

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

20 February 2019

**Report of the New Schools Establishment Group on the Patronage of 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 12 new 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 8th November 2018, an invitation was issued for applications in respect of the patronage of the 12 new primary schools due to be established in September 2019. The closing date for receipt of applications from applicant patron bodies was 13th November 2018. On 10th December 2018, the Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) website went live for parents to express their parental preferences in respect of the 12 new primary schools to be established in 2019.

The Forward Planning Section of your Department carried out an assessment in respect of each of the 12 areas, including an assessment of the parental preferences received. A meeting was convened on 14th February 2019 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 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 regarding both ethos and language of instruction currently available/planned 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
Boooterstown_Blackrock	An Foras Pátrúnachta	Irish
Donaghmede_Howth_D13	Educate Together	English
Dublin6_Clonskeagh & Dublin_6W (Regional Solution)	Educate Together	English
Dunshaughlin	Louth & Meath Education and Training Board	English
Glasheen_CorkCity/Pouladuff	Educate Together	English
Goatstown_Stillorgan_DLR	Educate Together	English
Kilcoole/Newtownmountkennedy	Educate Together	English
Killester_Raheny_Clontarf	Educate Together	English
Leixlip	Educate Together	English
Maynooth	An Foras Pátrúnachta	Irish
Swords/North	Dublin & Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board	English
Swords/South	Dublin & Dun Laoghaire Education and Training Board	English

In relation to the Patron Code of Conduct, the Group was made aware by Forward Planning Section of a number of issues relating to the expenses limit and issues which were raised by patron bodies with the Department in relation to the campaign activity of other patron bodies. In considering the issues raised and the overall operation of the Code of Conduct, the Group is cognisant of the fact that these patronage processes have been carried out as a pilot phase of the new system.

There was a single instance in one school planning area of a minor overspend which breached the expenses limit, i.e. less than €20 in excess of the €500 limit set out in the Code of Conduct. While the Group did not consider it material to the outcome of the process, the Group is of the view that patron bodies should ensure that the limit is strictly observed. The Group recommends that this matter be emphasised with patrons as part of the proposed future consultation by the Department.

The Group was also concerned that there were three instances in which issues were raised with your Department in relation to the Dunshaughlin patronage process. One instance related to information provided by a patron body on various social media platforms and the patron's website which appeared to link a preference for that patron's model of patronage to securing a place in the second level school in the area. While the Group acknowledges that the patron body confirmed that it issued clarifications immediately following notification of the issue, it considers that the information provided to parents in the first instance had the potential to be misleading or confusing for parents and also that the issuing of clarifications did not of itself fully remedy the matter. The other two instances of issues being raised were about early campaigning by other patron bodies. Having examined these matters carefully, the Group is of the view that none of the issues raised can be considered to be clear technical breaches of the current Code of Conduct.

The Group is therefore, making its recommendation in relation to the outcome of the process for this area on the basis of a consistent application by it of the assessment criteria across all 12 school areas, having regard to parental preferences and broader consideration of diversity, and is satisfied that parents and children of the Dunshaughlin area will be well served by this outcome.

The Department has indicated its intention to engage with patron bodies on feedback and learning from the operation of the process and Code of Conduct in the pilot phase for the 2019 schools. The Group welcomes and strongly endorses this proposed engagement by the Department with the relevant partners.

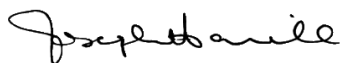
While the Group did not decide that sanction under the Code of Conduct should be imposed in relation to any issues arising in the pilot phase, the Group is of the view that, as part of the engagement, the Department should take the opportunity to emphasise the importance of adhering to both the letter and spirit of the code, the need to ensure that all information provided to the public is and remains accurate, and the need to remain within expense limits in any further processes.

The Group remains cognisant of 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 continues to make good progress in relation to consideration of Irish-medium preferences and has provided in its report to the Group an outline of how it might provide additional opportunities to expand Irish-medium provision, including by means of proactive engagement with existing Irish-medium patrons in relation to demand, and the potential for expansion of existing Irish-medium schools and/or the requirements for new schools. The Group welcomes this proactive approach by the Department, while appreciating the potential for constraints to exist, for example in terms of capacity or physical location.

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

Yours sincerely



Joe Hamill
Chairperson
New Schools Establishment Group