



Representing Vocational
Education Committees

Introduction

Background

In 21st Century Ireland, there is urgent need to ensure that all children have their education and human development needs met to the maximum possible extent - irrespective of their values, beliefs, language or traditions. This is the primary challenge facing Irish education today.

While, from 1831, it was intended that national schools would accommodate children from all religions, with religious instruction being provided in accordance with the religious denomination of the child, Irish primary schools are essentially denominational in character.

In this respect, it needs to be acknowledged that Ireland is unique when it comes to the operation of its primary schools in that all bar a handful of schools are privately owned and managed¹.

IVEA believes that the intention of those who established our national school system should now be realised. The time has come to change the way primary education is managed in order to cherish all our children equally and to enhance community and national cohesion. In this regard, the Catholic Church is open to exploring how it might divest itself of the patronage of some primary schools in order to cater more appropriately for diversity. There is agreement on the nature of the problem; we now need to work together to find the 'best-fit' solution.

VECs, with some 40 years experience of working with church partners in the management of community schools and designated community colleges are ideally placed to contribute towards a solution and, while a different kind of partnership will be required in the provision of fully inclusive schools in the primary sector, the smooth working partnerships, between church and State, that have developed over the years, at second level, provide a basis for moving matters forward in the primary sphere.

The pluralism and multi-denominationalism of a school is not compromised by the inclusion of a programme of optional religious education and instruction as part of the school programme and curriculum. Indeed, the requirement that all aspects of religious education take place outside of the school day (as espoused by one patron body in

¹ 95% of schools owned and managed by denominational interests and virtually all schools, with the exception of CNS and model schools, privately managed. This is in sharp contrast to what prevails in countries that we have close relations with where the State takes responsibility for the management of a significant proportion of schools – UK (75%), Italy (90%), Finland (98%) and Cyprus (94%). Interestingly, some of these countries have strong, and in some cases divided, religious traditions.

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particular) is overly restrictive. It also raises a very fundamental question as to why ‘religious’ parents would be targeted as the one group that cannot have their children educated in the way that they wish². The requirement to remove religious instruction from the school day is not a neutral requirement; rather is it one which requires religious parents to have their human rights moderated in a way that is not necessary in order to vindicate the rights of others.

Certainly, the inclusion of religious education in the school curriculum poses challenges but these are already being met in Community National Schools.

Catering to diversity in our schools is about much more than the religious and cultural dimension; real inclusion must cater to all forms of diversity – socioeconomic, learning, aptitudinal, amenability and so on.

The debate on school patronage has focussed exclusively on religious education and religious instruction and the extent, if any, to which these should be included in the school day. IVEA contends that the issues of quality of service provision, good governance and accountability also need to be taken account of at this juncture.

Patron Accountability

IVEA recommends that the Forum address the accountability requirement set out in the long title of the Education Act 1998. In this regard, we have the paradoxical situation where primary education, though almost entirely state funded, has, from the 1830s onwards, held the patron at the pinnacle of managerial authority.³

IVEA contends that this approach has not served the community well in every instance and that the Forum should consider a mandatory minimum set of criteria for recognition and continuation as a school patron; furthermore, that the state should, through robust oversight, ensure the compliance and accountability of patrons with their statutory and common law duties and responsibilities.

Section 8.1 of the Education Act 1998 granted automatic recognition of previously existing patrons of national schools. Since the commencement of that section, other school patronage bodies have come into existence principally by means of a group of people coming together and incorporating themselves under the companies acts as a company limited by guarantee without share capital and in circumstances where the liability of members of the company (which in some instances includes the board of management of national schools) is limited to €1 or IR£1 as the case may be⁴.

In the context of the ongoing legacy of the O’Keeffe V Hickey case⁵ and the plethora of reports that have shown the very negative effects of the “light touch” regulation of bodies

² See Oran Doyle LL.B, LL.M (Harv), Ph.D., FTCD, in *Egalitarianism, Religious Preference and the Integrated Curriculum* at http://www.ihrc.ie/download/pdf/oran_doyle_integrated_curriculum_paper.pdf

³ Glendenning, D. *Education and the Law* (1999 Dublin) P. 16

⁴ As with all other companies incorporated in a similar fashion the winding up of these companies could, in certain circumstances, be an issue entirely for the discretion and the decision of the members.

⁵ *O’Keeffe –v- Hickey* [2008] IESC 72.

that have abused the trust placed in them - in educational and care institutions and most recently in the banking sector - it is now inappropriate to consider any future development or realignment of school patronage structures which would not put in place robust systems of governance and accountability, notwithstanding the provisions of Section 18 of the Education Act (1998).

IVEA now submits that school patrons and schools should be required to prepare independently audited accounts annually, for inspection as required by the DES, and that anything less than this falls short of the type of governance and control systems that ought to exist in a state funded system of education – irrespective of whether the state continues to “provide for” primary education or becomes a “provider of” primary education.

Since the enactment of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act 1993, all VECs have been subject to stringent statutory requirements of governance and accountability and the Vocational Education (Amendment) Act 2001 further strengthened the governance, control and accountability of VECs. These developments are significant in the context of the proposal to vest patronage of the new community national schools with VECs.

In reforming national school patronage, IVEA submits that the present system which enables almost 100% of state funded primary education provision to be vested in a combination of religious bodies and/or private limited companies is inappropriate to satisfy the requirement of accountability which overarches the Education Act 1998. This is a matter that the Forum needs to address by way of firm and practical recommendations.

Constitutional and Human Rights Issues

In responding to the questions posed by the Expert Advisory Group, IVEA had regard for the constitutional provisions⁶⁶ relating to this matter. It also considered the authoritative view of Mr Justice Barrington on the distinction between religious education and religious instruction as set out in the ***“Campaign to Separate Church and State Limited –v- the Minister for Education [1998] 3 IR 321”*** wherein the judge opined that *“the constitution therefore distinguishes between religious education and religious instruction – the former being the much wider term. A child who attends school run by a religious denomination different from his own may have a constitutional right not to attend religious instruction at that school but the constitution cannot protect him from being influenced, to some degree, by the religious ethos of the school. A religious denomination is not obliged to change the general atmosphere of its school merely to accommodate a child of a different religious persuasion who wishes to attend that school”*.

In formulating its responses, IVEA took account of Justice Barrington’s view in conjunction with **Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)**, which provides that *“No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any*

⁶⁶ See Articles 42.1, 43.4 and 44.2.4 of Bunreacht na hÉireann

functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the state shall respect the right of parents **to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions**” and **Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** which provides as follows.

- (i) Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching.
- (ii) No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice.
- (iii) Freedom to manifest ones religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals or the fundamental rights and freedom of others.
- (iv) The State’s parties to the present covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians **to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.**

Significantly, **the Human Rights Committee** in its **General Comment** on this provision stated as follows.

*“The Committee is of the view that Article 18.4 permits public school instruction in subjects such as general history of religions and ethics if it is given in a neutral and objective way. The liberty of parents or legal guardians to ensure their children receive religious and moral education in conformity with their own convictions, set forth in article 18.4 is related to the guarantees of the freedom to teach a religion or belief stated in Article 18.1. The Committee notes that public education that includes instruction in a particular religion or belief is inconsistent with Article 18.4 **unless provision is made for non-discriminatory exemptions or alternatives that would accommodate the wishes of parents and guardians.**” (Human Rights Committee, General Comment 22, 1993, HRI/GEN/1/REV5, P145).*

Q1. Establishing parental and community demand for diversity

1.1 What should be considered in establishing the demand for diversity, taking account of parental wishes, in areas where the existing scale of school provision/ infrastructure is adequate?

- 1.1.1 Communities should not be divided in establishing the demand for diversity. Instead, every effort should be made to educate children together, irrespective of ethnic, religious, cultural and language or learning differences.
- 1.1.2 Communities have an emotive attachment to their schools and efforts to change patronage can be seen as an attack on the school and the community. Therefore, it is critical that consultation around changing patronage should build community confidence from the outset. Otherwise, children will transfer to other schools – creating a two-tier system.

- 1.1.3 Parental choice is not necessarily about choosing between denominational and non- denominational patronage. A State patronage, through an agent such as a VEC, can deliver primary education that meets the needs of **all** families. This would not require families to choose between denominational and non denominational education and avoid unnecessary division in communities.
- 1.1.4 Consultation to determine parental wishes about their children’s education is essential but plebiscites can foment community division.
- 1.1.5 Consultation should be about determining what diversity issues parents want schools to address rather than with a view to segregating students for their education. Where polling is resorted to, are we to assume that schools with more than, say, 60% of families preferring denominational education would remain under denominational patronage while schools with more than 60% of parents supporting non-denominational education would transfer to a non-denominational patron? This would threaten community cohesion.
- 1.1.6 The solution is not to privatise further primary education by transferring the patronage of denominational schools to private patrons that seem to reflect the current zeitgeist. Zeitgeists change and we risk being left, in the future, with another ‘patronage’ problem. The sustainable solution lies in the State, over time, in consultation with the current patrons, taking responsibility for the patronage/management of more and more schools - and not just for funding them. This way, the State can guarantee that local schools cater to the diverse needs of their communities, including the need for denominational religious education – under the one roof. This change should occur with minimum disturbance to students, parents and communities, schools under State patronage being models of best practice.
- 1.1.7 Currently, in a community served only by denominational schools, the preference in enrolment for Catholics presents real difficulties for those of other beliefs, most particularly, where a school is oversubscribed. Also, of course, there is the matter of those of other faiths and none being required to participate in the integrated curriculum – see 3.5 below. **All** families should have access to primary education as of right; and all students should have their belief system respected and supported by the schools they attend.
- 1.1.8 To avoid community division, the State should seek, through structured, transparent discussions with existing denominational patrons, to have the patronage of some 33% of schools transferred to the State over a period of some four (4) years. At the end of this period, in any community with three denominational primary schools, one would be a multi-belief school. In selecting the school for patronage change, the stakeholders in all local schools should be consulted on the understanding that the ultimate decision would be taken by the DES and that its decision would not be based on a plebiscite result.

- 1.1.9 Before the 'four year' transfer commences, the process should be piloted, using an action research approach, in a number of different areas – large urban community, medium sized town and relatively populous rural community.
- 1.1.10 Notwithstanding the unanswerable case for reforming primary school patronage, communities generally have confidence in our school system; so care needs to be taken to ensure that this confidence is not fractured.
- 1.1.11 Reforming primary education is about more than patronage. It comprehends, in particular, the integrated curriculum and enrolment; these issues should be explored when parents are consulted prior to decisions about patronage transfers.
- 1.1.12 In consulting with parents about what a State managed school would offer to parents, the following should be highlighted.
- ✓ All children in a catchment area would have an equal opportunity to enrol in the school – irrespective of religious affiliation, socio-economic status, ethnicity, language, etc.
 - ✓ The school would seek to meet the educational needs of all students, irrespective of their beliefs, aptitudes, interests or special educational needs.
 - ✓ The school would provide ethical and non-denominational religious education to all students within the curriculum in standard class groups – irrespective of their families' belief system. This would require a 'de-denominationalisation' of the religious education programme, given the integrated⁷ curriculum. IVEA rejects the view that religious education within the curriculum is inimical to educational pluralism and, in support, cites the conclusions of the [ODIHR Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion and Belief](#), at pages 76 and 77 of its *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public School*⁸. IVEA holds that the inclusion of religion in the curriculum is essential to equipping young people for life.
- 1.1.13 The school would provide 'faith formation' for children of all beliefs within the curriculum. While challenging, given the work already underway in community national schools, this challenge can be met. This work should be undertaken by appropriately trained personnel. For minority religions, it should be possible to support this work using web-based technology.

⁷ See Oran Doyle LL.B, LL.M (Harv), Ph.D., FTCD, in *Egalitarianism, Religious Preference and the Integrated Curriculum*, (pp 8-11) where Dr Doyle argues that the integrated curriculum may be perceived as unconstitutional 'as it unduly privileges the interests of one section of the community, to the extent that one may legitimately question whether the interests of another section were ever considered at all...' at: http://www.ihrc.ie/download/pdf/oran_doyle_integrated_curriculum_paper.pdf

⁸ The relevant excerpt from pages 76 and 77 of the *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public School*, are attached at [Appendix 1](#).

- 1.1.14 Students from families with no particular religious affiliation would be provided with a module on moral development when other students are participating in denominational religious education.
- 1.1.15 Students would be exempt participation in classes/activities that parents feel conflict with their own beliefs – this process to be governed by DES circular letter.

1.2 Where the existing scale of school provision is adequate, how can school(s) be identified to be transferred/divested/amalgamated so as to allow for diversity?

- 1.2.1 Divisive polling should be avoided. Instead, the DES should engage in structured consultation with communities where there is need for diversity of school patronage. This should occur in the context of an explicit State commitment to vindicating the **right of all children to an education appropriate to their needs**⁹ and should involve facilitated meetings between the State (DES) and the community; where the community can explain its particular needs and the State may explain what a change in patronage would entail. At such meetings, the DES should clearly explain how the change would guarantee inclusive enrolment while catering to the religious education needs of all students equally and respecting all belief systems equally, without diminishing student outcomes.
- 1.2.2 The consultation should involve the establishment of an advisory group¹⁰, representative of the local community to advise the DES prior to a decision being taken about what school should come under State patronage. Ultimately, the decision would be a matter for the DES, having considered the advice of the advisory group.

1.3 How might competing demands for diversity be considered and accommodated?

- 1.3.1 Providing a different school, with a different patron, to meet particular needs has cost implications for the State; the most cost effective solution is for the State, through agents such as VECs, to assume a patronage role, thus guaranteeing the educational rights of all children under the one roof.
- 1.3.2 A proliferation of patronage types means that different ‘belief groups’ grow apart from their earliest years; this can breed intra communal misunderstandings and

⁹ It would be important that all parties to the consultation would realise, from the very outset, retaining the status quo is not an option.

¹⁰ An advisory group might include: the principals in all local schools, the chairpersons of all local primary school boards of management, the parent representatives on all local school boards of management, local primary school patrons, the CEO of the local vocational education committee, local faith leaders and, where appropriate ethnic leaders in the local community.

divisions. In Finland, a country with a much envied school system, the vast majority of young people are educated together in State schools, where the curriculum includes compulsory religious education of a general character along the lines of what is proposed from 1.1.12 to 1.1.15 above. Furthermore, Finnish Schools must provide instruction in religions other than the Lutheran faith if there is a minimum of three students representing the faith in the school¹¹.

- 1.3.3 When it comes to the celebration of feasts in schools, we celebrate Catholic/Irish feasts. To cater to diversity, multi-belief schools should celebrate the principal feasts of all groups in the school and display icons relevant to all belief groups in the school.
- 1.3.4 Celebrations at the beginning and end of school years should include religious leaders from all belief systems represented in the school.

1.4 **In addressing “demand for diversity”, how can it be ensured that schools are socially and culturally inclusive?**

This question is answered implicitly above. Therefore, it is sufficient, to summarise as follows.

- 1.4.1 Students of all beliefs and none and all ethnic, cultural and social backgrounds should have an equal right to enrol in their local school. There should be no bias against recent arrivals in the community or against those from minority groups or those with special educational needs. However, school enrolment policies should facilitate siblings attending the same school.
- 1.4.2 General religious education programmes should be ‘denomination neutral’ – whether taught on a ‘stand alone’ or integrated basis.
- 1.4.3 Iconography and feasts should acknowledge the feasts and religious figures relevant to all belief groups in the school.
- 1.4.4 **All** school staff and volunteers should be trained in inter-cultural awareness. This should be extended to members of the parents association.
- 1.4.5 School ethos should be denominationally neutral and rooted in inclusivity and the appreciation of tolerance & diversity.
- 1.4.6 Each community should have access to a school that meets the above criteria, irrespective of its location. State patronage of primary schools is the key to success here. Some 40 years ago, State intervention through the establishment of community/comprehensive schools, and VEC community colleges made appropriate education available to swathes of Irish society that had been

¹¹ Finland has a population of 5.2M and its religious affiliations are as follows: - 80% Lutherans, 1,1% Orthodox, 0,4% Muslims, 1,1 % Others (Jews etc.), 13,5% no religious affiliation. For further details, see: http://www.mmiweb.org.uk/eftr/reeurope/finland_2009.html

effectively excluded from such education. Similar State intervention is required today.

Q2. Managing the transfer/divesting of patronage

2.1 Where changes of patronage are to be advanced, what practicalities need to be considered?

The following practicalities need to be considered.

- 2.1.1 A school's patronage should only be changed following real 'qualitative' engagement with all stakeholders – see 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 above.
- 2.1.2 Must be a transparent mechanism for decisions being taken about patronage change and all stakeholders **must understand and have confidence** in this mechanism; ideally, decisions should be reached through consensus rather than 'winner-takes-all' plebiscites – see 1.2.1, 1.2.2 above.
- 2.1.3 Critical that all involved with schools facing patronage change appreciate that the educational outcomes for students will be enhanced rather than diminished. This will require structures/processes to ensure that the community continues to have confidence in and support for the school. This can be achieved by adapting the VEC designated community college model. Here, while the VEC is patron and manages the school, it has a partner in the educational enterprise, usually a religious authority. These schools operate through a co-trusteeship with former patrons and a Model Agreement provides guarantees to the religious authority around school ethos and culture.

Where it is necessary to change the patronage for a denominational primary school, the option of transferring patronage to the State, through the local VEC, in line with the designated community college model, merits serious consideration. This approach would ensure the retention of parent/community confidence in the school yet allow the State to guarantee a fully pluralist education to all students. Of course, the guarantee would not be to maintain the ethos of the former patron but rather to guarantee that its co-religionists would have their need for denominational education met, as would children of other denominations. Also the former patron's major feasts and religious figures would be celebrated in the school, as would those of other belief groups.

- 2.1.4 All local stakeholders must be represented on the school board of management.
- 2.1.5 The Rules for National Schools¹² will need revision – particularly Rule 68, which deals with religious instruction.

¹² http://www.education.ie/servlet/blobServlet/rules_for_national_schools_7_13.pdf

**2.2 Please comment on some or all of the following:
What, if any, are the implications for:**

2.2.1 Existing (and future) pupils of schools

2.2.1.1 If the school transferring to State patronage operates in line with the above principles, there should be no negative implications for current or future students. Certainly, the religious education curriculum will be delivered differently and the school ethos, feasts and celebrations will reflect a parity of esteem for all belief systems represented in the school. This should not diminish student outcomes.

2.2.2 Parental choice

2.2.2.1 Parents would no longer feel pressurised to choose between different schools because the needs of all families would be met under the one roof. It is appreciated that, in the first instance, it would only be the State school that would give children from all families an equal chance of enrolment, provide denominational religious education to all students in separate belief groups and grant parity of esteem to all belief systems and cultures.

2.2.2.2 Assuming that State schools succeed in establishing themselves as models of good educational and social practice, over time, an increasing number of denominational schools would probably 'move' to this form of patronage.

2.2.3 Enrolment including local co-operation between schools in a community

2.2.3.1 Where one school, in a community with other denominational primary schools, comes under State patronage, it is important that all the community's primary schools should together guarantee a suitable primary education to all children resident in the community – irrespective of their length of residence in the community, their belief system, their ethnic or cultural background, etc.

2.2.3.2 Currently, schools can, where they have no vacant places, claim that it is not their responsibility to 'make' room for newcomers. Also, denominational schools can assert that it is not their problem if those of another denomination cannot obtain a school place. The current situation results in unnecessary stress and the rejection that parents experience is unacceptable in 21st century Ireland.

- 2.2.3.3** Giving all schools in a community a shared responsibility for providing a place for all applicants remedies this situation. To achieve this, primary school admission fora should be established in each community served by more than one primary school.¹³ These fora could have responsibility for ensuring that all applicants for places are accommodated in a school that meets their particular needs and that those seeking transfers between schools, on the basis diversity, are facilitated.

2.2.4 Employment of teachers

- 2.2.4.1** Primary school teachers would continue to be employed by school boards but, in the case of the State school, the whole area of HR would be supported by the VEC – releasing school principals to lead teaching/learning.
- 2.2.4.2** Where staff have a conscientious objection to a change of patronage, it might be possible to redeploy them to a school under the patronage of the former patron – subject to a suitable vacancy.

2.2.5. Teacher education

- 2.2.5.1** ITE would need to be revised to ensure that that **all** NQTs are equipped to address diversity (both formally and informally) and to teach both ethics and religion on a non denominational basis.

NQTs would also need to be equipped to teach denominational programmes to children from ‘minority’ religions – though some faiths would wish to undertake this task themselves. To this end, trainee teachers might be required to obtain certification in the teaching of two different denominational programmes, for example: Catholicism and Islam.

- 2.2.5.2** CPD programmes would need to be provided to practicing teachers to equip them to address diversity (both formally and informally) and to teach both ethics and religion on a non denominational basis. Also, some practicing teachers would need to be equipped to teach denominational programmes to children from ‘minority’ religions. Teacher training colleges could deliver the CPD programmes using blended learning formats and the face-to-face elements could be delivered in local education centres. These CPD programmes should be certified and count towards the achievement of post graduate qualifications.

¹³ Each forum might comprise the principals and board chairpersons for all ‘local’ schools and maybe the National Education and Welfare Board’s local educational welfare officer (EWO) and a representative of the local vocational education committee (as the local education authority)

2.2.6 Maintaining a student population that is inclusive and reflective of the school's community

2.2.6.1 The key here is to ensure that the 'inclusive' school, through the implementation of best practice in all matters, remains attractive to all sections of the local community and not just to 'newcomers' and/or the socially disadvantaged. It is critical that a school's intake reflects its whole community. For this reason, it is vital that moves to change the patronage of a denominational school are understood and supported right across the community.

2.2.6.2 'Inclusive' schools must set out to meet the full educational needs (including the denominational religious needs) of their communities and not just target an educational elite in a community. If their establishment is left in the hands of private interests, these schools may not serve the needs of all sections of the community – notwithstanding stated intentions. There can be a disconnect between policy and practice, as is evident, at second level, where some schools with model enrolment policies enrol relatively few SEN students.

2.2.7 School transport

2.2.7.1 Where the nearest school is oversubscribed or the nearest school does not meet the child's religious and/or cultural needs, transport and other arrangements should be put in place to facilitate children attending the next nearest 'suitable' school.

2.2.8 Ownership considerations and transfer of properties

2.2.8.1 Since patronage change must be cost neutral, property owned by religious authorities must be made available, long term, for the provision of fully inclusive primary education under the patronage of the State. This could be achieved by the State patron entering into a 99 year lease arrangement¹⁴ with the religious authority. A condition of this lease could be a commitment from the State patron that the school would meet the religious education needs of the children attending the school

¹⁴ It is appreciated that since 1999 the State owns the school property where a school is established on a greenfield site and also that the State has a lien over school property where it has funded its refurbishment or extension. However, there are many cases where the property is owned in whole or in part by the religious authority. Of course any lease agreement would only be in respect of property owned by the former patron. Before, any property transfers are effected in the context of this submission, it would be necessary to establish a nationally applicable mechanism for determining ownership rights for school properties; it would also be helpful if a model lease agreement could be agreed between religious patrons and the State in order to obviate the need for protracted negotiations at local level.

and that the school would celebrate the Church's main religious feasts and figures – a commitment that would also apply to those of other beliefs.

2.2.9 How can these changes be implemented in a cost neutral manner?

2.2.9.1 See 2.2.8.1.

2.2.10 Are there other ways to accommodate diversity using existing school accommodation?

2.2.10.1 The patronage of a denominational school could be transferred to a private nondenominational patron but this would further privatise primary education and result in unnecessary upheaval in a community, with students transferring in and out of schools depending on family attachment to denominational or non denominational education.

2.2.10.2 While IVEA sees no reason why multi-belief schools should not provide religious instruction, in belief groups, it would not be closed to the idea of primary schools under VEC patronage not doing so. Ultimately, VECs have the capacity to construct bespoke schools to meet the needs of the State and local communities and they have huge experience partnering a wide range of religious bodies and others to deliver schools with a particular ethos.

2.2.10.3 The Commission on School Accommodation notes there 'may be potential in the use of existing vacant spaces in school buildings in areas where there may not be a demographic need for a new school'¹⁵ and exploring this option might be productive.

Q3. Diversity within a school or small number of schools

3.1 If there are only one or two schools in an area, how can diversity be accommodated where there is not sufficient demand to justify a separate school?

3.1.1 The solution proposed above for communities where the existing scale of provision/infrastructure is adequate seems well suited to this situation. The patronage of one of the schools, or the only school, is transferred to a State patron, such as the VEC, and the school under State patronage becomes a fully inclusive school catering to the moral and religious education needs of all families in the community, irrespective of their belief system.

¹⁵ See [Report of the Commission on School Accommodation](#) pp. 51-52

3.1.2 The State patron would enter an agreement with the former denominational patron which would provide certain guarantees to the former patron and its co-religionists (see 2.1.3 above) and the former patron would lease the property to the State patron – 2.2.8 above.

3.2 How can parental choice be respected in a multi-cultural, multi-faith society taking account also of the two official languages?

3.2.1 Not only indigenous Irish and Catholic families might want their children to undertake their education through the medium of Irish¹⁶.

3.2.2 Inclusive education for those wishing to complete their education through the medium of Irish could be facilitated by the patronage for Irish medium schools being transferred to the State patron, through a process similar to that outlined above - see 2.1.3 and 2.2.8. Also, multi-belief schools could become Irish-medium schools or an Irish medium stream could be introduced in English-medium multi-belief schools.

3.2.3 VECs already provide second level education through the medium of Irish in Aonaid, Sruthana and Gael Choláistí. Consequently, VECs are well equipped to take over the patronage of Gaelscoileanna and, in partnership with the former patron, to provide fully inclusive Irish medium Schools.

3.3 What are the particular implications for enrolment policies?

3.3.1 Enrolment policies and practices must be fully inclusive – with all children in the catchment area having an equal opportunity to enrol in the school, irrespective of belief, socio-economic status, ethnicity, language, etc.

3.3.2 Where there is more than one school, the cluster of schools should be required to guarantee suitable school places to all children – see 2.2.3 above.

3.4 What are the particular implications for religious education and religious practice in a school?

3.4.1 The multi belief school, under State patronage, would accommodate religious education and religious practice as described at: 1.3.3, 1.3.4, 1.4.2, 1.4.3, 1.4.5 and 1.1.15 above.

3.5 What are the particular implications for religion as part of an integrated curriculum?

3.5.1 In the multi-belief school, denominational religion should not be integrated into the curriculum given the need for to parity of esteem for all beliefs. Indeed, it is

¹⁶ A case in point is the O’Halpín family, of Cork hurling fame. Sean óg was 11 when he arrived in Ireland from Sydney . Yet the four O’Halpín boys did their second level education through the medium of Irish and all are fluent Irish speakers.

arguable that the integration of denominational religion across the curriculum is unconstitutional.¹⁷ However, the integration of non-denominational religious education is acceptable - **provided** the teaching is sufficiently 'neutral and objective'.

What emerges from the current debate may have implications for the integrated curriculum in denominational schools. Indeed, the integrated curriculum, as currently implemented, may have to be reformed. It is not acceptable to require a primary student of, say the Muslim faith, who is attending a denominational primary school (because no other school is available in his/her community) to participate in education programmes that involve faith formation in another faith; and that is the implication of the integrated curriculum.

In the longer term, establishing multi belief schools under State patronage could lead to a transformation of denominational schools into institutions that truly value all beliefs and cultures.

4. Are there further topics, within the terms of reference, which should be highlighted? If yes, please elaborate?

- 4.1 Given the extent to which this submission is predicated on the notion of VECs taking on the role of State Patron, along the lines of what has been proposed for Community National schools, it is important to highlight the capacity of VECs to undertake this role to a high standard and to highlight the added value that VECs can bring to primary schools for which they may be patron – [See Appendix 2](#).

Additional Question....

In addition to the written submissions, exemplars of best practice to accommodate inclusivity are welcome.

The responses provided in this submission are based on the Community National School (CNS) Model and indeed, the recommendations about how primary education should be reformed to cater for diversity are based on the way the CNS model of primary provision has developed. A description of the CNS model and how it emerged is attached at [Appendix 3](#) and a copy of the information available on the CNS website (www.CNS.ie) is at [Appendix 4](#). **This submission should be read in conjunction with the submission made by the community national schools.**

Submitted: 7 June 2011

¹⁷ See Oran Doyle LL.B, LL.M (Harv), Ph.D., FTCD, in *Egalitarianism, Religious Preference and the Integrated Curriculum*, (pp 8-11) where Dr Doyle argues that the integrated curriculum may be perceived as unconstitutional 'as it unduly privileges the interests of one section of the community, to the extent that one may legitimately question whether the interests of another section were ever considered at all...' at: http://www.ihrc.ie/download/pdf/oran_doyle_integrated_curriculum_paper.pdf. This opinion, of course, remains to be tested in the courts.

APPENDIX I

Extract from the [ODIHR Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion and Belief](#) at pages 76 and 77 of its *Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public School*.

‘Teaching about religions and beliefs may be adapted to take into account the needs of different national and local school systems and traditions. The following conclusions are supported by a growing consensus among lawyers and educators and should be taken into consideration by all OSCE participating States when devising schemes for teaching about religions and beliefs.

Conclusions

Knowledge about religions and beliefs can reinforce appreciation of the importance of respect for everyone’s right to freedom of religion or belief, foster democratic citizenship, promote understanding of societal diversity and, at the same time, enhance social cohesion.

Knowledge about religions and beliefs has the valuable potential of reducing conflicts that are based on lack of understanding for others’ beliefs and of encouraging respect for their rights.

Knowledge about religions and beliefs is an essential part of a quality education. It is required to understand much of history, literature, and art, and can be helpful in broadening one’s cultural horizons and in deepening one’s insight into the complexities of past and present.

Teaching about religions and beliefs is most effective when combined with efforts to instil respect for the rights of others, even when there is disagreement about religions or beliefs. The right to freedom of religion or belief is a universal right and carries with it an obligation to protect the rights of others, including respect for the dignity of all human beings.

An individual’s personal religious (or non-religious) beliefs do not provide sufficient reason to exclude that person from teaching about religions and beliefs. The most important considerations in this regard relate to professional expertise, as well as to basic attitudes towards or commitment to human rights in general and freedom of religion or belief in particular.

Reasonable adaptations of policies in response to distinctive religious needs may be required to avoid violation of rights to freedom of religion or belief. Even when not strictly required as a matter of law, such adaptations and flexibility contribute to the building of a climate of tolerance and mutual respect.

Where compulsory courses involving teaching about religions and beliefs are sufficiently neutral and objective, requiring participation in such courses as such does not violate the freedom of religion or belief (although states are free to allow partial or total opt-outs in these settings)’.

APPENDIX 2

VEC Capacity in the Patronage and Management of Schools

VECs' experience as patrons in different models of schooling

VECs are the most significant repository in the State for expertise in the establishment and management of schools and this expertise is not just confined to the management of exclusively VEC managed schools but extends to the establishment and management of schools that accommodate the ethos of a VEC partner/s. In a sense, VECs have become an effective and efficient State instrument for providing schools with a variety of characteristic spirits (ethos) while avoiding a further extension/atomisation of school patronage.

Established by statute in 1930, to address the need for a system of schooling which could, *inter alia*, accommodate religious, cultural and social diversity, VECs have demonstrated an ability to respond to diversity in a number of different ways with a patronage tradition that includes:

- Vocational Schools
- Community Colleges – operating under a Model Agreement with the local Diocese
- Colleges of Further Education
- Gaelcholaistí – schools operating entirely through the medium of Irish and promoting the Irish language and culture
- *Aonaid* – Irish streams in schools which cater for a local small minority seeking an all-Irish language second-level education
- Joint trustees of Community Schools – a State agent to be deployed as required.

Indeed the evolution of post-primary education since 1970 paralleled the social, cultural and religious changes over that period. Community schools developed with shared patronage between VECs and various religious orders. From 1980 onwards, a different orientation developed with VECs developing designated community colleges, under VEC patronage, with a school board of management partnership arrangement involving the local Diocese. In more recent years, non-designated community colleges have been developed in certain areas under VEC patronage. In addition, VECs have met the demand for Irish-medium education provision at post-primary level, by patroning Gaelcholaistí. Most recently, VECs **at the direct request of the State** are patron designates to the new model of Community National Schools.

Historically, the extent to which enabling legislation has given VECs the capacity to flexibly respond to changing education and training needs has ultimately allowed VECs to adapt to various patronage requirements and respond **both to local community needs and national priorities**. Ultimately, the great strength of VECs is that they have the capacity to accommodate patronage needs bespoke to the stakeholders **now and into the future** in the communities they serve.

Benefits of supports provided by VECs

As statutory education authorities, VECs have an excellent track record in meeting the demands for education and training provision within their remit. VECs have accumulated huge expertise in the establishment and management of schools. They have also put in place structures and staffing that effectively and efficiently support school managements in the development of new

educational programmes, in continuous professional and curricular development, in leading teaching and learning, in supporting students with special needs, in HR, Finance, buildings' maintenance, capital projects, and so on. Essentially, VEC schemes form communities of professional practice in education.

VECs could mobilise all this experience and expertise in supporting primary schools under their patronage. Currently, in CNS schools, operating with VECs as patron designate, the VEC provide supports in building, procurement etc. (thus ensuring better value for money through a larger scheme approach), finance, health and safety, insurance, HR, education support, SEN support, parent classes and in-service for teachers.

Shared Campus Arrangements

VECs have a distinguished record over decades in delivering and working in partnership in the provision of education and training programmes within the communities they serve. VECs themselves are democratic in representation and statutorily accountable through governing legislation for the performance of their statutory functions. This structure provides significant transparency and accountability. In consideration of both community needs and exchequer demands, IVEA recommends a greater use of the **campus model**, which can accommodate a primary and a post-primary school on one site, with facilities for a further education college and crèche as required. This campus model can enhance the quality and range of facilities available to and of benefit to both school cohorts, while also being available for use by the local community. Moreover, in cases of typical cyclical evolution of community demographics, under-utilised school facilities can be turned to alternative uses, such as extended community and adult education programmes.

Essential compliance with building regulations is in the interests of good planning. As VECs have the technical and professional resources, and are statutorily accountable, they are ideally suited to procure and develop new primary schools and to provide for the adaptation and maintenance of vacant premises to facilitate the need for additional accommodation.

APPENDIX 3

The Community National School Model

In December 2007 the Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin T.D., announced that a new model of primary school patronage – the Community National School (CNS) - would be piloted under the patronage of County Dublin VEC. Minister Hanafin said that the new schools would “be open to children of all faiths and none.....aiming to provide for religious education and faith formation during the school day for each of the main faith groups represented” She went on to say that the schools would “operate through an ethos of inclusiveness and respect for all beliefs, both religious and non-religious”. There was recognition that there was a “need for an additional choice that can accommodate the diverse preferences of parents for varying forms of religious education and faith formation during the school day”.

The first two Community National Schools were Scoil Choilm and Scoil Ghráinne. Scoil Choilm was originally an emergency school established under the patronage of the Catholic Church but after one year, was transferred to the de facto patronage of County Dublin VEC. Scoil Ghráinne was also established in 2009. Both schools are in the Dublin 15 area. (Scoil Choilm was named by the original Catholic patron. Scoil Ghráinne was named –as was Scoil Chormaic in 2010 – to recall the legends of Ireland and to ensure that schools referenced female as well as male role models. Scoil Ghráinne shares a campus with Pobail Scoil Setanta, a second-level school also under the patronage of County Dublin VEC). Scoil Árd Rí in Navan and Naas CNS have since been established.

The initial stages of the establishment of the two schools involved extensive consultation with all the relevant stakeholders. Many meetings were held with the other local primary schools to address any fears or apprehensions, and there was extensive consultation with prospective parents (existing parents in the case of Scoil Choilm), local faith leaders, national faith leaders, the Department of Education and Science and finally with the newly appointed teachers. The CNS model was established to cater for children of all faiths and none and to provide for religious instruction during the school day, in accordance with the wishes of parents. Initially, it was difficult to see how this could be achieved on an equitable basis for all concerned. There were children in the schools of Catholic, Church of Ireland, Evangelical, Muslim, Hindu and no stated religious backgrounds. As the de facto patron was a State body, no one religion could be privileged over another. Parity of esteem and respect for all was paramount. As the de facto patron, the VEC also had to establish and ensure the ethos or characteristic spirit of the CNS model to run through the life of the school. This ethos was quickly established as one of inclusion with the overriding mission at all times of ensuring respect and welcome for all the children attending the school, no matter what their ability, socioeconomic background, culture or religion.

Meetings with all relevant stakeholders continued after the establishment of the schools and still continue. The Principals, teachers and parents meet at local level and also as a whole group. Local faith leaders, parents and the extended families are invited to the school for certain ceremonies that are integral to the school year. A Reference Group, composed of faith representatives, NCCA, INTO, DES, teacher training colleges and VECs is chaired by County Dublin VEC and meets on a regular basis to provide expertise and advice on issues relevant to the primary school curriculum in areas of religious education and pedagogy. Meetings are also organised with relevant faith

leaders of specific traditions to address any concerns and to access material for the multi-belief programme.

Goodness Me Goodness You

In the CNS model, children are taught a common programme of religion that acknowledges the religious identity of each child in an age appropriate manner. The “Goodness Me Goodness You” programme is taught each day for the patron’s half hour. Children are led in the same lesson that is based on a narrative model (the stories being drawn from the religions and cultures of many belief systems) and afterwards they sometimes either pray (if they are monotheistic in background) or contemplate (if they are polytheist, humanist or atheist). This practice of either prayer or contemplation takes place as a ‘quiet time’ that is a very useful skill for the children. In the prayer group, ‘God’ is referenced in a generic sense. For a number of weeks each year, children are taught in belief specific groups so that more focused religious instruction can take place. Children, parents and teachers are very happy with the programme to date and there is increasing anecdotal evidence of the satisfaction of the various belief groups with the approach taken. (The Reference Group that includes all belief partners, NCCA, INTO etc. has been of great benefit in this regard).

The CNS model caters for children of all faiths and none and offers multi-belief religious instruction, according to the wishes of parents, during the school day. This approach acknowledges the belief identity of pupils in a respectful and inclusive manner; informs children and parents about difference and commonalities and creates a school community that acknowledges all. The recent report of Religion and Education by the Irish Human Rights Commission included as a recommendation that “children should never experience exclusion or segregation in the school or in any way be undermined in their own faith or other philosophical convictions”. The CNS model would aim to be more positive in approach and actively seek to include and embrace diversity. This approach also addresses another recommendation in that report; “to promote religious harmony and understanding between groups, including those of a secular viewpoint”. Annual in-service takes place for teachers in the CNS model schools on the “Goodness me Goodness You” programme and regular feedback sessions are held with staff to address any concerns and enhance the provision. All classes are taught using interactive whiteboards to ensure maximum engagement for pupils.

The Sample Enrolment Policy for Scoil Choilm is attached at [Annexure 1](#) below.

The Sample Ethos Statement for Scoil Choilm is attached at [Annexure 2](#) below.

ANNEXURE 1: Sample Enrolment Policy

Scoil Choilm Community National School, Porterstown, Dublin, 15

Enrolment Policy

March 2011

Introduction

This policy is set out in accordance with the provisions of the Education Act, 1998. The manager trusts that by so doing, parents will be assisted in relation to enrolment matters. Furthermore, the manager and the principal teacher will be happy to clarify any further matters arising from the policy.

General information

Scoil Choilm CNS will operate within the regulations laid down by the Department of Education & Skills and will follow the primary school curriculum prescribed by the Department of Education & Skills which may be amended from time to time, in accordance with Sections 9 and 30 of the Education Act (1998). The on-going internal monitoring by principal and staff will be supported by external evaluation by the Department of Education & Skills Inspectorate.

Scoil Choilm Community National School is a co-educational Primary School which is under the temporary patronage of The Minister for Education & Skills. When the amending legislation is in place, County Dublin Vocational Education Committee will assume patronage of Scoil Choilm. The school aims to promote the full and harmonious development of all aspects of the child: intellectual, physical, cultural, moral and spiritual. Scoil Choilm seeks to provide a high standard of education where each child is encouraged to reach his/her personal potential. The school is committed to a spirit of inclusion, equality and harmony where each child and member of the school community is valued and treated with respect.

It is the policy of Scoil Choilm to respect, celebrate and recognise diversity in all areas of human life. Children attending Scoil Choilm will be taught and encouraged to view diversity as something which reflects the community from which the children are drawn. The school will endeavour to encourage the children committed to its care to have a pride in what makes them different and a belief that difference, when respected and valued,

gives strength and vibrancy to the total school community and the wider community in which they live. As part of its ethos, Scoil Choilm welcomes children from all faiths and none. In common with the other Community National Schools under V.E.C. patronage, Scoil Choilm will recognise the wishes of parents to have their children receive religious education, or morality based education as an integral part of the school curriculum.

Scoil Choilm opened in September 2007 in the Institute of Horology, Blanchardstown. Scoil Choilm was re-located to a new site in Porterstown Parish in September 2008. This site, on the Porterstown Road, will eventually be shared with Lutrellstown Community College which will provide post-primary education for those living in the area. Scoil Choilm currently caters for pupils in Junior Infants, Senior Infants, First Class and Second Class. In September 2011 the school will also cater for pupils in Third Class.

Scoil Choilm Community National School is a developing school and will cater for the full range of Primary classes, from junior infants to sixth class, as the school grows. When completed, Scoil Choilm will have capacity to cater for up to 32 classes.

Under V.E.C. patronage, a management board will be established. In the interim, Scoil Choilm will continue to be managed by a single manager. The manager/board of management will be committed to the successful implementation of recent legislation, in particular the Education Act, 1998, the Education Welfare Act 2000 and the equal Status Act 2000. The manager/board of management will fully subscribe to the principles of partnership, accountability, transparency, inclusion and respect for diversity, parental choice and equality.

In view of the pilot nature of the new patronage model and population change within the area served by the school, this admissions policy will be subject to regular review and possible change.

Enrolment Procedures

These procedures will be subject to regular review by the manager/board of management.

Applicants must be at least four years of age before the 1st September of the year in which they apply. (Compulsory attendance at school does not apply until the age of 6 years)

Junior Infants starting school will normally not be enrolled after 30 September.

- The catchment area, for enrolment purposes, consists of estates within the parish of St. Mochta's¹ and the following estates/roads:
 - Limelawn

- Aspen
- Inglewood
- Lohunda
- Castlefield
- Charnwood
- Sorrel
- Coolmine Close & Green
- Rockfield Close, Park & Drive
- Kirkpatrick Avenue & Drive

Every effort will be made to accommodate all applicants. In the event of the number of children seeking enrolment in any given class/standard exceeding the number of places available, the following criteria will be used to prioritise children for enrolment:

A. 1. *Children living within the catchment area.*

2. *Brothers & Sisters (including step-siblings, resident at same address) of children already enrolled.*

3. *Children of current staff members.*

then

B. *Children living outside the catchment area unless the area in which they live is within the catchment area of another Community National School which has vacancies in the appropriate class.*

- In the event of the number of children in category **A** exceeding the number of places available in a given year, children will be offered a place according to their chronological age
- The same criteria will be adapted in relation to category **B**, until all places are filled.
- All unsuccessful applicants will be placed on a waiting list, in accordance with the above criteria, for places that may become available at a later date.
- All unsuccessful applicants have a right of appeal under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998.
- The manager/board of management will communicate arrangements regarding enrolment through the parish bulletin, and local advertising.

Registration Procedure for Junior Infants for September, 2011

Registration for the 2011/2012 school year will take place from the 1st November until the 30th November 2010. All applications for places received by the 30th of November will be responded to within 21 days of the closing day for the submission of applications.

Applications for places in Junior Infants made after this date will only be considered when the initial waiting list is cleared and places will be offered on a chronological age basis, with priority being given to the oldest children.

To assist parents with their applications and to provide information on Scoil Choilm Community National School, Porterstown, an enrolment evening will be held in Scoil Choilm, on Wednesday the 23rd November from 7.00-9.00p.m. Enrolment forms are obtainable from the school secretary in Scoil Choilm.

Requests for enrolment forms should be made to:

*School Secretary,
Scoil Choilm Community National School,
Porterstown Road,
Clonsilla,
Dublin 15.
Telephone: 821 3352*

Registration alone does not guarantee a place in the school. Decisions in relation to applications for enrolment are made by the Manager/Board of Management in accordance with the enrolment policy.

Return of Forms of Acceptance

Letters of offer for places in junior infants will be made by post on or before the 20th December 2010. All completed registration & acceptance forms must be returned to the school, within two weeks of the letter of offer. It is the duty of parents to ensure that, by that date,

Scoil Choilm has:

1. An original long form Birth Certificate (together with a photocopy) **and**
2. **Two** of the following as proof of address (these must be dated within two months of the application):
 - a. ESB Bill
 - b. Gas Bill
 - c. Landline Telephone Bill
 - d. NTL Bill

If the school does not receive this documentation by the nominated closing date, the Board of Management will assume that the place is not being accepted and the place will be offered to the next child on the waiting list.

Waiting List

Unsuccessful applicants will be informed in writing by post of their place on the waiting list.

All unsuccessful applicants have a right of appeal under Section 29 of the Education Act, 1998.

Registration alone does not guarantee a place in the school. Decisions in relation to applications for enrolment are made by the Board of Management in accordance with school policy.

There will be an introductory meeting for parents of incoming junior infants in June of the year of entry.

Equality of access

No child is refused admission for reasons of religion, special educational needs, disability, language, gender, social status, ethnicity, or political beliefs & values.

In relation to applications for the enrolment of children with special needs, the school will meet with the parents of the child to discuss the child's needs. It is open to the school to request a copy of the child's medical and/or psychological report or where such a report is not available, to request that the child be assessed immediately.

The purpose of the assessment report is to assist the school in establishing the educational needs of the child relevant to his/her disability.

This policy is subject to regular review by the Manager / Board of Management.

Signed: _____

Date: 19.04.2011

ANNEXURE 2: Sample CNS School Ethos Statement

Community National School Ethos Statement

Introduction

Every primary school in Ireland has a patron.

The patron of the Community National School is the local VEC.

The patron has responsibility for developing a school ethos.

The ethos can be defined as the characteristic spirit of the school.

Because each school is a community of children, parents, management and teachers, the ethos needs to be shared by all in the school community

This ethos is an interim statement, drafted by management.

This draft statement of ethos is now being submitted to the incoming patrons i.e. the C.E.O.s of County Dublin, Kildare and Meath for their observations and comments.

Core values of CNS

The Community National Schools seek to provide a high standard of education where each child is encouraged to reach his/her personal potential.

The schools are committed to a spirit of inclusion, equality and harmony where each child and member of the school community is valued and treated with respect.

The school will serve the local community in its totality. It will welcome children without prejudice to class, creed or nationality. Realising the central role of parents in the education of their children the school will reach out to serve the educational needs of parents.

The education of children is a two-way partnership between parents and school. In playing out this role shared by school and parents, the school will keep parents fully briefed on their child's educational development and guide parents in the most effective way of collaborating with the school.

Ethos statement

A Community National School is one where:

- The school becomes a centre of the local community.
- Children are encouraged and supported in living their lives to the full
- High standards are the goal in teaching and learning
- Everybody is valued and treated with respect
- Diversity is recognised and celebrated
- Respect for plurality of faiths is seen as integral to the daily routine of the school.

What this ethos means

For our pupils we:

Place the interests of the pupils first

Promote holistic approach to education developing of all aspects of the child: intellectually, physically, culturally, morally and spiritually.

Provide a top class education where each child is encouraged to reach his/her potential.

Are committed to the spirit of inclusion and equality, where each member of the school community is valued and treated with respect.

Set high expectations in a caring and nurturing environment.

For our parents we:

Promote an open and consultative environment, where parents are recognised as partners in their child's education.

Encourage their involvement in the education of their child and we endeavour to support them in this process.

As a staff we:

Strive for excellence in all we do

Create a welcoming and happy atmosphere in the school

Value all members of the school community

Support and encourage each other

Listen carefully, communicate clearly.

Are committed to playing our part in developing the school as a learning organisation

Nurture each child and focus on their positive attributes

Work with outside agencies in the best interests of our pupils.

Hold collective responsibility for all our pupils, the school environment, good staff relations, a nurturing working atmosphere and a positive school reputation.

For our wider community we:

Reflect and cater for the needs of the community.

Work closely with community organisations and community leaders to enrich the education of our pupils.

Provide opportunity for the wider community to become involved in the life of the school.

APPENDIX 4: www.cns.ie

Source: www.cns.ie

What is a Community National School?

A Community National School is just as it says. **Founded in local communities**, these schools are **child-centred, inclusive, multi-belief, State supported** schools which strive to provide a **high quality primary education for every child** in line with the Primary School Curriculum and guidelines laid down by the Department of Education and Skills. The first Community National Schools were opened in 2008 in Phibblestown and Porterstown in Co. Dublin. Three further schools in Naas, Co. Kildare, Navan, Co. Meath and Balbriggan, Co. Dublin, opened in September 2010.

Mission

Community National Schools are committed to inclusion, equality and fairness in the provision of a high quality educational experience for each child, conducted in an environment that respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society.

Vision

That each individual child's experience of primary schooling will support the development of each child's moral, social, educational, spiritual, emotional, enquiring and creative abilities.

Key principles underpinning the Community National School model enabling you to make the **RIGHT CHOICE**

R espectful of diversity	C hild-centred
I nclusive	H igh quality standard of education
G overnment funded and State operated schools	O pen and accountable
H olistic development of each child	I nspirational leadership
T ogetherness with parents	C ommunity involvement
	E ducating for the 21 st century

Respectful of diversity

"If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people". ^[1]

Community National Schools operate through an ethos of inclusiveness and **respect for all beliefs** both religious and non-religious. Community National Schools provide a multi-belief education programme within the school setting delivered during school day(s). This commitment is an important and distinguishing feature of Community National Schools.

All children are taught a common multi-belief education programme called "**Goodness Me - Goodness You**" which centres on a common approach with the key to each lesson involving the relating of a story.

Preparations for key milestones in individual beliefs are provided for within the school day. Local belief leaders are encouraged to come into the school from time to time and particularly during the child's preparation for key milestones in accordance with his/her belief.

Inclusive

"Human solidarity is the necessary condition for the unfolding of any one individual". ^[1]

A **key hallmark** of Community National Schools is their **multi-collaborative and inclusive** approach to educating children - welcoming and respecting children of all cultures and beliefs. Community National Schools acknowledge the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society and are deeply committed to inclusion, equality and fairness.

Community National Schools operate through an **ethos of inclusivity and respect** for all beliefs, both religious and non-religious and recognise the wishes of parents, in making reasonable accommodation to having their children receive belief-specific teaching during the school day.

Government funded and State operated schools

"Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family". ^[1]

"Ireland today mirrors Ireland at various times in her past. Ireland has been forged from diversity, from successive waves of immigration including Celtic, Viking, Norman, English,

Scots and Huguenot (something which can be seen in the diversity of origins of surnames which are typical in Ireland)".

The Irish Nobel Prize winning playwright George Bernard Shaw expressed this when he wrote:

"I am a genuine typical Irishman of the Danish, Norman, Cromwellian and (of course) Scotch invasions".

This historic diversity has contributed to the richness of Irish heritage. The diversity found in contemporary Ireland contributes to the richness of our culture today and into the future ^[2].

Community National Schools represent a **new departure** in the delivery of primary education in Ireland. Community National Schools represent a new colour to the existing palate of options available for parents/guardians in the provision of primary education in Ireland.

Established initially in 2008, Community National Schools are **State schools** operating in accordance with prescribed guidelines and curricula for National Schools as set down by the Department of Education and Skills.

Community National Schools are subject to external monitoring and evaluation by the Department of Education and Skills' Inspectorate in line with established standards and practice.

Holistic development of each child

'The principle goal of education is to create men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done; men and women who are creative, inventive ... who can be critical and verify, and not accept, everything they are offered". ^[1]

Community National Schools strive to provide a primary school educational experience that **respects each child's uniqueness and cultivates each child's potential** through approaches that are child-centred, inclusive, dignified and founded on a commitment to contemporary, high quality teaching and learning methodologies.

Education, particularly at primary level, is influential in shaping one's view of the world and our sense of belonging within it. School is an important social setting and experiences in school contribute to the building over time, of core values such as justice, fairness in treatment, respect for oneself and others and so on. **Community National Schools, through the work of dedicated staff educating in a culture respecting diversity, invest in the holistic**

development of each child in a variety of capabilities be it academic, civic, social, moral or spiritual development

Togetherness with parents

"Parents and educators...need to establish a culture in which security and clarity of expectations are balanced with the encouragement of playfulness, inquisitiveness and self reliance". ^[1]

Acknowledging the role of the family and parents enshrined in Article 42 of the Irish Constitution ^[2], **Community National Schools respect the trust parent/guardian, place in having their child educated in line with the key principles on which these schools are based.**

The school community needs the support and active engagement at numerous levels by parents/guardians. It is a unique experience for any parent when their child goes to primary school and the **Community National School strives, through a caring and empathetic approach, to foster a welcoming and encouraging atmosphere in its schools throughout the child's schooling experience and in support of the child's parents and family.**

Whilst each Community National School is unique in its make-up, the fundamentals are the same. Community National Schools **value parents, their child and the child's family.**

The Board of Management and staff in Community National Schools appreciate **and willingly encourage the involvement** of parents, guardians and each child's family, in the education, social and moral development of their child both within and outside the school day.

A customary special '*Welcome Day*' takes place at the start of each school year for Junior Infant children and their parents/guardians and various celebratory days in belief calendars are acknowledged during the school calendar year.

Community National Schools provide a variety of **after-school activities** organised through the school for children and indeed for parents/guardians

Child-centred

"What we want to see the child in pursuit of knowledge, and not knowledge in pursuit of the child". ^[1]

A **child-centred** approach to teaching and learning impacts every aspect of your child's experience of school life. In real terms, it means that each child's needs and talents are fostered through teaching and learning approaches that strive to develop each child's academic, social, moral, emotional, spiritual and creative capabilities. Community National Schools endeavour to provide a welcoming, safe, encouraging and happy learning

atmosphere where your child can learn new skills and develop capabilities to enable him/her to engage positively and constructively with the community and the world around them.

High quality standard of education

"The pathway to educational excellence lies within each school".

Community National Schools place the child at the centre of the learning experience.

Proven conventional and contemporary approaches to the way the curriculum is taught, both contribute to the development of each child's learning potential and retention capabilities. Teaching is assisted through the use of modern educational equipment and technologies to support the child's learning process.

Open and accountable

"Something magical happens when you bring together a group of people from different disciplines with a common purpose".

The Board of Management

The Board of Management in a Community National School is established and has responsibilities based on the same obligations to those prescribed for other Irish primary schools. This means that the Board of Management is responsible for all matters relating to the operation and accountability of the school.

Community National School Boards of Management are structured to reflect representation from key stakeholders involved in the school. Every Community National School Board includes representatives of parents, teachers, the community, the patron and the Principal.

The VEC as Patron

The local Vocational Education Committee (VEC) currently acts as patron designate for Community National Schools pending the enactment of the necessary legislation to facilitate full VEC patronage. Following enactment, the local VEC will act as the patron of the Community National School, setting out the ethos and philosophy for the development of the school. As patron, the VEC will guide that ethos and see that it is supported by the Board and staff of the school.

From your perspective as a parent, you have the confidence of knowing that Community National Schools will be under the patronage of your local VEC. VECs have a distinguished

record over decades in delivering and working in partnership in the provision of education and training programmes within the communities they serve. VECs themselves are democratic in representation and statutorily accountable through governing legislation for the performance of their statutory functions. This structure provides significant transparency and accountability.

A number of **significant benefits** accrue to Community National Schools in **having the local VEC as its patron** not least of these is the additional support, expertise and knowledge-base that VECs possess which can act as an invaluable resource to Principals, staff, parents and the school community.

Inspirational leadership

"It is what teachers think, what teachers do, and what teachers are at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that young people get". ^[1]

Meade and Young ^[2] commented that the pupil-teacher relationship influences the engagement, motivation and behaviour of pupils at second level. The relationship between the teacher and child at primary level is particularly important given that the individual teacher educates across a variety of disciplines.

The drive, energy and commitment which management, teaching and support staff have demonstrated in the Community National Schools already opened, represents real commitment to the provision of a high standard quality educational experience which respects each individual child and approaches education with renewed purpose and ambition.

Community involvement

"All human beings are born with unique gifts. The healthy functioning of our community depends on its capacity to develop each gift".

Community National Schools are founded on a strong community identity. Not only will your child experience being part of the school's own community but also, and importantly, recognise that he/she is a valued member of the local community in which they live and grow.

Schools are important hubs in any community, oftentimes providing the sole link for parents whether working within or outside the home, to neighbours and the wider community. This has been particularly true in recent years with the emergence of large suburban areas populated by families who are not born in the area in which they, as a family, now live. The importance of the 'community' element in the establishment of these schools is a unique feature. Involvement from the local community is actively encouraged whether it is through promoting the Arts, broadening cultural experiences, promoting sporting and social activities or through a variety of other means.

Community National Schools are of the community - uniquely placed in the local community and providing a welcoming, friendly, approach to parental and community involvement.

Through its own unique character and dynamic, each Community National School strives to promote a positive experience for each child of being part of not only their own school, but also assisting in the child's development of a sense of belonging to and identity with, the community in which they live. Each Community National School simultaneously brings the community into the school and the school into the community.

Educating for the 21st century

"Do not confine your children to your own learning for they were born in another time".

Community National Schools teach for the 21st century, applying modern technologies with established and progressive approaches to educating each child. As Margaret Arbuckle, a leading US Educator, wrote: *'In high performing schools...teachers feel invigorated, challenged, professionally engaged, and empowered, just because they are there'*. This is true of the commitment to educating each child in accordance with the key principles that underpin this new initiative in primary education in modern Ireland so that as Robert M. Hutchins so aptly put it - *'the object of education is to prepare the young to educate themselves throughout their lives'*