

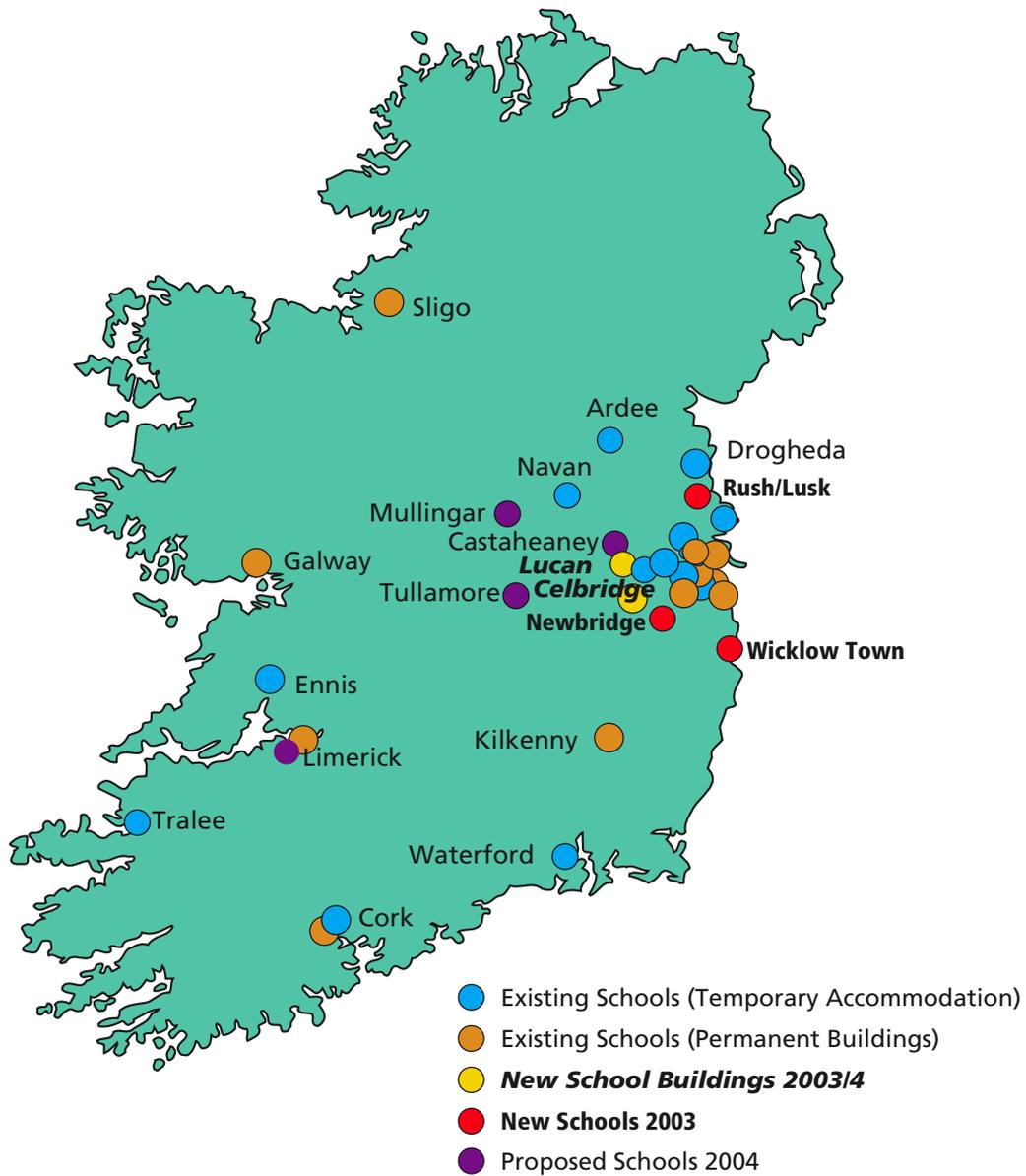
**Educate Together**

# **Annual Report of the Board of Directors**

**May 22 2004**



The first purpose built, State-owned 16 classroom Educate Together school in Ireland - Lucan Educate Together National School





# Annual Report of the Board of Directors

## Summary

The Board pleased to report another year of progress for Educate Together. This has been the first full year in which we have benefited from the services of the new Departments in our National Office. It has been a year in which we have tackled the necessary reforms of our internal structures. It has also been the year in which we have completed our Ethical Education Curriculum and it is a year in which we have at last seen the beginning of the redress of the historical under-funding of primary education – especially on the capital building side. At the same time, it has been a year that has highlighted the urgency of our need for long-term core funding and need to continuously raise the standards of delivery of our ethos in our member schools.

The key areas of progress have been:-

- Conclusion of the work to draw up the Ethical Education Curriculum for Educate Together National Schools;

- The opening of three new Educate Together National schools and the recognition of four more schools to open next September;

- 500 more places created in the sector this year;

- 60 additional staff positions in the sector;

- Structured support for Educate Together schools in the first years of operation;

- Deployment of full programme of training for Start-up Associations;

- Two new purpose-built State-owned permanent buildings for Educate Together schools;

- Deployment of a full programme of training for Boards of Management of all Educate Together schools;

- Significant advances in negotiations with the Department of Education and Science to improve the process whereby new schools are created, including the early provision of permanent buildings;

- Substantial improvements in our relations with the other partners in primary education;

- Improvements in our public media profile and the presentation of our strategic objectives in the political arena;

- Comprehensive review of Educate Together's internal governance and full implementation of its recommendations.

This progress is consistent with the ten central objectives laid down in the November 2000 Strategy Statement. Although we need to move decisively to secure core funding for the years 2006 onwards, the Directors are delighted to report that the current development plan has proved our ability to deliver substantial progress across the full range of these objectives and that Educate Together is placed to make further progress in the coming year.

## Growth of the Sector

A core legal requirement for Educate Together is to “promote a future where multi-denominational education will be as freely available to parents as any other educational option that they may choose” (Educate Together Charter). The context of a rapidly diversifying society is driving demand for the sector to assist groups who wish to open new Educate Together schools.

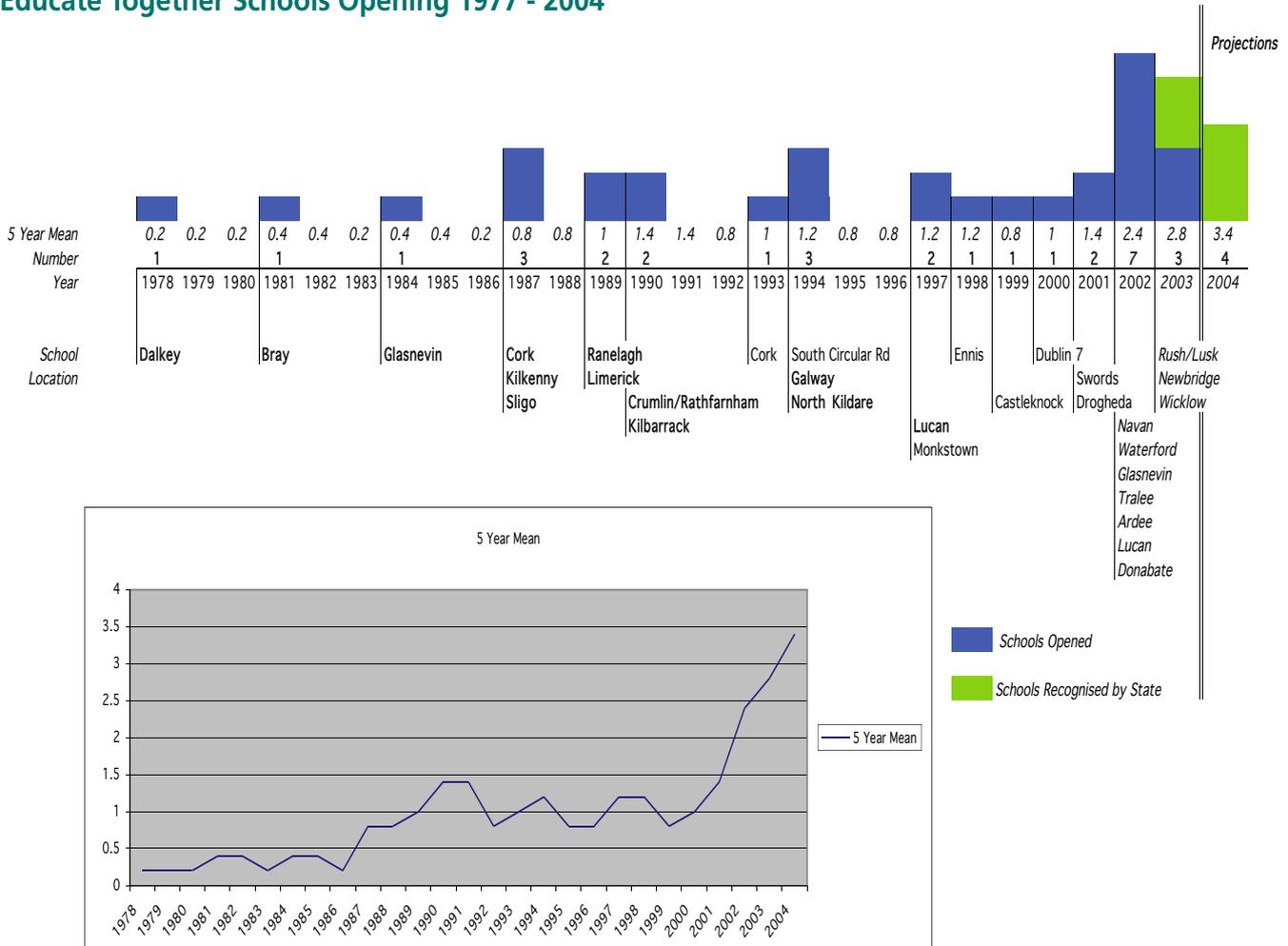
The graph, table and map underline the continued growth of the Educate Together sector. In the past year, we have welcomed three new schools, 16 new mainstream classrooms, over 60 new teaching posts and 487 new children. This growth is taking place despite the fact that welcome improvements in the pupil teacher ratio is reducing the capacity of our established schools and underlines the fact that the majority of Educate Together schools are still building up to their full capacity. The figures also highlight the continuing trend of schools in areas of rapid housing development moving towards a 16 classroom model and the substantial increase in special needs provision. This is also illustrated by the increase in the provision of Assisted Learning Units or Classes in Educate Together schools as the necessary resources required to implement these departments are provided by the State. The sustained growth of the sector can be clearly identified by the ratio between 6<sup>th</sup> class students and junior infants. This year, this percentage has risen to

1.84, meaning that there are almost twice as many entrants to the Educate Together sector than leavers, showing that the capacity of the sector – even without further schools - is approximately double its present level of around 5,000 students.

In the calendar year 2003, there was severe restriction on the State’s funds for new schools and a significant increase in the criteria required for the activation of recognition of new schools by the Department. The new school recognition process was further complicated by the wholesale redeployment of staff within the Department and significant delays in the process. In the end, final sanction to open the schools only arrived on 26<sup>th</sup> August, just one week before the start of term. This resulted in only three of the six proposed schools opening in September 2003, despite the fact that the viability of demand for six schools had been recognised by the Minister. It is a matter of great regret that in one case, where the proposed accommodation conformed in all respects to the Department’s criteria, the proposal was turned down purely on economic grounds. We are delighted that in two of these cases, in Limerick and Castaheaney, the schools are planning to open this year.

The increase in requirements involved in applying for new schools is imposing a serious restraint on the

## Educate Together Schools Opening 1977 - 2004



process of providing urgently needed new schools in the country and compounding social disadvantage. To supply the necessary professional reports for a proposal can cost a start-up association up to €25,000 and this, coupled with the all the varied expenses of the opening process, is putting an intolerable burden on voluntary groups of parents. These families are simply advancing their constitutional rights and the urgent educational needs of their children. The overall costs involved in presenting an application are now exceeding the €30,000 estimated last year. It is inevitable that costs at these levels will militate against the provision of Educate Together schools in areas of social disadvantage. We are making the strongest possible representations that these costs - especially those involved in satisfying the Minister's opinions - are borne by the State in all successful applications. Irrespective of success in this negotiation, we need to provide the necessary funds to support new schools in areas where local communities will not be able to fund-raise to this level. The provision of this support will become one of the objectives of our Development Fund.

## New Educate Together National Schools

Three new schools opened in September 2003, all opened with Educate Together as their patron. All are in new areas for the sector. Of the three, one opened in a Rugby club, another in a scout den and the third in a tourist hostel. Despite conclusive evidence of demographic trends and attitudinal changes, the State remains unable to pro-actively plan for suitable accommodation for new schools from their outset. As usual, the schools opened after a gruelling search for temporary accommodation. The Directors would like to express our thanks to all the individuals and local bodies who have assisted the schools with temporary accommodation this year. As patron of these schools, the Directors have taken great care to ensure that the process of establishment of Boards of Managements and selection of key staff has been carried out to the highest standards. Each of the schools has an experienced member or former member of an Educate Together board appointed as the patron's nominee on the Board. We would like to formally thank all those

### Educate Together School Sector 2003-2004

(all pupil figures at 30.09.03)

School	Opened	Years Operational	Mainstream Teacher & Including Principal	Change from last Year	Principal	Pupils	Change from last Year	Accommodation	Building type
Dalkey School Project	1978	25	9	0	A	238	-3	Permanent	New purpose-built school
Bray School Project	1981	22	9	0	A	239	-2	Permanent	New purpose-built school
North Dublin National School Project	1984	19	9	0	A	224	-7	Permanent	New purpose-built school
Cork School Project	1987	16	9	0	A	238	-1	Permanent	Reused school building
Sligo School Project	1987	16	8	0	A	171	-5	Permanent	Reused school building
Kilkenny School Project	1987	16	9	0	A	244	-1	Permanent	New purpose-built school
Limerick School Project	1989	14	9	0	A	212	-1	Permanent	Reused school building
North Bay Educate Together N.S.	1990	13	9	0	A	237	-1	Permanent	Reused school building
Ranelagh Multi-Denominational School	1990	13	9	0	A	250	7	Permanent	New purpose-built school
Rathfarnham Educate Together N.S.	1990	13	9	0	A	219	-12	Permanent	Reused school building
Gaelscoil an Ghoirt Alainn	1993	10	9	0	A	231	-1	Temporary	Prefabs
Galway Educate Together N.S.	1994	9	9	0	A	232	-5	Permanent	New purpose-built school
North Kildare Educate Together School	1994	9	9	0	A	250	-5	Permanent	New purpose-built school
Griffith Barracks Multi-Denominational School	1994	9	6	1	T	155	32	Temporary	Reused alternative building
Monkstown Educate Together N.S.	1997	6	9	0	A	243	25	Temporary	Prefabs
Lucan Educate Together N.S.	1997	6	13	2	A	353	44	Permanent	New purpose-built school
Ennis Educate Together N.S.	1998	5	4	0	T	87	1	Temporary	Prefabs
Castleknock Educate Together N.S.	1999	4	10	2	A	244	46	Temporary	Prefabs
Dublin 7 Educate Together N.S.	2000	3	6	1	T	153	28	Temporary	Reused alternative building
Le Cheile Educate Together N.S.	2001	2	5	0	T	133	37	Temporary	Prefabs
Swords Educate Together N.S.	2001	2	4	1	T	95	43	Temporary	Prefabs
Waterford Educate Together N.S.	2002	1	2	0	T	41	20	Temporary	Reused alternative building
Navan Educate Together N.S.	2002	1	3	1	T	57	21	Temporary	Reused alternative building
Tralee Educate Together N.S.	2002	1	2	0	T	40	18	Temporary	Reused alternative building
Donabate Portrane Educate Together N.S.	2002	1	3	1	T	63	30	Temporary	Prefabs
Dublin North Central Educate Together N.S.	2002	1	3	1	T	59	31	Temporary	Reused school building
Griffen Valley Educate Together N.S.	2002	1	4	2	T	91	67	Temporary	Prefabs
Ardee Educate Together N.S.	2002	1	2	0	T	32	11	Temporary	Reused school building & prefabs
Rush and Lusk Educate Together N.S.	2003	0	2	2	T	24	24	Temporary	Reused alternative building
South Kildare Educate Together N.S.	2003	0	2	2	T	20	20	Temporary	Reused alternative building
Wicklow Educate Together N.S.	2003	0	2	2	T	26	26	Temporary	Reused alternative building
		239	198	18	16	4901	487		

Increase in Classes	18
Increase in Pupils	487
No of administrative Principals	16
No of Teaching Principals	15
Increase in Teaching Posts (inc. Resource posts etc.)	58
Increase in Special Needs Assistants	34
Recorded Unsuccessful Applicants	1040
Home Languages (Max / Average)	20 / 6.18

Ratio of Junior Infants to Sixth Class 1.84

Average Insurance Costs for schools in permanent buildings	8,627	36.07	per pupil
Average Fundraising Requirement (BoM)	30,333	130.32	per pupil

Schools with Permanent Accommodation	13
State owned Permanent Buildings	7
Permanent buildings with architectural awards	5
Schools without permanent accommodation	18

who are assisting new schools in this way. In addition, experienced Principals of Educate Together schools and members of the Board of Directors sat on all selection boards for Principal teachers. This voluntary contribution is an invaluable help to new schools for which we would like to formally express our gratitude.

The National Office has organised a number of seminars and training sessions for those involved in establishing these schools. We would like to acknowledge the great help that each of these communities has received from our members both in the form of encouragement, visits, resources and often extensive time for advice and assistance.

### South Kildare Educate Together National School

South Kildare opened on September 1<sup>st</sup> in the function room of Newbridge Curragh RFC, with 22 pupils. The school has grown and flourished with Eimear Carey as Principal, and will take in 30 new pupils in September. The school will move to temporary structures on the site in September and hopes to be granted permanent recognition in 2004. The school community is focused on meeting the demands of parents in the area and looking towards a more permanent accommodation solution for the school.

### Rush Lusk Educate Together National School

RALET opened in Rush Scout Den with 24 children up to 6<sup>th</sup> class. In April, the school moved to an old Teagasc training centre at Blakes Cross, which will facilitate the growth of the school for the next 4-5 years. Around 20 additional children will join the school this September, with strong demand for places for subsequent years. The entire school community has worked extremely hard to cater for the needs of parents in the area, and continues to do so with regards to permanent accommodation. The Principal of the school is Marie Moreau.

### Wicklow Educate Together National School

Wicklow Educate Together opened in a wing of the Wicklow Bay hostel with Mary Feerick Byrne as Principal. The school has 23 pupils up to 5<sup>th</sup> class, with an additional 25 children joining the school in September. The school is intensively searching for long-term accommodation. The President of the European Parliament, Pat Cox, officially opened the school on May 10<sup>th</sup> 2004.

## New Buildings and Building Plans

Despite the great difficulties caused by the restrictions on the Capital Building Programme in 2003, Educate Together schools have considerable progress with their building plans. Of particular note are the achievements of North Kildare Educate Together School and Lucan Educate Together National School who moved into their purpose-built buildings. Both schools are State-owned.



Photos from the first day of the new schools - From the top. Wicklow ETNS, Rush Lusk ETNS and South Kildare ETNS

## North Kildare Educate Together School

After a wait of nine years, North Kildare Educate Together School (formerly North Kildare National School Project) moved into its permanent building on a five acre site in Celbridge in the last weeks of the 2002/3 academic year. This new building, developed with the detailed participation of the NKETNS community, is an outstanding example of the new integrated development that is possible for Educate Together schools. It is no surprise that this building has won a number of architectural awards and has pushed out the standards for primary school design. The school is built on a site provided by the local authority that includes a new Community College and sports facilities. The school also has a specialist unit for autistic children that is due to open in September 2004.

## Lucan Educate Together National School

The new building for Lucan Educate Together National School was finished in the first week of September 2003 and the pupils and staff moved in on September 8<sup>th</sup>. This is a 16-class school that also includes a fully operational Assisted Learning Unit. It is a two-storey design on an excellent site at the centre of the community. It is a great credit to the Lucan Educate Together community that they have managed to advance to the stage of a permanent building in the relatively short period of six years since opening. The Lucan school has also allowed their old pre-fabs to remain on their site to temporarily house Griffeen Valley Educate Together National school while its permanent building is constructed this year.

With the increased flow of funds into the Capital Building Programme in December 2003 and the 5 year funding envelope announced in the Budget, there is beginning to be significant movement in the primary building programme. Educate Together has participated in the drawing up of the criteria for the prioritisation of building projects and we now have a constructive negotiating environment with the Planning and Building Section of the Department of Education and Science in which to advance our schools' accommodation needs.

As the fastest growing sector in primary education, we have a disproportionate number of schools in temporary accommodation (18 out of 31) Of our schools that opened before 2000, 5 still await permanent accommodation, with Gaelscoil an Ghoirt Álainn, the first multi-denominational gaelscoil in the State, now ten years in operation, waiting the longest. Griffith Barracks Multi-denominational School, Ennis ETNS, Monkstown ETNS and Castleknock ETNS complete the list. We are confident that the objective and transparent criteria now being applied to the building programme will allow us to make considerable progress in accommodation for these schools – as long as the Government continues to provide the necessary funding to sustain the programme.

Evidence of the strength of the criteria process is seen in the priority that has been placed on urgently needed schools in areas of rapid housing development. The provision of permanent accommodation for Griffeen



Views of the New Lucan Educate Together National School Building. This is the first State-owned 16 classroom multi-denominational school in Ireland.





Valley ETNS which will move from scout den, through prefabs to permanent building in three years, the advancement of the Castleknock school to permanent build in 2005 and the commitment of the Department to move to site purchase for the Castaheany ETNS before its opening is evidence of considerable progress.

Of the 13 Educate Together schools opened since 1999, all operate in temporary accommodation. They have all made significant advances in capacity, staffing levels and accommodation in the past year.



## Schools Operating with Educate Together's Patronage

### Dublin 7

Dublin 7 ETNS is housed in accommodation rented from the Catholic Institute for the Deaf at St. Joseph's Navan Road. This year, it has increased its capacity by 28 and opened an Assisted Learning Classroom. The school is planning to move to permanent accommodation created in the redevelopment of the Grangegorman site. It will add a further classroom this year. Capacity in September 2003 was 153. Principal Teacher is Áine Sotscheck and Educate Together is represented on the Board of Management by Noel Dunne, Chairperson, and Elaine Bermingham, patron nominee.

### Swords

Swords ETNS moved into purpose-built prefab accommodation on a site provided free of charge by Gannon Homes this year. The site is part of a joint campus that includes an inter-denominational Gaelscoil, Gaelscoil Bhrian Boroimhe. Noel Dempsey, Minister for Education and Science, officially opened this joint campus in February this year. The school

whole school activities. Capacity in September 2003 was 95. Principal Teacher is Gerard Kelly and Educate Together is represented on the Board of Management by Barbara Merry, Chairperson, and Gerry McKevitt, patron nominee.

### Le Chéile

Le Chéile ETNS is currently in prefabs on the grounds of Drogheda Grammar School. It plans to establish a permanent building at this location. This year it increased its capacity by 37 to 133. It also welcomed a new Principal teacher, Micheal Garvey. Educate Together would like to pay tribute to the outstanding

work carried out by the previous Principal, Maurice Hurley, and wish him well in his new post. Educate Together is represented on the Board by Paul Corry, Chairperson, and Belinda Moller, patron nominee.



### Ardee

Ardee ETNS started its major re-development programme in 2003 after transforming from St. Mary's Church of Ireland National School in 2002. In January, it took delivery of a full-sized prefab that was opened by Minister Dermot Aherne in April, 2004. Principal

Teacher is Rosemary McGonagle and Educate Together is represented on the Board of Management by David Bothwell, Chairperson, and Paul Rowe, patron nominee.



### Donabate/Portrane

Donabate/Portrane ETNS has had a difficult and testing time over the past year. Initially located in the local Scout Den, the school was accommodated on an emergency basis in Turvey Golf Club. The school's plans for accommodation were thrown into crisis when Fingal County Council announced that the local community centre had run up such debts as to require the sale of the school's proposed site. After a tense month of negotiations, this decision was reversed and the school moved to purpose-built prefabs on its preferred long-term site. Despite the

uncertainties caused by these events, the school added 30 places to its capacity last September and has taken in many more children now it has a secure future. Principal Teacher is Maeve Corish and Educate Together is



provided 43 additional places in September and welcomed one additional mainstream teacher. The school will add a further classroom in 2004. The move to the site at Applewood is the third location for the school and it is hoped that this site will be quickly developed as its permanent home. The school urgently needs a room large enough for assemblies and other

represented on the Board of Management by Elaine O’Dea, Chairperson, and Ann Marie Leonard, patron nominee.

### Dublin North Central

Dublin North Central ETNS is housed in prefabs previously occupied by the North Dublin National School Project in Church Avenue Glasnevin. 31 additional places were created this year bringing its capacity to 59. It also established an Assisted Learning Classroom in September 2003 that was opened by an Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern. Principal Teacher is Attracta Hayden and Educate Together is represented on the Board of Management by Colm Fulham, Chairperson and Anne-Marie Jones, patron nominee.

### Navan

Navan ETNS is housed in a large private house in Flowerhill, Navan. The school moved to this location from the Order of Malta Hall, Academy Street this year. Despite its great difficulties with accommodation and transport services for children from the rapidly developing housing areas in the town, it created 21 additional places in September and its total capacity was 57. In May, 2004 the Minister for Education and Science, Noel Dempsey, officially opened the school and granted it permanent recognition. Principal Teacher is John Keaveney and Educate Together is represented on the Board of Management by Vernu Gramoney, Chairperson, and Stephen Moles, patron nominee.

### Griffen Valley

Griffen Valley ETNS is currently located in prefabs recently vacated by Lucan ETNS when moving to their new building on site. The school moved from the Lucan Scout Den and increased its capacity by 67 places and two mainstream teachers last September. As part of on-going negotiations between Educate Together and the Department, Griffen Valley ETNS will move to a permanent, 16 class-room, State-owned building in September 2004. This will represent the fastest move into permanent accommodation for any Educate Together school. Educate Together is represented on the Board of Management by Elaine Harris, Chairperson and Nuala Byrne, patron nominee.

### Tralee

Tralee ETNS is currently located in converted and refurbished buildings as part of the Collis Sandes complex. The school has grown in its second year of operation and now accommodates 40 children. The Board has plans to relocate to an area of housing development in the town. The Principal is Mike O’Donnell and Educate Together is represented by Colm O’Doherty, Chairperson and Deirdre O’Donoghue, patron nominee.

### Waterford

Waterford ETNS increased its capacity by 20 in September 2003. Currently in temporary accommodation in Lisduggan, it is planning to move to additional capacity in September. The board of the school is actively pursuing a range of ideas for its long-term accommodation. Principal is Margaret Boucher and Educate Together is represented by Joanne Galvin, Chairperson and Noeleen Dooley, patron nominee.



## Schools Proposed for 2004

This year four new Educate Together schools have been recognised. These schools are:-

### Castaheaney ETNS

Castaheaney ETNS was recognised by the Minister this year. It follows on the work of the Ongar Road/Clonee group that was planning to open with Dublin 15 ETA's patronage last year. The group has done extensive work in the area and has a pre-enrolment list in excess of 100. It plans to open on prefabs on the site reserved for a national school in the area. The development of an Educate Together school in this area has been welcomed by all current providers in the district and when the school opens, it should go some way to address the serious shortage of school places. The Department is recognising the provision of accommodation for this school under the "roofs over heads" criteria of the building programme and is committed to acquiring a site for the school in the near future. The Acting Board of Management is in the process of formation and interviews for the first Principal of the school are taking place this May.

### Limerick City East ETNS

Limerick City East ETNS was recognised by the Minister last year. Unfortunately, the Department rejected the proposed accommodation for 2003 on grounds of cost. This decision was made on August 25<sup>th</sup> and as a result there was no opportunity for an effective appeal. This year the school has proposed alternative accommodation in the Young Munster Rugby Club facility. The school plans to accommodate those children who cannot be accommodated in the Limerick School Project. The Acting Board of Management is in the process of formation and interviews for the first Principal of the school are taking place this May.

### Mullingar ETNS

Mullingar ETNS was recognised by the Minister in April this year. It plans to open in the town's Rugby club buildings. The action group was set up after a public meeting in the town last year. Together with the Tullamore proposal, we hope that the opening of these schools will lead to the expansion of Educate Together provision in the midlands. The Acting Board of Management is in the process of formation and interviews for the first Principal of the school are taking place this May.

### Tullamore ETNS

Tullamore ETNS is planning to open in the Charleville Castle complex. This is an exciting proposal as the castle is being redeveloped and restored as an educational facility that will be open to all. If the considerable administrative hurdles to this programme can be overcome in time, the school will open in the castle in September 2004. The Acting Board of Management is being formed and Principal interviews are in train.

## Schools Proposed for 2005 and beyond

The number of requests for assistance to open new Educate Together National Schools continues to be buoyant. In the past year, Educate Together has held public information meetings in Gorey, Wexford, Clare-Galway and Tyrellstown, Co. Fingal. Start up associations are being set up in these areas. Initial meetings have also been held in a number of other locations and requests for information on Educate Together schools continue to increase. The Development Department of Educate Together is now moving towards selecting areas for development according to a national strategy.

## Educate Together Second Level Developments

Educate Together is still to open its first second-level school. Whilst interest in such a development has been present in the sector for many years, the growth of the sector at primary level is at last bringing such interest to the level at which practical proposals are becoming realistic. Groups are investigating their options in



Dublin 15, Lucan and Galway. At present, Educate Together does not have the central resources to drive this programme but is seeking funding to employ a Second-Level Project Manager. Any second-level school operated under the Educate Together Charter would be legally obliged to be multi-denominational, child(or student) centred, co-educational and democratically run.

## Schools Support Department and Training Programmes for Educate Together Schools

Educate Together maintains a full-time school support department. In the past year, this has provided much needed support for many developing and established schools. This work is divided into three main functions. Firstly to provide professional confidential support to the Chairpersons of the Patron, Board of Management and Principal Teacher of Educate Together schools. This service allows problems to be addressed quickly and quietly and the key staff of schools provided with timely legal and administrative advice, facilitation and mediation services. Our School Support Department also facilitates whole school development sessions in which the issues of community development and delivery of ethos are discussed in schools. The third element of this Department is to draw up and deliver training programmes for the schools in the Educate Together sector. In the past year, we have delivered a training programme for all the new Boards of Management of Educate Together schools that took office last December. It is regrettable that the Department of Education and Science did not see fit to fund this training programme or the programmes run by other patron bodies. While the entire National School system depends of volunteers for the management of schools it is utterly unacceptable that these volunteers are provided with no support whatsoever by the State at a time when the legal and other responsibilities of Boards of Management are escalating.

## Public Relations and Fundraising

We have allocated considerable resources to public relations in the past year. This has resulted in the media profile of the sector being significantly raised. Educate Together has been represented on national TV, press and radio more frequently than any previous year. A feature of this work has been the emphasis on local radio and press in areas in which we intend to develop schools. Significant items have included feature articles and interviews in the Irish Times, including a feature on the celebration of the end of year festivals in an Educate Together school. The objective of this work is to show our sector as a dynamic part of the human rights agenda in Ireland, a modern transparent and accountable model of school governance and a vital part of the infrastructure of the new, developing Ireland.

We have also developed our own media. Educate Together Email News (ETEN) has become a regular news

bulletin over the past year and now is sent to thousands of subscribers. 23 editions have been produced since the last AGM. In addition, Educate Together has begun to take its exhibition stands into public events. The stands were exhibited at the open days in Newbridge and Ardgillan Demesnes in Co. Fingal, in Tullamore and at the Chinese New Year festival in Smithfield, Dublin.

Educate together also won awards in the Living Dublin awards and was nominated for the organisation prize in the MAMA Media and Multi-cultural awards run by Metro Eireann and RTE..

As our annual accounts show, Educate Together is at the mid-way point of a three-year development programme financed by a charitable foundation. As part of this programme, we are now concentrating on



building funds to carry our organisation to the next stage of its development. This consists of lobbying for increased funding from the State whilst also building up our independent fund-raising capacity. This will remain a central preoccupation of the Board of Directors in the coming year. The Board is employing a leading Fundraising consultant to assist in this work and sent two staff members on a three-day intensive training conference in the Netherlands on fundraising techniques.

## The Education Programme – the Ethical Education Curriculum

Over the past 25 years, Educate Together schools have been delivering an inclusive religious education core curriculum developed along the key objectives of the Charter in individual schools. Key early work was carried through in 1980s by Áine Hyland. In the past four years a new programme of research, consultation and drafting has been carried out. This has been a major item in three Ethos Conferences and is being brought to a conclusion this year. This programme has distilled the experience of the Educate Together movement and has produced for the first time in Ireland a rights-based, inclusive ethical education curriculum for the Educate Together schools. This will be a vital element for the future growth of the sector. It will define the patron's curriculum in all schools operating with our patronage. It will provide a clear statement of curriculum for trainee teachers and teachers considering taking posts in our schools. It will provide accurate information for parents considering our schools for the education of their children. When the document is launched later this year, it will be the first multi-denominational ethical curriculum ever produced for the Irish National School system. The Board of Directors considers that this document will play an important role in the future of Irish education and have allocated significant resources to its production. We would like to pay tribute to all those who have participated in its development and in particular to Carmel Mulcahy, Frieda McGovern, Paddie Murphy and Mary Kelleher who constitute the drafting team and authors of the document.

## Developments in Our National Office

The increased work-load borne by the National Office has necessitated the acquisition of additional office space in our current location in CentrePoint. We have taken an additional 3 offices and one shared area. During the year, we reluctantly said good-bye to Penny Forbes, our first Team Assistant, who left to follow her

family abroad and welcomed Deirdre Mangaoang to our team. We also welcomed Christina Attwood as our accounts person. During the year, significant advances in IT infrastructure, financial and time accounting systems and HR practices have taken place.

## Structural Change and Development in Educate Together

The Prospectus report on a charter of governance for Educate Together was presented at the last AGM. This report has been considered in great detail by the Board of Directors in the past year. A weekend team-building session and conference was held in September in which the ramifications of this report were considered and the work programme of the Board set out for the year. The Board set out to implement the structural changes proposed by Prospectus and have carefully moved to re-draft the Memo and Articles of the company and to ensure maximum support for these objectives. The Board has transformed itself from the loose structure of the National Executive into a professionally structured Board of Directors capable of managing our increased resources, full-time office and patronage functions. At the same time, the Board has developed the concept of a National Forum to ensure the democratic, representative and participative spirit of the organisation. The Board has organised itself into formal sub-committees including the Executive Sub-Committee, the Education Sub-Committee, the Policy Sub-Committee and the Audit Committee. This structure, with the number of Directors reduced to a manageable figure of 12 (10 elected and 2 co-options), brings our legal structure into line with best practice for charities and is sufficiently robust to support our





continued development. The Board called a successful Extraordinary General Meeting in April to ensure that the structural changes proposed would be implemented in time for this year's AGM. The Board has met 8 times in the past year, with two of these meetings being held as open meetings on the old "National Executive" model.

## **Relations with the Department of Education and Science**

Our negotiations with the Department remain difficult and promising. In the first six months since the last AGM, we were dealing with a period of severe restrictions in Departmental expenditure at a time in which Principal Officer grades in almost all sections were re-assigned. In this period, all in career development funding was removed, funding for training schemes and educational programmes such as our Ethos Conference was removed and there were severe difficulties with the new school recognition process. This resulted in delayed recognition of new schools, the creation of a phase of 'activation of recognition' that resulted in new schools only being finally approved in the last week of the summer holidays and meant that only three of the six schools recognised by the Minister were able to open. There was also no effective appeals mechanism in place to respond to these cases. This period also saw extreme pressure put on some of our fastest developing schools. In particular the continued existence of Swords and Donabate Portrane ETNS was put in jeopardy by inconsistencies and delays in accommodation grants and the schools only survived as a result of the extraordinary efforts of the staff, Board and parents throughout the summer holiday period.

Once the school year started, we – together with all other primary management bodies – were devastated by the news that there would be no funding for training for the new Boards of Management being recruited throughout the country.

The low point in our relations with the Department came in the week before the winter break when – after the collapse of negotiations on parent teacher meetings as part of the Benchmarking process – the Department issued newspaper advertisements critically changing the agreement on the Standardisation of the School Year. As a result, the Educate Together schools became caught in the cross fire between Department and unions. Five Educate Together school communities that availed of the flexibility of the agreement to accommodate ethical diversity were singled out for public comment rather than the hundreds of non-compliant second-level institutions. To their credit, the Educate Together schools involved held firm and adhered to the letter of Circular 19/03. We are delighted that the Teachers Conciliation Council put this issue in context and also that in the subsequent negotiations for standard school years up until 2007, the need for flexibility for schools of different religious patronages has been recognised. Under our legal charter, our schools cannot impose

specific religious holidays on their communities unless they are formal State holidays.

However, the 'bedding down' of the new senior posts in Department Sections and the Budget of December 2003 have brought significant changes. The increased funds for the primary capital building programme and in particular the 5-year funding envelope has at last seen progress in the crisis of accommodation for National Schools. The end of the situation in which the Department could not plan beyond the current year is greatly to be welcomed and is finally making applications for new buildings and extensions a realistic process. The publication of the building lists and the criteria governing their prioritisation is also welcome. Educate Together congratulates the Minister for his success in extracting the funds for the building programme at cabinet and in his commitment to remove local political lobbying from the decision-making process. It is clear however, that the current funds are insufficient to address the historic underfunding of primary education and we call on all parties to ensure that there is a sustained flow of funds into the primary capital programme for years to come.

## **New Schools Advisory Committee**

The NSAC is now in its second year of operation. We, together with other patrons have made representations on the first review of its work and are encouraged to see that a formal structure of appeals is being put in place and that a proposal that applications when recognised will be allowed to defer opening of the school for one year. This we feel will allow us to reduce the stress involved in the year of application and opening of a school and allow us to improve the training of the Board of Management of the proposed school and to work with the Department to provide suitable accommodation for all schools from the outset.

## **Relations with the Planning and Building Sections**

With the new staffing arrangements within the Planning and Building sections, we have been able to establish a positive negotiating environment. In particular, we are confident that with the refinement of the bands of the building programme all our schools in temporary accommodation will qualify for Band 1 or 2:1. We have established a schedule of review meetings each term and are confident that there will be steady progress in the future. In particular we welcome the improvements in the planning of accommodation for new schools in developing areas and we hope to soon be in the situation where no Educate Together school will open without an agreed schedule of appropriate short-term, mid-term and long-term accommodation. There are however, still many hurdles to overcome, in particular, we need an agreed mechanism by which we can facilitate the donation of sites for schools by landowners in the context of their housing development plans. We also need an agreed mechanism whereby diversity of school type in established areas with declining school going populations can be achieved in the context of rationalisation of existing schools.

One of the most encouraging developments with the Planning section is the pilot publication of area development plans. The first two of these plans, published for Mountmellick and Mountrath, for the first time contain a standard heading addressing the need to plan for diversity of school types. We hope that this approach will be applied throughout the country and will generate the basis for an agreed national plan to provide inclusive schools in all areas.

In February this year, Educate Together formally challenged the current system of local contribution to state-owned new school buildings and also challenged the terms of the 'temporary licence' that has been offered to the Boards of Management of such schools. We await a formal reply from the Department on these issues. We consider the system of local capital contribution to new buildings is only applicable in privately owned sites and that where the state owns both site and building such a contribution is simply a tax on parents who choose an Educate Together school. We have also challenged the basis upon which the State requires that a Board insures the State's interest in the building and have drawn the Department's attention to the fact that for second-level community schools, the State bears the full risk of the operation of the school without the board having to pay an insurance policy. Insurance costs for new schools have escalated in the past year, with some schools having to use up to a quarter of their capitation grants to pay insurance premia.

Despite a commitment made to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science last July, the Minister has not been able to make a date available to meet with Educate Together to-date. We are hopeful that such a meeting will be arranged in the near future.

## Lobbying and Policy Development

In order to achieve our objective that any family in the State should have a realistic option to send their children to a multi-denominational school, we need a strategic policy decision to be taken by the government to support the development of the Educate Together sector or schools that offer the same guarantees of inclusion and educational rights as our schools provide. Such a decision is the only way in which the State can vindicate its obligations under Article 42 of the Constitution, the European Convention of Human Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention for the Complete Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination. In order to prepare the grounds for this decision, Educate Together has presented this case to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Science on July 3 2003 and has commenced work with a number of governmental and non-governmental agencies. These have included the Equality Authority, Irish Council of Civil Liberties, Amnesty International, Irish Human Rights Commission and the Children's Rights Alliance. We were particularly encouraged by the all-party support for our work



formally expressed at the Oireachtas Joint Committee. We will be continuing this work on an ongoing basis into the future.

A further case put to the Joint Committee was for a radical overhaul of the process of creation of new schools. Educate Together has also campaigned for a change in the planning laws to facilitate the transfer of sites for schools at pre-zoning prices, at cost or free in the context of granting large scale planning permissions for housing development. We have made the case to politicians and the media that the current system whereby one arm of the State grossly inflates the value of land through the planning process and another arm of the State then has to pay this inflated price is in effect an indirect subsidy for housing development and is drastically increasing the cost of providing urgently needed new schools. Educate Together were invited to outline this case to the All Party Joint Committee on the Constitution on July 21, 2003 as part of its consideration of the issue of private property.

Educate Together and Educate Together schools continue to be unable to meet the growing demand for places in our schools. Whilst we are committed to expand the sector to meet this demand, we consider that it is fundamentally the responsibility of the State to address this situation. As a result of this, we are encouraging any parent who is unable to gain access to an existing Educate Together school or finds that there is no Educate Together school in their vicinity to apply directly to the Minister for the vindication of their constitutional rights. As a result we have issued standard letters to all our schools to be made available to the parents of any child refused a place.

## Relations with Other NGOs

Educate Together participates with other charities and non-governmental organisations in areas of mutual concern. These areas consist of charity tax reform and regulation, best practice for companies limited by guarantee, human rights, diversity, anti-racism, anti-discrimination and education. We actively participate in the Wheel, the umbrella body for voluntary and community organisations. Further afield, we have supported events organised by the Northern Ireland

Council for Integrated Education and ensured that our views are represented at international education conferences.

### Relations with Partners in Education

Educate Together has maintained close friendly links with other patron and management bodies in primary education in Ireland. This includes the Catholic Primary School Management Association, the Church of Ireland Board of Education, the Islamic Board of Education, Gaelscoilleanna, an Foras Patrúnachta,

the Irish National Teachers Organisation and the Irish Primary Principals Network. We have been represented as guests at the AGM of the CPSMA, the Annual Conference of the IPPN and the Annual Congress of the INTO. Our schools support service maintains close links with those of the CPSMA and the INTO and our Development Department works with Gaelscoilleanna on new school policy issues.

### Conclusion

The board considers that the work detailed in this report shows substantial progress along the lines of the strategy agreed in 2000. The sector is well placed for further growth and improvements in 2004/5 and we would like to thank all those who have assisted us either professionally or as volunteers in making this progress.

David Denny, Chairperson.

## Educate Together Secretary's Report on Director's Attendance

The Board of Educate Together held six meetings during the 2003/2004 school year, one of which was a full two-day meeting. In addition, two National Executive Meetings were held.

<b>Board Members</b>	<b>Board Meetings Attended</b>	<b>Nat. Exec. Meetings Attended</b>
David Denny, Chairperson	5/6	2/2
Bernadette Ryan, Vice-Chairperson	5/6	2/2
Belinda Moller, Vice-Chairperson	4/6	1/2
Marian Fitzpatrick, Secretary	5/6	2/2
Mel Thornton	4/6	1/2
Mary Aust	6/6	1/2
Gerard Kelly	5/6	2/2
Gerry McKeivitt	5/6	1/2
Niamh Ni Ghráinne	5/6	1/2
Catherine Earley	5/6	2/2
Carmel Mulcahy	4/6	0/2
Sheila Cullinane	3/6	0/2

Lucy Keaveny and Deirdre Tobin both stood down during the year for personal reasons and were unable to attend meetings.

**Marian Fitzpatrick**  
**Secretary**