



# “Sharing our Reflections”

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on behalf of the Advisory Group:

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# Structure of Presentation

- Reflections on the Forum
- I Overview of Background Context
- II Current School and Demographic Profile
- III Planning towards Future Patronage Arrangements
- IV Towards Divesting School Patronage
- V Irish Medium Schools
- VI Stand Alone Schools
- VII Issues



# Reflections on the Forum

- Part of a Distinctive, Consultative Policy Tradition
- Focus Public Attention
- Harvest Perspectives
- Extent of Engagement
- Extent of Documentation
- Role of Media
- School Diversity – an International Problem
- Irish Medium Schools, part of the Diversity Debate
- Towards a Solution for Changing Irish Circumstances



# Reflections on the Forum

- Submissions (220) – A Wide Spectrum of Views + Consultation with Young People
- Significance of Terms of Reference
- Not Re-designing of Primary System
  - Adapting a System to be More Inclusive
- Seeking to Secure Children's/Parents' Rights
- Forum is part of an On-going Process
- Adjustments to Schooling Provision can be Emotive, Upsetting for Communities
  - Solutions for the Common Good in a Calm, Respectful, Reasonable Way
- Advisory Group as Lifelong Learners



# Planned Approach

## I. Overview of Background Context

- Aim to give a Succinct, Informative Overview of the Historical, Constitutional and Legal Context of School Patronage
- Review of the Consultative Processes, Policy Developments and Commentary on School Patronage over recent decades
  - What's to be learned?
- Some International Viewpoints on Primary School Provision in Ireland



## II Current School and Demographic Profile

Aim to

- Present a Clear Picture of relevant features of the current Primary School System
- Present Key Features of the Population Profile of Contemporary Ireland, in so far as the Facts can be ascertained
- Clarify to what extent Current Provision matches the Population's Needs and Rights



# Some Facts

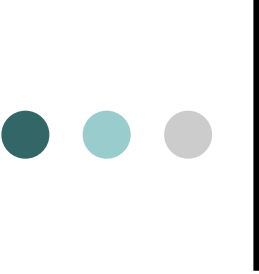
- 96% of Primary Schools under Denominational Patronage
- 20% of Schools have less than 50 Pupils
  - With an average of 156 pupils, smallest average school size
  - 33% have less than 5 teachers
- Projected Increase in Enrolment – 2014 → 2017
- More Multi-cultural Population – towards an Intercultural Society
- More Varied Belief Systems; increasing Minority of Non-Believers
- Changing Parental Attitudes on Religious Education
- Changing Patterns of Religious Practice
- Pressure for More Varied Forms of Patronage



# III Planning Towards Future Patronage Arrangements

- Legal Obligation on State to Provide For Primary Education, as much as is possible
- Moral Obligation on All Stakeholders to Co-operate and Facilitate
- An On-going Process
- State's Community National Schools 2008 → pilot
- State's Initiative on Patronage of New Schools
- Discussion Paper on School Enrolment
- Non-Denominational Schools
- Joint-Campus School Arrangements
- Forum on Patronage and Pluralism





## IV Towards Divesting School Patronage

### **Building on Experience**

- Expressions of Good Will and Intentionality
- Some Successful Transfers to draw on
- Scope from School Amalgamations e.g. boys/girls, senior/junior (51 since 2003)
- Schools becoming Surplus to Patron's Requirements
- Transfer of Leases to the State less Complicated
- Responsibility of State for School Planning and Variation of Patronage



# Possible Value of a Catchment /District Approach

- Cluster of Schools, Static Population, Parental Demand
- Consider the Overall School Provision
- Consideration of the Value for the Community (the common good of patronage change)
- Need for up-to-date Accurate Information on the Schools, Population, Pupil Numbers etc.
- Responsibility on State to Provide and Disseminate All Relevant Data
- Need to Assess Parental Demand
- Advisory Group Not in favour of Plebiscites, large Town Hall gatherings etc.



# Possible Phase One of Divesting Process

- Advisory Group urges Clarification of Legal Issues
- Urgency for Action on Divesting
- Yet, a “Big Bang”, or Radical Upheaval not best
- Value of a ‘Rolling Plan’ for Incremental Change
- The DES, at request of Bishops, has identified 47 Catchment Areas
- The Advisory Group Recommends that these 47 Areas should form Phase One of the Divesting Process.
  - 18 Dioceses, 258 schools



# Phase One

- DES to
  - Provide All Relevant Data to Patrons
  - Gather Evidence of Parental Preferences
- Patrons Report within a Time Period to DES
- DES to relate with Prospective Patrons
- A small Specialised Independent Group – advise, help resolve difficulties
- Report on Outcomes of Phase One → planning forward



# Phase One

- Protect Social Inclusion and Special Needs in Diversification
- Value of Proposed Enrolment Policy
- Overview by Inspectorate
- Children's Best Interests - Central in Transfer Arrangements
- Regard for Teachers' Rights and Viewpoints
- Positive Role for BOMs, Principals and Support Agencies



# How to Measure Parental Demand

Advisory Group is considering Two Approaches to be Operated Concurrently, where relevant

- (1) A Preference Register
  - This Register, of Parents of Future Primary School Pupils, would Indicate their Preference for a **Type** of School Patronage
  - DCYA's current Enrolment Form for free Pre-school Year seeks name of Primary School chosen by parents
  - We Recommend that DCYA also Collects Data on primary school **type** Preference
  - We consider that it would greatly Facilitate Planning if the Enrolment Form was collected a year earlier (at age 2+)
  - Alternatively, School Type Preference Data might be collected by DSP
  - Anonymised Data from Preference Register on DES website
  - Periodic Review



# Measuring Views of Parents (of Children in School)

- (2) Questionnaire prepared by DES in Consultation with Partners accompanied by a Brief Description of each Type of School Patronage
  - Issued to All Parents in the Schools within the 47 Areas
  - Questionnaire compatible with Computer Analysis
  - Report prepared by DES on Parental Preferences
  - Time scales to be decided
  - Staff allocated within DES to assist Forward Planning Section with this Initiative



# Register of Patrons

- Should be Developed, Extended
- Criteria of Suitability (use June 2011 criteria)
- Patrons to supply Statements of Schools' Characteristics
- Responsibilities of Patrons to be set out
- Accountability – Role of Inspectors





# V Irish Medium Primary Schools

- Part of the Diversity of Patronage Process, yet, Special Dimension
- Not a Denominational/ Religious Issue
- Variety of Patron Bodies and School Types
  - Denominational, Multi-denominational and Inter-denominational
- Schools in Gaeltacht:
  - 1975/1976: 153 schools and 10,789 pupils
  - 2010/ 2011: 106 schools and 7,302 pupils
- Schools outside Gaeltacht:
  - 1975/1976: 20 schools and 2,818 pupils
  - 2010/2011: 140 schools and 29,675 pupils



# Special Status of Irish Language

- **Constitution, Art. 8** – “The Irish Language as the National Language is the First Official Language”
- **Education Act, Sec. 6**
  - To Contribute to the Extension of Bi-lingualism in Irish Society and ... to Achieve Greater use of Irish Language at School and in Community
  - To Contribute to Maintenance of Irish in Gaeltacht Areas
  - To Promote the Language and Cultural Needs of Students having regard to the Choices of their Parents
- **Strategy, 2010 – 2030 – Obj. 6**
  - “A High Standard of all-Irish Education will be Provided to School Students whose Parents/ Guardians so wish. Gaelscoileanna will Continue to be Supported at Primary level and All –Irish provision at Post Primary level will be Developed to Meet follow-on Demand”



# Advisory Group Reflections

- I.M.S – part of New Schools Patronage Initiative
- I.M.Ss should be part of Area-based Parental Questionnaires to give Guidance on their future provision
- DES to Analyse Development of I.M.S to give Guidance on Future Applications
- Facilitation for Parents of I.M.Ss re Transport
- Partners to Explore Possibility of Special Category, on the Panel, for Irish Medium Teachers
- Pilot Idea of a “Satellite” entity by an I.M.S



# VI The “Stand Alone” School

- “Stand Alone” – School
  - Serves a Community with No other Choice of School
  - Serves a Diverse Population Mix
  - Needs Modification – agreed Protocol Protecting Rights of All Children Enrolled
  - BOM Membership should Reflect, where possible, Diversity in the Local Community
- At Forum, in June, it was stated that Many Schools were Inclusive
  - Advisory Group sought Exemplars of their operation
- DES to
  - Advise on Self-evaluation – on Diversity Needs within the School – including Questionnaires to Parents
  - Issue Guidelines/Exemplars of Good Practice



# Timetable Options in Stand Alone School

There are Practical Problems in Small Schools. Among possible Options to Assist Schools, we suggest

- Religious Instruction/ Faith Formation
  - be held at Different Times for Different Class Groups, facilitating 'Opting Out'
  - Timetabled for the Beginning or End of the School Day
- Schools to Explore with Minority Faith Groups the possibilities of Members Assisting the 'Opt Out' Pupils
  - Voluntary work is a Trait of Community – e.g. Parent Associations
- Consideration of the use of ICT for RI, during or outside School Hours



# Statutory Provision

- Education Act (1998) S.15 – BOMs “have Respect and Promote Respect for the Diversity of Values, Beliefs, Traditions, Languages and Ways of Life of the Society”
- Education Act, S. 15, should be Amended to Include new section after (2)(b) whereby the Board shall
  - Be Accountable to Parents, while upholding the Characteristic Spirit of the School, for also upholding the Constitutional Rights of Parents and Children with regard to Religious Instruction
- S.30(2)(e) “shall not require Any Student to Attend Instruction in Any Subject which is Contrary to the Conscience of Parent of the Student...”
- Amendment of the Equal Status Act (2000) (2), (c) to be considered, particularly in the Context of Stand Alone Schools, to facilitate the DES in “Providing for” the Education of All Children in the Area



# Rules and Curriculum

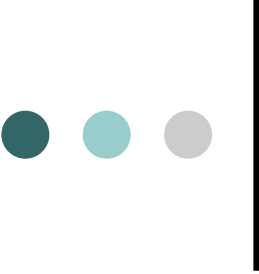
- The Minister should Review the Rules for National Schools to Ensure their Harmony with Article 44(2)(4°) of the Constitution and with Human Rights Conventions ratified by Ireland
  - Rule 68 should be Deleted
- Curriculum (1999) – school – “to be Flexible in making Alternative Arrangements for those who do Not wish to avail of the particular Religious Education it Offers”.
- The Introduction to the Curriculum Guidelines (1999) should be Revised to Ensure that while the General Curriculum remains Integrated, Provision is made for Religious Instruction/ Faith Formation to be Taught as a Discrete Subject.



# Next Stage

- The Advisory Group
  - Suggests that Some Local School Communities, following Self-evaluation, may need to Consider the Form of Patronage which best serves their Purposes. Roles of BOM and Principal are significant
    - Possibilities of a Change of Patronage, Co-patronage towards Transition to a New Patron, or Transition to a Community National School might be explored
  - Agrees with the Principles set out in the DES Enrolment Discussion Paper (2011) and considers that Enrolment should not Discriminate on Religious, Socio-economic, Languages, Cultural, Special Needs, or other status





# VII Issues:

## Religious Education

- The Advisory Group
  - Considers that Education about World Religions, Ethics and Morals (ERB) should be Part of the Curriculum for All Children whatever their Belief System. This view was supported at the Forum in June and at the Consultation with the Young People. It is in line with the Council of Europe, the Toledo Principles, the REDCo Project, and the Cambridge Review
  - Considers that the NCCA should develop an ERB programme for the Primary School and draw on existing RE Programmes when doing so
  - Suggests that Catholic Bishops consider that the revised Alive O Programme devote Two or Three Classes a week to ERB material and the Remainder of the classes to Faith Formation. This could Enhance provision of RE for All Primary School Pupils
  - Suggests that Other Groups provide Resources appropriate to their Belief System



# Religious Artefacts and Celebrations

- BOM Policy on Display of Religious Artefacts and Works of Art should be Inclusive of All Belief Systems in the School
  - Young People, “Every School should have a Display Wall on which All Beliefs in the School could be Represented”
- Much Good Practice in Celebrating Festivals of Different Religious Beliefs
  - Extend and Ensure that the Celebrations are Inclusive, Educational and Respectful of the Differing Traditions of the Children in the School



# Faith Formation

- Sacramental Preparation, or Education for Religious Rites of Passage for other Belief Systems, should not Encroach on the Time Allocated to the General Curriculum
- Communal Prayers/ Reflections, Hymns, Assemblies, where these take place in Schools, need to be Respectful of the Beliefs and Culture of All Children in the School
- Welcome new emphasis in the National Catechetical Directory on Faith Formation / Sacramental Preparation by the Family and Parish, supported by the School
- Continue On-going Dialogue with Patrons



# Complaints and Appeals

- Complaints relating to Enrolment issues and alleged infringements of the Rights of Belief Minorities, or those aggrieved at “Opt Out” arrangements of their Children from Religious Instruction should, in the first instance, be brought before the BOM of the School
- Where a Satisfactory Outcome cannot be achieved, Parents need an Effective, Non-adversarial, and Cost-effective Mediation and Appeals System
- The Advisory Group considers that an Expanded Role for the Office of the Ombudsman for Children could Provide an Appropriate Appeals mechanism



# Teacher Education

In the context of Restructuring of Initial Teacher Education Courses

- All Teacher Education Colleges should offer
  - Teaching Methodology Course applicable to All Religions
  - Compulsory Course on Ethics and ERB
- Existing Teachers should have Opportunity for CPD in relation to the New Approaches to Religious Education



# Resourcing

- In the light of the significance of the Objective of Greater Diversity and Pluralism in Primary Education, it is Not Sensible to expect that No Costs would be involved, despite Recessionary Pressures. While large Funds will not be available, it is necessary that
  - Administrative Funding be Prioritised to Assist the complex processes involved
  - Funding from existing Capital Budget be available for Minor upgrading where Patronage Transfer or Amalgamations occur
  - Current Resource Incentives for Amalgamation should be Retained
  - NCCA should be Provided with Assistance to Undertake preparation of an ERB programme