

WHERE TO NEXT?

The Second-Level Destinations of Educate Together Pupils

Executive Summary

Aim

This study examined the post-primary destinations of the 2008 cohort of Educate Together 6th Class pupils. The research investigated whether there was a pattern of Educate Together pupils going on to particular types of post-primary school.

Methodology

37 out of 44 Educate Together primary schools had 6th Class pupils leaving in June 2008. The schools in the study varied considerably in their location, age (years established) and pupil composition.

The research tool selected was a questionnaire, which asked for data on each graduating pupil, including the name of their chosen post-primary school. Open-ended questions were also included, designed to enquire whether there were any perceived local patterns or trends in post-primary school choice.

All schools returned the questionnaire, and a full census of all 6th Class pupils leaving the Educate Together network was therefore achieved. The unusual 100% response rate – at a busy time in the school year - reflects the high level of interest in the post-primary destinations of Educate Together pupils within the network of primary schools.

Findings

- In June 2008, a total of 642 6th Class pupils left 37 Educate Together primary schools to attend 162 post-primary destinations.
- Educate Together pupils went on to attend all available school types.
- The study shows evidence of a slightly higher frequency of co-educational destination schools than the national average (66% compared to 61% nationally), with pupils from some schools travelling significant distances to attend a co-educational post-primary school. This is likely to reflect a preference for co-educational schools among Educate Together parents, as suggested by previous research.¹
- While data suggest a higher proportion of Educate Together pupils go on to attend comprehensive schools nationally (18% compared to 2% of the general population) in fact this largely reflects the popularity of two particular comprehensive schools which have feeder school links with a number of long-established Educate Together schools in Dublin.
- 27% of pupils transferred to Church of Ireland schools compared to only 4% nationally. Again this can be linked to the popularity of the two comprehensive schools mentioned (The Church of Ireland manages 3 of the 4 comprehensive school destinations in the study).
- While data suggest a higher proportion of Educate Together pupils go on to attend fee-paying schools nationally (18% compared to 8% of the general population), this is affected by the location of many long-established Educate Together schools in South Dublin, where fee-paying schools are popular. When the 19 schools outside Dublin only are considered, the proportion is in keeping with the national average (9%).
- There were no significant patterns identified nationally in the destinations of pupils of different nationalities or home languages, or of pupils with Special Education Needs.

¹ Seery et al, 2007

- In many Educate Together schools, 6th Class pupils ‘scattered’ to a large number of post-primary schools. A class of 26 6th Class pupils from one school outside Dublin, for example, went on to a total of 13 post-primary schools.
- In some local areas, there would appear to be limited post-primary school places available for Educate Together pupils. Of the 60 pupils who transferred from 6th Class Educate Together primary schools in Lucan, only 16 went on to post-primary schools in the Lucan area.
- Difficulties were reported in gaining access to some Catholic post-primary schools and some VEC community colleges. This is likely to result from feeder school lists which give preference to either denominational or longer-established primary schools, or because catchment areas are based on parish boundaries.
- In two rapidly developing areas of Dublin, a high proportion of Educate Together pupils went on to the new VEC community college established in the area, but schools reported them as being their only option.
- Disappointment was expressed by some schools at the lack of an Educate Together second-level option in the area.

Recommendations

- While this study provides useful information about the post-primary destinations of Educate Together pupils, further research would be necessary to gain an understanding of the reasons for the trends identified. In particular, research into the perspectives and experiences of parents and pupils in selecting post-primary schools would be of interest.
- The number of 6th Class pupils leaving Educate Together schools each year is increasing rapidly as more Educate Together schools open (a further 14 since 2008) and newer schools reach full capacity. It would be useful to re-examine the post-primary destinations of Educate Together pupils in this context.

- The difficulties reported here on the part of Educate Together graduates in accessing certain second-level schools suggest the need for co-ordinated admissions procedures which take the rights of all stakeholders into account.
- In the context of an increasing demand for additional second-level school provision in the coming years, there is a need for a transparent, democratic process by which the most appropriate school type for an area can be agreed on. The current de facto policy of opening only VEC community colleges does not consider the rights of parents to choose the type of education they want for their children, or the benefits of diversity of school type to the system as a whole.