An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna
Department of Education and Skills

Patronage Assessment Report Post-Primary Schools (2019)

Report to the New Schools Establishment Group
Forward Planning Section
Department of Education & Skills
October 2018

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1. Foreword

Chairperson,
New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG).

Dear Chairperson,

On the 13th April 2018, Minister for Education and Skills, Richard Bruton, T.D. announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next 4 years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the current and future need for primary and post-primary school places across the country, with 26 new schools announced at primary level and 16 new schools announced at post-primary level (see Appendix A for details).

On the 7th June 2018, the Minister invited applications for the patronage of the four new post-primary schools due to be established in September 2019 in the following areas:

School Planning Area	School Size*	Year
Donaghmede_Howth_D13/Belmayne/Clongriffin	1,000 pupils	2019
Galway City & Oranmore (Regional Solution)	1,000 pupils	2019
Laytown & Drogheda (Regional Solution)	600 pupils	2019
Wicklow	600 pupils	2019

based on current projected need but will be responsive to patronage or demographic demand

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.

The applicant patrons for each school are as follows:

Donaghmede_Howth_D13/Belmayne/Clongriffin	Galway City & Oranmore (Regional Solution)	Laytown & Drogheda (Regional Solution)	Wicklow
City of Dublin Education and Training Board	Bishop of Tuam, Killala & Achonry (CoI)	Educate Together	Educate Together
Educate Together	Educate Together	Loreto Education Trust	Kildare & Wicklow Education and Training Board
Le Chéile Schools Trust*	Galway Roscommon Education and Training Board	Louth and Meath Education and Training Board	Le Chéile Schools Trust
Scoil Sinéad Limited	Scoil Sinéad Limited	Scoil Sinéad Limited	Scoil Sinéad Limited

3rd July 2018: Le Chéile withdrew its application for patronage of this school.

In the previous primary and post-primary patronage processes, the NSEG recommended that consideration be given to an examination of other options for a more effective and efficient means of disseminating information to parents and of collecting parental preferences. This recommendation was made on the basis of some patrons submitting considerable numbers of invalid parental preferences, which had to be individually identified and disaggregated from the valid preferences and which has a knock-on effect on the duration of the assessment process, adding unnecessarily to the work of the Department in assessing the applications and which was not to the benefit of any patron.

Taking into account the above recommendation from the NSEG and with the aim of providing parents with clear and objective information on all applicant patrons, the Department has developed an Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) website which provides objective information to parents on the models of patronage being proposed and which allows parents of eligible children to express their preferences with regard to patronage and language of instruction of the new school. Further details in relation to the new system and mechanisms for assessment of preferences are set out in this report.

In relation to the Patron Code of Conduct, there are some indications that the Code was not fully adhered to by a number of applicant patrons in relation to expenditure limits, either technically or in keeping with the spirit of the Code of Conduct. While there was no discernible material impact on the outcome of the process, it is proposed that the NSEG might consider this matter further.

The Department also wishes to draw to the attention of the NSEG the April 2017 report of An Comisinéir Teanga which contains recommendations in relation to the patronage process and in particular, to Irish-medium provision in this context.

The role of the NSEG is to oversee the patronage decision making process and to ensure that the process is implemented correctly and in line with the published criteria. Following consideration of the Department's patronage assessment reports, the NSEG is tasked with submitting a report with recommendations to the Minister for consideration and final decision.

Consistent with the arrangements governing the patronage process for new schools announced by the Minister in June 2011, the Department has completed its assessment of the applications received for patronage of the new post-primary schools to be established in 2019. This is the resulting report for the New Schools Establishment Group, which is submitted for consideration by the Group. A detailed assessment of each individual area is attached and forms part of this report.

Lorraine Reilly,
Assistant Principal Officer
Forward Planning Section - Department of Education and Skills
15th October, 2018

2. Changes to the Patronage Process

Further to previous recommendations from the NSEG regarding the method of collecting parental preferences, the Department has introduced a number of significant changes to the patronage process in this regard. Phase 1 of the pilot was introduced for the post-primary schools due to be established in 2019 and phase 2 of the pilot will be rolled out for the primary schools due to be established in 2019. These changes include:

- the introduction of a new online system for the collection of parental preferences;
- an option for parents to select patrons in order of preference; and
- a revised application process for applicant patrons.

➢ 2.1 Online Patronage Process System (OPPS)

In previous patronage processes, patrons and prospective patrons collected and demonstrated evidence of parental demand from the area to be served for the model of provision proposed as part of their application under the process. Parental preferences were collected based on direct engagement with patron bodies.

An Online Parental Preference System (OPPS) has been developed by the Department which provides objective information for parents on the applicant patrons which will facilitate parents in making an informed choice about their preferred model of patronage for their child's education. Parents are also given an opportunity to express a preference for their child to be educated through the medium of Irish or English.

The OPPS website allows parents to access the appropriate survey for their area, to input the details of the eligible child(ren) and to select their preferred patron and language of instruction. Eligibility to express a preference in the patronage process for post-primary schools to be established in 2019 requires that a child is due to start post-primary education in the 5 year period 2019 to 2023; and that the child is resident the relevant school planning area. It is important to note that the eligibility conditions for parents to express a preference with regard to patronage have not changed.

In order to express a preference, parents are requested to submit their Eircode upon entry to the system in order to determine whether they are eligible to express a preference for patronage of the new school. This system effectively eliminates the previous issue referenced by the NSEG whereby preferences in respect of children who were not residing in the relevant school planning area(s) had to be individually identified and disaggregated from the valid preferences.

➢ 2.2 Assessment of preferences

In previous patronage processes, patrons and prospective patrons collected and demonstrated evidence of parental demand from the area to be served for the model of provision proposed as part of their application under the process. Parental preferences were collected based on direct engagement with patron bodies. The new OPPS website allows parents to express a preference for their preferred patron or for more than one patron in order of preference.

Option (i) - First-past-the-post (FPTP)

The previous system provided for assessment of valid parental preferences on the basis that the applicant patron who received the highest number of parental preference votes was generally selected to be the recommended patron to the NSEG for the relevant school planning area.

Option (ii) - Proportional representation single transferable vote (PR – STV)

The OPPS system also allows parents to select patrons in order of preference. The eligible parental preferences of each school planning area are added together to determine the total poll and a quota is then calculated. Any applicant patron whose first preferences equal or exceed the quota is deemed to be selected for recommendation to the NSEG. The second and subsequent counts, if required, involve the exclusion of the lowest applicant patron(s) and the distribution of their parental preferences.

The Department has utilised the First-past-the-post method of assessing valid parental preferences for applicant patrons and considers that this method offers the most transparent method for tallying the parental preferences expressed. It is only in the event that there is not a clear outcome from the *first-past-the-post* method that the PR-STV method could be of assistance in considering the relevance of 2nd, 3rd and 4th preferences. It is proposed that the Department continue to make available the order of preference option in the second phase of the pilot of the new system and review further at that stage.

➢ 2.3 Patron Application Process

In previous patronage processes, applicant patrons were responsible for the collection of parental preferences in the first instance and the subsequent submission of an application for patronage which included the submission of the collected parental preferences. Under the new system for the submission of parental preferences, school patron bodies/prospective school patron bodies are invited to apply for patronage of new schools in advance of the OPPS system opening for parental preferences.

In relation to the four post-primary schools to be established in 2019, an invitation letter (Appendix B) issued along with a Patron Application Form (Appendix C) to existing patrons and patrons who had expressed an interest in previous processes. In addition, the letter of invitation and application form were made available on the Department's website for other prospective patrons following a press release on the opening of the process.

The information submitted by applicant patrons formed the basis of the information made available on the OPPS website to parents and included a patron matrix which sets out objectively the information on individual applicant patrons and their proposed model of provision.

In developing the OPPS website, the Department developed the 'Patron Matrix' which offers parents clear and objective information on each prospective Patron body, in addition to a direct link to the Patron body's website. This affords parents the opportunity to review all of the applicant patrons for the relevant school planning area, as compared to the previous patronage process, where parental preferences were collected by the applicant patrons following direct engagement with parents.

3. Parental Preferences

Parental preferences for patronage and language of instruction, from parents of children who reside in the school planning areas concerned, together with the extent of diversity currently available in these areas, are key to decisions in relation to the outcome of this process. The OPPS website allows parents to access the appropriate survey for their area, to input the details of the eligible child(ren) and to select their preferred patron and language of instruction.

In the 2017/18 school year, there were some 19,000 children in first to fifth class in the primary schools across the school planning areas for the four new post-primary schools. However, not all of these will wish to or be eligible to express a preference. In most cases, parents may intend

sending their child to an existing post-primary school in the area and as a result would not have considered it necessary to express a preference with regard to patronage of the new school.

The Department is satisfied that the level of valid preferences expressed in relation to the four new post-primary schools to be established in 2019 is of a comparable level to valid preferences expressed in relation to the previous post-primary patronage processes for schools that were established in 2017 and 2018. In the current patronage processes for the four post-primary schools to be established in 2019, there were between 424 and 638 valid preferences for each of the four areas, in comparison with valid preferences of between 236 and 1,435 valid preferences received in relation to the nine new post primary schools established in 2017 and 2018.

Invalid preferences in each of the areas were discounted where:

- the parent did not actually complete and submit their preferences;
- the parent did not select a preferred patron;
- the Eircode submitted was not a valid residential Eircode in the relevant school planning area; and/or
- the parent submitted duplicates of preferences in relation to an individual child (in which instance the last complete preference was considered the final preference in respect of that child to allow for parents who may subsequently have changed their mind/preference).

The percentage of invalid preferences has been reduced from an average of 42% invalid preferences in the previous post-primary patronage processes (2017 and 2018) to some 14% for the current process. The Department will continue build on the experience gained in the first phase of the OPPS pilot and will work on appropriate measures to further reduce the level of invalid preferences.

4.   Summary of Assessments

An assessment of each area is attached to this report and a summary of the outcome of each assessment is set out in the table below:

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

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