

Mr. Joe McHugh, T.D.
Minister for Education and Skills
Department of Education and Skills
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1

26th October 2018

Report of the New Schools Establishment Group on the Patronage of Post-Primary Schools to be established in September 2019

Dear Minister McHugh,

As members of the above named Group, we are pleased to present you with our report on the patronage of new post-primary schools due to open in September 2019.

Our role was outlined in a Ministerial announcement of 27th June 2011. That announcement also included the criteria and arrangements for the recognition of new schools and the role of the New Schools Establishment Group to advise the Minister on the patronage of new schools, following its consideration of an assessment report prepared by the Forward Planning Section of your Department.

On 7th June 2018, an invitation was issued for applications in respect of the patronage of the four new post-primary schools due to be established in September 2019. The closing date for receipt of applications from applicant patron bodies was 13th June 2018. On 22nd June 2018, the Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) website went live for parents to express their parental preferences in respect of the four new post-primary schools to be established in 2019. In this regard, the Group welcomes the fact that the operation of the new system will be kept under ongoing review by your Department.

The Forward Planning Section of your Department carried out an assessment in respect of each of the four areas, including an assessment of the parental preferences received. A meeting was convened on 17th October 2018 with the officials from Forward Planning Section to examine the initial draft assessments that had been forwarded to our Group for consideration.

The Group has considered the assessments made with regard to the patronage of the new post-primary schools to be established in 2019. The Group is satisfied to confirm its view that the criteria as set out in 2011 by your Department were applied in a fair and transparent manner to the applications received.

On that basis we are satisfied that the following recommendations regarding patronage of the new schools are in accord with these requirements and criteria, including the extent of diversity currently available in the relevant/adjoining school planning areas, and give due regard to the levels of parental preferences received. The Group is satisfied to make the following recommendations to you in relation to the patronage and language of instruction of the new schools to commence in September 2019.

Area	Proposed Patron	Proposed Language of Instruction
Donaghmede_Howth_D13	Educate Together	English
Galway City & Oranmore (Regional Solution)	Educate Together	English
Laytown & Drogheda (Regional Solution)	Educate Together	English
Wicklow	Educate Together	English

In relation to the Patron Code of Conduct, the Group has been made aware by Forward Planning Section of a small number of potential breaches of the Code relating to patron expenses incurred. While the Group understands there was no discernible material impact on the outcome of the process, it nonetheless recommends a number of changes to the Code of Conduct, including an increase in the expenditure limits from €300 (incl. VAT) to €500 (incl. VAT) and the inclusion of benefit-in-kind received in calculating expenditure. The Group also recommends that any changes made to the Code of Conduct should be highlighted to applicant patrons in the upcoming patronage processes.

In relation to the primary schools to be established in September 2019, the Group notes that the patronage process for these schools will commence shortly. With regard the primary school to serve the Drumcondra_Marino_Dublin 1 school planning area, the Group has reviewed

- its previous consideration of the parental preferences expressed in respect of this school planning area;
- the acknowledgment in its May 2016 report to the then Minister of the strong level of demand for Irish-medium education in the Drumcondra/Marino area; and
- the recommendations of An Comisinéir Teanga in his report of 27 April 2017 in this regard.

The Group is also cognisant of the fact that, in line with the conclusions of the assessment process carried out in 2016, patronage of the new school being established at that time to serve the Drumcondra_Marino_Dublin 1 school planning area was awarded to Educate Together and the school was subsequently established.

Having regard to the foregoing, the Group is of the view that a new assessment process is not required in this specific case and recommends that the new school to be established in 2019 to serve the Drumcondra_Marino_Dublin 1 school planning area should be a Gaelscoil under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnachta.

The Group notes the wider recommendation of An Comisinéir Teanga on Irish language requirements and acknowledges the positive changes already incorporated by the Department in the patronage process such as the facility for separate parental preferences in relation to language of instruction. The Group also notes that the Department is exploring how parental preferences for Irish-medium education can be further reflected in future patronage processes. This includes consideration of the level of demand which might, for example, warrant what would otherwise be a 24-classroom English-medium school being delivered (based on parental preferences) as a 16-classroom English-medium school and an 8 classroom Irish-medium school, if feasible from a practical perspective. The Group recommends that the Department explore this matter further, however, it notes that this is a complex issue which will require further consideration and consultation with the main patron bodies.

The Group would like to thank your Department's Forward Planning Section for its positive engagement on these matters and to acknowledge the expert and professional manner in which it presented its assessments to the Group in the cases under review.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Hamill". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J' and 'H'.

Joe Hamill
Chairperson
New Schools Establishment Group