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# An Investigation into Parental Attitudes and Preferences Regarding the Development of an Educate Together Post-Primary School

By

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# Abstract

Irish society has, within recent years, experienced significant social and cultural change. Our nation has become more secular, pluralist and culturally diverse. The implication of these changes for post-primary education in an intercultural era has been considered. Specific attention has been applied to determining the attitudes of Educate Together primary school parents towards their willingness to develop a model of post-primary education based upon the principles of the Educate Together Charter.

Parents have significantly contributed to this study through their participation in questionnaires and interviews. A focus group; comprised of Board of Management and Executive Committee members and parents met to discuss views and opinions regarding the possible development of an Educate Together post-primary school. Educationalists, working at primary, secondary and university levels have been consulted and their views documented.

The purpose of this study has been to investigate parental interest in developing a new model of post-primary education; namely an Educate Together post-primary school.

The results of this research have established that parents are indeed willing and eager to support this initiative. However, this research has determined that the burden of administration, on local school management teams involving parents, is severely limiting further exploration into future developments.

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# *Chapter One*

## Introduction & Structure of the Study

### 1. 1.  Introduction – The Past

The researcher's involvement with Educate Together (ET) began in 1997 when he enrolled the first of his three children in the newly created Educate Together primary 'school'. The Scouts Den, with its hall and play area proved an admirable location until it was discovered that the following year's intake of twelve pupils could not be accommodated into the existing two 'classrooms'. Temporary classroom accommodation was acquired and located upon the only free space available; namely the pupil's small play area.

This unfortunate situation repeated itself on an annual basis as the existence of the school came to be more widely known. The more pupils we enrolled, the less play space they had to enjoy. Soon our school began to resemble an 'H' block internment camp. The struggle to find a permanent home for our fledgling institution began in earnest. A suitable site was eventually found; funds were raised and architectural plans drafted. Now, eight years later, four hundred and twenty pupils enjoy the comfort of a modern spacious facility in which they can learn, play and grow up together.

### 1. 2.  The Present

Our school is representative of the neighbourhood in which it is built. It contributes positively to the development of a community where persons of all

religions and none are welcome; where cultural diversity is celebrated and valued for the richness it provides and where educational disabilities and abilities are given equal standing.

Our school is democratic. Leadership is shared by an elected Patron, Board of Management and a Parent-Teacher Association. An elected Student Council represents the pupil body. The professional role of the teacher is frequently supported by the participation of parents in many of the day-to-day activities that occur within the school.

The researcher is proud of his participation on the committees, sub-committees, work groups, representative bodies and other 'busy bodies' which helped achieve this school. His greatest pleasure however, is in knowing that his children enjoy a meaningful education in an appropriate ethical environment. The children are learning in an intercultural setting where all faiths and none are acknowledged and respected without prejudice. Where attention is focused upon a genuine concern for child-centred learning in a co-educational environment and where teachers are supported by meaningful democratic participation of parents/guardians in all aspects of the school's activities.

## 1. 3. The Future

Now that our primary school has been established and is working to fulfil its community's needs, the researcher's thoughts and those of other parents have turned to our children's futures within the existing provision of second-level

education in our locality. Is there sufficient interest amongst parents to consider alternatives?

## 1. 4.   Aims of This Investigation

The aim of this investigation is to determine parental attitudes and preferences regarding the development of an Educate Together post-primary school. A working hypothesis has been applied; namely that parents are willing to explore and participate in new models of post-primary education for their children.

Sub aims of this investigation were to determine; (a) If the parents of former Educate Together primary school pupils were satisfied with the provision of post-primary schools in their area; (2) What criteria are applied by Educate Together parents when selecting a post-primary school for their child; (3) Are co-educational post-primary schools more popular with parents of Educate Together pupils than single sex schools?

These are the issues that the researcher set out to investigate in this study.

## Note:

Ashbrook Educate Together National School (AETNS) and Ryeglen Educate Together National School (RETNS) are fictious names used to cloak the true the identites of two school communities documented in this study. Parent and student names have similarily been altered to ensure their anonymity.

## 1. 5. Structure of the Study

**Chapter One** offers a brief rationale for the study. The aim and objectives of the research are stated and an overview of the organisation and content of the document is provided. The writer also outlines the general hypothesis for the study and areas of initial inquiry.

**Chapter Two** is concerned with the management structures of primary and post-primary schools. The evolution of post-primary schools since the introduction of free education is discussed. Consideration is given to both the Parent/Teacher Association and the National Parents Council (Primary and Post-Primary). An examination on the role of ethos, values and culture in educational institutions is provided. Aspects of culture are discussed, specifically in relation to the role of the teacher. Community involvement in initiating social change is outlined. Particular attention is applied to the Ashbrook Educate Together National School (AETNS) community and its educational development activities. Prominence is given to the Educate Together organisation for primary schooling. This serves to act as a paradigm on which similar innovations for the introduction of post-primary education could be modelled. The increasing diversity in Irish society is reflected upon also. The emphasis being that Irish society as a whole would benefit if a broader, more inclusive, model of education could be developed.

**Chapter Three** focusses upon parental involvement in educational affairs particularly the parent-school partnership. Discussion is given to the development of post-primary education in Ireland since 1968. This section

details the development of Voluntary Secondary schools, Vocational Schools, Community Colleges, Comprehensive and Community Schools. The influence of economics in education is briefly addressed. The chapter continues with references to proposals from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment regarding new initiatives for post-primary education.

**Chapter Four** outlines the methodology applied in this research. This includes an overview of qualitative and quantative analysis and a rationale for their inclusion in this study. The essential preparation and planning of the data gathering processes shall also be discussed. The relevant key research participants are described and the rationale for their inclusion in this study provided.

**Chapter Five** details the presentation and analysis of the data arising from the study.

In this chapter the researcher presents and analyses the data gathered in Survey A under the following headings; (1) Why parents choose an Educate Together primary school; (2) Post primary school destinations of AETNS $6^{th}$ class pupils; (3) Parental preferences for the selection of post-primary schools; (4) Parental interest in establishing an Educate Together post-primary school. The researcher shall also present and analyse the data gathered in Survey B under the heading; Levels of parental satisfaction concerning post-primary schools. This survey was completed by parents twelve months after their children had entered post-primary education.

Details shall also be presented which outline the discussions between AETNS parents and the researcher. Furthermore, an outline of the discussions held with educationalists not associated with AETNS shall also be presented.

**Chapter Six** reflects upon the findings in relation to the material in chapters four and five of this study. It draws together issues arising from surveys and interviews conducted throughout the research and, following the conclusion, a list of recommendations for further research is provided.

The issues discussed in this study will contribute to an increased understanding of the nature of parental attitudes and preferences towards post-primary education. Furthermore, the analysis presented will allow for the development of wider dialogue on the issues investigated which may, in turn, identify areas for further study.

## *Chapter Two*

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### 2. 1. Introduction

This chapter commences with a brief outline of the history and structures of the Educate Together national organisation and the schools that operate under its domain. This is provided for the purpose of identifying the position and significance of this organisation in subsequent chapters.

The concept of ethos in education shall be discussed. The role of values and culture in educational institutions shall be described with appropriate definitions provided. These will function as references for later comments and analysis on the activities in which schools and teachers engage.

The involvement of communities in initiating educational reform is also discussed. This is relevant to the nature of this study as it identifies the location where the thrust for reform in post-primary education is occurring.

The increasing diversity in Irish society in terms of ethnic composition and patterns of belief shall be discussed. Particular focus shall be given to the parents' right; as provided by the constitution, to opt for a school of their choosing.

Current developments in Educate Together schools are outlined with an analysis for their growth in popularity provided - particularly with regard to parental attitudes and the shortage of school placements in rapidly expanding

communities. The economic implication for the State and communities in providing new schools is examined.

Finally, the activities of a community wishing to develop an Educate Together post-primary school are described.

## 2. 2. Educate Together – An overview of the organisation

Educate Together as an organisation developed from a movement to establish multi-denominational primary schools which first emerged as the Dalkey School Project (DSP) in February 1975. By 1984, when Educate Together was established, there were three schools in operation, Dalkey, Bray and Glasnevin. Educate Together is the national representative organisation of Patron Bodies and boards of management that are affiliated to the Educate Together Charter. (See Appendix A) The organisation became a limited company by guarantee in 1998. Educate Together aims to

> ...meet a growing need in Irish society for schools that recognise the developing diversity of Irish life and the modern need for democratic management structures. In particular, Educate Together guarantees children and parents of all faiths and none equal respect in the operation and governing of education (Educate Together Charter, 1999, p.1).

A national office is responsible for the operations of the organisation which is led by a Chief Executive Officer. Other salaried officers include a National Coordinator, Development Officer, Foundation Development Officer and a Secretary. A Board of Directors oversees the activities of the officers of Educate Together. The Directors are legally responsible for the organisation and are governed by company law.

Each Educate Together school is both recognised and funded by the Department of Education and Science. An Educate Together school differs from other National Schools in that the role of the patron is conducted by limited company whose membership generally consists of parents and is commonly referred to as the Association. (It should be noted that an Association is not exclusively comprised of parents; members of the wider community may also participate in the activities of the patron. See Appendix B)

Currently, there are three models of patronage within Educate Together; (i) Schools with individual (local) patronage; (ii) Schools with patronage under the Educate Together national body and finally, (iii) Schools opened under the patronage of an existing school. (As in the case of Monkstown school which operates under the patronage of the Dalkey School Project.)

In traditional cases, the patronage of a school normally resides with an established church, usually with the Bishop's House (Drudy & Lynch, 1993). The patronage of Protestant schools is under the umbrella management of the Representative Church Body (R.C.B.). This group represents the interests of all Protestant churches.

## 2. 3. Democratic Structures: The role of the Patron

Originally each new Educate Together school was developed with three levels of democratic involvement. The first level is known as the Executive Committee or local patron. An Executive Committee is elected annually by members of the School Association. The Executive Committee is charged with, amongst other

duties, the provision of buildings and the maintenance of ethos. Each Executive also nominates the Chairperson to the Board of Management. However, since 1999 all newly formed E.T. schools have come under the patronage of the national body of Educate Together. No opportunity is offered to local representatives wishing to act in the role of school patron. Given the democratic nature of E.T. schools it seems ironic that this aspect; one of the four pillars of the E.T. charter, is being denied to many parents willing to participate at this level. The mission statement of Educate Together clearly states its purpose to

> ...promote a philosophy of education in which no child is an outsider, which promotes the fullest development of ability irrespective of gender, class or stereotype; and which encapsulates this ethos in a *democratic partnership uniquely combining the involvement of parents* with the professional role of teachers (Author's emphasis) (Educate Together charter, 1999, p.1).

It should be noted that this researcher contends that the absence of a local Executive Committee removes an important democratic layer of decision-making within the organisational structure of an E.T. school.

## 2. 4. Democratic Structures: The role of the Board of Management

The Board of Management represents the second level of democratic involvement in Educate Together schools. Boards of Management are generally comprised of nine persons; principal, two parents, two teachers, two members of the Executive Committee and two independent representatives. Each Board is responsible for the daily operations of the school as well as the appointment of the principal and staff. Educate Together Boards of Management however are, according to the Educate Together Chief Executive Officer, Paul Rowe, charged with [operating] "...democracy within the school and combine this with an

obligation to positively support and affirm the professional role of the teacher…to build a genuine partnership between the teacher and parent in the operation of the school" (Rowe, 2004 p.9). This continues Rowe "obligates the Board to build an educational community in which the full resources of both roles are brought into play for the benefit of the children and society" (ibid). Educate Together Boards of Management could, from this description, be seen as instruments for attaining improved individual and social development in communities.

## 2. 5.  Parents' and Parent/Teacher Associations

Educate Together schools can have within their structure a number of associations which can exercise influence. Parent's Associations (in some instances referred to as the Parents' Council) or Parent/Teacher Associations are important in that they provide substantial 'networks' of communication throughout the school community.

Smyth, writing in *Do Schools Differ?* an investigation into academic and personal development among pupils in the Irish second-level sector states, "The vast majority of schools (83%) have a Parents' Association or Council; boys' Secondary and Vocational Schools are somewhat less likely than other school types to have such a body" (1999 p.37). When referring specifically to parental involvement in post-primary schools Smyth comments, "The limited information available on parental involvement in the sampled schools indicates a positive association between the extent of such involvement and pupil outcomes" (ibid p.222).

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In the case of Ashbrook Educate Together National School (AETNS) the Chairperson of the Parent/Teachers Association (PTA) is also a member of the Executive Committee and consequently functions as a significant link for communications between the two bodies. The democratic principles, as described in the Educate Together Charter, are more effectively realised when relationships of this nature are established in schools. An effective PTA will engage itself in policy issues and make regular submissions on fundraising, ethos and communications within the school community. Smyth (1999) when referring to the Irish context of parental involvement in the post-primary schools commented that the limited information available indicated a positive association between the extent of such involvement and pupil outcomes.

Literature on organisational structures within schools often describes Parent's Associations as being weak (Fullan 2001, Pena, 2000, Chrispeels, 1996).

## 2. 6. The National Parents Council

The National Parents Council (NPC) was established with the aim of involving parents more actively in all aspects of the education of their children. The NPC has undoubtedly increased its influence in national fora on education. The NPC has the potential, according to the 'Green Paper', issued for discussion on 'Education for a Changing World' (Government of Ireland, 1992) to develop into a strong and active body, articulating the needs and concerns of parents. The document further commented

The councils [NPC] contribution to policy issues is very much welcomed and will continue to be an important part of policy formulation (Government of Ireland, 1992, p.155).

Unfortunately however, this potential has not been fully realised as the NPC has yet to generate widespread support from the body of parents at local level. The NPC should focus more upon the parent and 'radicalise' them to expect more from schools.

The Parent's role, as stated in the 'White Paper', Charting Our Education Future (Government of Ireland, 1995), confers on them the right to active participation in the child's education. This includes their right as individuals to be consulted and informed on all aspects of their child's education at school level, and their right as a group to actively participate in the education system at school, regional and national levels. The Department of Education has stated

Parents are integral in the education of their children. They will be consulted, as other recognised key interests are, and will have an opportunity to influence national educational policy and its local implementation (Government of Ireland, 1995, p.139).

Studies identify parental involvement as one of the key variables associated with school effectiveness in general and with pupil attainment in particular (Munn, 1993; Smyth, 1999; Fullan, 2001). Parents are undoubtedly, a vital element in the schooling of their children. Significantly, parents themselves are aware of their influence and are progressively eager to increase their involvement. The potential to generate greater parental participation lies within the organisation of the NPC.

## 2. 7. Ethos

It is the researcher's firm belief that children's values and attitudes can be shaped by the values and attitudes of those in their midst; particularly parents and teachers. In this respect the ethos of the setting can be quite fundamental to the quality of the learning environment. This view is strongly supported throughout the literature (Steiner 1924, Burman *et al*, 1998, Lipman 2003).

## 2. 8. Ethos – A Definition

The word ethos derives from the classical Greek meaning 'habit'. In its truer form ethos refers to the individual traits of the person. In modern parlance however, ethos has become associated with organisations, institutions and the workplace. With regard to the educational situation ethos is used to explain or justify the influencing factors in operation within the institution. Another definition of ethos refers to, 'The disposition, character or fundamental values peculiar to a specific person, people, culture or movement' (Oxford English Dictionary).

In the organisational context, ethos can be described as the character, sentiment or disposition of a community of people, considered as a natural endowment; the characteristic tone or genius of an institution or social organisation (Senge, 1990). In the opinion of the researcher the word *ethos* refers to a particular distinctive spirit or character that serves to guide an individual or group towards a particular goal. In this context *ethos* provides a guidance system that can be employed to maintain direction.

## 2. 9.  Ethos – In Practice

Literature produced by Educate Together frequently refers to an ethos which permeates its activities. Ethos is regarded as the sentinel by whom the activities of the organisation are guarded. Prior to further commentary specific to Educate Together, the researcher wishes to illustrate the significance of an espoused ethical perspective in education using a number of historical examples.

Aristotle (384-322 BCE) writing in *Politics* twenty three centuries ago, describes the importance of 'character' within an institution.

> No one will doubt that the legislator should direct his attention above all to the education of youth; for the neglect of education does harm to the constitution. The citizen should be moulded to suit the form of government under which he lives. For each constitution has a peculiar *character* which originally formed and which continues to preserve it (Book VIII, Section 1).

Aristotle refers to the formation and preservation of an over arching spirit or ethos which guides each institution. Interestingly, he states the importance of 'moulding' the citizen into an appropriate form suitable to the particular regime in question.

Irish denominational education has, it may be argued, endeavoured to follow Aristotle's 'moulding' of its students into contemporary society through its adherence to prescribed religious principles. The State has supported schools in this regard. Rule 68 of the *Rules for National Schools* states that religious instruction is

> ...a fundamental part of the school course, and a religious spirit should inform and vivify the whole work of the school (Department of Education, *Rules for National Schools*, p38).

Drudy and Lynch, writing in *Schools and Society in Ireland* appear to concur with this statement. When commenting on ownership and control at primary level in Irish schools they state, "Not only are National Schools explicitly recognised as being denominational...but their whole curriculum is meant to convey religious values" (Drudy and Lynch, 1993, p.77).

John Dewey (1859-1952) more than eighty years ago, urged that each school should become a model home, a complete community. A shared vision, realistic developmental goals and a caring way for people to be and learn together would energise students, staff and parents. Dewey's significance for educators lies in a number of areas. Firstly, his belief that education must engage with and enlarge experience has continued to be a significant element in educational practice. Secondly, his concern with interaction and environments for learning provides a framework for teaching. Last, Dewey's passion for democracy, "For educating so that all may share in a common life, provides a strong rationale for educational practice" (Cited in Smith, 1994 p.64).

Dewey referred to the ethical foundation upon which schools must function in *Democracy and Education* when he expressed the opinion that any education given by a group tends to socialize its members, but the quality and value of the socialization depends upon the habits and aims of the group (Dewey, 1916).

The 'habits and aims' to which Dewey refers are worthy of examination. Educational debates, particularly those involving multicultural schooling often

refer to an espoused ethos which seeks to articulate and describe the governing values and environment which guide pupils' learning.

Educate Together, as an organisation, endeavours to promote its ethos as an essential feature intrinsic to all activities. The origins of the Educate Together schools ethos date from the establishment of the Dalkey School Project in 1975.

In a paper presented to the Marino Institute Conference on School Culture and Ethos, Paul Rowe, Educate Together C.E.O stated

> ...it is a fundamental obligation of any school to define its ethos in written form". Rowe further stated that, "...to be real, this statement [of ethos] must have a legally enforceable character and should be written sufficiently precisely so as to give security to all those involved in school affairs (Rowe, 2000, p.2).

In this regard Ashbrook Educate Together National School (AETNS) have produced, through its Ethos Committee and in a process involving numerous meetings with stakeholders over many years, an ethos document which outlines the guiding principles for the school community. The fundamentals of which include the statement

> At Ashbrook Educate Together National School, we are proud to live and learn within an ethos that is based on a *triangle of care and responsibility*. Encouraging and supporting our schoolchildren's safe, healthy and happy development is our shared priority. We hold all children, staff, parents and guardians as equally respected and valued members in our school. All members share responsibility for the life, spirit and ongoing development of our school community. This shared responsibility ranges from management of practical tasks, such as maintenance of school property, to hands-on work in the classroom to support and enhance the children's learning (AETNS ethos document, 2005, p.10).

The reference to 'ongoing development of our school community' in this extract is deliberate and signifies the community's intention to establish a provision of post-primary education at some future stage. This development is regarded by many parents as a logical extension to the existing educational facilities available to the community. The researcher was curious to determine the extent to which parents were willing to explore this possibility - hence this investigation of parental attitudes and preferences.

The fundamental ethos to which Educate Together subscribes can be found in this short extract from the Memos and Articles of Educate Together schools. The objects for which the Association is established are: to advance education in Ireland, to develop, promote and support the establishment of schools in accordance with the following four principles: (1) A child-centred approach to education; (2) co-educational and committed to encouraging all children to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities; (3) multi-denominational i.e. all children having equal rights of access to the school, and children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds being equally respected and finally (4) democratically run with active participation by parents in the daily life of the school, whilst positively affirming the professional role of the teachers.

(Source: Educate Together Charter, 1999, p.2)

## 2. 10. Values in Schools

*In our time and culture the school is the chief instrumentality for making the lives it can touch rich in values. Understanding this to be the principle purpose and justification of formal education is the first and most important step in improving the lot of mankind* (Jarrett, 1991, p.87).

The concept of values refers to the beliefs held by societies, institutions, groups or individuals to which a special priority or worth has been attached. Values can be considered as attitudes or principles that act as points of reference in decision making or in the evaluation of beliefs and are closely related to integrity and identity.

A similar understanding of 'values' is provided by Hill when commenting

> When people speak of values they are usually referring to those beliefs held by individuals to which they attach special priority or worth, and by which they tend to order their lives. A value is, therefore, more than a belief; but it is also more than a feeling (Hill, 1991 p.16).

Schools are powerful institutions which can exert significant influences. All political, social, cultural and religious elements are contained within schools, as are the biases which accompany human interaction (Drudy and Lynch, 1993). This point of view is also shared by Hill who states, 'The school is in the business of values education, unavoidably' (Hill, 1991, p45). Elaborating, further Hill comments

> ...schools must become more than knowledge factories, and assessment more than apple-sorting, for students are more than disincarnate minds, and so are teachers (ibid).

Schools, as organisations are robust and complex institutions. They are robust in that they reside in their historical past and in the rituals embedded within their value systems and culture. Schools contain complex hierarchical structures which are further compounded by the nature of relationships that are to be found within them. Value positions exist in schools and therefore cannot be avoided in the educational process.

## 2. 11.  Culture in Schools

Students, teachers and parents face a new social era which demands innovative, dynamic and reflective approaches to learning. The individual autonomy that resides in each teacher influences the culture and general climate of the school. The development of an ethos and the formation of school cultures are features which are heavily influenced by the principal and teachers. Commitment to the implementation of ethos by principals and teachers is vital in order that pupils and the school itself flourish.

## 2. 11. 1.  Culture – A Definition

Edgar Schein's definition of culture is, when viewed in the context of schools, particularly salient

> [Culture is]...that pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered or developed...that have worked well enough to be considered as valid, and therefore taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to these problems (Schein, 1985, p25).

Schein indicates that culture is difficult to change, time consuming and anxiety provoking. The key issue for educational managers, he states, is that they must become marginal in their own culture and recognise its deficiencies. Critical thinking, Schein indicates, opens up new ways to 'unfreeze' an organisation which is a 'prelude' to change (ibid, p29). The 'unfreezing' mentioned in this quotation of Schein's refers to the process by which people become *aware* of the need for change when change is required.

Gareth Morgan in his book, *Images of Organisation* describes culture as being shared; both in understanding and sense-making (Morgan, 1986 p.126). Morgan argues that culture must be understood as an active, living phenomenon through which people create and recreate their worlds. As with Schein, he agrees that culture is a developing, evolving process and that the values particular to an organisation are embedded in the rituals, norms and traditions that define its structural stability or sturdiness.

An interesting aspect to Morgan's view of culture is his interpretation that culture can become 'a kind of prison' (ibid p.199). The researcher equates this to a condition in which participants become enclosed and restricted in a rigid structure of norms and values as strong as any boundary walls.

The impact of cultural norms upon the behaviour of new personnel entering a school can be significant. For example, it would take a particularly determined newly graduated teacher with high levels of motivation *not* to be influenced by some aspects of the culture and values of his/her new place of employment. Robert Evans in his book titled, *The Human Side of School Change* states that

> Culture can confine both our perspective and approach to problem solving. From the time we join the department of a school and become to be acculturated, as we learn the schools traditions and customs and adapt its perspectives, as we master our tasks and fulfil a role, we make a *trade off* that helps entrench the power of the schools culture (Evans, 2000, p63).

Evans also makes reference to the 'gravitational pull of culture being strong in schools'. He implies that the solid mass of the institution has a containing effect over the smaller elements found within its organisation. Proponents of change

need to be aware of the power of culture which can modify and create change within the process of change itself.

## 2. 12.   The Role of the Teacher

Whilst it is generally accepted that schools are in the business of teaching, the knowledge taught is a feature of the curriculum and the value system in which it is based (Donnelly, 2000). The traditional role of the teacher is however, one of facilitating and directing the transfer of knowledge. Factually, there are other less obvious activities in which teachers engage. Schools are, as has been previously mentioned, important sites for the transmission of culture, values and knowledge *other* than that which is contained within the formal curriculum (Coffey, 2001). This relates to the phenomenon known as the 'hidden curriculum' by which the informal activities of a school are propagated. These activities are neither prescribed nor are they written into any mission statement. Instead, they are acted out within the value system of the organisation.

Teachers nonetheless, are unavoidably implicated in the transfer of their personal values within the school environment. They can carry with them into their classrooms 'baggage' based upon their own individual experiences. Musgrave succinctly identifies the situation stating

> In one respect the teacher is in a unique position. He [sic] has been formed by the social system to which he returns to form others. He can very easily transmit values that he has picked up himself as he passed through the education system (Musgrave, 1971 p.39).

Would such a phenomenon gravely affect the formation of character during the development of an Educate Together post-primary school?

Teachers are however, in autonomous positions within their classrooms which can lead to conditions of professional isolation (Fullan and Hargreaves, 1992). Collaboration, participation and the cultivation of a close working relationship amongst the staff is central to success in many activities. Motivated teachers are essential in achieving successful outcomes. No matter how promising a new idea may be it cannot impact upon the student if it is superficially implemented (Fullan, M. 2001). Banks stresses the importance of the role played by teachers when writing

> ...it is possible for pupils to be educated for social change and to close the gap between social realities and declared democratic ideals. Teachers must become agents of change and act as cultural mediators. This role requires teachers to have commitments to democratic values, knowledge and pedagogies and can activate these in their professional lives (Banks, 1987, p.46).

Contemporary educators must concern themselves with nurturing all that is good in humanity. They must champion social responsibility whilst promoting individual liberty. The *raison d'etre* for teachers and schools of this new century is to revitalize social interaction and awaken the dormant forces of tolerance, respect and mutual understanding. Teachers must reflect these values in their work with students.

## 2. 12. 1. A Teachers' Dilemma

In an increasingly secular post-modern Irish society the implications, for religiously managed schools, of differing ethos and values between the individual teacher and the relevant organisation has become problematic. Established educational institutions have reported finding difficulty in attracting

appropriate staff to carry the ethos forward with subsequent generations of students (Conference of Religious in Ireland, 2001).

It is probable, given the current employment and contemporary social situation, that there are teachers for whom their professional lives create dilemmas. Teachers can feel pressurised by the value systems of particular schools which seek to maintain positions which may not parallel their own privately held views. If this is the case, what are their options?

## 2. 13. Community Learning

The concept of community learning invokes, to the researcher, a vision of a learning system that is flexible and appropriate to the needs of the community in which it is based. Such a notion is not futuristic yet it contrasts with the established educational 'condition'.

The primary role of schools in Irish society has essentially been restricted to providing formal education to pupils engaged in day classes; the exception being those schools that provide evening classes and further adult education. Little encouragement is generally given to groups and associations wishing to avail of the facilities which schools can offer. Examples of the type of restrictions include the unavailability of P.E. halls after normal school times for sporting activities; public liability insurance restrictions which prevent cultural events and unavailable classroom facilities for senior citizen activities or evening time special needs education. Undoubtedly there are institutions which allow greater access to the wider community, but these are the exception rather than the norm.

The vast majority of primary and post-primary school buildings and facilities are not in State ownership and therefore cannot be publicly accessed. Their ownership instead lies in private hands; predominately with a religious congregation.

Each school is a valuable asset that, in the experience of the researcher, remains isolated from the community. Schools cannot, in such instances be regarded as being an integral part of the community. Nor are they providing any additional opportunities for the creation and maintenance of sustainable community cohesiveness.

## 2. 13. 1  Community Learning - A New Concept

Such concepts as 'community cohesiveness' mirrors the networking ideologies of Ivan Illich, Bela Banathy, James Moffett and others who encouraged communities to create the conditions for self reliance and sustainability. Bela Banathy's 'Design Architecture' is an interesting model for participatory democratic action which can be applied to the educational domain. According to Benathy, Systemic Design Architecture is an appropriate instrument which can

> ...assist a community with revisiting and refining its values and beliefs. In addition, all members of the community, not just those elected to the school board or parents of children who attend public schools, participate in the design solution of the learning system. This activity includes defining what the system is and what the system will do for learners, describing the systems functions and finally, defining the enabling systems which typically are the management system (Banathy, 1992 p.24).

The kind of community that this learning system could help create is one in which participants can endeavour to cultivate and maintain closer ties and help

create mutual understanding, particularly where diverse social and cultural and physical differences occur. A publicly owned Educate Together post-primary school could facilitate the broader needs of the community. By day it would function as a school and by evenings and weekends as a community learning centre. The school could be staffed by qualified specialist and subject teachers willing to work 'non-traditional' or flexible hours. This would greatly increase the wider community's access to education and significantly enhance their potential to participate in life-long learning.

## 2. 14. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is responsible for advising the Minister for Education and Science on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education and for primary and post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. The following statement is transcribed from its website

> The NCCA plays a key role in shaping a world-class education system that meets the needs of all learners, supports their participation in communities and in society, and contributes to the development of the knowledge society in Ireland. http://www.ncca.ie (Accessed 26th June 2005).

The Council is currently engaged in developing proposals for the redesign of post-primary senior cycle education and has outlined its strategies necessary for their implementation. The proposals set out detailed recommendations that take account of the practical implications and issues involved in instigating large

scale change for students, parents, teachers, schools and the wider education system (NCCA 2004).

The researcher, at this juncture in the chapter, wishes to introduce to the reader the possibility of considering a model Educate Together post-primary school as an ideal location for the introduction of new designs and strategies in second-level education as proposed by the NCCA. Would as new post-primary setting facilitate educational innovation more easily?

The genesis for change with regard to the leaving certificate can be difficult to identify. However, one particular document stands out. The *Report of the Commission on the Points System* suggested that

> Little will change in the ideas of teaching and learning and the quality of the educational experience offered to students unless reform of the leaving certificate (established) encompasses assessment change (The Report of the Commission on the Points System, 1999, p.67).

An extensive review process involving many of the partners in education was undertaken by the NCCA. The *Proposals for the Future Development of Senior Cycle Education in Ireland* (April, 2005) indicated that leaving certificate students have little sense of following a programme, but rather a study of what appears to be a largely unconnected series of subjects. It commented further that, the narrow range of achievement currently included in the leaving certificate should be broadened to include non examination subjects and co-curricular activities (NCCA, 2005).

A rationale for change has since been proposed which, according to the NCCA will move away from the traditional focus upon 'getting the leaving' to a concept where

> Greater emphasis [will be] placed on learners taking more responsibility for their own learning, on an improved relationship between the acquisition of skills and knowledge, and where there is a focus on the learning, and the learner as well as on the Leaving (ibid, p28).

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) has also recently published a guideline document for schools entitled *Intercultural Education in the Primary Schools* (NCCA, May 2005). These guidelines support the Primary School Curriculum and identify ways in which intercultural education permeates the curriculum. The specific aims are to facilitate schools and teachers in creating an inclusive culture and environment and to raise awareness within the educational community of issues that arise from increasing linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity in Ireland. One particular aim of the guidelines states that its purpose is

> To contribute to the development of Ireland as an intercultural society based on a shared sense that language, culture and ethnic diversity is valuable (NCCA, 2005 p.5).

Interculturalism is well defined in this NCCA document and is comparable to the view held by many of the participants engaged in this study. The NCCA state

> While the term 'multiculturalism' is sometimes used to describe a society in which different cultures live side by side without much interaction, the term 'interculturalism' expresses a belief that we all become personally enriched by coming in contact with and experiencing other cultures, and that people of different cultures can and should be able to engage with each other and learn from each other. In Ireland, the approach to cultural diversity is one of interculturalism (ibid p.3).

The researcher is heartened by this educational description of interculturalism, particularly in that it acknowledges that cultures must, *'engage with each other and learn from each other'*. The author can identify fewer more suitable locations for 'engaging' and 'learning' to live in mutual respect than in the schools of our nation.

The role and position of the school in an intercultural society is also considered by the NCCA. The document comments that

> Education not only reflects society but also influences its development. As such, schools have a role to play in the development of an intercultural society. While education cannot bear the sole responsibility for challenging racism and promoting intercultural competence, it has an important contribution to make in facilitating the development of the child's intercultural skills, attitudes, values and knowledge. An intercultural education is valuable to all children in equipping them to participate in an increasingly diverse society. *Equally, an education which is based on only one culture will be less likely to develop these capacities in children* (ibid p.3). (Authors emphasis)

This is a significant statement and one which the author greatly welcomes, for it acknowledges the increasing diversity of Irish society and accepts that our cultural identity can no longer be regarded in the singular. Intercultural education must concern itself with nurturing all that is good in humanity. It must champion social responsibility whilst promoting individual liberty. The *raison d'etre* for schools of this new century is, in the opinion of the researcher, to revitalize social interaction and awaken the dormant forces of tolerance, respect and mutual understanding. Educate Together post-primary schools, if established, could be well positioned to facilitate the needs of our changing

society. Communities such as AETNS *are* willing to engage, are the bureaucrats willing to listen?

## 2. 15. Intercultural Education

Ireland currently enjoys a vibrant economic resurgence which, in conjunction with the expansion of the European Union and the corresponding rights and privileges offered to member states for the free transfer of trade and travel, has brought many foreign nationals to our shores. Our State's acceptance of immigrants and asylum seekers from countries further removed from the borders of Europe has also increased the ethnic diversity of our country.

Predictions from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) indicate that the inward flow of foreign nationals will continue into the foreseeable future (CSO, 2005). The Department of Trade and Industry has calculated that seventy thousand manually skilled workers are required over the next five years in order to sustain the projected building programme (Department of Trade and Industry Report, May 2005).

Diligence and professional planning must be exercised if Ireland is to successfully develop a caring and humane policy with regard to the integration of its new residents which, logic dictates, must include an educational provision appropriate to the needs of immigrants and their children.

Existing Educate Together primary and planned post-primary schools could be well positioned to facilitate inclusive education in the continuing diversification

of Irish society. Model post-primary schools could be established in which the innovative plans of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) could be realised.

## 2. 15. 1. Intercultural Education – Lessons To Be Learnt

A brief examination of intercultural education in Germany is provided in the following section. This inclusion is justified on the basis that Ireland must endeavour to learn from the past experiences of our European neighbours.

Since the late 1950s Germany has experienced a large intake of Turkish and Moroccan immigrant workers that were, for the most part, employed in the construction, engineering and service industries. The families of these 'gast-arbeiters,' usually followed at a later time. The German government's intention was that the workers would return to their homelands as the requirement for their labour diminished. Therefore, a *dual strategy* was designed and enacted by the German educational authorities that would integrate foreign children, on a temporary basis and also prepare the children for their eventual repatriation.

The result was a system of "national classes", "preparatory classes" and "mother tongue classes" which separated the foreign from the German students and may have prevented foreign children from achieving their full educational potential (Castles and Miller, 1993).

(**Note**: repatriation has not occurred in many instances. This has resulted in problems of integration and assimilation for those that remained in Germany and

for those of second or third generation children willing to return to their parents' homelands. Many children born in the host country fail to become fluent speakers of their parents' language and are often disadvantaged when attempting to emigrate.)

## 2. 16. Ireland – A Homogenous Country?

The rate of change with regard to emigration/immigration may fluctuate, however there can be one certainty; there can be no returning to that which once was: namely a predominantly insular, Catholic and white Ireland. (It is point worth emphasising that Ireland was never as homogenous as was implied. The fact that segregated schooling existed for those of different faiths, genders, social classes, particularly at post-primary level, as well as those with disabilities and those that belonging to the Traveller Community challenge the idea that Ireland was homogenous. Rather it was a place where the majority segregated themselves from those who were different and where this type of segregation was actively supported by the State.)

Our economic development will continue to attract foreign migrant workers from different cultural origins. As has occurred in other host countries, children of families will face linguistic and social difficulties. International experience to-date indicates that such children will also encounter educational difficulties in attaining academic success (ibid). Our State must continue to devise methodologies, policies and appropriate educational practices which will enable our educational system to become more flexible and inclusive when dealing

with diversity. Unfortunately bureaucratic monoliths are generally slow to respond and are frequently measured in their reactions to events. Consequently, the origins of change frequently occur at the community level.

Ashbrook Educate Together National School (AETNS) is a prime example of a community reacting to the needs of its members. As early as five years ago this community spoke of developing a model of post-primary education which, it was hoped, would better serve the needs of the parents and pupils living in its neighbourhood. These parents are aware, perhaps more than most, of the changes required in the provision of education to enhance and support integration not solely for the minority groups but for all its members.

Todate, little consideration has been given by the State to support the intercultural educational initiatives of AETNS and other communities seeking to address the issues of religious and cultural diversity.

## 2. 17. Current developments in Educate Together schools

There are thirty nine Educate Together schools currently operating in the primary education sector (Educate Together Annual Report, May 2005). Other Educate Together schools are in advanced stages of development and are expected to receive permanent status. (Dungarvan, Letterkenny, Naas, Portlaoise and Wexford Town are expected to begin September 2006.) A further four 'start-up' schools are expected, under provisional status, to commence operation in 2008. The geographical spread of Educate Together schools has grown from

the suburban settings of Dublin to now encompass many developing towns and areas throughout the country. The emergence of this relatively new sector in Irish education is due, in the opinion of the author, to two factors.

In the first instance it is a consequence of the changing attitudes of parents who seek greater diversity in education. Parents also desire to become more involved in educational affairs by means of greater democratic participation. In doing so, they are exercising their constitutional right, as the primary educators, to designate that which they feel to be the most suitable educational model for their children. Article 42.4 of the constitution of Ireland supports parents' aspirations by clearly stating that

> The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation (Article 42.4 Constitution of Ireland, 1937).

In the second instance, the significant shortage of primary school places in rapidly expanding communities may also be contributing to the development of Educate Together schools. With the assistance of an organisation such as Educate Together, expertise and support can be quickly imported into local situations - effectively fast-tracking the establishment of a new school. This latter point raises some important issues regarding the popularity of Educate Together schools. Are parents, in their desperation to secure a school placement for their children opting for an 'off the shelf' solution to their problems?

Poor planning in urban and suburban developments throughout the country has left many fledgling communities bereft of essential facilities. School buildings are not prioritised and, when compared with houses and apartments are less profitable to the construction industry. The Department of Education and Science; already struggling to cope with many already over-crowded and Dickensian school buildings, are also implicated in this failure to provide the necessary school places in newer conurbations. Consequently, most new start-up schools commence operations in inappropriate locations such as scouts' halls, community centres, golf and other sports clubhouses. Only seven of the existing thirty nine schools are housed in purpose built school accommodation. The remainder is located in re-used or prefabricated buildings. There are currently eleven thousand pupils attending the existing established Educate Together schools (Educate Together Annual Report, May 2005).

However, the reality of engaging in the establishment of new schools requires substantial financial provision. Dedicated parents, intent on establishing new schools are significantly hampered in their activities through insufficient funding and resources. Alvey commented upon this situation describing the effort required in time, money and commitment by parents in order to establish a multi-denominational school as being substantial (Alvey, 1991).

The State's elimination, in 1999, of the requirement that schools should provide 15% of the building costs as well as the school site was a significant development. However, every new school was originally required to provide a 'local contribution' capped at €63,500. The State would then issue a license

agreement to the Patron stating the terms and conditions of the buildings use. In the case of AETNS, one of the first multi-denominational schools in which the site was wholly purchased by the State, the Patron in this instance the Chairperson of the Executive Committee (the researcher) refused to sign the license agreement. It was decided that until legal clarification had been provided outlining the rights and entitlements of the Patron - through its payment of €63,500 towards the building costs – that the license agreement would remain unsigned. The concept of co-ownership of school buildings was, in the opinion of the researcher, a 'complication' which was not foreseen by the Department of Education and Science. This situation has, since May 2005, been altered. The 'local contribution' has ceased to be a requirement of the Department of Science. Any new school building will, in its entirety, become the property of the State. This development is regarded by the AETNS school community as a significant advancement. It effectively removes the financial barrier preventing the establishment of new Educate Together schools. AETNS has since instigated proceedings for the return of €63,500 paid by the school to the Department of Education and Science.

## 2. 18. AETNS – Our Future plans

AETNS and Ryeglen Educate Together National School (RETNS) are in close geographical proximity to each other. Both schools have an annual intake of two junior infant classes per year and will, upon full attendance, have a combined total of almost one thousand pupils. Of these, one hundred and twenty pupils per year will be completing sixth class and shall be endeavouring to commence their secondary education. A significant level of interest has developed amongst

parents of pupils attending these schools to explore the possibility of establishing a continuation of the Educate Together model into post-primary education. Currently, no such school model exists.

An approach was made to the Department of Education and Science in February 2002 by a representative body of the AETNS (a subcommittee composed of parents, Board of Management and Executive Committee members) to determine the requirements for the establishment of a post-primary school. Subsequent to the Departments response, a site on which to locate the school was identified. A proposed curriculum, timetable and pre-enrolment list were formulated. An initial pre-enrolment occurred on Saturday 9th March 2002 during which the names of eight hundred and fourteen students were documented over a four hour period. The pre-enrolment list currently stands at eleven hundred and twenty pupils (AETNS, May 2005). This information was returned by the sub-committee to the Department of Education and Science. Todate, no response has been received with regard to this initiative other than a formal acknowledgement of receipt of the initial documentation. However, despite the lack of communication on the part of the Department of Education and Science, the school community continues to pursue this initiative and has remained committed to the project. Current activities include discussions with elected political representatives concerning the possibility of building a school premises through a Public/Private Partnership.

There are however, two Educate Together schools currently exploring the possibility of establishing an E.T. post-primary school initiative; Galway and

Glasnevin. Educate Together, the national organisation, has also commenced dialogue with representatives of County Dublin Vocational Education Committee which may lead to the establishment of a post-primary school project in the North Dublin area.

## 2. 19. Educate Together - National Developments

New developments in the re-organisation and structure of Educate Together (E.T.) have seen the establishment of a new directorship as well as significant modifications to their original Articles and Memos of Association. A proposal, at the 2004 Annual General Meeting to modify the wording of the Article and Memos of Association of Educate Together was adopted. This change removed any explicit references to the word 'primary' from its original statements. E.T. is now in a position to focus more upon the promotion of its educational ethos in both primary *and* post-primary sectors. This important change in their terms of reference effectively allows for the transition of E.T. into the secondary school sector. Educate Together are currently examining the possibility of expanding their organisation and staffing levels to include an Education Officer; part of whose brief shall be to coordinate future developments in the area of secondary education.

## 2. 20. Conclusion

The history of the Educate Together organisation is one of democratic participation in primary education. It evolved from a small, yet committed, body of parents seeking a greater degree of democratisation and religious integration in schools. There are now thirty nine similar primary schools, four multi-

denominational Gaelscoilenna and two independent multi-denominational schools serving the needs of their communities (See Table 2). In this regard, Educate Together is an example to other organisations and community's intent on generating innovations of their own.

Educational institutions function within cultures and value systems which impact upon the learning and teaching experience for all those involved. Teachers should be conscious of their position in the transmission of cultural ideologies and be aware of the location in which they themselves function. In this regard, the role of the teacher training is important.

The potential of the National Parents Councils are not being fully realised. Both wings of the NPC (Primary and Post-Primary) must endeavour to increase their membership and support at local levels in order to achieve greater involvement in the affairs of their schools.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment has been identified as a 'forward-thinking' body, whose proposed innovations could, if endorsed by the Department of Education and Science, have the potential to invigorate and revive the Irish post-primary educational system. An Educate Together post-primary school, if established, would be an ideal setting to implement their proposals.

Cultural and ethnic diversity in Irish society is increasing as is the obligation on the State to provide an appropriate education for its people. This will, in the

opinion of the researcher, require new innovations in the provision of education particularly at post-primary level.

Evidence from other European countries has shown that educational policies that focus solely upon integration of minorities are weak and are likely to fail in their objectives. The Irish State has an opportunity to benefit from the experiences of other countries. This could generate greater parental and community involvement in intercultural developments leading to new approaches in education.

Questions have been raised regarding the rationale behind the establishment of new Educate Together schools. Are parents consciously choosing a model of education which they feel appropriate to the changing belief patterns and cultural diversity of their communities or simply convenience?

Finally, the AETNS school community is attempting to instigate educational innovation appropriate to the needs of its community. Parents have indicated a willingness to participate in an experimental programme of post-primary education which may lead to the development of an Educate Together post-primary school.

*Chapter Three*

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## Literature Review

### 3. 1. Introduction

Significant volumes of material have been written on parent-school partnership and the involvement of parents in their children's education. This chapter shall commence with definitions of partnership relevant to this study. The chapter shall also examine aspects of parental partnership with reference to noteworthy literature. The development of integrated education in Northern Ireland shall be outlined. This serves as an example of parental involvement in the instigation of new systems of education. A description of the key elements in post-primary education in Ireland shall be provided. A conclusion to the chapter is given which is followed by a short critique of the existing post-primary system. Finally, an overview of the post-primary schools is presented.

### 3. 2. Partnership – What does this entail?

Partnership implies co-operation towards a common goal. However partnership also refers to an understanding where roles are agreed and awareness exists of the responsibilities that reside with each role. Partnerships invite power sharing and generate respect for the relative positions held by each partner (Fullan, 2001).

## 3. 3. Educational Definitions of Partnership

Definitions of *partnership* in the context of parental involvement in education vary. Epstein *et al* (1997) comment that partners recognise their shared interest and responsibilities to work together to create enhanced programmes for children. Epstein *et al* articulate the point that partnership is not solely dependant upon components working together but working separately along similar lines to achieve a desired result.

Chrispeels writing in *A Framework for Parent Involvement* (1996) expresses a similar definition of partnership

> [Partnership] is a mutual collaboration, support, and participation of families, community members and agencies, school staff...in activities and efforts that directly effect the success of children's learning and development (Chrispeels, 1996, p.56).

Both Epstein's and Chrispeels's definitions concur on the point that partnership entails collaboration in activities that compliment each other. Partners, they contend can work separately yet successfully achieve a unified goal. Such is the situation at AETNS where parents democratically participate in the affairs of the school; in their role as school Patron, membership of the Board of Management and Parents/Teacher Association. Their guidance is offered on issues concerning ethos, school policies and finance. All of these activities are conducted with the sole purpose of supporting the professional role of the teacher.

Defining parental *involvement* in education is more problematic. The extent to which parents are said to be 'involved' in the education of their children can depend on the perspective of the observer. Involvement could be defined as 'root and branch' participation which seamlessly integrates the home and school

in the education process. To some 'involvement' may be considered as membership of Parent-Teacher Associations whilst to others it may entail quite limited activity requiring only that homework be completed and the student's journal signed.

Epstein writing in *School, Family and Community Partnerships* (1995) defines six types of involvement that can help develop more inclusive programmes for educational partnership; (1) Decision making - by increasing the level of parent participation in school governance and advocacy; (2) Communicating - by establishing mechanisms that foster effective communication networks between the home and school; (3) Parenting – by providing services that support family efforts to nurture student learning at home; (4) Volunteering – by recruiting and organising volunteer activities that support student learning; (5) Learning at home – organising homework help and support for parents in their efforts to assist students academically and socially; (6) Collaborating with community - identifying and integrating community based resources that would strengthen school activities, parents and each students learning (Epstein, 1995, p.70).

Many of such activities can, according to Epstein, be seen to incorporate more than one form of involvement as there are often indiscrete boundaries between each activity.

Parents are, according to the literature, a vital element in the schooling of children. School effectiveness studies identify parental involvement; both with the school and with the teachers, as one of the key variables associated with

effectiveness in general and with pupil attainment in particular (Munn, 1993; Smyth, 1999; Fullan, 2001).

This finding is also supported by Macbeth in *Involving Parents: Effective Parent-Teacher Relations*. Macbeth claims that the parental dimension of schooling is central to the professional performance of teachers. He states

> In my view we neglect it at our peril, for our impact as teachers and our status as professionals may substantially depend upon the extent to which we take seriously the phrase 'partnership with parents' (Macbeth, 1995, p.1).

Macbeth also comments that

> ...the huge majority of parents have a genuine, deep concern for the welfare of their children, have powerful emotional bonds with them, provide reference models which they copy, influence their attitudes...If schools are concerned with education then parents must be viewed as key elements of it (ibid, p3).

This view is supported by Tizard *et al.* (1988) who, in an earlier study reported that the home provides a very powerful learning environment, and identified constraints on school staff which make it difficult for them to be as educationally effective as parents. The 'constraints' to which Tizard refers are the discipline, organisational and managerial cultures which can often dominate and detract from the school experience for children.

Pena (2000) examined a number of studies in which parental involvement produced measurable gains in student academic achievement, as well as increased positive behaviour and emotional development. The more involved parents are with their child's schooling, the greater it seems are the chances of

their children doing well. This is a view widely held by researchers and strongly supported in educational literature.

Munn (1993) identifies three aspects to traditional parental involvement namely; that which is concerned with the well-being of the parent's own child; that which is done to support the largely taken-for-granted value system of the school and finally, that of collective action, such a through parent's or Parent/Teacher Associations which are primarily concerns of fund-raising and similar actions. Rarely, would such activities challenge the school's way of doing things (Munn, 1993).

Parents are also relevant to what occurs *inside* schools. Macbeth proposes some distinct reasons why this should occur; (a) That parents are responsible in law for their child's education, and in that sense they may be regarded as the school's legal clients; (b) If most of a child's education happens outside the school, especially in the home, and if parents are co-educators of the child with teachers, then it seems logical to make the two elements of school-learning and home-learning compatible, and for teachers to use that home-learning as a resource; (c) Research indicates that family-based learning influences the effectiveness of school on a child. It may be a significant factor among the complexity of forces associated with inequality of educational opportunity; (d) Besides providing a professional service for parents, the teacher is also an agent of the State. There are implied functions of checking upon parents' fulfilment of duties and, arguably, of being an educational safety-net for pupils with incompetent or uncaring parents and finally; (e) It seems democratically

reasonable, in a decentralised system in which important decisions are made at school and class levels, that those with a stake in a school should influence the nature of those decisions (Macbeth, 1995, p4).

These are powerful statements in support of parental participation in educational issues. They justify the establishment, in the Irish context, of inclusive Boards of Management where parents are endowed with a meaningful participative role.

Parents are encouraged to participate in Parent-Teacher Associations which are an important additional layer of democratic influence in schools. Also the learning experience for our children is enhanced through improved levels of collaboration which, according to Macbeth, increases teacher effectiveness. Parents, through their actions and behaviour, teach their children and through that teaching they influence the extent to which teachers can be effective.

Jowett *et al.* (1991) in a large-scale research project, commissioned by the British Department of Education and Science (DES), investigated a wide range of activities related to 'parental involvement' in schools. The study entitled, *Building Bridges: parental involvement in schools*, determined that developing work with parents can significantly improve what is provided by schools, but that the potential of this practice was frequently under-exploited. The study also concluded that the superficial and problem-centred nature of much of the contact between parents and professionals meant that chances to capitalise on the opportunities for exchanging information and working together were lost.

The final paragraphs of the study by Jowett *et al.* stated a note of caution which merits inclusion at this point. "Little enough thought has been given", the writer's state, "to what enhanced contact between professionals and parents could ultimately result in. Defining and explaining school policy to parents, where it exists, is not easy and may lead to the public overhaul of practices based on what have been considered unalterable facts" (Jowett *et al.* 1991, p126).

The researcher, in agreeing with this final statement, contends that the traditional parent-teacher relationship is undergoing notable change. The willingness of teachers to meet parents outside normal school hours; the increasing openness of home-school communications and the growing spirit of partnership which permeates the atmosphere in many schools is both heart-warming and encouraging for future developments.

When parents become involved, they increase their understanding of the educational process. Parent-school cooperation also advantages students by enabling their parents to provide better guidance to their children at home and more often use positive forms of reinforcement (Becher, 1986). It is imperative therefore, that schools find ways to include parents in as many areas of its activities as possible without hindrance to the professional role of the teacher.

## 3. 4. Northern Ireland – The Case of the Integrated School

The researcher wishes to comment on the educational developments in Northern Ireland from the perspective of parental choice and participation.

The National School system had, at its introduction in 1831, the object of establishing a non-denominational arrangement in schools throughout Ireland. However, with the passing of time the opposition from Churches, of all denominations, gradually ensured that individual National Schools came under the influence of the denomination in the local area and by the last quarter of the nineteenth century a *de facto* religiously segregated system was in place throughout Ireland (Fraser and Morgan, 1999).

The partition of Ireland in 1921 was to lead to the development of a 'controlled' and 'maintained' schools structure in Northern Ireland (Ibid). The 'controlled' schools were financed by the State but were, in effect, Protestant in ethos and attended almost exclusively by pupils from unionist backgrounds. The 'maintained' schools were, until 1992, partially funded by the Catholic clergy providing a Catholic education and 'a cultural and social environment with links to the Nationalist tradition' (Akenson, 1973).

The case for developing newer forms of post-primary education has existed in Northern Ireland for many years; albeit for very different reasons than in the contemporary cultural environment of the Republic. Given the provinces historical context and religious separation, it was almost inevitable that new initiatives would emerge to redress its community's divisions.

In 1974 a parents pressure group, All Children Together (ACT) was established with the intention of developing an integrated education system. The rationale

and development of ACT was based upon the aim that pupils should learn to respect the traditions and values of both communities, and in doing lessen 'mutual suspicion and anxiety' (Dunn, 1991). Initially integrated schools were established as independent schools (financed largely by charitable foundations, voluntary bodies and parental fund-raising) and could only receive Government funding once their viability was established. This situation was altered when the Education Reform (NI) Order, 1989 came into effect. Thereafter, schools received one hundred percent support from the Department of Education, Northern Ireland (DENI).

The Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) was established in 1987 to co-ordinate efforts to develop Integrated Education and to assist parent groups in opening new integrated schools.

> Integrated Education can best be described as the bringing together in one school of pupils, staff and governors, in roughly equal numbers, from Protestant, Catholic, other faiths and none. It is about cultivating the individual's self-respect and therefore respect for other people and other cultures. Integrated Education means bringing children up to live as adults in a pluralist society, recognising what they hold in common as well as what separates them, and accepting both (NICIE, 2005).

In 1988 Coopers and Lybrand conducted a survey of parental demand for integrated education in an area of Northern Ireland. The results indicated that parents, in selecting a post-primary school, placed greatest emphasis on the schools academic and disciplinary performance. The survey showed that there was a 'substantial level of demand for integrated education itself' (Fraser and Morgan, 1999).

Further research, undertaken by Agnew *et al.* established that a majority of parents believed that integrated schools could be an 'effective means of expressing cultural and religious diversity' (Agnew *et al.*, 1992).

The development of integrated education in Northern Ireland has not been without its problems. Fraser and Morgan writing in, *In the Frame: Integrated Education in Northern Ireland: the implications of expansion*, describe the capital cost to the exchequer in the 'facilitation' of integrated schooling in Northern Ireland as being a grave source of contention. It has been estimated that one-third of the capital budget for new schools in 1995 was being used to support the integrated sector which provided for less than 3% of the then school population. Those in support of integrated education argued that the continuation of State support was necessary for their schools survival, whilst the 'controlled' and 'maintained' sectors were concerned with the heavy drain on what they regarded as their resources (Fraser and Morgan 1999). In a further analysis of integrated education, Fraser and Morgan comment on parents' difficulties in establishing new schools

> Parent groups, with limited experience and expertise in the procedures which have to be followed…in setting up a new school often encounter management and/or organisational problems which have the potential to comprise the quality of the education provided (Fraser and Morgan, 1999, p.68).

In their concluding comment in, *When Does 'Good News' Become 'Bad News'? The Relationship Between the Government and the Integrated School*, Fraser and Morgan describe the dilemma of creating change in established systems.

> Perhaps most fundamentally it highlights the difficulty all participants face in attempting to develop and sustain a system which reconciles principles of equity, long-term educational needs of a whole society

and the desire to involve and accommodate individuals and groups whose concerns focus on the more immediate and local issues which impinge directly on their lives (Fraser and Morgan, 1999, p.8).

Since 1981, when Lagan College in Belfast began, a small but growing number of integrated primary and post-primary schools have been established in Northern Ireland. (The 58th integrated school opened in September 2005. The NICIE now caters for 16,000 pupils across the Six Counties of Northern Ireland.) They are distinctive in that they have been established by parents rather than the State or a church. Integrated schools are 'shared institutions' in that their management, staffing and enrolment are drawn in roughly equal numbers from the Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland (NICIE, 2005).

Integrated schools are of interest to the parents of Educate Together primary sector in that they serve as an example of what can be accomplished. Undoubtedly, the situation and settings in Northern Ireland are quite different, but the outcome has been quite positive in that a greater diversity in school choice was achieved.

## 3. 5. The Irish Dimension

It is worth examining the source from which Irish parents are empowered to associate themselves with the education of their children. The Irish Constitution (1937) states

> The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide according to their means for religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children (Article 42.1).

Whilst the State identifies and indeed guarantees the rights of parents to 'provide' for the education of their children, few parents had, until recent years, chosen this course.

Cluskey writing in, *Parents as Partners in Education: An Equality Issue* (1996) states that whilst parents are determined to behold the primary rights as educators of their children, very few have in effect exercised their rights to do so. While this statement may have indicated the general norms of the previous decade, it may not be held to be as true for the contemporary educational landscape.

The traditional role of the parent, as viewed in many schools, was one of passive compliance and acceptability, has significantly altered. Indications are that some parents are beginning to adopt a consumerist position and have increasingly come to regard the school as a service provider.

## 3. 6. Contemporary Post-Primary Education in Ireland

This section of the study shall discuss the evolution and development of the post-primary sector in Irish education *since* 1967. Emphasis shall be given, in particular, to the establishment of comprehensive, community schools and colleges. A critique shall be offered with regard to their effectiveness and relevance in contemporary Irish society.

The contemporary post-primary sector of Irish education encompasses four different school models. These are Voluntary Secondary Schools, Vocational Schools and Community Colleges, Comprehensive Schools and finally, Community Schools.

In 1967, at the time of the introduction of free secondary education in Ireland there were two models of post-primary education in operation; the voluntary secondary and the vocational school systems. Most of the fee-paying sector in post-primary education was made up of Roman Catholic schools. (There was also in existence at this time a school which catered for the Jewish community in Ireland.)

### 3. 6. 1. Voluntary Secondary Schools

The Report of the Council of Education on the Curriculum of the Secondary School (1963) set out, according to O'Flaherty, what it believed was the factual position of secondary schools at that time.

> First of all, they are strongly religious in character, religious motives having led to their foundation and religious bodies being, in the main, their trustees, patrons and managers. The dominant purpose of their existence is the inculcation of religious ideals and values (Council of Education cited in O'Flaherty, 1992, p23).

The voluntary secondary school system was, in 1967, the largest provider of post-primary education (O'Flaherty, 1992). Voluntary secondary schools had a, 'Wide degree of public acceptability and catered for seventy-five percent of post-primary students' (ibid, p2). Control within these schools lay with the religious trustees and was generally dominated by the denominational character of the order. The schools were privately owned and managed. Teachers were

employed by the Manager of the school who, in most cases was a member of a religious order (Randles, 1975).

The publication of *The Future Involvement of Religious in Education* (FIRE) report in 1973 stated in its findings that the involvement of the religious in educational affairs was changing due to increasing lay and decreasing numbers of religious teachers in voluntary secondary schools. Such changes would entail alterations in the management of schools, specifically the report refers to, '...broadening of the management process [which would] serve to strengthen the schools position with regard to the exercise of bargaining power in negotiations affecting the school's existing or future circumstances'(Conference of Major Religious Superiors, 1973, p19). The 'broadening of the management process' mentioned in the report refers to the development of boards of management for schools. This is one of the earliest indications as to how management structures within voluntary secondary schools should develop.

Voluntary secondary schools provided for both the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations. The *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools* (1971-1972) states that the purpose of the Intermediate Certificate in voluntary secondary schools is

> ...to testify to the completion of a well-balanced course of general education suitable for pupils who leave full-time education at 16 years of age, and alternatively, to the fitness of the pupils entry for more advanced courses of study (Cited in Randles, 1975, p19).

Similarly, the Leaving Certificate in the voluntary secondary school was seen to prepare pupils for, '...immediate entry into open society or for proceeding to further education' (ibid, p19). The traditionally academic programme of

education provided by voluntary secondary schools was used to prepare pupils for clerical employment or in preparation for higher studies.

The curriculum of the voluntary secondary schools followed a mainly 'academic' theme, despite a long-standing tradition of the practical/vocational subjects given by the Christian Brothers, and others, over many years. It can be argued that this view holds true in the minds of many parents today, many of whom were educated in such schools.

Undoubtedly, the voluntary school sector has undergone significant change. This was predicted, particularly by O'Flaherty when writing in 1991, that the denominational character of the [voluntary secondary] schools has been guaranteed even though many of them will effectively be lay schools in the future.

### 3. 6. 2. Vocational Schools and Community Colleges

All vocational schools and community colleges are built and maintained by the State. These are operated by statutory Vocational Educational Committees (VEC's) and are formed by nominated and elected members. Each VEC has a Chief Executive Officer to whom the executive powers of the committee are largely delegated. Each vocational school has, since 1974, a Board of Management comprising nominated and elected members including two parents, at least one staff representative and members of the vocational committee.

Community colleges have been established, in many instances, due to mergers between voluntary secondary and VEC schools (Drudy and Lynch, 1993).

Community colleges evolved, according to O'Flaherty as the VEC response to the development of the community school and were established under section 21 of the Vocational Education Act, 1930 (O'Flaherty, 1992).

Boards of Management on community colleges include representatives of Bishop's House and other religious congregations associated with the school's locality.

Boards of Management in vocational schools and community colleges are sub-committees of the VEC; their policies and decisions must be ratified by the VEC prior to adoption. All funding for these schools is provided by the Department of Education and Science and is channelled through the VECs.

The educational objectives of voluntary secondary school as defined in the *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools*, contrasts with those of the vocational school. In the vocational sector the purposes and objectives of schools were to provide

> ...practical training in preparation for employment in trade, manufactures, agriculture, commerce and other industrial pursuits and also general and practical training for the employment of *young persons* (author's emphasis) in the early stages of such employment (Vocational Act, 1930).

The curriculum of the vocational school and community college was described as having a typically strong practical and technological bias with some academic subjects also on offer (Drudy & Lynch, 1993).

Each post-primary model had its own distinct role to play in the education of the young. Such was, and in the minds of some parents still exists, the view that vocational education caters for the less academically endowed or working class student. This perception suitably assisted and perhaps legitimised the 'invasion' of higher education by the middle classes whose claims on education replaced their former 'inherited wealth'. A report from the Justice Commission on Equality on changes in Irish society identified factors which indicated that education had began to replace other factors, such as inherited property as a means by which inequalities can be transmitted or preserved from generation to generation (Conference of the Religious in Ireland, 2004).

### 3. 6. 3. Comprehensive schools

Dr P.J. Hillary, former Minister for Education commenting at a press conference, outlined what he perceived as, *"The weaknesses of the existing two tier system of post-primary education"*, stated

> It is true that up to two thirds of our children already receive some post-primary education. The remainder, however, whose parents pay their fair share of taxes and rates which help provide post-primary education to others, might be called today's *Third Estate*, (author's emphasis) whose voice, amid the babel of competing claims from the more privileged, has hitherto been scarcely heard (Irish Press, 20th May, 1963).

This reference to the *Third Estate* is interesting in that the Minister is alluding to and identifying a group within society which had not yet begun to organise and articulate its voice with regard to its educational marginalisation from society. Such comments were unusual at the time and were often championed only by Non Governmental Organisations (NGO's), religious congregations and civil liberties groups.

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Dr Hillary continued his critique of the existing educational system stating

> The second structural weakness is of a general nature and arises from the fact that our secondary and vocational schools are being conducted as separate and distinct entities with no connecting link whatsoever between them. This coupled with the haphazard way, speaking educationally, in which many pupils find themselves in one type of post-primary school or another (ibid).

At the conclusion of his press statement Dr Hillary stated

> Let me claim for the plan which I have just outlined that it is not set in Hy Brasil (sic) or Never-Never Land but would solve in a practical way and within a reasonable time the main problems of our post-primary education…not only of a better coordination of our entire education system but equality of educational opportunity (ibid).

This statement clearly expressed the Minister's willingness to engage in a development process which would entail the introduction of a new model of educational provision, namely the establishment of a system of comprehensive education.

Comprehensive schools were introduced as denominational co-educational schools and open to all classes and levels of ability, offering a wide curriculum to match the aptitudes of their pupils (Coolahan, 1981). The management structure of a comprehensive school depends upon its particular religious denomination. Catholic comprehensive schools comprise of a board which includes one religious representative from Bishop's house, a member of the school inspectorate and VEC representation. In the case of Protestant comprehensive schools there are three denominational representatives on the board. This allows greater denominational control (Drudy and Lynch, 1993). The first comprehensive schools in the State were established in Carraroe, Cootehill and Shannon.

### 3. 6. 4. Community Schools

O'Flaherty, in *Management and Control in Irish education* (1993), indicates that the genesis for the establishment for community schools can be traced to the *Investment in Education* report of 1965. This report pointed to the inadequacies of the existing provision of post-primary education. It is likely, according to O'Flaherty, that this inadequacy was responsible for the drafting of the Comprehensive Schools document, where for the first time since the 1930's the State had indicated its willingness to establish its own schools.

Community schools would, according to the Department of Education, lead to the elimination of the barriers between secondary and vocational schools and the creation of a unified post-primary system of education (Department of Education, October 1970).

Community schools were expected to provide for the development of adult education in their localities. The facilities of the school would also be made available to voluntary organisations and the community in general. Building and operational costs would be met by the State.

Envisaged with the development of the Community School was the establishment of a general system of State schools (Randles 1975). The omission of any reference to religion was not, according to Randles, accidental since it transpired that the schools were to be nondenominational in nature. Interestingly, research by Norman (2000) investigating the religious ethos of one

Dublin community school (Referred to as Mount Seskin) established that the contemporary ethos there was more holistic than the Catholic voluntary secondary schools studied by McDonnell (1995) and O'Keefe (1998). Norman's research entitled, *Ethos in Irish Catholic Post-Primary Schooling: The Case of the Community School* concluded that teachers, parents and to a lesser degree students saw the purposes of the Community School in terms of personal and social development (Norman, 2000). Furthermore, Norman concluded that attitudes of the students at the Community School were significantly more positive towards religious education than the attitudes of their counterparts in the Catholic Voluntary secondary schools (ibid). Interestingly, Norman also states that the educational goals as outlined in its official documents are more fully realised within the operative ethos of the Community School than they are in many Catholic secondary schools (ibid).

## 3. 7. Conclusion

Post-primary education in Ireland has undergone extensive restructuring since the introduction of 'free education' in 1968. The changes were brought about by a variety of factors which included, amongst others, an economic necessity and the requirement of the State to generate an educated workforce. (This is not dissimilar to contemporary educational economics.) Also influential in the design of post-primary models was the State's determination to provide a 'comprehensive' education distinct from the denominational and privately controlled Voluntary School sector. Brave and difficult decisions were taken

which effectively laid the foundation on which Ireland could capitalise from its entry into a European free market.

The current post-primary provisions of second level education arise from both historical and developmental occurrences. Historical in that the existence of the voluntary secondary schools was established and nurtured by the religious congregations for the moral and spiritual welfare of the faithful. Developmental in that the Education Act of 1930 furthered the continuance of 'manual and technical instruction' in vocational schools. The merging of both voluntary and vocational schools by the formation of Comprehensive and Community Schools and Colleges displayed a willingness of the State to develop new models of post-primary education relevant to the contemporary societal and economic needs of the day. That process began almost forty years ago at a time in our history when the necessity for change was acknowledged. The necessity for change in the provision of education has re-emerged. Ireland has radically changed.

Forty years later the prosperity (although not currently enjoyed by all members of society) has brought new challenges. Its young people are faced with complex issues which extend far beyond the experiences of their predecessors. Students need to become analytical thinkers – capable of deconstructing the imagery and shallowness exhibited in much of contemporary popular culture. Youth culture is often synonymous with sub-culture and resistance; seen as fashionable and trendy. It is therefore, very necessary for schools to develop and engage their students in meaningful dialogue which encourages critical self reflection.

Psychologically, students must be provided with the opportunities to develop their cognitive, affective and motivational abilities to cope and adapt to the changing intellectual demands of contemporary Irish life. The ability to discern the social and cultural interaction with others in society is highly important. Our education and assessment systems must reflect these attributes accordingly. Given the competitive nature and environment of contemporary post-primary schools it is difficult to envisage how the best interests of the student can be served in the existing situation.

## 3. 8. A Critique

While it can be strongly argued that each of the models of post-primary education available in Ireland is unique – in its origins, structure and ethos – it can be equally argued that these models are weak in critical and reflective thinking of their aims.

Schools are not by their nature generators of change, they merely reflect the *status quo* in society. The contemporary assortment of post-primary school models has, since their introduction from 1968, undoubtedly served the nation well. Their existence owes much to the societal and economic norms of their day. In the mean-time Irish society not remained static but instead has undergone significant and dynamic change.

What is *not* required in post-primary schooling of the future is a 'tinkering' or 'tampering' with the existing devices but an entirely new formula, fresh from the designer's table. Schools should become 'hubs' within the community that

capitalise upon current understandings of how children learn and take seriously the commitment to lifelong learning. There is a need to radicalise the parents to expect more from schools. Communities need schools to stimulate change and to encourage positive civil and cultural harmony. Too much that passes for education is lost in the race for points.

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## 3. 9. An Overview of Post-Primary Schools

### Secondary Schools

These are privately owned and managed, mainly by religious authorities and Boards of Governors. They are subject to Department of Education recognition and regulations. The Department pays 90% of approved building costs. Equipment and recurrent costs are met largely by a flat-rate capitation grant per student. Teachers' salaries and allowances are paid almost in full by the Department of Education. Post-primary schools have traditionally offered an academic curriculum, but increasingly they are offering more vocational and technical options and generally non-selective. Many post-primary schools are still single sex-schools.

### Vocational Schools

These schools are administered by Vocational Education Committees (VECs) which are elected by the local authority of the area in which they are located. Day to day management is by Boards of Management and the schools do not

charge fees. They are 90% funded by the Department of Education and 10% by the VECs.

## Comprehensive Schools

There are a small number (16) of Comprehensive schools which were established originally as part of the proposed expansion of post-primary educational provision. They are administered by Boards of Management which include representatives of the VEC and the Department of Education. Different Boards structures have been developed for Catholic and Protestant schools. They receive 100% funding from the Department of Education.

## Community Schools

These are the successors to the Comprehensive schools. They are similar but have a different management structure involving greater participation of local community interests including trustees of amalgamated schools and/or local religious interests, parents etc. Many resulted from the amalgamation of Secondary and Vocational schools. They receive 100% funding from the Department of Education and do not charge fees but are required to make a relatively small local contribution towards buildings and equipment.

## Community Colleges

Almost identical to Community schools, but differ in that they are administered and funded by the VEC. Many Vocational schools have dropped the word 'vocational' and now use the term 'community college'.

*Chapter Four*

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## Methodology

### 4. 1.    Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodologies used in the construction of this study. A description of quantitative and qualitative methodologies shall be offered as well as the rationale for their inclusion. The essential preparation and planning of the data gathering processes shall also be discussed. The relevant key research participants are described and the rationale for their inclusion in this study provided.

### 4. 2.    Details of Research Activities

The following research activities were conducted during this investigation.

Two questionnaires (surveys A & B) were piloted and deployed to parents. Survey A was used to establish the preferred choice of post-primary school as determined by parents of pupils *currently* attending an Educate Together primary school. Survey B was deployed to parents of *former* Educate Together primary school children in order to determine their satisfaction with the chosen post-primary school.

Informal short interviews were conducted with parents *after* the questionnaires had been analysed. (These were done in an attempt to corroborate the results of the two questionnaires.)

A small focus group of six volunteer sixth class parents was established. This was undertaken in order to determine their specific personal opinions and aspirations for their children's post-primary education.

Informal semi-structured interviews were conducted with three individuals not directly associated with the school. Each of these individuals is currently involved in educational affairs and is, or has been, closely associated with the Educate Together organisation. The rationale for their inclusion in this study is justified on the basis that each is a parent of a child or children who had completed primary education in an Educate Together school. These interviewees are regarded as significant 'insiders' in the educational system in Ireland. Their opinions on the establishment of a post-primary Educate Together school can be contrasted with the opinions of parents of AETNS that participated in this study.

The data from the research will be presented in a later chapter and used to evaluate parental dispositions towards engaging in a new model post-primary education based upon Educate Together principles. This study will, in essence, investigate parental enthusiasm and support for the establishment of an Educate Together post-primary school.

## 4. 3. Objectives

Objectives of this research include:

- o Establishing the post-primary school destinations of pupils attending AETNS.
- o Determining the satisfaction rates of parents of former AETNS pupils for their chosen post-primary school.

o To determine if parents of children attending an Educate Together primary school are willing to explore and participate in developing an Educate Together post-primary school.

By revisiting the parents of former sixth class pupils (surveyed in the original questionnaire – survey A) with a second questionnaire (survey B) the researcher can determine the parent's satisfaction with the chosen school. Were the parent's original expectations of the post-primary school fulfilled? Was the chosen school suitable, in the opinion of the parents, to the child's educational and social needs? Would the parents reconsider sending their child there again? If an option to send their children to an Educate Together post-primary school existed - would the parents avail of the opportunity? Such were the questions the researcher sought to investigate.

## 4. 4.    Overview of the Data Gathering Process

**(November 2004 – July 2005)**
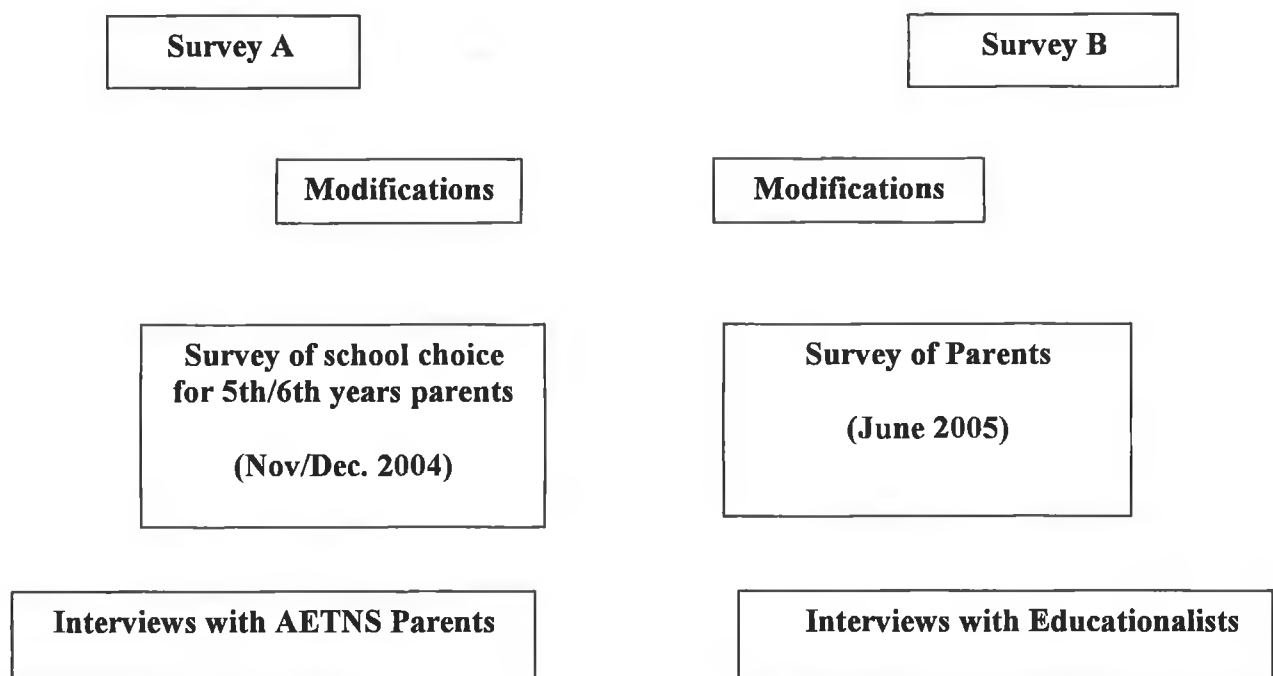
| Survey A | | Survey B |
|---|---|---|
| Modifications | | Modifications |
| Survey of school choice for 5th/6th years parents (Nov/Dec. 2004) | | Survey of Parents (June 2005) |
| Interviews with AETNS Parents | | Interviews with Educationalists |

| Data and Analysis of Results | Data and Analysis of Results |
|---|---|

**A Focus Group of six parents meet to discuss their views regarding an ET post-primary school.**
**(April 2005)**

**Analysis and Research Recommendations**

## 4. 5. Considering Research Methodologies

Educational researchers have available to them a number of techniques by which data can be collected and analysed. Kane, in her book entitled *Doing Your Own Research* describes the analogy between selecting the appropriate research technique and fly fishing. 'You choose the right one for the fish you want to catch. No fisherman would use the same kind of fly for twenty different varieties of fish' (Kane, 1990 p.51). Each technique is designed to collect certain types of information and does not get other types.

The major categories of techniques available to educational researchers – generally labelled as being either quantitative or qualitative instruments – use interviews, questionnaires, observation and documentary/written source analysis for data collection. Each technique is designed to gather particular types of

information and, according to Kane, 'Each technique yields information that only it can obtain, but it also reinforces the other techniques' (ibid, p.51). This latter point is particularly significant. By using different data gathering methodologies a cross-referencing or 'triangulation' can occur. Triangulation refers to an examination of similar data through different strategies, in order to verify and strengthen the validity of results.

In considering the relative merits of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies Fenstermacher states

> Strict empirical methods, such as those usually associated with behaviourism, deny or dismiss...the intentional, purposive nature of human behaviour. This dismissal is a serious problem, for it gives rise to research in education that does violence to morally grounded conceptions of education. On the other hand, quantitative methods...are replete with mechanisms for intersubjective appraisals of validity and generalisability making them extremely valuable tools for disciplined inquiry. In contrast, qualitative methods are not burdened with a history of attempts to achieve isomorphic dependence on the physical sciences. These methods can accommodate the telic properties of persons in ways that do not do violence to morally grounded theories of education. Yet qualitative methods do lack established mechanisms for intersubjective appraisals of validity and generalisability (Fenstermacher, 1986 p.41).

Fenstermacher further states that the distinction between the logic of knowledge *production* and the logic of knowledge *use* permits the educational researcher to, '... employ any method of inquiry that meets the criteria of adequacy imposed by the disciplines or methodological analysis, without concern for the practical, pedagogical effects of the inquiry' (ibid, p.43). With this statement Fenstermacher is, in effect, justifying the use of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies on the basis that some framework is required upon which 'deliberation' of outcomes can be conducted.

## 4. 6.    Methodologies

## 4. 6. 1. Quantitative Techniques

Quantitative research, employing surveys and questionnaires to gather data, has been applied in this study. The rationale for incorporating this research tool was to: establish the reasons why AETNS was selected by parents as the primary school of choice; collect preliminary information from fifth and sixth class parents regarding the criteria for selecting a post-primary school for their children; determine parental satisfaction for the selected post-primary schools and finally, to determine the support of parents for an Educate Together post-primary school.

Two questionnaires entitled, **Survey A** and **Survey B** were deployed. (See Appendices D & F respectively.) These surveys were later triangulated with informal discussions and semi-structured interviews. By this manner of operation the outcomes of both surveys could either be corroborated or rejected.

## 4. 7. The Participants

For the purposes of relevance and immediacy only parents whose children were currently attending either fifth or sixth class were supplied with questionnaires. These parents are, by and large, the group with the longest attachment and experience with the school. Many of these parents belong to the original parental group responsible for establishing AETNS. They had struggled hard, over a period of years to establish the institution and provide a permanent school building. Their commitment to their children's education and the wider school

community is immense. Their children, in fifth and sixth class, were generally their eldest child. Therefore, this group would be encountering the institutions of post-primary education in the role of parent for the first time. It is worthwhile to mention that the experiences and observations of these parents would be influential in any subsequent decisions on post-primary school selections by the remainder of the AETNS parent body.

The majority of the members of this group were Irish nationals (82%), the remainder coming originally from various African, Asian and East European countries. Few language problems were encountered as all participants spoke English.

## 4. 8.    Questionnaires

### 4. 8. 1.  Survey A

Survey A was piloted with work colleagues of the researcher whose children were of school going age and, where possible, chosen because they were the parent of a fifth or sixth class child in primary school. (Parents of such children are generally perceived to be more conscious of the transition between primary and post-primary school.) This latter element proved useful and led to the re-writing of questions 1, 3 and 6 which were regarded, by the recipients, as being vague or unclear.

A covering letter was provided to parents asking them to participate in this survey. The letter also stated the nature and purpose of the questionnaire. (See

Appendix C) This survey was completed in the period November-December 2004.

The decision to employ a survey as a research instrument proved worthwhile. A high percentage of parents (88%) responded to the questionnaire. Significant 'value added' comments were furnished along with the survey returns in the form of hand written statements by parents. These comments provided useful topics for conversation and enhanced the discussions which occurred at a later stage in this study.

An important incident, which merits comment, occurred at the commencement of this study. Survey A, which was enclosed in sealed envelopes and individually addressed to parents, was originally given to the teachers of fifth and sixth class at AETNS. The researcher's instruction to each class teacher clearly stated that the survey was to be distributed to the pupils. These pupils, in turn, would ensure that their parents/guardians completed and returned the questionnaires to the relevant class teacher for collection. On examination, it was discovered that a significant number of the returns; in the order of fifty percent, were completed by the *pupils* themselves. This situation was identified through the pupil's use of his/her own signature which was found on many of the completed questionnaires. (Parents were not asked to identify themselves, although in the subsequent re-issue of the survey a number volunteered their family names on the returns.) This situation, when identified, caused particular consternation to the researcher. It had not been foreseen that the pupils would interfere, albeit innocently, with the questionnaire. In order to prevent any

possible 'contamination' or further confusion all the original returns were collected and destroyed.

In a second deployment of Survey A, each parent/guardian was individually presented by the researcher with the questionnaire. (The occasion was a parent/teacher meeting held prior to the Christmas holidays.) Parents/guardians were requested to return the survey by hand to either the class teacher, the school secretary or in the attached stamped addressed envelope. A return rate of eighty eight percent (88%) of the total number of surveys issued resulted from this improved distribution and collection procedure. In two incidences where doubts were raised over the authenticity of parental/guardian survey return the pupil's journal was examined by the pupil's teacher to cross match against a verifiable adult signature. On examination both returns were accepted.

The questionnaire consisted of nine individual questions. Each question could be answered by checking the relevant box. Three of the nine questions allowed the participants to provide additional information. Question six specifically asked the participants to identify their preferred choice of post-primary school from a list of those available to them in the local area. This information would prove valuable in determining the destinations of sixth class pupils with regard to co-educational or single sex schools. Also, the post-primary school selection for pupils of national and non national parents could be determined. (The researcher was, in this instance, keen to establish if non national parents differed from Irish parents in their selection of post-primary schools.) The responses from

participants would provide additional data which could be integrated into the discussions and interviews later in the study.

## 4. 8. 2. Survey B

Survey B was issued to parents of *former* AETNS 6<sup>th</sup> class pupils to determine their satisfaction levels for their chosen post-primary schools. This survey was deployed twelve months after survey A. (The intervening time allowed parents ample time to familiarise themselves with the operation of the post-primary school and therefore, were in a position to provide accurate opinions and recommendations.)

A covering letter, reminding parents of the nature and purpose of the study was included with this questionnaire. (See Appendix E) This survey was completed in the period May/June 2005. Twenty six questionnaires (out of a possible thirty) were completed thereby giving a return rate of eighty seven percent (87%).

Survey B contains eight questions - all of which could be completed by checking the relevant box. Two questions; Q5 and Q7 provided the respondents with the opportunity to provide additional information. This feature, particularly with regard to Q7 yielded interesting details regarding parental dissatisfaction with the selected post-primary school. (See survey B – results.)

## 4. 9.   Methodologies

## 4. 9. 1.  Qualitative Techniques

Qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena. Examples of qualitative methods are action research, case study research and ethnography. Qualitative data sources include observation and participant observation (fieldwork), interviews with key informants and analysis through the researcher's impressions and reactions. The motivation for doing qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, comes from the observation that, if there is one thing which distinguishes humans from the natural world, it is the ability to communicate through the spoken word. Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live. Kaplan and Maxwell (1994) argue that the goal of understanding a phenomenon from the point of view of the participants and its particular social and institutional context is largely lost when textual data are quantified.

Structured and unstructured qualitative interviews are regarded as purposeful conversations; generally between two persons and with the express intention of gathering information (Kane, 1990). Interviews are employed by researchers to garner descriptive data which is provided by the interviewee in their own particular style and context. Later analysis by the researcher allows the development of insights on how interviewees interpret their world (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998).

Interviews, despite their usefulness over other investigative tools, have some disadvantages. Interviewees can, in their willingness to assist the investigator, provide inaccurate or misdirected information. This phenomenon, as noted by the researcher, was more likely to occur when conducting one to one interviews than in a group situation. Interviewers can, on the other hand, selectively use responses from respondents that validate or endorse their stated position. Such influencing factors are referred to as *response effects* (Borg and Gall, 1983) and are well documented in the literature.

Given the nature of this study; investigating views and opinions of parents in a school community, both a quantitative and qualitative dimension for analysis was deemed desirable. Both tools could be used effectively to gather information without having an overdependence upon any single option.

## 4. 9. 2. The Participants - Dialogue with parents

Six informal interviews or discussions were conducted. Each participant was personally known to the researcher. These parents were chosen because they indicated, on their completed questionnaires, their willingness to further discuss the topics which appeared on the questionnaires. The researcher was careful to try to include a cross section of the school community. A gender balance was created by ensuring that both mothers and fathers participated in the study. Parents from ethnic minorities also took part in these discussions. The researcher encountered no refusals with regard to parents participating in the discussions. Two practicing teachers were participants in these discussions, one

primary and one post-primary. Both persons are teaching in schools outside the locality.

The meetings were held on the school premises, usually in the parent's room. This room is comfortably furnished with tables, chairs and couches supplied by the parents or through donations from local companies. Tea and coffee facilities are available. Many informal conversations and discussions are held here. The room is regarded as a 'neutral' location and is popular with parents and staff alike. Parents were notified of the forthcoming interview by the researcher, usually one week in advance by personal contact, either by telephone or email. Each discussion was preceded by a brief account of the research being undertaken during which the interviewer outlined the nature of the study and described his association with the school. The personal relevance, with regard to the researcher having three children in attendance at AETNS, was always stated at the commencement of each discussion. Discussions were conducted in the early evenings – usually between seven thirty and eight thirty and lasted thirty to fifty minutes each in duration. (The researcher is a key holder with access to the school buildings outside normal school times.)

The topics covered in the discussions centred primarily on the concept of post-primary education and the expectations of parents thereof. Essentially, parents were asked to express their concerns and opinions regarding:

o The transition of their children from an Educate Together primary school into a post-primary school setting.

o The development of an Educate Together post-primary school.

### 4. 9. 3. The Participants - Discussions with Educationalists

The justification to include educationalists from outside the school community was to determine if any similarities existed between their views and those of local parents.

Each individual was selected by virtue of their longstanding association with multi-denominational education in Ireland. Between them, they share over fifty years experience in multi-denominational education. Significantly, each interviewee is a parent of children that attended a multi-denominational primary school. Each person therefore, had personal experience in the decision-making process that occurs when one's child is making the transition between primary and post-primary education.

Contact was initially established with the interviewees by way of postal letters. In each instance a formal description of the researcher's aims and objectives was presented in the introduction. A statement was also included which clearly indicated that this research was being conducted in partial fulfilment of a Masters degree in Education at NUI Maynooth. The researcher's personal connection with an Educate Together primary school was also presented. Finally, each letter concluded with a request inviting the person to participate in an informal and unrecorded interview. (The researcher did however take notes, particularly whenever the interviewee recommended specific studies or relevant authors.) Each participant responded quickly, by way of e-mail, informing the researcher of their willingness to participate in this project. Subsequent e-mails and telephone conversations between the researcher and the participants outlined

the general thrust of the interview. Participants were not presented with a pre-determined set of questions prior to each interview. Two of the interviews occurred at their places of work. The third interview occurred in a Dublin hotel. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

## 4. 9. 4. Focus Group

In order to obtain a more personalised view of parental choice for post-primary schools a small focus group of six parents/guardians met on one occasion for approximately ninety minutes. The location for this meeting was the parent's room of AETNS. All parents that were contacted responded positively to a personal invitation from the researcher. Each person was selected on the basis of their long established commitment to the school. (Each is a member of one, or more, of the decision making bodies within the school community - Parent/Teacher Association, Board of Management or Executive Committee (Patrons) representatives.) The group consisted of four mothers and two fathers, all of whom had children attending fifth or sixth class in AETNS.

The theme for the discussion centred upon the following topics:
- o The current provision of post-primary education available in the locality.
- o How would an E.T. post-primary school be expected to differ from an existing post-primary school?
- o The willingness of the school community to engage in developing a post-primary school.

## 4. 10. Conclusion

The decision by the researcher to include both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies in the collection of data has proven worthwhile. Despite an initial reluctance to engage with these forms of instruments; generated no doubt by unfamiliarity and inexperience on the researcher's part, the processes have provided valuable and meaningful information.

Questionnaires enabled the views and opinions of a wider and more remote cross-section of the school community to be gathered. Consequently, the relative 'distance' between the researcher and the participant offers a degree of confidentiality which, the researcher feels, cannot be replicated in the 'face to face' engagement of an interview situation. That stated; more questions were raised by the questionnaire than were answers given. It is the opinion of the researcher that greater deliberation could have been applied to the selection of the questions which, in turn, may have resulted in obtaining better 'quality' results. To explain this point further. The questionnaires were, in hindsight, deployed prematurely. Greater consideration should have been applied to the drafting of each instrument. The researcher, by failing to liaise more closely with the supervisor of studies failed to capitalise from the undoubted expertise and experience available. Consequently, an opportunity to harvest more detailed information was lost. This researcher therefore, strongly recommends that detailed and continuous communications should be conducted with experienced researchers on each questionnaire *prior* to any deployment. This singular act of consultation will greatly enhance research outcomes.

The questionnaires did, in their present condition, provide interesting and rich data which, upon reflection, enabled the researcher to delve and explore deeper into parental opinions during the interview stages.

The process and procedure of interviews, albeit in an unstructured form, proved beneficial. By asking broad, almost general questions the researcher can allow the participant to develop their subject matter further. The researcher can later explore, probe and return to issues relevant to the study. However, as an inexperienced interviewer the researcher frequently interrupted the 'flow' of the interviewee and thereby possibly missed valuable data. Only in the later stages of the interview schedule did the researcher begin to overcome this particular difficulty.

Qualitative research, as applied in this study, has extracted meaningful and valuable data. Interviews enabled the generation of information concerning personal experiences which were highly relevant to the study.

New and unexpected insights have emerged concerning the thoughts and fears of parents in the AETNS community.

# *Chapter Five*

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## Presentation and Analysis of Data

### 5. 1.    Introduction

In this chapter the researcher shall present and analyse the data gathered in survey A under the following headings (i) Why parents choose an Educate Together primary school, (ii) Post primary school destinations of AETNS 6th class pupils, (iii) Parental preferences for the selection of post-primary schools, (iv) Parental interest in establishing an Educate Together post-primary school. Survey A details the responses of fifty (50) participants.

The researcher shall also present and analyse the data gathered in survey B under the heading; Levels of parental satisfaction concerning post-primary schools. (This survey was completed by parents twelve months after their children had entered post-primary education.) Survey B details the responses of twenty six (26) participants.

Details shall also be presented which outline the discussions between AETNS parents and the researcher. Furthermore, an outline of the discussions held with educationalists not associated with AETNS shall also be presented.

## 5. 2.  Why Parents Choose an Educate Together Primary School

With regard to the reason *why* parents chose an Educate Together primary school for their children, analysis revealed the following preliminary information.

Sixteen (16%) of parents felt that the school is in a convenient location; Twelve (12%) of parents opted for a co-educational primary school; Twenty six (26%) chose the school because of its multi-denominational character; Eight (8%) chose the school because it is housed in a modern new building; Fourteen (14%) stated that no other school was available to them; Eighteen (18%) chose the school because of its particular ethos. Finally, six (6%) chose an Educate Together primary school because of its democratic organisation. The following illustration has been provided to graphically reproduce the above information (See Figure 5.1).
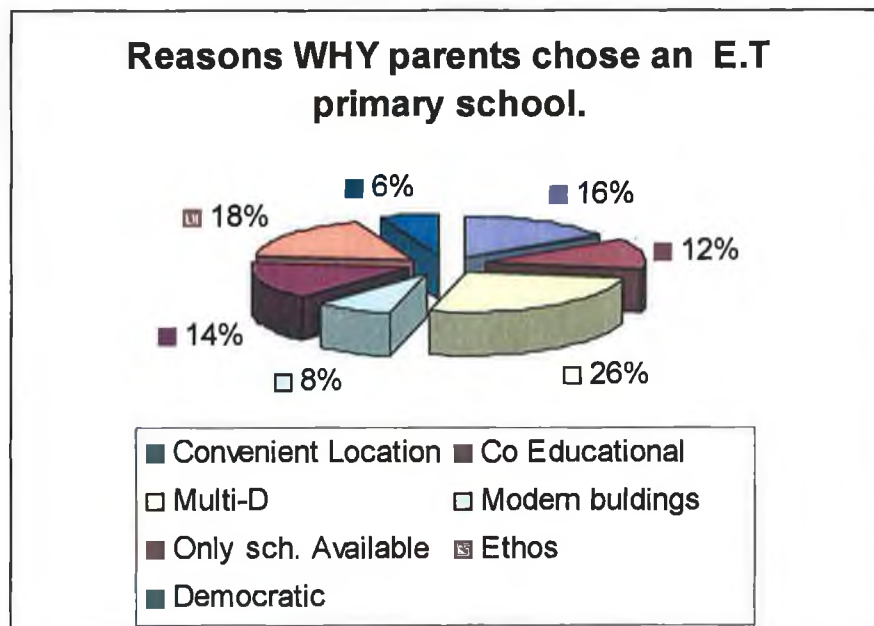


**Figure 5.1**

## 5. 3.    Post-primary School Destinations of AETNS 6th Class Pupils

Survey A records the details, as provided by parents/guardians, of twenty eight boys (28) and twenty two girls (22) attending fifth and sixth class in AETNS (Question 2).

Eighty four percent (84%) of parents has considered secondary school placement for their child (Question 5). On closer analysis the results showed that ninety two percent (92%) of sixth class parents had actively become involved in Post-Primary school choice whilst only sixty eight percent (68%) of fifth class parents had considered their Post-Primary school options.

## 5. 4.    Parental Preferences for the Selection of Post-primary Schools

Sixty four percent (64%) of parents identified the co-educational community school as the preferred choice of secondary school for their child (Question 6). This outcome surprised the researcher. (One of the key pillars of the Educate Together ascribes co-educational schooling as being central to its ethos.) Further analysis revealed that twelve percent (12%) of parents identified a single sex boy's school as the preferred choice of post-primary school whilst twenty two percent (22%) of parents identified a single sex girl's school as the preferred choice for their child (Question 6).

Eighty percent (80%) of parents that chose to send their child to a single-sex post-primary school were foreign nationals. This outcome itself raises some very

interesting questions. Why are more foreign nationals than indigenous parents sending their children to single-sex schools? Is this a national phenomenon or unique only to this area of the country?

Two percent (2%) of parents identified a co-educational fee paying school as the preferred choice of secondary school for their child (Question 6).

Sixty five percent (65%) of parents agreed with the statement that an Educate Together post-primary school is an option which should be developed (Question 7). Furthermore, fifty two percent (52%) of parents indicated that, if the option were available to them, that they would send their children to an Educate Together post-primary school (Question 8).

## 5. 5.   Parental Interest in Establishing an Educate Together Post-Primary School

Many participants have agreed, throughout all aspects of this research, to the *desirability* of establishing an Educate Together post-primary school. The pre-enrolment of eight hundred names was frequently mentioned in discussions with parents as being tangible proof of interest. Acknowledgement has also been given to the fact that conceivably not all parents were acting solely in support of an Educate Together school provision and were acting, perhaps, out of desperation given the shortage of school placements that currently exists in the locality.

The recent establishment of the Ryeglen Educate Together National School will, according to the respondents, continue to ensure that the establishment of an Educate Together post-primary school shall remain a focus of attention into the foreseeable future. Two Educate Together primary schools in close proximity would, it was said, strengthen the case for the development of a post-primary school at *"some stage in the future"*.

Frequently, discussions with parents centred predominately on the 'mechanics' of establishing a post-primary school. The general consensus was that it would be an onerous and difficult task. The primary difficulty being, according to parents, was the establishment of the necessary forum. Few, if any of the current management committee members, were prepared to subscribe to the task. An experienced and longstanding member of the Executive Committee commented that he would find it difficult to engage with this project:

> *I cannot foresee anyone from the existing school committees committing themselves to developing a secondary* [E.T.] *school here in West Dublin. This is a broader and more difficult national issue...You know, I was very naïve in our early days at AETNS. I thought nothing of starting a school for my children...I'm not sure I would like to begin that process over again.*

A similar view was also stated by another participant.

> *No one has ever really doubted the intention to pursue the development of a secondary school before. I believe that it exists, but not with the current executive committee...We are parents, not professionals and I think that its fair so say that we have more than enough on our plate at the moment with running the* [primary] *school.*

The views presented here are indicative of the group that was present. The consensus was that an Educate Together post-primary school would be a valuable addition to the current provision of educational institutions in the West

Dublin area. They also concluded that, were a post-primary school to be established, it would enjoy strong support from the community. However, it very clearly emerged that this group felt that the drive to pursue the project further must evolve from *outside* the current Board of Management and Executive committees. Members indicated that they would consider playing 'peripheral roles' but were unwilling to commit to project leadership.

## 5. 6.    Analysis of Survey A

### 5. 6. 1.  Introduction

The introductory questions used in this survey were applied in order to determine the numbers, sex, class (fifth or sixth) and sibling position of the pupils attending AETNS (Questions 1, 2, 3, and 4). The remaining questions five questions were used to identify the preferred post-primary school and the reasons for its selection. Participants were also asked to express their opinions on the establishment of an Educate Together post-primary school.

### 5. 6. 2.  Questions 1 – 4

In keeping with co-educational theme of mixed primary schools, it is not surprising to find a general balance between the genders found in both fifth and sixth classes in AETNS. Interestingly, there are more girls from non-national families attending than boys. Of the children from foreign nationals sixty four percent (64%) were girls and thirty six percent (36%) were boys. There was anecdotal evidence from the teaching staff at AETNS which indicated that the

boys from foreign national families were attending local single sex boys' schools in the locality whereas the girls were more likely to attend a co-educational school. This was an interesting and unexpected outcome of the study into attendance at AETNS. No further research was conducted into the issue on this occasion, however the outcome, if correct, merits further investigation. For what reasons would foreign national parents primarily send girls to co-educational and boys to single sex schools? Is this occurrence particular to all children of foreign nationals or unique to AETNS?

### 5. 6. 3.  Question 5

Eighty four percent (84%) of parents of pupils in fifth and sixth class had enrolled their child in a post-primary school. Closer examination of these figures indicated that ninety two percent (92%) of sixth class pupils were enrolled in a least one post-primary school. The remaining eight percent (8%) of pupils were children that were either recent enrolments and therefore new to the locality or were moving out to as yet unidentified schools.

The shortage of post-primary school places in the locality has been an issue for a numbers of years. Therefore it was surprising that a higher than expected number of fifth class parents had, at that stage, not enrolled their child in a post-primary school. (It has been well documented that parents will enrol their child in a number of second level schools during fifth class – leaving the final selection until later.) The indications were, from informal conversations with fifth class parents, that a post-primary school outside the locality was regarded as a potential school choice. Some fifth class parents, it appears, were awaiting

the recommendations and responses from parents of older children who now attended this school before making their school selection. Such actions serve to highlight the communicative nature of dialogue that exists between the parents in the AETNS community.

The researcher finds it interesting; given the apparent shortage of post-primary school places in the area, that almost one-third of parents of fifth class pupils had not sought to enrol their children in a post-primary school. Subsequent discussions in interviews revealed that some parents were willing to delay enrolments for particular schools. As one parent stated, *"I can afford to await the opinions of my neighbours regarding* [named school]. *Their experiences will help determine my final choice"*. Another parent plainly stated, *"I won't make the final decision* [on school selection] *until I know what's going on there. I have a great opportunity here to learn from other parents"*. Such comments by parents clearly display their abilities to analyse the educational conditions relative to a given locality. Parents are becoming keen observers of educational affairs and are therefore better positioned to make informed decisions.

### 5. 6. 4. Question 6

Parents were asked, in the cases were it was known, to identify their preferred post-primary school choice for their child. Sixty four percent (64%) stated that co-educational as the preferred option. This result surprises those that have been made aware of the results of the survey. Expectations within the school community were that a higher number of AETNS parents would choose co-educational schooling for their children as their first option. In particular, those

parents involved with the focus group were surprised at this result. Explanations offered during this session were that parents are perhaps, as one participant commented, *"willing to adopt a wider educational experience for their children"*, during primary school but wished to see greater levels of application to academic studies at a later age.

Twelve percent (12%) of boy's parents indicated that a single sex school would be their post-primary selection for their child. This contrasts with twenty two percent (22%) of girl's parents. The comments of two foreign national parents indicate that single-sex education is, particularly with respect to girls, more culturally desirable. One parent, a mother, commented *"Young children are more interested in play and games at the primary school. When it comes to secondary school, parents must consider what is best for their child. It is my opinion that young men and women should be separated so that they can learn in less disturbed situations"*. When asked to clarify the term 'less disturbed' this mother responded, *"In my country* [named] *young girls of fifteen and sixteen are being prepared for marriage. Mixed schooling can make for great difficulties for parents"*.

### 5. 6. 5. Question 7

A significantly high number of respondents stated the opinion that an Educate Together post-primary school should be developed. Sixth five percent (65%) of parents expressed this view. Of the group, eighty two percent (82%) provided a short statement to support this opinion.

Many respondents referred to the democratic nature of the school as being an important factor in the formation of their view. One parent stated, *"Here* [in AETNS] *my voice is heard and my opinion counts, that's more than can be said for any other school I've ever known"*. Another commented, *"Children will benefit from greater levels of participation by parents in an Educate Together forum"*. These views were replicated within the focus group. For example, on a number of occasions participants discussed the format of any future Board of Management in an Educate Together post-primary school. The researcher produced the document for examination and further outlined its contents. (The researcher was responsible for the drawing up of the provisional Articles and Memos of Association for a proposed Board at AETNS. This document, along with a proposed timetable and a pre-enrolment list of eight hundred names, was submitted to the Department of Education and Science at their request. See Appendix F, Model Agreement, sections 2, 3a.)

Participants in the focus group agreed, in general, with composition of the proposed Board. Reservations were however, expressed regarding the absence of any Department of Education and Science representation on the Board. The researcher indicated that this omission was intentional. The decision to present this document to the Department in its current draft form was quite intentional. It was hoped that the omission would provoke and generate discussion within the inspectorate.

## 5. 6. 6.    Question 8

Fifty two percent (52%) of respondents indicated that they would, if the option were available to them, send their child to an Educate Together post-primary school. On closer examination, the results clearly indicated that larger numbers of fifth class parents, sixty two percent (62%) favoured this option whilst less sixth class parents, thirty eight percent (38%), were disposed to the concept. In attempting to understand this occurrence the researcher entered into informal conversations with parents. Evidence from the parents indicates that sixth class parents are generally satisfied with the outcomes of the AETNS school community to-date. One parent said

> *We have a fine school with young committed teachers. I myself would have loved to attend this school as a child. We're lucky to have gotten as far as we have.*

Another parent commented that

> *When I came to* [named area of the country] *there were only fields with cows in them. There were no shops, schools or facilities of any kind. There wasn't even street lighting... Let no-one under-estimate what has been achieved by us* [the parents] *in getting this school built.*

Securing a permanent school building and facilities appears to have been the objective of many parent's endeavours.    Their desire to enter into further negotiations towards the establishment of a post-primary school would appear to be diminished.

Participants of the focus group expressed similar views. One parent, a member of the Board of Management commented

> *Setting up the* [primary] *school was necessary as my children had nowhere suitable to go. I don't know if I have the stomach to begin*

> *another uphill struggle when there is some choice of secondary school available.*

Another participant expressed the view that it was unlikely that the existing Board would embark upon the task of organising a post-primary school. He stated, *"We* [the Board of Management] *are so caught up in the running of this school that it would be unwise to spread ourselves too much. I cannot foresee it happening"*. This view was further supported by a two members of the Executive Committee [Patron] one of whom commented,

> *I cannot image the development of a secondary school... The current bodies operating within the primary school have their hands full... It would require a whole new influx of parents to move this process on. No, in my opinion it's not going to happen, not within my lifetime in this school.*

An unfortunate incident occurred during the course of this meeting which, the researcher feels, warrants mentioning. Approximately half way through the meeting a second Executive Committee member stated the opinion that the Department of Education and Science had greatly increased capital funding for the provision of post-primary school extensions in the locality. It was her view that the *"necessity"* to extend the school structure into post-primary education was therefore, *"almost eliminated"*. The researcher at this point queried the particular member's opinions on the role of the Executive Committee. Was it, the researcher enquired, to support the direction and progress of AETNS along the lines of its ethos or to accept, with regard to educational provision, the *status quo*? The Executive member took exception to the question and asked to be excused from any further participation. It was regrettable that the person chose to take this action. There was no personal offence intended. The researcher felt

that the particular question was justifiable and was within the scope of the meeting. Those other persons present supported the researcher in this opinion.

### 5. 6. 7. Question 9

This question produced valuable insights into why an educate Together primary school was chosen by this group of parents. Parents were asked to select, in order of preference, their reasons for choosing AETNS for their children. Seven possible options were available to choose from. (See Appendix D)

The largest percentage of first preference responses, twenty six percent (26%) indicated that the multi-denominational aspect of the school was the foremost reason for selection. Eighteen percent (18%) of first preferences were ascribed to school ethos whilst twelve percent (12%) indicated the co-educational nature of the school as being a factor. These three results, totalling fifty six percent (56%) indicate that parents took an informed decision to enrol their child in an Educate Together school over and above reasons of convenience (16%), no other available school (14%) and facilities (8%).

Six percent (6%) of parents identified the democratic nature of the school worthy as their first preference choice. (See Figure 5a for details.) Analysis of the results of Question 9 indicate that parents are making a conscious decision to send their children to an Educate Together school, in many cases from outside their parish and catchment areas of their home addresses. This indicates that parents are willing to discommode themselves in pursuit of what they perceive to be a better education for their children.

### 5. 7.    Survey B - Levels of parental satisfaction concerning post-primary schools

### 5. 7. 1. Introduction

This survey (See Appendix F) was distributed in May/June 2005 to twenty six (26) parents whose children had recently completed their first year in post-primary education. These pupils had formerly attended AETNS. All the participants had previously completed survey A (See Appendix D) in Nov/Dec 2004.

The information being gathered would assist in determining parental satisfaction with their choice of post-primary school and, following one year after their child's completion of primary schooling, assist in estimating parental enthusiasm for the concept of an Educate Together post-primary school.

### 5. 7. 2.   Results

Twenty six (26) out of a maximum possible return of thirty parents (30) completed Survey B. This represents a return rate of eighty six percent (86%). The following details refer to twelve girls and fourteen boys (46% girls and 54 % boys). Graphs have been developed to assist the reader.

### 5. 7. 2. 1. Question 2

Twelve percent (12%) attend a single sex boy's school; Twelve percent (12%) attend a single sex girl's school with the remaining seventy six percent (76%) of students now attending a mixed post-primary school (See Figure 5.2).

**Post-Primary School Destinations.**

■ Boys Only ■ Girls Only □ Co Ed.

■ 12%

■ 12%

□ 76%
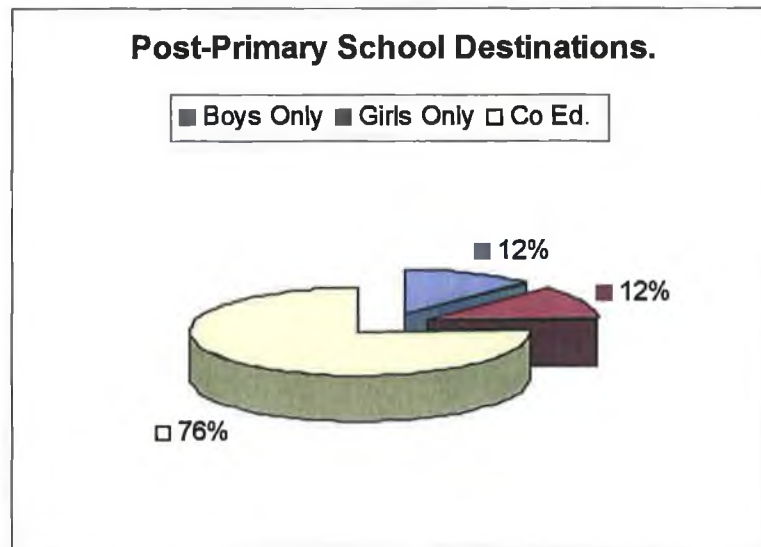
**Figure 5.2**

## 5. 7. 2. 2. Question 3

Thirty nine percent (39%) of students attend a post-primary school *within* the locality; Sixty one percent (61%) of students attend a post-primary school *outside* the locality (See Figure 5.3).

**School selection within or outside the locality.**

■ Local Area ■ Outside The Locality

□ 39%

■ 61%
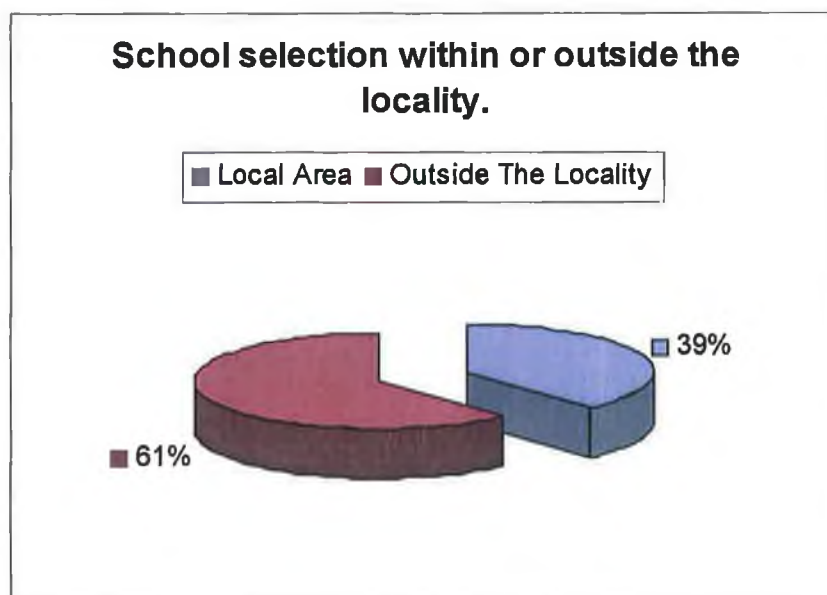
**Figure 5.3**

## 5. 7. 2. 3. Question 4

In seventy three (73%) of the cases the post-primary school was selected by the parent and not by the individual student.

## 5. 7. 2. 4. Question 5 (1st preferences)

Parents, when asked to indicate their main reason for selecting the post-primary school, provided the following data based upon their *first preferences* only.

Thirty one percent (31%) of parents indicated a first preference for the school's academic record. Thirty four percent (34%) of parents indicated a first preference for extra-curricular activities. Zero percent (0%) of parents chose the school for its close proximity to the family home. Eleven percent (11%) of parents chose the school for its attention to discipline. Eight percent (8%) of parents indicated that the schools facilities were a factor in its selection. Finally, fifteen percent (15%) of parents chose the school for its pastoral care system. (See Figure 5.4)



**Figure 5.4**

### 5. 7. 2. 5. Question 5 (2nd preferences)

Parents, when asked to indicate their main reason for selecting the post-primary school, provided the following data based upon their *second preferences* only. Twenty three percent (23%) of parents chose the school for its academic record. Twenty seven percent (27%) of parents chose the school for its extra-curricular activities. Eight percent (8%) of parents selected the school on the basis of its close proximity to the family home. Eight percent (8%) of parents selected the school for its attention to discipline. Another eight percent (8%) of parents chose the school for its facilities. Finally, Twenty seven percent (27%) of parents selected the school on the basis of its pastoral care system. (See Figure 5.5)



**Post-primary school selection:
Parental 2nd preferences.**

■ Acad. Record ■ Extra Curr. □ Close Prox.
□ Discipline. ■ Facilities. ▣ Pastoral care

□ 27%   ■ 23%

■ 8%   ■ 26%
□ 8%   □ 8%

**Figure 5.5**

### 5. 7. 2. 6. Question 5 (3rd preferences)

Parents, when asked to indicate their main reason for selecting the post-primary school, provided the following data based upon their *third preferences* only.

Thirty eight percent (38%) of parents selected the school on the basis of its academic record. Thirty one percent (31%) of parents chose the school for its extra-curricular activities. Four percent (4%) of parents selected the school on its close proximity to the home. Four percent (4%) of parents chose the school on the basis of its attention to discipline. Zero percent (0%) of parents chose the school for its facilities. Finally, twenty three percent (23%) of parents selected the school on the basis of its pastoral care system. (See Figure 5.6)



**Figure 5.6**

## 5. 7. 2. 7. Question 5 (4<sup>th</sup> preferences)

Parents, when asked to indicate their main reason for selecting the post-primary school, provided the following data based upon their *fourth preferences* only.

Ten percent (10%) of parents chose the school for its academic record. Forty one percent (41%) of parents selected the school on the basis of its extra-curricular activities. Eleven percent (11%) of parents chose the school for its

close proximity to the home. Eight percent (8%) of parents selected the school on the basis of its attention to discipline. Twenty percent (20%) of parents chose the school for its facilities. Finally, ten percent (10%) of parents selected the school on the basis of its pastoral care system. (See Figure 5.7)
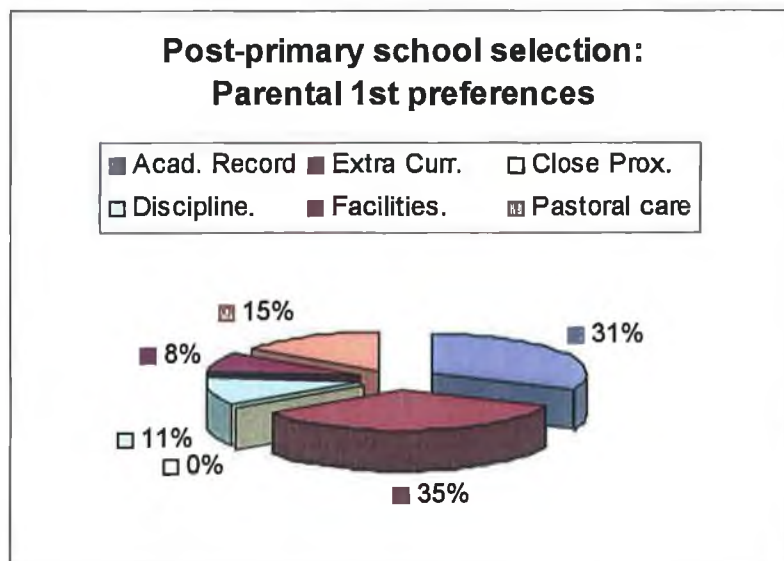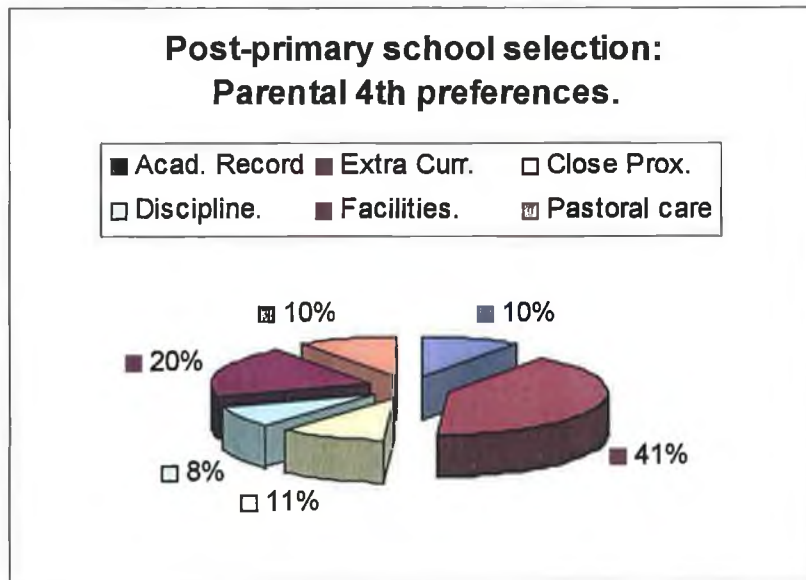


**Figure 5.7**

### 5. 7. 2. 8. Question 5 (5th preferences)

Parents, when asked to indicate their main reason for selecting the post-primary school, provided the following data based upon their *fifth preferences* only.

Eleven percent (11%) of parents chose the school for its academic record. Nineteen percent (19%) of parents selected the school on the basis of its extra-curricular activities. Eight percent (8%) of parents chose the close for its close proximity to the home. Eleven percent (11%) of parents selected the school for its attention to discipline. Twenty percent (20%) of parents chose the school on

the basis of its facilities. Finally, thirty one percent (31%) of parents selected the school for its pastoral care system. (See Figure 5.8)



**Post-primary school selection: Parental 5th preferences.**

- Acad. Record
- Extra Curr.
- Close Prox.
- Discipline.
- Facilities.
- Pastoral care

11%
31%
19%
20%
11%
8%
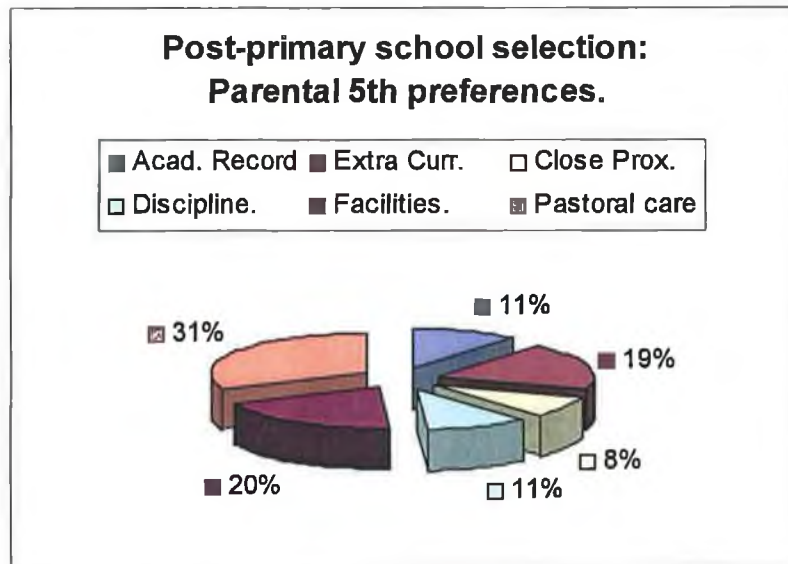
**Figure 5.8**

## 5. 7. 2. 9. Question 5 (6th preferences)

Parents, when asked to indicate their main reason for selecting the post-primary school, provided the following data based upon their sixth *preferences* only.

Fifteen percent (15%) of parents selected the school on the basis of its academic record. Thirty one percent (31%) chose the school for its extra-curricular activities. Eight percent (8%) of parents selected the school on the basis of its close proximity to the home. Four percent (4%) of parents chose the school for its attention to discipline. Eleven percent (11%) of parents selected the school for its facilities. Finally, thirty one percent (31%) of parents selected the school on the basis of its pastoral care system. (See Figure 5.9)
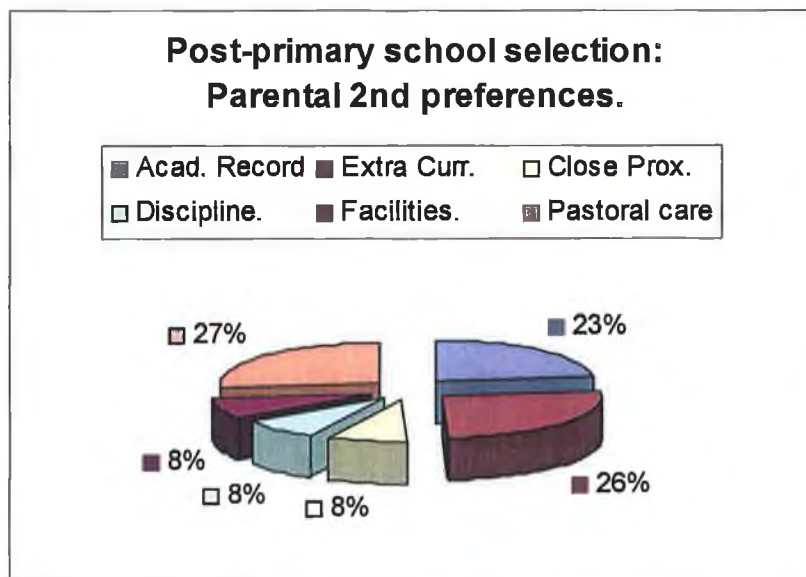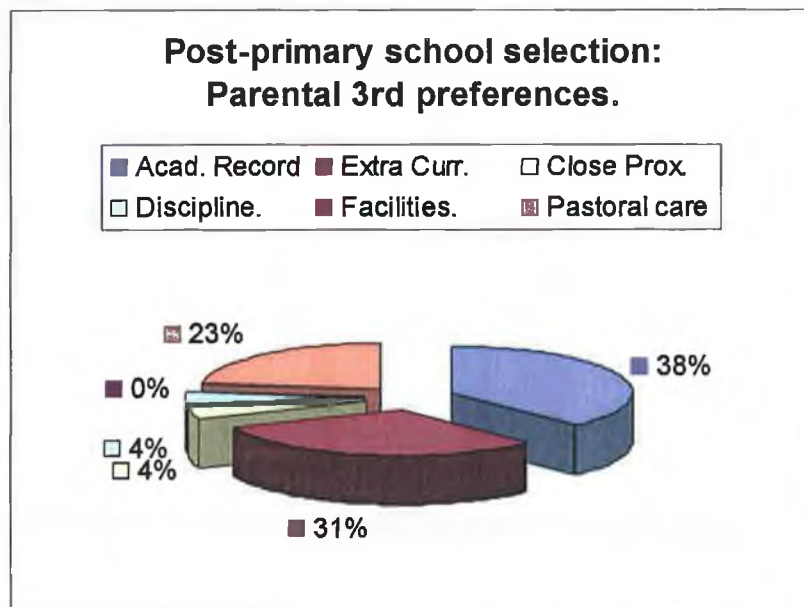
**Post-primary school selection: Parental 6th preferences.**

■ Acad. Record ■ Extra Curr. □ Close Prox.
□ Discipline. ■ Facilities. ▣ Pastoral care

▣ 31%   ■ 15%
■ 11%   □ 4%   □ 8%   ■ 31%
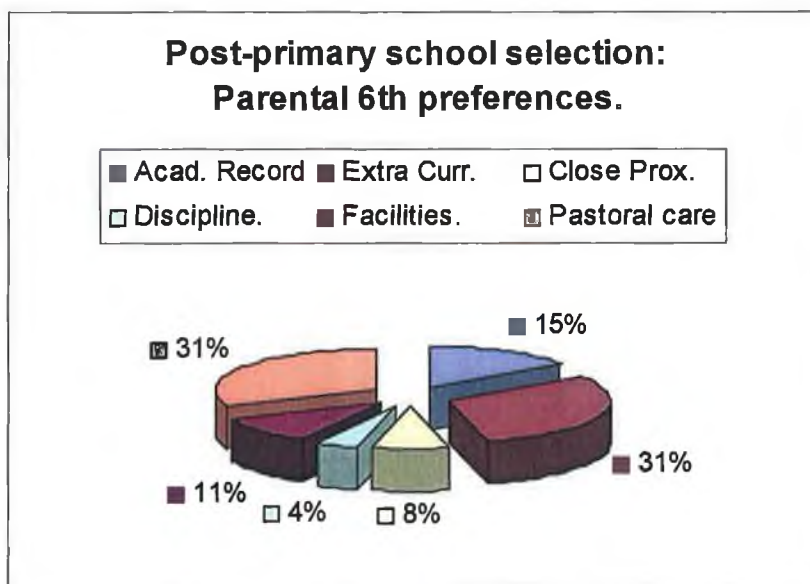
**Figure 5.9**

In the event that none of the six available options were preferable to parents, a request to provide additional information was made available by the researcher. Five parents chose to use this facility. In four cases the parents stated that relocation to another part of the country or moving abroad was the primary reason for school selection. In one instance, a parent stated that the particular school was chosen because, *"It would be another disaster if my son ended up in the same class again as pupil X"* [Pupil's name mentioned].

Seventy seven percent (77%) of parents sought the opinion of the primary school as to the most appropriate post-primary school for their child (Question 6). Sixty five percent (65%) of parents would, if the opportunity presented itself again, send their child to the same post-primary school (Question 7). Question Seven also included an option for parents, in the event that they were dissatisfied with the post-primary school, to provide additional information.

Nine parents, representing thirty five percent (35%) of the population, used this facility.

The most common complaints made by these nine parents/guardians were; Bullying and taunting by older students. (Bullying, as reported by these parents, was recorded to have occurred only in single sex schools. No instances of bullying were reported in any of the co-educational schools.); Pastoral care services were regarded by parents as being inadequate. Little attention was, it was reported, being given to individual students; School regimes were regarded as being unnecessarily 'authoritarian' in nature. (Parents indicated that they were concerned for their children. The school authorities were it was felt, preoccupied with order and control within the school much to the detriment of cooperation and respect from the students.)

Question Eight asked parents, if the option were available, would they send their children to an Educate Together post-primary school if one was available. Seventy seven percent (77%) of parents indicated positively to this question by stating that they would – if the option were available to them – send their child to an Educate Together post-primary school; fifteen percent (15%) of parents stated that they were satisfied with their choice of school; eight percent (8%) of parents indicated, by writing additional information on the return sheet, that they were *"unsure"* or *"unclear"* of the question. In one particular instance a parent asked, *'How would an Educate Together school be different?"*

Additional information was provided by parents in five instances. (Respondents voluntarily recorded their views on the reverse side of the questionnaire. Each parent signed and dated their response.)

In four cases the parents described their unhappiness with their choice of post-primary school. Failure of the school management to deal effectively with bullying was the main cause of dissatisfaction in three of the four responses. One parent stated that they removed their child from the school within the first term as a result of intimidation conducted by older students. Another parent wrote that her child was frequently taunted – primarily because of her ethnicity. The parent wrote, on a supplementary page not supplied by the researcher:

> *My child is learning to face the reality of racism in this country. I am grateful to our teachers and pupils at AETNS for providing her with the self confidence to understand that they, not* [child's name] *are ignorant and morally weak.*

This parent further stated that it was not intended to relocate the child in another post-primary school.

Whilst this 'anxiousness' of parents with children that are transferring from primary to post-primary schools is well documented (Smyth, McCoy & Darmody, 2004) the root of these parents concerns appears to emanate from one of school character and ethos. Particular post-primary school regimes appear less able to cope with issues regarding intolerance and racism. This was characterised by one parent (non Irish and of a minority faith) who stated

> *I have an input into the activities that concern the religious and moral education of my children here in Ashbrook Educate Together National School.*
> *This will not be the case when they move on to the secondary school.*

Similar views were expressed regarding the multicultural and multi-denominational nature of AETNS which more closely mirrored the local community. The existence of groups with different ethnic and religious backgrounds was, it was felt, much less represented within the structure of the post-primary school.

*"It is unfair"*, a parent commented, *"to send a pupil to an Educate Together school for eight years and then expect them to acclimatise to another regime for the following five years without any continuity of character between the two systems"*.

Many parents that participated with this investigation would agree with this statement. In broad terms, the dissonance between feeder primary and post-primary schools emerged, both in the written and spoken word, throughout this research. The manner by which the State expects pupils to negotiate their way through the transition from primary to post-primary schools appears to be becoming less tolerated by parents.

A participant, a female primary teacher, made the point that the introduction of the New Curriculum at primary level, with its emphasis upon discovery was, *"...to be applauded. Unfortunately, when the pupil goes on to second level the emphasis switches to predominately rote learning and terminal examinations"*. This, another parent indicated was a sufficiently, *"good enough reason"* to develop a continuation of the Educate Together *"characteristic"* into post-primary education. *"A new model, a hybrid if you like, is required"*, he

commented, *"to replace what has become an out-dated system of education for students".*

The role of education was also discussed particularly with regard to providing students with the necessary skills to lead to, what one parent described as, *"healthy academic and emotional growth as well as a sure sense of independence".*

The group strongly supported another participant's view that students were increasingly driven towards the *"sink or swim"* competitive nature of terminal examinations. Both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations were regarded by parents as being 'out-dated' and were no longer suited to the needs of either the students or the educational system itself. An insightful comment was recorded by a participant who observed that

> *The examinations system in this country is solely used for the purposes of containment...it restricts access to many sections of higher education which continues to remain the preserve of the professionals... and this is done with the full support of the State...Unfortunately, in this school the more we strive to instil respect and understanding for others within our children, the more we disadvantage their competitiveness in the outside world.*

## 5. 8.    Focus Group

### 5. 8. 1. Introduction

In order to obtain a more personalised view of parental choice for post-primary schools a small focus group of six parents/guardians met on one occasion. All parents that were contacted responded positively to a personal invitation from

the researcher. Each person was selected on the basis of their long established commitment to the school. Each is a member of one, or more, of the decision making bodies within the school community - Parent/Teacher Association, Board of Management or Executive Committee representatives (The AETNS Patron). The group consisted of four mothers and two fathers, all of whom had children attending fifth or sixth class in AETNS.

The participants discussed the current provision of post-primary schools in the locality from their position of future involvement. Four post-primary schools are available in the local area; a Community College, Presentation Convent, Christian Brothers and a fee-paying co-educational school. Each of the schools mentioned is oversubscribed and all, with the exception of the fee-paying school, require more accommodation and facilities for the projected increase student numbers. (None of the persons present at this meeting had a child attending any of the post-primary schools in question.)

Each of the participants agreed that there was an 'adequate range and diversity' of schools to cater for the needs of the wider community. However, all present agreed that there was scope for the development of an Educate Together post-primary school to cater for the wishes of parents from AETNS and Ryeglen Educate Together National School (RETNS). The basis for this conclusion lay in the belief, as one participant commented

> *Realistically the Community College is the only viable option for parents. I don't intend to send my children to a single sex school and I can't afford the fees in* [named school]. *I would like to see a small scale Community School in my locality where my sons can develop as young adults and not as cattle in a mart.*

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The perception that each of the available schools was more formalised and lacked, as one member mentioned the, *"personal touch"* was universal amongst this group. Two participants, both mothers, expressed their fears that their children would find it difficult to settle into [named school]. The reasons offered by these parents were that the existing schools were too large and lacked intimacy. When the researcher enquired as to how the parent came to reach this opinion, without having had first hand experience with the named school, the individual replied stating

> *My two nieces and nephew attended* [named school]. *Their mother always brought a photograph of her children along to the Parent/Teacher meetings after the fiasco which surrounded her first meeting with* [named teacher]. [Pupil's name] *was four months in the school and yet some of his teachers didn't know his name.*

Two other members commented that they had, separately, visited a local school with the intention of enrolling their children there. Both persons were satisfied with the efficiency of the school in processing their applications but were dismayed when informed that their requests to meet the Principal, Deputy Principal or Year Head prior to enrolment were refused. It was a policy of the school, at that time, not to provide prospective parents the facility to speak with the school managers or teachers. (This policy has since been rescinded.) Only in exceptional circumstances, they were informed, could such meetings occur. The secretary declined, when asked, to provide examples of 'exceptional circumstances'. Both persons mentioned their surprise and disappointment with this situation with one parent saying, *"I was put in my place before I had entered the door"*.

## 5.9.  How would an E.T. post-primary school differ from the existing provision of schools?

Participants were asked to state their views on how an Educate Together post-primary school would differ from post-primary schools with which they were familiar. The resulting statements were varied and ranged from; (i) The composition of the Board of Management; (ii) The employment of staff; and (iii) The enrolment policy.

Common throughout the responses though, was the theme of establishing multicultural and multi-denominational education for students in a co-educational setting. Five of the six persons present identified the need to create a school community which reflected the diversity in contemporary Irish society.

The discussion which developed as a result of this exercise was both interesting and engaging. Strong sentiments were expressed which indicated the high regard held by those present for the concept of multi-denominational education. This was unsurprising given the composition of the group.

One participant's response to the question of how an E.T post-primary school would differ was

> *An Educate Together post-primary school would be a place of learning, discovery and hopefully fun... Parity of esteem would be given to all students irrespective of race, creed, colour or ability. Teachers would be facilitators of learning in modular based programmes tailored to the strengths of the individual student...Parents are core partners in all aspects of the governance of the school... Greater emphasis would be given to on-going student assessment.*

Another participant referred to the student's learning experience as being, in his opinion, fundamental to the success of any post-primary school, enquired

> *If the Transition Year programme in schools is such a great success as is often reported, then why can't students commence this programme in first year and run it through to their final year?*

Comments of this nature again indicate the knowledge of parents regarding educational programmes at post-primary levels. (To repeat, none of the parents present at this discussion have children in attendance at a post-primary school.)

The employment of staff in post-primary schools was discussed. The perception that schools, *"harboured' incompetent or underperforming"* teachers was expressed by some participants. One parent, an officer manager with a large multi-national employer in the locality stated

> *Every employee in* [named company] *receives at least one annual review, in most cases two... Accountability is fundamental, in many instances, to performance. I work on the basis that my colleagues and I operate as a team... If there's a weak link we remove it. It's as simple as that.*

The researcher, the only post-primary teacher present in this group, informed those present that schools and teachers were not in the habit of 'covering' for underperforming colleagues. The Teaching Council would, the researcher mentioned, engage in the process of teacher assessment and accreditation and, with the co-operation of the teacher unions, further progress could be made towards greater professionalism. This statement was met with scepticism; with one parent responding:

*"It will take over ten years before any form of proper regulation in teaching becomes effective. By then my children will have long passed through the system".*

Teacher training was discussed at length. The participants stressed the importance of having only fully qualified staff in the school. This point was forcefully made by one parent stating, *"Too many non qualified teachers are teaching in schools"*. Whilst this is perhaps the case in a significant number of primary schools, it is however less of an occurrence in post-primary education. Parents are however becoming more aware of the importance of qualifications within the teaching profession. In an increasingly consumerist society accreditation, particularly in post-primary teaching where accountability largely remains absent becomes, in the minds of many parents, all the more important. An issue for the Teaching Council perhaps – is it a function of the Teaching Council to educate the general public regarding the qualifications of teachers in Irish schools?

One participant, a foreign national, enquired as to the minimum qualifications required to secure a permanent teaching post in post-primary schools in Ireland. She and three others present expressed their surprise on learning that the majority of those employed in post-primary schools did not have degrees but rather higher diplomas in education.

## 5. 10. Discussions with Educationalists

### 5. 10. 1. Introduction

Informal semi-structured interviews were conducted with three individuals not directly associated with AETNS. Each of these individuals is currently involved in educational affairs and is, or has been, closely associated with the Educate Together organisation. The rationale for their inclusion in this study is justified on the basis that each is a parent of a child or children that had completed primary education in an Educate Together/Multi-Denominational school. These interviewees are regarded by this researcher as significant 'insiders' in the educational system in Ireland. Their opinions on the establishment of a post-primary Educate Together school can be contrasted with the opinions of parents of AETNS that participated in this study.

### 5. 10. 2. Interviews

Details of the preparation, planning and structure of these interviews have previously been documented in an earlier chapter (See 4.9.3.). Essentially, the primary objective of the researcher was to establish each interviewee's views and opinions on the development of Educate Together into post-primary education. The researcher does not intend to treat each interview separately but rather to present an overview of their responses. The justification for this decision being that the focus of this research endeavours to enquire primarily into the attitudes and preferences of parents in the AETNS community. However, the researcher was also eager to investigate dissimilar locations in order to establish if comparable opinions were held.

Each of the interviewees warmly welcomed the enquiry into parental attitudes and preferences regarding the development of an Educate Together post-primary school. One participant commented:

> *To my knowledge, no-one has investigated the post-primary school destinations of Educate Together pupils. Less is probably known of the wishes of Educate Together parents for the development of a post-primary school.*

Another, referring to the investigation stated:

> [Named location] *is somewhat unique in that there are more than two E.T schools available in one area. The likelihood of having a greater concentration of parents committed to the pursuit of a post-primary school is much improved. I wonder however, if the same level of commitment would be found in areas where school placements are less critical?*

The researcher; aware that each of the participant's children had attended either an Educate Together or a Multi-Denominational school sought to establish the post-primary school destinations of their own children. Enquiries established that in two cases the children progressed to Comprehensive Schools. In the remaining case the interviewee's children attended a Community College.

Further enquiries by the researcher confirmed that significant thought and deliberation had been applied in determining the most suitable post-primary school for their children. In particular the aspect of co-educational schooling appears to have been a significant factor in the selection in all cases. One participant offered the comment, *"Education in a single-sex school was not an option for my children"*. This participant later in the interview added that

*As parents, we were deeply committed to a co-educational learning environment. We could not agree with those who argue that single-sex education is preferable for either boys or girls.*

When asked by the investigator, *"Did you ever consider the possibility of there ever being an Educate Together post-primary school?"* each participant offered contrasting opinions. One interviewee stated that the prospect had never been discussed during their tenure with an E.T. school. Elaborating further on this point the participant added, *"We were so engaged in securing the most basic of accommodations from the Department [of Education and Science] that we didn't, at any stage, consider post-primary education. And, to be honest, I don't think anyone in the organisation thought it relevant at that time".*

Another participant mentioned that the Patron of an early established Multi-Denominational school had examined the possibility of commencing a post-primary school. Many informal discussions had apparently occurred, however no distinct initiative had ever emerged to progress its development further. The participant concluded this section of the discussion by stating

> *There were sufficient secondary school options available, if you could afford them. They had the resources to provide for their children in such schools. This wasn't the case in primary education... [Parents] weren't in control of the situation and some despised this fact... These parents, you must remember, were predominately well educated and middle class. They were accustomed to getting what they wanted.*

The researcher enquired specifically into each participant's personal views concerning the development of Educate Together in the direction of post-primary education, particularly in the light of recent social change. Was it an inevitable outcome that Educate Together post-primary schools would emerge?

Responses from all three interviewees indicated that this was not necessarily the case. One participant commented

> *It is perhaps correct to assume that the availability of Community Schools and Colleges throughout the country has satisfied the requirement for more increasingly diverse life-styles and cultures... I do not think that parents are as restricted in their choice of post-primary schools as perhaps they might be in the provision of primary schools.*

Doubts were raised by each of the participants regarding the States', teachers' or indeed parents' willingness to engage in newer initiatives at post-primary level. The example of the NCCA and the curtailment of its plans to overhaul senior cycle education were cited by two participants. The failure to engage with the proposals of the NCCA, they both felt, clearly signalled a weakness within the body politic itself to embrace new innovations. One participant commented

> *A ministerial career is founded upon having a safe pair of hands. Most Ministers are preoccupied with ensuring that they aren't going to be the one to let the ball drop...It's a case of safety first for many. When in doubt, kick the ball to touch.*

Interesting discussions developed between the researcher and two of the participants regarding terminal examinations held in post-primary education. The researcher proposed the idea that an Educate Together post-primary school could offer, as a viable alternative to the existing Leaving Certificate, the International Baccalaureate as the terminal examination. The Baccalaureate differs significantly from the Established Leaving Certificate in that greater emphasis is given to on-going assessment. The proposal was deemed to contain merit. The programme could allow individual students greater scope and autonomy in learning. However, the participants separately agreed that the

financial costs which accompanied the programme were prohibitive and could only serve to further marginalise disadvantaged students. This opinion was broadly supported by each of the other participants. The argument for developing an alternate post-primary model, they concluded, was weakened by the diversity of post-primary schools currently available.

## 5. 11. Conclusion

## Themes

Resulting from an analysis of the data collected the author can identify the emergence of specific key themes. Each theme is presented, for the purposes of this conclusion, separately. Greater emphasis however, shall be applied to each theme in the final Chapter Six (Conclusions and Recommendations).

## Parental Preferences – Primary School Choice

AETNS parents are less likely to send their children to a primary school solely out of convenience. Evidence from the investigation into *why* parents chose AETNS for their children has established that forty four percent (44%) of parents chose the school on the basis of its ethos and democratic structures. This result confirms the previously made statement that parents are deliberate and were mindful in their choice of schools. Further evidence supporting this outcome was to be found in the numbers of children attending AETNS that did not live in the locality. School records indicate that eleven (11) pupils in sixth class live more than three kilometres from the school.

Only sixteen percent (16%) of parents indicated that the school's convenient location was influential in its selection. This low figure, in the opinion of the researcher, further supports the evidence that parents are selective with regard to school choice. It should be stated that the district in which the school is located is a notoriously congested area for traffic, particularly during morning hours. It was a surprising outcome therefore, that not more parents were obliged to accept AETNS as a school of convenience rather than choice.

A similar outcome, regarding the irrelevance of convenience in the selection of schools, was repeated in the examination of post-primary destinations.

## Parental Preferences – Post-Primary School Choice

The results of both surveys clearly indicated that parents were deliberate and mindful in their choice of both primary and post-primary schools for their children. The greater percentage of parents interviewed in the course of this investigation were, in the opinion of the researcher, 'intelligent observers' of the educational system. Parental understanding of the workings of educational institutions coupled with their abilities to navigate through the system brings to mind the work of Bourdieu. It was very much in evidence throughout this investigation that parents, associated with AETNS, have both the cultural and social capital necessary to 'profit' from their dealings with schools.

With regard to parental preferences for post-primary schools, it was established that the over-whelming choice of AETNS parents was the co-educational

Community College. Sixty four percent (64%) opted for this option. This was all the more remarkable as the preferred school lies *outside* their immediate locality. (This outcome parallels a similar result regarding AETNS as the parents' primary school of choice. Earlier in this investigation it was established that parents were purposeful in their choice of AETNS as the preferred primary school.)

The result appears to justify the original intentions of the founders of Community Schools and Colleges back in the 1970s that such schools would better serve their communities future needs.

## Parental Preferences – A Post-Primary Educate Together School

Interest in establishing an Educate Together post-primary school continues to remain an aspiration for the parents at the AETNS. Sixty five percent (65%) of parents indicated the opinion that a post-primary school would be both welcomed and supported by them. This represents a significant number of parents within the school community. This figure is further bolstered by the post-primary pre-enrolment list (See Chapter Two - Future Plans.) which now stands at over eleven hundred names. (It can be reasonably assumed that there were many parents with no connection to AETNS that pre-enrolled their children in order to ensure some post-primary school places into the future. However, the researcher, having organised and attended the pre-enrolment, was present to observe many parents from AETNS and different Educate Together primary schools in the county enrol their children.)

Unfortunately the burden for developing any initiatives into the future depends upon generating sufficient support amongst an already over-worked Board of Management and Executive Committee.

It has emerged from this investigation that, despite there being widespread support for the concept of establishing an Educate Together post-primary school, there appears little in the way of enthusiasm within the existing local management structures. Of perhaps even greater concern is the apparent shortfall in the numbers of volunteers willing to step forward to support the existing school management system. It would appear that the 'pioneering' days at AETNS are beginning to diminish. Can it be that we are now observing all that *has* been established and not all that *will* be achieved? If this is the case we have lost a valuable opportunity to explore and innovate in education at a crucial juncture in our changing society.

This outcome is rather unfortunate yet it seems to mirror similar disinterest observed in comparable voluntary organisations throughout the sector. Has the litigious nature of contemporary Irish culture become so invasive that persons, generally willing to give so freely of their time and effort, are fearful of participating in community developments due to the risk of legal or financial liability? Or have parents become sceptical of the nature of an espoused 'partnership' as expressed by the State, which they feel in reality offers them little in the way of tangible support.

The participants of the Focus Group were in agreement that an Educate Together post-primary school should evolve out of the existing school community. The development of Ryeglen Educate Together National School, a second Multi-Denominational school in the locality was, according to the participants, indicative of parental wishes to develop alternative democratic school structures distinct from traditional models. In acknowledging that the 'energy' to generate enthusiasm for the creation of a post-primary school was lacking, this group nonetheless strongly indicated their willingness to support the aspiration.

## Parental Preferences – Future Ambitions

The Focus Group, individual parents and the educationalists who were interviewed in the course of this research were in agreement in identifying the distinctive features that they felt necessary for a theoretical model of post-primary education. These participants observed that a pioneering curriculum (based upon the recent NCCA proposals for example) which could be offered in an alternative model of secondary education would be successful. An innovative composition in the schools' management structure; its parental participation; its staffing and teaching methodologies were the foremost factors which, parents felt, would lead to successful outcomes in post-primary education.

The development of a post-primary school under the umbrella of Educate Together could be, it was agreed, an opportunity to innovate and explore new practices and methodologies in Irish education. Each of the participants was in full agreement with the view that parents are willing to seek another avenue for

the education of their children. The State, it was felt, needed to invest in new ideas by supporting and engaging with parents. Partnership, it was stated, requires shared belief in common goals and aspirations as well as respect for the union that is created in any merger.

## Diversity and Inclusion in Educate Together Schools

It has emerged from this investigation that almost two-thirds (64%) of the foreign national children in attendance at AETNS are girls. This is double the number of foreign national boys. This raises the question as to why parents of foreign national children are more likely to send girls to a co-educational school than boys. This outcome contrasts with the findings from Survey B which indicated that foreign national parents are twice as likely to send girls to single-sex schools as boys.

It has also transpired from the research that foreign national parents are less likely to send their children to a co-educational post-primary school. In each case involving foreign-national children at AETNS in sixth class, the parents selected a single-sex post-primary school for their child. This outcome would, if it were to continue into the future, impact greatly upon the diversity levels within an Educate Together post-primary school. The mindset that presumes homogeneity in schools could be further strengthened – to the detriment of education generally (Devine, Lodge & Deegan, 2004).

# *Chapter Six*

## Conclusions and Recommendations

### 6. 1. Introduction

The conclusions and recommendations of this investigation into parental attitudes and preferences regarding the development of an Educate Together post-primary school will be described in the context of the research and as outlined in the literature review of this thesis.

The researcher has previously indicated that significant themes have emerged from the research (Chapter Five). These themes shall be discussed. Conclusions and recommendations relating to their significance to post-primary education shall be presented.

### 6. 2. Parental School Choice

It is generally accepted that schools are in the business of producing and reproducing knowledge (Donnelly, 2004). However, parents have now come to expect from schools more than the mere generation of knowledge. It is also probably true to say that parents were never in a position to closely examine or evaluate the work of individual schools in order to determine their effectiveness. This may soon change. The recent announcement by the Department of Education to publish school reports (expected in January 2006) will provide parents with an even greater insight into the 'business' being carried out in our schools. The Minister for Education, Ms Mary Hanafin has recently stated

> *School inspection reports from whole-school evaluations and other inspections, when read in their entirety can provide balanced and well informed information on schools...The whole-school evaluation process involves an examination of all the relevant activities of a school, from the quality of teaching and learning to the availability of extra-curricular activities and the implementation of policies in areas such as bullying and health and safety* (Irish Independent, Tuesday 11th October 2005).

The publication of school reports will provide parents with more detailed information upon which they can select, or reject, schools for their children. Undoubtedly, parents will become more selective.

## 6. 3. AETNS – A Different Choice

The existence of choice has always been a feature of strength at AETNS. Parents are united through their differences - respecting diversity for qualities it brings into the classroom. The weaknesses of religious and cultural homogeneity are greatly reduced, if not removed. Consequently, each classroom begins to mirror the community in which the children and their families live. Parents, by having the choice to determine the most appropriate school for their children, are adding to the effectiveness of their children's learning experience.

That parents *choose* to have their children educated at AETNS has been well established. Research has shown that forty four percent (44%) of AETNS parents indicated, by use of first preferences, that they had chosen the school on the basis of its ethos and democratic structures. An examination of home addresses established that many of these parents lived further than three kilometres from the school site. This result confirms the investigator's opinion

that parents do make conscious decisions regarding their selection of schools *when* they have options available to them.

## 6. 4. Parental Expectations – Democratic Participation

The Educate Together Charter (See Appendix A), the document to which parents look for guidance in procedural and management issues, states that all schools should fulfil a growing need in Irish society to recognise the developing diversity of Irish life and the modern need for democratic management structures (Educate Together Charter, 2005). This standpoint echoes some earlier statements by Chrispeels (1996), Epstein (1997), and Fullan (2001) who suggest that partnerships invite power sharing and generate respect for the relative positions held by each partner. It also seems democratically reasonable that those with a stake in a school, i.e. the parents, should influence the nature of the decisions that impact upon their children (Macbeth, 1995). Parents, it must be remembered, are responsible in law for their child's education, and in that sense they may be regarded as the school's legal clients.

## 6. 4. 1. Educate Together Democracy – A Critique

The democratic involvement of parents in Educate Together is a fundamental characteristic of the organisation. Their influence in policy has been responsible for determining the character and direction of Educate Together through the years. It is therefore surprising, in the opinion of the researcher, that parents are being denied an opportunity to participate in the formation of new Educate Together schools by their removal from the position of Patron.

Prior to 1999 an Executive Committee performed the role of school Patron. The Executive Committee was responsible for, amongst others, the guardianship of ethos and the provision of buildings and accommodation. The Committee also appointed the Chairperson of the Board of Management – in itself a powerful authority within the school structure. The involvement of a local Patron brought to the school an added tier of parental influence.

However, each new school has, since 1999, Educate Together as its Patron. (Of the thirty nine existing schools in operation twenty two are now under the direct patronage of the national organisation. A further five schools are expected to commence operation in September 2006.) This raises three distinct issues.

In the first instance; can Educate Together justify the elimination of the local Patron given that they have operated so effectively in earlier Educate Together schools? The removal of the local Patron certainly denies parents a level of authority within their own school composition. It is the view of the researcher, a former Chairperson and long term member of an Executive Committee, that the existence of a local Patron also provides greater independence and therefore less reliance upon the national organisation. Local affairs are easier managed and in shorter time-frames.

Secondly, the researcher feels that Educate Together, in its current formation, cannot sustain the demands placed upon it by the increasing number of schools. The limited resources available to the organisation do not, at this time, permit the scale of support required by schools. Educate Together, in its willingness to engage with and support emerging school communities, should not allow itself

to become over-stretched. It has responsibilities and commitments to the existing schools.

The Department of Education, whilst fully aware of the increasing financial pressure on Educate Together, is remiss in failing to provide adequate support to the organisation. In the financial year 2004-2005 a grant of less then €42,000 per annum was provided to E.T. by the State (Rowe, 2005). (Ironically, this amount was similar to the amount of P.A.Y.E. paid by its five staff members.) The failure, by the Department of Education, to furnish Educate Together with the necessary resources to enable the organisation to perform its obligations could also be construed as potentially mindful and deliberate. This leads the researcher to conclude that Educate Together is being allowed to suffer as a result of its own success. This raises two interesting questions; why does the State deprive Educate Together of the necessary support which will allow it continue to develop schools? Are there other factors at play?

The third issue concerns impartiality. Who, in the event of conflict emerging between schools or bodies within Educate Together, shall act as mediator between the parties? Ideally, Educate Together should remain the umbrella organisation for all schools. Its independence would enhance its position as mediator and could therefore act with greater authority. This however, cannot be facilitated under the current circumstances. Educate Together, as Patron of all schools since 1999, cannot be regarded as wholly impartial due to its commitments and responsibilities to all schools under its patronage. The policy

of automatic patronage imposed upon new Educate Together schools requires re-examination.

## 6. 5. Democratic Participation – A Utopia?

The reality of participation in post-primary schools appears, as was evident from parents interviewed in the course of this research that many parents continue to remain disconnected. Although parents are interested, informed and concerned regarding their children's education, they feel excluded from participation in decision-making about school management (Hanafin and Lynch, 2002). At the very least, schools are obliged to have policies in relation to regular meetings with parents. In actuality however, these often amount to little more than ritual without any serious engagement. This situation is made all the more difficult by teachers who increasingly recognise the importance of and necessity for parental involvement in schools but have not developed adequate professional confidence and skills to be able to deal with relationships between parents and the school (Sugrue, 2000).

The level of dissatisfaction expressed by former AETNS parents regarding post-primary school participation is cause for concern. Having been accepted as partners within the AETNS school structure it was subsequently more difficult for them to adjust to the subservient position expected from the post-primary system. The informal nature of events such as conversations often held in corridors or outside classrooms with primary school teachers and management were replaced, the parents felt, by appointments and distance in the post-primary school.

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Parents expressed concern for their children, some of whom appeared disaffected in the bureaucracy and rigid structures; particularly in the single-sex schools. It was this group of former AETNS parents that spoke most longingly for an Educate Together post-primary school. Their opinions and views will carry significant 'weight' in the continuing debate at AETNS surrounding the establishment of a post-primary option.

## 6. 6.  AETNS - Parent's Attitudes

AETNS parents value the importance of an academic education as a gateway to future success for their children. However, parental responses to questioning regarding the role of schools in the lives of their children strongly indicated that student's achievements must be measured other than in terms only of purely academic outcomes. Parents accept also that it is far more difficult to measure the moral and social achievements of a school than it is to compare academic results.

Parents at AETNS are distinctly aware of the pressures placed upon their children by the current educational system and are concerned of its effect for their personal development. Such fears were clearly signalled by the responses of parents in both surveys and interviews. The following sections of this study deal with the researcher's conclusions of the surveys and discussions conducted in the course of his research.

## 6. 7. Survey Conclusions

Surveys A and B record the details of sixty children attending or formerly attending AETNS. The conclusions and recommendations based on those surveys are presented in the following sections.

## 6. 7. 1.  AETNS As The Chosen Primary School – Why?

Participating parents were asked to identify their reasons, in order of preference, for selecting an Educate Together primary school for their children. Significant numbers of parents indicated that the school was selected upon the basis of its multi-denominational, ethos and co-educational character. These aspects accounted for fifty six percent (56%) of all first preferences (26%, 18% and 12% respectively). It may therefore be concluded that many parents are very deliberate in their selection of AETNS as being the most appropriate primary school for their children. The researcher rejoices in this result. It justifies the years of hard work and effort spent campaigning to establish a school, our school, appropriate to the needs of our community. This result also vindicates the decision to build an Educate Together school in the locality. Elected politicians and councillors, existing primary school principals and the clergy opposed the choice of primary school. A vociferous and determined operation was mounted to thwart the project. This soon petered out when it became apparent that there was wide-spread support form the wider community for the initiative. Much later, five years to be precise, the researcher had the enviable pleasure of welcoming all community representatives and delegations to

participate in the formal opening of AETNS's permanent new building. We had arrived.

In considering the school to be located in a convenient location, only sixteen percent (16%) of parents indicated that this was their first preference selection. This result would infer to the researcher that these parents are willing to travel distances in order to have their children educated in an Educate Together primary school. This deduction was confirmed when the addresses of the parents of fifth and sixth class pupils were examined. Eighteen (18) out of a total of fifty (50) pupils – representing thirty six percent (36%) of this group, live in areas *outside* the vicinity of the school. This result helps substantiate the conclusion, previously made, that AETNS is the school of choice for these parents.

Fourteen percent (14%) of parents stated that no other primary school was available for them to choose from. This figure is lower than was expected. West Dublin has experienced a large shortfall of primary school places for a number of years with many of the existing schools having vastly oversubscribed pre-enrolment lists. One theory which may account for this result is that it concerns only the higher classes' i.e. fifth and sixth. These classes have experienced relatively pupil high turnovers in recent years. (Families moving house is one explanation which has been proposed.) It would be worthwhile to conduct a similar study with parents of Junior and Senior Infants classes to determine if these results could be replicated.

Finally, eight percent (8%) expressed their opinion that the school, being housed in a modern building, was the reason for their first preference. This low figure is in keeping with the researcher,s expectations. It should be remembered that the majority of these parents had originally enrolled their children when AETNS was based in inappropriate temporary accommodation. The likelihood that their children would attend school in a modern, well designed permanent building was far removed from their immediate concerns; namely to establish a multi-denominational primary school which catered for their needs.

## 6. 7. 2. Preferred Post-Primary School Destinations

Analysis of the results revealed that the overwhelming choice was a co-educational community college (64%). Whilst this is not unexpected, given that AETNS is co-educational, the number of pupils that are expecting to travel *out* of their existing catchment area is. Sixty percent (60%) of parents indicated that their children would be attending a different community college outside the catchment area despite the availability of a local community college near by. In all but one of the cases where the pupil was expecting to attend a post-primary school outside their catchment area, this child was always the eldest son or daughter. This situation can perhaps be explained by one of the following two factors.

In the first instance, the local community college applies a sibling policy. This makes it more difficult for the eldest child in a family to gain access to the school. Parents, by enrolling their eldest child in the school outside their

locality, have significantly improved chances of placements for any remaining siblings.

Secondly, discussions with parents revealed that they were better convinced of the potential for their children to succeed in the post-primary school outside their locality. The majority of parents had attended this school's annual 'Open Night' and had subsequent meetings with both the principal and deputy principal. Parents were satisfied that their children would integrate well into this school.

The researcher has established that the school in question utilises graphic designers to produce newspaper advertisements which appear prior to the 'Open Night'. This, in conjunction with the principals' availability to meet prospective parents, seems to indicate an explicit and deliberate 'public relations' programme.

### 6. 7. 3. Single-Sex or Co-educational Post-primary Destinations?

Twelve percent (12%) of parents identified a single sex boy's school as the school of choice while twenty two percent (22%) of parents selected a single sex girl's school. Anecdotal evidence from primary school teachers indicated that the majority of those parents intending to enrol their children in single sex schools were members of various foreign national communities. (This view was later substantiated when the sixth class graduation brochure for the 'Class of 2005' was published. Details of all the pupil's names and post-primary school destinations were outlined. The family surnames of Kalid, Ogunsola, Khan,

Patchu, Nateel, Tomulisni and Singh were the only non Irish surnames printed. These pupils are of Muslim or Hindu faith and were, in all cases, enrolled in single sex post-primary schools.) Why is this occurring?

**Note:** The family surnames given are pseudonyms and not the pupil's actual name.

The researcher has established that amongst foreign-national parents, culture extensively dictates the post-primary school destination of their children. Single-sex schools provide the gender segregation that some cultures demand for young adults. This particular outcome of the investigation was unexpected by the researcher given his limited contact with people belonging to these cultures and may have serious implications for the development of any Educate Together post-primary school. It had always been assumed, by both the researcher and many of the participants interviewed in the course of this investigation that the inter-cultural and co-educational aspects at AETNS would carry forward into a post-primary school. It would appear that such assumptions were both premature and naïve. Further research into this outcome is warranted.

### 6. 7. 4. Parental Interest in Establishing an E.T Post-primary School

Sixty five percent (65%) of respondents indicated their opinion of the need to develop an Educate Together post-primary school. Fifty two percent (52%) indicated that they would support such a school by sending their children to attend. No specific reason is apparent for the fourteen percent (14%) difference between the two figures. A possible explanation can be offered by concluding

that parents wishing to send their children to single sex schools answered negatively to this question.

The researcher finds that the high number of positive responses; sixty five percent (65%) indicates a noteworthy groundswell of support for the establishment of an Educate Together post-primary school. This result illustrates the confidence that these parents have developed for the organisation and dynamic within the primary school. Furthermore, it confirms the trust which parents feel they can extend to the school organisation in any future post-primary school development. This result is not without significance.

## 6. 8. Survey B

Survey B revealed interesting details regarding the preferences of parents in their choice of post-primary schools. Co-educational schools are, it has been established, the principal destination of sixth class pupils from AETNS. These figures closely replicate the results of Survey A which was conducted one year earlier. Seventy six percent (76%) of former AETNS pupils now attend a co-educational community college or school. This represents a rise of ten percent (10%) on the previous year.

A community college outside the locality attracts more pupils from AETNS than the local community college. Sixty two percent (62%) of the graduate sixth class pupils have enrolled in this school for the academic year 2005-2006. This rise may be explained by the 'lobbying' of parents through newspaper articles and an 'Open Night' conducted by the community college. If this assumption were

to be proven correct it would indicate that schools are 'straying' outside their traditionally established catchment areas in order to attract more pupils. The underlying reasons for this occurrence are unclear. Is it that the community college is beginning to experience falling attendance from the local area? Or is it that the school is attempting to attract pupils from an apparently more middle-class background? Further investigations on attendance figures would help determine the answer.

The research has indicated that parents of AETNS pupils narrowly chose 'extra-curricular activities' in favour of 'academic record' when considering the most appropriate post-primary school for their child. This result confirms the expressed opinions of parents who participated in discussions that each student's personal development was as valued as their academic achievement. This, the researcher feels, is an important outcome. It establishes, albeit on a small scale, that the AETNS parent is *deliberate* in the choices they make regarding their children's education.

Thirty five percent (35%) of respondents in Survey B expressed dissatisfaction with the selected post-primary schools. The sources of their concern centred primarily on bullying, reduced emphasis upon the pastoral care and authoritarian codes of discipline. These issues were most pronounced in the single sex schools, particularly regarding references to bullying. Is it the case that more instances of bullying occur or are reported in single sex schools than any other? Or are there other factors at play? Are AETNS pupils, for example regarded

differently by school colleagues in single sex schools than in co-educational schools?

The researcher has not enquired into these areas, however it would be worthwhile consider another Educate Together primary school location using similar research instruments to determine if comparable outcomes can be found.

The researcher concludes, from the body of evidence produced in the course survey B, that the majority of parents (65%) *are* satisfied with their selected post-primary school. However, there is a significant percentage of parents (35%) who state that they are dissatisfied and further identify some causation thereof.

It appears from the research that students from AETNS are experiencing difficulties in being accepted by other students when entering single sex post-primary schools. This phenomenon, which was quite unexpected, has occurred primarily in the case of a boy's school with two other incidents being reported in a girl's school. In the case of the co-educational school, no incidences were reported. The researcher strongly recommends that this outcome should be investigated in other Educate Together primary school areas with the view to determining if this issue is a result of local conditions or is more widespread. The national office of Educate Together will be informed of this finding and shall be urged to investigate further.

## 6. 9.  Interviews with AETNS parents

A total of six interviews or discussions were held with parents of fifth and sixth class pupils. These parents were selected for interview on the basis that each had

a history of long term commitment to the school in that all of their children were enrolled, since junior infants in AETNS. These parents were also personally known to the researcher and had indicated a willingness to be interviewed at some point earlier in the research process. Three individuals of this group are currently active on committees in AETNS. Amongst this group are two practising teachers, one from the primary and the other from the post-primary school sectors. A gender balance was maintained in the selection of the participants which also included members of an ethnic minority community in AETNS.

Two distinct concerns emerged from the discussions held with these parents. The first was the anxiousness as described by parents for their children's integration into the post-primary school sector. These parents feel that their children enjoy a learning experience which is characterised by high levels of support and encouragement by teachers in an atmosphere of mutual respect and co-operation. Their fears are that the pupils will experience difficulties in transferring to more regimented and formalised teaching system. Such concerns were expressed separately by each participant during discussions.

In one case, concerning parents from an ethnic minority background, the mother expressed, in quite emotional terms, her worries regarding her son's transfer from AETNS to post-primary school. *"He won't survive"*, was her most frequent comment.

Other participants stated similar opinions, but with less emotional emphasis. It was noteworthy that Irish national parents, when referring to their child's transfer to post-primary school generally indicated that, *"They* [the pupils] *will just have to get on with it"*. This, to the researcher, infers a higher level of tolerance for the existing post-primary school system with which these parents are themselves familiar. It implies also an acceptance by these parents of a 'rite of passage' through which their children must pass.

This group of participants were of the opinion that a post-primary Educate Together school would be a desirable option for their children. The non existence of an 'over-arching' religious ethos was an *"attractive"* feature which, in conjunction with the multicultural activities of the school could, it was felt, accommodate AETNS pupils more easily. These parents also collectively expressed the opinion that the Educate Together ethos and code of practice had stimulated parental interest and involvement in the primary school and that it *"made sense"* to pursue developments onto post-primary education.

The second concern generally expressed throughout these discussions was the parent's expectations regarding the role and purpose of education. AETNS parents participating in this study clearly indicated that their primary concern for their children is that they enjoy their school experience and also that they develop the necessary personal and technical skills to cope with modern living. Academic attainment is regarded as an important outcome of schooling and is valued by these parents for the benefits it endows. However, these parents indicate that they equally value a broad learning base which fosters extra-

curricular activities and interpersonal skills development. This point was also solidly expressed by parents in Survey B where extra-curricular activities out-scored academic records in first preferences for school selection.

The post-primary examination system was discussed with all participants. At some stage during each discussion the participant commented upon the unsuitability of terminal examinations to adequately measure a student's performance. In this regard, many parents stated similar wishes to reform all modes of assessment along more 'humane' guidelines. The existing Leaving Certificate had, it was stressed, become 'outdated' and 'exclusive' and was badly in need of revision.

The discontinuance of the Junior Certificate was mentioned on more than one occasion. Participants that were knowledgeable of the Transition Year programme indicated its suitability for becoming the preferred learning methodology for junior cycle students.

## 6. 10. Focus Group

The discussion with this focus group resulted in interesting and significant conclusions. In the first instance was the general agreement amongst the participants that an Educate Together post-primary school would be widely supported in the community. This view was expressed from the outset of the discussion and remained unchanged throughout. Reference was made to the post-primary school pre-enrolment – conducted in March 2002 which resulted in the collection of over eight hundred names and now (July 2005) stands at eleven

hundred – as a testament to the willingness of parents in the community to support its establishment. Certainly, it could be argued that parents enrolling their children with this project were doing so to ensure a placement, and undoubtedly have enrolled children in other schools, but the numbers must speak for themselves.

Ryeglen Educate Together National School has since been established in the area and will effectively double the number of pupils attending Educate Together schools in the locality. Preliminary enquiries indicate that these parents are also interested in examining the possibility of a post-primary school development under the banner of Educate Together.

In the second instance was the conclusion of this influential group that, despite the interest which may exist in establishing a post-primary school, the determination to do was absent. This was a surprising outcome to the researcher.

It transpired in the course of the discussion that members of the Executive Committee (Patron at AETNS) and Board of Management felt so encumbered by their responsibilities and duties to the primary school that they were unwilling to engage in this project. Their current workload was, they described as *"onerous"* and *"arduous"* and effectively disqualified them from wider ranging activities. An immediate effect of this regrettable situation is the probable loss of an immeasurable body of knowledge and experience which could be brought to bear in support of the project. In the absence of an Educate

Together second-level co-ordinating group, small school communities, such as AETNS, cannot afford loose such personal 'capital' from their ranks.

Has the stage been reached where the 'voluntary' nature of involvement in school management by parents is no longer sustainable? Is it necessary to professionalize the role of the parent in a more permanent fashion – as a remunerated member of the staff?

Is this situation unique to AETNS or are other Educate Together schools experiencing similar difficulties? Further research is strongly recommended.

One possible solution to problem of acquiring sufficient support to develop post-primary education in West Dublin would be to develop a working group comprised of both AETNS and RETNS school communities. It would be in the mutual interests of both primary schools to cooperate on this project and would perhaps enjoy a greater chance of succeeding.

Finally, with regard to determining how an Educate Together post-primary school would differ from the existing of provision of secondary schools, the Focus Group proposed that teaching should occur in modular based programmes in which teachers operated as facilitators of learning. Whilst this is not an original innovation, it does however indicate the willingness of parents to engage in 'futuristic' learning programmes as distinct from the teaching, learning and assessment instruments current employed in contemporary post-primary schooling.

## 6. 11. Conclusions

This study reveals that there is an expectation by parents/guardians at AETNS that an Educate Together post-primary school could make a significant contribution to the social and personal development of their children. This outcome was not unexpected. Parental satisfaction with the existing primary school structure is high.

Of particular significance to this investigation has been the outcome that parents at AETNS, whilst accepting of the need to establish an Educate Together post-primary school, are unwilling to actively engage in its development. Throughout the course of this investigation the researcher encountered individuals willing to assist in the exploration of a post-primary school. Few however, were prepared to take ownership of the project on behalf of the school community.

It has been established that members of the Executive Committee (Patron), Board of Management and The Parents Association are so heavily burdened with the management and maintenance of the existing primary school that they are disinclined to consider, at this point in time, further responsibilities. It has been suggested, on more than one occasion, that the development of an Educate Together post-primary school requires an orchestration of participating local primary schools under the direction of the national body. The general consensus of participants being that no new development in this area was likely to occur into the foreseeable future.

Many parents, through their active involvement with the management structure at AETNS, have observed and consequently developed a greater critical awareness of the inner machinations of an educational institution. This familiarity has invariably led some parents to expect that post-primary schools would allow similar access to their management structures. This has not been their experience.

The most popular post-primary school destination for AETNS pupils is the co-educational community school.

Direct evidence from the research indicates that significant numbers of parents of former pupils at AETNS are dissatisfied with their level of participation in local post-primary schools.

Teacher training was identified by the researcher as a weakness of the existing systems. Towards resolving this issue is the proposal that greater consideration be given to developing training programmes with an emphasis on full term degree qualifications rather than the 'snap-on' attachments better known as Higher Diplomas. The researcher envisages that teachers in Educate Together post-primary schools would regard professional accountability as an important feature of their working conditions and in return would expect much greater support in their teaching roles through improved and more frequent in-service education.

Parents at AETNS are concerned that the government's educational policies are increasingly directed – disproportionately – towards the generation of wealth and not towards the betterment of society as a whole. The economic aims of the Lisbon Agreement ever increasingly appear to supplant the educational aims of Dewey, Freire, Schein *et al.* Education, parents feel, should not be regarded as the creation of viable economic 'utilities' but rather towards the empowerment of the individual to enhance their potential in both the personal and social domain. This view is supported by the greater proportion of parents who participated in this study.

Participants, interviewed in the course of this research, have expressed concern that society is losing sight of the democratic purposes for which education was intended. Education, the participants felt, is much more than merely obtaining qualifications which enable young people to secure employment. Instead education should be celebrated as a process of liberation from the strictures of conformity and subservience. In a democratic and pluralist society education should provide the means by which all individuals find available to them the opportunities to enjoy personal fulfilment.

The significant societal and cultural changes that are now occurring in contemporary Ireland merit a new vision of education appropriate to the needs of students and parents. Institutions of the State must find the means to nurture and support new opportunities for educational processes to strive. Students, at all levels, must be exposed to ideologies which stimulate their thought processes

regarding rights and responsibilities and further cultivates respect for the diversity of peoples that exist.

There State must also acknowledge that a large scale educational monolith cannot satisfy the smaller democratic entities which are active and support many communities. The smaller players in the field have a valuable contribution to make.

The State is slow to recognise this contribution from community enterprise which has achieved many outstanding successes in our recent times.

The researcher feels that barriers to developing intercultural education will continue to exist if the current system remains in position to serve only the cultural and societal traditions from which it evolved. In our emerging pluralist society notions of conformity; acquiescence to the dominant features of the day, should come to be regarded as obsolete. Interculturalism, the respectful co-habitation of diverse cultures and traditions living together must become part of the new tradition. Education, in any civil society must teach people, young and old alike, to respect differences in religions, lifestyles and values. Difference should be valued – for it renders us as distinct and unique.

Cognisance must be given to the rapidly changing nature of local communities in our State. Facilities and provisions must be generated to support and sustain their continuing viability. Such accommodations will, the author believes, inevitably entail the development and implementation of, amongst others, the

establishment of newer forms of post-primary schooling appropriate to the needs of the coming generation.

The futuristic recommendations as described in an earlier NCCA document, *Directions for Development* (2002) are idealistic and visionary. The scope for improved involvement, engagement and enjoyment in learning for both parents and pupils is addressed. However the setting, namely culturally frozen and static work practices and procedures that currently exist in many schools will stifle progress and limit the effect of any desirable change.

An ideal location to develop new learning environments is in a progressive institution free of historical traditions and practices that are associated with contemporary education. An Educate Together post-primary school – a model school – can be such a setting. Where true independent and self directed learners can work within flexible timetables and can learn under enlightened guidance. Where the relationship between school management and teachers is characterised by trust and engagement and shares the common goal of facilitating meaningful and enjoyable school experiences for all.

*Not changing, leaving things as they are is not an option. It is a temptation'...[post-primary] is too important a stage in life and education of a young person to attempt to hold the system together with superficial repairs or to await the onset of a crisis. More significant rebuilding is needed* (NCCA, 2002, p.28).

## 6. 12.  Recommendations

A national survey of Educate Together primary schools should be conducted in order to determine the numbers of schools that are engaged in the process of establishing a post-primary school provision for their pupils.

That research, similar to this investigation conducted at AETNS, is undertaken in locations where Educate Together post-primary schools are being considered. (To determine if comparable difficulties are encountered elsewhere.)

An informational website should be developed. This would enable parents, school representatives and other interested parties to communicate across national and international borders. This would facilitate a wider dialogue amongst those interested developing in similar projects.

Further research is required into the post-primary school destinations of Educate Together sixth class pupils.

It appears from the research that students from AETNS are experiencing difficulties in being accepted by other students when entering single-sex post-primary schools. Further research is required into this phenomenon to determine its extent and causation.

Research should be carried out to determine the extent of the 'voluntary' nature of involvement in school management by parents in Educate Together schools.

## 6. 13. Proposals for A Future Educate Together Post-Primary Schools Curriculum.

Finally, the author now proposes a theoretical curriculum framework within which an Educate Together post-primary school model could operate. This framework has been included on the basis that it supplements existing topics in both Junior and Leaving Certificate subject areas and also in the hope that it may generate further dialogue and discussion for the reader.

Post-primary schools should offer an inclusive arrangement of contemporary culture within the curriculum. The following series of points is designed to act as a potential framework. This structure offers the student greater exposure to a wider, more inclusive curriculum in which diversity is acknowledged and respected.

## Towards developing a more diverse and inclusive school curriculum and environment:

- Music and art studies from a wider variety of cultures.

- Study Literature from a wide selection of cultures, ethnicities and religions.

- Libraries to include books representing all sections of the student population.

- Inviting parents/guardians and representatives from the many cultural and religious groups within the school community to speak in classes. (Similar projects are currently being conducted in some Transition Year Programmes. This proposal entails extending their application throughout the year groups – particularly in Civil, Social and Political Education classes.)

- Physical education classes to include minority national games and activities.

- National days and religious events to be recognised within the school.

- The Department of Education and Science to initiate a recruitment campaign which, as its primary objective, would be the employment of qualified teaching staff from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. If necessary the Department should instigate recruitment in foreign teacher training colleges and universities.

- Similarly, qualified persons with disabilities would be encouraged to take up teaching positions in schools.

## The role of an Educate Together post-primary school must be to:

- **Integrate the naturally occurring diversity in communities into schools.**
  Schools must mirror the communities they serve.

- **Assist the students develop a positive self image.**
  Allow pupils to see who they are, where they come from and to feel proud.

- **Demonstrate that there is difference and this difference is good.**
  Stimulate a capacity to relate and respect diversity in society.

- **Teach students to recognise prejudice and to become critical of bias.**
  Identify stereotypical imaging, bullying and discrimination.

- **Stimulate the student's capacity to confront bias and unfair treatment.**
  Foster critical and reflective thinking in young people.

# Appendices

## Appendix A

### Educate Together Charter

**Recalling** Article 26.3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

"Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children"

and Article 42.4 of the Constitution of Ireland:

"The state shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and, when the public good requires it, provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard, however, for the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation",

**and recognising:**

1.1    That many parents have a valid preference for schools in which boys and girls of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds can be educated together in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and respect,

1.2    That the multi denominational schools established under the banner of Educate Together are a distinctive response to the growing demand for such an option within the Irish educational system,

**Educate Together affirms that:**

2.1    Children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds have a right to an education that respects their individual identity whilst exploring the different values and traditions of the world in which they live,

2.2    Parents are entitled to participate actively in decisions that affect the education of their children. In particular, they have the right to decide what kind of school reflects their conscience and lawful preference,

2.3    Multi denominational schools have the right to be treated no less favourably than other schools within the Irish educational system, in accordance with their needs and their identity,

2.4    The state has a duty to take the identity of the multi denominational sector fully into account when deciding on policy that affects the establishment and development of schools,

**and Commits itself to:**

3.1     Support the establishment of schools which are,

**Multi-denominational** i.e. all children having equal rights of access to the school, and children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds being equally respected,

**Co-educational** and committed to encouraging all children to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities,

**Child centred** in their approach to education,

**Democratically run** with active participation by parents in the daily life of the school, whilst positively affirming professional role of the teachers, in any area where the demand for such a school exists,

3.2     Promote fuller awareness and recognition of the identity of the multi denominational sector at all levels in Irish society and abroad,

3.3     Participate in appropriate structures and activities concerned with the future development of education in Ireland and abroad,

3.4     Promote a future where multi denominational education will be as freely available to parents as any other educational option they may choose.

# Appendix B

## An Overview of the AETNS Structure

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┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
│   The Executive Committee            │
│   (The Patron Body)                  │
└──────────┬──────────────────────────┘
           │
           ├──────┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
           │      │        The Board of Management           │
           │      └─────────────────────────────────────────┘
           │
           ├──────┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
           │      │      The Parent/Teacher Association      │
           │      └─────────────────────────────────────────┘
           │
           └──────┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
                  │          The Ethos Committee             │
                  └───────────────────┬─────────────────────┘
                                      │
                  ┌───────────────────┴─────────────────────┐
                  │  The Post-Primary Development Committee   │
                  └─────────────────────────────────────────┘
```
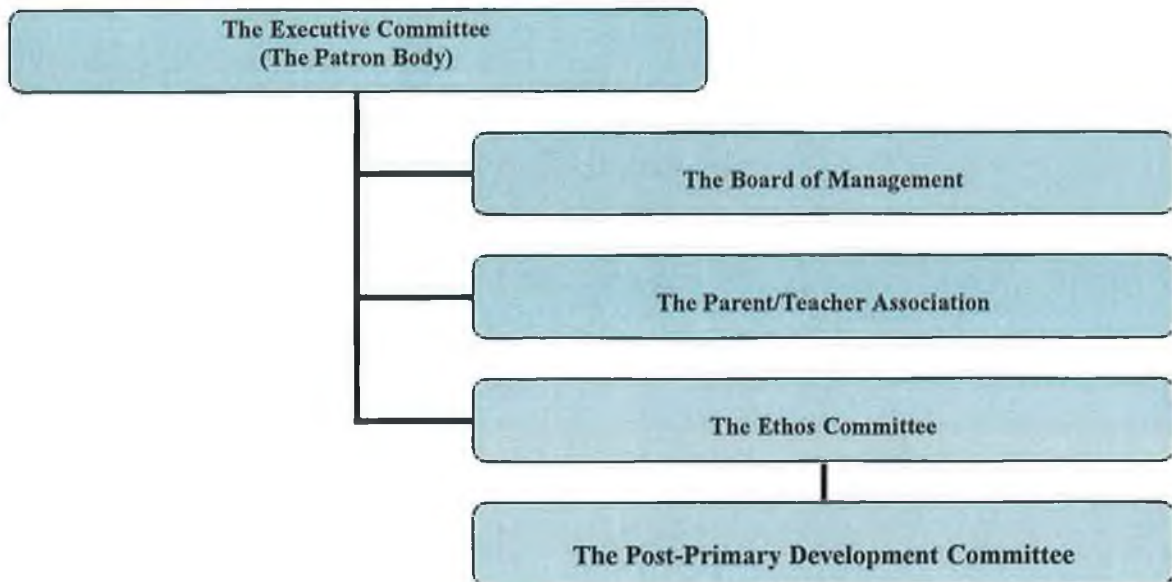
Currently, there are three models of patronage within Educate Together; schools with individual (local) patronage; schools with patronage under the Educate Together national body and finally, schools opened under the patronage of an existing school. (As in the case of Monkstown school which operates under the patronage of the Dalkey School Project.)

AETNS is under the direction of the Executive Committee or Patron Body. The Committee is composed of eight members including a Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer. The remaining members are drawn from the Board of Management and Parent/Teacher Association. AETNS is formed as a limited company with charitable status.

# Appendix C

**Letter to Parents/Guardians regarding survey A.**

<div align="right">14<sup>th</sup> June 2004</div>

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am writing to you to request your participation in a survey. I am researching the *preferred* type of secondary education that parents/guardians are choosing for their children on completing 6<sup>th</sup> class. This research is being done as part of a programme of further education in Maynooth University.

There are a number of second level school options available to you within the local area; for example, Community College, Christian Brothers and the Presentation Convent etc. Of particular interest to me is your choice of secondary school which you feel is the most appropriate for your child.

Also, if the option of a second level school, which operated under a similar ethos and structure of an Educate Together primary school, were available to you, would you send your son/daughter there?

Please, take the time to complete the short questionnaire that accompanies this letter. Your cooperation would be greatly appreciated.

Yours Gratefully,

Philip Devereux

# Appendix D

## Survey A

Re: Parents of pupils *currently* attending an Educate Together primary school.

The information collected in this survey is being used to determine the *preferred* choice of secondary school as determined by parents of pupils attending an E.T. primary school.
Parents cannot be identified from the answers given. A result of this survey will be posted in the school.
Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.
Please check the relevant boxes. √

**Question 1.**  How many of your children are in attendance at *this* school? ☐

**Question 2.**  How many boys? ☐    How many girls? ☐

**Question 3.**  In this school, which class is your *eldest* child in? (Please tick the appropriate box)

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Jnr. Infant  Snr. Infant  1ˢᵗ  2ⁿᵈ  3ʳᵈ  4ᵗʰ  5ᵗʰ  6ᵗʰ

**Question 4.**  Please state if this child is the eldest boy ☐ or girl ☐

**Question 5.**  Have you already considered a secondary school for your eldest child attending this school?

Yes ☐    No ☐

**Question 6.**  If you chose Yes to the previous question, please state the type of school chosen.

☐                    ☐                    ☐                    ☐
**Community College**   **Christian Brothers**   **Presentation Convent**   **Fee Paying School**
(Co-educational)     (Boys Only)         (Girls Only)

☐  **Other** - Please indicate the school type.

_____
_____
_____
_____

**Question 7.** In your opinion, is there a need to develop an Educate Together Secondary school?

Yes ☐     No ☐

Please provide a short statement for your choice of answer to the above question.

_____

_____

_____

_____

**Question 8.** If the option to send your child to an E.T. secondary school in your locality were available – would you choose to send your child there?

Yes ☐     No ☐

**Question 9.** Please indicate, by using 1$^{st}$ preference (1) 2$^{nd}$ preference (2) etc your reasons for selecting this school as the school of choice for your child.

☐ The school is in a convenient location.

☐ The school is co-educational. (Boys and girls attend.)

☐ The school is multi-denominational.

☐ The school is housed in a modern building.

☐ No other primary school was available.

☐ The school ethos.

☐ The school is more democratic in its organisation.

Please feel free to provide any other statement which more correctly reflects your reasons for selecting this school for your child(ren).

_____

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_____

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# Appendix E

## Letter to Parents/Guardians regarding Survey B.

1[sh] June 2005

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am writing to you requesting your participation in a survey.

Your son/daughter has recently entered secondary school having previously attended an Educate Together primary school. I am investigating the reasons and motives as to *why and for what reasons* students choose to attend a particular secondary school.

There are a number of second level school options available to you within the local area; for example, Community College, Christian Brothers and the Presentation Convent etc.

If you had the option of having an Educate Together secondary school available to you, would you send your son/daughter there?

This research is being done as part of a programme of further education in Maynooth University. Please, take the time to complete the short questionnaire that accompanies this letter.

Your cooperation would be greatly appreciated.

Yours Gratefully,

_____

Philip Devereux

# Appendix F

# Survey B

Re: Parents of pupils *formerly* attending an Educate Together primary school.

The information collected in this survey is being used to determine parental satisfaction with the choice of secondary school for their child. All questions relate to your **most recent child** to have entered secondary education.
Parents cannot be identified from the answers given.
Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.
Please check the relevant boxes. √

**Question 1.** Your most recent child to enter 2nd level education is a boy ☐ girl ☐

**Question 2.** The school chosen is boy's only ☐ girl's only ☐

mixed boys & girls ☐

**Question 3.** This school is in the locality ☐ outside the locality ☐

**Question 4.** Who decided upon this school as the preferred choice?

Parents ☐ Child ☐

**Question 5.** Please indicate, by using 1st preference **(1)** 2nd preference **(2)** etc the main reasons for selecting this school as the school of choice.

For its academic record. ☐ For its attention to discipline. ☐

For its extra curricular activities. ☐ For its facilities. ☐

For its closeness to the home. ☐ For its pastoral care. ☐

If, in your opinion, none of the above options apply, please indicate any other reasons for the choice of school.

_____

_____

_____

**Question 6.** Did you seek the opinion of the primary school as to the most appropriate secondary school for your son/daughter?

Yes ☐        No ☐

**Question 7.** If the opportunity presented itself again, would you be satisfied to allow your son/daughter to attend the same secondary school?

Yes ☐                No ☐

If you answered **No** to the previous question, please indicate your reason(s) for doing so.

_____

_____

_____

_____

**Question 8.** If the option to send your child to an Educate Together secondary school in your locality were available – would you choose to send your child there?

Yes ☐        No ☐

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Board but shall not have a vote nor be entitled to vote. The Principal shall be the permanent Secretary of the Board and in his/her absence the Deputy Principal shall act as Secretary.

(vii) The members nominated and elected as prescribed shall remain members until the third year after the date when their Board was first constituted to the intent that the term of membership of any Board of Management shall not exceed three years.

(viii) A vacancy occurring in the membership of the Board shall be filled by a member nominated or elected by the body who had nominated or elected the person who had ceased to be a member.

(ix) The term of office of a Board shall be deemed to expire on the 30th day of October in the third year after the Board was constituted.

(x) The nomination and election of members of an incoming Board shall be made and done at least one month before the date of expiry of the term of office of the then existing Board and the Board so constituted shall assume office forthwith on that expiry date.

(xi) Members of the existing Board or of former Boards shall be eligible for nomination or election provided that they have retained their qualification for such nomination or election.

(xii) The voting members of the Board shall at their first meeting in each year elect one of their number as Chairperson of their meetings for that year. An election for Chairperson shall thereafter take place annually. If the Chairperson shall be absent from any meeting, the voting members present shall, before any other business is transacted, choose one of their number to preside at that meeting.

(xiii) Where the Board is established before a Principal is appointed the Board shall appoint one of its members to act as Secretary for the time being.

(xiv) "Year" means the period of twelve months commencing on the first day of October in each year.

**Members of the Board not financially interested in the School.**

4. Except in special circumstances with the approval in writing of the Minister no member of the Board shall take or hold any interest in any property held or used for the purposes of the School or receive any remuneration for services as a member of the Board, or be interested in the supply of work or goods to or for the purposes of the School.

**Determination of Membership of the Board.**

5.    Any member of the Board who is absent from all the meetings of the Board during the period of one year, except for reasons approved by the Board, or who is incapacitated from acting, or who communicates in writing to the Secretary of the Board a wish to resign shall thereupon cease to be a member of the Board.

**Quorum.**

6. (a)  Five voting members shall be required to form a quorum for a meeting of the Board

   (b)  If at the time appointed for a meeting a sufficient number of members to form a quorum is not present, or if at any meeting the business is not completed, the meeting shall stand adjourned sine die and a special meeting shall be summoned as soon as may be convenient.

   (c)  Any meeting may be adjourned by resolution.

**Meeting of Board.**

7. (a)  The Board shall in addition to holding a meeting at least once in every school term hold such other meetings as may be necessary for the efficient discharge of its functions.

   (b)  A meeting of the Board may be convened at the request of any five of its voting members.

**Convening of Meeting.**

8. (a)  Seven clear days at least before a meeting of the Board, a notice to attend the meeting, specifying the business proposed to be transacted thereat, and signed by the Secretary, shall be left at, or sent by post to the usual place of residence of each member of the Board.

   (b)  The names of the members present at a meeting of the Board shall be recorded in the minutes of that meeting.

**Minutes of Meetings.**

9.    The minutes of the proceedings of the Board shall be kept by the Secretary. The Minutes shall be open to inspection by the Minister.

10    The expression "Parents" in this document should be taken to include "Legal Guardians".

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# Appendix H

## Articles of Management

### For Ashbrook Educate Together Secondary School.

1. The school shall be managed with the object of providing a comprehensive system of post-primary education open to all the children of the community, combining instruction in academic and practical subjects and ongoing education for persons living in the area in which the School is located and generally for the purpose of contributing towards the educational development of the said community. The School shall be conducted in accordance with the following articles.

### Finance.

2. (i) The Board shall submit to the Minister before the 30th day of April in each year an estimate in such form as may be required by the Minister the income and expenditure required for the School during the following financial year. Due provision shall be incorporated in the Board's financial scheme and submitted to the Minister. On receipt of the Minister's annual financial allocation, the Board.
Shall allocate any monies as required in its budget.

   (ii) The Board shall open and maintain a Bank Account and shall make petty cash disbursements in the name of the Board. Cheques drawn on the School's account shall be signed by the Principal and by a member of a panel the members of which shall be nominated for that purpose by the Board. The Board may nominate a substitute for the Principal to sign cheques drawn on such account if at any time the Principal is unable to do so.

   (iii) The Board shall at all times keep proper and audited accounts for all monies as is required by law at the given time.

### Premises and Equipment.

3. (i) The Minister shall be responsible for the erection of the School buildings and for the development of the School premises and shall be responsible for the expenditure on the initial equipping of the School

(furniture, books and apparatus in the School and other School materials).

(ii) The Board shall be responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the School premises out of annual financial allocation provided for that purpose by the Minister.

(iii) The Board shall in consultation with the Principal be responsible for carrying out minor repairs and for the choice and replacement of books, stationery, furniture apparatus and other materials for the School and such articles may within the limits of the estimates approved for any year and subject to such regulations as the Minister shall from time to time prescribe. The Board may delegate their functions in this respect to the Principal subject to such conditions as they may think fit to impose.

(iv) Receipts for equipment and other articles ordered for the purpose of the School shall be signed only by the Principal or such other person or persons for that purpose by the Board.

(v) The Minister will make payment for the expenditure incurred upon receipt of certified accounts from the Board or the Principal.

4. The Board shall have an inventory of stock in the School taken annually and shall consider the same and shall submit a report thereon to the Minister.

5. (i) The Board, under the auspices of the committee shall concern itself with the condition and state of repair of the School premises.

(ii) With respect to major repairs to and alterations of the School premises, the work shall be subject to the prior approval of the committee and carried out under the direction of the committee's architect.

(iii) The Board shall determine the uses for community purposes of the School buildings or grounds at times which will not affect School work. Regulations and conditions governing the user of the premises for community purposes shall be prepared by the Board for approval and shall be subject to alteration from time to time with the approval of the Board.

**Selection and Appointment of Staff**

6. (i) Applications for a vacant post shall be sought by the Board by way of advertisement in the local and public press.

(ii) The Board shall convene an Interview Panel for the purposes of interviewing candidates to the positions which may arise in the school.

(iii) The minimum composition of the Interview Panel shall be at least four members; one representative of the Executive Committee, one representative of Educate Together, one Inspector of the Department of Education and Science and the school Principal. The chairperson shall

be agreed by the persons aforesaid from among their own number and shall have a casting vote in the event of a tie.

(iv)    Any member of the Board shall be eligible to act as substitute if any member of the Interview Panel is unable to attend.

(v)    The Principal shall draw up a short list of interviewees from the applications received.

(vi)    The Interview Panel shall after the interviews short list, in order of merit, and shall submit that list to the Board for recommendation.

(vii)    The Board shall have regard to the order of merit settled by the Interview Panel and shall make appointments in accordance therewith save where in any particular instance the Board shall consider there is good and sufficient reason for not making an appointment or for departing from the said order of merit in which event the Board shall submit the matter to the Minister for determination.

(viii)    The qualifications for appointments to the teaching staff shall be such as are stipulated from time to time by the Minister.

(ix)    Vacancies for teaching posts shall be notified to the Minister

### Non Teaching Staff

7.    The non teaching staff of the school, including persons employed for the purposes of care and maintenance of the premises, shall be appointed to and dismissed from service of the Board subject to any directions which may be given by the Minister with regard to the number and conditions of service of such staff.

### Organisation and Curriculum.

8.    Subject to the provisions of the Minister as to the general educational character of the School and its place in the educational system the Board shall have the general direction of the conduct and curriculum of the School. The Board shall arrange for the setting up of a Staff Council consisting of all whole time teachers of the School under the Chair of the Principal.

**Staff Council.**

9.(i) The Staff Council will consider the curricular arrangements of the School and may make recommendations to the Board regarding the extension of the subject range, the arranging of the time-table and the provision of school equipment.

(ii) The Staff Council may, on request, advise the Board of any educational or other problem which the Board may put before it. The Council may, on its own initiative, make submissions to the Board on any educational or other matter connected with the School. At the first meeting of the Staff Council the members shall determine the time and day of it's meetings that such meetings shall not occur less than six times in each year.

10. Subject to the provisions of these articles and to the direction of the Board, the Principal shall control the internal organization, management and discipline of of the School, shall exercise supervision over the teaching and non teaching staff. He/She shall have power, for any cause which he or she judges adequate to dismiss subject to the approval of the Board or to suspend pupils from attendance for not more than ten school days or until the following meeting of the Board whichever is the shorter but on the dismissal or suspension of any pupil the parent or legal guardian shall be informed that he or she has the right to appeal to the Board.

**Returns.**

11. The Board shall forward to the Minister such returns and reports as the Minister may require.

**Indemnity**

12.(i) The Minister shall insure against Fire Damage to the buildings of the school and against occupiers' liability. The Minister shall indemnify the Board and the teaching and non teaching staff in respect of actions or demands taken or made against them arising out of the proper discharge of their duties whether in respect of pupils or otherwise.

(ii) The Minister shall insure in respect of visitors, parents and other members of the public who have permission from the Board to be on the school premises in respect of such risks as may be incurred by them while acting in a normal manner on such premises.

(iii) The Minister shall provide insurance to indemnify the Board or the teaching and non teaching staff against claims by visitors, parents or other member of the public who without permission shall be on the school premises where

such claims shall be made in circumstances which do not disclose a default or wrongful act on the part of the Board or the members of the staff against whom such actions are made.

The expression "parents" in this document again should be taken to include "legal guardians".

# List of Tables

| Year | Closures | New Schools | | | |
|------|----------|-------------|---|---|---|
| | | **Catholic** | **Gaelscoileanna** | **Educate Together** | **Others** |
| 1998 | 12 | | 6 | 1 | 1 |
| 1999 | 14 | | 4 | 1 | 1 |
| 2000 | 17 | | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| 2001 | 11 | 2 | 2 | 2 | |
| 2002 | 9 | | 3 | 7 | |
| 2003 | n/a | 2 | 2 | 3 | |
| **Total** | **63** | **4** | **18** | **15** | **3** |

## Table 1

All school closures are denominational schools – many as a result of amalgamations.
Source: Educate Together (2005)
www.educatetogether.ie/reference_articles/Ref_Art_005.html (Accessed 21-4-05).

## Table 2

| | | |
|--------------------|------|-------|
| Catholic | 2919 | 93% |
| Church of Ireland | 184 | 5.8% |
| Multi-denominational | 35 | 1.0% |
| Presbyterian | 13 | 0.5% |
| Inter-denominational | 4 | 0.1% |
| Muslim | 2 | 0.06% |
| Methodist | 1 | 0.03% |
| Jewish | 1 | 0.03% |
| Other | 1 | 0.03% |
| **Total** | **3160** | **100%** |

Distribution of Irish Primary Schools according to Religious Ethos, 2002-2003
Source Department of Education and Science (December 2004).

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