

Mr. Richard Bruton TD
Minister for Education and Skills
Department of Education and Skills
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1

28 April 2017

**Report of the New Schools Establishment Group on the Patronage of Primary Schools
Scheduled to Commence in September 2017 and 2018**

Dear Minister Bruton,

As members of the above named group, we are pleased to present you with our report on the patronage of new primary schools due to open in September 2017 and 2018.

Our role was outlined in a Ministerial announcement of June 27, 2011. That announcement also included the criteria and arrangements for the recognition of new schools and the establishment 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 28 November last, the Department informed patrons/prospective patrons of the details of the four primary schools to be established in 2017 and 2018 and invited them to make applications for consideration of patronage of these schools. The closing date for receipt of these applications was 6 January, 2017.

The Forward Planning Section carried out an assessment of the applications received and on 24 April, 2017 the initial draft assessments were forwarded to our Group for consideration. A meeting was convened on 27 April, 2017 with the officials from Forward Planning Section and discussions took place on the process of examining the submissions and arriving at assessments. In the course of further discussion we recommended that a small number of minor amendments and clarifications be made to the assessments.

The Group has considered the revised assessments made with regard to the patronage of the new primary schools to be established in 2017 and 2018. The Group now confirms that the criteria as set out 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 and give due regard to the levels of parental demand demonstrated in the applications.

The Group welcomes the improvement in the process, whereby in addition to parents having an opportunity to express their preferences for their preferred patron body, they also have an opportunity to express their preference for their child to be educated through the medium of Irish or English. This brings greater visibility to consideration of the level of demonstrated demand for education through the medium of Irish.

The Group is satisfied to make the following recommendations to you in relation to new schools to commence in September 2017 and 2018:

County	School Planning Area	Recommended Patron Body	Recommended Medium of Instruction
Cork	Ballincollig	An Foras Pátrúnachta	Irish
Dublin	Pelletstown	Scoil Sinead	English
Dublin	Dun Laoghaire	Educate Together	English
Dublin	Dublin South City Centre	Educate Together	English

In relation to our recommendation for Dún Laoghaire, while the level of parental demand very clearly indicates that the patronage of the new school should be awarded to Educate Together, the Group noted the significant number of parental preferences for Irish medium education in an area where such provision is limited and the capacity for further expansion is constrained. In the circumstances, the Group considers that the Department should examine further how best this additional demand for Irish medium education at primary level should be met, given that the new school under ET patronage will satisfy projected demographic needs in the area.

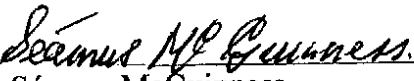
Regarding our recommendation on Pelletstown and given that Scoil Sinead will be a new patron body at primary level (it is working in partnership with Dublin and Dún Laoghaire ETB on the management of a new post-primary school in Lucan), the Group recommends that appropriate arrangements be put in place by the Department to support Scoil Sinead in complying with the patronage commitments entered into under this process and to monitor and advise on the development of the school, particularly through the challenging start-up phase.

In relation to the operation of the patronage process on the ground, while there were no direct breaches of the code of conduct, the Group is aware that the potential for breaches in some instances was highlighted during the process. In two cases, these issues related to a leaflet distributed by a patron body in which the wording could be construed to imply that a decision had already been made on the patronage of the school – the patron gave examples of how other patrons use similar language. In another case, an email had been circulated between staff within a State body highlighting the merits of a particular model of school in one of the areas in which a new school is to be established. While these instances could not be considered as breaches of the code of conduct, the Group recommends that patron

applicants should be reminded of the need to act in accordance with the spirit, as well as the letter, of the code and to communicate clearly with parents in a way that seeks to ensure that they understand the nature and importance of the preferences they are being asked to express.

The Group notes that although clear guidance is given by the Department at the information meeting for prospective patrons and in the documentation made available from the Department's website, successive patronage processes continue to show that some patrons submit considerable numbers of invalid parental preferences, which have 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 is not to the benefit of any patron. The Group reiterates its previous recommendation 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

The Group would like to thank the officials in Forward Planning Section for the assistance given throughout this process.


Séamus McGuinness,
Chairperson