups as well. There was a Church of Ireland group, a Jehovah's Witness group, and a Baha'i group. They were the main religious groups within the school and for a while, each of those other groups decided to have religious formation classes within the school. So if that happened, again, you might have two Jehovah's in your class and they'd go out and again that causes, because you're left with such large numbers then, and yet you can't go on with something because two students are going to be missing and you're going to have to do it again, so there was issues about that. The other interesting thing is that none of those communities apart from the Catholic community persisted with religious formation within the school even though they were offered it and were welcome to do it. I think the reason for that was that all of those faith communities looked after faith formation in their own religious communities anyway, you know they had Sunday Schools, Church of Ireland had Sunday Schools, the Jehovah's had like weekly meetings where they taught their children about their religion and similarly with the Baha'is. But the Catholics in Ireland at that time didn't. There was no where else. If it's not taught in the schools, it's not taught. And that's just a historical and traditional thing, the way the Catholic groups always did it. The Catholic Church handed over the religious instruction to the schools. And 70%, maybe 60% of our parents were Catholics

and they had come through that system themselves, they'd come to the school expecting that their children would have religious instruction and indeed they did have. So when it was taken away from them or when they felt it was being taken away from them, they felt uneasy about that. They felt it was part of their rights were being infringed or something. So it was a little bit controversial at the time. It was difficult. But the executive committee and the REAC committee worked very hard to make it a very painless process and they tried to bring all the groups along with them as best they could. And actually they did it very well. So I think the REAC committee, Mai Byrne was in charge of that. That's the Religious Education Advisory Committee that was set up by the executive. They surveyed parents and they asked them various questions about what they felt, and as a result of that...they surveyed them particularly on the issue of religious instruction within the class time and on view of what they get back they felt they should go forward with the process of removing it from the school day. They asked parents to write submissions and so a lot of parents wrote submissions and the submissions were very different. They were either strongly in favor of out, or very strongly in favor of in. I think there was a lot of dialogue and a lot of meetings in people's houses where people talked through things and eventually the EGM happened. The executive had taken the decision not to go for a straightforward vote because they felt that the vote might be...like if it were 49-51 or whatever, it might be very divisive. They decided at that meeting that they'd just look for feedback from people. They did look for maybe a show of hands about how people felt about the issue and it was something like 75-25 in favor of moving it from the school day.

BN: How did the Board respond to resistance from parents?

CK: They had meetings. Again, the REAC committee, I was talking to the Chair this morning and she said they had many meetings in her house with representatives from the Catholic Parents Committee. And indeed, one of the people on the REAC committee was the Chair of the Catholic Parents Committee and she was in favor of moving it outside of school which was very helpful in the whole process. I think if she had been against it, it would have been much more divisive. She gave a very impassioned speech, actually, on the night. And she was the Chairperson of the Catholic Committee, recommending that it be taken outside of school hours and I think she brought a lot of the Catholic community with her. She was very measured and strong in her views but she was very conciliatory and I think she was pivotal, her role was pivotal in it. Because we had so many Catholic parents, if we didn't bring those people along with us, we would have been in serious trouble, I think.

BN: Were there any practical steps that had to be taken to move the FFOSH?

CK: Yeah there was, actually that was another problem that once the decision had been taken, to remove instruction out of the school day, it was felt that the children who had already been in the school or the children who were enrolled for the next year, had a reasonable presumption to have it in the school day. So they decided that they would not just blanketly remove it. The meeting happened in 2003. So the children who were already in the school, they continued to have faith formation classes in the school day until they left. And children coming in were informed before they came in that no longer

was faith formation classes going to be offered in the school day but that the school building would be made available to them for faith formation classes afterward. I think that helped as well, I think that helped a lot. Catholic parents that were in the school at the time knew 'well at least my child will be going through with formation during the school day' and new people coming in knew that wasn't going to be the case. So they made their choice fully informed to that when they were coming on. I think there are more difficulties with it because there were eight classes in the school. We find here now, we don't have a Catholic Parents Committee, but our children in this school who do Catholic instruction facilitated by the Catholic school across the way. The teacher comes over and the priest is very involved as well and they do it after school hours. It only really happens in the year they're making their sacraments. They really only do it in second class for the sacrament of penance and Communion and then again in sixth class for their Confirmation, whereas in the Bray School Project, there was weekly classes and for every class, all the way through. So now if you were having Catholic instruction outside of school hours, straight after school, how would you do eight classes? Unless you did it one a day and then even that's difficult to get someone who'll come in to teach for one hour every day, and then that'd still only do five classes. So there were practical issues around that and I'm not exactly sure how they were resolved since I'm gone. It's possible that they just do instruction for the sacramental classes, the second class and sixth class, but I'm not 100% sure about that.

BN: And did any of the other religious groups ever decide to offer religious education outside of school hours?

CK: No, just the Catholics. And again I think they had started to offer it in the school days, each of those other three groups, but I just felt or they felt, I think, that it just wasn't necessary, that they were repeating what they do in their own church. They already had it. But they were kind of very pleased to be offered it within the school day because they felt they were being recognized. It was recognition within the education system for their belief and they thought 'oh this is really nice, thank you very much, we will do it.' But actually when they started it they felt 'oh this is nonsense. This is extra, we just don't need it.' It was literally that the Catholic group, who in Ireland it had always been done through the schools, there was no mechanism for them to do it outside, they would have had to reinvent the structure to do it outside school and they found that very difficult. Whereas it was still the Catholic parents who had organized it within the school day but they were able to offer one Catechist a day's work, so she would come in on a Monday and do all the classes on the Monday. That's the way it worked when it was in school--one class would be at nine, half nine, ten, half ten. Once it was out of school then, just the structure is more difficult for them to organize so I think there were practical difficulties with it in that the Catholic group felt quite strongly, but I think as well they felt philosophically that the multi-denominational aspect was being taken away and it was now becoming more non-denominational which they hadn't signed up for. I think that was a feeling amongst some of the Catholics. But although the views were expressed very strongly at the time, there was no backlash or anything, no difficulty in attracting children to the school afterwards, no drop in numbers, or no fall out in any of those ways. And I think over the years people feel it was a very good decision, a very good choice

BN: Did the enrollment in faith formation classes stay fairly consistent after they moved it out or were there fewer children?

CK: I'd say fewer children. Fewer children would've taken the option of faith formation. I'm not 100% sure on that because I'm gone since 2007. The decision was taken in 2003 but it was being phased out over those years while I was there, so it was always there while I was there. So I don't really know the answer to that question but I could find out easily for you, if you wanted to give me a ring about that.

BN: Since Bray School was a later school to undertake this transition did they look at other schools and how they had gone through this as a model?

CK: I'm sure they did. I know Paul Rowe came to the EGM at the time and I know he would have been in contact with our executive and our executive would have been in contact with him. More in the role of, he was involved with the North Dublin, so I think there would have been a lot of discussion with them. But I wasn't actually a pivotal person, I wasn't on the committee. But I think they were very, very careful about the process, very careful to involve parents and to seek submissions and to avoid conflict and I think they did it very well.

BN: Is there any evidence to illustrate that moving the FFOSH was a good approach or a better approach?

CK: When I look at our school now, we would have so many faiths represented in our school that it just, the practicalities of it, would be ridiculous. It couldn't happen. In terms of the religious education program, I think people feel more strongly that the religion education program is the core program in the school if it's not being diluted in some way by children being taken out in faith formation classes. I'm not 100% sure about that, but I think it's clearer, we're all clearer about what the role of the school is and I think the parents who attend our school are clearer about the role of the school than they were when there was faith formation within the school day. I think there is certainly more clarity about it.

PH: Was the local Catholic parish helpful at all? Did they provide support when you were moving the classes outside of school hours?

CK: It really didn't come down to the local parish at all; it was the Catholic Parents Committee who, they had always been involved with employing the person who did the catechetics in the school and that person dealt with the parish then, for the sacraments. I don't think it made any difference to the parish whether it was in school or outside of school. It didn't seem to make any difference to them at the time. We were in two different parishes because we were in two different premises. We found the first parish very, very accommodating to us and not so much the second parish, but that's just the individuals who were involved at the time. But I don't think it made a difference to the local parish because actually they weren't involved really at all in the faith formation. It

was the catechists who did that work. But they facilitated—our children used to go to church to make their sacraments, and they facilitated that.

BN: Upon reflection do you think there's anything that could've been done differently or better in the process?

CK: I think the process was very, very well dealt with. I don't think it could've been dealt with better. And I think because it was a very difficult thing for the Catholic parents and they felt their rights were being taken away from them. There was a lot of dialogue around at the time. And I think neither Kiernan Griffin, who's the principal, nor Paul Rowe, who's the Educate Together representative, went one way or the other. They left it open to parents. Like the Principal didn't say 'well I think you should do this.' He kept out of it. He kept out of the decision and I think that was helpful as well. If he were seen to go one way or the other that might have pulled an awful lot of people away from it or with it, it depends. And I know what he felt but he didn't allow that to color it...so it stayed with the executive committee, the REAC committee, and the parents, so that's where it stayed. So I feel like it was done really well, by a lot of dialogue, and a lot of surveys and submissions were written. And people's views were taken very seriously and people's voices were heard and people felt their voices were heard even when the result really wasn't what some people wanted. But it did, in the end, really go with what the majority of people did feel it should be removed outside school. There was only one child I ever heard of, one family, who was very disappointed, they didn't send their third child to the Bray School Project, they sent their child to a Catholic school. But that's only one case out of all the families that we know of. So I think it was dealt with very well but I think it was a really contentious issue and a difficult issue for us. And it seemed to be more contentious with our school than it was with other schools, I'm not quite sure why that was. There seemed to be more support amongst the staff for faith formation in the school than there was in other schools, and that was what was unusual about our staff. But the staff had no role in it, really. Staff only had a role if they were parents, and of course a lot of us were parents in the school, but we didn't have a pivotal role aside from being on the REAC committee and making our voices heard there. But everybody's voices were heard. We did feel in the end that a good decision had been made. And the way it was phased in slowly meant that the people understood what they were getting when they came to the school would continue to get that. And that anybody coming into the school knew what they were getting into and they were in agreement with it before they came in. Or at least, they had chosen to come in knowing that there was no religious instruction within the school. And I think that was a very, very fair way to deal with it.

PH: Are there any specific recommendations you would make to schools that are undertaking this process now?

CK: Well I think I'd be a lot happier with the process now that faith formation doesn't happen in schools and that you wouldn't provide it, any schools opening now are not providing it to parents, any Educate Together schools. I think if you do offer it the way we did in Bray and the way the earlier schools did, it becomes like a right to parents and then it's very difficult to take it away. So I think to be clear from the very beginning, that faith

formation is not what we do in Educate Together schools, and people coming in understand that, that makes life clearer and easier. I think clarity is very important there. And I think to be as facilitating as you can to the faith formation groups using your premises and to be celebrating with them when they're having their celebrations and to be totally behind faith formation groups within your school. To be seen to do that is very important. We don't want people to feel that we have anything against religion or religious formation; we want to support it, we need to show them we support it.

5. Interview with Chris Lennon – July 20th, 2011

BN: Could you first tell us what school you were affiliated with and what position you held at the time of the transition.

CL: I was in the Dalkey School Project National School and I was principal.

BN: And what was your role in the process of moving FFOSH?

CL: It was primarily my responsibility to organize the timetabling of the faith formation classes. We facilitated those classes by means of a subcommittee of Catholic parents who (...) Catholic, Roman Catholic children who had requested religious formation classes. So the subcommittee of the BOM, the sort of executive if you like, was within the schools, I was the one who handled negotiations. Between the parents' committee and the teacher and myself (?) timing for the classes.

BN: Who was the first group to bring this idea forward? Was it your idea or the parents or...

CL: The school had faith formation classes and they had been largely within school hours since the school was formed which was in 1978, 79. But there was always a certain degree of quiet about them. In the first case I think for staff, who found that it quite disruptive of their day, when a large group of children would be removed from the class for about a half hour, forty minutes. And the second case from some of the parents whose children didn't go to these classes and it was, they thought, highlighting difference. So there was always a little bit of dispute amongst it. I didn't have a particularly principled stand on it one way or the other, but I was concerned that there was an issue around the whole class being disrupted. Because of course, at the time, I don't know what the situation is now within schools, but I think it's the same at Dalkey, the number of children—particularly in what we used to call supplement class, the ones where children made First Communion, Confirmation, in the Catholic Church there would be a very large group of children, probably two-thirds of the class, would be taking this class. That meant in the class of over 30, you'd only maybe have 10 children left in the classroom. There was not much you could do. (difficult to hear) I don't know what you know about the curriculum within Irish national schools but it's a fairly loaded curriculum and the timings are pretty confined, what you're supposed to spend time on. And there was never any clear indication of what you were supposed to take that time from. Because the time for

religious instruction is half an hour per day and that in Educate Together schools should be the religious education, the ethics program. What's now the ethics program, what in those days was the religious education program. No one wants to take time from that so then what are you going to take time from? Are you going to take it from English, are you going to take it from Gaelic, are you going to take it from maths? Those kinds of debates were ongoing. It seemed to me that really the practical solution to all of this is that it'd be better if we could get it outside altogether. And then we had, what kind of catalyzed it for me a little bit was that it was always difficult for the subcommittee to get teachers, people who would come in maybe two or three days a week and just do an hour's work. You don't get too many people who want to do that. They'll do a morning, they don't necessarily want to do a couple days for a period. At one stage, there was a teacher came and there were certain ways in which she could manage it, she could do it before school began, like in the very early part of the school day. We started at half eight, so that period half-eight til ten to nine was an assembly period. So we arranged that she could come and do the religious classes at, say, twenty past eight, so that meant ten minutes is outside and then there was another, it went til nine. So we were only actually taking ten minutes out of the school day. That appeared to be much more successful. Then, what I did then was that over the period of a number of years when we do the negotiations on a yearly basis, I edged that back until the kids were starting at, say, ten past eight. And then they were back in their class from ten til nine.

BN: Okay, so you kind of gradually moved it?

CL: Exactly. And then at the later dates, I can't remember the details, I'll have to go back through the files that are in school or talk to somebody or whatever, but at the later date then was a change again in the teacher and the new teacher couldn't do the morning time. So I suggested, well, why don't we do after school? And nobody said anything. So there we were, we had it outside, after school. This is different from other people in that other people ended up with confrontation. This was never seen as a principled thing. It was seen as a principled thing at the earlier stages of the school. While I was doing this it became seen as a practical issue more than a principled issue. Nobody ever thought it necessary to bring it to a full meeting of parents and discuss it and so forth, maybe have a vote on it or whatever. It just sort of evolved, if you like. And over the years, six or seven years, it just became that's the way it was done. It just became a fact of life that religious education classes, faith formation classes, were like another extracurricular; they were outside the school hours. And parents then had to make the choice between doing drama or doing their faith formation classes or whatever it might be.

BN: So in this case, would you say there wasn't a big ideological drive to move it out?

CL: Now there were a couple of times where it came near to it being a bit of an ideological type thing. There were one or two parents who became kind of agitated about it but the practicalities of it ended up that the teacher couldn't do it in school time anyway, so what was the point of having a big ideological debate if we couldn't get someone to do it? And I didn't terribly encourage the idea on an ideological basis. To my mind, I do see the ideological point, that especially when there's such a large number of

children being taken out of class it can make other kids feel different. But I personally, as a parent of children in Educate Together schools years ago, I never found that much of a big deal. Because there's always differences in children anyway, and that has to be dealt with. So I didn't really see it as that big of a deal. I thought primarily from a practical perspective, you're using school time for all the other subjects. It's not like you have the half hour that's allocated to faith formation in Catholic schools, because that half hour is already gone on our ethical program—really, really important. So it means you're going to have to take something off the other subjects and that's really difficult. And I often wondered, if an inspectorate from the department ever actually took this seriously and looked at it properly...but they wouldn't want to the ideological row either, you see. But they would have to look at it properly and see that it's actually taking time from other core subjects in the curriculum. In a way, I think that's something that happened within Muslim schools when they were using more time than was allowed within the Dept. of Education for faith formation, that was questioned through the Dept. of Education, there was a big row in Muslim schools over that. And it never became as big of an issue in Educate Together schools because Bray also had faith formation classes within school hours when my sons were going there. And they had big ideological discussions and removed them But it often struck as that if the inspectorate were to look at it, they would see that time had to be taken away from something because those children weren't in class for all the time they were supposed to be. So from my point of view, I always saw it as being much more of a practical thing than an ideological thing.

BN: Do you think moving the faith formation classes out had a positive impact on the school?

CL: Well, I think it had a positive impact certainly from the staff point of view because they were very happy about it. We stopped having the rows about 'is this really an Educate Together school when there's loads of Catholic children?' which I always thought was a bit of a spurious argument anyway. But that would come up, I don't know how people thought we would say 'no you cant come to school if you're Catholic but you can come if you're any other religion.' That used to always agitate me. But, you know, people always have their views. So we left all of those kinds of rows out of it. So it did have a positive effect, it was much easier to manage in lots of ways. There were always difficulties, one of the difficulties of faith formation classes are the quality of teachers that sometimes come in, and sometimes that's an issue. It's removed from the school because it's not really part of the school and its outside the school day, yes there is reputational issues sometimes. If the kids behave badly, someone who's not a member of the staff goes out and says "those kids down there at the Educate Together school, they're really badly behaved.' But it might be because the individual teacher can't control them because they're not very good at what they do. There were those kind of issues, they were slightly separate, and we managed those in other ways.

BN: Were there any other difficulties you encountered with moving FFOSH? Any other practical things that had to be accounted for?

CL: There were a lot of practical things that had to be accounted for terms of themselves, not in terms of all of the school, since it's really up to parents to get this organized. It was

difficult for them because, at a later stage again, the first teacher that went teaching after school hours used to come in every afternoon, five afternoons a week, and that way got through all of the classes. Then we had a teacher at a later stage who could come in over three days a week, and that meant she could only take two or three classes, which meant some kids had to go home and come back. And that was always a difficulty, a practical difficulty. Parents used to want to keep the kids in the school to hang around, do homework, or that sort of after school sort of stuff. We had a lot of difficulty with all of that but that wasn't just faith formation classes that caused that, all sorts of other extracurricular activities that was an issue about. And I know some schools do provide childcare after school, we never felt this part of our responsibility to do that. It would be a very big extra burden on a BOM to have to actually take responsibility for that. So we never got involved in that terribly, but we had a couple of lovely rows over it.

BN: Did enrollment stay fairly consistent when faith formation classes were moved?

CL: It did. It always used to drop anyway outside the sacrament classes. It'd be grand for first and second class and then it might drop off in third and fourth and then they'd come back for fifth and sixth. Now it always did that and I think it may have did that a little bit more, but then the church itself issued a directive and I had several parents come in to me about this. They had to attend a regular basis. To be honest, I had every sympathy with the church on that one. It's like being an (a la carte?), you either were or were you weren't, but just doing it for the sake of doing it, I thought was a bit (?) really. So I'm afraid parents got a bit of a short rift from me when they came in to complain about the church on that one; they could complain about other things, but not on that one. I don't think we have anything else, really it went quite smoothly in the end, when it went out I wondered when we finally agreed with the Catholic parents at the time that this was the best kind of solution, we were going to have them in the afternoons and it would be outside school. Initially when it moved outside school, it was still inside by about ten minutes. The kids normally finished at ten past two, and the religion classes used to start her class at two. Then there was an issue with space, we had an extra resource teacher, so we didn't have the space any more. So the following year it had to be moved outside but nobody really...people probably muttered a bit, but mostly they were fine with it because they were used to children

BN: And there's never been any talk of moving it back into school as the teachers have changed?

CL: Never, it's never been discussed, it's never been mentioned even. I think it's been taken now that that's the way it is, so nobody has mentioned it. The only time we've had it is only once or twice...because Dalkey is such a long-established school occasionally you'll get parents who don't actually recognize it's an Educate Together school and they get a bit of a shock when they come along and say 'What about religion?' usually in first class. And you say 'actually, we're not a Catholic school.' And they say 'well we know that but...' But that's easy to say, that's not such a big problem here.

BN: Looking back is there anything you think could've been done differently or better in the process?

CL: No I'm quite glad I did it the way I did because some of those ideological kinds of articles, it's like reinventing the wheel time after time after time. Literally every new group of parents...and while I believe that every new group of parents have to make of their own the actual, the whole business of the Educate Together philosophy, I actually think that's very important to get to understand that and have meetings about it and so on, there are some things that really...any school will have its own traditions and its own ways of doing things and so on. Really there are some things that you should just be able to get on with and say 'this is the way we do it here. You like it or you don't.' I know that doesn't sound very democratic, and I AM very democratic, and I do think people should have a say but you can't run an institution and everybody has a say on absolutely everything, so I think certain things. As I've said, because I always thought of this as not being as much of an ideological thing, as being very practical to undertake, that was what I felt. I felt it was find to do it the way we did it. But I have to say, when I started doing this, I didn't intend particularly...I didn't start with the intention that I'm going to move this out ten minutes by ten minutes. I started with an effort to try to solve a practical problem, while being quite conscious that it was an issue for staff and for curriculum, which was my main interest. I would have been very in favor of taking it outside altogether. But I was conscious it was there, it was inside the school, and this is the way things were done at the time, so we'd go along with that. But if there was an opportunity to take up less school time with it, then I was going to take that opportunity. At a certain stage it became clear to me that we could move this outside altogether without too much force. So I worked at it, bit by bit.

BN: Do you think that if the one teacher's availability hadn't been dictated like that, if she hadn't only been available outside of school, do you think this change still would've happened eventually?

CL: I think it probably would have happened eventually, because eventually we would have had to have that sort-of ideological discussion. There would have been a build-up of steam on it. Particularly when you think of the period of time, I went there in '91, I suppose we moved it out by '95, '96. But even if it hadn't at that stage, the pressure on the revised curriculum and the increased pressure and time and so on, would've put pressure on the whole thing, I think. We would have, probably around the same time as Bray, I think that's really what happened in Bray, they just couldn't manage it anymore. And I know that they had more than one group. We were lucky in that we only ever had the Catholic children looking for faith formation, because that was offered to every faith within schools, but only the Catholic parents actually looked for it. Actually that's not quite true, a number of Church of Ireland parents over the years looked for it. But it was our habit that if somebody else looked for it we'd go to the local representative of whatever that church was and say that this is what was happening and did they want to meet with parents or whatever and discuss means of bringing it in. But our local Church of Ireland director said the same thing every time, that if they're anxious to have their children brought up in the faith to tell them to come to Sunday School. End of conversation, you know? So I reported back to the church parents and they said 'well...okay.'

BN: Do you have any recommendations for other schools that would be looking to undertake this move?

CL: I wouldn't dream of recommending anything to them because personally I feel the schools have changed a lot in the last couple of years. I'm not sure the kinds of thing that I did would really...well I suppose I would suggest to them to open a conversation about it, really. I don't think you could do what I did. There would have to be a conversation. Maybe the principle, teacher might decide she's going to start a conversation about it...off it, at least. And she's going to talk to a select group of Catholic parents and see what they think about it and point up the issues around curriculum, because I think they're the most compelling ones. I know there's an issue around the difference thing but I think that you could argue against that, as well, right? There's an argument that goes do you hide difference or do you confront it? That's a basic kind of principle behind that. And you could go round and round the garden with that argument and you'd have people on both sides of it and both of them would be right. So I don't think that's going anywhere. So I actually think the most compelling argument for taking this out is the practicality; say you cannot manage another subject within school hours. I mean already this year the Minister is telling us to spend more time on numeracy and literacy, so that's going to have to come from somewhere. That whole debate, I think, is the best one to come out of (?). It also means that you're not saying to Catholic parents, which I don't think most Educate Together principals want to, that we don't want you in the school, we want to pretend you're not there. And we're kind of getting at you. I don't mean that anyone would actually say that, but it might be the impression that's given. Instead of which, and I suppose this reflects a bit of my so-called management skills, but I would be saying to them 'no it's not that, but we do have a really serious practical issue here.' But I think you have to take your time at doing any of these things, let the people just think about it and get their heads around it a bit and not just impose anything. That's the diplomacy bit, isn't it? And the democratic bit, as well.

6. Interview with Aine Hyland – July 26th, 2011

Note: Aine Hyland was describing the initial Department of Education and Science policy on religious education for Educate Together schools.

AH: They always just simply referred to "religious education within school hours for those groups who require it. The issue in a way was how we, in the Dalkey School Project, how did we interpret that. Initially we were always very clear that the broad policy of the DSP, as well as the subsequent two schools, would be that the religious education core curriculum, which is very similar to what is now the ethical education curriculum. There is a predecessor to that which I wrote back in the early 80's, it's a little cream book called Religious Education Core Curriculum. The Dept. of Education's policy on what we would now call Faith Formation within school hours, they didn't use that language at the time. They used the language of religious instruction which is the language that was in the rules and indeed is still in the rules for national schools. But indeed we did a double take on that, we deliberately misinterpreted that. WE knew of

course what they were looking for, they were looking for us to provide denominational instruction within school hours for all those who sought it. We did not accept that and our policy was that we would facilitate, we would provide religious education core curriculum for all children within school hours and then that we would facilitate the provision of denominational instruction for all those whom it was required. We deliberately did not use the phrases, in the first ten, fifteen years, we did not use the phrase inside or outside of school hours. Not that we didn't know what the department wanted, of course we knew what the department wanted, but we decided that if we just didn't use the words "in or outside school hours" than it wouldn't be an issue on way or the other. We were obeying the rules of the department which was to provide religious education and then, in addition, we added the extra bit which was "to facilitate the provision of denominational instruction," that was our phrase, "to facilitate it." And initially our intention was, of course, to facilitate it outside school hours and that is what we did in the beginning at Dalkey. But there was pressure because some of the students were coming from long distances, to facilitate some of that provision within school hours. And for a period, we did facilitate some Catholic instruction within school hours to prepare students for the sacraments, for First Communion and Confirmation. It was in general not our policy to do that. Our policy in general was to facilitate that type of provision outside school hours. And within quite a short period of time, I would say by the third or fourth year of the Dalkey School Project, we were in a very small building, just three rooms and we had three teachers teaching across the spectrum. Like we had a class of Juniors, and a class of Seniors, and then the school principal was teaching everybody from first to sixth class; there were about 20 or 25 children in that age group, maybe 30 even. And it was a very small space. So we couldn't facilitate separate provisions of denominational instruction during school hours, even if it was our policy, it physically wouldn't have been possible. Within quite a short period, as soon as we began to allow the Catholic group to have some instruction within school hours (and it was one of the parents, by the way, that taught them. It was never, ever taught in the DSP, none of the main class teachers, ever taught denominational instruction. They never did that, they only taught the religious education core curriculum.) For one or two years, the first year was 1978-79, so maybe 79-80 there was some provision and indeed I remember the parent, her name was Mrs. Downs and she was a parent of a child at the school and she taught religious instruction two mornings a week from 9 to 9:30. But then we got a request from a Baha'i group and from a Jehovah's Witness group and from a biblical, Bible group for denominational instruction within school hours. Once that happened we realized it was simply not possible to facilitate different groups, we simply didn't have the space, there was no way we could do that. In that early phase of the school, Catholic instruction was being provided in the staff room, we had a tiny little staff room, and that's where the children went from 9 til 9:30. Once another group asked for it, there was no more space so then we had to stop it completely. Because we were very clear that we could not discriminate against any group. We could not give to one religion what we could not give to all religions. At that stage the decision was taken to discontinue the teaching of denominational instruction within school hours, and allow the building to be used after-school hours for whatever group wanted it for denominational instruction. So that was in Dalkey, I was on the BOM at the time, and it was very clear what we were doing. Now we were holding our breath at the time that no parent would complain to the department, because we were concerned that the Dept.

would make an issue of it; it was definitely Dept. policy to do it, but we had decided it was simply not possible and we were going to challenge the Dept. and ask them to provide the facilities and the teachers and all of that. We knew of course if we did that they wouldn't insist. But it never happened, in fact the inspector fully respected the policy of the school and the principal and wisely kept his mouth shut. So we had no problem. Now when Bray was opened I think it was a bit different because they were drawing children from a wider catchment area, they also had better accommodation and more accommodation. And I think from very early on they did try to facilitate—their policy was the same as ours, their policy was to provide religious education, core curriculum, for all children within school hours. And then to facilitate the provision of denominational instruction for those who required it. Now we never said within school hours, it was the Dept.'s policy to provide denominational instruction, in other words faith formation, within school hours, but they didn't make an issue of it. So were able to manage not to do it for long-ish periods. I mean, on and off, if there was a complaint from a parent group and it went to the Dept. that was tricky because technically it was their policy to have us provide faith formation. But since they didn't provide us with any facilities to do so or any teachers to do so, and luckily in both Dalkey and Bray, none of the class teachers had agreed to teach faith formation classes. And we had encouraged them not to, that was not what they were being employed to teach. The religious education which they were being employed to teach, was the religious education core curriculum. And throughout the 80's I ran summer courses on the development and teaching of the religious education core curriculum, not just for the teachers in Dalkey, but for the teachers in Dalkey and Bray and North Dublin and, in fact, until Ranelagh. Have you seen the Ranelagh book, by the way? Have a look at the Ranelagh book because the letters that are in that... Ranelagh was 1987-88, it became a multi-denominational school, an Educate Together school, and the correspondence is actually reproduced in that book. You can see the Dept.'s letters saying they would require the school's policy to state that they would provide denominational instruction within school hours. The formal Dept. policy is clearly stated in the letters that are reproduced in the Ranelagh book, I'm sure there's a copy of that in the Educate Together office. Have a look at that and see the wording of that letter. That's the wording the Dept. continued to use. As far as I know, I was Secretary of Educate Together in 1987-88 and I was Chairperson from 1991 to 1996; it was still a voluntary organization, they didn't have an office, didn't have a full-time person, so until Paul was appointed in 1996, Educate Together was a voluntary organization, it had nobody paid to work there. In fact, I was the Secretary initially and then the Chairperson. My recollection is that during that period, the Dept. continued to use that wording, not just until 1987. I would say the Dept. used the same wording from 1987-88 when we started until certainly the early 90's. And I don't know when the Dept. changed its policy. Paul was very effective in getting all these things clarified once he was appointed and I'm sure there are papers in Educate Together on that. But if you were to ask me, I know for sure that not just Dalkey, Bray, and North Dublin, but the following schools which were Sligo, Limerick, Kilkenny, Cork... all those up until the early 90's, the Dept. policy didn't change. What happened was that we were more inclined to be, shall we say, flexible within schools and to interpret the Dept.'s policy more flexibly. And then from school to school it varied. When our pupils got access to free transport and they got access in say the Limerick children, Sligo children, Kilkenny children were coming quite long distances by the school bus.

Initially our pupils were not allowed to use the school bus for free. That happened when I was Chair, I'd say about 1989, the Minister for Education agreed that the children going to Educate Together schools would be allowed to use the school buses. From that point on, it was more difficult to insist that the Catholic instruction would take place outside school hours and a lot of the schools intended, then, to provide Catholic instruction within school hours—a certain amount of it anyway. Because it would be too difficult for the children that couldn't stay on after school for religious education, for the faith formation classes, because the buses would be gone. Those two issues were to some extent tied up. I'm not absolutely certain, and this is why we really have to get the papers back from Michael Johnston but I'm not sure he'd remember that detail, but I'm absolutely certain that the Dept., all along, had a policy of us providing religious instruction within school hours. The only thing was that they didn't articulate it maybe as clearly in the beginning as they meant to articulate it, because we were both using different language and interpreting it differently.

BN: Was the Dept. aware these schools were offering it out of school hours and reinterpreting the language?

AH: They were. Well, their inspectors were aware. Once we were opened...our attitude was, we would have signed anything to get a school open. Once we were opened we felt okay, they're not going to close us down now because there's going to be a real issue about the teachers, what were they going to do about the teachers? The Dept. never would've cared about children, but they certainly would've cared about having the teacher unions on their back. So if for example, there was a serious problem in relation to the provision of faith formation classes and we refused to do so, what was the worst thing the Dept. could do? Close us down. If they closed us down it would be a very serious problem; we knew they wouldn't do that, and they never did that. So I suppose technically the inspectorate knew but I suspect on file, if you were to look at the Dept.'s file today, the Dept. would argue that as far as they were concerned, the school, we were obeying their policy. I'm quite sure that would be their formal stance and I imagine there was never anything in writing in a Dept. file to indicate that we were not providing denominational instruction within school hours. And there were times we did it; we were not consistent either. It depended on what worked for us and what didn't work for us. When we didn't have space we couldn't do it. When we only had requests from a small group of Catholic children's parents for preparation for First Communion, we sometimes gave into it. But it was not, in general, our policy would have been not to do it because we were aware if you do it for one group, every group has a right. And then we did find later on that other groups did, quite correctly, ask to have the same facilities made available to them to do it.

BN: At this early phase of the Educate Together schools was it more of a pragmatic decision?

AH: It was pragmatic. The policy of Educate Together, from the very beginning of the Educate Together movement and of the Dalkey Project and the subsequent schools, their policy was to provide the religious education core curriculum for children, taught by the classroom teacher. And that's the yellow, cream-colored book you would have seen. It's not terribly different from the Educate Together curriculum, not as well thought through obviously. Probably also a little more comparative religion and less ethics, if you asked

me I'd say that'd be the difference. It was pragmatic, we didn't want to have a head-on collision. The Dept. has the power to not recognize us, remember, if we didn't agree to have this policy document, if we should have a policy that, as far as they were concerned, coincided with their policy. I suspect that before Ranelagh, there wording wasn't quite as rigid. It never occurred to them that we wouldn't have the denominational instruction within school hours, at the beginning that never occurred to them. When they realized that's what we were doing, and as I said the best letter is the letter reproduced there in the Ranelagh 21 story and you'll see exactly what the Dept. says there. They said they want the policy of the Ranelagh Multi-Denominational School to provide for denominational education within school hours for all those for whom it was required. Paul might know when the Dept. eased off on it. They certainly didn't ease off before the 90's. Galway, I think, was also after that policy and Galway started around 1994. So from 1978, the Dalkey School Project was in 1978 and discussions about that been going since about 1974, so the first twenty years, from 1974 to 1994, that was the Dept. policy. I don't know what the Dept. policy is now...I suspect it's still the same...

7. Interview with Deirdre O'Donoghue – July 27th, 2011

Respondent is discussing FFISH as it relates to department policy.

DO'D: The school had no choice but that. Now Rathfarnham Educate Together opened as well and insisted on not having faith formation within school hours, and the department accepted that. There was something if I remember rightly around the thought that we had a look at Sligo. Everyone of us when we opened to Educate Together and became patron, one has an inclination to look at the previous schools memorandum and articles of association. They're basically the legal framework for the patron of the company, there are two things: there are the board of management and the legal entity of a company. We would just look at the last school that opened and more or less copy and paste theirs and maybe make a few changes if need be. I know that we opened in 1989, I think the following year and we said in Rathfarnham's memorandum and articles that we would not have religious instructions in within school hours. The department accepted it so we never had religious instruction in school hours. I think we were probably the first school to do that in terms of not having it in our memorandum and articles of association. By that time other schools like North Dublin had moved to that position anyway, but they moved to it after quite acrimonious AGMs and a lot of grief within the school itself weather it should be moved in or out. We started ab initio from a position of no religious instruction within school hours. So we were quite fortunate, it was never an issue for us. It did become an issue in year two, when there were a group of parents who really wanted to move faith formation inside school hours. There were a couple of quite contentious meetings where people said things like, "What are you afraid of?" It was quite emotional. In the end it never happened. Faith formation was never put in school hours.

BN: In your role in the National Office have you had to deal with the movement of the faith formation classes at all?

DO'D: No, because from Rathfarnham onwards it was always outside school hours and any new school after that it was always outside school hours. Then in 2001 when we opened the first school under Educate Together patronage, all of our schools had religious instruction outside school hours. It has never been inside school hours within schools under Educate Together's patronage.

BN: When Bray was moving in 2001 they did their own thing?

DO'D: Yes Bray went their own way, you would hear anecdotally and sometimes you would get schools to ask you to come and talk to them about it. A couple of schools asked, if we have anyone who would talk about the pros and cons, because they wanted to have a meeting with the parents where they could be informed around both the advantages and the disadvantages.

BN: Emer mentioned in an e-mail that you might know about an issue where the schools move faith formation out but then somehow it manages to end up back in the school day.

DO'D: Yes, the places where that generally happens, it tends to be around logistics. It happens particularly in the country schools where a lot of the children are bussed in, and then bussed out again. So it is very hard to find a time there where they can actually fit it in because you have a situation where you can't have two busses so you can't have a situation where one bus comes along half an hour later. Or they might have difficulty getting a teacher to do it. In some schools what they have done is they would have it for the first 20 min of the day and it is not definite whether it is considered school time or not. Gorey school and Gaelscoil an Ghoirt Alainn did that for a while which is under the patronage of An Foras Patrúnachta. There was a grey area around the An Foras Patrúnachta schools that were multi-denominational as to whether the faith formation would be inside or outside school hours, and eventually about 10 years ago An Foras Patrúnachta decided to put faith formation outside of school hours. We are definitely counting it outside school hours; we are not having it inside school hours. Now it may have crept back in again but it does tend to be around the logistics of the actual practical policies of having it outside the school day.

BN: Did Educate Together have an official stance when it comes back to the school to base their logistical concerns?

DO'D: No, where it comes back into the school for schools under our patronage, it has to go back out again. We had a case with our dean recently where we got a complaint from a parent that the religious instruction was being done within the school day. We said no. We wrote to the board, asking if this is true, and if so you need to address it. It fell upon the lines of, look we have had this complaint, can you explain to us what the situation is? I think the situation there was that they had a teacher doing it – around the logistics of that. We had to say “No. Sorry we understand how difficult it is but you cannot do that.” Sometimes schools like Ardee that are small, would be worried about their numbers so they would be concerned that if they make it difficult for Catholic parents they will lose those children to other schools where it is part of their curriculum; where they do not have

to make the effort to do it. We have said to them, “That may be but no. It is an Educate Together school and you cannot have it within school hours.” There will be other things that might pop up as well around schools that are sharing. You have two sacraments, you have first communion, which is around about 7 or 8. Then you have confirmation, which is around about 12. They both always happen in primary school, by the time the children leave to go to second level they’re done and dusted. Holy communion is actually by far the easier because first communion can be done by anybody, any priest can administer it. So, you could get a priest to come and do it in the local church on a Sunday. It’s not as fixed. The problem with confirmation is it has to be the bishop; it can’t be the local priest. So the bishop will come to an area, he will do the area and he will have it all time-tabled out because he will have a huge diocese to do. So he will have this church with this school and this church with that many schools all the way down. So Irish schools tend to go in with other schools because they often would not have a population big enough to be able to have a day for themselves. You might find three to four different schools in the area having their confirmation on whatever day they are having it. Now the thing about that is then in order to do that the schools coordinate the singing and the readings and the general liturgical bits and pieces and the artwork and the offerings and all of that. So if you have an Educate Together school in among three Catholic schools, they’re all doing it during school hours. They can pop down to the church to put up their bits and pieces and practice their singing. The Educate Together School has difficulty with that. It can’t really do it. What tends to happen is that the parents will arrange for someone to take the children down to the church out side of the schoolday. In normal cases it would be the teacher of the class who take the children down. So again the parents in an Educate Together school are faced with more difficulties. So you do sometimes find a bit of slippage, where you might have half the class going and say you have your two 4th and two 5th classes. Half of one fifth class goes and the other half goes, so you think why don’t we have one person take them down to the church and someone else take the other half of the class and stay in there. You are still covered logistically for the amount of numbers. But strictly speaking that should not happen. We don’t hear about incidents unless somebody complains, saying my child didn’t have their full day in the class because they all went down to the church. Another thing would be one of our schools recently has a school choir; a lot of the children across all levels are included in the school choir. The school choir was asked to sing at the confirmation, which is a huge piece of kudos to them. There was a big question mark with the board as to weather the children could or wouldn’t or would be able to. Also whether the teachers would accompany them or not, the school got around that by saying to the parents, “look we have had this offer. Your child is in the choir, if you wish your child to attend this that is fine but it would be out of school time and they would not be accompanied by the teacher.” Unless the teacher wants to do it on their own time which would mean them taking the day off and getting a substitute. It tends to generate bad feelings because people feel that they are hard done by. “It is so easy for all the other schools, why is it so bloody hard for me?” “Why do you really make our life hell?” That can be quite difficult to ease back in there. I suppose it is the default value in all primary school’s in the country and all Catholic primary school’s in the country is that this is how it happens. So to stand outside and go, “No it doesn’t happen like that in our school,” it is hard for some people to get over that and to get around thinking about that, without

thinking what's the point? "Why are you doing this big hassle of a thing, why not just let it go?" It would be much easier.

PH: How have some of those issues been resolved in schools, like with the busses?

DO'D: They tend to be resolved through discussion with the parents. I think that is true of all issues that come up around conflicts between religious beliefs in the family and what is happening in the school. Whether it is instruction within school hours, swimming with persons of the opposite sex, music or dance for some religions. It does get narrowed down to talking to the parents. Sitting them down and saying look this is why we are doing this. We are not doing this out of the badness of our hearts or to make life awkward for you. There is actually an underpinning ethos behind this. This is where we are coming from on it. That would often resolve things; parents would say, "Alright I understand where you are coming from." Maybe we could arrange for one of the busses or do something else. The school will help out in those situations wherever it can. But mostly it gets resolved through discussions with the parents and trying to work out what can be done. The school itself being very clear on why it is doing what it is doing. Not just "Well you have to do this because head office says so." They have to really believe and understand why they are doing it. Sometimes that involves a lot of discussion with someone in the head office or national office to tease it out with the school before they can tease it out with the parents. Occasionally things that we do not hear about may very well solve it, I do not know.

BN: You are familiar with Dalkey, Bray, and North Dublin right?

DO'D: Yes I would be

BN: Would you be able to comment at all, because we are looking at them and the idea is that this could potentially be important in the future when they are trying to transition Catholic schools. Do you think that they would face distinctly different challenges than a Catholic school would face in moving faith formation outside of school hours?

DO'D: I don't think that they would, because you're dealing with trying to get people to think about things in a different way. One of the differences I suppose would be that Catholic parents would have sent their children to a Catholic school with a certain expectation. If you send your children to an Educate Together school the school can at least argue that you ought to have thought about this kind of thing when you sent your child to that school. For Catholic parents who are very comfortable with having their instruction within school hours, I think you as a parent would find it pretty hard if someone said, "Well we are all changing now it is going to be outside school hours, you are going to have to pay for it, and find the teachers." I think that kind of thing would have to be dealt with very carefully. Having said that I think the schools dealt with it very differently. They had different problems. I do think all the problems we ever had in any of our schools boiled down to communication and expectations. It is trying to be clear about what the expectations are. So if you have a group of Catholic parents in a Catholic school that is transforming I think you are back down again to communication. Talking to them,

asking them what their expectations are, and explaining what our expectations are as an organization. How the expectations or how our schools run and how that happens. Then sitting down and saying to them, “Look; this is where you are at the moment. This is where we want to be, how do you see us traveling from here to there?” They have to buy into that journey, by listening to the fact that there is going to be a journey and then by how it is going to be made. I think if they are part of that then you can have that, there has to be a reasonable transition phase and there has to be a respect for the fact that when they sent their children to this school this was what it was. I think for me, if halfway through my children’s life in school somebody turned around and said this is going to be a Catholic school now, and it has been decided. What would be my best possible outcome, and what would be my 80% outcome, 70% outcome. What is the threshold below which I can’t go or I’ll take my child out? Is there a way of meeting that honestly and I think that has to be matched by an honesty from Educate Together. In, “Well I am sorry no we can’t match that we can not give you this much. What we can give you is this, is that enough?” For them to come back and go “No, well that wouldn’t be enough but if there was another 5% I could manage that.” A disastrous way would be to go in and say this is the way it is going to be. If Educate Together is about anything we are about bottom up, we should be about bottom up that is what our whole ethos is based on. Then it has to be around engaging through constant dialogue. Getting people to understand. In order to get people to buy into something you have to get them to understand it. In order to get them to understand it you have to get them to be aware of it. That is a huge pyramid. The first stage is getting them to understand what’s happening, why is it happening and what you are trying to do. While at the same time saying to them, “Look, it is not that what you have is wrong we just do it differently.” That is tough to get across to people that you do it differently but their way isn’t wrong. Educate Together should be able to do that. We are about respect for diversity. We shouldn’t have a problem telling people that we do it differently. Not right, not wrong, just differently. Then to explain why we are all in it, to move forward.

BN: One of the differences we were looking at between North Dublin and Dalkey as apposed to Bray, is that Bray moved it out gradually. Only the incoming students had faith formation outside of school. Is that something that’s been taken into consideration?

DO’D: I think that would definitely be one way of doing it. I think it would satisfy both sets of parents coming in, as long as it would be made really clear. I think you would have a rough 8 years ahead of you. In terms of the way the teachers have to deal with two streaming it. On the other hand Gaelscoil an Ghoirt Alainn did something similar. There was a guarantee there that they would keep it for the existing students for a three-year period. Then they would phase it out gradually over the three years. So I think they only applied it to the top classes. Now it may be that Gaelscoil an Ghoirt Alainn wasn’t up to full capacity at that stage. I think it depends on what the school wants. Sometimes phasing causes more difficulties than just doing it on a deadline and saying, “Look we are changing it here and that is that.” I think it very much depends on the school community and the type of people that are in the school, in terms of whether they are happy to negotiate or if they do not want anything to do with it at all. We have to remember that parents sent their children to a Catholic school with the expectation that faith formation

would be within school hours. You have to be sensitive to that. I think that's possible yes. I think that might be a less contentious way to do it. Having said that it means taking 8 years to change the ethos of schools.

BN: Do you think in the future when Educate Together is looking at Catholic schools would there be a process of surveying parents to see if one school is more receptive to the concept than another school? Is there a level of non-receptiveness that they would deem as not worth trying?

DO'D: I don't know the answer to that. The process that the education partnership, the processes have not been set up yet, so I don't know how the decisions are going to be made. As to which schools are going to be the ones picked for transformation, or who is going to do the picking. I would certainly think that you would have to have a reasonable buy-in by a reasonable amount of parents and it would have to be more than just the majority. I would be very loath to take over a school where the statistics were 51 to 49. I just don't think that is enough. I am sure there is more information out there about transformations – in any situation what the tipping point is percentage wise for people who are willing to go along with the move. I am very certain that it is a lot higher than 51 to 49. I think you would have to have a fairly strong buy-in from parents. Making sure the parents understand exactly what this is going to mean. It would have to mean Educate Together not fudging it, not pretending it is going to be easy, and not saying, "I am sure we will be able to accommodate you in some way," then having a lot of very disgruntled parent's whose expectations did not match what we were talking about. Looking at the misunderstandings that arise between people generally over what one person said and what one person heard, I think there would have to be a lot of concentrated work done. Asking parents what is your understanding of what I am telling you. Tic tacking backwards and forwards making sure it is very clear, on what is going to happen and what the impact is going to be. Whether it is going to involve more money, or buses, or picking up children. I think that has to be faced squarely I don't think you can give fuzzy answers like, "That can be ironed out, no problem." You have to say, "Yes that might be a problem. How can we address that?"

BN: One other comparative we were looking at between the schools is particularly with North Dublin it seemed like within the negotiations the logistic dialogue framed it in very ideological terms. A lot of talk about the inclusion of children and how this was an obligation to the ethos. Whereas Dalkey framed it not at all in ideological terms it was purely pragmatic, the teacher can't come during these hours so we are moving it out. Do you think moving forward if there is any advantage going one way or another or do you have to incorporate both?

DO'D: I would try and incorporate both. I think the problem with the ideological bases, in my experience at NDNISP was that parents formed into two very distinct camps very quickly. There was a lot of acrimony. Now when I say that, Paul's children were in the school and mine weren't. As it happened I was a member of North Dublin of the patron body. We had our children's names down for a few different schools and we had signed up to be members of the patron body to find out what the schools were doing and give

support for that. NDNISP was one of them. Myself and a friend of mine who also had her children's names down went along and, we never had a hope in hell in getting our children into NDNISP because we were so far down the list, under hundreds of others. It was on the north side and we were on the south side, so it was highly unlikely that our children were going to go there. But we went along to be supportive for that and as it happened we counted the votes on the night because we were seen as independent, because we had no axe to grind one way or another. Not in relation to the religious thing but in relation to sibling policy. It would be interesting to talk, I mean I don't know enough about it but I got the impression rightly or wrongly that in NDNISP it was more a contentious issue then it was in Dalkey. It divided camps. You cant divide a camp by saying the teacher can't do it, and we are moving it outside for pragmatic reasons. It is hard to argue against that. Now you will find people say, "Well my sister will be willing to do it no problem within school hours." But the ideological thing is you have to be careful not to say to people "I'm right and you're wrong. There is a right way to do it and there is a wrong way to do it and mine is right." I just think that that polarizes people very quickly. I think that the way to do it is to say, I think we are in a stronger position than NDNISP would have been, and it's very much established now that it's outside school hours. So everyone would be very clear that signing up for an Educate Together school faith formation is outside of school hours. Back to saying this is where we need to be as an Educate Together school, this is part of our ethos, this is where we are, how are we all going to make that journey from here to there? It will be different in different schools depending what they require. I think the pragmatic approach can work very well, but in a Catholic school the danger with a pragmatic approach or basing it on a logistical issue is that people can come up with a solution to the problem. So you either keep inventing problems or come clean and go "No we really need to move it outside." I think that is probably where we need to say it has to move outside after a period of time, and to decide what that period of time is.

PH: Do you think that if the transition happened within a Catholic school that there would be issues with the teachers that are in the school having to be trained to teach the Learn Together curriculum during the school hours as opposed to what happens in the Catholic education during the 30 minutes a day?

DO'D: I think that there will be a perception that there will be a problem. I think that the teacher will need training, because it is a different way of doing things. It is not just teaching children particular beliefs, it is teaching them to think around four particular strands. Yes there would be an issue with that. Having said that I would imagine that most people when they look at the Learn Together curriculum would see that there is not a lot of controversy in it, there is nothing dogmatic in it. It is very much exploratory and it's very much coming from a way of thinking. I think that there would be some teachers, yes, that would have a problem, but others would take to it and would love the freedom and the openness to create new ways of teaching. I think some of them might be nervous and worried about whether they will be able to teach it. But I reckon a period of training would get over all of that. Your not asking them to teach anything as truth and I think there would be more teachers who would be happy to teach it than teachers who would be reluctant to. I would hope

Appendix B – Educate Together Position Paper

Meeting Parental Demand - Facilitating Diversity of School Type in Areas of Stable Demographics

Position Paper - October 2010

Context

Demand for Educate Together schools continues to grow nationally - both in developing areas and in areas where there is little or no population growth. In some urban areas the demand is at a level 10 times the number of places on offer. In many areas, the only option for parents is still to send their children to a denominational school.

The possibility of the Catholic Church divesting itself of certain primary schools was raised by the church with the Minister for Education and Skills and discussed at a meeting in November 2009 with senior representatives of the church¹. At the request of those senior representatives, the Department undertook to identify possible areas where the demographics and existing school configuration was such that there might be potential for the Catholic Church to consider divesting patronage.

The Department of Education and Skills issued a report in August 2010 identifying 43 town areas and 4 city areas where diversity was desirable but where new schools were unlikely to be needed. It was not intended that this be an exhaustive list. Indeed Educate Together is aware of a number of stable demographic areas where there is considerable demand for Educate Together schools which are not included in this list. This report invites the Catholic church to “trial the modalities by which the number of catholic schools could be reduced and thus releasing some schools for other patrons”.

Educate Together has experience of meeting parental demand in areas similar to those included in the report; via transfer of buildings, change of patronage and other creative solutions. It wishes to engage constructively and pro-actively in a process to identify parental demand and develop solutions which meet that demand, while respecting the rights of all parents to choose the type of education they want for their children.

Experience

Three case studies have been chosen to illustrate different processes by which parental demand for diversity of school type in an area has been met through changes in existing schools and the provision of an Educate Together school.

North Bay Educate Together National School - amalgamation of existing schools with Catholic patronage

North Bay Educate Together NS was established in 1990, the 8th Educate Together school to open. Parental demand for an Educate Together school in the area emerged in the late 1980s. When the Boys' and Girls' Catholic National schools in Kilbarrack were amalgamated, this enabled site of one of the schools to become available for other school types. This site is now occupied by an Educate Together school (North Bay) and a Gaelscoil (Míde).

Ranelagh Multi-denominational School - transformation of existing school with Church of Ireland patronage

Ranelagh Multi-Denominational School was the 10th Educate Together National School to be established. When a decision was announced that St. Columba's Church of Ireland National School was due to close in 1991, parents of children attending the school decided to work together to create a new multi-denominational primary school on the site.

In May 1988, in view of the planned closure, a public meeting was held at which the Ranelagh Multi-Denominational School Association, (R.M.D.S.A.), was formed, with the aim of becoming patron of the proposed school. The Church of Ireland was supportive and agreed to transfer its title to the site and its buildings to the R.M.D.S.A. The Association negotiated with the Department of Education for recognition of the new school.

In September 1988, the former two teacher school was expanded to three teachers. Children were enrolled in the school on the understanding that, rather than being closed, it would be transformed into a Multi-Denominational school. After prolonged negotiations, the Department of Education in December 1989 granted provisional recognition to the school backdated to September 1988. The school quickly reached its full capacity and is now heavily oversubscribed, with demand regularly reaching at least ten times the number of places available.

NB. Ardee Educate Together National School is another example of a Church of Ireland school successfully transforming to a vibrant Educate Together national school.

Rathfarnham Educate Together National School - transfer of educational facilities from a religious order

Rathfarnham Educate Together National School was established in 1990 as South City School Project. In 1993, following extensive consultation and negotiation by the school's management, it moved into its current premises, which had previously been the property of the Loreto Order. The Order donated this premises to the Department of Education and Skills for the purposes of accommodating the Educate Together school.

Learning

Educate Together's experience shows that where parents wish for the provision of a new school type in an area, creative solutions can be found which meet with the agreement of existing patrons and the Department of Education and Skills.

Through this experience, a number of key issues have been identified which must be considered in any change, transfer, transformation or partnership process:

- Any change process should be fully supported by parental demand
- Parents, children and teachers must be fully involved in any proposals and developments
- Change of ethos of an existing school can be a lengthy and difficult process. Where this is proposed, significant support must be made available to the whole school community to guide this process. Transitional arrangements may be necessary and the rights of members of the existing school community must be protected within these arrangements.
- If an existing school is to change ethos, teachers' rights must be considered carefully. Where appropriate, teachers should be offered redeployment, continuing professional development and/or other support as appropriate
- Patrons should enter any change, move or transfer process in a spirit of partnership and cooperation, with a view to engaging constructively and seeking creative solutions which best meet the needs of communities. If there is a proposal that an existing school may change ethos, the rights and wishes of the school community should be central to all discussions.

Position

Educate Together is willing to consider requests from any school community to become members of its organisation or to transfer to its patronage. It is also willing to consider proposals from other patrons and/or the Department of Education and Skills which will help to meet the growing demand for Educate Together schools in areas where new schools are not planned. Any such requests or proposals would be examined with full regard to the rights and wishes of parents, children, teachers and existing patrons. Educate Together is committed to seeking creative and cost-effective solutions to meet parental demand.

The experience of Educate Together in finding solutions, whether these solutions involve transfer of patronage or other mechanisms, is available to other patrons, the Department of Education and Skills and the Commission on School Accommodation for policy-making and development purposes. In addition to its ongoing membership of the CSA and its contributions to that body's review process, Educate Together is happy to make itself available to engage with any other interested bodies on this matter.