

Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector

Progress to Date and Future Directions

July 2014

Ministerial Foreword

Ireland has a proud record of promoting and respecting human rights. They are enshrined in our Constitution and in various acts of the Oireachtas. They are also set out in conventions and treaties of international bodies such as the United Nations where we continue to play an active part in support of these rights.

It is important to ensure that our own structures and institutions are dedicated to upholding the highest standards of respect for human rights. This applies to schools as well as to other institutions.

In this context, while we rightly emphasise the importance of education outcomes, we must also be conscious of our responsibility to ensure that the primary school system respects the rights of all pupils, regardless of their background, beliefs or nationality.

Part of the response to that challenge has been to increase the diversity of school choice available to parents. The Forum on Patronage and Pluralism, which I established in 2011, recommended various steps be taken to ensure that a greater diversity of patronage be available in our primary schools. This paper outlines the progress in this regard since the publication of the Forum Report. I am keen to see continued progress.

However, the provision of diversity of choice in new schools does not obviate the need for all existing schools to continue to cater for pupils of a variety of backgrounds. The Forum Report also made recommendations aimed at ensuring that all schools, where change of patronage is not an option, cater for the diverse range of beliefs and nationalities which are now an intrinsic part of Irish society. I recognise the good work that some schools are already doing. I think that it is important and useful for others to be able to learn from their example. This paper outlines examples of how schools are working to respect the rights of pupils of all faiths and none, while still remaining true to the ethos of the school.

As noted by Kieran and Hession (2005), inclusion is more than just a passive or silent toleration of minority faith children by a school which never engages in consultative and supportive discussion with their parents or guardians. It is a more positive concept and one which we need to promote and encourage in our schools.

A study based on interviews with people of minority beliefs about their children's experiences in the denominational system is illuminating in this regard (Deegan, Devine and Lodge 2004). Key issues emerged regarding how children can sometimes feel alienated because of their different religious beliefs. However, in the decade since that study was released teachers have adapted well to the changing pupil profile in their classrooms. They recognise that it is not acceptable that any child feels "invisible or subordinate in our schools" because of their religious beliefs.

Respecting and upholding the rights of all minorities in schools is an important responsibility of the state.

Irish schools have a proud tradition of serving their communities. Their contribution to the development of our society and economy has been enormous. Denominational patrons have been an important part of this and will continue to play a strong role in our education system.

However, our schools can be busy places. There is a risk that we can overlook some fundamental rights to which pupils and their parents are entitled.

These issues may not be a pressing concern for parents who are happy with their children's schools. This does not, however, release us from our responsibilities to make sure that schools are as welcoming and as inclusive as possible to all pupils of all backgrounds, beliefs and nationalities.

It is important that Ireland continues to be seen as a country which upholds human rights. We cannot allow the country to run the risk of being the subject of ongoing criticism in this regard. I am publishing this paper in order to promote greater discussion and debate on how we can ensure that all our pupils feel welcome and included in school.

Ruairí Quinn, T.D.

Minister for Education and Skills

July 2014

Chapter 1: Background and Context

1.1 Background

The Programme for Government (Government of Ireland, 2011) included a commitment to establish a Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the primary sector. The objective was to allow for an open debate on change of patronage of primary schools in communities where it was appropriate and necessary. It was envisaged that the Forum's recommendations would be drawn up into a White Paper for implementation by Government.

The Forum was established and consulted widely with stakeholders in the sector. It made a series of recommendations, as set out in detail in Chapter 2, which covered:

- Future patronage arrangements;
- Divesting of patronage;
- Irish language provision; and
- Promoting inclusion of diversity in existing schools.

Chapter 3 describes in greater detail the progress being made to implement the recommendations of the Forum Report. There has been progress on a number of fronts, including:

- A New Process for the Establishment of New Schools;
- Divesting of Patronage of Existing Schools;
- Development of a new Curriculum on Education about Religion and Beliefs and Ethics; and
- New Enrolment Legislation.

In relation to accommodating diversity in schools, the Forum Report recognised that in many parts of the country, settlement patterns and distances between schools are such that providing diversity of choice would be a challenge. Therefore, it recommended that existing schools should be in a position to accommodate diversity among the pupils from the communities in which they are located.

Following a public consultation process and an examination of practices in existing schools, this paper describes how many schools are working to ensure that all pupils feel welcomed and included in their schools. Chapters 4 and 5 outline a number of areas of good practice in this regard and sets out options and proposals which can be considered by schools for progression. The topics covered include:

- Current Practice in relation to the right to opt out;
- Scheduling of Religion Classes and other Religious Activities;
- Options for Pupils in relation to Religious Ceremonies of the Ethos of the School;
- Celebration of Religious Festivals;
- Display of Artefacts; and
- Evaluation of Policies and Practices.

The paper does not set out to be prescriptive and recognises that each school has its own ethos and operates in a particular context. Therefore, it encourages schools to consider their own practices critically and to consult meaningfully with their own communities and

stakeholders in formulating policies and developing practice in this area. It also envisages that such policies and practices would evolve and develop as the school and the environment in which it operates continue to change and develop.

The principles of good communication, clarity on rights and responsibilities, openness to dialogue and flexibility are commended as being important for all stakeholders in order to ensure that the school can work to protect and respect the rights of all members of the school community.

The implementation of the recommendations of the Forum Report will continue into the future. As recognised in this paper, no one size fits all in these matters and the implementation of the Forum Report will continue to take account of changes and developments in Irish society. It is envisaged that this process will be organic and will allow sufficient flexibility for schools working in different contexts.

The views of all stakeholders, in particular parents and school authorities, involved in dealing with these issues are always welcomed in this regard and can be submitted to cpu@education.gov.ie at any time.

1.2 Changing societal context: increased diversity of the Irish population

Most (96%) primary schools in Ireland are owned by religious patrons. As can be seen in Table 1, 90% of these schools are under the patronage of the Catholic Church. For many years, religious orders and local parishes were centrally involved in establishing and running schools in Ireland, leading to the majority of primary schools being under religious patronage. The patrons often gave the land for schools to be built and also contributed to the cost of building and running schools. Patrons continue to support schools' Boards of Management in their role of managing the schools.

This situation is unique among developed countries and has its roots in the historical development of primary education in Ireland. In 1831, the primary school system, as we know it today, was established. It is a system which has evolved as a partnership between state and patrons and which has worked well. For many years, the vast majority of people in Ireland subscribed to Christian denominational churches, mainly the Catholic Church. Therefore, the dominance of denominational patronage in the system accorded with the belief systems represented in the population in the country.

Table 1.
Total number of primary schools by patron body (2010/11)*

| Patron Body | No of Schools | % of Total |
|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Catholic | 2,841 | 89.65 |
| Church of Ireland | 174 | 5.49 |
| Presbyterian | 17 | 0.54 |
| Methodist | 1 | 0.03 |
| Jewish | 1 | 0.03 |

| | | |
|--|--------------|-------------|
| Islamic | 2 | 0.06 |
| Quaker | 1 | 0.03 |
| John Scottus Educational Trust Ltd | 1 | 0.03 |
| Lifeways Ireland Ltd | 2 | 0.06 |
| An Foras Pátrúnachta na Scoileanna Lán-Ghaeilge Teo | 57 | 1.80 |
| Educate Together Ltd (national patron body) | 44 | 1.39 |
| Schools in Educate Together network with their own patron body | 14 | 0.44 |
| Education and Training Boards** | 5 | 0.16 |
| Minister for Education & Skills*** | 9 | 0.29 |
| | | |
| Total | 3,169 | 100% |

*This table outlines the patronage of ordinary mainstream primary schools and does not include special schools

** Community National Schools are under the interim patronage of the Minister but are intended to transfer to ETB patronage by the end of 2014

***The Minister for Education and Skills is patron of the nine Model Schools.

However, Irish society is transforming rapidly. Our education system needs to adapt continuously to the changing profile of the Irish population which now includes people of many different religions, beliefs, nationalities and ethnic backgrounds.

As Table 2 shows, there has been a significant growth in the diversity of religions, beliefs, traditions and backgrounds represented in Ireland. For example, between 1961 and 2011, the number of people describing themselves as having “No Religion” has increased from 1,107 to over 256,830. Meanwhile, the numbers of people choosing the category of “other stated religions” has also increased to over 75,000 in the 2011 Census.

Therefore, our schools are catering for a significantly more diverse population nowadays than the population that they traditionally served. Many schools have made significant efforts to welcome this more diverse population. Furthermore, the system has adapted to serve this increasingly diverse population. For example, there has been an increase in the number of schools under non-religious patrons and there has been an increase in the number of new multi-denominational schools established.

However, the system needs to adapt further to ensure that it can cater for all different traditions. It needs to continue to serve the needs of traditional beliefs, for example, the main Christian denominations in Ireland, but it also has to ensure that there is respect and provision in line with all the different traditions, religions and beliefs now represented in our population.

We have a responsibility to ensure that our schools are inclusive of pupils from all backgrounds and beliefs. This paper is primarily concerned with the inclusion of pupils from different religions, beliefs and traditions and it outlines the work done to date in this regard as well as setting out some options on how matters can be progressed further.

Table 2**Population classified by Religion 2011****Population Usually Resident and Present in the State by Religion and Nationality, 2011**

| Religion | Nationality | | | |
|--|--------------------|----------------|---|------------------|
| | Irish | Other | Not stated, including no nationality | All |
| Roman Catholic | 3,525,573 | 282,799 | 22,815 | 3,831,187 |
| Church of Ireland, England, Anglican, Episcopalian | 93,056 | 30,464 | 925 | 124,445 |
| Muslim (Islamic) | 18,223 | 29,143 | 764 | 48,130 |
| Orthodox (Greek, Coptic, Russian) | 8,465 | 34,854 | 684 | 44,003 |
| Other Christian religion, n.e.s. | 24,023 | 15,258 | 371 | 39,652 |
| Presbyterian | 14,348 | 8,311 | 176 | 22,835 |
| Apostolic or Pentecostal | 5,520 | 8,182 | 174 | 13,876 |
| Other stated religions | 34,867 | 40,227 | 561 | 75,655 |
| No religion | 173,180 | 82,194 | 1,456 | 256,830 |
| Not stated | 29,888 | 12,925 | 25,855 | 68,668 |
| All religions | 3,927,143 | 544,357 | 53,781 | 4,525,281 |

Source: Census of Ireland 2011 (CSO, 2012)

1.3 National Legal Framework

Article 42 of the Constitution deals with the right to Education and the State's obligation to provide education to be provided to all children. However, it is also important to note the provisions of Article 44 in relation to Religion. Under Article 44 of the Constitution, all parents have the right to withdraw their child from religious instruction in school¹.

Under Section 30 of the Education Act 1998, a student cannot be required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student or, in the case of a student who is 18 or more, the student him/herself.

1.4 International Obligations

In recent decades, Ireland has become party to a number of international human rights treaties and conventions. These instruments, inter alia, articulate and recognise the right to education and the right to freedom of religion and belief². Ireland undertakes to protect the human rights set out therein by becoming a party to these treaties and conventions.

It should also be noted that these human rights attach to all individuals and that thresholds do not apply to their realisation i.e. rights accruing to sufficiently large groups but not to individuals.

1.4.1 Monitoring Committees

Ireland, in common with all other states that are party to these conventions, is the subject of periodic examination of its performance in relation to the implementation of its obligations under these instruments by the monitoring committees established under the treaties.

In recent reports, the various monitoring bodies have criticised Ireland's performance in relation to the provision of diversity of patronage and choice of school type. The reports have noted that the overwhelming majority of schools in the country are under denominational patronage, with Catholic patrons representing the large majority of denominational patrons. The small number of multi- or non-denominational schools in the

¹ Article 44.2 states inter alia

1° Freedom of conscience and the free profession and practice of religion are, subject to public order and morality, guaranteed to every citizen.

2° The State guarantees not to endow any religion.

3° The State shall not impose any disabilities or make any discrimination on the ground of religious profession, belief or status.

4° Legislation providing State aid for schools shall not discriminate between schools under the management of different religious denominations, nor be such as to affect prejudicially the right of any child to attend a school receiving public money without attending religious instruction at that school.

² These instruments include:

The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

The Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities

The UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

The UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

The UN Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD)

system has been criticised as has the risk of a mismatch between the schools available and the rights of citizens in a more culturally and religiously diverse society.

The Committee notes with concern that the vast majority of Ireland's primary schools are privately run denominational schools that have adopted a religious integrated curriculum, thus depriving many parents and children who so wish to have access to secular primary education. ICCPR (October 2008)

The Committee notes with concern that the education system in the State Party [Ireland] is still largely denominational and is mainly dominated by the Catholic Church. The Committee further notes that non-denominational or multi-denominational schools represent only a small percentage of the total and regrets that according to reports there are not enough alternative schools.[....] The Committee reiterates its previous concluding observations and recommends that the State Party accelerates its efforts to establish alternative non-denominational or multi-denominational schools and to amend the existing legislation that inhibits students from enrolling in a school because of their faith or belief. CERD (March 2011)

The Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review of Ireland at the UN Human Rights Council published in December 2011 noted the concern of other UN Member States about the education system in Ireland. The Report called on Ireland to

“Accelerate efforts in establishing a national network of schools that guarantee equality of access to children, irrespective of their religious, cultural or social background.”

and also to

“Encourage diversity and tolerance of other faiths and beliefs in the education system..”

1.5 Responding to our Obligations

It is essential for the education system to adapt and evolve to reflect the changes in the society it serves and to uphold the rights of all pupils. There has been a growth in the provision of multi-denominational primary schools, including both Educate Together schools and Community National Schools. Between the academic years 2007/08 and 2013/14, of the 61 new primary schools which were established, 44 were multi-denominational.

Ireland has a good record in the arena of promoting and respecting human rights. It is important that we continue to live up to the high standards set in international conventions. Ireland will continue to be the subject of international criticism if it does not move to address the concerns raised by the Monitoring Committees of the international human rights treaties to which it is a party. Ireland is also obliged to protect the constitutional rights of all its citizens and to ensure that public policy evolves and develops to promote the protection of these rights.

Chapter 2. Forum on Patronage

The issue of the changing educational needs of society was addressed in the Programme for Government (Government of Ireland, 2011, pp. 12-13). The Programme included two specific commitments relating to the issues of patronage and pluralism.

- *We will initiate a time-limited Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector to allow all stakeholders including parents to engage in open debate on change of patronage in communities where it is appropriate and necessary. The Forum will have concise terms of reference and will sit for a maximum of 12 months.*
- *The Forum's recommendations will be drawn up into White Paper for consideration and implementation by Government to ensure that education system can provide sufficiently diverse number of schools, catering for all religions and none.*

Upon taking up office in March 2011, the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairí Quinn, T.D., established the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector. The terms of reference of the Forum gave it the task of coming up with recommendations on what steps could be taken to ensure that the education system at primary level could provide a sufficiently diverse number and range of primary schools to cater for children of all religions and none.

The Forum consulted with various stakeholders and held a number of public meetings with stakeholders to discuss the key issues arising.

The Forum report was published in April 2012. It is available on line at www.education.ie

The Report's recommendations can be broadly divided into four areas:

- Those dealing with planning towards future patronage arrangements and having a more diverse range of patronage types for new schools in areas of rising population.
- Those dealing with the practicalities of achieving divesting of patronage where there is a stable population and a demand for diversity of school types;
- Those dealing with Irish language provision; and
- Those dealing with the creation of more inclusive schools, particularly so-called 'Stand Alone' schools, often in rural areas, which account for about 1,700 of the near 3,200 primary schools and where divesting to another patron is not a feasible option.

2.1 New Schools for Areas of Rising Population

The Advisory Group noted that the Minister for Education and Skills had announced new requirements and criteria for deciding on the patronage of new schools in June 2011. In the context of a rising population and demand for new schools in areas of rapid population growth, the Minister had stated that the criteria to be used in deciding on patronage of a new school would place a particular emphasis on parental demand for plurality and diversity of patronage.

The New Schools Establishment Group has been set up to advise the Minister on the patronage of new schools. The Forum Report commended this approach for the recognition of patrons where new schools are required.

2.2 Divesting of School Patronage

The Advisory Group's recommendations in this area focus on divesting of school patronage in areas of relatively stable population where it is neither socially desirable nor economically feasible to build new schools.

The Report concludes that in areas where there is a cluster of denominational schools, but a parental demand for an alternative form of school patronage, *'it is generally accepted that the main target for divesting is from an existing patron, through the Department of Education and Skills, to a new patron'*.

The Group recommended a three-stage process involving gathering evidence of demand for change of school patronage, followed by consultation of patrons with school communities and the provision of options by the patrons to the Department of Education and Skills. The Department would then evaluate the options and make recommendations to the Minister for decision.

2.3 Irish Medium Primary Schools

The Report noted that the denominational or religious character of the school is not as big a concern in relation to Irish medium schools, as these exist under a variety of religious patronage arrangements. The Advisory Group noted and welcomed the fact that Irish medium schools were included within the remit of the new school patronage arrangements announced in June 2011.

The Advisory Group recommended that parental demand for Irish medium schools should form part of the analysis of the areas being considered in Phase One of the divesting process.

2.4 Promoting More Inclusive Schools

The fourth broad area covered by the recommendations of the Advisory Group was the need to ensure that existing schools are inclusive and that they have processes in place to protect the rights of pupils with regard to denominational religious education, religious practice and opt-out arrangements. This is in a context where it is accepted that denominational schools will remain the preference of many parents.

The Report noted that part of the response to greater diversity in the population was to provide a greater diversity of schools under different types of patronage. However, there is a recognition that the State cannot provide more schools than are required in a given geographical area, solely to meet the demand for different types of patronage. The high cost of providing and maintaining school buildings, along with the cost of running such schools, including staff salaries, is such that it would not be feasible to pursue such a policy.

The challenge, therefore, is to ensure that diversity is accepted and included in the existing primary school system, while, over time, greater diversity of patronage is introduced.

In addition, even where there is a diversity of patronage, this does not release existing or new schools from their obligations to respect the human rights of all pupils. It was in this context that the Report made a series of recommendations relating to the need to ensure that all schools serve the entire communities in which they operate in a way that clearly respects the human rights of all.

The Report pays particular attention to the situation of the 1,700 or so primary schools which are at least 3km from their nearest neighbours and where it is clear that provision of diversity through a choice of school under another patron is not a practical option. The Group recommended that the Department of Education and Skills develop and issue a protocol to protect the rights of all children enrolled in a school and that the practical application of such a protocol be incorporated by each school into its School Plan. This would be done in consultation with the patrons, parents, management bodies and other interested parties.

Key elements which the Report suggested for consideration in the development of such a protocol included:

- ensuring that Boards of Management of denominational schools reflect the diversity of the local community;
- developing mechanisms for Whole School Evaluation and self-evaluation by schools of practice on diversity and ethos;
- ensuring equitable enrolment policies;
- dealing effectively with the Constitutional right to opt out of religious education;
- ensuring education about religion and beliefs (ERB) and ethics is available to all students. Any new programmes would be developed in consultation with the education partners and would be complementary to and not supplant existing religious education programmes, many of which already include some ERB.

2.5 Other Issues

The Report also recommended that, while the general primary curriculum should remain integrated during the school day, provision should be made for religious education/faith formation to be taught as a discrete subject and that sacramental preparation, or education for religious rites of other belief systems, should not encroach on time allocated for the general curriculum. It suggested that there should be agreed school policies on issues such as the conduct of religious and cultural celebrations. A review and updating was also recommended of the Rules for National Schools, which date from 1965, and in particular Rule 68, which refers to Religious Instruction as *“by far the most important part of the school curriculum”*, and reference in which to, *“a religious spirit informing and vivifying the whole work of the school,”* (Department of Education, 1965) has been criticised nationally and internationally as outdated.

The Forum Report drew attention to the need for complaints and appeals procedures to deal with enrolment issues and with allegations of infringement of human, Constitutional or statutory rights relating to freedom of religion. The importance of continuing to make provision for social inclusion and for children with special educational needs while catering for diversity was also emphasised.

Chapter 3. Implementation of the Recommendations of the Report

Following receipt and publication of the Forum Report, the Minister for Education and Skills responded to the Report with an “Action Plan” in June 2012. (See www.education.ie for more detail on the Action Plan outlined by the Minister in June 2012.)

Since then, a number of different steps have been taken to implement many of the recommendations contained in the Action Plan. A short update on the key initiatives taken is given below.

3.1 New Process for the establishment of New Schools

In 2011, new arrangements for deciding upon patronage for new primary and post-primary schools were announced. The purpose of the arrangements is to provide a balanced approach, to allow for applications to be made from prospective patrons for the establishment of schools.

A New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG) was established in 2011 to advise on the patronage of new schools. The Group’s criteria place a particular emphasis on parental demand for plurality and diversity of patronage and patron bodies proposing schools at either primary or post-primary level are asked to provide evidence of demand for such patronage.

20 new primary schools are to be established by 2017 under the new arrangements. Between the academic years 2007/08 and 2013/14, 61 new primary schools were established, of which 44 were multi-denominational.

3.2 Process for Divesting Patronage of Existing Schools

The Forum Report recommended that in areas of stable population, where there is evidence of demand for different types of patronage, this demand could be met by divesting patronage of existing schools. This was in line with the approach suggested by the Catholic Bishops in 2007 and 2008 in various published documents.

In 2008, negotiations had been initiated between Catholic Church representatives and the Department of Education and Science in relation to issues involved in a divesting of school patronage process. The Department produced a list of areas where a case could be made for appraisal for possible divesting. The Catholic Schools Partnership also undertook a consultation in relation to possible areas for divesting.

As part of the implementation of the Action Plan announced by the Minister in response to the Forum’s Report, surveys of parental preferences in 43 such areas were undertaken, beginning with five pilot areas in the Autumn of 2012.

The aim of the surveys was to establish the level of parental demand for a wider choice in the patronage of primary schools within these areas. The areas concerned have relatively stable populations and in these circumstances there is little prospect that new schools will be established there over the next number of years for demographic reasons. Therefore, the only mechanism for alternative patrons to become involved in school provision in these areas is

through the possible divestment of some existing school provision in the areas provided there is sufficient parental demand for wider choice of patronage.

Surveys were undertaken on a pilot basis initially in five areas and the Department published a report on these in December 2012 which is available on www.education.ie. Thereafter, consultations took place between the stakeholders regarding the pilot survey and the changes that might be required for the next phase of survey work.

The next phase of surveys took place in January 2013 when the remaining 38 areas were surveyed. Of the 43 areas surveyed in total, sufficient parental demand for a wider choice of school patron emerged in 28 of the areas to support change in the patronage of schools. Parents expressed a preference for Educate Together as the alternative patron of choice in 25 of the areas and in 2 of the areas the alternative patron of choice was the local Education and Training Board (ETB). A report on the results of these surveys was published in March 2013 and is available at www.education.ie.

One area demonstrated sufficient demand for an Irish language national school. 35 of the 43 areas surveyed already have a gaelscoil option available for parents. The surveys also reflected that many parents are happy with the current schools on offer under existing patronage arrangements.

Following discussions with the existing Catholic patrons on the potential for permanent accommodation options and discussions with Educate Together on their priorities for initial start-up areas, three new schools are intended to open in September 2014 in Tramore, Co. Waterford, Trim, Co. Meath and Malahide/Portmarnock, Co. Dublin. These new schools are subject to the availability of temporary accommodation and viable enrolments. In addition, a former Christian Brothers primary school building in Basin Lane, Dublin 8 will be in use from September 2014 by an Educate Together school, which opened in temporary accommodation in September 2013.

In Ballina, Co. Mayo, the transfer of a Church of Ireland school to Educate Together patronage is also under detailed discussion. This follows the agreement of the local Church of Ireland Bishop, local parents and the school community to a change of patronage.

Discussions are continuing to take place with the Catholic authorities in the selected areas. The engagement with patrons so far has been positive. However, divesting has not proceeded at the pace originally envisaged. It is intended to work with patrons to ensure that further progress can be achieved for new schools in 2015 and onwards.

3.3 Development of a New Curriculum on Education about Religion and Beliefs and Ethics

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has been given the task of developing a new curriculum for Education about Religion and Beliefs and Ethics. Teaching and learning about different religions and beliefs and ethics may already be taking place in many primary schools but is not happening in them all. The Forum Report proposed that the NCCA curriculum would be supplementary to programmes already in existence which provide for ERB and Ethics. ERB and Ethics will be in addition to, and not in any way a replacement for, existing religious education programmes. The new curriculum will provide consistency, structure, support and a curricular space to allow for learning and for discussion

of the issues in this area. A Programme Officer to develop the curriculum was appointed by the NCCA in 2013. The work will involve extensive consultation with all relevant stakeholders. A Discussion Paper is being prepared, which will form the basis of a consultation in the Autumn of 2014.

3.4 New Enrolment Legislation

The Education (Admission to School) Bill, 2014 is currently being drafted. The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education and Social Protection held public hearings on the proposals and published its report on the matter in March 2014.

Work on the drafting of the Bill is currently under way in the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel and it is envisaged that the Bill will be published in Summer 2014.

The aim of the Bill is to improve the admissions process and to ensure that the way schools decide on applications is structured, fair and transparent. The legislation also proposes a mechanism for ensuring that every child receives a school place.

Under the proposed legislation, schools will be required to publish an enrolment policy which will include details of the school's arrangements for pupils whose parents do not wish them to attend religious instruction.

3.5 Accommodating Diversity in Schools

As noted above, among the issues identified in the Report of the Forum was that providing diversity of patronage outside urban areas would pose a particular challenge. This is especially the case in a country like Ireland which has a dispersed population pattern outside urban centres. Therefore, commuting patterns and travel distances to schools are such that accessing more than one choice of school would not be a realistic option for many people in many parts of the country.

Already Ireland would be considered to have a large number of small primary schools. Therefore, in many rural areas, there is not a sufficiently large school-going population to sustain a sufficient number of schools to provide diversity of patronage to meet the demand that may exist. Therefore, providing additional schools, under alternative patronage, would risk undermining the viability of existing schools, which would not be acceptable. In addition, the cost of providing additional schools, staffing and running them, would be substantial and, in the current budgetary climate, resources are being focussed on meeting the demand for new schools in areas of growing population.

Accordingly, the existing local school is the only realistic option for most people in many parts of the country. The school, whatever its ethos, is catering for the full range of traditions, religions and beliefs in the community and it is important that the school is supported in its efforts to welcome and respect this diversity.

In any event, all schools, as noted in Chapter 1 above, even where they are geographically proximate to schools under different patronage, are obligated to respect the constitutional rights of pupils and their parents and should welcome and include all pupils enrolled in the school.

In light of the particular challenges that this issue poses for Irish schools and in the knowledge that many parents and schools are already dealing with this issue in a practical way on an ongoing basis, the Minister decided to launch a public consultation on the matter to gather the views of parents in particular on what needs to be done to ensure that Irish schools can be inclusive of pupils of all faiths, beliefs and traditions. The next section sets out the detail of this consultation.

Chapter 4; Consultation, Examples of Good Practice and Communication

4.1 Overview of consultation process

In September 2013, the Minister launched a public consultation that asked parents in particular, to submit their views and thoughts on how primary schools can make all children feel included and involved. This included issues such as how best to accommodate students of various belief systems and traditions and how schools have developed and implemented policies on marking religious celebrations and the display of religious symbols in the school.

Copies of the consultation documents were circulated to all Parents Associations, Boards of Management and other stakeholders.

Table 3 below gives an overview of the submissions received in response to this earlier consultation document.

Table 3
Responses to the Call for Proposals

| Category of Respondent | Number of Submissions | % of total (approximate) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Parents/Individuals | 377 | 86.47 |
| Parents' Associations | 10 | 2.29 |
| School Staff | 11 | 2.52 |
| Members of Boards of Management | 4 | .92 |
| Organisations | 28 | 6.42 |
| Stakeholder Organisations * | 6 | 1.38 |
| TOTAL | 436 | 100% |

*These were the stakeholder groups involved in the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector: The stakeholder groups that responded were:

Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools
Catholic Schools Partnership/ Catholic Primary Schools Management Association (joint submission)
Gaelscoileanna Teo
National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education
Irish National Teachers Organisation
National Parents' Council - Primary

As can be seen from the table the vast majority of submissions came from individual parents. The responses cover a wide spectrum of opinion and samples of anonymised extracts from the submissions are quoted in this chapter and in the next chapter to give an impression of the different views expressed.

These ranged from people who are strongly of the view that religious education should have no role at all in primary education to others who believe that primary schools in Ireland are already very inclusive and who oppose any change in the current system.

“My view is that religious instruction has no place in schools. In particular, it should not be permitted in schools that receive state funding, irrespective of the school's patronage. I want my taxes to go towards Education not Indoctrination of my children.” – Parent, No. 127

“Those who are Catholic and who chose to send their children to Catholic schools want their children to be taught Catholicism in school and taught correctly.” Parent, No. 402

However, the issue of ensuring that all schools, but particularly those in rural areas, can serve their local communities effectively and provide a welcoming and inclusive educational environment for all, regardless of their backgrounds remains as one of concern.

Some of the respondents favoured doing more to promote inclusion in schools. Many of these point out that schools, in their experience, are already devoting time and effort to being as welcoming as possible. However, they accept that while the school should not have to change its ethos, more work could be done in this respect. They are of the view that schools would be open to receiving additional guidance and guidelines in this regard.

“The current examples of good practice could be strategically built upon for all schools if there was further provision of direction, guidelines and resources on promoting inclusiveness” - National Organisation, No. 375

A sizeable number of respondents were of the view that if the State wants to provide plurality and diversity of patronage in the system that it should move to establish new schools (under the New Schools Establishment Group) itself and leave the existing denominational schools as they are. This group would not welcome teaching about or celebrations of religions or religious festivals other than those of the religious ethos of the school.

“These schools are owned by the Catholic Church and were founded, paid for and supported by Catholics and they also provide excellent education to non-Catholics. If the Irish State wishes to provide education to children of parents who do not wish their children to attend Catholic Schools then these people should fund their own schools or the State can make separate provision, if approved by the majority of taxpayers.” – Parent, No. 279

“I want my children to have a Catholic education and I would like that priority be given to promoting the ethos and existing traditions of such an education in Catholic schools” – Parent, No. 388

While the NSEG and the process of divesting may provide means of providing diversity of patronage in many urban areas, as noted above, there remain parts of the country where providing additional schools would involve duplicating existing resources and would risk undermining the viability of existing schools.

Therefore, it is prudent to provide the existing schools with support and guidance in ensuring that their efforts to be welcoming and inclusive are effective.

4.2.1 Examples of Good Practice

It was frequently stated in responses to the public consultation that schools are welcoming and inclusive. However, the point was also made that other schools might not be aware of how these schools have approached the issue. It is clear that sharing of information and good examples of practice will in turn promote the dissemination of such knowledge.

One of the questions posed as part of the public consultation was to ask parents to cite examples of such good practice and what individual schools were doing on the ground to ensure that children did not feel excluded or isolated in practice and that their rights were respected.

While individual arrangements will be reached by different schools and different parents operating in a variety of different contexts, there is still a value to learning from such practices. Even if they cannot be applied in all circumstances, they have a value in showing how, in a spirit of inclusiveness and dialogue, solutions can be reached which allow the school to be true to its ethos, while welcoming and including all pupils.

Not all respondents were able to give examples in response to this question. However, as will be seen in the next Chapter, there are examples of good practice in relation to these issues and different options for schools which work in different contexts. These cover issues such as the operation of opt-outs; religious ceremonies; marking the religious celebrations of others; and display of artefacts.

From the examples of good practice cited and from consultation with other stakeholders, it is apparent that some key underlying principles exist in relation to successful inclusion in schools. These include:

- Good communication;
- Clarity on rights and responsibilities;
- Good relationships between the various parties;
- Openness to dialogue and compromise; and
- Flexibility

It is also notable that schools where a proactive approach to diversity is taken and where there is greater awareness of the need for dialogue tend to be more successful at serving the needs of the communities in which they are situated.

A school which permits enrolment by those of a different faith group or of no faith, but does not move actively to welcome these pupils and include them is taking a very minimalist view of inclusiveness. The absence of active discouragement to enrol does not equal a genuinely open and inclusive approach on the part of the school. It has been suggested in public discourse that all pupils attending schools that take a more proactive approach to inclusiveness can benefit from this, while the school itself benefits from the rich diversity of pupil backgrounds and beliefs.

4.2.2 Good Communication

Good communication brings clarity on the rights and responsibilities of the various stakeholders and it promotes better relationships. In individual schools, good communication between boards of management, principals, teachers, other staff members, parents, pupils and the wider community is vital. However, it is important that it be underpinned by an openness to dialogue and compromise and by a flexible attitude on all sides.

The language used is especially important. Many schools go out of their way to be sensitive in their approach. However, in an effort to avoid any misconception about the denominational ethos of their schools some may use language in their policy statements which can be off-putting for parents of different religions, belief systems and traditions.

There are schools which are, in practice, very welcoming and open towards pupils of all backgrounds. However, all of these schools may not reflect these good practices fully in their written policies. Parents of other backgrounds may be deterred from entering into dialogue with such schools on the basis of a perusal of their written policies only. Therefore, it is important both that good practice should be reflected in the written policies of the school and that this should be shared with parents and prospective parents who are considering enrolling their child in the school.

This potential mismatch between aspiration and achievement may occur for different reasons. It may be due, in part, to a lack of experience of the importance of real dialogue with parents of different backgrounds. There is a risk that the absence of a complaint from a parent will be equated with satisfaction. However, good communication will ensure that parents feel able to articulate their position while also ensuring that the school is able to outline and explain its position and practices. It is also important to retain an element of flexibility, so that policies and practices can change and evolve, where necessary, in response to the outcome of dialogue with stakeholders. Parents' Associations may play a useful role in promoting good communication in these matters and also in helping to foster good relationships with parents and seeking the views of parents on all aspects of school life.

In addition, the views of pupils should also be sought in an age-appropriate way. The Irish Human Rights Commission (2011)³ argues that the views of pupils in relation to exemption procedures or any perceived encroachment on their personal religious or philosophical convictions should be taken into consideration, in addition to the views of the parents.

Pupils from the dominant ethos in a school will grow up in a society that is multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and has a multiplicity of beliefs. They are not served well by absorbing a view that 'other' beliefs are of less value or should remain invisible.

4.3 Knowledge of Human Rights

Dialogue on these issues should be informed by knowledge and clarity on the situation regarding the rights of all pupils and parents. The chances of positive discussion and dialogue relating to these sensitive matters are greatly increased if there is a clear

³ Religion and Education: A Human Rights Perspective May 2011 p. 105

understanding of the realities of the situation in relation to rights and responsibilities on all sides.

The Forum Report noted with approval the conclusion of Honohan and Rougier (2011) that “whatever the shape of future Irish education, teachers need to be equipped to deal with religious and cultural diversity within schools. There is a clear need for more compulsory training for teachers in this area.” Therefore, it is proposed that the Colleges of Education and others involved in the training of teachers be approached with a view to including education on this dimension as part of the curriculum followed.

In addition, consideration will be given to providing training in relation to these matters, as part of the continuing professional development (CPD) of the teachers in our schools.

In this regard, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission has produced a number of publications which provide useful background information and training materials for teachers⁴. The provision of training for Principals, teachers, members of Boards of Management and other stakeholders in relation to these matters will be explored in detail with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission with a view to improving knowledge in this area, which in turn will provide greater clarity on these matters and how best to promote positive discussions on a rights based approach in schools.

⁴ These publications include:

Human Rights Education in Ireland: An Overview Irish Human Rights Commission Dublin: 2011

Young People Promoting Human Rights and Equality in Ireland: 6-step Teacher Guide to CSPE Action Project and Exhibition Irish Human Rights Commission Dublin: 2013

Equality in Second Level Schools: A Training Manual for Educators and Trainers The Equality Authority Dublin: 2014

Chapter 5: Options for Future Directions

“One size does not fit all” is a clear message from individual schools which are adapting in different ways to the rapidly changing pupil profile in their classrooms. This chapter will seek to draw on the lessons learned, examine what works and make suggestions for schools to consider.

It is important that all schools, whether or not they have a highly diverse student population, take time to consider their policies and practice in this regard and review whether they are taking the steps necessary to welcome all pupils and make them feel included.

In this regard, the Forum recommended that all schools should develop policies in relation to including pupils of different religions, beliefs and traditions in the school.

This process would be led by the school’s Board of Management and Principal, but would also include the patron, staff, parents’ association, the parent body, pupils (in an age-appropriate way) and all other relevant stakeholders.

Such a process would take into account the school’s particular ethos, traditions and circumstances and would be conducted in a spirit of inclusiveness, dialogue, mutual respect and willingness to compromise.

When agreed, the policy would be discussed with all parents prior to enrolment and the opportunity used to explain the school’s ethos, background, approach to accommodating different faiths etc. This discussion would also allow time to discuss with prospective parents their concerns and issues in relation to these matters.

A process of ongoing review would enable schools to evaluate their performance and the effects of the implementation of the policy in practice. Any such evaluation process should allow for feedback from parents and other stakeholders so that their views can be taken on board.

Such policies would cover issues such as:

- Opt outs from religion classes and other religious activities;
- Religious celebrations;
- Display of religious and cultural artefacts in the school;
- Pre-enrolment information for parents;
- Evaluation and feedback.

5.1 Current Practice in relation to the right to opt-out

As noted above, under Article 44 of the Constitution, all parents have the right to withdraw their child from religious instruction in school. Under Section 30 of the Education Act 1998 whereby a student cannot be required to attend instruction in any subject which is contrary to the conscience of the parent of the student or, in the case of a student who is 18 or more, the student him/herself.

As noted above, the new Education (Admission to School) Bill, 2014, which is currently being drafted, will require schools to publish an enrolment policy which will clarify the

school's arrangements for upholding the constitutional right of parents that their children not attend religious instruction.

In some cases, parents may wish to withdraw their children from religious instruction for certain times of the year, when faith-specific instruction is prioritised e.g. during preparation for sacraments, while participating in the class for other parts of the religious education curriculum. Other parents choose to withdraw their child from religious instruction classes completely.

Schools are obliged to respect parents' rights to withdraw their children from religious instruction classes. Different schools have different ways of facilitating parents who wish to withdraw their children from religious instruction classes.

For instance, some pupils remain in the class doing school work or other non-school work. Some pupils read or have online lessons about their own beliefs and traditions. Modern ICT allows some pupils to participate in online or interactive lessons in the classroom while religious instruction is taking place. These lessons may relate to the individual pupil's own religion, beliefs or traditions.

Some schools allow children to leave the classroom but remain in the school. They may move to another room e.g. a library or resource room where they are supervised by another member of staff. School policies on the work that they do in such supervised situations differ, with some schools preferring pupils to do school work while others allow general reading or the pupil may do work related to the individual pupil's own religion, beliefs or traditions.

Another option is for pupils to move to another classroom, where they participate in the lessons in that classroom. In larger schools, with multiple streams of each grade, it may be possible to stagger religion classes, so that pupils who wish to opt out can move to another class of the same grade and follow the curriculum in that class. The logistics of such an arrangement depend on the numbers seeking to move class and the number of classes available.

Where the school does not have the facilities or the staff to facilitate such withdrawal, the pupil may remain in the classroom, while not participating in the lesson. This can relate to child protection concerns and the absence of other staff to supervise children who have been withdrawn from the class.

“Opting out of religion class is obviously necessary for children of other faiths and none, however there is a vast difference between not partaking but happy to still be 'around' their friends but reading or doing some activity to being taken out of class altogether. This smacks of segregation and I haven't yet met a parent of another faith who actually wants this. Of course on a purely logistical level this is problematic for schools in terms of providing supervision for children not present in their own/host class.” – Parent (no. 351)

In such cases, some parents chose to collect their child from the school in order to ensure that they are not present in the classroom for religious instruction. This can pose challenges for parents vis-à-vis their own domestic or work commitments.

“The provision by the school for opt out facilities for children who do not wish to attend. Religion classes would not be possible without the provision of additional supervisory resources by the Department of Education. The opt out option is provided within the school to any parents that do not wish their child to attend religious classes but it is done so within the class environment. One suggestion in the booklet to change religious education to either the start or end of the school day also raised a safety concern, trying to account for the movements of children on and off the premises at various times of the school day.” Parents’ Association, Co Kildare (no. 187)

Some parents raised concerns about children leaving the class in such circumstances and expressed concern that the child would be the subject of unwelcome attention or feel different to their peers.

“So now our son is in the local Catholic school. He is very happy there so far, but now we face the challenge of how to ensure our son isn’t made feel excluded or marked out as different simply because we wish to exercise our human right to freedom of and from religion.” Parent No. 385

However, it is worth noting that in many schools children leave and re-enter the classroom for a variety of reasons relating to differentiated learning or participation in other activities outside the classroom. Therefore, it may be the case that leaving the classroom during religious instruction is unlikely to attract greater notice or comment, given its normality in many classrooms.

5.2 Scheduling of religion classes and other religious activities

A school’s policy including a protocol on the timing of religious education class during the school day might be of assistance to parents. This was referred to at the launch of a research report of the Catholic Schools Partnership by its Chairperson in October 2011.

It has been suggested that religious instruction could be organised to take place at the same time every day, which is the practice in many schools. The Minister and the Forum Report suggested that organising such classes to take place at the start or at the end of the school day could facilitate withdrawal by parents if that is their choice. However, this may give rise to some other issues such as those regarding school transport and supervision of pupils.

If religious instruction is to take place during the school day in the classroom, then having such classes at a set time every day can provide greater certainty for parents who prefer their children to opt out and withdraw them from the classroom or school building entirely. Many schools have religious instruction from 12-12.30 p.m. which facilitates an opt-out for some children. However, for others, their parents’ domestic arrangements or work commitments are such that they cannot collect the pupil from school at this time and so such an arrangement does not work for them.

In situations where parents want their child to withdraw from the classroom, but remain in the school building e.g. in the school library or resource room, having a large number of children from different classes and of different ages in the library or in another room at the same time could pose supervisory challenges for the school.

Other possible options which might be considered include religion classes being clustered so that for example, rather than having 30 minutes per day five days a week, it would be possible to have one or two longer sessions per week. This would facilitate withdrawal arrangements. However, there would be concerns about pedagogical issues for younger children with such long lessons, which may not be suitable for younger children.

In larger schools, with multiple streams of each grade, it may be possible to stagger religion classes, so that pupils who wish to opt out can move to another class of the same grade and follow the curriculum in that class. The logistics of such an arrangement would depend on the numbers seeking to move class and the number of classes available.

As can be seen, there are various options for schools to facilitate parents who wish to have their child opt out fully or partially from religious instruction classes and this is by no means an exhaustive list. It is useful for a school to have thought through the possible means of facilitating an opt-out and to have discussed the parents' wishes and requirements before the child starts school. In this way, there can be dialogue and openness to arriving at mutually acceptable solutions.

5.3 Including Pupils in Religious Ceremonies of the Ethos of the School

In denominational schools, major events in the school year are often marked by a gathering together of the entire school community. Such assemblies can include a religious element e.g. an end of year liturgy or a prayer service. There is a need to balance the wish to express the denominational ethos of the school with the objective of including everyone in the celebration.

In some schools, with the consent of their parents, pupils of other faiths, traditions and beliefs attend such ceremonies and participate in "other ways". For example, they may provide the music or sing at such ceremonies. Other pupils, attend but do not participate in any way, while others prefer not to attend and the school provides alternative activities for them elsewhere in the school or in their own classroom, while the religious ceremony is taking place. The school organises a staff member to be available to supervise these activities. Consultation with parents is key to ensuring that appropriate arrangements are made for such pupils.

"when we have a school mass, children who are not catholic sometimes attend as they like playing their instruments in the school choir. This is the choice of each family. Obviously, they don't receive communion in these cases. No fuss is made. Children are naturally accepting of differences. Some children opt to remain in school on such occasions, and we always facilitate this. We are open with the children about our differences, and we rejoice in the fact that we are not all the same! At the same time, we remain true to our ethos as a catholic school." – Teacher, Co Galway (no. 262)

In Catholic schools, sacramental celebrations can be a significant event in the school calendar. How these are handled can be important for the school and its community. As noted above, some non-Catholic pupils may choose to attend these celebrations and may participate in ways such as through music or song. Other pupils may choose not to participate and alternative arrangements can be put in place for them.

5.4 Celebration of Religious Festivals.

The Forum Report recommended that Boards of Management should develop a school policy on religious and cultural celebrations. Such policies should aim to ensure that celebrations are inclusive, educational and respectful of the differing traditions of the pupils in the school.

In practice, many schools take steps to mark the major religious festivals during the year, whereas other schools hold an intercultural day or week at which all religions, belief systems and traditions represented in the school are celebrated. Representatives of different religions, belief systems and traditions represented in the school come into the school to give talks or presentations to the pupils.

“In schools with a faith based ethos the display of statues and symbols around the school reflects this and should of course be explained to the children. For other religions or cultures as religious holiday or other major celebrations take place they could be marked in some way as they occur.” – Parents’ Association (no. 404)

If these celebrations are planned and marked during the year in a way that involves consultation with the parents this can usually be handled in a positive way. Whether this is a one-off culture week or an ongoing celebration of diversity at appropriate times during the year is a matter that can be handled locally.

In other schools, rooms and facilities are made available after school for religion classes for different faiths and denominations. These can be for pupils in the school or other members of the community to come to the school for such classes. This is an example of a good practice which allows good relationships and mutual understanding to develop between the school and the community which it serves.

Some caution regarding tokenism or a touristic approach being taken to these celebrations was expressed as part of the public consultation.

“...suggest that the school has a Diversity and Equality policy which encompasses much more than just religion and ensures that the approach used by the school is not tokenistic or touristic as opposed to reflecting the everyday lives of the children attending the school – which is the risk when using a multi-cultural approach to this issue” – parent (no. 92)

Again, this is best handled by the school having a good relationship with the different groups in order to ensure that celebrations are marked in a way that is culturally sensitive and age-appropriate.

5.5 Display of Religious Artefacts

Most denominational schools have some display of religious artefacts or symbols of some kind in the school, although practice in this regard can vary according to the denomination. The display of such artefacts is a legitimate expression of the historical and cultural values of the school as well as its religious ethos.

There were strong views on the importance of the display of such artefacts in Catholic schools in particular, with many parents expressing strong opposition to any moves to remove such artefacts or ban their display.

“I want crosses and catholic statues to remain in pride of place in my catholic schools, not gathered in a dedicated space along with Buddha.” – Parent (no. 426)

“This notion of having symbols and statues of other beliefs and religions in a Catholic School is ludicrous” – Parent (no. 393)

In some schools, there is a display space or display spaces in each classroom set aside whereby artefacts germane to other religions or belief systems are displayed at different times during the year. This usually coincides with major festivals of particular religions e.g. material re Hinduism being displayed when Diwali is being celebrated. The ethos of the school is reflected in permanent displays of artefacts while the temporary display space is used for rotating displays.

“In schools with a faith based ethos the display of statues and symbols around the school reflects this and should of course be explained to the children. For other religions or cultures as religious holiday or other major celebrations take place they could be marked in some way as they occur.” – Parents’ Association (no. 404)

Banning the display of religious artefacts is not suggested. Rather, it is suggested that other artefacts reflective of other traditions could be displayed in a school as part of a process of celebrating diversity and educating pupils about the existence of other religions, beliefs and traditions. As noted above, in some schools there is a particular time of year set aside to mark interculturalism and the display of artefacts is an integral part of this celebration.

5.6 Evaluation of Policies and Practices

The Forum Report recommended that both school self-evaluation and external inspection could play a role in supporting the implementation of policies regarding diversity in schools.

Self-evaluation provides a process whereby schools are enabled to review their own practice and policies in a systematic way. Currently, the Department has required schools to prioritise specific aspects of literacy, numeracy and other teaching areas in the first phase of school self-evaluation, due to end in 2015/16. It is anticipated that materials will be provided to support schools in examining aspects of their leadership and management, including their whole-school policies regarding diversity and pluralism, in a further phase of self-evaluation following 2015/16. School self-evaluation, involving as it does, dialogue with parents and other stakeholders has the potential to be an important tool in ensuring agreement about how to realise greater inclusiveness and diversity in schools.

The Forum Report also recommended that schools’ work to develop and implement inclusion and diversity policies should be evaluated by the Inspectorate in whole-school evaluation. Already, these inspections collect considerable quantities of data on the views of students and their parents about their schools through confidential questionnaires. Some of the questions used already touch upon themes concerning the atmosphere of the school, including questions about the extent to which parents feel the school is an open and

welcoming environment. It is planned to refine these question sets further to provide better data on inclusiveness and diversity. Of course, inspection has to be informed by a set of articulated expectations, and work to define realistic expectations concerning inclusiveness will be required of the Department and others in this regard. This report is one of the first steps to this end.

5.7 Conclusion

Ireland has a tradition of promoting respect for human rights both nationally and internationally. In the field of education and freedom of religion, it is important that we build upon this tradition, while taking account of the changes in our society.

Our schools have adapted to the changes in society and many schools are positively disposed towards serving all members of the communities in which they are located. These schools have initiated new practices and have adapted existing practices in order to accommodate diversity among their pupils.

The Forum on Patronage examined many of these issues and the challenges arising for the Irish education system. In line with the Action Plan set out by the Minister for Education and Skills in 2012, the recommendations of the Forum are being implemented.

The New Schools Establishment Group was established in 2011 and greater diversity of patronage can be seen in the new schools being established in recent years.

The divesting process is also ongoing and while progress has not been as rapid as originally envisaged, progress is being made and the process of divesting particular schools has already begun.

However, while the promotion of diversity of patronage is part of the response to the changes in our society, our existing schools also have a key role to play. As noted in the paper, all schools, regardless of their geographic proximity to, or distance from, other schools under alternative patronage, have the same obligations to respect the human rights of all pupils and their parents. There are many examples of schools which are working to develop good practice in relation to accommodating diversity among the communities in which they are located.

As can be seen from this paper, there are many different views on the issue of how schools can promote inclusion of all their pupils and be welcoming all members of the communities in which they are located. There are many different approaches being adopted by schools in different contexts around the country. These schools are applying practices which aim to be inclusive of all, while respecting the traditions and characteristic spirit of the schools.

Approaches to organising religious education and/or religious ceremonies which allow those who wish to opt out to do so are described in the paper as are the different ways of handling issues such as celebrating religious festivals or displaying religious artefacts, including those of other religions, faiths and beliefs.

Rather than being prescriptive, this paper aims to inform schools of the emerging range of practices with a view to them considering their own practices critically and consulting with their own communities and stakeholders to formulate new policies in this regard. Such

policies could be the subject of ongoing review and revision as the school and society continue to change. This evolutionary approach allows the school to ensure that its practices remain suitable for the school, its pupils and their changing requirements. School evaluation could promote this process of review and revision and could also promote good practices among schools.

Therefore, as a national policy framework is developing, each school could develop its own practices and policies, which accord with its own ethos and local circumstances. Of course, these policies and practices would need to aim to ensure that the rights of all are respected and that Irish schools are places of welcome, learning and development, which operate in a spirit of cooperation, mutual respect and positivity.

As outlined in Chapter 4, key principles such as good communication, clarity on rights and responsibilities, openness to dialogue and flexibility are important for all sides in order to ensure that policies on issues such as religious celebrations, display of artefacts, opting out of religious instruction can operate in a way that protects the rights of all.

By implementing these principles in agreeing policies on these issues, all schools under all different patron bodies, can work to ensure that they can remain true to that ethos while also protecting and respecting the rights of all members of the school community.

At national policy level, the implementation of the recommendations of the Forum Report will continue. As noted in the opening lines of this chapter, no one size fits all in this regard and the implementation of the Forum Report will have to take account of ongoing changes and developments in Irish society. Therefore, it is not envisaged that this process will reach any particular destination but will be an ongoing organic evolution which will allow sufficient flexibility to respond to changes in society and to take account of different operating contexts.

The views of stakeholders, in particular parents and school authorities, who are dealing with these issues on a day to day basis in our schools are always welcome. These can be submitted to cpu@education.gov.ie and will continue to inform the further development of policy in this matter.

Appendix 1

List of organisations/individuals who made submissions to the public consultation in Autumn 2013

Stakeholder organisations

| |
|---|
| Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS) |
| Catholic Primary Schools Management Association & Catholic Schools Partnership (joint submission) |
| Gaelscoileanna Teo |
| Irish National Teachers' Organisation |
| National Association of Boards of Management in Special Education |
| National Parents' Council – Primary |

Other organisations

| |
|---|
| Atheist Ireland |
| Childcare Committees Ireland |
| Community National Schools |
| Conference of Religious in Ireland |
| Diocese of Elphin |
| Diocese of Ferns |
| Diocese of Limerick |
| Dublin City Integration Forum (DCIF) |
| Education Together North Central Start Up Committee |
| Green Party |
| Humanist Association of Ireland |
| Ireland Stand Up |
| Irish Lebanese Cultural Foundation |
| Irish Traveller Movement |
| Kerry Diocesan Education Council |
| Kerry Travellers Health & Community Development Project |
| Marino Institute of Education |
| Muslim Children's Parent Groups |
| National Association of Primary Diocesan Advisors |
| National Traveller MABS |
| Secular Parents Group Dalkey |
| Show Racism the Red Card |
| St. Anthony's Park Community Development Initiative |
| St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra |
| The Integration Centre |
| Traveller Health Co-Ordinator, HSE South |
| Waterford Traveller Community Development Project |
| Wicklow Travellers Group |

Parents' Associations

| |
|---------------------------------|
| Piper's Hill CNS |
| Scoil Choilm CNS |
| Scoil Chormaic CNS |
| Scoil Ghráinne CNS |
| Scoil Íde Naofa |
| Scoil Mhuire gan Smál, Kilkenny |
| Scoil Mhuire na n-Aingeal |
| St. Cremins NS |
| St. Mary's BNS |
| The Downs NS |

Member of a school Board of Management

| |
|-------------------|
| Callaghan, Eamon |
| Collins, Nora |
| Connolly, Patrick |
| Fahey, John |

Members of staff in a school

| |
|--------------------------|
| Caldwell, Laura |
| Dermody, Anita |
| Foy, Ruth |
| Horgan, Laura |
| McMorrow, Theresa |
| Murphy, Mairéad |
| O'Donovan, Mary |
| O'Regan, Brendan |
| O'Sullivan, Terry |
| Staff at St. George's NS |
| Uí Chonchúir, Cáit |

Individuals/parents

| |
|------------------------|
| Ahern, Mamie & Paul |
| Alsane (Bean) |
| Arthure, Fr.Robert |
| Ascough, Tom |
| Ascough, Seán |
| Bailey, Seán |
| Barbeau-Person, Aurore |
| Barden, Anne |
| Barrett, Anne |
| Beck, Richard & Julie |

| |
|--|
| Bedford, Mark |
| Benson, A |
| Beyssac, Raphaele |
| Bishop, Amanda |
| Bow, Josephine |
| Bowler, Paul |
| Boyle, Evana |
| Bradley, Ted |
| Brennan, Tony |
| Brescanu, Tina |
| Brown, Therese (on behalf of 12 people) |
| Bulfin, Alise & Brew, Liam |
| Burke, Catherine |
| Burke, Enda |
| Burke, Iomar |
| Byrne, John |
| Byrne, Mark |
| Cahill, Anne |
| Carabine, Maeve |
| Carey, Susan |
| Carr, Patrick & Anna |
| Carr, Dennis |
| Casey, Anne |
| Chamberlaine, Karen |
| Chan, Patrick |
| Churchward, Mary |
| Clarke, Heather |
| Clifford, Clare (on behalf of 8 people) |
| Coleman, Marc |
| Coleman, Michele |
| Comerford, Quentin |
| Conboy, Wesley |
| Conway, Prof. Eamonn, Duffy, Dr Eugene & Van Nieuwenhove, Dr Rik |
| Cooke, Miranda |
| Cooke, Philip |
| Cooney, Fand |
| Corcoran, Austen |
| Corcoran, Paula & Browne, Cornelius |
| Cosgrove, Mary |
| Costello, Niamh |
| Costello, Suzanne |
| Creagh, Margaret |
| Crowley, Gavin |
| Cummins, Pat |
| Cunniffe, Ornagh |

| |
|---------------------------|
| Cunningham, Joan |
| Daly, Kieran |
| de Clár, Ray & Aoife |
| De Paor, Liam |
| Dean, Janet |
| DeBarra, Colm |
| Deegan, Martin & Teresa |
| Desbonnet, Luc & Margaret |
| Devaney, James & Anne |
| Devenney, Lynda |
| Diggins, Judy |
| Dignan, Jean |
| Dillon, Michael |
| Doherty, Donna |
| Doherty, Mary |
| Doherty, Darragh |
| Donnelly, Liz |
| Donnelly, Derbhile |
| Donohoe, Carol |
| Donohue, Breda |
| Dorman, Catriona |
| Dorrian, Pauline |
| Doyle, Janice |
| Doyle, Stewart |
| Doyle, Anne |
| Doyle, Alma |
| Doyle, Tommy |
| Duffy, Mary |
| Duggan, Anna |
| Duggan, Derval |
| Dunne, Alan |
| Dunne, Judith |
| Dunne, Colin |
| Dunne, Gary |
| Dyball, Tim |
| Egan, Sarah |
| Egan, Orla |
| Elstoe, Tony James |
| Elstoe, Maria |
| English, Wendy |
| Fagan, Ciara |
| Faherty, Jacqueline |
| Fahy, Mary |
| Farragher Walsh, Louise |
| Farrelly, Peter |
| Farren, Patricia |

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| Fernandez, Damaris |
| Finn, Lili & Brian |
| Finnegan, Tanya |
| Fitzgibbon, Mary & Michael |
| Fitzpatrick, Lisa |
| Fitzpatrick, Eamon |
| Flanagan, Brian |
| Flynn ,Frank |
| Flynn, Madge & Donohue, Noranne |
| Fogarty, Clare |
| Foley, Liam |
| Foley, Ruth |
| Forde, Fr. Des |
| Forrest, Kathleen |
| Fowler, Rebecca |
| French, Alan |
| Freney, Vincent |
| Fuller, Colin |
| Fuller, Robert |
| Furlong, Majella |
| Gahan, Joanne |
| Gardner, Emmet |
| Garvey, Maura |
| Giblin, Marina |
| Giusti, Giovanni |
| Gleeson, Martin |
| Godkin, Claire |
| Graham, Suzanne |
| Greene, Margaret |
| Griffith, Nora |
| Griffith, Catherina |
| Harmon, Lucy |
| Hayden, Rónán |
| Healy, Fr. Bernard |
| Hegarty, Jacqui |
| Henry, Lara |
| Higgins, Josephine |
| Hinchliffe, P. |
| Hoban, Esther |
| Hofmann, Maria |
| Hogan, Fr. Joe |
| Hogan, Niamh |
| Holmes, Bridget |
| Hope, Suzanne |
| Hough, Janice |
| Hughes, Peter |

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| Hurley, John |
| Hynes, Therese |
| Jackson, Tim |
| Johnson, David |
| Jordan, Tony |
| Joyce, Clare |
| Kavanagh, Anthony |
| Kavanagh, Catherine |
| Kearney, Diarmuid |
| Keaveny, Orla |
| Keddy, Dermot |
| Kel, Ciaran |
| Kelleher, Liz |
| Kelly, Olwyn |
| Kelly, Betty |
| Kelly, Fr. Liam |
| Kelly, Seán & Joan |
| Kennedy, Bairbre |
| Kennedy, Noreen |
| Keogh, Mary |
| Keogh, Pádraig |
| Keszynska, Monica |
| Kieran & Grenham |
| Kilgallen, Marie |
| Lane, Dermot |
| Lane-Spollen, Emma |
| Lanigan-O'Keeffe, Gwen |
| Larkin, Gerard & Joan |
| Le Provost, Laurent |
| Leahy, Fiona |
| Leenheer, Martijn |
| Lematre, Jean-Francois |
| Leonard, Anthony & Frances |
| Levins, Philippa |
| Lewis, Jane |
| Little, Stella |
| Loftus, Rev. John |
| Lonergan, Aidan |
| Looney, Denise |
| Looney, Niamh |
| Loughnane, Fergal |
| Low, Andrew |
| Loxley, Fiona |
| Lyons, Bridget |
| Lyttleton, Philomena |
| Madden, Brian |

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| Magee, Emer |
| Magera, Esther |
| Maguire, Olive |
| Maher, James & Anne |
| Maher, Sheila |
| Maher, James |
| Mannion, Mrs C. |
| Martin, Veronica |
| McCamley, Caroline |
| McCarthy, Ellen |
| McCarthy O'Connell, Kathleen |
| McCormick, Felicity |
| McDermott, Richard |
| McDermott, Lucia |
| McDonagh, Ultan |
| McDonagh, Nuala |
| McDonnell, Michael & Bríd |
| McDonnell, Anita |
| McEvilly, Agnes |
| McGann, Brenda |
| McGee, Colm |
| McGowan, Carol & Aidan |
| McGuinness, Susan |
| McInnes, Barbara |
| McKervey, Henrietta |
| McKiernan, Clair |
| McMahon, Deborah |
| McMahon, Yvonne |
| McNamara, Liz |
| McNulty, Michelle |
| McTiernan, Tadhg |
| Meehan, Rosa |
| Mercer, Karl & Mary |
| Minihan, Karen |
| Moran, Matt |
| Morgan, Antona |
| Mouze, Christophe & Cullen, Ciara |
| Mulcahy, Paula |
| Mullins, Patrick |
| Mulroy, Eilis & Martin |
| Murphy, Thomas |
| Murphy, Shona |
| Murphy, Mary |
| Murphy, E. |
| Murphy, Gerard |
| Murphy, Eileen (Submission on behalf of 29 people) |

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| Murray, John |
| Nestor, Valerie |
| Nawrocka, Weronika |
| Ní Argadáin, Neasa |
| Ní Cheallaigh, Aingle |
| Ní Dhochartaigh, Louise |
| Ní Dhubhda, Sandra |
| Ní Ghairebhith, Siobhan & Harrington, John |
| Neylon, Sr. Anne |
| Nolan, Rossa |
| Nolan, David |
| O Caollai, Eochaidh |
| O Ceallaigh, Séamus |
| Ó Coigligh, Ciaran |
| Ó Dubhthaigh, Gearóid |
| O' Flaherty, Ed |
| O h-Iceadha, Séamus |
| O'Beachain, A.P. |
| O'Brien, Catherine |
| O'Brien, Therese |
| O'Brien, Jimmy |
| O'Brien, Bill |
| O'Byrne, Mary |
| O'Callaghan, Denise |
| O'Cathail, Donncha |
| O'Connel, Ruth |
| O'Connell, Harmon, Kieran |
| O'Connor, Niamh |
| O'Connor, Paula |
| O'Connor, Pat |
| O'Connor, Eamonn |
| O'Connor, Loretta |
| O'Donnell, Bláithín |
| O'Donnell, Eileen |
| O'Flaherty, Linda |
| O'Floinn, Angela |
| O'Gara, Ger |
| O'Hara, Mary & Paul |
| O'Hare, Anne |
| O'Keeffe, Caroline |
| O'Keeffe, Anna |
| O'Leary, Liz |
| O'Leary, Mark & Anne |
| O'Leary, John & Póilín |
| O'Mahony, Rosemarie |
| O'Malley, Fiona |

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| O'Malley, Niamh |
| O'Malley, Margaret |
| O'Meara, Esther |
| Ó Murchú, Daithí |
| O'Reilly, Claire |
| O'Reilly, Kevin |
| O'Riordan, Mark |
| O'Rourke, Joe |
| O'Shea, Conor |
| O'Shea, Helen |
| O'Shea, Pauline |
| O'Sullivan, Jim & Kathleen |
| O'Sullivan, Nessa |
| O'Sullivan, Deirdre |
| O'Sullivan, Eva |
| O'Sullivan, Donal |
| O'Toole, Maria |
| Parkes, Gráinne |
| Parsons, Robert |
| Patterson, Marc & Kyne, Breda |
| Pepple, Elizabeth |
| Pittock, John. S. |
| Pittock, Deirdre T. |
| Plassart, Delphine |
| Power, Declan |
| Proctor, Tony |
| Pullen, Sinéad |
| Purcell, Louise |
| Quinlan, John |
| Quinn, Eadaoin |
| Raftery, Bernadette |
| Reilly, Margaret |
| Reynolds, Geraldine |
| Rice, Nora |
| Rodriguez Cabo, Celsa |
| Roe, Fiona |
| Ryan, Paul |
| Ryan, Georgina |
| Ryan, Emer |
| Sadler, Liam |
| Savage, Emer |
| Scannell, Niamh |
| Scarry, Pádraig |
| Scott, Judy |
| Sealy, Brigid |
| Sheehan, Bryan |

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| Sheerin, Sheila |
| Simms, Clodagh |
| Sinnott, Kathy |
| Slattery, Bríd |
| Smith, Heather |
| Stockil, Gerard |
| Stratton, David |
| Sugrue, Joan |
| Sullivan, Fr. Shane |
| Swan, Suzanne |
| Sweeney, Mary |
| Taylor, Mary |
| Tobin, Mary |
| Togher, P.J. |
| Togher, Agnes |
| Topham, Ruth |
| Twomey, Elizabeth |
| Uí Laimhin, Nuala |
| Uí Threasaigh, Joanne |
| Vander Schueren, Dirk |
| Wade, Letitia |
| Wall, Clodagh |
| Walsh, Eilish |
| Ward, Patricia |
| Watters, Rosemary |
| Wheatley, Gillian |
| Whelan, Alan & Kate |
| Whelan, Elaine |
| Whelan, Martin |
| Whoriskey, Liz |
| Williams, Nadia |
| Williams, Greg |
| Wilson, Sheila |
| Woulfe, Nuala |

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