

EDUCATE TOGETHER

the right patron for your child's secondary school





Educate
Together

Paul Rowe
CEO

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Thank you and I hope you will not penalise me too harshly if I start by acknowledging the work being done by the Department of Education and Skills in this application. This is the first time that parental preference has been surveyed in this way. We believe that this should become the norm and we are enthusiastic to work with the department to ensure that this process is fair, free from any bias or preference, transparent and effective.

Educate Together is an Irish educational charity, it has been working establishing a network of schools over the past 32 years. **Today it has 58 schools educating around 13,000 children in 18 counties. Over the past 10 years we have opened 40 schools and have a national team of 20 professionals supporting this work.** Our schools have shown themselves to be popular and are growing rapidly. In Gorey, we opened in 2005 with 24 children the school now has 280 and is rapidly growing to its full 16 classroom capacity.

We run schools that are very popular, they win the trust and support of parents who recognise the depth to which we are committed to ensuring real equality of opportunity for children and that their full range of abilities are encouraged.

You may say that it is easy for me - or anyone else - to make such claims. However I would ask you to look for the evidence yourselves and the actual track record. In the 11 Whole School Evaluations of Educate Together schools that have been published by the Inspectorate of the Department, you will see 98 references to "Good", 98 references to "Very Good", six references to "Excellent", one reference to "Praiseworthy" and 28 references to "Commendable". In the area of Science, entries from Educate Together schools make up 10% of the primary entries to the Young Scientist Exhibition, although we make up only 2% of primary schools (In other words, if you send your child to an Educate Together school it is five times more likely to be involved in the Young Scientist exhibition than an other school type). Educate Together schools are consistently over represented in school science awards and the only Irish winner of the NASA scientist for a day award was an Educate Together student.

In relation to our second-level programme we have a dedicated development team, which includes full-time staff, an advisory group of senior educationalists and key teaching and educationalist volunteers.



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As a patron body, **Educate Together has no other agenda but to deliver the highest possible quality of education to children in schools** and to make Educate Together schools a choice for parents anywhere in Ireland. **Our structures do not allow for party political influence or interference** in our business. We are independent of the State, our national staff are not state employees and - as a patron of schools - **we are not subject to the vagaries of government policy, cut backs, embargoes or pay-cuts.**

Educate Together is independent, we consistently bring added value to State funding of education. In this regard, I would like to state clearly that there has not been a single cent of taxpayers money spent on the preparation or publication of the case that our start up group in Gorey is making at this time.

Educate Together is legally obliged to ensure that all children, irrespective of their social, cultural or religious backgrounds are given equality of access and esteem in its schools. In the matter of religion, the critical aspect of how Educate Together runs schools is that we ensure that no child is placed in a situation in which they are pressurised or compelled to attend religious content against their conscience of preference.

It is similarly obliged to ensure that its schools are co-educational and offer a comprehensive programme to counter gender stereotyping and ensure that children are encouraged to develop all their talents, Learner centred in their approach to education and are democratically run.

This last point is really important. We have learned over and over again that the more a school welcomes and encourages parental, student, staff and community involvement, the better are the educational outputs for all its children.

The Educate Together model brings unparalleled added value to the business of running schools. Because of our community base, our openness to voluntary and parental participation, our schools bring huge additional resources to the process of educating children. Our schools routinely provide a far wider range of subjects and activities than those provided by the State curriculum.

Lastly, at a time of unprecedented crisis in our public finances, and speaking directly to the public representatives present, Educate Together brings unparalleled value to the State in education. Educate Together is independent. Its national staff are not state employees. For every €1 we receive in grants to our national body, we deliver about 10 times that value in the services we deliver. We currently receive €140,000 per annum from the State as a grant for our role as a representative body for school's board of management yet our projected turn-over for the current year is around €1.4million.

Finally, I believe that Educate Together's application to open its first second-level school in Gorey is a fantastic opportunity for Gorey. Gorey is a growing, dynamic part of the country. It already has a great reputation for the quality of its second-level school. Educate Together's application will ensure that Gorey is widely seen in the forefront of educational progress in Ireland and will be a development that will benefit the area for many years to come.



Educate
Together

Emer Nowlan

Head of Education and Network Development

We are here today to consider who will provide the best school for the Gorey community. So we need to ask the question “what makes a good school?”. In this we need to look beyond the glossy prospectuses and ask what really makes for a good, thriving school. Educate Together runs 58 schools. As Paul outlined, we are the fastest-growing sector in Irish education - not because we have a nice logo, or because we have any special political support, but because we run excellent schools, and parents know our track record. So ask yourself - what makes a good secondary school?

WHAT MAKES A GOOD SECONDARY SCHOOL?

- absolute commitment to the educational needs of children
- broad, balanced and relevant curriculum
- local management - strong leadership
- excellent teachers who are committed to innovation
- culture of parental involvement
- motivated students who are respected and involved

We are saying that these qualities will make Gorey Educate Together secondary school not just a good school but a vibrant, community-based, innovative school - one which provides a real choice for parents in the area.

Fundamental to a good school is an absolute commitment to the educational needs of children. A good school provides a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum with the full range of subjects and qualifications on offer. It is a school with strong leadership and a local management structure. It is a school with dedicated, highly skilled teachers who collaborate and have a shared vision. It is a school where parental involvement is nurtured, and one where students are fully respected, motivated and involved.

LEARNER-CENTRED ETHOS

- whole school community committed to excellence in learning, equality and active citizenship
- clear values, enshrined in Charter.
- schools must be: Multi-denominational, co-educational, learner-centred, democratically run
- comprehensive Ethical Curriculum

Educational research shows clearly that successful schools are those with a clearly defined and well-implemented ethos, or characteristic spirit. Educate Together's ethos is based on values of equality and human rights and is defined in the Educate Together charter. The principles of the charter are outlined here but it is the work done by school communities in implementing these principles that makes our schools so successful.

Under this charter, Educate Together schools are committed to a fully learner-centred approach. This means that all decisions in the school are taken in the interests of students and their learning needs. Our schools show - and our Blueprint for second-level schools describes in detail - what a truly learner-centred approach really looks like - with students being taught to take responsibility for their own learning and being facilitated to excel in different areas according to their strengths.

Our values are actively taught through our Ethical Education curriculum, as well as being modelled in the everyday practices in the school community. The ethical curriculum includes moral and spiritual development, equality and justice, religious education, global development and active stewardship of the environment.

You may have heard, for example, that our school in Ardee, Co Louth, won the national tidy towns school award last week - this would be an example of the values of our ethos being put into practice in a school.

LOCAL LEADERSHIP

- independent, well-supported Board of Management
- outstanding Principal
- clear, shared aims and objectives
- positive and collaborative learning environment

A key difference between the secondary school that we are proposing and a Vocational school or community college is the management structure. While VEC boards of management are sub-committees of a political structure, boards of secondary schools, like community schools, are independent and make important decisions locally.

Our Board of Management will have parent, teacher and student representatives and will draw on national and local educational expertise. It will be accountable to the local Gorey community, as well as to the Department of Education and Skills and its patron, Educate Together.

This board will be extremely well supported - it will have the undivided support of our advisory panel of experts in secondary education, whose members are outlined in our documentation, as well as that of our national office staff which includes: a dedicated second-level education officer; myself as Head of Education and my background is also in second-level education, as well as our team of four Leadership and Governance support staff. We also have a regional development officer responsible for this geographical area who will work with the school on everyday matters such as buildings and accommodation.

Educate Together has opened 17 successful schools in the last 3 years. We understand fully the importance of the Principal in establishing and leading a good school, and building that school from the ground up. The first task for the Board of Management will be appoint an outstanding Principal. A rigorous and transparent recruitment process will be started as soon as the school is sanctioned, with a selection committee working hard to ensure that the very best Principal for this school is found - and then well-supported in this very important work. This Principal will share the values of the school and will lead the community in pursuing the school's educational aims.

That Principal will then work with Board to select the very best staff for the school and to develop a positive and collaborative working environment where teachers are supported to deliver the very best education for students in the school.

EXCELLENT TEACHERS

- already attracting the best teachers
- rigorous, independent selection process will ensure the right expertise for this school
- management structure and timetabling will promote positive relationships between teachers and students

Ever since Educate Together has been publishing details of its plans for second-level education we have been attracting interest from teachers all around the country - these are teachers who are committed to a modern way of working, teachers who want to work in an environment where innovation is the norm, and where mutual respect between students and teachers is a reality.

This is not surprising, though, as we have a track record of attracting excellent teachers at primary level. Our dedicated teaching staff have a lot to be proud of: they have pioneered a range of innovations at primary level, including everything from Student Councils to Science and Technology. Educate Together schools are consistently over-represented at the Young Scientist exhibition and in the Discover Science awards. Many of our teachers and Principals are leaders in their own right; including Simon Lewis who some of you may know from his time in Gorey ETNS. Simon is well-known nationally as an expert in ICT in education, and has won international awards for his educational blogs.

Unlike in VEC schools, our teachers will be employed by the school, and not drawn from a central pool, meaning that we can focus entirely on recruiting the right teachers with the right skills for this school. As an example, our Blueprint details how ICT will be a core feature of teaching, learning, assessment and communication in the school. We know from experience that for this to work in practice, all teachers must be confident and innovative in their use of technology - our recruitment process will take this into account.

As this team of excellent teachers grows with the school, our creative approach to timetabling and team teaching will mean that they are supported to develop strong and caring relationships with their students.

CULTURE OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

- success of Gorey Educate Together National School
- parents and teachers working in partnership
- natural progression towards students taking more responsibility

We know that parents in Gorey have high educational expectations. Gorey ETNS was opened 5 years ago with 24 pupils, as a result of a parental campaign. It now has over 270 pupils on the thriving campus that it shares with a Gaelscoil, and which it will share with the new secondary school.

In all of the factors that contribute to the success of our schools, parental involvement is probably the crucial one. Our network keeps growing because more and more parents want to choose our educational approach.

Research shows very clearly that parental commitment is at the heart of educational success. We are experts at capturing that parental commitment and channelling it into quality educational provision. There is a delicate balance between the professional role of the teacher and you as parents and primary educator of your children. We know how to get the most out of that balance - and we also know how to stimulate student involvement in the process.

Our second-level approach is designed to manage the sensitive progression through adolescence, ensuring that students take increasing responsibility for their own learning, and supporting parents to manage that change.

ENGAGED STUDENTS

- responsibility, active citizenship, confidence, respect
- relevant and applied approach to curriculum
- agreed code of behaviour, dress code

If you visit our primary school in Gorey - and I hope that if you haven't you will - you will be struck by the confidence, respect and communications skills displayed by our pupils there. Our ethos demands a high level of student involvement, not only in learning, but also in active citizenship and in decision-making in the school. Through this participation our students learn the necessary skills to take an active role in society and in their future places of work and study. Our curriculum innovations will make learning relevant for young people. Approaching the curriculum through themes and topics, rather than enforcing artificial subject boundaries, has been shown to make learning more relevant, enjoyable and motivating for secondary school students. We will reverse the disengagement which the research shows happens around second or third year typically in our schools at present - instead students' natural curiosity will be stimulated and nurtured through real life projects and actual research.

Our approach to policy making involves all stakeholders - students, parents and teachers. Our schools have agreed codes of behaviour and dress codes. These are based on the rights of everyone to learn in a safe and secure environment, and are built from the ground up. This results in agreed codes which the whole school community buys into - and that every member of the community feels a responsibility to uphold. As well as eliminating time consuming conflict over imposed and sometimes arbitrary uniform rules, this also has the effect of promoting important communication and negotiating skills, as well as an understanding of the relationship between rights, responsibilities and democracy.

CURRICULUM INNOVATION

- all commentators agree that innovation is necessary (NCCA, Universities, multinationals, etc.)
- Educate Together Blueprint shows how - supported by leading educationalists, IBEC, local support
- integrated curriculum in Junior Cycle, individual learning profiles, ICT, key skills
- dynamic and innovative school promoting life skills as well as academic achievement and qualifications

We are entering a period of change in education in Ireland. Almost daily now we hear in the media that our second-level system needs reform, that we need to change the way we are doing things if our children - and our country - are to be able to compete for jobs in the global market. Microsoft, Dell, all our big employers, and third level institutions are complaining that our students arrive in university - and in the workplace - without the problem-solving, creative and critical thinking skills that are necessary in 2010. We want our young people to be able to work in teams, to be able to communicate well in the global community, and to be well-rounded, ethical and active citizens.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has announced reforms to the Junior Cycle which are long overdue. Our Blueprint paves the way for these reforms and our second-level schools will be perfectly positioned to take advantage of the changes to curriculum and State examinations that are most definitely coming down the line.

Our plans provide for an integrated curriculum in Junior Cycle, personalised and broad assessment, and a focus on key skills - communications skills, problem-solving, critical thinking, ICT - these will all be crucial to the new way of doing things as our schools adapt to the needs of modern Ireland. Our approach to Junior Cycle, which is outlined in detail in our Blueprint, will ensure that your children will not only learn all the necessary curriculum content that they need to progress to senior cycle, but that they will also develop really important skills which will ensure that they excel in senior cycle and beyond, gaining the best possible qualifications as well as lifelong learning skills.

THE BEST SCHOOL FOR THE GOREY COMMUNITY

- Which patron has a proven track record in establishing successful schools that thrive?
- Which patron is entirely focussed on providing the best learner-centred education for its students?
- Which patron has the support of leading second-level educationalists at national and local level?
- Which patron can provide the best secondary school for your children in 2011 and beyond?

So I want to leave you a few questions that we feel you should ask yourselves in deciding which school this community should choose. We want you to ask yourselves:

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- Which patron is entirely focussed on providing the best learner-centred education for its students?
- Which patron has the support of leading second-level educationalists at national and local level?
- Which patron can provide the best secondary school for your children in 2011 and beyond?



Educate Together

We believe that parents in Gorey should have the opportunity to choose a high quality, community-based, innovative school - one which complements the great work which is going in the existing community school, and one which keeps Gorey firmly on the map in terms of providing the very best schools in the country.

Thank you for your attention. We would be delighted to answer any questions you have.

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