



**An Roinn Oideachais**  
**Department of Education**

# **Patronage Assessment Report Post-Primary Schools (2021)**

**Report to the New Schools Establishment Group  
Forward Planning Section  
Department of Education  
December 2020**

<b>Table of Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1. Foreword</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. Patron Code of Conduct</b>	<b>6</b>
➤ 2.1 Patron Expenses	6
➤ 2.2 Issues Raised in Relation to the Code of Conduct	6
<b>3. Parental Preferences</b>	<b>7</b>
➤ 3.1 Eligible Cohort	8
➤ 3.2 Verification of Preferences	8
<b>4. Language</b>	<b>8</b>
➤ 4.1 Assessment	8
➤ 4.2 Parental preferences for Irish	9
➤ 4.3 Technical Issue with OPPS Survey	9
<b>5. School Planning Areas</b>	<b>10</b>
➤ 5.1 Issues Raised	10
<b>6. Summary of Assessments</b>	<b>11</b>
 <b><u>Appendices:</u></b>	
➤ Appendix A – Patron Invitation Letter	
➤ Appendix B – Patron Application Form	
➤ Appendix C – Code of Conduct	
 <b><u>Attachments:</u></b>	
➤ Ballincollig Assessment Report	
➤ Booterstown_Blackrock & Dún Laoghaire Assessment Report	
➤ Dunshaughlin Assessment Report	
➤ Gorey Assessment Report	

## 1. Foreword

Chairperson,  
New Schools Establishment Group (NSEG).

Dear Chairperson,

On the 13<sup>th</sup> April 2018, the Government announced plans for the establishment of 42 new schools over the next 4 years (2019 to 2022). This announcement follows nationwide demographic exercises carried out by the Department into the current and future need for primary and post-primary school places across the country, with 26 new schools announced at primary level and 16 new schools announced at post-primary level. A small number of additional schools (2 primary and 1 post-primary) were announced in the interim.

The initial announcement in 2018 indicated that post-primary schools were due to be established in 2021 in the following five areas:

- Ballincollig;
- Booterstown\_Blackrock & Dún Laoghaire;
- Dublin2\_Dublin4;
- Donaghmede\_Howth\_D13/Baldoyle/Stapolin; and
- Sallynoggin\_Killiney\_DLR/Cherrywood.

However, the Department has recently completed the first step of a demographic review at post-primary level having regard to updated information on demographics and additional residential development. Following this review the establishment of the schools that were due to be established in the following school planning areas in 2021 were deferred:

- Dublin2\_Dublin4;
- Donaghmede\_Howth\_D13/Baldoyle/Stapolin; and
- Sallynoggin\_Killiney\_DLR/Cherrywood.

As part of the review a demographic need for post-primary provision was identified in other areas of the country. As a result additional new post-primary schools will be established in 2021 in the following school planning areas:

- Dunshaughlin; and
- Gorey.

Accordingly the OPPS was conducted on the patronage of the following post-primary schools which are to be established in 2021:

- Ballincollig;
- Booterstown\_Blackrock & Dún Laoghaire;
- Dunshaughlin; and
- Gorey.

On the 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2020, the Minister invited applications for the patronage of the four new post-primary schools due to be established in September 2021 in the following areas:

School Planning Area	School Size*
Ballincollig	600 pupils
Booterstown_Blackrock & Dún Laoghaire (Regional Solution)	1,000 pupils

Dunshaughlin	600 pupils
Gorey	500 pupils

*\*based on projected need at time of announcement but will be responsive to patronage or demographic demand*

The Department had postponed the patronage process for the post-primary schools due to open in 2021 from earlier in the year, given the Covid-19 related restrictions.

As the year unfolded, it became clear that restrictions would remain in place for the foreseeable future. The Department decided that the OPPS process should commence in October 2020, despite the continuing situation with regard to Covid-19, as it was considered important that the 2021 post-primary patronage process was completed in order that the successful incoming school patrons would have sufficient time to make the necessary preparations for the schools' opening in 2021 and to provide certainty and clarity for incoming patrons, parents and children alike in respect of the patronage of the four post-primary schools to be established in September 2021.

The Department was conscious that, given the restrictions in place nationally as well as the impact of remote working arrangements generally, it would not be possible for patrons to engage in the normal way with communities, and much of the patronage campaigns would have to take place in an online environment.

In light of the remote working arrangements in place for most organisations some adjustments were made to the application process, e.g. removal of the requirement for applicant patrons to submit hard copy application forms and supporting documents which were required to be submitted to the Department by e-mail only.

Despite the different nature of the local campaigns undertaken by the applicant patrons, engagement figures for each of the school planning areas were generally in line with those of previous OPPS.

The closing date for receipt of applications from applicant patron bodies was 21<sup>st</sup> October 2020. On 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2020, the Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) website went live for parents to express their patronage preferences in respect of the new schools to be established in 2021 and closed on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020 at 9am. The applicant patrons for each school are as follows:

School Planning Area	Applicant Patrons
Ballincollig	An Foras Pátrúnachta Le Chéile Schools Trust
Boosterstown_Blackrock & Dún Laoghaire (Regional Solution)	An Foras Pátrúnachta Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB) Educate Together
Dunshaughlin	An Foras Pátrúnachta Catholic Education An Irish Schools Trust (CEIST) Louth & Meath Education and Training Board (LMETB)
Gorey	Catholic Education An Irish Schools Trust (CEIST)

### Code of Conduct

In relation to the Patron Code of Conduct, a number of complaints were received in relation to this process from an applicant patron. Details of the complaints are provided in Section 2 of this report for consideration and discussion at the NSEG meeting.

Given the benefit in engaging with Patrons in the Patron Workshop including on the Code of Conduct, which took place in April 2019, it was intended that the Department would conduct a further workshop in 2020 to continue this useful stakeholder engagement and feedback process however due to the ongoing pandemic and related restrictions, such a workshop was not held in 2020. The Department hopes to be in a position to hold a workshop in 2021.

### School Planning Areas

A matter for consideration has arisen in recent patronage processes, including in the current process, relating to school planning area boundaries. This issue arises predominantly in respect of parents who wish to express a preference for the patronage of a new school, but live outside of the school planning area in which the new school will be located. Further details are provided at Section 5 of this report for consideration and discussion at the NSEG meeting.

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

Consistent with the arrangements governing the patronage process for new schools announced by the Minister in June 2011, the Department has completed its assessment of the applications received for patronage of the new post-primary schools to be established in 2021. This is the resulting report for the New Schools Establishment Group, which is submitted for consideration by the Group. A detailed assessment of each individual area is attached and forms part of this report.

**Jill Fannin,  
Principal Officer  
Forward Planning Section - Department of Education  
10<sup>th</sup> December 2020**

## 2. Patron Code of Conduct

Prior to the last patronage process for the post-primary schools to be established in 2020, a number of amendments were made to the Patron Code of Conduct (attached at Appendix C to this report) on foot of discussions between the NSEG and the Department arising from consultation with the patrons at the patron workshop in 2019. Prior to commencement of the patronage process for the post-primary schools to be established in 2021, an additional line was added to the Code of Conduct to clarify that the Code of Conduct covers the use of online/social media/virtual activity in addition to more traditional means of engaging with parents in light of the increased online engagement resulting from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A number of complaints were received in relation to this process from an individual patron. Details of the complaints are set out in Section 2.2 below.

### ➤ 2.1 Patron Expenses

The Code of Conduct requires that patrons agree to maintain expenditure on promotional material within an overall limit established for each identified area and provide statements of expenditure for the purpose of satisfying these requirements. The expenditure limit for each area is €500 (incl. VAT).

None of the applicant patrons exceeded the limit set out in the Code of Conduct. All of the supporting documentation was submitted within the required timeframe.

Further details of the above will be provided to the NSEG for consideration.

### ➤ 2.2 Issues raised in relation to the Code of Conduct

The below issues were brought to the attention of the Department by an individual patron during the course of the current patronage process:

Patron body	School Planning Area	Summary of Issues Raised
N/A	General point	An applicant patron, An Foras Pátrúnachta (AFP), has expressed its dissatisfaction that parental preferences are limited to those parents/guardians with eligible children who live in the school planning area, given the view of AFP that parents are willing to travel longer distances for Irish-medium education. As a result, parents who may wish to express a preference for a new post-primary school to provide Irish as the language of instruction will not always be from the school planning area which the school is being established to serve.
N/A	General point	An applicant patron, An Foras Pátrúnachta, has expressed its dissatisfaction that due to the composition of primary schools in any given area (which tend to be under one

		patron) that this creates a challenge arising from asking a primary school with one language ethos and one spiritual ethos to support or share information with parents for a different model.
N/A	Technical issue with OPPS survey	An applicant patron, An Foras Pátrúnachta, informed the Department of a technical issue with the Irish version of the OPPS survey and sets out that the issue is likely to disproportionately affect AFP rather than other applicant patrons. Section 4.3 of this report deals with this issue
Le Chéile Schools Trust	Ballincollig	An applicant patron, An Foras Pátrúnachta, has alleged that another applicant patron, Le Chéile Schools Trust, breached the patron Code of Conduct in the above patronage process. The substance of the complaint relates to representatives of Le Chéile Schools Trust allegedly advising parents that there is already a gaelcholáiste in Ballincollig and also that parents have been promised places for their children in the Aonad in Coláiste Choilm.
Le Chéile Schools Trust	Ballincollig	An applicant patron, An Foras Pátrúnachta, has alleged that another applicant patron, Le Chéile Schools Trust, breached the patron Code of Conduct in the above patronage process. The substance of the complaint relates to representatives of Le Chéile Schools Trust allegedly advising parents that special classes will be sanctioned in the new school if the school is under the patronage of Le Chéile Schools Trust.

The Department welcomes the opportunity to discuss the above in detail with the NSEG at the meeting of the Group and will provide the relevant correspondence and responses received from the patron bodies in question.

A number of representations in relation to the patronage process were made to the Department by third parties. These will be provided for the information of the NSEG.

### 3. Parental Preferences

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

### ➤ 3.1 Eligible Cohort

In the 2019/20 school year, there were some 9,223 children in the estimated eligible cohort i.e. first to fifth class students enrolled in the primary schools across the relevant school planning areas. These children are now in 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> class in 2020/21. However, not all of these will wish to or be eligible to express a preference. In many cases, parents may intend sending their child to an existing post-primary school in the area or another area and as a result would not have considered it necessary to express a preference with regard to patronage of the new school.

The Department is satisfied that the percentage of valid preferences expressed in relation to the four new post-primary schools to be established in 2021 (ranging from some 14% to 38% of the eligible cohort) is of a comparable level to valid preferences expressed in relation to the previous post-primary patronage processes for schools that were established between 2014 and 2020 (ranging from some 1% to 44% of the eligible cohort).

In the current patronage process for the four post primary schools to be established in 2021, there were between 302 and 687 valid preferences for each of the four areas.

### ➤ 3.2 Verification of Preferences

The Department has put in place a verification process based primarily on data held in the Department's enrolment databases. Invalid preferences in each of the areas were discounted where:

- The parent submitted duplicates of preferences in relation to an individual child (in which instance the last complete preference was considered the final preference in respect of that child).
- The PPSN was not a valid PPSN and/or was not a valid PPSN relative to the information provided;
- The parent did not actually complete and submit their preferences;
- The parent did not select a preferred patron; and / or
- The child was enrolled in a class group outside of the eligible cohort i.e. not currently enrolled in 2<sup>nd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> class in a primary school in the 2020/21 school year.

## 4. Language

### ➤ 4.1 Assessment

The Department has incorporated the language of instruction of a proposed new school as part of the assessment process for post-primary schools from 2019. This ensures that parental preference for Irish-medium instruction at post-primary level is an integral part of the patronage assessment and recommendation process. It serves to inform decisions concerning a school's language of instruction and brings greater visibility to consideration of the level of demonstrated demand for education through Irish.

It is open to all applicant patrons, where applicable, to propose provision of English or Irish-medium education. Applicant patrons proposing an English-medium school are also required to confirm their commitment to provide an Aonad where there is demand for it. Parental preferences for each patron, together with the extent of Irish provision, if any, currently available in the area, are key in relation to the outcome of this process. In this regard, parents, in expressing their preferences, were requested to indicate their preference for the language through which they would prefer their child(ren) to be educated.



The assessment process analyses existing Irish-medium provision in the area and also takes into account existing Irish-medium provision in the adjacent school planning areas. Consideration is given to demonstrated demand and long-term sustainability, including provision of a sufficient range of subjects. This assists the consideration in terms of whether a new post-primary school should take the form of a Gaelcholáiste (a post-primary where the language of instruction is Irish), an English-medium school or an English-medium school with an Aonad (Irish-medium Unit).

#### ➤ 4.2 Parental preferences for Irish

In respect of parental preferences for Irish as part of the post-primary OPPS, the possibility of establishing an Aonad within a school remains part of the Arrangements for the Establishment and Patronage of New Post-Primary Schools to which the Department must have regard and the NSEG must consider in advising the Minister. The Department acknowledges that a parental preference for Irish-medium education in the OPPS does not necessarily equate to a parental preference for an Aonad in an English-medium school. Equally, it is the Department's view that it is not possible to say that all preferences for Irish medium, or for an Irish-medium patron, are exclusively preferences for gaelcholáistí (i.e. that an Aonad is not acceptable).

In order to have more clarity in relation to a parental preference for Irish-medium education at post-primary level, an additional question was trialled in this OPPS survey. For those parents who indicated a preference for Irish-medium in response to the question on their preferred language for the new school, the following question was also asked: *"If you selected Irish as your language preference, would you consider sending your child to an Aonad (Irish-language unit) in an English-language school in the event that a Gaelcholáiste (Irish-language school) was not established in the area?"*. The options for reply were "yes" or "no".

The question included a brief explanatory note/information box regarding Aonaid as follows: *"An Aonad is an Irish-language unit in an English-language post-primary school. While it is the aim of Aonaid to provide full immersion in the Irish language, in practice, Aonaid provide varying levels of immersion education. Some Aonaid provide all subjects through Irish, in other cases the majority of subjects may be provided through Irish and in some cases, a smaller number of subjects may be provided through Irish."*

The responses to this question are included in the area assessment reports. Across the four areas, 36.5% to 100% of parents who expressed a preference for Irish as their preferred language of the school responded yes to the above question.

The Department considers that the responses to this question provides useful information and intends to include this question in future post-primary OPPS surveys, subject to the views of the NSEG.

The Department continues to consider that Aonaid remain part of the available approaches, in particular circumstances, to providing Irish-medium post-primary education for students who wish to avail of such education.

#### ➤ 4.3 Technical Issue with OPPS Survey

The Department wishes to draw the NSEG's attention to an issue which arose with the Irish version of the OPPS survey. As part of the survey and prior to parents expressing their language preference or their preference for a particular applicant patron, parents were asked for information on each child, including the year the child is due to start post-primary school. The options which were to be available in this regard were each year from 2021 to 2025. This question was on page three of the survey. However, in the Irish version of the OPPS website, four options (2021, 2022, 2023, 2024) were provided rather than five. The option of 2025 as the year to start post-primary school was

inadvertently not included in the Irish version of the OPPS website. It was correctly included in the English version.

This was brought to the Department's attention by an applicant patron during the weekend prior to the OPPS closing for parents at 9am on Monday 16 November. Accordingly the Department was not in a position to amend the Irish version of the OPPS to include 2025 as an option while the survey was live.

The Department has analysed the relevant data on incomplete surveys commenced by parents on the Irish version of the OPPS and has concluded that the maximum number of parental preferences potentially affected by this omission is 33 across the four areas. The basis of this assertion is that some parents would have a number of children due to commence post-primary school over the period 2021 to 2025, if the potential impact of this issue was to be calculated based on each of the parents who started a survey in Irish and continued to page 3 where the error was present (excluding the one parent that subsequently completed a survey through English) having a child due to start post-primary school in 2025 and in respect of whom they would have expressed a preference, the maximum potential impact of this issue would be 33 parental preferences which potentially may have been submitted, had the option of 2025 been available in the Irish version of the OPPS survey.

Given the substantial margins between the first placed patrons and the other applicant patrons and regarding the language parental preferences, the Department is satisfied that this issue, although unfortunate, has not had a material impact on the outcome of the process in any of the four areas.

The Department has enhanced its testing protocols on the OPPS in order to minimise the likelihood that such an error would occur again on the OPPS for parents.

## **5. School Planning Areas**

As indicated in the foreword to this report, queries have been raised in relation to parents who live in a nearby school planning area and wish to express a preference for the new school but cannot as they live outside of the school planning area in which the new school will be located.

In order to plan for school provision and analyse the relevant demographic data, the Department divides the country into 314 school planning areas and uses a Geographical Information System, using data from a range of sources, to identify where the pressure for school places across the country will arise.

The school planning areas are used in the demographic exercise as a basis for the assessment of areas of growth and to inform recommendations on the establishment of any new schools required in that school planning area.

New schools established since 2011 to meet demographic demand are required, in the first instance, to prioritise pupil applications from within the designated school planning area(s) which the school was established to serve. The Department's main responsibility is to ensure that schools in an area can, between them, cater for all pupils seeking school places in the area. This does not preclude schools from enrolling pupils from outside of the designated school planning area where they have sufficient places.

### **➤ 5.1 Issues Raised**

The Department has received a number of communications from parents about the impact of school planning area boundaries on the eligibility of parents to express a preference in patronage processes and on future enrolment of children, given the requirement on patron bodies to prioritise enrolment

from within school planning areas. These concerns arise where parents may wish to express a preference for the patronage of a new school in a nearby school planning area, however only parents of children living within the school planning area in which the new school is located are eligible to express a preference.

New schools established since 2011 to meet demographic demand are required to prioritise the enrolment of children from within the school planning area which the school was established to serve. It is for this reason that only parents of eligible children residing in the school planning area can express a preference with regard to the patronage of the new school. However, an expression of a parental preference for patronage of a school is not an application for enrolment and does not confer any entitlement to a school place. Once the school has been established, parents may apply directly to the school in relation to their child's enrolment.

It is important to note that schools are not precluded from enrolling pupils from outside of the school planning area, rather it reflects the need to accommodate in the first instance the demographic for which the school was established. Where there are places available, applicants for enrolment should be admitted by the school (in accordance with any further prioritisation determined by the school).

The Department does not consider that the revision of school planning areas nationally will necessarily resolve the issue as the impact would be significant, the process would be cumbersome and in any event, would likely still result in families living outside redrawn school planning area perimeters not being in a position to express a preference as part of the OPPS and seeking access to a new school. It had been hoped that more consideration could be given to the issue and certain approaches discussed with patron bodies at a 2020 Patron Workshop, however this was not possible in 2020 due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. It is planned that the Patron Workshop would take place in 2021, at which this issue can be considered with patron bodies.

## 6. Summary of Assessments

The criteria considered in the patronage assessment process was notified to applicant patrons in Enclosure 1 of the Patron Invitation Letter (included in Appendix A to this report). This criteria includes *inter alia* consideration of parental preferences as well as the extent or range of diversity of patronage, including ethos and language of instruction, offered across existing schools in the area. An assessment of each area is attached to this report and a summary of the outcome of each assessment is set out in the table below:

Area	Proposed Patron	Proposed Language of Instruction
Ballincollig	Le Chéile Schools Trust	English
Boosterstown_Blackrock_&_Dún_Laoghaire (Regional Solution)	Educate Together	English
Dunshaughlin	Louth and Meath Education and Training Board	English*

Gorey	Educate Together	English
-------	------------------	---------

\* With the school patron to give consideration to the establishment of an Irish-medium Unit (Aonad) when the new school is in its permanent location, if demand from parents indicate that this would be feasible.

**Forward Planning Section  
Department of Education  
December 2020**