

Ms. Norma Foley, T.D.
Minister for Education
Department of Education
Marlborough Street
Dublin 1

12th February 2021

**Report of the New Schools Establishment Group on the Patronage of Primary
Schools to be established in September 2021**

Dear Minister Foley,

As members of the above named Group, we are pleased to present you with our report on the patronage of three new primary schools due to open in September 2021.

Our role was outlined in a Ministerial announcement of 27th June 2011. That announcement also included the criteria and arrangements for the recognition of new schools and the role of the New Schools Establishment Group to advise the Minister on the patronage of new schools, following its consideration of an assessment report prepared by the Forward Planning Section of your Department. The membership of the NSEG comprises of the following:

- Mr. Joe Hamill, Retired Secretary General of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs;
- Professor Gerry Mac Ruairc, Head, School of Education, National University of Ireland Galway;
- Professor Sarah Moore, Professor of Teaching and Learning, University of Limerick.

On the 12th November 2020, an invitation was issued for applications in respect of the patronage of the three new primary schools due to be established in September 2021. The closing date for receipt of applications from applicant patron bodies was 19th November 2020. On 26th November 2020, the Online Patronage Process System (OPPS) website went live for parents to express their parental preferences and closed at 10am on 21st December 2020.

The Group acknowledges the unprecedented challenges faced by patrons this year and wishes to acknowledge that the Covid-19 environment posed new challenges for applicant patrons. The Covid-19 related restrictions meant that direct face-to-face engagement with applicant patrons and parents was not possible and applicant patrons needed to focus their efforts on online and virtual activities such as hosting online meetings and using social platforms to engage with parents and to increase awareness.

The Forward Planning Section of your Department carried out an assessment in respect of each of the three areas, including an assessment of the parental preferences received. A meeting was

convened on 9th February 2021 with the officials from Forward Planning Section to examine the initial draft assessments that had been forwarded to our Group for consideration.

The Group has considered the assessments made with regard to the patronage of the new primary schools to be established in 2021. The Group is satisfied to confirm its view that the criteria as set out in 2011 by your Department were applied in a fair and transparent manner to the applications received.

On that basis we are satisfied that the following recommendations regarding patronage of the new schools are in accordance with these requirements and criteria, including the extent of diversity regarding both ethos and language of instruction currently available or planned in the relevant/adjoining school planning areas (where applicable), and give due regard to the levels of parental preferences received. The Group is satisfied to make the following recommendations to you in relation to the patronage and language of instruction (where applicable) of the new schools to commence in September 2021.

Area	Proposed Patron	Proposed Language of Instruction
Donaghmede_Howth_D13	An Foras Pátrúnachta	Designated Irish*
Dublin 2_Dublin 4	An Foras Pátrúnachta	Designated Irish*
Sallynoggin_Killiney_DLR/North	Educate Together	English

*These two schools were designated as Irish-medium in advance of the OPPS commencing in accordance with the framework to provide more opportunities to increase the provision of Irish-medium education at primary level announced in September 2019.

In relation to the Patron Code of Conduct, the Group was made aware by Forward Planning Section of an alleged breach of the Code of Conduct by an applicant patron in the Donaghmede_Howth_D13 patronage process, brought to the Department's attention by the other applicant patron. Having considered and discussed the issue regarding the alleged breach of the Code of Conduct in detail, including the response provided by the Patron body against whom the allegation was made, and the overall operation of the Code of Conduct, the Group is satisfied that there were no breaches of the Code of Conduct.

Although the substance of the alleged breach is not considered to be a breach of the Code of Conduct, the Group considered the issue raised at its meeting of 9 February, including the correspondence received both from the applicant patron which brought this to the attention of the Department and from the applicant patron against whom the complaint was made. Having considered the foregoing and the likelihood or otherwise of the issue raised having an impact on the outcome of the process, the Group is satisfied that there was no material impact on the outcome in Donaghmede_Howth_D13.

In forming this view the Group has taken into account the following:

Issue raised: Dublin and Dún Laoghaire Education and Training Board (DDLETB) statement that if it is awarded patronage of the new school in Donaghmede_Howth_D13 that it will open a special class.

NSEG view: The NSEG considers that, in light of the developments in Department of Education policy and the provision of special education in Ireland in recent years, it is not unreasonable to expect that

a new primary school will have special education facilities and/or special education classes. Our view is that this matter did not confer any significant advantage to DDLETB over An Foras Pátrúnachta in this process.

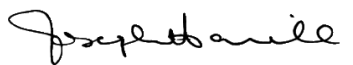
The Group notes that none of the applicant patrons exceeded the expenditure limit for each area of €500 (incl. VAT) set out in the Code of Conduct and that all of the supporting documentation in this regard was submitted.

The Group notes that the Department continues to make good progress in relation to consideration of Irish-medium preferences and is continuing to implement the measures to increase access to Irish-medium education as part of the patronage process for primary schools, including the designation for Irish-medium education of five new primary schools being established from 2020 to 2022, including two of the above schools.

In April 2019, the Department engaged with patron bodies on feedback and learning from the operation of the process and Code of Conduct in the pilot phase for the 2019 schools. It was proposed that the Department would conduct a further workshop in 2020 to continue this useful stakeholder engagement and feedback process. Due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic it was not practicable to conduct such an event in 2020, however, the NSEG welcomes that the Department has set out that it intends to conduct a workshop in 2021 in order to continue stakeholder engagement with the patron bodies.

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

Yours sincerely



Joe Hamill
Chairperson
New Schools Establishment Group