

**University of Strathclyde**  
**Department of Educational Studies**

**The Multi-denominational Option:**  
**A Study of the Educate Together Movement in the Republic of Ireland.**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation explores multi-denominational education in the Republic of Ireland. Educate Together is the umbrella body for the vast majority of such schools. The literature review charts the historical developments of the Irish education system that have shaped the present day system, as well as examining the evolution of the Educate Together sector.

The main research element of the dissertation involved interviews with educational personnel and parents in multi-denominational schools. This element highlights priority issues for the sector and provides an overview of the way the sector is currently organised.

From what is discovered from the interviews and literature review, an attempt is made to make recommendations for future development and future areas of research in the Irish context.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **1.1**            **Introduction**

This chapter begins with a short presentation of the background to the research concern addressed in this dissertation. The aims and objectives as well as the research questions posed, will be explicitly stated. An outline of the structure of the remaining chapters is presented.

#### **1.2**            **Context**

In the academic year 2002-2003 there were approximately 3,200 National (or Primary) schools in the Irish Republic. 99% of these elementary schools are under denominational control (Rowe, 2003). Patrons enjoy considerable protection under the Irish Constitution and statute law.

The establishment, during the last decade, of a number of multi-denominational schools in the Republic of Ireland has been one of the most important structural changes in the Irish education system since the foundation of the state. In a wider context these schools represent one manifestation of the changing demographic and belief patterns. ‘The figures from the 2002 census provide powerful evidence of the irreversible trend towards ethnic and social diversity in Ireland. The figures provide more detail of religious and ethnic diversity than ever before measured and show dramatic increases in all headings of minority opinion’ (Educate Together, 2003, June 19).

As a result of changing patterns of religious practice a considerable number of parents wish to send their children to multi-denominational schools which are committed to respect and actively support the identity of children irrespective of their social, religious or cultural backgrounds. Thus many are opting to send their offspring to Educate Together schools which are in the main set up by groups of concerned parents themselves. Such is the increased demand from parents for multi-denominational schools that Educate Together is 'now opening more schools than any other provider in the state'. (Rowe, 2003, July 23)

However, some opposition from the Department of Education and Science (D.E.S) has and still is being encountered. While the former Minister for Education and Science, Mr. Noel Dempsey, acknowledged that most schools which had been established in recent years were in the Irish medium (Gaelscoileanna) and multi-denominational (Educate Together) sectors, he points out that while the state has an obligation to provide educational facilities, it does not have a constitutional obligation to provide schools of a particular ethos 'everywhere they are demanded' (Irish Independent, 2003, June 11, p.18).

The Catholic and Anglican (Church of Ireland) churches own and manage the vast majority of national schools in the Republic of Ireland. The present system originated in the nineteenth century when all of the island of Ireland was part of the United Kingdom. Attempts to set up multi-denominational schools failed due to determined opposition from some senior clergymen from the major churches. However, today Ireland is a country experiencing the immigration of historically large numbers of

people with diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, which has led to new challenges with regard to the provision of education being faced.

In some ways the government has addressed this challenge by establishing denominational schools e.g. the Muslim Schools.

### **1.3** **Outline of Study**

There is a dearth of research in this area. There are much uncharted waters in the area of multi-denominational education in the Republic of Ireland. There is a definite need for a contemporary history of this movement.

It is imperative to find out why these schools were founded and try and ascertain the reasons why teachers opted to work in and parents chose to send their children to Educate Together schools, so as to gain a greater understanding of the nature of multi-denominational education in Ireland.

Therefore this study is intended to examine the views of parents and teachers with regard to Educate Together and to chart the historical evolution of the movement. Ideally this research will result in a general contribution to the sphere of multi-denominational education in Ireland.

This research has several components. The literature review is examined in chapters two, three and four. The second chapter provides an overview of the historical roots

of the Irish education system. It is necessary that such an account be provided in order to familiarise the reader with the origins of the Irish school system and therefore to fully comprehend the situation that currently exists. This section will, in the main, concentrate on the period from the establishment of the National School system to contemporary times and will highlight how a system that was originally envisaged to be multi-denominational became denominational within a few decades. The Northern Ireland education system is also examined and issues of research in the area of integrated education are identified.

The third chapter provides an insight into the current organisation and categories of both primary and second level schools within the present day Irish education system. This is a complex area and the reader must be fully aware of the various categories of schools that exist in the Republic of Ireland in order to comprehend the emergence of Educate Together. Recent media coverage on controversies regarding the multi-denominational / inter-denominational sectors and the wider issue of the system of patronage within the school system will also be discussed in order to fully acquaint the reader with the current situation.

Chapter four outlines the methodology and data collection process of the research.

Chapters five and six will examine the development of the Educate Together movement and the issue of multi-denominational education in the Republic of Ireland. This data on the Educate Together movement is provided in order that the reader is given a comprehensive account of the evolution of multi denominational education in the Republic of Ireland

The results of the research process are presented in chapter 7 and the conclusions in chapter 8.

This study attempts to give an outline of the development of multi-denominational schools in the Republic of Ireland. It also examines the historical evolution of the education system in Ireland and the general educational context within which primary and post primary schools function in Ireland. The background to the establishment of multi-denominational schools is explored. The role and activities of Educate Together - the co-ordinating committee for existing and prospective schools, are explored. The thesis concludes by discussing the key problems faced by the educational grouping at this stage in its development.

#### **1.4            Aims and Objectives**

The main aims of this research are:

- To research the origins and current state of first and second level education in Ireland.
- To review the current debate on denominational and multi-denominational schools in Ireland.
- To inform future policy on this sphere of education in Ireland.
- To examine the contemporary history of the ‘Educate Together’ movement.



The overall aim of the investigation was to examine the roles of parents and teachers in the establishment and running of the set of multi-denominational schools which have been or are in the process of being established in Ireland.

A number of more specific issues were identified, and these have provided the framework for the actual research. They included:

- How parents become conscious of and involved in the multi-denominational school movement;
- What features of the organisation and running of the schools do parents feel most concerned to be involved in and why do they regard these as legitimate areas of parental concern? How do teachers see the relationship between themselves and parents, including whether they are conscious of actual or possible areas of tension or difficulty?
- The reasons why teachers choose to move into the multi-denominational school sector, including the relative importance of positive factors like the perceived attractiveness of the new schools, and negative factors like dissatisfaction with the types of schools in which they previously worked;
- How teachers see their roles and responsibilities, and the extent to which they are aware of differences from the patterns which obtain in other schools which they have worked in;
- How teachers see their career patterns developing as a result of their move into multi-denominational schools and their views about the possibility of returning to other sectors;

- The relationship of parents and teachers connected with the multi-denominational schools to other official bodies such as central and local government departments, the churches and the teaching unions.
- The religious education programmes in multi-denominational schools.

In addition to providing information about the interactions of parents and teachers in the specific context of the multi-denominational schools in the Republic of Ireland, it is also hoped that the findings will make a useful contribution to the wider debate, currently in progress about the organisation and control of schools and the implications of more extensive parental involvement and higher levels of teacher-parent interaction.

## **1.5**                    **Research Questions**

The main research questions that I intend to address in this study are:

- How have the primary and secondary systems of education evolved?
- How is religious education provided for in the Irish school system?
- How are religious minorities catered for?
- Is there a firmly integrated sector emerging in the south of Ireland?

## **1.6**                    **Chapter Summary**

This chapter presents an introductory background to multi-denominational education in the Republic of Ireland. This background forms the basis for identifying the

outlined research questions. The dissertation structure is outlined and the contents of the remaining chapters are described.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Historical Development of the Irish Education System**

#### **2.1            Introduction**

Any examination of current educational issues in Ireland has to be set against the background of historical developments, especially those that occurred during the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century in order to provide the reader with an understanding of the current system. Whether mass education in Ireland should be provided on a religiously segregated or denominationally integrated basis has been a controversial issue since the early nineteenth century. Therefore, it is especially important that the current debate about multi-denominational schools Ireland must be set in a long historical context.

#### **2.2            Pre Reformation Era**

Ireland has a long tradition of education that dates back at least to the Bardic schools which were of Druidic origin. They pre-dated and later co-existed alongside the monastic ones founded by Ireland's early Christian saints. They provided purely secular education i.e. training poets, historians and lawyers. They taught the Brehon code (the Gaelic legal system) which continued to operate in the North until the Plantation of Ulster. The Bardic schools continued to exist long after St. Patrick brought Christianity to Ireland. Another type of early Irish school was the monastic one. St. Ciaran founded Clonmacnoise in 544 A.D., St. Enda established a foundation in the Aran Islands, St. Columcille (Columba) did so at Derry, Kells and

Iona in Scotland. The Irish monastic schools produced men who were to bring the Christian faith all over Europe. St. Aidan went to Lindisfarne, St. Columbanus is credited with the monasteries of Luxeuil and Fontaines while St. Killian went to Wurzburg (Dowling, 1971, p.25). Ireland even today prides itself on being the light of Christendom during the Dark Ages. Our monasteries acted as centers of learning where Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Gaelic were studied. Beautiful manuscripts were created, copies of the scriptures e.g. the Book of Kells. The institutions also encouraged craftsmanship which produced many masterpieces e.g. the Ardagh Chalice, the Tara Broach etc. Both of these types of schools had their roots in religious founders i.e. druids or monks.

The Anglo-Norman invasion of Ireland heralded a new era in history of the structure of the Christian Church in Ireland and thus its system of education. The Bardic schools continued to exist in Gaelic dominated areas outside of the Pale (i.e. the region around Dublin which was in the Anglo-Norman sphere of influence). Baron Richard de Clare or Strongbow as he was known led a group of Norman Knights who landed at Bannow Bay, County Wexford in 1169. He was sent by King Henry II who had been invited to invade by King Dermot Mc Murrough of Leinster who was engaged in a dispute with the High King Rory O'Connor. However it was not until the plantations and wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that Ireland was completely subdued by the English. The Ulster Plantation carried out in the reign of King James VI/I was to mark the destruction of the last Gaelic clan-based kingships in Ireland. When they were destroyed so were the centres of learning they had acted as patrons to. Stanihurst (the old English i.e. person of Anglo-Norman descent)

historian had said of them that the Gaels ‘esteem their poets who write Irish learnedlie’ while Campion talks about medical students spending sixteen to twenty years in full-time study (Dowling, 1971, p.15).

The Irish Church experienced a period of ecclesiastical reform after the Anglo-Norman invasion in the twelfth century. St. Malachy, Archbishop of Armagh and St. Lawrence O’Toole, Archbishop of Dublin were key figures in this campaign to re-organise the structure of the Irish Church on continental lines. This meant moving from a monastic centred model to one that was organised on diocesan lines. French religious orders established monasteries in Ireland e.g. Sts Malachy and Bernard were responsible for the Cistercian Abbey being set up at Mellifont. Reform had begun prior to the Norman invasion but was carried out in greater haste after it. The Augustinians and Franciscans came to Ireland in 1230, while Dominicans and Carmelites arrived in 1224 and 1274 respectively (Dowling, 1971, p.36). These monasteries and friaries often had schools attached to them which provided a classical education concentrating on Latin and Greek as well as English and maths. They also provided religious instruction.

### **2.3**                    **The Effects of the Reformation**

King Henry VIII of England was Lord of Ireland (he later upgraded the country to a kingdom in the process making him King of Ireland). Due to the refusal of the Pope to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, Henry decided to sever the links

between the churches in his kingdoms and the Holy See, thus creating national Catholic churches under his authority. He was not a Protestant, indeed he was granted the title Defender of the Faith for his book 'In Defence of the Seven Sacraments' which he wrote with the help of St. Thomas More and Erasmus. He did not alter the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church but established a national Catholic Church under his control. However Henry VIII dissolved religious orders and confiscated monasteries, convents etc which he used to increase the revenue in the royal coffers. The closure of these religious communities also resulted in the closure of their schools.

However the English government during this period directly began to intervene in the area of provision of education. Private grammar schools had been established by the nobility e.g. the Earl and Countess of Ormond set one up in 1538. However many members of the aristocracy and gentry were not prepared to invest in such projects. Therefore Henry VIII set up a system of parish schools. He did this because he wanted to culturally assimilate the Irish into the English nation. He followed a policy of anglicisation which hoped to displace Gaelic with English. The schools in question were set up to achieve that aim rather than for purely educational reasons.

Queen Elizabeth I and King James VI / I established Diocesan and Royal schools for the same reason i.e. cultural assimilation. These establishments as well as the University of Dublin, Trinity College Dublin (T.C.D.) were founded to promote Protestantism of the Anglican variety, the faith they by law established in Ireland. These institutions were supported by the government as instruments of its policy of

anglicisation in both linguistic and religious terms. Dowling (1971, p.52) points to Archbishop Boulter's Charter schools which took 'Papist' children to schools far away from their parents so that they could learn English and be converted to Protestantism. He tells us that between 1733 and 1824 Charter schools received over £1,000,000 in public funds and £600,000 in private donations. Catholic experiences of penal legislation and the threat of proselytism were to colour the attitudes towards formal education of members of that community at home and abroad for generations to come.

Bishop McQuaid of Rochester an Irish-American viewed Catholic schools as protective walls built to protect children of his faith 'from the wolves of the world'. In the mid-nineteenth century, American public schools read the King James authorised version of the Bible. Thus many Irish-American Catholics believed it was necessary to build their own denominational school system. They may have recalled the threat of proselytism via formal education in their own ancestral country. They would have agreed with English Secretary of the Poor School Commission (1853-1890) who said 'There can be no sound education without religion. As is the teacher so is the child. As is the trainer so is the teacher' (McLaughlin et al, 1996, p.9).

Laws passed by William III and Mary along with those passed during the reign of Queen Anne were like others enforced under Cromwell's Lord Protectorate aimed at encouraging the people to abandon Catholicism and the Gaelic language. William iii's penal legislation against Catholics included banishing bishops and members of religious orders many of whom were teachers. He also passed an act to restrain



Catholic middle-class or landed families from sending their children abroad to be educated. The government believed that no Catholic should be employed as teachers in schools as such people would promote Catholicism and encourage use of the Gaelic language. During Penal times, when Catholicism was legally suppressed, Irish colleges were set up at Salamanca (1592), Lisbon (1595), Douai (1596), Antwerp (1600), Prague (1631), Toulouse (1660), Paris (1677) and four were built in Rome. These often prepared Irish students for the priesthood but also educated members of well-off families (Dowling, 1971, p.61). Hedge schools were set up. These were illegal but popular with the Catholic peasantry. Erasmus Smith complained they were taking away pupils from his foundations (Dowling, 1971, p.71). Protestant organisations such as the London Hibernian society and the Baptist society engaged in proselytism from the start. Thus Catholics were wary of such schools and members of the church attended hedge schools where they paid a teacher for his services. Some of these men had been clerical students while others had learned all they knew by travelling all over Ireland to study with the hedge masters of best repute.

#### **2.4**                    **The Development of the Modern Education System**

As already highlighted, there was a long tradition of state support for education agencies. Ireland was used by the Westminster government as a place where new policies would be tested out to see if they ought to be put into effect in Britain. During the nineteenth century Adam Smith's theory of Laissez-Faire (i.e. the government should not intervene in the economy and should ensure Free Trade

exists) dominated British political and economic thinking. However Smith argued that the government ought to provide elementary education as industry required a literate, numerate workforce.

In 1831, the Westminster government was responsible for establishing a National School system in Ireland which provided state supported primary education. The election of Daniel O'Connell, a Catholic land owner and barrister to the House of Commons forced the government to introduce a bill to emancipate Roman Catholics and allow them to take their seats if elected to parliament. Catholic emancipation was granted in 1829. Lord Anglesey the Lord Lieutenant and Lord Stanley the Chief Secretary for Ireland wished to establish a non-denominational system of primary education where all regardless of creed would study secular subjects together while having religious instruction separately in accordance with the beliefs of their own particular church. Priests and Ministers would be given access to the schools to catechise members of their own flocks (Coolahan, 1981, p.6). Prior to the creation of this system the Catholic middle class had begun to send their offspring to those private schools, in the main run by the religious orders which had been founded as a result of the Relief Acts passed by Grattan's Parliament from 1792 on.

Lord Stanley invited the liberal Protestant Duke of Leinster to become chairman of the new Board of Commissioners for National Education. This board consisted of 4 Anglicans (Church of Ireland), 2 Roman Catholics, 1 Unitarian and 1 Presbyterian. They were responsible for financing the building of schools, setting the curriculum

and securing the textbooks. Both the Catholic and Protestant Archbishops of Dublin, Drs. Murray and Whately were members. Archbishop Murray and Bishop Doyle of Kildare and Leighlin supported this system as being the best option available for Catholics. They preferred it to the hedge schools and those founded by the Kildare Place Society. The latter group had established primary schools which provided a non-denominational education. However the society was accused of giving grants to proselytising organisations. The Catholic religious orders had begun to establish schools but they were not widespread enough. Due to the relief acts passed by Grattan's Irish Parliament a number of religious orders were created in or introduced to Ireland. Nano Nagle introduced the Ursulines and then established the Presentation order. Catherine McAuley set up the Sisters of Mercy while Edmund Ignatius Rice founded the Christian Brothers which led in turn to the establishment of the Presentation Brothers (Coolahan, 1981, p.9). The government realised after Catholic Emancipation that the demands of Irish people for a state-funded system of education would have to be dealt with.

However, from the beginning, there was controversy over the multi-denominational character of the National Schools. Within the three major churches: Anglican, Catholic and Presbyterian there were debates on this issue. Dr Whately the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin had to argue against his co-religionists who felt that Anglicanism, the established faith should penetrate every aspect of the curriculum. In 1839 his opponents who believed the Bible was central to all education and believed Catholic priests should not be allowed to use the premises to catechise children set up the Church Education Society. Dean Burgh criticized the national school system

because of the absence of proselytism (Coolahan, 1983, p.42). They founded Anglican primary schools independent of the national system. Catechetics classes were optional but all had to attend Bible readings from the King James version of the Bible. Thus most Anglican children attended these schools. This had the result of turning the majority of national schools in the south into de facto Catholic schools (Coolahan, 1981, p.16).

The Roman Catholic hierarchy with the notable exception of Dr. John MacHale Archbishop of Tuam supported the national system initially. Dr. MacHale appealed to Rome seeking a ban on Catholic attendance at such institutions. He said ‘from the extensive power now claimed by the state over a mixed education, it would soon claim a similar despotic control over mixed marriages and strive to stretch its net over all ecclesiastical concerns’ (Akenson, 1970, p.1). In 1838 the Pope declared Roman Catholics should have nothing to do with the schools. However, Dr. Murray appealed the issue and in 1841 Pope Gregory XVI left it to each bishop to decide if he wished to set up national schools in his diocese (O’Buachalla, 1988, p.22).

The Presbyterians were also deeply divided on the issue with Rev. Dr. Henry Cooke leading fundamentalist opposition to the scheme which drew support from the liberal Rev. Dr. Montgomery. The former clergyman led a campaign of intimidation involving the burning of national schools and harassment of teachers. He argued that the board’s plan to study selected biblical texts amounted to the mutilation of the Bible. Rev. Cooke prevailed at the Synod of Ulster and Montgomery and his fellow liberals withdrew forming the ‘remonstrant’ Synod of Ulster. Thus Cooke was to

remain unchecked by the liberal faction (Akenson, 1970, p.162). In 1840 the Board of Commissioners offered a compromise which Cooke accepted. If they were prepared to build their schools without grant aid from the board, the Presbyterian schools would become known as non-vested. This new category would be effectively under denominational control. The manager could exclude clergymen of different faiths from entering the premises to give religious instruction to members of their flocks. In non-vested schools it was up to non-Presbyterian parents to withdraw their children from religion lessons. The state paid the salaries of teachers in these schools and provided them with textbooks (Akenson, 1975, p.4). As Coolahan (1983, p.41) stated this amounted to the establishment of 17 schools with a conscience clause.

This was the most important step in establishing a segregated, denominational system of education which was totally at odds with the original intentions of Lords Anglesey and Stanley. The percentage of mixed schools began to fall. Religious segregation during school days became a marked picture of Irish life which continues to the present day. In 1862, 53.6% of schools were denominationally mixed, however by 1900 only 35% were (Akenson, 1975, p.4). Most schools had clergymen as managers. An Englishman Dr. F.H.Dale said that 'except amongst the clergy, little or no interest is manifest in the primary schools in Ireland' (Akenson, 1975, p.4). By 1852 only 175 national schools out of a total of 4,795 were under joint Catholic/Protestant management (Akenson, 1975, p.2).

1848 was the year of liberal revolution all over Europe. Pope Pius ix was a reactionary who feared secularization and liberalism. Dr. Paul Cullen, a former rector

of the Irish College in Rome was appointed archbishop of Armagh. He wished to romanise the Catholic Church in Ireland. He was an ultramontanist i.e. he believed in strict loyalty and obedience to the Pope and in the uniformity of practices in every part of the Universal Church. He opposed Gallicanism which believed that every national church in the Catholic tradition had its own distinctive features. In 1850 in his role as Patron of All Ireland (Armagh is the ecclesiastical capital for Catholics and Anglicans) he convened the Synod of Thurles. This meeting of the hierarchy favoured the separate education of Roman Catholics. Nearly one hundred years later Dr. John Charles McQuaid was to concur with this view when he stated that ‘parents have a most serious duty to secure a fully Catholic upbringing for their children’. He also stated that ‘only the church is competent to declare what is a fully Catholic upbringing’ and ‘those schools alone which the church approves are capable of providing a fully Catholic education’ (Akenson, 1975, p.96). The Christian Brothers after an initial trial of some of their schools under the national school system withdrew them. This religious order did not enter the system until 1925 after the foundation of SaorStat Eireann (Irish Free State) which is now the Republic of Ireland.

When Dr. Paul Cullen was then appointed Archbishop of Dublin after the death of his predecessor Dr. Murray, he refused to take his seat on the Board of Commissioners for National Schools. In 1859 the composition of the board was changed giving Catholics ten seats out of a total of twenty one. However this did not placate the bishops of Ireland’s largest church. The Model schools had been established as non-denominational bodies dedicated to the training of teachers.

However in 1863 the bishops condemned them and forbade Catholics to attend them. Cardinal Cullen effectively achieved his aim of creating a denominational system of primary education.

Managers of schools, usually clergymen had almost unlimited powers. The Irish National Teachers Organisation (I.N.T.O.) was involved in a number of disputes caused by cases of unfair dismissal. One famous case that shows the power wielded by a clerical manager of a school was that of Mr. and Mrs. Healy of Clonmel who were sacked by the local parish priest, who refused to reinstate them even though they had the support of the local bishop. In another high profile case Mrs. Carey of Leighlinbridge was forced by Fr. Connolly to take on as a monitoress a girl who had failed her qualifying exams. Mrs. Carey was then threatened if she did not resign to make way for that girl, her husband the principal of the boys school would be sacked. Mrs. Carey in the 1890's with the support of the I.N.T.O. won her case (O'Buachalla, 1988, p.41). In 1871 the bishop of Clogher ordered that a certain teacher be sacked if he did not resign from the I.N.T.O. (Durcan, 1971, p.203). However, the I.N.T.O. eventually got full recognition from the church authorities but had to accept the principle of clerical managerial control of schools.

In 1906 the British government promised a much more limited form of devolution than that demanded by the Home Rule Party. It involved the establishment of three departments which would control local government, agriculture and education respectively. Patrick Pearse the famous Irish patriot and teacher had viewed this proposal as educational home rule. He was executed for his leading role in the 1916

Easter Rising which aimed for the creation of a republic. Yet he had supported the devolution bill in 1906 because he believed that the British education system in Ireland was too exam orientated and was in fact a ‘murder machine’ which relied on learning by rote. The clergy opposed the bill because they viewed it as a threat to their control of Catholic schools. Professor Corcoran of U.C.D’s Education department from 1909-’42 stated the church’s view when he said ‘the most essential issue in the Catholic nature of Catholic schools is full Catholic control of the choice of teachers, retention of teachers and removal of teachers’ (O’Buachalla, 1988, p.215). In 1919 the British administration in Ireland tried to pass a bill into law which would create a department of Education under the presidency of the Chief Secretary (i.e. the official in charge on a day to day basis of the British Dublin Castle civil service) that would control all primary, secondary and technical instruction in Ireland. Cardinal Logue speaking during 1919, the year that saw Sinn Fein M.P’s establish the Dail (Irish Parliament) and the beginning of the Irish War of Independence, stated that the only parliament we would accept a department of education from would be our own. Logue played the green card because he feared MacPhearson’s bill could alter the status quo i.e. segregated denominational education.

## **2.5                    The Post-Independence Irish Education System**

The first Free State government (Cumann na nGaedhael) did not wish to incur the wrath of the churches by interfering in the denominational structure of our school system. Indeed the President of the executive W.T. Cosgrave who was appointed



after the deaths of Arthur Griffith and Michael Collins in 1922, proposed that the Dail should guarantee the Pope 'that it would not make laws contrary to the teachings of the church' (O'Buachalla, 1988, p.61). Eamonn de Valera's Fianna Fail government came to power in 1932 and remained in office until 1948. His 1937 constitution (Bunreacht na hEireann) was in line with Catholic social teaching (articles 42.2.4, 44.2.6.) recognising the primary role of parents in the education of their children and the rights of denominational schools to receive state funding. Indeed in the 1965 edition of Rules for National Schools the importance of R.E. on the curriculum was emphasised (Coolahan, 1981, p.158).

The majority of secondary schools in Ireland are denominational, owned by religious bodies. State schools very often have religious involvement on their Boards of Management. As has been mentioned the secondary schools legally allowed to exist in Penal times were those sanctioned by the state. They were engaged in the fostering of the Protestant faith and the English language. Due to the Relief acts and Catholic emancipation many Religious orders set up schools. The Catholic church did not favour integration in the secondary school system. At this time only those who won scholarships or came from families who could afford to pay the fees attended Irish secondary schools. The Catholic and Protestant churches were satisfied to keep their own schools under their control. Secondary schools were the bastions of the merchant, professional and landed classes. Many diocesan colleges were recruitment grounds for candidates for seminaries. Even though the Catholic Church was not prepared to allow direct involvement in their second level schools they needed some form of funding from the government. In 1878 a compromise was reached when the

Intermediate Education Act was passed. An examination board was set up which gave funds to school managers on the basis of their students' results at public examinations. Irish secondary schools provided a classical education in line with that provided by Grammar schools. Secular priests established diocesan colleges e.g. Summerhill College, Sligo which often acted as junior seminaries. The Christian Brothers, Jesuits, Ursulines, Sisters of Mercy, Loreto Sisters were the mainstay of the Catholic educational sector in Ireland (Atkinson, 1969, p.77). The payments by results system benefited all secondary school regardless of their religious ethos. Cardinal Cullen in 1867 had restated the need to preserve intermediate educational establishments and ensure that they were free from all government control (O'Buachalla, 1988, p.30). The Intermediate Education Act gave him what he wanted i.e. financial assistance from the government without giving up any control over denominational schools. However teachers' salaries in secondary schools were very low, as they were not paid by the state. In 1919 a U.K. government report stated that many secondary teachers were emigrating because their salaries were so inadequate (Report of the Board of Intermediate Education, 1919, p.9). Given the very low attendance rates up until 1967 with the advent of free schooling, the issue of secondary schooling was not as controversial as that of primary schooling.

Protestant schools in the Republic of Ireland have generally been treated favourably if the number of pupils on their rolls were lower than those of other schools in their areas. They were allowed to remain open when Catholic schools of a similar size would be closed or amalgamated. In 1962-63 only 3% of pupils in the state were Protestant, yet 9% of the national schools were (Akenson, 1975, p.117). In the early

years of the state there was high Protestant emigration from the Irish Free State. Many suspected Loyalists had been targeted by republicans. Many Protestants viewed such attacks as sectarian. In 1922 the Church of Ireland Archbishop Gregg of Dublin and Sir William Goulding sought guarantees off Collins for the safety as well as civil and religious rights of those who wished to remain in the Free State. The Church of Ireland Gazette reported in 1930 that Anglicans were satisfied with denominational education with a conscience clause (i.e. right to opt out of R.E.). In 1939 Bishop Harvey of Cashel said that the government had treated Protestant schools far better than any U.K. administration would have (Akenson, 1975, p.117). When free education was introduced in 1967, Protestant secondary schools like their Catholic counterparts were to receive the vast majority of their funding from the state. Many Protestant students benefited from free bus transport to school if they lived in outlying areas. They were also given state aid to attend a Protestant boarding school, if they were not within commuting distance of a Protestant secondary school. The state did not wish to be seen to be unfair to the minority community.

However it insisted on the importance of the Irish language on the curriculum. Many Protestants viewed this emphasis on the Gaelic language as an attack on their anglophone culture and their Hiberno-British heritage. They feared that this emphasis on the Gaelic language would result in their co-religionists being excluded from employment in branches of the Department of Education. However this issue also concerned other Irish people who were not native Gaelic speakers. Thus the majority of the English speaking population found themselves in much the same position, regardless of their religion. They also had to ensure they would pass Gaelic as it

became a compulsory subject, if you were to be awarded the Intermediate and Leaving Certificates. The Protestant schools adapted to this system as did the others.

Ireland's schools have been forced to change in every generation but the denominational character of the Irish systems of primary and secondary education has not significantly altered since the nineteenth century. The churches regard control of their schools as the means of preserving a central role in the moral education and formation of their members. They fear that secularisation would escalate if they were to cede control of their schools to the state.

Vocational schools were primarily non-denominational in character and were initially intended as a preparation for careers in the trades. Such schools could not engage in general education by preparing students for state examinations such as the Leaving Certificate and generally concentrated on the teaching of practical subjects e.g. woodwork, metalwork.

The Constitution of the Irish Free State in 1922 and of the Republic of Ireland in 1937 further established the subsidiary role of the State in the provision of education. The 1937 Constitution enshrined the primary role of parents in the educational formation of their children in Article 42:

‘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 the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children’.

The Article goes on to state that parents shall be free to provide this education in their homes or in private schools or in schools recognised or established by the State.

The responsibilities of the State are relatively limited. Article 42.4 states 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 or moral formation’.

Jerry Whyte (1992) highlighted that

‘These provisions (of the 1937 Constitution) reflected Roman Catholic social teaching by enshrining a principle of parental supremacy in respect of the education of children’.

The European Convention on Human Rights (Article 2) which states :

‘No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions’.

This also upholds that principle.

In 1953, the Council of Education issued its report on the function and curriculum of primary schools and drew attention to what it regarded as an anomaly in the situation in regard to the control and management of national schools. The report pointed out

that the theoretical object of the national school system "is at variance with the principles of all religious denominations and with the realities of the primary schools and consequently that it needs restatement". It was suggested that "it be amended in accordance with Article 44.2.4. of the Constitution and that the fullness of denominational education may be legally sanctioned in those schools which are attended exclusively by children of the same religious faith". It was noted in the report that at that time 97% of national schools in the Republic were in fact attended exclusively by children of the same religious faith.

When the Rules for National Schools were eventually revised by the Minister for Education in 1965, the fact that not all national schools were attended exclusively by children of the same denomination was ignored. No provision was made for children whose parents did not wish them to attend denominational schools.

Similarly, the 1966 Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that:

‘The Covenant undertakes to have respect for the liberty of parents and when applicable legal guardians to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions’.

This was at variance with the intentions of the founders of the national school system.

In Ireland, post-independence, parents were never directly consulted by the State about their wishes regarding the education of their children. It was assumed that their opinions would be transmitted by the churches. Negotiations which took place in relation to the development of schooling took place between the State and the various religious authorities. The Roman Catholic Church in its code of Canon Law stated the following in Canon (226.2) :

‘Because they gave life to their children, parents have the most serious obligation and the right to educate them. It is therefore primarily the responsibility of Christian parents to ensure the Christian education of their children in accordance with the teaching of the church’.

During the period 1918 to the late 1980s, Canon Law (1374) made it quite clear that "Catholic children may not attend non-Catholic, neutral or mixed schools, i.e. those which are open also to non-Catholics." In Ireland, these Canons were interpreted strictly by the bishops. The laity that they were bound under pain of mortal sin not to send their children to non-Catholic schools. This applied to education at all levels, even third level. Until the early 1970s Catholics in Ireland were forbidden by their bishops to send their children to Trinity College, Dublin, which was regarded as having an ethos unsuitable for young Catholic men and women.

The rules of the Department of Education in relation to primary schools were changed. New rules published in 1965 gave explicit recognition to the denominational character of primary schools and many of the safeguards relating to children of minority religions or of no religion were removed. In 1971 a further complication was added to the situation. A new primary school curriculum was

introduced and this new curriculum encouraged the integration of subjects, both religious and secular. The Teacher's Handbook was quite specific in this regard :

‘The decision to construct an integrated curriculum is based on the following theses: ..... that the separation of religious and secular instruction into differentiated subject compartments serves only to throw the whole educational function out of focus. The integration of the curriculum may be seen .... in the religious and civic spirit which animates all its parts’.

The rule requiring teachers to be sensitive to the religious beliefs of those of different religious persuasions had been removed. According to the curriculum guidelines, all schools were expected to offer an integrated curriculum where religious and secular instruction would be integrated. While the rule under which parents were allowed to opt their children out of religious instruction still remained, this rule became effectively inoperable since religious and secular instruction would now be integrated. Even if religious instruction were separately timetabled, it could be assumed that a specifically denominational ethos would "permeate the school day".

Taken together, the rules of 1965 and the provisions of the 1971 curriculum created a new situation. The state now formally recognised the denominational character of the national school system and made no provision for children whose parents did not wish them to attend exclusively denominational schools or to attend religious instruction within such schools.

Unlike other countries there is not in existence a parallel system of non-denominational schools organised by the State which would cater for the



interests of minorities. In this respect, the Irish system of national education was fundamentally different to system of education in England where "parallel" systems had evolved resulting in a small number of denominational schools existing side by side with local authority controlled schools.

When the national school system was set up in 1831, its main object "was to unite in one system children of different creeds". The National Board was "to look with peculiar favour" on applications for aid for schools jointly managed by Roman Catholics and Protestants. While the National Board set down the curriculum for moral and literary instruction, the Patron of each school determined the form and content of religious instruction in the schools under his patronage. The rules for national schools stated that "no pupil shall receive or be present at any religious instruction of which his parents or guardians do not approve" and also "that the periods of formal religious instruction shall be fixed so as to facilitate the withdrawal of (such) pupils".

From the early 1930s onwards, a Jewish national school was also recognised and funded by the state authorities.

## **2.6 Education in Northern Ireland**

Northern Ireland has in the main a system of primary and second-level education that is divided along religious lines. The system that presently exists has its origins prior to partition. According to Dunn the two major cultures of the province have existed over some centuries beside each other and have evolved independent structures and institutions to serve them (Dunn, 1983, pg.234). Northern Ireland, despite its

relatively small population of about 1.6 million, effectively sustains at least three parallel systems of schooling, almost exclusively state funded and significantly divided on the basis of the cultural/religious background of its residents. Despite some overlapping at the edges in some schools, about 90% of the school-going population attend the school perceived to be identified with 'their own community' – those regarded as Catholic or Protestant.

Lord Londonderry had sought to lay the legislative basis for a non-denominational system through the 1923 Education Act. He established three types of schools: county schools which were to be owned and managed by the local authorities, voluntary schools which were to be owned and managed by private or church interests but which would receive limited public funds and 'four and two' schools which would receive a higher level of public funding as public reps would have minority representation on school committees. Lord Londonderry wanted a united system of education which would allow all children to be educated together and allow clergy men of all faiths to enter the school outside of normal school hours to engage in religious instruction with those who voluntarily wished to participate.

It was expected that Protestant schools would transfer their schools to County school status. However they did not do so as the Protestant churches were unhappy with the 1923 act. The protestant churches campaigned for modification of the 1923 Act. Londonderry resigned and a number of amendments were made to the act were made ensured that these schools would have a Protestant ethos e.g. simple Bible teaching would be required in county schools and representatives of Protestant churches being

appointed on the boards of governors which managed these schools. One of the alterations to the 1923 act was to set up committees in each local area to short-list candidates for teaching posts in order to ensure that as far as possible Protestants were appointed (Gallagher, 2005, pg. 157).

The Protestant churches wanted a state owned, controlled system of education that had a protestant ethos. It was not until 1968 that the Catholic church belatedly accepted a form of the 4 and 2 structure. The catholic church had even been reluctant to dilute clerical authority over schools by giving authority to lay members of their own community. They did so to receive a higher public subsidy. Separate catholic schools were the only social institution over which the Catholic Community had authority. They also were a source of middle-class jobs (Gallagher, 2005,pg 157)

Any examination of the current education system in Northern Ireland demonstrates that, in spite of the increasing secularization of society generally, the churches have continued to assert an important and continuing influence and authority (Byrne and McKeown 1998, pg.322). Catholic maintained schools, which since 1993 have been able to access 100% state funding, are unashamedly confessional schools, associated with a local parish and engaged in Catholic religious education programmes, most especially in the preparation of primary school children for first confession, first communion and confirmation. At the post-primary level, as well as Catholic maintained secondary schools there are Catholic voluntary grammar schools, also closely linked to the parish and diocesan system, and also significantly funded by the state.

In parallel are the controlled, state-managed, primary and post-primary schools which serve substantially the ‘perceived Protestant’ community. The earliest controlled schools were former Protestant schools, established in the nineteenth century by the Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist Churches, that were transferred into state control following the 1930 Education Act (Akenson 1973, pg.111). Protestant clergy have had representation on the Boards of Governors of these schools to the present day. The Protestant Churches have also had a role in the inspection of religious education, and while they are not in any sense official church owned schools, it is not entirely inappropriate to perceive them as de facto Protestant on the grounds that the majority of those who attend them are from that community. There are also several Protestant-foundation voluntary grammar schools which, like their Catholic counterparts, are directly funded by the state at a high percentage of their total costs.

Since 1981 the province has witnessed the emergence and growth of what is called the Integrated Schools sector (NICIE 2007). By January 2007 there were more than sixty integrated primary and post-primary schools which cater for about 6% of the school-going population – about 18,000 pupils. Most of these schools have been newly established, though about a quarter of them are ‘transformed’ former controlled schools. (No Catholic schools have undergone this transformation, and nor do they seem likely to do so in the light of the very strong opposition to integrated education expressed by the Irish Catholic hierarchy).

A statement of principles by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education

(NICIE) would seem to confirm this with the phrase that ‘the integrated school is essentially Christian in character’, although it is also emphasised that the integrated school seeks ‘to promote the learning of shared culture, beliefs and traditions’ (NICIE 2001).

Additionally Northern Ireland has a small group of fewer than twenty independent schools, many of which would have fundamentalist Christian ethos. Many of these have been set up under the patronage of the Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster which was founded by the Reverend Ian Paisley. They have chosen to be completely free from state funding in order that they do not have to implement certain tenets of the curriculum of which they disapprove .

A majority of Northern Ireland primary teachers have taken their initial teacher education course in one or other of the following institutions. St Mary’s is a Catholic foundation; a significant part of the work of the large religious studies staff centres around their provision of the Catholic Religious Education Certificate, which is essential for any person wishing to teach in a Catholic primary school, and indeed for teachers wishing to teach religion to the Catholic pupils in integrated primary schools. Stranmillis, however, while it is publicly perceived to be the Protestant counterpart of St Mary’s, is actually a non-denominational institution. Stranmillis has traditionally attracted students from the Protestant community.

In the early 1980s there was an attempt by the British government to merge Stranmillis, the Queen’s University School of Education and the two Catholic colleges on the Stranmillis site, following a report by the Northern Ireland Higher

Education Review Group but this suggestion was vehemently opposed by the Catholic Church and by many politicians representing that community (Richardson, 2008). This led to a successful campaign, to stop any interference with the right of the Church to train its own teachers (McMinn and Phoenix 2005). It should be noted, however, that Protestant church representatives now constitute a minority serving on the Boards of Governors of Controlled Schools. Byrne and McKeown (1998, pg. 330) have drawn attention to the concerns of leaders in the Protestant denominations about their relative lack of influence in the controlled school sector as compared with that of the Catholic Church in the maintained schools.

## **2.7 Issues from Research on Integrated Education in Northern Ireland**

As highlighted by Abbott et al (1999, pg. 1) ‘it is not always easy to separate out educational issues from other areas of social policy, far less to isolate integrated education from the broader field of education and social and community issues’. Therefore they found it ‘necessary to attempt to identify a number of discrete themes’ (pg. 1).

- **Parental choice in education**

Integrated education in Northern Ireland can best be understood through the prism of parental choice. Parents were the prime movers in the establishment of the integrated education sector in Northern Ireland. There still remains unresolved tension between ‘parents’ right to choose the type of school they wish their child to attend and the obligations of the state in responding to that choice’ (Abbott et al, 1999, pg.2). This

also raises wider issues such as the roles parents ought to play in the establishment and operation of schools in Northern Ireland. In almost all western developed societies parental choice is recognised as an important civil right but its operation is circumscribed (Walford,1996; Adler,1997).

- **The establishment, purpose and structure of integrated education**

‘One of the distinctive features of integrated education has been its genesis and early evolution outside formal structures’(Abbott et al, 1999, pg.2).

A large number of studies suggests that founding groups had three fundamental aims. ‘These were defined as religiously balanced enrolment, establishment of a distinctive ethos in which different religious and cultural traditions are equally valued and management structures which encourage active involvement of parents’ (Abbott et al, 1999, pg.2).

- **The demand for integrated education**

The integrated education lobby have always clearly stated that the impetus for the movement was due to parental demand for non-denominational education in Northern Ireland. Unfortunately it has been difficult to accurately gauge demand for integrated education in Northern Ireland among the general population as research is dependent on the format of the questions asked and the context (Abbott et al, 1999, pg.2).

Cairns and Dunn (1992) pointed out the serious methodological problems involved in carrying out opinion surveys in Northern Ireland on issues with a community relations dimension and the further difficulty of interpreting some of the findings. They illustrated this clearly from their own study (Cairns et al, 1990) where the phrasing of questions relating to attitudes and choices brought out a range of results. Thus although a considerable majority of mothers of pre-school children supported the concept of integrated education, a lower proportion would consider sending their child to an integrated school if one was available and an even lower proportion, faced with the reality of a school opening locally, said they were actually likely to enrol their child. (Abbott et al, 1999, pg.3).

- **Parents' reasons for choosing integrated schools**

Since the integrated nature of such schools is their defining feature it would be expected that this would be the primary reason why parents enrol their children in these schools. Studies have indicated that this is not always the case. 'Morgan et al. (1992) showed that parents could have a range of quite different reasons for sending their children to integrated schools. These could be ideological, in the sense of reflecting a belief that their children should be educated alongside children from the 'other' community. Even here, though, there were differences between those who felt that the religious integration was most important whilst others were not sympathetic to religion at all and wanted a secular integration. In other cases, however, educational motives were cited as central with some parents being attracted by the 'child centred' philosophy of the integrated schools whilst others were reacting to dissatisfaction with existing institutions. For some parents it was geographical



proximity or convenience which they saw as important. There was also a clear group of parents in mixed-faith marriages who saw the schools as meeting their need to have their children educated in an environment which overtly valued both traditions'. (Abbott et al, 1999, pg.3).

- **Parental involvement in integrated schools**

'One of the most distinctive features of the new integrated schools is the fact that they have been established by parent groups and indeed a high level of parental involvement at all stages in the school's development is regarded as one of the key principles of integrated education'(Abbott et al, 1999, pg.3).

Morgan et al. (1992) examined the role of parents from the foundations of the schools and throughout their evolutionary process. 'They suggested that there are considerable difficulties in defining what 'involvement' means to different parents. Some see it as the development of a 'one-to-one' relationship with the class teacher whilst others are interested in an active role in management through the Board of Governors' (Abbott et al, 1999, pgs.3, 4).

Marriott (1989) examined the complexities of the interactions between parents and teachers in an effort to explore the role parents can play in the actual educational work in the integrated school without usurping the role of the teacher. He suggests that this is capable of being advanced by teachers who were prepared to extend their 'sense of professionalism' but that it could also be seen as threatening (Abbott et al, 1999, pg.4).

- **The role of head teachers in integrated education**

The developing role of head teachers in the integrated schools was examined by Morgan et al. (1992), in relation to the curriculum, management and relationships with parents and parent governors. 'Whilst .... all head teachers experience pressure from different quarters, it was shown that there were high levels of stress amongst the head teachers interviewed, partly due to the need for unfamiliar skills (such as financial planning and fund-raising during the early phases of development and direct negotiations with the Department of Education for Northern Ireland)' (Abbott et al, 1999, pg.4).

- **Teachers and the curriculum in integrated schools**

It has proved difficult to define the ways in which the classroom experience in integrated schools differs from that in other sectors.

The meaning of a multicultural curriculum in the new integrated schools was investigated by Dunn et al. (1990) who found' that teachers were anxious to develop ways of enabling pupils to 'see the worth of other cultures'. This they believed required a 'common core' curriculum in, say, Religious Education or History, which the integrated schools would share with other schools supported by added components incorporating dimensions specific to each denomination'. (Abbott et al, 1999, pg.4).

‘As part of a larger study on the roles of parents and teachers in integrated education, Morgan et al. (1994) considered the changing nature of teaching for those who taught in integrated schools and examined their motives for working in this sector. Their experiences had many similar characteristics to those of teachers in denominational schools in Northern Ireland, but the teachers interviewed were particularly aware of the need for sensitivity in relation to the different cultural traditions and for this to be reflected in the curriculum’ (Abbott et al, 1999, pg.4).

- **Pupil relationships in the integrated schools and their impact on pupil attitudes**

The evidence for this theme has been limited at best as it ‘faces very considerable methodological, logistic and ethical problems’ (Abbott et al, 1999, pg.5). What is available is generally the result of small scale case studies. For example, Irwin (1991) analysed the friendship choices of Catholic and Protestant pupils in an integrated secondary school, taking into consideration the effects of social class and sex on sectarian integration, and of primary school attended on social integration.

‘Whilst the evidence was limited in extent, the author's conclusions were that integrated secondary education could improve inter-community relations in Northern Ireland and that segregated schools added to the polarisation of that society’ (Abbott et al, 1999, pg.5).

- **Patterns of pupil recruitment in integrated schools**

There is a general belief that integrated education has tended to cater for pupils from middle class backgrounds who live in areas where there has been little unrest and who already have extensive cross-community contacts.

‘Other issues relating to recruitment concern the suggestions that Protestants are less likely to wish to send their children to integrated schools than Catholics, that there are more boys than girls amongst applicants and that secondary level applicants come mainly from those unable to secure a grammar school place’ (Abbott et al, 1999, pg.5).

- **Integrated nursery education**

‘A number of the integrated primary schools have linked nursery classes, and an emphasis on the importance of early education in shaping children's attitudes was a feature of the thinking of the pioneers of integrated education. At the same time the nursery classes were seen as an unfair recruiting ground by opponents and there have been major disputes about the funding of integrated nursery provision. In a study of the integrated nursery sector Stephen (1990) drew attention to the major objective of developing a model of integrated nursery education which could be used elsewhere. But again there are no clear data about the long term impact of attending an integrated nursery class’ (Abbott et al, 1999, pg.5).

## **2.8**            **Conclusion**

Chapter two provides the reader with the historical background to the present day system in order that an understanding of the development of schooling in Ireland is developed. The Northern Ireland education system is examined and issues of research in the area of integrated education are identified.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Irish Education System**

#### **3.1**            **Introduction**

A brief discussion of the current structure of educational provision in the Republic of Ireland is appropriate in order to familiarise the reader with the Irish situation.

#### **3.2**            **Background to Present Structure**

As highlighted in Chapter 2, the Irish state, therefore, inherited an education system which consisted of a network of elementary schools serving the whole country but almost totally segregated on denominational lines between Roman Catholics and Protestants (mainly Church of Ireland/ Anglican in the Republic of Ireland). In addition there were a limited number of fee-paying secondary schools providing a 'grammar school' form of education. Again almost all of these schools took either exclusively Protestant or Roman Catholic pupils. Free secondary education only became available in 1967.

Religion, or more accurately differences between religious denominations, has clearly been a major force shaping the present structure of education in Ireland. But politics and religion have been inextricably linked for centuries in Ireland and, therefore, the present schools reflect the outcome of a long series of political and cultural as well as religious controversies.

One side effect of this complexity is that a number of the terms frequently used to describe types of schools are also likely to be unfamiliar to educationalists outside the Republic of Ireland, and the following paragraphs are an attempt to clarify the

structure. The multi-denominational schools have deliberately been omitted from this analysis as their position is discussed in detail in chapter four.

### **3.3**                    **The School System in the Republic of Ireland**

In the Republic of Ireland there were 873,528 pupils in all schools (505,883 in Primary and 367,645 in second-level schools) during the 1993-1994 academic year (DES, 1994). These numbers had decreased to 486,444 pupils in primary and 335,929 in second-level schools (DES, 2009).

In the Republic of Ireland the Roman Catholic church has historically played an important role in the management of education. Although the distinctions are less explicit than in Northern Ireland, the dynamics of the system raise issues about multi-denominational, denominational, non-denominational and secular perspectives on education. Virtually all Primary (National) schools have a Catholic or Protestant ethos. At second level, there are approximately 410 secondary schools. A further 341 Community, Comprehensive and Vocational schools have more secular management structures (DES, 2002).

There is a degree of segregation on the basis of gender. Many schools in the Republic of Ireland were traditionally single sex, but this is changing. The newer Comprehensive and Community schools are mainly co-educational. The remaining single-sex schools are predominantly in the secondary sector with some also at primary level. New Primary schools must be co-educational.

More recently, demographic factors have largely determined the types of new schools being established. Also, amalgamations of existing schools are occurring, especially in rural areas. These have tended to result in the establishment of either Community schools or Community colleges. Similarly, in the Dublin area, the new towns on the periphery of the city are establishing Community schools or colleges.

### **3.4                    Primary schools in the Republic of Ireland**

Statutory schooling age in the Republic of Ireland is between ages 6-16 years. Children may start at four years, if there is room, and many do. The average starting age is five. The Constitution of the Republic of Ireland recognises parents as the prime educators of their children and there is a right to educate at home, although in practice this rarely happens.

Primary schools in the Republic of Ireland are almost exclusively State-aided parish schools, established under diocesan patronage. Although denominational, they are required, if numbers permit, to accept all denominations. National schooling is non fee paying. There are 3,161 Primary schools staffed by over 20,000 teachers. There are also 115 special schools and 79 private schools. More than 50% of Primary schools have four teachers or less (DES, 2002).

Since 1975 most Primary schools have Boards of Management which employ the teachers. Teacher salaries are paid by the Department of Education and recurrent



costs (for heating, cleaning etc.) are funded by 'capitation grants' per pupil from the Department of Education.

Schools are also required to raise a contribution equal to at least 25% of the capitation grant. Funding for the site of a National school is provided by the local community through the Patron.

### **3.4.1            Gaelscoileanna - Irish Language Schools**

Gaelscoileanna are generally set up by parents who own the school through a limited company. When temporary recognition has been granted the Department of Education will pay teacher salaries and capitation grants. It normally takes 3-5 years to prove viability and attain full recognition. They receive a small amount of extra funding compared to National schools. This is in the form of a higher capitation grant and is paid because these schools are not parish schools and so do not have the parish financial support.

The co-ordinating body for the schools is called 'Gaelscoileanna'. It assists with start-up and liaises with the Department of Education. It is funded through Bord na Gaeilge. Gaelscoileanna gives all new schools, including those in Northern Ireland, a start-up grant. It liaises closely with Gaeloiliunt, the umbrella body for Irish medium schools in Northern Ireland.

### **3.5**                    **Second level education in the Republic of Ireland**

Entry to second level education is at the age of 12 years and, unlike Northern Ireland, no official transfer procedure exists which determines the post-Primary school which children will attend.

In the year 2002/03 there were 751 Post- Primary schools attended by 367,645 pupils and staffed by 20,355 teachers.

There is a three year Junior cycle leading to the Junior Certificate at approximately age 15. Typically 8-9 subjects are taken at this level. Senior cycle follows which may be of two or three year's duration depending on whether the school offers a 'transition year'. Where students opt to take transition year they may do so immediately after. The Senior cycle is a broadly based curriculum and typically 7 subjects are taken for the Leaving Certificate. Subjects are offered (usually) at two levels but at three in certain subjects.

### **3.6**                    **Types of second level schools in Ireland**

In the academic year 2002/2003 there were 751 second level schools aided by the Irish Republic's Department of Education. 410 were secondary schools operated by religious authorities. Only 24 secondary schools are not Catholic owned. One of these schools is Jewish while the other is a German school. The remainder are Protestant belonging in the main to the Anglican Church of Ireland, the Methodists and the Quakers.

### **3.6.1            Secondary schools**

These are privately owned and managed, mainly by religious authorities and their Boards of Management. 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. Secondary schools have traditionally been similar to Grammar schools in Northern Ireland in offering an academic curriculum, but increasingly they are offering more vocational and technical options and generally non-selective. Many Secondary schools are still single-sex schools.

### **3.6.2            Vocational Schools**

These schools are administered by Vocational Education Committees (VEC's) which are elected by the local authority of the area in which they are located. Originally Vocational schools were set up to provide technical and agricultural training as opposed to a general education. These were the only non-denominational schools Catholics were allowed by their bishops to attend without fear of censure. In 1989/1990 twenty-eight out of the thirty-eight V.E.C.'s had clergymen as members. Four of them were chairmen of their committees (Drudy & Lynch, 1993, p.80). 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.

### **3.6.3**            **Comprehensive Schools**

There are a small number of Comprehensive schools which were established originally as part of the proposed comprehensivisation of second-level education. 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. Comprehensive schools are secondary schools that have opted to enter the state-controlled sector. However they maintained their denominational characters due to a strong religious representation on their Boards of Management. There were sixteen such schools in 2002, eleven were Catholic and five were Protestant. The latter group of schools opted for boards composed of three church representatives and one each from the V.E.C. and the Department of Education (Drudy & Lynch, 1993, p.9). The Protestants did so in order to ensure the ethos of these five schools.

### **3.6.4**            **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. They have representatives of the V.E.C., Department of Education and two religious orders serving on their Boards of Management. In the main these are effectively Catholic state schools, though they are open to all. 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.

### **3.6.5            Community Colleges**

Almost identical to Community schools, but differ in that they are administered and funded by the VEC. Some Community colleges operated by the V.E.C.'s are the results of mergers between vocational and secondary schools. In these V.E.C. colleges there is significant Catholic influence on their Boards of Management. However they are still regarded as non-denominational. All V.E.C. schools and colleges in the Irish Republic (as well as Community Schools) have full-time catechists of the Roman Catholic persuasion. Many have full-time chaplains (all of whom are approved by their local bishops and most of whom are priests). These people be they lay people, or members of religious communities, or priests are all in receipt of salaries from the state.

Attempts have been made in recent years by The Campaign for the Separation of Church and State to stop full-time chaplains from receiving state salaries. They said that this practice was repugnant to the constitution which guarantees the state will not endow any religion. The Judges felt that the state was constitutionally correct to do so as Articles 42.2.4 and 44.2.6. accept and protect denominational interests in education. These articles make explicit the state's role in providing aid for denominational schools.

### **3.6.6            Other Second Level Schools**

The Jewish community has schools at both primary and secondary level. The Muslims have a primary school, a move which if followed to its logical conclusion will lead to the founding of one of the European Union's first state funded Muslim secondary schools.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology**

#### **4.1. Introduction**

This chapter places the study within a methodological framework. The methods employed, approaches and procedures for data analysis are explained. The ethical considerations of the researcher are also outlined.

#### **4.2. Methods and Approaches**

The methods of investigation were designed with the purpose of better serving the objectives of the research. Mellon (1990, pg.49) states that the two main questions to be addressed were: “who might have the information you need and who is accessible”? As highlighted by Patton (1990, pg.45), “where the focus is on individuals, an inductive approach begins with the individual experiences of those individuals”.

Conducting a research study is like taking a descriptive and explanatory snapshot of reality (Crabtree and Miller, 1992). A long semi-structured interview research technique was chosen in order to get a detailed description of the Educate Together movement. The long interview is an appropriate technique when the researcher seeks to capture meanings, perspectives and other subjective information not normally available through other research techniques. Furthermore, interviews maximise the

opportunity for more complete and accurate communication of ideas between the researcher and the subjects under study (McCracken, 1988).

The semi-structured interview was selected as the primary data-gathering tool in order to allow the participants to help guide the outcome of the interview. The questions and possible probes were included in an interview guide, which was used with the intention of providing flexibility during the actual interview. The researcher followed the lead of the participant within the interview guide structure, whenever appropriate, to gain pertinent information about the multi-denominational experience. This type of interview permitted the participants to tell their stories and therefore, interview responses provided in-depth, rich information from each participant about their experiences.

All of the twenty-one Educate Together schools that existed in the state prior to 2002 were contacted in order to ascertain whether or not they would take part in this study. An explanatory letter was forwarded to each school outlining the purpose of the study and requesting that principals, deputy principals, teachers and parents in such schools might participate in it. It was intended to include in this study schools from different parts of the Republic of Ireland. A Gaelic language medium school is included in this study due to the fact that it forms a distinct element of the Educate Together movement. In this case the desire among the founders to have a Gaelic/Irish speaking school in their local area was as much a motivating factor as their wish for it to be multi-denominational in character. As part of the study the researcher also interviewed both a founding parent and a teacher associated with an integrated



school in Northern Ireland. This was done in order that the Educate Together sector could be compared with the Integrated Education sector in Northern Ireland. Paul Rowe, the C.E.O. of Educate Together was also interviewed in order to gain the official view of that organisation concerning the development of that sector to date as well as possible ways in which it may develop in the future.

Ten out of twenty-one schools responded favourably to the request asking them to participate in the study. Six of these schools were based in Dublin, two in Cork, one in Meath and one in Wicklow. All the schools were based in urban areas. However, the school in Meath drew from a mixed urban and rural hinterland. The majority of Educate Together schools are located in urban areas due to the fact that they have a better chance of enrolling a viable number of students.

In ten of the schools, nine principals and two deputy principals were interviewed. Two teachers agreed to be participants including a Roman Catholic catechist (who was employed on a part-time basis to prepare students for the sacraments in two Educate Together schools) and a teacher who was working in an affiliated Gaelscoil. The principals of the schools in which these teachers worked requested them to take part in the study. There was a poor response from parents resulting in only one interview. I contacted the schools' parents associations directly as well as start up groups in order to be able to interview parents who wished to send their children to Educate Together schools. However, despite a number of follow up calls and letters, I was unable to elicit a better response from the parent body. However, four of the principals were founding teachers of such schools and five of them had

children who had been students within this sector. This, therefore, opened up the possibility of being able to question them in their role as parents of children who attended Educate Together schools.

I contacted Gaelscoileanna which is an umbrella group for Gaelic medium schools located outside of Irish speaking regions (gaeltachtaí) and sought their assistance in procuring the addresses of any multi-denominational schools affiliated to them and the names of their principals. I sent letters to four schools which were multi-denominational but were not affiliated to Educate Together in order to elicit information as to why they had not opted to do so. The principal of one of them agreed to be interviewed by me for the purpose of this study.

Interviews were recorded by means of dictaphones and tape recorders. More than one device was brought to each meeting thus ensuring that there was a back-up tape if one mal-functioned. This also secured clear audio recordings of each interview. Interviewees were asked to give consent to the recording of our discussions and all of them agreed to do so. The interviews were conducted at times and in locations that would suit the individuals who had agreed to participate in the study. The taped interviews were transcribed. After transcription, the data was examined for emerging themes. These quotations were then placed into separate computer files which were organised on a thematic basis.

As part of this study, a representative of Gaelscoileanna was also interviewed. That organisation was contacted in order to ascertain if they would allow staff members be

interviewed by me. One member of staff made themselves available for that purpose. Gaelscoileanna is an umbrella body that acts on behalf of Gaelic language medium schools some of which are under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnachta (which is a patron body of Gaelic medium schools, all of which have either a Catholic or an inter-denominational or a multi-denominational ethos). A member of that patron body was interviewed in addition to the Gaelscoileanna interviewee in order to further examine how they perform their duties. The schools under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnachta which have a Catholic ethos are not under the control of the local bishop or of a religious order. The issue of how An Foras Pátrúnachta and Educate Together relate to each other will also be addressed.

In this study, the researcher used the interview guide to encourage the participant's open-ended remarks to lead both the researcher and the participant into interesting and pertinent territory. The researcher assumed that with the use of this qualitative methodology, the participant's memory would unfold throughout the interview.

Potential schools were contacted through letters sent to school principals that sought participation in this study. The letter assured participants that confidentiality would be maintained. In the subsequent week a telephone call was made to each principal who had replied and interviews were scheduled with the principal and any deputy principals, teachers or parents who were willing to take part in it.

The sample of school principals, teachers and parents, in Educate Together schools, provided the main bulk of data. Secondary data was collected from available

literature on the field and in recent media reports, with the purpose of facilitating the research process and thereby supporting the conclusions more effectively.

The study includes an attempt to gain a more in depth knowledge of the subject matter through the conducting of a series of semi-structured interviews, in addition to a comprehensive literature review. The semi-structured method was adopted, as it allowed for a list of themes and questions to be covered in each of the interviews whilst still allowing a level of flexibility. The order of questions could be changed depending on the flow of the interview, allowing it to take a more natural course like a conversation. It also allowed for the addition and subtraction of questions again depending on relevance to the situation. Such a structure leads to an exploration or even explanation of the themes which have already been touched upon in document form. This multi-method approach allowed for triangulation, using different methods of data collection within the study to ensure that it is as full and balanced as is possible within the relatively short time scale.

#### **4.2.1** **Literature Review**

The first part of the research was to be the use of secondary data, by analysis of written documents, including transcripts, books, journals, magazine articles and newspapers. This section will be essential to my introduction of the subject of the study and the wider ideas and issues involved. I gathered and studied a considerable number of reports, papers and other documents of relevance to the subject. These included extensive documentation sourced in Ireland and relevant research conducted

overseas.

Hart (1998) underlines the importance of the literature review preceding the research, stating that it is necessary for understanding the specific topic, the research already made on it, and the key issues involved. More specifically, he defines literature review as:

“The selection of available documents (both published and unpublished) on the topic which contain information, ideas, data and evidence written from a particular standpoint to fulfil certain aims or express certain views on the nature of the topic and how it is to be investigated, and the effective evaluation of these documents in relation to the research being proposed” (Hart, 1998,pg.13).

In addition, Strauss and Corbin (1998) highlight the role of literature review as a valuable source of experience that leaves the researcher with a better understanding of the information needs of the field, awareness of the gaps left by previous studies, and sensitivity to the issues that might be identified in the data. Literature could be a secondary source of data, and help the researcher to formulate questions to be used in interviews, during the initial stages of the research. It can also confirm findings, comparing the research results to past evidence.

#### **4.2.2** **Interviews**

The research includes an attempt to gain a more in depth knowledge of the subject matter through the conducting of a series of semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview employed ethnographic research techniques: asking orally a

series of structured questions, and then probing more deeply, using open form questions to obtain additional information (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). It also allowed for a list of themes and questions to be covered in each of the interviews whilst still allowing a level of flexibility and change. The order of questions may be changed depending on the flow of the interview, allowing it to take a more natural course like a conversation. It also allows for the addition and subtraction of questions again depending on their relevance to the situation. Such a structure will hopefully lead to an exploration or even explanation of the themes upon which I have already touched in the literature review.

The interviews were conducted on a face-to-face basis with a single participant at a time. The venue for the interview was the choice solely of the respondent, to ensure that he/she was as comfortable as possible with the process; where necessary, the interview occurred during the working day at his/her place of work. A tape recorder was used to record the face-to-face interviews. This method was decided upon, as it would be easy to miss information or simply slow down the discussion to record the interview through note taking. Having said that, some note taking still took place during the interview as it helped to maintain concentration and focus (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2000).

The main advantage to using the interviews was that they allowed for a probing of the subject with the experts that could not be achieved through other methods alone. As Bell (1995) suggests, an interview can be used to follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which a questionnaire can never do.

The disadvantages are the data quality issues of reliability, bias and validity. Simon and Burstein (1985, p.242) highlight that the development of questions that do not necessitate the participant to answer within the interviewer's framework reduces the bias imposed by the interviewer. This is made possible in the semi-structured approach.

As previously stated, each interview was recorded by the use of a tape recorder and then transcribed for analysis at a later date. The advantage of being able to more correctly recollect interviewee's statements was clearly assisted by the presence of the tape-recorder, but consent was always required. It was clearly stated that the individual's anonymity would be respected, but that the use of a tape-recorder was purely conditional on the interviewee's acceptance. It was also made clear that the interviewee could object at any stage to the inclusion of certain material on the tape. All taped conversations were transcribed verbatim. These transcripts were then analysed. Interviews were carried out in a "standardised open-ended structure" (Patton, 1990,pg.289). Sequences of questions for the interviewees were determined before the interview although they did vary from interview to interview (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2000, p.243). The format of the interviews also evolved as more was learned about the Educate Together movement.

#### **4.3.            Analysis of Data**

Each interview was guided by an interview schedule which was also used for note taking during interviews. As a result, in addition to the taped conversations, over one

hundred pages of notes also form part of the interview data. As the research progressed relevant, interesting points and quotes were collected into computer files. As more and more points of interest and quotes had been collected, these were separately categorised into different areas such as parental involvement, reasons for the establishment of schools and religious education etc. These categories were based primarily on the distinct themes identified by Abbott et al (1999) in their review of integrated education in Northern Ireland (as outlined in Chapter 2). Not all themes fitted within the study of the Educate Together movement as there were significant differences in the origin and subsequent development of both sectors. However, there were enough similarities to make their framework of issues appropriate to use.

These pieces of categorised interview data proved very valuable in terms of illustrating important ideas and arguments throughout the analysis stage. Billig states that that formal education has a dual importance i.e. it is often claimed to be the process by which ideology is transmitted but it is also something that people have ideologies of (Billig et al., 1988, pg. 42). He further states that ideologies of education necessarily include conceptions of human nature, of how we become what we are, of the relationship between individual and society, as well as prescriptions for the conduct of teaching and learning. Education is organised and funded on a societal scale and carries with it societal values concerning such matters. Billig refers to two contrasting ideologies active in education i.e. traditional transmission-orientated education and the democratic/ child-centred approach. He states that these approaches are not totally mutually exclusive (Billig et al., 1988, pg. 45). The child-centred pedagogic approach was associated with Jean Piaget who upheld the



principle of ‘learning by doing’. The Plowden Report which was published in 1967 has had a major influence on the development of the British primary education system. It explicitly supported the observations concerning the forms of teaching the pupils responded best to (Plowden Report, 1967, paragraph 522). However Meighan suggests that other types of authoritarian schooling are taken for radical non-authoritarian alternatives. This creates the myth of the existence of non-authoritarian primary schools (Meighan, 1981, pgs 333-334). Billig states that the traditional ‘chalk and talk’ teaching had disillusioned many and led in turn to the desire to shift towards more progressive methods. However he states that teacher’s ideological conceptions tend not to be so neatly packaged and consistent as those put forward by educational theorists (Billig et al., 1988, pg.46). I will attempt to examine the data I collected for the presence of ideological dilemmas.

Billig et al.’s (1988) discursive approach stresses the importance of shared social knowledge, as understood in ‘the thinking society’ of Social Representations Theory, but extends this by emphasising the way in which thinking takes place through the dilemmatic aspects of ideology and common sense. The individual thinker is not the focus of attention, but the contrary aspects of socially shared beliefs which give rise to dilemmatic thinking (Billig et al., 1988). Ideology informs the dilemmatic aspects of common sense, and is reflected in both the thinking of the contemporary society and its cultural and ideological history (Billig et al., 1988). Ideology and common sense, rather than being a complete and unified set of beliefs, are “reproduced as an incomplete set of contrary themes, which continually give rise to discussion, argumentation and dilemmas” (Billig et al., 1988, p. 6). Contrary themes of common

sense exist in all societies in the forms of opposing maxims, proverbs and folk wisdom, and antithetical pairs of shared beliefs, images and moral values (Billig et al., 1988). The existence of these opposing images, words, evaluations and maxims permit not only the possibility of social dilemmas, but also of social thinking itself (Billig et al., 1988). In dilemmas, these socially shared images, representations, and values are seen in conflict. Without the presence of such contrary themes, social dilemmas could not be experienced, and deliberations and much of thought would not be possible (Billig et al., 1988). Ideological themes of dilemmatic character can be found in all conversations, routines and interviews (Billig et al., 1988). Furthermore, if thinking and arguing are linked, then the rhetorical skills of argument are closely linked to skills of thinking (Billig (1987; Billig et al., 1988) and the capacity for using rhetoric, can be considered as a universal and pervasive feature of everyday situations and meaning (Billig, 1987). Within this notion of thinking and arguing however, not all members of a society think, argue or are perplexed about the same things (Billig et al., 1988).

‘Attitudes’, within this theoretical approach, represent a stance on matters of controversy rather than individual cognitive evaluations (Billig, 1987), and as such are inseparable from the contemporary controversies of common sense ideologies (Billig, 1991). Every ‘attitude’ in favour of a position is also, either implicitly or explicitly, a stance in opposition to a counter position and is constructed rhetorically to justify a position and criticise the counter-position (Billig, 1991).

Billig’s notion of ideological dilemma was employed as a method of analysis of my

interview data. This method gives greater insight into what the interviewees actually believe. It afforded the opportunity to examine apparent contradictions as regards the difference between what they state that they aspire to do and what they actually do. Themes and contrary themes emerging from the data were also examined.

A semi-structured interview approach was employed. Questions were prepared before the interviews. However, interviewees were allowed to bring up issues that were not anticipated. Participants had enough freedom to bring up the issues that were important to them. The interview approach was flexible as the researcher had to be ready to ask questions that would probe issues that arose in greater depth.

Tape recordings were listened to in order to see if there were any common themes recurring. These recordings were then transcribed and these transcriptions were checked against the tapes in order to ensure that they were as accurate as possible.

The data was then examined in order to look for interesting themes or discursive features. These were indexed and the data was read again on a number of occasions in order to check, if the themes which were initially picked were justified or not, as well as to check if there were other themes which had previously been missed. A preliminary analysis was then written, testing initial hunches against the data. This process of analysis was on-going, extracts had to be examined in detail in order to assure accuracy (Billig, 1997, pg 54). The interviews were examined to uncover any ideological dilemmas as they would give a greater insight into the kernal issues that affect Educate Together schools today.

Billig (1997, p.43) states that discursive psychologists insist upon the rhetorical aspects of “giving views”. He further argues that there is an inherently argumentative dimension to the giving of views. This means that there is often a lot going on in discussions when people are engaged in giving their views and discourse analysts must seek to uncover the complex richness of the social business of “giving opinions”. This can only be done by paying attention to the detail of what is been said. I must remind myself that what counts for the discourse analyst are the claims being made and disputed by the participants. This process of analysis will involve many drafts before a satisfactory one is produced. Billig states that even final, published analyses can only be provisional in so far as the researcher for a variety of reasons believes that the final draft cannot be improved upon by him or her (Billig, 1997, pg.48). I bear in mind that the researcher attempts to get below the surface data and to search for the deeper, hidden patterns that may emerge in semi-structured interviews.

#### **4.4**

#### **Presentation of Results**

This study uses two main sources of information: literature review and interviews. Where interview transcripts are used, they are bracketed in quotation marks and the text is emboldened and because of the promised confidentiality of the interview protocol, I do not name subjects with the exception of Paul Rowe, C.E.O. of Educate Together who did not wish to remain anonymous.

Lengthy excerpts from interviews are provided because ‘the words of the participants should, to some extent, be allowed to speak for themselves’ (Burke, 2003, pg.100) and also ‘provides the reader with a sense of "being there" to take part in the interview’.

Coolican (1990,pgs. 235-6) also states that ‘the final report of qualitative findings will usually include verbatim quotations from participants which will bring the reader into the reality of the situation studied.... The quotes themselves are selections from the raw data, which ‘tell it like it is’. Very often comments just stick with us to perfectly encapsulate people’s position on some issue or stance in life, which they appear to hold’. I also intend to examine the interview materials for evidence of ideological dilemmas.

#### **4.5** **Ethical Considerations**

As humans were a very important component of this dissertation research, the issue of informed consent had to be addressed. Therefore, it was necessary to inform all interview participants about the study, their role within the investigation, and how the information they provided would be used. While, as argued by Miles and Huberman (1994, pg 291) it may be that truly informed consent is impossible in qualitative research the issue could not be dismissed, and, accordingly all participants selected for the study were informed of both the nature and purpose of the research. They were all given the opportunity to decide whether to participate in the survey or to withdraw at anytime.

The main principles of research ethics are:

- The identity of participants' must be protected in order that the published results of the study do not humiliate or harm them in any way. Anonymity must therefore be extended to all records, written or electronically recorded, that are collected during the study.
- All participants must be treated with respect and informed of the researcher's interests. The participant must agree to participate in the study. The researcher must not lie to the participants or record conversations on hidden mechanical devices.
- The researcher must make clear the terms of the research and abide by the terms of the agreement.
- The findings must be based on the data and truthfully reported.

(Bogdan and Biklen, 1992)

The details outlined in this chapter clearly show that this dissertation was conducted according to the ethical guidelines listed above.

## **Chapter 5**

### **The Educate Together Movement**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The Educate Together multi-denominational school system in the Republic of Ireland owes its origins to the Dalkey School Project. Many individuals and informal groups came together in 1975 when the Dalkey School Project was initiated. The group hoped to persuade parents, the religious and political establishments that the existing denominational school system did not embrace all. They felt that some existing schools could be persuaded to change themselves into integrated schools. In the event, however, it proved very difficult to persuade any existing schools to do so. The churches were firmly opposed and there were legal problems in changing ethos and ownership of existing schools.

The Dalkey School Project was much more persistent than key interest groups in the Irish education system could have envisaged. When it became clear that no existing schools were likely to try to become multi-denominational, it was decided that the group would themselves establish a school that would satisfy their criteria. Over the last three decades the group has set about raising money, negotiating the complexities of planning and safety regulations, finding temporary premises, employing staff and meeting the requirements of education legislation. The local contribution towards the cost of setting up the temporary premises, the cost of the

new building and the cost of purchasing the site was in the region of £150,000 (Hyland,1993).

This chapter of the dissertation explores the development of multi-denominational education in the Irish Republic from its beginnings and examines the implications that this new departure has had for the whole primary education system in the state. Educate Together is the most radical movement within the Irish primary system since its foundation and it is ‘now opening more schools than any other provider in the state’. (Rowe, 2003). This research has attempted to examine an educational phenomenon which is at a relatively early stage of development and which is changing rapidly. During the years of my study there have been major changes, many new schools opened and the sector has grown to forty one schools. Educate Together is fast emerging as a major pillar of Irish education system.

## **5.2                    Educate Together Schools**

At this stage, a certain amount of factual information about the multi-denominational schools themselves is necessary. The following list gives details of all the schools, which had opened up to 2008.

**Table 5.2.1    Chronology of Educate Together Schools**

<b>School</b>	<b>Established</b>
Dalkey School Project National School	1978
Bray School Project National School	1981
North Dublin National School Project	1984



Cork School Project	1987
Sligo School Project	1987
Kilkenny School Project	1987
Limerick School Project	1989
North Bay Educate Together National School (formerly North Bay National School Project)	1990
Ranelagh Multi-Denominational School	1990
Rathfarnham Educate Together School (formerly South City School Project)	1990
Gaelscoil an Ghoirt Álainn	1993
Galway School Project	1994
North Kildare Educate Together School (formerly North Kildare National School Project)	1994
Griffith Barracks National School (formerly Crumlin Multi-denominational School)	1994
Monkstown Educate Together School	1997
Lucan Educate Together National School	1997
Ennis Educate Together National School	1998
Castleknock Educate Together National School	1999
Dublin 7 Educate Together National School	2000
Le Chéile Educate Together National School	2001
Swords Educate Together National School	2001
Waterford Educate Together National School	2002
Navan Educate Together National School	2002

Tralee Educate Together National School	2002
Donabate Educate Together National School	2002
Dublin North Central Educate Together National School	2002
Griffeen Valley Educate Together National School	2002
Ardee Educate Together National School	2002
Rush / Lusk Educate Together National School	2003
South Kildare Educate Together National School	2003
Wicklow Educate Together National School	2003
Mullingar Educate Together National School	2004
Tullamore Educate Together National School	2004
East Limerick Educate Together National School	2004
Castaheany Educate Together National School	2004
Tyrellstown Educate Together National School	2005
Balbriggan Educate Together National School	2005
Gorey Educate Together National School	2005
Claregalway Educate Together National School	2005
Letterkenny Educate Together National School	2006
Blessington Educate Together National School	2006
Adamstown Castle Educate Together National School	2007
Esker Educate Together National School	2007
Bracken Educate Together National School	2007
Belmayne-Dublin 13 Educate Together National School	2008
Carlow Educate Together National School	2008

Carrigaline Educate Together National School	2008
Aston Gate Educate Together National School	2008
Greystones Educate Together National School	2008
Lucan East Educate Together National School	2008
Maynooth Educate Together National School	2008
Midleton Educate Together National School	2008
Skerries Educate Together National School	2008
Kilcolgan Educate Together National School	2008
Thornleigh Educate Together National School	2008
Wexford Educate Together National School	2008

### **5.3                    Development of the existing Educate Together schools**

This section will outline the development of each of the Educate Together schools currently in operation and will place their history in chronological order so that the reader is provided with a basic summary of events.

#### **5.3.1                    The Dalkey School Project**

The Dalkey School Project was set up in 1975 to focus the commitment of those who wanted the option of schools within the National School system which would be multi-denominational, co-educational and under a democratic management structure and which would have a child-centred approach to education. The strategy of the new organisation was to work to get one school into the Irish education system (Hyland, 1996).

The task confronting the Dalkey School Project in 1974 was formidable. The National School System had been relatively undisturbed since it was founded in the nineteenth century. The Labour Party had consistently supported the idea and some Fine Gael T.D.'s (members of parliament) and local councillors had also indicated support although the conservative wing of that party including the then Minister for Education, Richard Burke, were not sympathetic to the movement. During the years 1975 to 1978 the Dalkey School Project was involved in protracted correspondence with the political parties, with the Department of Education and with the local authorities while simultaneously building up its membership, establishing the extent of local support for the school and organising fundraising events as well as searching for suitable premises in which to open a school (Hyland, 1996).

The founder members faced considerable opposition from conservative elements in society. As stated by Hyland (1996) 'It was as if we were in some sense dangerous radical subversives about to undermine the structure of society'. A pamphlet which was distributed in the Dalkey area called on the electorate to contact their TD's or to write to the Minister of Education registering their objection to the proposed school and it stated as follows :

Atheistic interest in the Dalkey School Project is clear. Ireland's system of education is denominational by Constitutional guarantee ... we submit that there is no need for such a school as this which can only be divisive. It can only be hostile to religion in an age when it was never more needed ... Dalkey could be a precedent for major trouble in other areas.

This pamphlet originated from an organisation called The Council for Social Concern with an address in Ely Place which was the headquarters of the Knights of St. Columbanus (Hyland,1993). However, largely because of the support of the new Fianna Fáil Government in 1978, the Dalkey School Project opened its doors to 90 pupils in September of that year. The early years were not easy. The school was in temporary premises, initially in a private house bought by supporters for that reason and subsequently in a variety of different places including church halls lent by the Presbyterian Church and the Church of Ireland as well as in rooms temporarily provided by the local Vocational Education Committee. The new Dalkey School Project building was opened by Fine Gael Minister, Gemma Hussey, in 1983. (Hyland, 1996).

In the case of Dalkey, more than IR£150,000 had to be raised by parents for the new school. This was to become a feature of subsequent projects which all had to engage in fund-raising campaigns.

The 1960's saw the introduction of free secondary education. This led to considerable public debate about educational issues generally. The troubles erupted in Ulster and people were anxious to improve relations between Protestant and Catholic on the island of Ireland. Many viewed educational segregation as a root cause of sectarianism. In some areas of Dublin, growing numbers of families from a Catholic background began to send their children to local Anglican schools, perhaps because they felt that the ethos of such schools was more liberal than that of Catholic schools. In the Dublin suburb of Dalkey the Church of Ireland school, St. Patrick's,

had been a small national school since the early 1890s. It had been a one-teacher school for over 60 years. In the 1960s it became increasingly popular for local Catholic families to send their children there. Thus by 1974 it was a five teacher school with over 180 pupils on the rolls. Parents and teachers would have liked the school to continue to grow to an eight teacher school (one teacher for each year of the national school cycle). They would also have liked the Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, in his role as patron, to recognise the de facto multi-denominational nature of the school. However, the local rector in his role as school manager and the Select Vestry of the parish were unwilling to go along with the wishes of the parents. Following discussions with the DES the manager was "directed" by the DES to restrict enrolment to the existing capacity of the school. A letter from the DES dated 8 March 1974, included the following paragraph:

**"As is stated in the Preface to the Rules for National Schools under the Dept. of Education, the State gives explicit recognition to the denominational character of national schools. In accordance with this principle, it would be expected that priority in enrolment would be given first to children of Church of Ireland parents living within the school district (which is not co-terminous with the Parish of Dalkey); second, to children of other Protestant families and thereafter - to the extent to which space might be available - other children; and it is suggested that acceptance of children for enrolment should, in future be decided on that basis".**

The Dalkey School Project was set up in 1975 to focus the commitment of those who wanted the option of schools within the national school system, which would be

multi-denominational, co-educational and under a democratic management structure, and which would have a child-centred approach to education, as indicated in the introduced new Primary Curriculum (1971). The membership of the new Project included some parents who had been involved in St. Patrick's N.S. as well as parents and others who had not. The national school system had been undisturbed for over 100 years. There was an established equilibrium between the Department of Education, the Churches and the Irish National Teachers Organisation, the only teacher union representing primary teachers in the Republic of Ireland. There was a price for the Churches' control of education; they provided sites for schools and they paid the local contribution towards the capital and running costs of their schools. The State paid the salaries of the teaching staff, the larger share of the capital costs (averaging 85%) and an annual capitation grant (at that time £28 per pupil per annum) towards maintenance costs. The Dalkey School realised it would have to fund-raise on a very large scale if it was to succeed in setting up a school. The Dalkey School Project constituted itself first as an Association and later as a Company Limited by guarantee. It was decided early on to seek recognition as a Patron of national schools and to attempt to set up a national school within the existing rules of the Dept. of Education.

Jack Lynch, in a newspaper interview in 1975 had expressed support for a multi-denominational school on a pilot basis and in January 1977, he indicated that "he sincerely believed we must have some modicum of inter-denominational education" (Hyland (1993), Hyland (1996)). The Labour Party had consistently supported the idea and individual Fine Gael T.Ds and local Councillors had also indicated support,

although Richard Burke, who was Minister for Education at the time was hostile to the movement. In June 1977, a general election was held. Before the election, Fianna Fáil had indicated that if they were returned to power, they would support the setting up of a multi-denominational school in Dalkey. When Fianna Fáil came to power in July with John Wilson as Minister for Education, they delivered on their pre-election promise and the following month the Minister instructed the Department officials to enter into discussions with the Dalkey School Project with a view to enabling them to set up a school. Eventually in September 1978 the D.S.P. national school was opened - in temporary premises in Dun Laoghaire. There was considerable difficulty in procuring suitable premises. Some administrators at both local and central levels seemed to have difficulty in accepting that a multi-denominational school could be a valid part of the national school system. The D.S.P. national school functioned in temporary premises for six years, while negotiations and planning for a new permanent purpose-built school continued. During this time the school grew from 80 pupils to more than 300 pupils, from three teachers to ten. Places at the school have always been highly sought after and selection is on a first come first served basis. When the new building was opened in 1984 by Minister for Education Gemma Hussey, all the political parties were represented, including former Taoiseach Jack Lynch. The local contribution towards the cost of setting up the temporary premises, the cost of the new building and the cost of purchasing the site was in the region of £150,000 - all of which had been raised by voluntary contributions and by various fund-raising events.



### **5.3.2            Bray School Project N.S. 1981**

While the new building for the Dalkey School Project was being built, other groups with similar aims were active, and in due course a second school was opened in Bray, Co Wicklow. The school in Bray opened in 1981 in pre-fabricated classrooms on a site lent by Bray Vocational Education Committee on the Main St. in Bray. Like the Dalkey School Project, the enrolment in the Bray school increased rapidly and after a period of five years it had outgrown its temporary premises. After some difficulty, the Project acquired a site about 2 km. outside the town and in 1990 a purpose built 8 classroom school with a room for remedial teaching, a school library, and a school hall was formally opened by the Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke, T.D. Like the Dalkey School Project, the Bray S.P. also had to engage in considerable fund-raising to provide the cost of the site and the local contribution for their new school building - in their case the total came to over £120,000. Also like Dalkey, the Bray School Project is registered as a Limited Company and is Patron of the school. However, it is worth noting that the Bray group worked closely with Dalkey S.P. in the early months and years of its existence and it was originally intended that the Dalkey School Project would act as Patron of both schools. However, the Department of Education refused to accept this proposal and insisted that the Bray School Project acted independently as Patron of its own school. The Bray School Project due to space restrictions can only accept about half of the children who apply, even though it now has new accommodation. A feature of such schools is that they are in the main oversubscribed when it comes to applicants.

### **5.3.3 North Dublin National School Project, Glasnevin 1984**

North Dublin National School Project was set up in 1984 and by necessity had a close relationship with Dalkey and Bray. It benefited from their experience. Such cooperation between project schools was to become an enduring feature of the multi-denominational movement. The N.D.N.S.P. evolved from a wish by parents on Dublin's northside to send their children to a school in which children of both sexes, and of all religions and none would be educated together. In 1982 the N.D.N.S.P. applied to the office of public works to use the model school building (which was about to become vacant) in Glasnevin as temporary premises for a school. In 1983 a five year lease was signed and approval given to carry out renovations on the building and site. The school opened on 3rd September 1984 with three teachers and 92 pupils.

Like Dalkey and Bray, North Dublin N.S. Project grew rapidly and within a few years, most of the playground space had to be used to accommodate pre-fabricated buildings. Since 1987 the Project has spent considerable time and energy in trying to find a site on which a new building might be erected. This search was temporarily halted in the late 80s and early 90s when the Department of Education made it clear that they would not favour grant aiding a new building while numbers were falling in denominational schools in the area, and classrooms and school buildings were lying empty. The Project then tried to acquire one of these premises, but despite the combined efforts of the Project and officials of the Department of Education, it did not succeed. The Catholic Church authorities in the Archdiocese of Dublin, who are the legal owners of buildings being sought, were not prepared to negotiate the

transfer of these buildings either to the Department or to the N.D.N.S.P. On the 24th April 2002 N.D.N.S.P finally moved into new accommodation.

#### **5.4            Setting up of Educate Together**

The Dalkey and Bray groups had worked closely together in 1980 and 1981 when Bray was seeking permission to open a school. In 1983 and 1984 Dalkey and Bray had supported the North Dublin group and met regularly with them to advise them on a variety of issues and give them the benefit of their experience. At this time other groups around the country were interested in setting up multi-denominational schools and it was decided to set up a committee Educate Together to act as an umbrella body which would co-ordinate the activities of the existing groups and support new groups. In 1983 a coordinating committee, Educate Together, was set up to coordinate the efforts of the various groups which were attempting to set up multi-denominational schools in the Republic. This committee also acted as a negotiating body with the Government and the Department of Education in relation to issues which were of general interest to the sector. In the early 1990s, Educate Together was formally recognised by the Minister for Education as a body representing the interests of multi-denominational education in Ireland and as one of the partners in education to contribute to the debate leading up to the publication of a White Paper on Education in 1995. Educate Together played a full part in this debate and as a result the Report on the National Education Convention of 1994 and the White Paper of 1995 recognise the difficulties of the multi-denominational sector . The White Paper on Education proposes a greater democratisation of the control and governance of the education system in Ireland. Educate Together now coordinates the activities

of a rapidly growing sector. However, the body receives minimal government funding.

## **5.5**                    **1984-1987**

Between 1985 and 1987 four Projects were set up and became Associate members of Educate Together - Waterford, Cork, Sligo and Kilkenny. A further Project was set up in the South Dublin area in 1985 - supported largely by parents of children who could not be accepted in the Dalkey School Project because of the lack of space there.

In 1987 the Sligo, Kilkenny and Cork projects managed to get their schools started. They managed to do this despite new "regulations" introduced by the Department of Education around this time - applying solely to multi-denominational and all-Irish schools, but not to denominational schools - which made it more difficult in some ways than it had been for Dalkey, Bray and North Dublin to set up new schools. This created a situation which was arguably in breach of the Constitution of Ireland. The new regulations stated that multi-denominational national schools, if recognised, would have provisional recognition only in the early years and during this period could not receive any capital grants. This meant that at the stage when the school would be growing most rapidly and would have to spend money on refurbishing and furnishing temporary premises, no capital grants would be available.

Around the same time, the falling birth figures in the Republic had begun to affect overall enrolments in national schools and it was becoming clear that in the coming decade there would be surplus accommodation in national schools throughout the country. In this scenario, the government seemed to be reluctant to recognise further national schools - even though those which existed were under denominational

control and could be deemed to be "in violation.... of the conscientious and lawful preference" of the parents who wanted multi-denominational schools for their children.

## **5.6                    The Senate Debate 30 October 1986**

The Sligo School project encountered such difficulties that it led to debate in the upper house of the Irish Parliament, the Senate. A request for sanction to open a school in a disused glass factory in the town (which was available for rent) was turned down by the Department on the grounds that there were empty classrooms in a Catholic school - St. Anne's. The same excuse was used to refuse permission to the Sligo School Project to erect prefabricated classrooms on a site which the Vocational Education Committee was prepared to make available. The Minister for Education, Patrick Cooney stated:

**"It would defy reason if we were to grant-aid to the full and maximum extent what is essentially an experimental project, or indeed any school that was a new concept in an area no matter how desirable.... It is a new concept in that area and the rule regarding the granting of provisional recognition has to take into account that sometimes experimental projects do not continue after the initial enthusiasm wanes. Consequently I and my officials would have a lot of egg on our faces and would be the butt of indignant taxpayers if we were to fully grant aid ab initio something that we were not satisfied was going to endure...."**

His justification for provisional recognition lacked credibility because he did not require newly established denominational schools to meet the same criteria that he imposed on the multi-denominational sector but he held all the power in his position

as Minister of Education and there was nothing either the Sligo School Project or Educate Together could do to change the situation.

When Senator Higgins pointed out that the Project's efforts to lease empty classrooms from the Catholic Trustees of St. Anne's National School had failed and that the Church was not prepared to negotiate with them Minister Cooney replied:

**In an effort to help the project we drew their attention to the fact that there were empty classrooms provided at taxpayers' expense in other schools in the town. The management of those schools and the project people did not reach a meeting of minds, and in retrospect, that did not surprise me. .... There was nothing I could do about that because the State does not own the school. This is a private school and the school project when set up will also be a private school; it will not be owned by the State although it will be State supported and State assisted. This is the system we have. I have no power to twist the arm of any school board and say they must give these people their spare space. I can only point the people in that direction.**

In practice neither Minister Cooney nor any subsequent Minister ever intervened to prevent the sale of a national school building which was sought by a multi-denominational school.

### **5.7                    Mary O'Rourke, T.D., Minister for Education, 1987 - 1991.**

During the ministry of Mary O'Rourke from 1987 to the end of 1991, seven new Educate Together schools were set up. Minister O'Rourke was a firm supporter of the

sector. She made an important policy decision in 1990 when she announced that children attending multi-denominational schools were entitled to the same school transport benefits as children attending denominational schools.

### **Sligo School Project, 1987**

In Spring 1987 when the Sligo School Project, which had been negotiating with the Department of Education for over two years for sanction to open a school, were told by Mary O'Rourke that they could go ahead and open in September 1987. Minister O'Rourke intervened directly on behalf of the Sligo School Project to get agreement from the Board of Works to lease to the Project prefabricated buildings at the back of the old Model School in Sligo. Sligo was the first Educate Together school outside the greater Dublin area and demand in Sligo has been much greater than ever anticipated.

### **Kilkenny, 1987**

The Kilkenny School Project N.S. also opened in September 1987 - in a newly built complex owned by the Scouts and Guides on the Bennettsbridge Rd. Like its predecessors, the Kilkenny School quickly outgrew its accommodation and a number of pre-fabs were erected on the grounds around the main building. (There are now 244 pupils and 9 teachers in the school). Consequently, permission has recently been given by the then Minister for State at the Department of Education, Liam Aylward, T.D., to the Kilkenny School Project to purchase a site for a new building.

### **Ranelagh, 1988**

The recognition of the Ranelagh Multi-Denominational National School came about in quite a different way to the other schools in the sector. For almost a century the Church of Ireland had run St. Columba's National School on Ranelagh Rd. In the 1980s the school was a two-teacher school with about 50 pupils - only a handful of whom were members of the local Anglican parish. There is another national school (Sandford N.S.) under Church of Ireland patronage in the same parish and early in 1988 the Church of Ireland authorities indicated that it had decided to close St. Columba's N.S. as from the end of the school year 1991. The parents in the school were not happy with this decision and they appealed both to the Church authorities and the Minister for Education not to close the school. The Minister encouraged the parents to contact Educate Together and to try to merge with the South City School Project which had been formed some time earlier (see later paragraph). Efforts to get agreement on a merger failed and in June 1988 the Ranelagh Multi-Denominational School Association was formed with a view to taking over the patronage of the school from the Church of Ireland. The Church of Ireland was supportive and agreed to transfer its title to the site and buildings to the new Association.

In December 1989 provisional recognition was granted to the school, backdated to September 1988. The school has continued to develop since then and currently has 243 students and 13 teachers. 'Despite its rundown appearance and obvious shortcomings in terms of facilities, the Ranelagh multi-denominational school continues to attract a growing enrolment. This may be due to its educational policy, its multi-denominational ethos and its strategic location in a popular inner city



suburb. The purpose and spirit of the school do not vary from those of other primary schools. As a multi-denominational school it seeks only the opportunity to provide a new strand within the national school fabric' (Doyle, 1998).

### **5.8                    Limerick, 1989**

In July 1986 a group of parents in the Limerick area wrote to Educate Together indicating that they were interested in setting up a multi-denominational school. During the following three years they built up their membership and pre-enrolment list and organised a number of successful fund-raising events. Their great difficulty was finding suitable accommodation. They had planned to open in 1988 but a number of premises which they tried to secure fell through. Late in 1988 they got agreement from the Red Cross in Limerick that they could lease part of their premises in Cecil St. in the centre of the city - a premises which was undergoing major revovation through a FAS scheme. In September 1989 the school opened with 56 pupils and two teachers and six weeks later it was declared officially open by Minister O'Rourke. The school grew rapidly, doubling in size the following year and growing to a five teacher school in 1991. As a result of the direct intervention of the Minister an empty Employment Exchange Building in Upper Cecil St. was made available in 1991 for additional classrooms. However, the Catholic diocese has shown no interest in making such space available to the Limerick School Project and getting a suitable permanent school building is likely to be an uphill struggle. Such indifference by the Catholic Church to the needs of the multi-denominational sector has been a marked feature of the experiences of many school projects. As it

expanded, the Project moved from the old Labour Exchange in Upper Cecil Street to the former School of Professional Management Studies on O'Connell Avenue.

"The dream was to achieve a purpose-built building for primary school children," remarked Eileen Kennelly, principal.

"That dream is coming closer to reality now as the builders move on site and begin the transformation. The whole process should be completed by January 2002 and both past and present teachers, pupils and parents will heave a collective sigh of relief!" (Limerick Leader, 11/11/00)

The proposal to open a second Educate Together school in Limerick follows the success of the Limerick School Project which was established in 1987 and this year moved into brand new accommodation in O'Connell Avenue. The second Limerick School Project national school is planned to open this coming September. "Last year the number of children applying for a place in Limerick School Project multi-denominational national school was double the number of places available. This year the demand for multi-denominational education is so great that there are three applicants for every place available in Limerick." (Limerick Leader, 19/10/02). The organising committee for the new school already has temporary premises organised and so has tremendous potential to successfully open next September. (Educate Together, 2003)

## **5.9                    South City School Project, 1990.**

The existence of the South City School Project has been referred to in the section on Ranelagh Multi-Denominational School. This Project was formally constituted in

July 1987 and became an Associate member of Educate Together shortly afterwards. It was clear from the start that there would be no difficulty in attracting pupils for a viable school in the Dublin South City area and the South City School Project was willing to consider accommodation in any area of the south city. The suggestion by the Minister in 1988 that the Ranelagh parents seek to amalgamate with the South City group seemed on the face of it to be reasonable suggestion. South City School Project carried out a systematic search for premises for over three years after it was set up in 1987. At the suggestion of the Department it sought to lease empty classrooms in both primary and post-primary schools in the south city area. Over 30 schools were contacted, many of which had some empty space. However, none of them was willing to lease their empty classrooms. One reason given was "As the Patronage of (our) school differs from that of the School Project and as running a building under two Patrons would not be a practical proposition, the Board of Management does not consider feasible the use of the building by your group". There was an empty national school building in Milltown. This building was 30 years old with about 8 classrooms and was vested in the St. Lawrence O'Toole Diocesan Trust (which holds all property owned by the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin). By the end of 1988 the Milltown School was no longer used as a national school because of demographic patterns in the area and it was advertised for sale in 1987. South City School Project was not successful in preventing the private sale of the premises in February 1988.

Following the decision not to merge with Ranelagh in summer 1988, South City School Project found it difficult to convince the Department that another school in

the south city area would be viable. However, they had now focussed their search for accommodation in the Crumlin area - a less advantaged area than Ranelagh - and during the lead up to the General Election in 1989, they campaigned vigorously for a multi-denominational school in this area. By early 1990 they had located a Church of Ireland school on St Mary's Rd. in Crumlin - a five roomed building of which only one room was being used by the single-teacher Church of Ireland School. The local Select Vestry agreed to rent two classrooms to the South City Project and in September 1990 South City School Project National School opened with two teachers and about 50 pupils. In 1991 a further teacher was added to the staff and a fourth teacher was appointed in 1992.

#### **5.10                    North Bay School Project, 1990.**

North Bay Educate Together National School (NBETNS) opened in September 1990 with 26 pupils and a principal teacher. Since then the school has grown to 238 pupils, 14 teachers, classroom assistants and an administrative principal (NBETNS, 2010). The project to create a new multi-denominational school was started by a group of parents committed to the principles of Educate Together who found that there were no places for their children at North Dublin's only other multi-denominational school in Glasnevin. Their main priority was to find a suitable premises in which to start and for the first 18 months the situation looked bleak. Early in 1990 however, they became aware that a large 16 classroom national school building in Kilbarrack was no longer being used by the Catholic authorities as a national school and it was rumoured that it had been acquired by the Department of Education. Some of the classrooms were being used by an Irish language school and

a special school under the Patronage of St. Michael's House. Again it was through direct contact with the Minister, Mary O'Rourke, that these rumours were confirmed and the Project spent the next few months trying to convince the Minister that a block of classrooms in this building should be leased for a multi-denominational school. It was August 1990 before the Department agreed to this request but in spite of fact that the new school year was to start a few weeks later, the Project decided to forge ahead and open in September 1990. In 1991 enrolment had grown sufficiently to appoint two further teachers and a fourth teacher was appointed in September 1992.

The building in which North Bay operates is a spacious modern purpose-built school. There are 8 classrooms and it is expected that an additional four classrooms will be made available as required. The accommodation situation of the North Bay School Project was the most satisfactory of all Educate Together schools at point in time.

### **5.11                    Gaelscoil an Ghoirt Alainn, 1993**

In 1993 Gaelscoil an Ghoirt Alainn opened in Mayfield in Cork. It is an Irish language medium primary school which is under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnachta and is affiliated to Educate Together. It is the only Gaelic language medium school that is in the Educate Together sector. It was to be the catalyst for the establishment of An Foras Pátrúnachta which is the patron body for Gaelscoileanna i.e. Gaelic language schools located outside the gaeltachts (Irish speaking regions of the country).

### **5.12                    North Kildare Educate Together National School, 1994**

An Educate Together school was established in 1994 in Celbridge, County Kildare. It was set up to cater for those living in the north Kildare region who wished to avail of a multi-denominational education option for their children. This area is within the commuter belt of Dublin. The school had been housed in portacabins for nearly a decade on a site at Ballymakealy Lower. In that period it has grown to accommodate two hundred and fifty children and eighteen staff. In June 2003 the Department of Science & Education funded a new €3.5 million building at Clane Road with a contribution of over €65,000 from the school community (NKETS, 2007)

### **5.13                    Galway Educate Together National School, 1994**

Galway Educate Together National School (GETNS) was set up in 1994, as Galway School Project, by a group of parents who wished to establish a school run in accordance the key tenets of the Educate Together movement. This school project like many others was to find it very difficult to get suitable premises. The bishop of Galway, Dr. Casey, who was Patron of all Roman Catholic national schools in the diocese refused to lease any of the empty classrooms in schools under his control to the Project.

### **5.14                    Recent Developments in the Sector**

#### **Monkstown Educate Together National School, 1997**

Monkstown Educate Together National School was established in 1997. The Patron of METNS is the Dalkey School Project, a limited company limited that acts as Patron of two schools, one at Monkstown and the other at Glenageary (which is known as Dalkey School Project National School). Both schools are equals which share a common patron body (METNS, 2007)

### **Lucan Educate Together National School, 1997**

In 1997 local resident associations in Lucan called a public meeting and presented the option of an Educate Together school. On September 1st, 1997, the school became a reality. The school was first located in a scout's hall situated close to the Liffey. Two years, the school had grown to be able to employ five teachers and it moved to four portacabins in the grounds of St. Edmundsbury. The school later moved to its permanent site in Willsbrook. . The school was to have grown to 450 pupils with a staff of 36 by September 2006, which is a remarkable rate of growth, considering that it is not yet ten years old (LETNS, 2007)

### **Ennis Educate Together National School, 1998**

This school was established in 1998 with one teacher and nineteen pupils. By September 2004 the student population of this school had reached over one hundred and twenty. The school has currently fourteen staff employed including an administrative principal, six class teachers, a shared resource teacher and two special needs assistants (EETNS, 2007)

### **Castleknock Educate Together National School, 1999**

This school was established because of the efforts of parents in Castleknock and the surrounding areas to establish a multi-denominational primary school. The school received temporary recognition from the Department of Education and Science in June 1999 and it opened in September of that year. In 1999 the principal and the first teacher had been appointed. The school was originally opened in the local community centre and as pupil numbers grew it was allowed by the Irish Christian Brothers to base itself on a temporary basis in the grounds of Saint Joseph's School on the Navan Road. In 2003 the school secured a permanent site in Castleknock and moved into a purpose built temporary building. In 2005 the Department approved the building of a sixteen classroom school which is due to open in April 2007. This building will also contain a special needs unit for autistic children (CETNS, 2007)

#### **Dublin 7 Educate Together National School, 2000**

This school was set up by a group of parents in 1999 and was initially located in temporary premises in Henrietta Street. Since 2002 the school has been located in temporary accommodation on the grounds of St Joseph's School for the Deaf , Navan Road, Dublin 7. The school is actively pursuing a permanent site on which to base itself (Dublin 7 Educate Together, 2007)

#### **Swords Educate Together National School, 2000**

Swords Educate Together Association was established in 1999 in order to set up a school in that area. The school, opened in September 2001 with seventeen Junior Infants and two Senior Infants. It initially had to rent accommodation from the Swords Celtic football club (Swords Educate Together, 2007).

#### **Le Cheile School, Drogheda, 2001**



This school was established due to the efforts of the Drogheda East Meath Educate Together Association. It opened with forty six students in September, 2001 (<http://indigo.ie/~suzannes/>). It is currently located in temporary accommodation on the grounds of Drogheda Grammar School. In 2006 there were two hundred and forty seven students enrolled (Mulcahy, 1996, pg. 63).

### **Waterford Educate Together National School, 2002**

This school is based in the Millenium Youth Resource Centre, Lisduggan (There was an earlier attempt to set up a multi-denominational school in the city in the 1980's, however the Waterford School Project group was inactive by 1986 (Educate Together, 2007)

### **Tralee Educate Together National School, 2002**

In reply to a parliamentary question on the number of special needs assistants employed in schools in Kerry, Minister Hanafin stated in November 2005, there were three employed in this school. She was replying to a question asked by Martin Ferris T.D. (Oireachtas, 2005)The school was initially located in Colles Sandes House (Educate Together, 2007).

### **Donabate Portrane Educate Together National School, 2002**

This school was initially based in premises belonging to the local Sea Scouts and later to the Turvey Golf club. They now have a four year agreement with Fingal County Council allowing them to rent a site located in the village of Donabate. They

hope to get a permanent site soon and are in negotiations with the Department of Education and Science (DPETNS, 2007).

### **Navan Educate Together National School, 2002**

The Department of Education and Science according to the chairperson of the Navan Educate Together Association, Karen Kinahan was prepared to sanction the school in September 2001, if the association could find suitable accommodation for it (Independent, 2001). However that proved to be very difficult and the school finally opened in 2002. In August 2005 the school moved from premises in Flowerhill to a new site on the Commons Road (Navan Educate Together, 2005).

### **Glasnevin Educate Together National School, 2002**

This school opened using the name Dublin North Central Educate Together National School. It has pupils in all classes from Junior Infants to Sixth class. This school has an assisted learning class which was established to provide for the needs of autistic pupils (GET, 2007).

### **Griffen Valley Educate Together National School, 2002**

This school initially based itself in the scout den in Lucan. It then moved into pre-fabricated buildings that had been used by Lucan Educate Together National School. It got permanent premises which were occupied in September, 2004. In 2005 there were two hundred and seventy three pupils from twenty six countries (Mulcahy, 2006, pg.65).

### **Ardee Educate Together National School, 2002**

Ardee Educate Together National School was established in September 2002. This school was formerly St. Mary's Church of Ireland National School. It was facing closure as a Church of Ireland school as a result of the decline in the number of Anglican children attending. The Board of Management and parent body of the school sought to transform the school into a school with the Educate Together ethos and redevelop it to meet the needs of the growing population in the Ardee area. The Anglican archdiocese of Armagh and the Department of Education and Science agreed to the transfer (Educate Together, 2007). This school is located in county Louth which is a county bordering Northern Ireland.

### **Rush and Lusk Educate Together National School, 2003**

This school originally started operating from a scout den and later moved to the old Teagasc Training Centre in Lusk. In 2002 there were twenty four pupils, by 2006 that number had risen to 110 (Mulcahy, 2006, pg.66).

### **Newbridge Educate Together National School, 2003**

This primary school opened to its first cohort in the grounds of Rosetown Rugby club (Educate Together, 2007). This school was originally known as the South Kildare Educate Together National School. In the academic year 2003/2004 the school was allowed use the clubhouse, in 2004 it moved into pre-fabricated accommodation on grounds owned by the club. They currently have a staff consisting of seven full-time teachers, a part-time resource teacher and a full-time

special needs assistant (Newbridge Educate Together, 2007).

### **Wicklow Educate Together National School, 2003**

This school in common with many others in this sector had difficulties acquiring a site in which to open their school. In 2003 it opened on a temporary basis in part of the Wicklow Bay Hostel (Educate Together, 2007)

### **Mullingar Educate Together National School, 2004**

The Minister for Education and Science, Noel Dempsey gave the go-ahead for a new Educate Together national school to be established in Mullingar from September 2004. The Mullingar *Educate Together* Action Group had been working on the establishment of a primary school in the town for over a year. The school had already pre-enrolled 57 children. It opened in premises belonging to Mullingar Rugby club (Westmeath Examiner, 24/4/2004).

### **Tullamore Educate Together National School, 2004**

This was the first such school to be set up in Offaly. It is presently located on the premises of what was formally the Gael Scoil. The school is growing in pupil numbers and teaching staff. At the end of the school year 2005/6 the school had thirty four pupils on the roll with two mainstream teachers and a resource teacher. In October 2006 there were over fifty pupils on the roll, a principal, two mainstream

and one resource teacher, a special needs assistant and a full-time language support teacher (Tullamore Educate Together, 2007).

#### **Limerick City East Educate Together National School, 2004**

Limerick City East Educate Together N.S. received approval to open in 2003 but unfortunately could not open as planned due to accommodation difficulties. They then secured temporary accommodation in Young Munster Rugby Club in Rosbrien (Educate Together, 2007).

#### **Castaheany Educate Together National School, 2004**

This school was given temporary use of four classrooms in the new Griffeen Valley Educate Together N.S. building in Lucan. Sixty children were enrolled in and arrangements had to be made to transport them to Lucan every morning (Educate Together, 2007).

#### **Tyrellstown Educate Together National School, 2005**

In July 2005 permission was given by Fingal County Council for a temporary premises for this school to be erected with six classrooms included on a site on the Powerstown Road (Fingal County Council, 2005).

#### **Balbriggan Educate Together National School, 2005**

The Balbriggan Educate Together Association was set up in June 2004 and in the spring of 2005 they received official recognition as a national school. The school opened in Sunshine House in the town. However they have secured a permanent site (Educate Together, 2007).

#### **Gorey Educate Together National School, 2005**

The association that campaigned to open this school had eighty pupils pre-enrolled prior to the opening of the school in September 2005 (Educate Together, 2007).

#### **Claregalway Educate Together National School, 2005**

The Galway North Educate Together committee had been working to provide a new national school since 2003. It hoped to cater for growing urban population centres in the north of the county (Galway Advertiser, 21/4/2005).

#### **Letterkenny Educate Together National School, 2006**

Letterkenny Educate Together N.S. is the first school of that type to be opened in Co. Donegal and indeed in Ulster. Initially there were thirty six pupils attending the school. At the moment it is located in temporary accommodation but is actively searching for permanent accommodation (Educate Together, 2007).

#### **Blessington Educate Together National School, 2006**

This school is also known as Tigh na nÓg Educate Together National School. It opened with forty pupils and three teachers (Educate Together, 2007).

### **Adamstown Castle Educate Together National School, 2007**

This school opened in September 2007 (Educate Together, 2007). It is the third Educate Together National School in the Dublin West suburb of Lucan.

### **Esker Educate Together National School, 2007**

This school opened in September 2007 (Educate Together, 2007). It is the fourth Educate Together National School in the Dublin West suburb of Lucan.

### **Bracken Educate Together National School, 2007**

As a result of a serious shortage of primary school places in the Balbriggan area, Educate Together were asked by the Department of Education and Science in early September 2007 to open a second Educate Together National School in the town as soon as possible, as an emergency measure. This school opened on 24th September 2007 (Educate Together, 2007).

### **Belmayne-Dublin 13 Educate Together National School , 2008**

Belmayne Educate Together National School opened its doors on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 in a premises provided by the Department of Education and Science (Educate Together, 2009).

### **Carlow Educate Together National School, 2008**

Carlow Educate Together National School is located at Unit 5, Shamrock Business Park in Graiguecullen. It is an 8 classroom school with maximum capacity for 240 children. This building was delivered on schedule by the Department of Education and Science. The school opened on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 (Educate Together, 2009).

#### **Carrigaline Educate Together National School, 2008**

Carrigaline Educate Together National School opened successfully in temporary premises on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008. The principal is Mel Thornton, who has many years' experience of teaching in an Educate Together school and indeed is a former director of the organisation (Educate Together, 2009).

#### **Aston Gate Educate Together National School, 2008**

Aston Village Educate Together National School opened on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 in a brand new permanent building delivered on time by the Department of Education and Science (Educate Together, 2009).

#### **Greystones Educate Together National School, 2008**

The Department of Education and Science handed the keys of the Greystones Educate Together National School building to Educate Together on August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The building was shared with a new Gaelscoil for the first few months until an adjacent building was completed (Educate Together, 2009).



### **Lucan East Educate Together National School, 2008**

Lucan East Educate Together National School is the fifth Educate Together to open in the Lucan area. The school is situated off Griffeen Avenue in Lucan in the townland of Kishoge. It is five minutes' walk from Griffeen Valley Educate Together National School. The school opened on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 in a purpose built school building. The school started with three classes but will eventually become a sixteen classroom school (Educate Together, 2009).

### **Maynooth Educate Together National School, 2008**

Educate Together received the keys to a new state-of-the-art building for Maynooth Educate Together National School on August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2008 and the school was prepared and up and running for September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008. It is located on the Celbridge Road (Educate Together, 2009).

### **Midleton Educate Together National School, 2008**

Midleton Educate Together National School opened on August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2008 in temporary accommodation in the local rugby club (Educate Together, 2009).

### **Skerries Educate Together National School, 2008**

Friday August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2008 saw the handing over of keys to the new purpose-built school for Skerries. The school opened on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 (Educate Together, 2009).

### **Kilcolgan Educate Together National School, 2008**

Kilcolgan Educate Together National School opened on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008. This school should provide for the wider South County Galway area, including Oranmore, Ballindereen, Kinvara, Ardrahan, Craughwell, and Gort. It opened with 20 children and has grown since (Educate Together, 2009).

### **Thornleigh Educate Together National School, 2008**

A brand new purpose-build building was handed over to Educate Together on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> August, 2008 and the school opened on September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008 (Educate Together, 2009).

### **Wexford Educate Together National School, 2008**

Wexford Educate Together National School opened on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> August 2008 (Educate Together, 2009).

## **Chapter 6**

### **The campaign to separate church and state and the Irish education system**

#### **6.1**                      **Introduction**

This chapter of the dissertation examines the policies of the Campaign to Separate Church and State (C.S.C.S.) from its beginnings and specifically examines those policies that deal directly with the Irish education system. The chapter also acquaints the reader with contemporary discussion on the issue of Church State entanglement in the field of education in the Republic of Ireland.

#### **6.2**                      **Church State Entanglement**

In the 1990s cases involving the clerical sex abuse of children began to be heard in the courts and were widely reported in the media. Cases also emerged of children

who had suffered traumatic physical abuse while in the care of orphanages or industrial schools run by Catholic religious orders. As a result the standing of the Church was greatly eroded due to these scandals.

In 2005 controversy erupted when a junior minister in the coalition government, Liz O'Donnell, criticised the 'special relationship that has existed for many decades between Church and State' (O'Donnell, 2005). She further stated that 'the cosy phone calls from All Hallows [Irish seminary] to Government Buildings must end'. The Taoiseach, Mr Bertie Ahern responded by saying that without the input of the Church, Ireland would not have come as far as it has in recent years. Describing the Catholic Church as an important part of civil society, he said its role in managing primary schools was indispensable and that without it the education system would become unmanageable (RTE, 2005). This was shown to be the case when the Department of Education recently requested that the Catholic Church set up a new primary school in Dublin 15 under its patronage even though it will cater for a mainly non Catholic immigrant population. The Church has now agreed to act as a caretaker patron for this new emergency school but only until an alternative is arranged. The Dublin archdiocese says it was reluctant to open another Catholic school in the area because it believes the existing schools are sufficient to cater for the Catholic population. Archbishop Diarmuid Martin has said Ireland needs to quickly find new models of school patronage to suit the changing society (RTE, 29/5/07). Jane McCarthy, Development Officer of Educate Together stated that "we were very surprised that we were not asked to sponsor the school. We would have hoped for a much wider consultation on the matter. There seems to be a bulk of ninety parents who are not Catholic and we wonder how appropriate it would be for

so many people of different religions to be under the patronage of the diocese” (Northside People West, Vol 12, No. 23, 6-12/6/2007, pg.6). The admissions policies of local Catholic primary schools admit pupils of other faiths and no faith where feasible but where there is pressure for places, preference is given to Catholics and siblings of existing students. These rules discriminated against recently arrived non-Catholic immigrants to the state. There is a fear that this will lead to racial segregation in Ireland’s education system. This was highlighted in the media controversy regarding the Educate Together primary school in Balbriggan, Co. Dublin which was established in September 2007 to accommodate children who had not received places in other schools. All the children who have so far enrolled are black, Irish born children of African immigrants. The Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin stated ‘it might be a colour issue, but not necessarily a race issue’ (Irish Independent, 4/9/07, pg.15). Councillor Ruth Coppinger of the Socialist Party stated that in Balbriggan and Dublin 15 “the Department sat on its hands and didn’t supply the schools, and there’s social consequences of this. We’re getting a form of segregated education in Dublin 15 and Balbriggan” (Fingal Independent, 12/9/2007, pg. 9). Labour party Senator Ivana Bacik stated in a letter that “the recent crisis over primary school places in Balbriggan underlines the urgent need for a fundamental restructuring of our primary school system to ensure equality of access for all children. It is time for religion to be left outside the school door” (Irish Times, 27/9/2007). Maurice Hurley, principal of the Tyrellstown Educate Together National School stated that the Catholic church has a stranglehold on education in Dublin 15 which could lead to racially segregated schools springing up around the area in the coming years (Community Voice, Issue No.92, 24/5/2007- 6/6/2007). However the

current deputy leader of the Labour party who represents the area in the Dail, Joan Burton is quoted as saying that “the problems in the area are not about sectarianism or ethnic differences but about a shortage of schools and school places.”

Seamus Mulcroney, in an article published in the Irish Catholic stated “that for all the talk of empty churches, there are still a huge amount of practicing Catholics in Ireland”. He further states that “ influx of new immigrants are also increasing the numbers of Catholics, approximately 50% of the new Irish are Catholic and they are not just from the staunchly Catholic Poland and Lithuania. One in three people with black or black-Irish ethnicity is Catholic while the predominant religion amongst Asians in Ireland is also Catholic at 26%” (Irish Catholic, 18/10/2007, pg. 21). Mulcroney who is a former Director of Policy for the Progressive Democrats further stated that the Church of Ireland which is politically influential, especially in the South Dublin and Wicklow region would not look favourably on moves to reduce their role in education. He also referred to the fact that the Muslim population was not in general favourable to secular education. He further argues that the elite favour sending their children to private denominational schools which they believe provide their children with an excellent education but also allow them to network within some of the most powerful forces in Irish society. He argues that any attempt by the opposition parties to launch a campaign to reform the educational system could result in driving many Catholic voters (sometimes most unwillingly) into becoming Fianna Fail voters. He further states “No wonder the Fianna Fail strategists are smiling so much these days”. In an editorial in the same newspaper , it was stated that “it has become all too fashionable in recent years to categorise Catholic schools as mono-religious, mono-ethnic and mono-cultural institutions, that are doing little or nothing

to help the “new Irish” integrate and feel fully at home in Ireland”. This editorial further states that those involved in Catholic education like their counterparts in other schools, have been to the forefront of addressing the challenges posed by an ever-increasing diversity in Irish life. It further states that some Catholic schools are extremely diverse in their nature with some drawing upwards of 90% of their students from non- Irish backgrounds and that in some schools up to 50% of pupils from non-Catholic backgrounds (Irish Catholic, 13/9/2007, pg.12). The Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin Dr. John Neill warned that “the whole pattern of education which has served this Republic so well and given due recognition to the majority and minority contribution to education is now under serious threat”. Archbishop Neill also points to the haphazard, unimaginative response to the need for school places in rapidly developing areas on the east coast and the midlands of the Republic and the result is that in some areas the Church of Ireland pupils would become a minority in their own schools. This trend encouraging schools with four classes to virtually double overnight to accommodate this demand for spaces could in his opinion seriously undermine the ethos of Church of Ireland schools (Belfast Newsletter, 11/5/2007, pg.19). Ilona Frayne, the principal of St. Peter and Paul’s national school in Balbriggan slammed the ‘smokescreen’ being used by the Department of Education and Science which led to a row over the role of Catholic run schools and their enrolment policies. She said “it’s a child place issue, regardless of who was to be taken in and regardless of what mix of children”. Her school was one of the first schools in the county to enrol non-nationals and have in the region of twenty different nationalities attending on a daily basis (Fingal Independent, 12/9/2007, pg.8). She further stated that although her school was denominational, it

embraces every culture. The Catholic Primary School Manager's Association (CPSMA) stated that in one new Catholic school in the Adamstown area of Lucan, St. John the Evangelist that 90% of the children are non-national and half of these are non-Catholic. Mgr Dan O'Connor said that this proves that 'the Catholic school is inclusive and shows up the lie that they are white and Catholic only' (Irish Catholic, 13/9/2007, pg. 1) Anne McDonagh who is the Director of the Education Secretariat in the Archdiocese of Dublin stated that situation in Balbriggan could have been avoided "with forward planning" on the part of the Department of Education and Science (Fingal Independent, 12/9/2007, pg. 9). Breda O'Brien points out that Fingal (an administrative county within Dublin) is the fastest growing region in Ireland which is growing by the equivalent of the population of County Leitrim every three years. She also states that the 2006 census showed that Fingal had 50,000 people of non-Irish origin. She used the example of Balbriggan, a town in north Dublin which had attracted lots of investor-buyers who bought houses to rent them out. O'Brien says that non-Irish families with children of school going age were attracted to this town. This had an unforeseen effect on the local school system. She says that if efforts are not made to "welcome and integrate these newcomers, places like Balbriggan are a recipe for social chaos within a generation" (Irish Catholic, 13/9/2007, pg.12). Paul Roe, the C.E.O. of Educate Together said in 2005 that in the Fingal area there is the massive problem of the state needing to plan for schools in new housing estates (Blanch Gazette, 20/11/2005, pg. 13). Bob Dowling a member of the national board of Educate Together stated that "many have said that a school place crisis was going to occur in Balbriggan. We've all known about it for a while but the Department has been caught with its pants down and wasn't prepared." He



went on to say that “the blame cannot be put on the Catholic Church or Catholic schools in Balbriggan. Their policies are legal and binding and they are only exercising their rights. Traditionally Catholic schools have taken non- Catholics but the reality is that the Catholic schools are over-subscribed and don’t have the places”. He went on to state that traditionally the Republic of Ireland was 95% Catholic and education was provided by the Catholic Church but Ireland is changing and people should have choice. He further stated that “there are more and more kids who are not Catholic and more and more parents who want to send their children to a multi-denominational school” (Fingal Independent, 12/9/2007, pg. 9). Fine Gael T.D. for Dublin West , Dr. Leo Varadkar stated that “the school places crisis is a systems failure. Rather than trying to shift the blame on to local councils, school boards, the Archbishop or even parents, the Minister should take charge of the situation” (The Local News, 20/9/2007).

In 2006 the Irish Primary Principals Network representing over 90% of school principals wanted preparation for the Catholic sacraments of Holy Communion and Confirmation to be removed from the classroom and be conducted outside of school hours. This organisation also questioned the fact that the vast majority of primary schools in the state are under clerical management. Sean Cottrell, the national director of the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) stated that “the day is gone when organised religion in denominational form is required to govern and manage schools”. He further stated that the Churches who own school buildings should consider the value of trading or sharing ownership and control of schools in return for a proper state funded scheme to provide chaplaincy for all primary schools. However Rev. Dan O’Connor the General Secretary of the CPSMA said that he was

taken aback at the IPPN proposals which, he said had not been discussed with the association (Irish Independent, 30/1/2006, pg. 1). An editorial in the same paper stated that large numbers of teachers do not wish to teach religion at all. It further states that of those who do so wish, not all subscribe to the emphasis placed by the Catholic Church on the supreme importance of religion in the school, reflected in intense and prolonged preparation for Holy Communion and Confirmation (Irish Independent, 30/1/2006, pg.14). Cottrell states that the Church is acutely aware that the more the school is associated with preparation for sacraments and general faith formation, the greater is the likelihood that children will cease to practice once they leave primary school- as this practice is only associated with the school. He further states that the more schools do for parents in faith formation, the more those parents are disempowered from ever having to make a decision or to play a meaningful role in their children's religious education (Irish Independent, 30/1/2006, pg. 14). Cottrell emphasises the primary role of the parent in the religious formation of their own children and states that they should be encouraged to take up their responsibilities in this matter, rather than leaving the religious formation of their offspring to the primary schools.

### **6.2.1 Community National Schools: A New Model of Provision**

In December 2007 the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin Dermot Martin called for more inter-denominational national schools to be set up under the control of the Vocational Education Committees. The Archbishop said that in his view Catholic schools are over represented in the national school system of elementary education. He further stated that the Catholic schools in practice had been and would continue to be a model of integration. The CPSMA also said it welcomed the fact that provision had

been made in the new community national schools for religious instruction in this new model of primary school. Educate Together said it was surprised at the fact that the Department of Education and Science had signalled its intention to build community national schools in three areas where it had originally suggested the establishment of multi-denominational schools (Irish Independent, 14/12/2007, pg. 10). Minister Hanafin announced her intention to set up the state's first community primary school at Diswellstown in Dublin 15. Pat O'Connor the C.E.O. of the County Dublin V.E.C. which has been given the responsibility of acting as patron of this school stated that it will cater for the diversity of religious faiths represented in the area. The school will be faith neutral and the Minister said that "provision will be made within the school setting for the religious, moral and ethical education of children in conformity with the wishes of their parents". County Dublin V.E.C. lodged three formal applications to be appointed as patron of new primary schools at other sites in the county namely Adamstown, Phibblestown and Skerries (County Dublin V.E.C. Newsletter, April 2007). It has recently been confirmed that 'the first two schools will be opened in the Phoenix Park and Phibblestown, Dublin 15 in September 2008. A third school, Scoil Choilim, Diswellstown, Dublin 15, which opened under the temporary patronage of the Catholic Church in September 2007 will also make the transition over to the community national school model within 2 years' (County Dublin V.E.C., 2008, pg.2).

### **6.3 Campaign to Separate Church and State**

In 1988 C.S.C.S. was formed. Many of the executive committee members had been involved in the production of the Church and State magazine which was launched in

1973, in order to advance the cause of secularism in Ireland. However it was the passing of the referendum introducing a Pro-Life amendment to the Irish Constitution in 1983 and the failure of the Taoiseach Garret Fitzgerald's attempt to legalise divorce (also by means of referendum) in 1986 which provided the impetus for the establishment of this organisation. Their key objective is that Ireland will develop into a state where social liberty extends to all citizens regardless of creed, a society devoid of sectarian prejudice. The C.S.C.S. is intent on removing the Church from its key roles in the education and the health service etc. It also agitates that the Church should be made to pay a greater share of the costs involved in compensating victims of clerical sex abuse. It furthermore wishes to further secularise the Irish Constitution (Church and State, 2004).

John O'Brien (1973, pg 30) states that 'Catholic policy is still firmly committed to the demand that the church should have the right to establish denominational Catholic schools with the assistance of taxation collected by the state. It still demands this right to hire and fire teachers in such schools'. He goes on to quote from a Ph.D thesis presented by Patrick J. Duffy, a student of the University of London in 1967 in order to back up his point of view. Duffy is quoted as having stated that 'Church ownership of schools is invalidly regarded as a protective bulwark against state intrusion, above all against control by a future unfriendly government' (pg.36). Jenny Murphy (1982) stated that in the field of education 'the church did its work thoroughly in turning out generations of rote-learning, brain washed bastions against the modern foreign culture'.

The Church and State periodical has since its inception viewed the Irish system of education as being denominationally controlled and in need of secular reform. John O'Brien (1973, pg.18) quotes John Mescal's conclusion that 'the Irish system of education is pre-eminently a church system, devised by church authorities'. O'Brien further states that the religious orders have been able 'to decide who teaches in the schools. The clerical school managers have the right to appoint whosoever they please or reject and sack whosoever displeases them. In this way the church has a free hand to teach their children only what pleaseth them' (pg.20). He further states that the Catholic Church was in a central system with an ideological monopoly in Irish education. David Alvey (2004, pg.18) stated that 'there is now a public awareness that the traditional Church/State relationship was heavily biased in the Church's favour. The Irish Catholic Church is demoralised and on the ropes but it is not about to give up the ghost. Formally, in a legal sense, the Church still controls education'. The Campaign for the Separation of Church and State believes that the State has not played the full part in the Irish education system. It is succinctly expressed in a 2001 editorial: 'In the past, the state was very much the marginalised step-father of education. It provided the funds for paying teachers – which it had no part in training or hiring. Mother Church was the employer, but teachers' Trade Union militancy was always directed not at it but at the state' (Church and State, 2001, pg.2).

The case of the dismissal of Ms Eileen Flynn from her permanent, whole time teaching position at the Holy Faith convent school in New Ross, Co. Wexford was to attract a considerable degree of publicity (Flynn vs Power, High Court, 1985). Miss

Flynn had moved in with and become pregnant by a local publican who had been deserted by his wife. Thus she was dismissed from her position in August 1982 for 'failing to observe the Catholic ethos'. The Employment Appeals Tribunal found by two to one against her (Church and State, 1984, pg. 44-45). Even though she was not a member of the Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland (A.S.T.I), the secretary of that union said that his executive took a serious view of the matter, as the union had been set up originally to protect teachers from the whims of clerical management (Church and State, 1984, pg.45). This case clearly demonstrated that Church authorities could sack a teacher who was in effect paid from the public purse. When the case was appealed to the District Court, Judge Noel Ryan upheld the dismissal stating that 'the nuns had been too lenient with Miss Flynn' (Church and State, 1984(a), pg.41). Church and State(1984(a), pg.46-47) states 'the Flynn Affair has highlighted the Church's near monopoly of schooling in this country. Everyone is free to have the education they want so long as it is Catholic'. It further states that 'what we have in Ireland is a Catholic democratic dictatorship: that is, a perfectly democratic organisation of education which is entirely in the Catholic interest and works against any non-Catholic forces'. In 1987 in an editorial published in the campaign's magazine it was stated that 'the Catholic Church is determined to prevent Catholic children attending anything but clerically-controlled schools. It was further stated that 'the secular lobby must come to the assistance of these isolated group of parents in their efforts to establish their own hedge schools (Church and State, 1987, pg.5). The editorial refers to schools opened without official sanction by Catholic parents during the penal times. They did not wish to send their offspring to schools with a Protestant ethos as they were afraid of proselytism. The author is concerned

that students whose parents wish them to receive a secular, multi-denominational education are being denied that right due to the lack of availability of such schools. It is further stated in that article that ‘whoever controls the schools, controls the future’ (Church and State, 1987, pg.5). This phrase neatly sums up the viewpoint of the campaign to separate Church and State concerning the education system.

By 1992 scandals involving the clergy were beginning to be publicised. The campaign for the separation of Church and State regarded such disclosures as undermining the position of the Catholic Church in Irish society. David Alvey (1992, pg.26) says that ‘despite the body blow to the credibility of the Catholic bishops which Bishop Casey’s resignation inflicted and which rumours and revelations about breaches of clerical celibacy are continuing to inflict; and despite a myriad of other straws in the secularist wind – the decisive battle in Church/State relations will still be in education’. He goes on to say that ‘the introduction of secular reform into the field of education threatens the foundations of Irish Episcopal power as it was constructed in the nineteenth century. The Church’s position in education is like a fortress, once a part is dismantled, the whole becomes vulnerable’ (pg.6). David Alvey in his book ‘The Case for Secular Reform’ presented case studies of families who had been discriminated against in the Irish education system which was and is overwhelmingly denominational in character. He was a key member of the campaign and was encouraged by it to compile these case studies and publish them. Such was the persistence of the Campaign that the Department of Education recognised C.S.C.S. as a representative pressure group despite the fact that this displeased Catholic authorities. The Minister for Education had decided that the Campaign to

Separate Church and State was to have full participation rights in the consultative process known as the Education Convention which was to play a leading role in the discussions that were eventually to lead to the Education Act. The C.S.C.S. lobbied for the need to secularise Irish society. It was the first major group in the Republic of Ireland to openly criticise the role of the Catholic Church in key areas of Irish society e.g. Education, Hospitals etc.

The campaign also highlights the decline in the numbers of priests, religious brothers and sisters working as teachers and principals/deputy principals over the past few decades: 'In 1970 there were 2300 religious working in catholic secondaries in the Republic. Today there are 600 and of those a mere 5% are under 35 years of age (Church and State, 2000, pg.16). The campaign wishes to draw attention to the major change in the Irish education system. Religious personnel in schools no longer play the vital role they once did. John Swift (1991, pg.10) of the Secular Society of Ireland states that that the society's constitution was 'to oppose unremittingly the system of clerical management and the consequent sectarian teaching in schools'.

The campaign also highlights the fact that all the teacher training colleges in the state are owned by church interests (with the exception of Thomand Physical Education College in Limerick). These colleges are maintained by state funding. The Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland choose who may be a primary teacher in the Republic of Ireland, as there is no non-religious way into primary teaching. Thus the multi-denominational sector and the minority religions have no way of getting teachers with a non-denominational bias (Church and State, 1990, pg.3).



However, by 1997 the campaign for the separation of Church and State seemed to accept that it would be impossible to totally dismantle the largely denominational system of education. 'It is impractical to expect that in a predominately Catholic society in which denominational education has long been the norm that the system can be transformed along the lines of a complete separation of Church and State as in France or in the United States. Sudden extreme changes would merely antagonise the main body of citizens who otherwise would be open to the idea of fair play for the secular-minded minority' (Church and State, 1997, pgs 2-3). The editorial in question further stated that 'the Republic is ripe for the establishment of a more pluralist education system at present – but a reform would have to contain measures that reassure the conservative majority if it is to succeed. Revolutionary strategies should have no place in this scheme of things' (p.3). These quote show clearly that the campaign has a pragmatic, step by step approach to the reform of the Irish education system.

Alvey (1993) highlights that 'a growing number of Irish families feel that the education system discriminates against them. They see the system, particularly at primary level, as a monopoly controlled by the Churches. They feel the system treats them as though they don't exist'. He further stated that 'the system we have is one of compulsory religious instruction for most pupils, funded by the state in part due to the fact that the Catholic Church requires that a religious ethos must permeate the entire work of the school and the entire curriculum'. Alvey goes on to say that the national schools system 'has become a sectarian system, in which the rights of non-

believers and people outside of the mainstream churches are trampled upon'. The remedies suggested by Alvey were firstly 'that religion be taught as a completely separate subject from the regular subjects. It should be given a place on the timetable that allows the children who are opting out to do so without embarrassment '. He further argued of the need for the creation of a nationwide network of multi-denominational schools, open equally to pupils of all persuasions and none which would provide parents with real choice where precious little exists at the moment' . Senator Joe O'Toole, former General Secretary of the Irish National Teachers Association when discussing the lack of a multi-denominational sector in the Republic of Ireland's education sector stated that 'it is now time for the State to move on this particular issue..... No one so far has spoken about objections to the idea of parental choice being made available so why is it not there? (Church and State, 1993).

This debate was held on the Late Late Show, Ireland's long running television chat show (Late Late Show, 7/5/1993). A female teacher in the audience during the discussion in question stated that when she was interviewed for a teaching position she was asked questions directly related to her religious beliefs and how she would teach religion. She stated that 'I had no alternative but to lie my way into a job', she went on to say that 'I would never be able to be a principal, had I revealed that I had non-religious beliefs'. Sr. Eileen Randles, a member of the Loreto order and secretary of the Catholic Primary School Managers Association argued in favour of the integration of religion into secular subjects. She states that 'integration, more times it is called cross-curricular themes, is an internationally accepted principle, a good teaching practice'. She also states that 'the Churches- all the Churches- and I

must say I regret that we haven't a representative of the Church of Ireland here- the Churches have in fact provided education for the people of the country with state aid'. Gay Byrne followed this contribution by saying that this situation occurred 'because there was no-one else to do it'. David Alvey (1993) in an article stated 'that the denominational stranglehold over education necessarily reproduces a conformist mentality'. In this article he was reporting on a seminar held in May, 1993 hosted by the then Minister for Education, Niamh Breathnach in Malahide, Co. Dublin. Helen Mahony of the Teachers' Union of Ireland said that the role of the Churches had been to the detriment of democratic control of the system. In this article Alvey states that 'the Church is undermining the multi-denominational movement by starving it of school buildings (p.11). He backed this point up by pointing to the example of a fire-gutted multi-denominational school in Crumlin which had not been offered alternative accommodation by the Catholic Church which owned all the school property in the area. Alvey (1994) in another article states that 'the triangular power grouping of Department, teacher, unions and Church that has been determining educational matters since the seventies'. He is of the opinion that the aforementioned groups do not want anything to disrupt their control of the education system. He stated that 'by tradition, finance officials have been critical of the subservience of Education officials to the Catholic Church' and that 'no minister for Education would dare to take on the Catholic Church at the heart of its power base in the education system (pg.5)'. Fintan O'Toole (1998) summarised the influence of Catholicism on lives of citizens of the Irish Republic at the end of the twentieth century when he wrote that "An Irish person was, and is, likely to be born in a Catholic hospital, educated at Catholic schools, married in a Catholic Church, have

children named by a priest, be counselled by Catholic marriage advisors if the marriage runs into trouble, be dried out in Catholic clinics for the treatment of alcoholism if he or she develops a drink problem, be operated on in Catholic hospitals and be buried by Catholic rites”.

David Alvey in his speech to the National Education Convention on 14<sup>th</sup> October, 1993 argued that ‘the denominational aspects of the present structures of the education system were designed to facilitate the Churches. They cannot accommodate the three new minorities that have developed in Ireland over the last twenty years – namely people with no religion, the smaller minority religions and Catholics and Protestants who dislike denominationalism’. Alvey further argues that ‘no other state in the [European] community fails to make free, un-denominational schooling available to its citizens in publicly-owned buildings’. Alvey regards un-denominational schooling as being in essence secular education. Alvey also said that ‘parents were obliged to baptise their children in order to gain a place in school’ and that ‘children were victimised by other children or even by teachers or chaplains because of their beliefs’ (Church and State, 1994, pg. 6). Malachy Lawless (1994, pg.18) asks ‘where are the checks and balances in such a publicly funded, albeit private, voluntary institution, which can prevent the indoctrination of non-Catholics who have no choice but to attend this school’? In an episode of R.T.E’s current affairs programme, Prime Time, two issues were examined i.e. firstly the difficulties of multi-denominational sector in trying to obtain premises to start new schools and the opposition of the Catholic Church to any real democratisation of primary school management in Catholic schools. Emmet Stagg, a Labour Party T.D. (member of the Dail, the Irish Parliament) said ‘I don’t accept that they [the Church] own the

schools. 90% of the provision is made by the general taxpayer in monies paid to the schools, and the other 10% is collected from the parents locally, so the issue of democracy, I believe, whoever provides should have a controlling say' (Clifford, 1994, pg 19). This is a kernel issue in the debate concerning the system of education and who should exercise control over it. The Department of Education in May 1986 (during the period when Garret Fitzgerald was Taoiseach (Prime-minister) leading a Fine Gael / Labour coalition government), announced that children already attending denominational schools could not be moved by parents if a multi-denominational school was established in the area. Such children could not be counted towards the total number committed to enrolling in the proposed multi-denominational school. All such school projects had to prove they were viable by providing the authorities with lists of firmly committed prospective candidates. The Church and State publication stated that 'it must be assumed that the condition was made because denominational schools were afraid of the competition and of falling schools rolls' (Church and State, 1987, pg. 3). Lawless (1987, pg.7) states that 'in implementing the R.E. programme, teachers in multi-denominational schools are not aiming to communicate the doctrines of a particular religion. She goes on to point out that students attending Catholic schools face months of indoctrination and preparation for rituals, if they are making their first communion or about to be confirmed. Lawless states that during second and sixth classes when these sacraments are conferred the syllabus is more or less abandoned. She argues that children are deprived of their right to a full education and the children of other faiths or no faith, who because of the denominational system have no choice but to attend such schools have to suffer a double injury' (pg.8).

## **6.4**            **Conclusion**

Chapter five provides the reader with an examination of the policies of the Campaign to Separate Church and State with specific reference to Ireland's system of primary education. Recent controversies that have erupted regarding Church State relations are discussed in order to contextualise the discussion within a contemporary framework.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Research Findings**

#### **7.1**            **Introduction**

This chapter will report and discuss selected findings from this study. Data for this study was derived, in the main, from semi-structured interviews. The findings will be presented and discussed in this chapter, rather than being presented here, and discussed in the next chapter. This will allow a more coherent sense of the findings to emerge.

#### **7.2**            **Reasons for the establishment of Educate Together schools**

Many people who were not of Catholic or Protestant backgrounds or whom were in mixed marriages believed that their children would be considered outsiders within the existing denominational school system. Individuals appeared to fear that their children could be subject to indoctrination especially in R.C. schools, which were very concerned with religious formation.

Others chose the multi-denominational route because the child has parents from different faith traditions or ethnic backgrounds. All are clear that these schools are multi as opposed to non-denominational in character. The state will not grant recognition to non-denominational schools. Many teachers have opted to work in Educate Together schools due to the fact that they had suffered a crisis of faith. This applied in particular to lapsed Catholic teachers who felt they were being untrue to themselves when they were participating in religious instruction/formation. Many of these individuals regarded their move to the Educate Together sector as a liberating experience. A number of parents and teachers favour the democratic structure of these schools in which all interested parties have a say. Traditionally priests and rectors had a great deal of power within denominational schools in their role as managers. Many were attracted to Educate Together schools because they were co-educational. In the past there was a strong tradition of single-sex schools, which has left Ireland with the legacy of a high number of such schools at both primary and second levels. A lot of parents and teachers favour the Educate Together sector because they have a less authoritarian structure of discipline than that which is perceived to exist in many traditional denominational schools. Some minority groups can feel aggrieved by the large number of Catholics who opt for multi-denominational schools as it can result in children of minority backgrounds not getting places due to the first come, first served policy. A large number of parents choose an Educate Together school for their children because they have developed excellent reputations in their local areas. Others choose it because of the proximity of these schools to their homes. Others favour them due to the fact that that they

perceive that children are encouraged to learn by developing their thought processes rather than by learning by rote.

The primary reason for the establishment of Gaelic medium multi-denominational schools was that they would provide an education through the Irish language. The fact that they opted for a multi-denominational ethos appears to have been an issue of secondary importance. However some teachers in the schools opted to work in them due to the fact that they had such an ethos. In common with many teachers in other such schools they regarded it as a liberating experience in which they would not have to conform to rules of a faith, which they may not practice.

One founding parent (a recent immigrant from Scotland) felt that her Irish-born children would feel excluded in the local Catholic school because they were Protestant.

**‘I’m Presbyterian, my husband is Anglican, we go to a Methodist church, our children are Irish. We didn’t want their Irishness to be first identified by their exclusion from First Communion and things like that and there are a lot of parents in the community like that. Some of the committee really felt that this was a moment in Irish society when you are looking at another school you’re looking at embracing the multicultural nature’.**

This lady and her husband became interested in establishing a multi-denominational school because in their locality the only options that existed were owned and



controlled by the Catholic Church. Her observations raise the possible fears of proselytism and indoctrination of children from other faith backgrounds attending such schools.

**‘OK my daughter comes in from school and tells me that this is what we do – crossing herself – blessing herself. I would say that’s absolutely fine if you want to cross yourself that’s absolutely fine but there are choices in the way you pray and she said to me, but Mummy no that’s what we do. Now to me that defines the differences’.**

This lady also stated that it was possible to have an authentically multi-denominational school which had a majority Catholic intake.

**‘If you have 70% Catholics in a multi-denominational school they are not experiencing their religion as the way to do it, they are experiencing their religion as a number of ways of believing. So the perspective in which they put their religion is already different regardless of the mixture of the community they’re in’.**

This raises a possible dilemma i.e. are Educate Together schools really educating students about difference by in most cases refusing to allow their Catholic pupils to receive instruction for the sacraments during normal school hours? Are the schools ignoring difference rather than practically embracing it? Are children in such schools being provided with the opportunity to experience and celebrate difference?

Differences between faiths, nationalities and ethnic groups must be examined. Students ought to be encouraged to celebrate their differences as well as what they share in common. Individual pupils ought to be encouraged in R.E. lessons to express their particular religious beliefs in an atmosphere of mutual respect. The core religious education programmes in Educate Together schools ought to ensure that what different belief systems hold in common, as well as those tenets that divide them, are examined in an open and frank manner.

The interviewee went on to define what in her opinion are the major differences between Educate Together and Catholic schools.

**‘The only difference as far as I can see between Educate Together for instance and the Catholic schooling, you have national curriculum, you have national teachers, you’ve got good educational standards, the three R’s and whatever else, you’re only talking about the Educate Together school is providing children with the ability to choose to see difference, to understand difference, to enjoy difference and the catholic school has got a particular doctrine, Christian doctrine with a lot of love in the centre of it, but nonetheless a particular doctrine taught. Now there seems to be only one difference and that is in the Educate Together School the children have choice and in the Catholic school in a sense they don’t have that choice, this is how we do it’.**

A relatively large number of the founding parents are from other lands. This could be a motivating factor as they would have experienced different education systems in their own countries and would want a more multi-cultural education for their

children.

**‘I mean we have 12 or 13 different nationalities in the parentage, some would be you know one parent is Italian, one parent is from Jordan, one parent is from Egypt and the other is Irish mainly, a mixture. But basically I see the school here as just being an ordinary school for the area but providing a kind of a wider catchment’.**

A vice- principal stated that one Muslim mother had chosen an Educate Together school because she did not like the fact that her children would have to sit through Catholic R.E. lessons.

**‘In all the schools that she had gone to in Ireland, they had told her that the child would have to put up with the Catholic religion being taught and she just didn’t want that. Now the child is a Muslim but is not a fundamentalist Muslim, she didn’t want the child going to a Muslim school either, she just wanted the child mixing with Irish children and that goes back to the question, we really wouldn’t ask, she volunteered that information, we didn’t ask’.**

She further stated that:

**‘I’ve taught in a Catholic school where there were Protestants and they had to sit while Confirmation went on and they had to sit while First Confession went on and they had to sit while First Communion was going on and I felt sorry for**

**them, a child has a right to an education where another religion, but I would feel very sorry for a Muslim who feels very strongly about their religion having to sit in a classroom while Confirmation or Confession is going on. That child's right has been violated'.**

This raises the following issue i.e. does exposure to your fellow students receiving catechetical formation violate your rights or give you a greater understanding and tolerance of another belief system? Are some parents opting to send their children to multi-denominational schools due to the fact that they may be prejudiced against Catholicism or Anglicanism?

The Educate Together movement will have to ensure that there is not an anti-Christian bias in their classrooms. As Ireland has a strong Christian heritage and culture, it does a disservice not to examine in detail the Catholic and Protestant faiths and their combined influence on this country. Pupils and teachers must not shy away from studying Christianity along with other faiths. Educate Together must ensure that schools in that sector really do treat all faiths including Catholicism with equal respect.

They must develop policies to counter any possible bias or prejudice that teachers or parents may hold against certain faiths. Practical steps must be taken to ensure that all are treated with equality. Due regard must be given to the fact that anti-discrimination regulations are enshrined in both domestic and European Union legislation and that Educate Together schools could find themselves before the courts, if they do not proactively address this issue. The various interest groups

within such schools must identify that this is indeed a genuine problem and then a process of policy development that engages staff in these developmental processes, so that they will understand the problems and the resulting policies, in order to move towards much better practices.

One parent believed that the state has handed over its responsibility in the area of education to the Catholic Church:

**‘So I mean why the Catholic Church controls 95% of the buildings, primary schools, hires all the principal teachers and subsequently controls the whole system, I don’t think is right for a State just to hand over control’.**

The principal of a multi-denominational school, which is not affiliated with Educate Together, informed me that the founding parents of the Gaelscoil in which she works were divided over the ethos of the school. One group wanted it to be non-denominational but the department will only recognise A) denominational, B) inter-denominational or C) multi-denominational schools:

**‘There was a third opinion which would have been extremely strongly put which would have been a non-denominational school because we would have a cohort of parents who find it difficult to accept a multi-denominational school, what they really want is what they would describe as a non-denominational school, something along the lines of public primary schooling in France which as I understand it from what has been said to me would be totally non-denominational. The third option, the one they wanted the non-denominational**

**school was not an option as regards the Dept. of Education, they do not entertain the idea, that a school must state it's ethos when looking for recognition and the only type of ethos that was available at that time was Catholic, Church of Ireland or multi-denominational'.**

An issue that needs to be addressed is the question of whether a non-denominational option should be provided for parents who wish to send their children to a school in which there is no religious education programme. Are parents who favour the non-denominational option being forced to opt for Educate Together schools instead?

The state has in recent years created a new category of primary school, the community national schools. These schools will provide denominational instruction for different faith groups within school hours. The government ought to consider allowing those children attending those schools whose parents do not wish them to study any R.E. programme, to be provided with an ethics programme that is rooted in secular humanism, when their colleagues are studying religion or receiving denominational instruction. This is a feasible option due to the fact that R.E. lessons in such schools will be held at specific times in order to avoid any particular religious ethos spreading throughout the whole curriculum, as would be the case at present in most denominational primary schools. A non-denominational option can be created within this new type of school while those who wish their children to receive denominational instruction can also do so. If the students who opt not to study R.E. in some form or an ethics based programme are given more lessons in other subjects, it may be construed as giving them an advantage over others or indeed it may be considered as a form of punishment by some of those pupils. Therefore serious

consideration must be given towards the introduction of ethics programmes but this also raises the question of whether such courses ought to be on the curriculum for all students regardless of their religious backgrounds?

However the issue of removing the study of R.E. from the school curriculum at both primary and second-level must be addressed. Is this not a viable solution to the issue of educational provision in an increasingly diverse society? However would the pupils who emerge from such non-denominational schools be denied a rounded education which would include an examination of major world religions and belief systems? This is a dilemma that would arise, if the Republic of Ireland were to ban the teaching of R.E. in schools under its control. By ignoring different faiths and their histories and practices, would such schools be authentically preparing students to live in a diverse society? If we live in a pluralistic society must we not have some knowledge of the religious beliefs of our fellow citizens?

The following teacher who had lengthy experience teaching in the Catholic school system stated that they did not accommodate difference in the way that Educate Together did:

**‘Now I remember being at a meeting in Navan and there was a woman at the meeting and she said her child is adopted, so therefore the child was different straight away. The child is black so the child is different in two ways. She as a single parent, so the child was different in three ways and yet she was meant to go in and sit in a classroom where everyone is the same because the Catholic**

**doctrine and the Catholic teaching the rules, the Archbishop of Dublin I think two years ago sent a letter to all parishes in the area that the criteria for getting into Catholic schools were that you must be Catholic, living in the area, then Catholic outside of the area if there was no school for them to go to. Then brothers and sisters of those Catholics already within the school, then Catholics from outside the area who did have another school to go to but who wanted to opt to go to that particular school, so there are four categories already. It came out the time of the Travellers, their right to get into school and the fifth category then was anybody else in the area. Now that's forcing everyone to sign up to being a Catholic'.**

Over recent years the Catholic and Church of Ireland schools have taken in substantial numbers of non-nationals, people of different religious persuasions and students from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. This raises the issue that the first come, first served policy of Educate Together may be having the unintended consequence of preventing recently arrived immigrants etc enrolling in their schools. Are Educate Together schools becoming middle-class bastions? The Educate Together system must re-consider the first come, first served system.

One possible solution would be to reserve a certain number of places for refugees, travellers and people from socially deprived backgrounds. If this is done then the claim that such schools are becoming elitist institutions would be clearly addressed. In the Integrated Education sector in Northern Ireland efforts are made to ensure that at least 40% of the school population come from either the Roman Catholic or Protestant traditions. This is done in order to ensure that the school population is



representative of the society in which it exists. Educate Together must look at the creation of a list system for enrolment which would involve separate lists for different groups e.g. religious and ethnic communities. This system of different lists would ensure that there was a religious and ethnic mix within these schools. The Educate Together movement must consider what is being done in the Integrated Education sector in Northern Ireland in order to ensure diversity in the classroom. It must adapt their list system to suit the needs of Educate Together which is operating in urban areas that have experienced high levels of immigration in recent years and have large ethnic, national and religious minority communities in their districts

The changing moral climate in Ireland during the latter decades of the twentieth century was to fuel this desire for choice in the field of education. Ireland was changing from a mainly peasant to an urban society;

**‘And it seemed to me in the 1970s and 1980s this requirement that a bishop in a diocese or a parish priest or a rector and vicar was not necessary to run schools since we had a largely literate and numeral population, that a local committee of parents quite as legitimate a manager for a school as local clergyman. So that in a sense was a democratic issue as well, that there was an in-built majority and a nomination of the chairperson in the 3,000 and so national schools and these were being appointed by bishops, by local clergy and not by the parents or clients of the school’.**

**‘Ireland in the ‘70s and ‘80s was becoming less a monoculture and a more open society and that the role of the churches and religion in Ireland was waning and**

**that people were confident in their own abilities, the country was largely growing up, becoming a modern European State, I felt that these type of schools more reflected the changing Ireland than the traditional schools that had lasted over 150 years at that stage’.**

One parent stated that the lack of authentically multi-denominational schools in the state at second-level proved to be a hindrance especially for those children who had attended Educate Together primary schools. Can the Educate Together movement achieve its aims without becoming a major element of the second-level system? Is there really a need for such schools for secondary students? The vast majority of secondary schools are privately owned by different religious organisations. Comprehensive, community and V.E.C. schools also provide denominational R.E. programmes and many of them have representatives appointed by religious authorities serving on their boards of managements. The two latter types of schools claim that they have a multi-denominational ethos but yet have church appointed nominees on their boards. This also raises a possible dilemma, how does one define and decide which schools are genuinely multi-denominational in ethos? Such schools must demonstrate that they treat all faith systems equally.

Educate Together ought to ensure that the core R.E. programmes in each of their affiliated schools, really do treat all faiths in a fair and objective manner. The Educate Together movement ought to inspect on a regular basis how their schools formulate and implement their R.E. programmes. At the present time the state and the churches employ their own inspectors of advisors to monitor that the curriculum

is being correctly implemented. Traditionally the state did not inspect R.E. but rather left it to the religious authorities to do so. However, in the last decade, that has changed as R.E. is now offered as an examination subject in both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. Therefore the state has appointed inspectors to ensure that the curriculum it has established for examination purposes in R.E. is actually implemented. Patron bodies have generally inspected the R.E. programmes being implemented in their schools, Educate Together must ensure that it does the same.

**‘Well I’ve had the situation where my child who is 17 was asked outside the door by the local chaplain and asked about whether he went to Mass or whether he didn’t or whether in believed in God or whether he didn’t. And I really, really took that as an infringement of his rights. I’d have less difficulty with it if he was asked within the classroom, but removing from the class and the same thing happened with my daughter who is 13 and that’s a VEC run school. And I know a lot of people have gone through the Educate Together system who end up sitting in the back of classes for religion, whose rights were respected in primary school and all of a sudden finding this huge, sit in the back of a class because that happens in various places’.**

This raises the possible dilemma that while all V.E.C. schools claim to be multi-denominational (they in many cases hire Catholic chaplains etc), are they in fact and practice living up to their stated ethos? Nearly all V.E.C. second level schools have in recent decades provided only Roman Catholic R.E. lessons. They have in general

only hired catechists trained in church approved colleges. If these schools are really multi-denominational why are very few, if any Protestants, Muslims or Jews hired to teach R.E. in them? One practical step that could be taken to ensure that such schools are authentically multi-denominational would be to remove Catholic church representatives from their boards of management or from interviewing boards in such schools. Alternatively one could appoint representatives of other faith groups to these boards of management, however it might be easier to simply remove all church representatives. Community schools and V.E.C. schools are generally open to anyone who lives in their catchment areas and do not in the main have to adopt a first come, first served policy. Therefore such places of learning are usually representative in terms of the religious and ethnic composition of the communities in which they are based.

Many of the teachers whom I interviewed wished to teach in multi-denominational schools because they felt uncomfortable having to live up to the stereotype of the denominational primary school teacher who is expected to uphold certain moral standards of the Catholic church even in their private life:

**‘There’s a great freedom, I have to say, in my instance as a teacher, I find a great freedom in not pretending, that you can actually be truthful to yourself and be a Catholic the way you want to be without feeling you’re just doing it because you’ve a job and you don’t depend on it, which I don’t think is a very healthy way to be in employment’.**

A teacher in another school stated:

**‘There are a lot of people and teachers who could be lapsed Catholics or whatever but they have to go in and be fervent about it and teach it and whatever, and they may not, one person just said at interview he said hand on heart he said I did Confirmation this year and to be honest my heart wasn’t in it, because I didn’t really believe in it’.**

A colleague also stated:

**‘Well, one of the biggest draw to a lot of primary teachers who worked in denominational schools is the big question, the main question their faith, which is what happened to me. And decided that they couldn’t actually live the lie of teaching say Catholicism when it wasn’t what they believed in and for that reason decided to jump ship’.**

**‘We had jobs advertised recently and had 70 applicants and there are lots of jobs out there, some schools find it hard to get for whatever reason. We’re very popular in terms of attracting young people to the schools’.**

These quotes pinpoint a possible ideological dilemma in Catholic schools concerning lapsed Catholic teachers been forced to help form children in a faith which they themselves do not practice. Can Catholic schools achieve their goal of faith formation, if some teachers are just hypocritically going along with the religious ethos of the school in order to keep their jobs? The government should consider

time-tabling religious instruction lessons at specific times in denominational schools and allowing those teachers who wish to engage in it to do so while affording those teachers who on grounds of conscience object to doing so to teach students who do not wish to avail of such lessons other secular subjects. It ought to be possible for R.E. lessons to take place at a set time each day and the possibility of hiring a number of catechists to provide religious instruction and prepare the students for the sacraments should also be considered. Obviously this is a very difficult issue to deal with as the patrons have the right to recruit teachers who support the school ethos. However solutions must be found as the Republic of Ireland is in the highly unusual position of having nearly 99% of primary schools under the patronage of the Catholic and Anglican churches. At the moment parents have the right to allow their children opt out of R.E. classes. However in many cases no alternative arrangements are made for them.

A principal in a Dublin suburb stated:

**‘I mean you come into this place and you wouldn’t necessarily know and apart from that you wouldn’t see any crosses, Padraig Pearse wouldn’t be seen when you come in the door, you wouldn’t necessarily know that it’s much different in many respects in terms of religion and the fact that it’s not being taught’.**

I would pose the question that this principal teacher seems to be confusing Catholicism and Irish nationalism. He refers to the fact that in his school there are no religious or political icons on the walls. Is this school ignoring difference rather than

exploring it? Why can one not have a cross or a star of David on display? Is that not a concrete example that the school respects diversity and encourages mutual respect in a pluralistic environment. Is this principal teacher allowing his personal views on the matters of Catholicism and Irish Republicanism/Nationalism to influence the way in which these ideologies are explored in his school?

Staff members in such schools ought to receive regular in-services which would ensure that they would reflect upon and be aware of their own prejudices so that hopefully they do not pass them on to future generations. Educate Together schools must clearly demonstrate that they are multi not non-denominational in character. All ought to feel comfortable in sending their children to such schools and do so in full confidence that differences in terms of culture, ethnicity and religion will be respected.

He further stated:

**‘That put me on this road. Kind of a personal thing really, I mean I would have come from a very strict Catholic background and I would have reacted against that and I guess when I had the freedom I did. All the way through primary and secondary school you towed the line and your mother wouldn’t want you to go that way. But as it happened I wasn’t interested at all and when I got the freedom and went to college, I had freedom I realised this wasn’t right at all, a lot more to life than the world view I was brought up with’**

He further stated:

**‘But in general, I think that’s the attraction for teachers where they do not have to engage in religious instruction. As I said earlier they go to denominational teacher training colleges and coming out from there you’re expected to teach Catholic First Communion, Confirmation, even though you mightn’t necessarily have a strong faith yourself, or any faith yourself, you’re still obliged to teach it and you might not agree with it, but you still have to do it, your employers are the church, whatever church you’re working for. So I think that’s one of the attractions. On the down side of course, the premises aren’t great but you find teachers willing to sacrifice that’.**

One senior teacher believes that while many parents are attracted by the multi-denominational ethos of the school others choose the Educate Together route because they are also co-educational and actively encourage parental involvement. This individual also acknowledges that many parents are now simply choosing such schools because they have developed good reputations. This raises the issue that the desire for a multi-denominational education may not be a priority for many of the parents who are enrolling their children in Educate Together schools that the choice may be made for a variety of other reasons e.g. that they are co-educational, have high academic standards, that they are perceived to have smaller classes and cater for children with learning difficulties.

**‘Parents in the early years of the school in my opinion have more emphasis on**



**the multi-denominational aspect of it, and the pioneering aspect of it and the inclusiveness of it. A lot of all the Educate Together schools and our one in particular we have written in our mission statement that no child shall be an outsider and that's very powerful, I think about that very often. But as the schools become established and become just very good schools, parents can, and do, chose the school, for instance, maybe the co-educational side of it, maybe the democratic management side of it, maybe just the general school reputation, there are parents who don't want to become involved in their children's education, and that's also true who will hand it over, as has traditionally been done in Ireland'.**

This raises the issue that children whose parents deeply desire that they receive an education in a multi-denominational environment may find that others who are choosing the school solely on the basis on academic results may find that their children will not secure places in their local Educate Together school.

One teacher summed up what they believe to be the reasons behind parents sending their children to her school:

**'The main reason why we would have the number of children we have is because our school is the only co-educational school in the area, that's the main reason they're there. Secondly, the fact that they feel we achieve to a great level; thirdly, there is a perception there that our classes are smaller, which they are in some cases. Fourthly, also with the last number of years, a very strong**

perception out there that children who have learning difficulties are catered for to a far greater extent. Because of the fact that the classes are smaller and also that we would have a very strong learning support team. So we would have a number of parents who would decide for that reason. Somewhere in the order of priorities there would be a number of people who would have decided that they wanted their children to school where they would not get strict Catholic education or not get strict Church of Ireland education, where they would get something different’.

One teacher who agreed with this view-point said:

‘One is that this school is a co-educational school and that is one of the basic principles of Educate Together that the schools are co-educational. 21 years ago or 25 years ago, quite a deal of the schools in the greater Dublin area, the large schools, were separate boys’ schools and separate girls’ schools. You often had Junior Schools which had boys and girls, but with boys up to a certain age then had to go to a boys school, so that’s one of the principles of the Educate Together schools is that they are co-educational. The second essential point is the religious differences in the boys’ Catholic school the teachers were contracted to teach the Catholic religion to instruct the children in their religion and to prepare for the sacraments. In all church schools there is a requirement to teach instruction, to instruct the children in whatever faith is managed under and that to me didn’t seem to be in keeping with my role as a teacher or a necessary part of my role as a teacher, so the idea that children from different

**religions and children with no religion would be taught together and have the same religious education i.e. an education about religion, about the aspects of life and society that are addressed by religion was an attraction to me as well’.**

Another teacher believes that Educate Together schools encourage a flexibility of thought that will serve them well in a rapidly changing job market:

**‘So the children that I am teaching, the children now in 1<sup>st</sup> class in primary school, about half of them are going to work in jobs that have not yet been invented, we can’t go on teaching them the same thing, that the thing to do is just learn everything that you’re taught, write it all down, pass your exams, what we have to teach is innovation, flexibility, confidence, and adaptability. You have to be able to have an inner core of, for instance, an inner moral code, you have to have with the fast change all around you, an internalised moral code rather than the external one, and that’s what I think often wasn’t developed, it was just the rules because this is what they say, this is what you’re told to do’.**

Changing population patterns have been a prime cause behind the emergence of such schools as in the following town in Munster:

**‘There is the indigenous Irish population but there’s a huge influx of people over the last 10 years but specifically over the last five years, the town has trebled in size since 1995 and during the course of 1994/5 while they were**

**exploring the idea of establishing an all-Irish school there were a number of people who had moved in from abroad, particularly English people who heard about this when it was advertised’.**

The deputy principal of a school in West Dublin stated that demographic patterns led to her school becoming very multi-cultural in terms of the pupil body and led to it becoming the first Educate Together School to have two classes in each year.

**‘Whereas our school, we have two of each stream, and because of the area that we’re in Lucan, it’s so a growing area and then with Hewlett Packard and Intel, we have a very multi-cultural background’.**

**‘Well we were the first Educate Together school to go to two and that was under a lot of pressure from the Department because there’s just no spaces in Lucan and at the moment there’s another Educate Together school opening in Lucan this September. So that was the first reason that that happened, because a lot of the ethos of Educate Together schools was the smaller, just the eight classes, a smaller community as such, but we were put under pressure and then we felt that we still could have the nice community spirit and ethos, with the bigger school, so that’s why’.**

The role of mothers as prime movers behind the decision to send their children to Educate Together schools is shown in the case of the family of the C.E.O. of that organisation Paul Roe:

**‘As a parent, my children went to the North Dublin National School Project so it was really my wife’s choice of school at that and she was very insistent that she wanted an education which would be respectful of the rights of people and we went up to the North Dublin School Project which was then in its fourth year of operation and it went on from there, so I got involved as a parent activist through development in ’88’.**

Their decision was also based on the good reputation as well as the ethos of the school.

**‘Our neighbours were sending their children to the school and they spoke very highly of it and we went up and met the principal and were sort of knocked over by the enthusiasm, the child-centred approach and we were attracted by the fact that it was a system which was run in a very transparent way, you could find evidence of the ethos, the four principles and it was quite clear that there was a commitment that the school would be run in this way, the rights of parents, the rights of children were very, very clearly defined. From our background we’d been very committed to the concept that humanity and its diversities is an enormous resource which should be cherished and delighted in and it’s something which we were very keen that our children should grow up and be totally comfortable with, with that wide perspective, we didn’t want our children to be brought up in an environment which assumed that everybody thought the same’.**

Paul Rowe stresses the need for an education system that caters for the rights of students. However is there an ideological dilemma, in that are denominational schools not also respectful of the rights of people, are they not also child-focused institutions as well? Does Educate Together have a monopoly of these virtues? Catholic and Church of Ireland schools have had to adapt to an increasingly diverse intake. Many of these parish schools have sought to integrate rather than to assimilate these students. Both churches have been careful not to be accused of using their parish school networks as instruments of proselytism. They have sought to respect those of other faith backgrounds while not diluting the ethos of their schools.

Rowe states that:

**‘we’d much rather sort of encourage people to think that education should be based on the rights of the children or young people that go through it and that at second level it is clearly not the case that the developmental needs of young people in the second level system are clearly not being met and increasingly not being met. We have a very narrow curriculum or assessment centred system of education in second level whereas what we would like to see is a holistic, rights based approach which would recognise the full range of human potentiality on an entirely equal basis, so the children with the superior social skills, co-operative skills, ability to work in a team have those abilities recognised and valued just as much as those who are able to pass academic exams very successfully’.**

Roe believes that the present structure of our education system has been in itself the

major cause of the emergence of Educate Together;

**‘Our point is that the system is totally unbalanced, that it is unsustainable for a modern European state with a rapidly diversified society to sustain a situation where 99% of the primary schools available to citizens are legally obliged to uphold the ethos of one or other particular religious ethos and in the case of 93% of the primary school that is the ethos one particular church which is the Catholic church’.**

**‘The problem is the system is unbalanced, in most European countries, most countries in the world the State provides a system of inclusive education, respecting of the rights of its citizens and comprehensively throughout the country and then allows private denominations, private institutions to provide specialist types of education, particularly non-denominational or particular educational philosophies. The difficulty in Ireland is that the system is ran the wrong way and I think there is growing recognition that if we can put in a national network of inclusive schools you would actually allow the denominational, the Catholic schools to retain their identity as Catholic schools much more easily because they would not have a significant percentage of children and families involved in their schools who really would prefer to be somewhere else’.**

Is there a possibility of an ideological dilemma emerging i.e. does Educate Together think its model of school ought to be the major player in the future or just one of a

number of choices? Roe argues that the opening of more multi-denominational schools will allow Catholic schools retain their identity. If denominational schools retain the majority of schools and pupils in the state, will the opening of more Educate Together schools lead to a lack of diversity in the parish controlled sector and thus contribute to polarisation within the community? This issue must be addressed because there is a danger in areas of the northern and western suburbs of Dublin that a de facto segregated system of education could emerge. The indigenous Irish population may opt to send their off-spring to the local parish school while the immigrant community may well disproportionately choose Educate Together or community national schools.

The state and the major patron of primary schools in the Republic of Ireland, the Roman Catholic church must come to an accommodation which would see the latter handing over a significant number of schools and allowing them to transform their ethos to a multi-denominational ethos. This would really give choice to parents. I would suggest that the community national school model has the best chance of success, as it would allow those who wanted their children to be exempt from or to receive religious instruction to be facilitated.

An interested party stated that:

**‘The Department is obliged to provide for diversity. They are, under the Education Act, obliged to provide for diversity of education and they are not doing it and at some stage there will be a test case. Because the schools are**



**finding it so hard to get the accommodation set up’.**

### **7.3                    Difficulties encountered establishing a school.**

In line with my findings in the Literature Review founding parents and teachers faced an uphill struggle having to set-up their schools in locations as diverse as scout dens, GAA club, community halls, private houses and discotheques. Many schools came into being without furniture as well as permanent accommodation. Some after acquiring a site had to operate in sub-standard vermin infested pre-fabricated classrooms.

Indeed in one case the Catholic Church provided accommodation for an Educate Together school. This was highly unusual as the Catholic Church with its own sector of education appeared to regard Educate Together up to that point as a possible threat. Protestant Churches have in the past helped some projects schools with accommodation. Many founders of these schools felt that they were at a huge disadvantage compared to the Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland, which have enormous land banks at their disposal. The whole business of acquiring a site was in many cases very difficult. In recent years the local contribution to a site has been capped.

One principal told me the following concerning the establishment of a multi-denominational Gaelscoil (i.e. an Irish language medium school). That individual was reacting to a viewpoint held by some principals of English medium Educate

Together schools that it was easier to establish a Gaelscoil because the Department of Education is biased in favour of such schools;

**‘In September 1994 the door opened on the first morning a Thursday morning in a disco. We were in a disco on Thursdays and Fridays. We moved into a house, a holiday house on Monday of the following week and we were there in the living room/kitchen of 45 blank Street on that Monday for the entire week and on the second Monday morning I arrived at school and I was presented with a sheriff’s letter telling us we were going to be evicted and I didn’t have a phone, and I had to lock the door with the children inside and a parent standing with them while I rang down the street to a coin box to ring the chairperson who told me to go back up to the school and lock the door no matter who came to put us out, stay in there’.**

**‘We went back down to the disco and we spent 12 months in a disco, no windows, no natural light of any description coming, 39 steps from the disco down to the yard which was covered in gravel, it was the backyard of a pub and that’s what we had for a yard, we stayed there for 12 months. The following summer we spent the entire summer renovating what was a two-roomed Protestant school which fell into disrepair in 1971 and had been home to jackdaws and pigeons ever since. And we went in there in September 1995 and we stayed there until September 1999 with series of pre-fabs having eight lunchtimes every day so that we could accommodate the children in the small space we had in the yard and from there we moved to a field and on that field**

**we now have a beautiful building, ten pre-fabricated classrooms, a hall, a series of toilets, offices, a playschool and whatever you decide you might want for a school. Totally prefabricated, corridors which have to be mopped first thing every morning whether it's wet or dry they have to be moped because on wet mornings you have rain and on dry mornings you have condensation. Vermin visiting and continuing to visit and basically that's it, that's the setting up a Gaelscoil'.**

This is by no means unrepresentative. Many school projects have had to endure similar experiences. Educate Together does not have vast tracts of land at its disposal as do the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches. Denominational schools have very little trouble acquiring sites from their own land banks and in the past did not find it difficult to get capital funding from the state authorities. The next interviewee a vice-principal in a major south-western suburb of the city of Dublin informed me of similar experiences in the establishment of the first Educate Together School in Lucan. It was also the first multi-denominational school in the country to receive a site from the local county council.

**'I came the second year, the first year there were two classes upstairs in the rooms in the Scouts Den the next year I was there and we had the two class rooms and we had two prefabs so we stayed there for two years and then the next September we were to move to here and it wasn't ready of course there was some red tape somewhere, so we were in Edmondsbury we had transported very dilapidated prefabs, these prefabs are lovely are but the ones we had there from**

about September to Christmas we were in Edmondsbury we had 6 or 7 prefabs dotted all over the place, when we look back on it now it was a mess and then we moved here that Christmas and we've been adding on now, we just had six classrooms, we added on two more, now this September we need two more again. So we can't really add on much more because this is our actual permanent site. When we were given the site we were the first Educate Together to be given a site by the Council, so once we got on the to the site, but the usual thing of planning permission, tenders and all of that, delays the whole thing, somebody needs another piece of paper for something, so hopefully now 2004 for definite we should definitely be in'.

Another principal told me of how his fellow teachers and students had to hold classes in a small church community hall from which

'Once a week we were sort of evicted from the place because of the mother and toddler group using the place, one side, we were basically a hedge school once a week, we'd go off to the library, that was great we went on lots of field trips, actually we went to churches, we used to go on field trips but we couldn't afford them after a while, every Wednesday, the churches were free so we went down to all the churches and had multi-denominational instruction, an interesting experience'.

His vice-principal stated that:

**‘The desks had to be put away every single even, can you imagine putting away all of those desks, every bit of furniture, all the books, all the jigsaws, all the Lego, and if you didn’t put it in the exact fit, it was a jigsaw, we were so cramped for space, the desks didn’t go in the proper way, the last item of furniture wouldn’t go in and you had to have it secure because Cubs, Scouts, Beavers, Old Age, Bingo, Badminton, took over in the hall when we left. On a Wednesday there was a mothers and toddlers group and I would say they were more a political group than a mother and toddlers group but there was a lot of opposition to it being in the community centre, so they insisted where there were maybe one or two toddlers the first year, the numbers swelled to about 30 when we started in the community centre. They insisted on their Wednesday morning keeping the mother and toddler group going, so [Principal] would have to leave and walk around [area] with his kids on a Wednesday morning. He used to bring them to the library or on a wet day he’d come in to my classroom and we’d do some movement to music or something like that. When it came to extending to 4 teachers the parents association, which I know the management board, knew about it, because some of the parents were members of the management board, they objected to prefabs going up at the side of the community centre. Now the school across the road from us was a basic school and the whole yard was dotted with prefabs so why they were objecting to us having prefabs when they had oodles of them and were in the process of putting up prefabs again that summer because the school was growing. And hence we found ourselves son the 12<sup>th</sup> August with no school to go to because they didn’t object to the planning permission until the very last minute and the 12<sup>th</sup> August**

we discovered we had no school to go to and at that stage we had got permanent recognition. Are you aware of the temporary recognition? At that stage all year we were operating under temporary recognition but towards the end of the year we got permanent recognition and the difference that made to us was the Department had some responsibility to us. Now to get the community centre they had sourced something like 89 buildings in the area and the only place they could get was the community centre. So when we were closed down, they would have sourced us in St. Joseph's and in the end they did pump an awful lot of money and they made the place very comfortable for us but again in St. Joseph's they were very afraid of us. Like that article went into the paper with the picture of St. Joseph's that they had to negotiate with Archbishop of Dublin and the Church was furious and the principal was furious about the article because it was only going to draw publicity for them and some of their parents objected to us being there as well, so they took a lot of flack for us being there'.

Parents proved to be active in seeking accommodation for the schools.

'How we got in there, the group of parents set this thing up four years they looked at every single little bit of property that was around [area]. [area] is a very built up area and there is not much in the way of property, empty buildings around the place, which you could rent, or whatever. So they looked at literally every single little doghouse, every little nook and cranny they could possibly and drew a complete blank apart from this one place and one place was willing to let school start up, a bit of opposition here and there but eventually

**got the thing up and running. We were there for a while but then we had this problem with planning permission. I went away on holidays and away for all this and came back and found there was no school, but fortunately, the great thing about this Educate Together is that people in your absence or even while you're here will work away behind the scenes, when I got back the whole school had moved down to the road to an interesting location, to a Catholic run institution'.**

He further stated that costs in acquiring a site in Dublin or in the rest of the state had been prohibitive but the government has finally stepped in to address this issue.

**'This presented an absolutely crushing financial burden on voluntary groups of parents in the Dublin area in 1997 you would have been talking in terms of £5 million Irish pounds to acquire a site suitable for a school and this had a massively negative effect on our ability to open schools. Since 1998 and the announcement that the state would henceforth be prepared to offer to acquire sites for our schools and would cap the amount that we would have to pay for building of our schools to £50,000 Irish at that time that is suddenly taking literally taking millions of pounds off the fund-raising targets you need and that is the one critical factor which is allowing us to suddenly be able to open more schools. The issue with the enrolment policy is purely a matter of supply and demand. I mean our attitude to it is to increase the number of spaces and as we are increasing the number of spaces there will be less difficulty in accessing the schools'.**

However most schools must at the beginning go through the temporary accommodation route.

**‘The practical situation with us is that we went to the scout, the sea scouts and we were there for the first year but we can literally only stay there one year because of the size of the site. They have been marvellous people to be with and work with and we found that a great experience, very welcoming, as we have with every single community group here. We have had terrific support’.**

Newly appointed principals often found themselves in the same position as this individual:

**‘We only got permission to start up in June, I wasn’t involved I was only hired at the middle end of July, we had no furniture, no kids officially, we had lists alright and may or may not have been told we’re getting permission, I didn’t even know who the principal was, who the teachers were, how many teachers, how many classes, what to make-up, no furniture, no kids, one teacher and then we started, we still started off with 44 kids, we had 53 within a couple of months and that’s significant because 50 is a kind of number that gets you permanent recognition in the likes of the Department’.**

He contrasts the treatment received by Educate Together start-up schools with that received by new denominational schools.



**‘In fact the denominational schools usually start up with permanent staff the minute they go on, which means they have better funding, better staffing, better everything, and they have, they have the land. We’re set up with nothing; we have to pay 25% of the rent ourselves, why? I know two schools in Dublin started off last year, same as ourselves, less than 50 kids, they had permanent recognition, only pay 5% of the rent, we pay 25%, they’ve had bigger grants of at least €10,000 - €12,000’.**

Many school projects have to become major fund-raisers, however they are not unique in the Irish system of primary education in having to do this. Many schools engage in various exercises designed to raise extra funds to cover the running costs which they incur. In recent days a denominational primary school in Co. Cork has had to ask pupils to bring toilet roll to school with them as they could no longer afford to provide it due to cuts in state funding (RTE, October 6, 2009).

**‘But we had applied for the local golf clubs to run a golf classic for next year, came up with a cancellation and said will you take it, 4½ weeks in advance and these things by all accounts take months and months to plan, we ran it and got €7,000’.**

One interviewee provided me with an account of what was involved in the establishment of his particular school. He also contrasts what his school had to go through in order to get accommodation, recognition etc with the experiences of

Catholic schools.

**‘Well the problem traditionally was much worse than it is currently. Traditionally, the patron of a school which would be bishop or the board of education, the patron of the school provided the site free gratis to the State or to the local community for the school, which meant that when the Bray School Project Association set up in order to build a school, we needed a 2.5 acre site and the cost of a 2.5 acre site in the greater Dublin area, anywhere in the country for building purposes, is a huge problem for a group of parents. It’s not a huge problem necessarily for a body such as the Catholic Church, which has a huge land bank or has the resources in order to divert money into that end of things. So that was the tradition. Now in the last couple of years that situation has changed where the maximum amount a patron has to pay is set down and the State defrays the rest of the cost, but it’s still significant in terms of coffee mornings or bazaars or whatever to do that. So it’s not as big a task now whereas if you locate a site, the amount of money that you will require to purchase it is not as significant as it was for the earlier schools, so that helps that situation, but it is still is a difficulty when the state doesn’t actually provide the sites because what traditionally happens for example in a Greenfield site where they’re going to build 1,500 houses under planning they’re required to leave a site area for shopping or for schools or for churches and this happens all over say west Dublin, throughout the ‘70s and ‘80s and in all of the cases in all of these areas, the Catholic church was asked to be the patron of the school and applied for a school and purchased the site. It’s not open to Educate Together,**

we don't have that kind of finances of that back-up to do that, but if the State was to buy that site and then survey the people in the area as to what kind of a school they wanted, then it would be, if you excuse the pun, a level playing pitch. So that's one difficulty. The other difficulty is that in certain areas clearly the school population is shrinking and there's an existing school with available accommodation and what groups like the Bray School Project or the Sligo School Project or the Mullingar School Project are asking the State is to build another school beside a half-empty school, because these are vested in the trustees of the various churches. So in the setting up of schools we were very fortunate here in that Wicklow County Council sold us this site in about 1985 or 1986 way below commercial rate, 2.5 acre site for £25,000. Now we got a significant grant from the Ireland Fund towards the setting of the school which helped that. The State has now dropped the requirement for a local contribution for the day to day running of the school'.

'Now the State has done away with that requirement and it is time the State did away with that requirement in terms of the land on which schools are built'.

'It's much easier for the Minister for Education if he's opening a new school in a satellite town of Dublin to say yes well the Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin will know where there's a site, I can deal with him, we've dealt with him for 150 years, than it is to deal with a group of local people who want a certain type of school'.

Are the Catholic and Anglican churches to be condemned for investing so much of their own capital into the education system? Should they not be commended for doing so? Is it true to say that the denominational school type is preferred by the Department of Education and Science when in recent years the majority of new schools that have been established have been designated as having a multi-denominational ethos (i.e. either Educate Together or Community National Schools)?

#### **7.4                      Attitudes of Churches**

A teacher in an integrated primary school in Northern Ireland said that the local Catholic clergy had originally reacted very negatively to the establishment of such a school in their parish. They probably felt it would threaten pupil numbers in their denominational schools.

**‘I know that priests visited all those people and told them they would be blacklisted and this was a very bad step and would need to think twice about it and there was a very degree of intimidation and I think it probably made those people much stronger, as you say kind of a reaction, much stronger in deciding well we don’t really want that sort of an attitude. And when their friends heard about it, we should send our children to the integrated school as well because we don’t want our children to grow up without mixing with people from other backgrounds. I think they possibly shoot themselves in the foot and it’s only now when the school has become such a success that they probably have thought we better revise our attitude here’.**

The Catholic Church authorities have in the past reacted strongly to the establishment of Educate Together schools in certain areas in the Republic of Ireland, in some cases refusing to administer the sacraments to children who attended them. This demonstrates that this Church objects to Catholic pupils attending schools not under its patronage.

**‘Well we have at the moment, 94 children in the school, it’s a two-year programme, had to fight very hard to have it all in my previous school for instance, the local priest refused to allow the children have Communion and Confirmation in the local church because they had attended a multi-denominational school – that was in the early days’.**

**‘The church bodies relented. It actually went back to the Archbishop; it was the Archbishop’s decision in the end. It was just a local priest thought he could flex his muscles and frighten people’.**

When asked why was he so opposed to multi-denominational education, the response was as follows:

**‘He was opposed to it because the numbers had gone down in the local Catholic school’.**

**‘This priest argued well he just thought he could bully people really, he said you’re Catholic why are you sending your children to this heathen school, and**

**the parents just said well then we don't want anything to do with you, we will go our own way and approached the Archbishop directly'.**

In one multi-denominational school the Church of Ireland organised its own R.E. classes.

**'The same with the Church of Ireland they were not happy that one of the existing staff would do it because what we wanted was that it would be provided for from within the existing resources of the school with the consent of the parents were that possible but the Church of Ireland, the rector wasn't happy that one of our staff would do it, because he felt it would be preferable if somebody who actually practised and was a member of the Church of Ireland would do that, and that's perfectly acceptable'.**

This principal believed that Anglican clergy would be more involved in their schools than their Catholic counterparts

**'It's my perception anyway that the Church of Ireland the clergy would be more involved in their schools, whereas the clergy aren't that involved in the Catholic schools because they just don't have the time'.**

This person also gave an account of what they regard as the withdrawal of the Catholic Church from direct engagement in the provision of education. If this is actually happening, will that not de facto lead inevitably to the fundamental re-

structuring of our primary education system? Will the issues of change of patronage and ethos not come to the fore in the coming decades? The Catholic Church may be prepared to transfer a significant percentage of the schools under their patronage to the state. The Department of Education and Science must immediately embark on talks with the ecclesiastical authorities on this issue.

**‘I could because I think things have changed an awful lot even in the last five years where you had the religious pulling back from the schools by virtue of the fact that they didn’t have the number of clergy there to actually take up posts as even chairpersons of board of management and a lot of the denominational schools around the country and even in Dublin now have secular chairperson, again it would have been unheard of 15 years ago, so even the denominational schools would tend to be shifting a little bit more towards the multi-denominational ethos where the clergy would have little input into the school other than the sacraments for example, the chairperson would be secular and look to the clergy for advice on particular areas of the curriculum’.**

One teacher while stating that in general the attitudes of the churches had been positive towards them but that there were exceptions to this rule.

**‘There was one priest who was contacted a while ago and could we do First Communion in his church, we won’t mention any names, and we were told in no uncertain terms, well if you’re going to a school like you can’t expect us to accommodate you in the Sacraments. But again he would be very much not the**

**norm’.**

This principal further states that he is optimistic about the future relationships between the various ecclesiastical authorities and Educate Together.

**‘We would say improving all the time. As religious personalities actually understand what we’re about, they realise that we pose absolutely no threat and are complimentary development in Irish education which actually in the longer term now will have very significant benefits and would take a lot off pressure off their educational activities. We would have to say that even from the earliest days, those who were involved in the religious formation of children we have good relations with them and there were individuals, there were occasionally at local level we would have people who referred to us as the Godless schools from a point of view of simply lack of knowledge and a prejudice, but that really .. we’ve moved on from that. There used to be difficulties for the Catholic parents in Educate Together schools who in the structure of our schools, they set up a Catholic parents committee and then would organise their own Communion and Confirmation classes. There used to be a trend that was sometimes quite difficult and there wasn’t any structure in the Catholic church to facilitate the access to catechists etc. and in recent times that’s changing a lot, the local parish priest for example in many cases is very happy to assist the Catholic parents in organising Communion and Confirmation classes and even religious orders have formally offered services to us to assist in those and the problem doesn’t really apply with other religions because other religions traditionally have not**



**relied on primary schools to deliver their religious instruction, they would have had Sunday schools, Bible classes, or whatever, which were outside school hours, they were voluntary things that members of their community participated in and so in our relations with the other minority religious would have been very, very straight forward and would have no real issues with them at all’.**

The Church of Ireland has in general been more favourable to the establishment of multi-denominational schools than the Catholic Church; indeed it has transferred property held under its patronage to that of Educate Together. The Church of Ireland was prepared to transfer a school premises which it was about to close to the Educate Together sector. However does any existing school patron really welcome any competition that might undermine the viability of one of their schools? There must be a meeting of all interested parties as it is incumbent on the government to ensure that real choice does exist within our primary education system. It must be accepted that the emergence of a strong multi-denominational sector will be at the expense in particular of the Catholic schools system.

**‘Well, sometimes it happens, our school in Ranelagh was St. Columba’s Church of Ireland school and it was a school that was losing numbers and ceasing to be viable and there was a very amicable and friendly arrangement reached whereby the infrastructure of the school was transferred to the Ranelagh multi-denominational school, local patron, and the RNDS also undertook to retain the contracts of all the two teachers involved in the school and effectively the school**

went forward as a multi-denominational school and it's thriving, it's a school with a very large waiting list now, so it's not the first time. In the case of Ardee which is the school this summer, the situation is a little different in a sense that Archbishop Eames has actually applied to Department to close the school because there were very, very few Church of Ireland parishioners using the school and what happened in that case was that the board of management entered into discussions with Educate Together from the point of view of transferring the patronage and very recently Archbishop Eames has indicated his willingness to agree to that transfer of patronage, so this is really a case where the Church of Ireland were wanting to concentrate their resources on a couple of other existing Church of Ireland schools and that this school has ceased to be viable as a Church of Ireland denominational school'.

'So is it only when closure is inevitable that the Church of Ireland would consider transferring?'

'Well really that's a question for the Church of Ireland. We would be very ... Educate Together is entirely in favour of the continued existence of denominational education and in particular we would be entirely in favour of the religious rights of minority group in our society, we completely endorse their rights to run and operate schools under their denominational ethos and characteristic spirit'.

He further states that the Catholic Church has in recent times aided Educate Together by allowing multi-denominational schools to acquire property/accommodation on a

temporary or permanent basis. However did they do so when it could have threatened the viability of one of their own schools by aiding a potential competitor? If Educate Together is going to become a significant sector of our education system, will that not necessitate a corresponding decline in the denominational sector?

**‘Our experience is quite pragmatic and very varied. The example that you gave in Cork was that there was huge local opposition to the transfer to the Cork School Project but the bishop of Cork at the time was quite convinced of the educational integrity of the Cork School Project and overruled his local people as bishops, I suppose, can do and ensured that the transfer went ahead’.**

**‘Recently Archbishop O’Connell before he was a cardinal, facilitated the Castleknock Educate Together school to temporarily housed in St. Joseph’s School for the Deaf on the Navan Road and has continued to do so, the Dublin 7 Educate Together National School is now being housed there this September and the Educate Together National School North Dublin is also temporarily housed in that accommodation. So our experience is that it’s very varied, I’d have to be honest and say that in certain areas there is still considerable resistance to the development of Educate Together’.**

A principal in Cork city complemented the Franciscan Order for the help they have given his school.

**‘They come in, one of the members acts as Chaplain and he’s an outstanding man and we have fantastic relations with them. And we had a play here the**

**other day and I invited the Franciscans to come along, it was their hall, but they came along and they enjoyed themselves’.**

One founding parent believed that the Church of Ireland had changed its mind over making land available to the local Educate Together school project due to the Dunboyne school controversy over the teaching of religion in an inter – denominational school.

**‘We approached the Church of Ireland because they have a nice wave of land there and we need somewhere to move. There’s a permanent site in Donabate but it is not necessarily going to be possible to move straight onto it which is another thing. But we got a tacit yes in principle but now it has gone further up the church we are being told no there are difficulties. It is around very specific areas it’s around the fact that well once you are on site will you ever move off and it is also interestingly enough, is it Dunboyne? There’s a problem!’**

**‘Yes, and what is being said, that’s happened there could we be opening ourselves up to some type of high publicity situation by having this type of education system on our land’.**

**‘I’ve not heard of any reaction from the Church of Ireland although we will have in the sense that we were going to get more involved there’.**

This parent stated that in her locality the local Catholic clergy was initially hostile to the setting up of a multi-denominational school. She further gives her opinion as to why this view may be held so strongly by some priests.

**‘I think for me what’s happened here is it’s not hostility, it’s not conflict, it’s maybe an misunderstanding of what Educate Together is going to do to the traditional heartland of the Catholic’.**

She further discussed the reactions of the local Catholic clergy towards the new educational venture in that area.

**‘The parish priest was a wee bit different. We said, this is our idea for another school in the area that we all know we need, let us know if this is what you want and the plan was to have it in the parish hall because that is the hall in Donabate and it is treated very much as a community hall and we organised this, six days before the parish priest pulled it on us in a rather curt manner I have to say and it was very interesting to me at the time because my committee members who would have been either Catholic members of the church or lapsed Catholics were all really furious and it went straight over my head and I just thought well we’ll just have to find another place to go really. It was an interesting cultural moment. One of our committee members had a long conversation with the younger priest and to me it was concerning to all of us, that really his take on what the community were looking for out of education was rather old fashioned and he is only in his early thirties. His feeling was that**

**what the church should be doing is instilling even stronger the spiritual values of the Catholic Church in the Catholic schools. Whereas, as you may know already, Educate Together schools have a very good fostering of children's beliefs, they come out with a good sense of that. And I was surprised at the younger man not having a stronger sense, he actually had said what makes you think that this community wants this type of school. And we had been inundated that particular day, we couldn't handle the people coming through the door there were so many and the subsequent pre-enrolment and the kiosk we had over there, all this sort of public interface we have had has been incredibly overwhelming, so I felt quite saddened by that. He wasn't hostile by any means he was just perplexed'.**

She further states that she believes that the priests fear that the emergence of Educate Together will accelerate the growing trend of secularisation. She commends Educate Together supporters for being passionate about their ethos but she appears to condemn Catholics for being equally enthusiastic about their type of school. This appears to be a double standard.

**Yes, I think what I took from the younger priest's comments really was that they were concerned maybe about the multi-denominational school coming in and effecting already the lack of follow through with children doing their First Communion or whatever and then not coming back to Mass regularly. I think they felt that Educate Together coming in was going to enhance that problem'.**

One principal who had spent a considerable amount of time in the Catholic system felt that a lot of priests lacked any real knowledge of the education system of which they were supposedly 'managers'. Many of the priests have never worked in schools before and have not trained as teachers. Ought the government make it a requirement that all school managers have experience working in the educational sector? One could argue that the present situation is farcical.

**'Some of them just because they're a priest they're getting the title of manager of a school and they haven't a clue and I'm not saying them all, a lot them do a good job and have done a good job, but I prefer the idea of Educate Together'.**

One senior teacher stated that her husband's promotional opportunities had been affected because she had moved into the Educate Together sector. This raises the issue that teachers who opt to teach in the multi-denominational sector may be marginalising themselves and that this may result in damaging the career prospects of these individuals or their close family members.

**'He wouldn't get promoted because I've gone to an Educate Together school he wouldn't ever get promoted now in the denominational sector because I've made a big statement'.**

He was a senior, well-respected, professional teacher who in her view had suffered because she did not remain in the Catholic school system.

**‘He applied for a local denominational school recently, and he didn’t even get a call for interview. Now we suspected he wouldn’t because no. 1) you don’t go to Mass and no. 2) you don’t pay dues and that very much will set the tone for your rise within a denominational school’.**

The issue of why a person who was not committed to the ethos of a school would apply to be principal etc must be addressed. Is the Educate Together sector large enough to provide substantial job opportunities and promotional prospects for teachers working within it? This teacher believes that even though the moral climate is changing the majority will still wish to send their children to denominational schools.

**‘The influence of the church is waning, people’s attitudes are changing but they are still suspicious of our schools. The tradition of the institution of the church is still there and the land banks etc’.**

Another interviewee stated that in their opinion while the churches were engaged in a retreat from direct involvement in education they wished to ensure that their ethos would be maintained in their schools after their withdrawal.

**‘In a sense the property is vested in them as trustees, but if you look at any Catholic school or Church of Ireland school, in the sense that it is vested in the church, the monies that provided the school and maintained the school almost exclusively come from the State and from the taxpayer. I feel that the way**



things are going increasingly the churches don't have the personnel to manage schools and they hand over huge parts of their role within schools to lay people and I think that's going to continue. I think the churches in this country are going to have to examine their role, not just in the light of recent scandal, but in the light of the place of religion within Ireland at the moment or the place of religious practice and will have to define their roles'.

'I think there are certainly indications that the churches are on the one hand withdrawing from education, but on the other hand leaving behind them a blueprint which they see promote the continuity of the ethos of church schools'.

'I was at a number of conferences recently where the ethos of schools was discussed and there seems to be a tendency within the educational spokesperson for religious groups to say that we should be pulling out but we haven't got the personnel to continue on in education but we leave behind us a system which ensure that the Catholic ethos or the Church of Ireland ethos or the Jewish ethos or the Muslim ethos will continue. Now I think if you move that one step, the next step after that will be the people on the ground will question the ethos as to whether it should be one church, one denomination or it should be multi-denominational, so it is a evolutionary process and I do feel the churches at this stage are tactically withdrawing from the frontline of education but leaving behind blueprints for the continuity of what they see is the essential ethos of their school'.

The following interviewee unfortunately concurred with many of the others when the

following was stated concerning the reaction of the local clergy to their school.

**‘It would not be positive. It wasn’t positive, from the very beginning it hasn’t been positive. We had chaplain when we were in our old site, we were in a different parish at that time, and the priest would come but he really wasn’t very much in favour of the school and at every opportunity he could actually basically told the parents that they really weren’t doing the right thing by sending their children to our school that they should have been sending them to a Catholic school and that they were not getting a proper Catholic education if they send their children to our school. Now we never lost any children because of comments that he made, on a couple of occasions we lost families because maybe they felt that our ethos wasn’t what they wanted but we never, the priest that we know of, we never actually lost families directly because of anything the priest said. When we came to this area we’d have had a new parish and we invited the priests of the area to come up and see us and to meet the Catholic teacher and to meet the Catholic children and to date they’ve never arrived’.**

## **7.5 Relationships with existing local schools**

There have been mixed reactions from pre-existing schools to the establishment of multi-denominational schools in their catchment areas. If the demographic profile of an area is poor a denominational school may regard an Educate Together one as a threat to their student numbers and ultimately their survival. If however the area is a growing suburb where the pupil numbers appear to be guaranteed for the next

generation then such a school may be regarded as filling a perceived need. Teachers and Clergy in denominational schools can react to multi-denominational schools from different perspectives. Teachers will react if they feel their job security is under threat whereas some clergy may be ideologically hostile to the notion of multi-denominational education in the first place.

One Educate Together principal succinctly summed up the reason for some negative reaction from established schools in an area:

**‘If there are three butchers shops in the town and the fourth one opens up there’s always worry’.**

He also stated that there was an initial negative effect on the numbers attending the local primary school. He responded to their concerns in the following manner:

**‘The local school first felt a bit, I think, because a few kids came during the summer, left and some kind of heads were out of joint, but as I said to them, look they are going to be coming from here over to you as well in time and there are plenty of kids in the area and all the rest, but then one or two people locally in other schools were a bit anti-multi denominational school per se’.**

A principal in Cork stated that some antipathy from local schools could be avoided if new multi-denominational schools only set up with junior infants classes.

**‘Suspicion, yes and we obviously took kids from other schools and that created bad feeling and I think the mistake made when we opened up and it’s very hard, you should open up Junior infants and maybe Seniors but opening up Juniors as we did to about 4<sup>th</sup> even 5<sup>th</sup> at this stage but I can understand if you want to move Johnny and his sisters at 9 years of age in 3<sup>rd</sup> but if the people had more experience they would have said no, we’ll grow like this year by year and give ourselves breathing space, but sure they had no experience and then what you’ve got then in a number of the boards of management, people who had their only knowledge of education was their own schooling’.**

However some schools appeared to welcome the establishment of new ones. This was the case in areas of growing population. One founding parent in north County Dublin acted as chair of the committee set up to establish their school stated that:

**‘One of my roles has been kind of liasing with people like yourself and particularly with the head of the girls’ school, with my daughter being there. I went in and spoke to her, told who I was and this is what we were doing and the reason were doing it was because we all knew we needed another school and it made a lot of sense having a multi-d school because it allowed them to be catholic. And she was delightful and she said well do you know I want to be principal of a village school I don’t want this to be getting out of control and that’s great. And the principal of the boys’ school phoned us and congratulated us. She phoned me and was delighted. They both however were pushed to the wire on our recognition not coming through which has been an appalling thing’.**

Other principals also reported that they had positive reactions from other schools and religious authorities. One stated:

**‘We certainly had the most co-operative and harmonious relationship with both the local schools. The original location of this school was beside a convent school and an all boys school and beside a Catholic church close to a Methodist church and Church of Ireland and Evangelical Hall and Jehovah Witnesses meeting house, and all of those religious groups took part in opening ceremonies and co-operated in every way, and any of the groups that had children within the school certainly were represented at various functions and that at the beginning of the school. So I would have to state that we had the utmost co-operation both from the local schools, local convents, colleagues in other schools, we never experienced any difficulty at that level’.**

However some of those I interviewed stated that some fellow teachers in traditional denominational schools had reacted negatively to them. One stated:

**‘Yes, the teachers are they’ll say behind your back oh that’s the crowd from Educate Together’. So I think the view is people with horns, there is that attitude to us and until such a time our schools are greater in number, we’ll be viewed with suspicion’.**

This individual may have been quite paranoid about the attitudes of teachers in the

denominational sector towards those in the Educate Together sector as she uses quite extreme language e.g. that they are viewed as ‘people with horns’. They also point to the reasons that may underlie such antipathy:

**‘It’s fear of change, it’s also obviously to work in a school like this you have to flexible, adaptable, interested, lively and a fairly good worker and other teachers are kind of set in their ways and they don’t want to change anything’.**

**‘They’re very traditional and very set in their ways and wouldn’t at all welcome parental involvement, the further away they could keep the parents the better’.**

One interviewee stated that her school experienced a considerable level of hostility from an established denominational school.

**‘We would have done everything to kind of promote ourselves as a normal school but I believe parents that came to us subsequently said that there were some horrible things said about us by the staff and by the principal of the school local to us’.**

Hopefully this will prove to be the exception rather than the rule. However it may be the result of fear and consternation caused by the emergence of a dynamic new competitor in the local educational landscape.

## **7.6                    Role of parents**

Parents have a key role in establishing multi-denominational schools. They are the impetus, the driving force behind Educate Together. In the democratic structure of these schools parents continued to have a say in the way they are run. A teacher in a multi-denominational primary school in Cork illustrates the importance of parents as founders of schools when she states:

**‘Well my understanding of what happened in 1993 when parents were trying to set up this school was that there were two different sets of parents, some people who wanted to be Gaelscoil, others who wanted to be a multi-denominational school, and basically they decided to go together to have a better chance of getting their school if they went together, so both schools went together and decided it would be a multi-denominational Gaelscoil’.**

**‘That they wanted a school and at the end of the day they felt they would have a better chance if they went together and both ethos be equally represented’.**

However a distinction has to be made between the role of parents and that of teachers. The latter wish to ensure that their professionalism is respected. Many stressed that while parents ought to and indeed must have a voice in the affairs of the school, teacher's professional competence must not be impaired by parents. They can come in and help, or share their skills but not usurpe the role of the pedagogue. In one school they have addressed teachers concerns in the following manner:

**‘Normally if just a person is coming in once off it’s fine, but if they’re coming in for a long period of time say every week or every Monday we normally ask them to sign a form saying that they would not disclose if there was any discipline problem in the class, they wouldn’t disclose that sort of information to other people, parents or that they wouldn’t discipline the children that that’s the teacher’s role and basically if you’re very polite to them, things .. we’ve never had a problem here with parents ever’.**

Does this strategy i.e. asking parents to sign a form with a confidentiality clause in it, actually censor parents from discussing discipline issues which they may have a legitimate interest in? Is this an attempt to censor parents and to stifle their opinions? This raises the issue of how truly democratic Educate Together schools are. They proclaim themselves to be far more welcoming of parental involvement than denominational schools are. This may indeed be so, as some teachers who have taught in both sectors have stated that Educate Together is far more open to parental involvement. However maybe they are biased as they are now employed in the Educate Together sector. One senior teacher who worked for most of her career in denominational schools stated that in her opinion her former colleagues in that sector were:

**‘Very traditional and very set in their ways and wouldn’t at all welcome parental involvement, the further away they could keep the parents the better’.**



Many parents are encouraged to bring some of their own talents into the classroom:

**‘Parents are not in the class their own child is in because there would have been problems with confidentiality and maybe reading and results and marking and confidences being broken, so there is a stringent code of practice and parents sign up to that when they volunteer to come in and help. They are doing things like photocopying homework, sticking things into books, maybe putting up displays in the corridor and they are maybe helping out in team games like after school, maybe basketball, netball, football, rugby, you know that sort of thing, and they are doing things that aren’t seen as infringing on professionalism, although we have parents now at the moment who are doing reading partnership programmes which are brilliant with children who are not reading as well and they come in and do extra reading with these kids’.**

This again raises the question of whether the need to preserve confidentiality results in censoring parents from discussing discipline problems which they have witnessed in class. Could this actually negatively affect the role which parents can play in the school? Educate Together must formulate policies that actively encourage parental involvement in a meaningful way in the day to day life of the schools in question. A teacher in a multi-denominational school in Cork told me that parents could often be a useful resource in the classroom:

**‘This year now parents had come in for art and we had parents in for science twice, cutting up hearts and stuff – things that I probably wouldn’t want to do,**

**cutting up eyes, these kind of things, very often the parents will actually approach us’.**

**She further stated that ‘the other way the parents help out an awful lot here is through CAPER the children and parents enjoying reading, the parents come in and they read with the children in the morning, when I had the younger classes here, we’d start with that as well and the parents would come in – maybe five or six parents, sit down with the children, they take a group’.**

One principal told me that on occasion parents must be cautioned if they are unreasonable:

**‘We have a vegetarian couple of a child starting in September and they are militant animal liberationists and they came to me and said I believe the school gets corned beef sandwiches and I said that’s right, but our daughter’s a vegetarian, ah she doesn’t have to eat them, not everybody eats them, yeh but they’ll be in the same room. Now if I go down that road of even indulging that conversation there’s no stopping, where do you go, then nobody else would be allowed to have leather shoes, anything like that. You have to have a bit of common sense as well’.**

This raises an ideological dilemma i.e. how far can a school go down the road of trying to accommodate the beliefs of parents? In the above case parents who were animal liberationists were trying to impose their beliefs on the whole school population. How does a school decide which beliefs it will accommodate or not? Is it

possible to be all things to all men, women and children? Have Educate Together schools developed practical policies to deal with this issue?

Educate Together schools must ensure that parents realise that while all beliefs and practices are respected, no single one can be imposed upon others without their consent. School authorities in this sector need to be prepared to clearly state this kernel principle to any parents who are enrolling their children and act to enforce it when necessary.

One principal defined in practical terms the different roles in an Educate Together school of parents and teachers.

**‘That there is a professional line, that teachers are professionals and they’re here to teach. But the parents can come in a Junior Class and help pare all the pencils, tie all the shoe laces, wipe all the noses, all that sort of thing, we’ve parents helping in the yard now as well, but you have to lay down the rules as such’.**

**‘I know parents and there’s a lot that they can do, an awful lot of little things, sorting out, going on tours, going swimming, sorting out the library, cataloguing, cover books, all those little bits and pieces, not the teaching. And then if somebody oversteps you say sorry we’re the professionals’.**

**‘You have to be open to letting the parents contribute and then you have to set ground rules and then when things go wrong, and things do go wrong, you have**

**to be firm and stand firm on issues’.**

This leads to a possible dilemma i.e. are parents really been treated as partners by the schools or are they regarded as simply a source of unpaid manual labour? Parents in Educate Together schools play vital roles when they are been established, however are they side-lined when the school is up and running? The role of parents in the ongoing development of these schools must be examined. Clear guidelines must be provided and parental involvement must be encouraged in Educate Together schools. One founding parent described the parents as following:

**‘So it’s a case of I think the parents yeah it’s more that they are the real ‘yeast’ of the school and I would say that the parents will be the energy that really allows this school to develop forward. And at the moment I don’t know whether I’m being naïve or I’ve missed the plot.’**

She further states that mothers rather than fathers tend to be the prime movers behind the establishment of Educate Together schools. They also are firm believers in the principles that underlie multi-denominational education because they have opted to become pioneers of new school projects.

**‘You get the impression that the men have floated on through with this as a notion in the background and the women have stayed fairly engaged, So the children that are going to this school this year have parents who believe wholeheartedly in education and they believe wholeheartedly in education that**

**is pioneering, that is forward looking and that is what you will experience by coming to this school now and unfortunately the building is not perfect’.**

Another principal wished to clearly demark the roles of teachers and parents in the classroom:

**‘I mean we have a lot of involvement here in the school from parents, but it’s very much on a support basis they are not telling how to teach a class, that’s no, no’.**

**‘We have had parents in for a specific function, they go and they might have a particular skills, we had one parent in showing us all the scuba diving’.**

**‘We have now set up, set up what’s called a core curriculum stuff, a religious and values education thing, that has been set up and the parents have been involved in that, some would be questionnaires, some would be seminars or workshop, some of it might be general meeting’.**

**‘I don’t see difficulties, the concept of stopping parents coming in is not one that I would share. The night before last there was a guy called Frank who has two kids in the school, but he is interested in communications and radio, so we have a licence for next Tuesday we’re going to broadcast from the school here on local radio, now he’s been working day and night with school on this project’.**

**‘We’re involved in a filming project at the moment, and it’s a grandparent who down there teaching the kids how to edit and film a part of the Film in Schools project’.**

This teacher saw parents as valuable educational resources who can provide invaluable insights into areas in which they themselves may have considerable expertise. Many teachers in such schools send their children to them. Therefore they in many cases hold the dual roles i.e. of parent and teacher. This clearly displays their commitment to the multi-denominational sector within which they teach. They would not send their own children to these schools unless they were satisfied that they were of the highest standard.

**‘My youngest child is 16 but while he was in school, every member of the board of management here was a parent in the school, so we have roles as parents, we have roles as teachers’.**

He further stated that:

**‘There has to be a respect on either side for the complementary with different roles, that parents and teachers have in the education within school of their children’.**

Many of my interviewees told me that they felt that the principles of Educate Together were influencing the more established traditional denominational schools.

One stated:

**‘But even ordinary schools now are actually the parents are having a lot more say now than say 10 years ago, they would have had no say because I remember working in the other sector as well and the parents would have had no say – almost no say, whereas now they would have a lot more say. But I think that’s happening in every school, but certainly in Educate Together schools would always have been a tradition of parents having a say and parents have the vested interest like all groups in education and their interests are taken into account’.**

She further stated:

**‘We have parent associations, they’ve always worked in multi-denominational schools, now the other schools have had them as well but it’s only a new thing, they don’t have to have them as such, not all schools have them, but we traditionally have always had them. All multi-denominational schools have always have had parents association and they also would have a lot of power’.**

A number of teachers in Educate Together schools have spoken about the influence which they feel that their sector is having on the denominational sector. A number of interviewees referred to the fact that traditional denominational schools are adopting a more favourable attitude towards parental involvement etc. They state that Educate Together is a catalyst for change which will result in the transformation of our

education system.

### 7.7                    How multi-cultural and pluralistic are Educate Together schools?

Many new arrivals to this country have to enter denominational primary schools as opposed to the new all-embracing multi-denominational ones as they may have a very limited number of spaces. One of the main reasons for this is the existence of the first come, first served policy which was adopted by the early project schools in order to have an admissions policy that was totally transparent and fair. However it now has produced some unforeseen consequences e.g. schools with an over abundance of middle class children. This policy has also reduced the numbers of refugees / asylum-seekers such schools can accept. Many of those I interviewed wish to have this policy in some way altered.

The principal of a major Educate Together school in a major suburb of Dublin admits that his school has no refugees or asylum seekers. He puts this down to the fact that his school operates a first come, first served policy which in his opinion needs urgently to be reviewed.

**‘Our enrolment system is a first-come, first-serve basis and a lot of people put their children down on the way out of the maternity ward for here and that tends to lessen the number, for example, we have no refugees or asylum seekers although there are many in [area], it’s something that we’re looking at as a school in a democratic way consulting with parents and teachers and the**



**children if appropriate’.**

However in recent years some newly established Educate Together schools in Dublin have enrolled a vast majority of their pupils from the immigrant communities. This raises the issue that in some cases if the ethnic composition of the school becomes majority foreign national, does this lead to indigenous Irish people opting to send their offspring to other schools?

One principal acknowledged the complexities about of introducing a quota system for enrolling children in Educate Together schools:

**‘We have 94 children and about 20 of them are non-national. Now you get back to the intake policy again regarding refugees. You see it’s very difficult if you have reserved places, who are you going to have reserved places for? For instance, you could have Irish Travellers, how many do you keep? Do you keep reserved places?’.**

This interviewee has clearly pointed out an ideological dilemma associated with the first come/ first served policy i.e. do you scrap the policy and have a quota system for minority groups? If you alter the system, how do you work out the logistics associated with it e.g. how do you define a minority and how many places do you reserve for that group? Reserving places for minority groups is an option that must be explored. The list system for different religious and ethnic groups which was referred to earlier in this thesis could solve this problem.

Some are afraid that as their schools earn good reputations, they might become

overly attractive to Catholics thus becoming virtually mono-denominational as regards intake:

**‘The Educate Together policy is by first come, first served, children when they’re enrolled on the pre-enrolment list are written into a hard back book by date of application, very strictly, there’s no squeezing in a child here or there, because you know the principal or anything like that, strictly by date of application. Now that has various disadvantages as well. One is that it makes the school quite middle-class in that they are most likely to be parents who will remember to put the child’s name down the day they’re born which is what you have to do, the week they’re born if not the day, we get faxes from the labour ward now. Now that makes a school middle-class. Also when the denominational instruction, particularly the Catholic denominational instruction is within school hours, it meant that there were more and more Catholic parents sent their children to that school if it was a good local school’. ‘So the school very quickly got an excellent reputation, and it became the local school, so the intake changed, there weren’t any of these buses with children from all over the city anymore, it became children walking down the road, now there was nothing wrong with that, but again, Irish society being as it is, the school became almost totally Catholic, children of Catholic parents by virtue of that’.**

The principal in question feels that the attractiveness of such schools to Catholics means that many from minority groups who have recently moved into the area may

find themselves unable to enrol their children in their local Educate Together school. In Northern Ireland integrated schools have to maintain a balance between the two major religious communities. There must be the same requirement in urban areas of the Republic of Ireland especially in cities and towns that have experienced rapid levels of immigration in the past decade. Educate Together must also ensure that no ghetto schools emerge which are almost exclusively populated by foreign nationals or their children. This serious issue must be addressed or it may lead to the creation of a racially divided education system.

**‘People who had moved to the area, people of a minority religion or people who didn’t have a belief system involving a particular religion at all, they felt that this was the natural option to send their children to this school, but the places were all taken by people who had other options. Now this is a very dicey argument and this creates a lot of hassle because the implication was that Catholic parents should send their children to Catholic school and leave this one for people who don’t want that option. Now the Catholic parents’ group was very vocal and insisted that they had just as much right as anybody else which they do, now the Educate Together schools are the only people who have that open door policy, who have the open enrolment policy’.**

One principal stated the reason why her school adopted a sibling’s policy:

**‘We got to the situation where for instance if there was a child born let’s say in May, the second child in the family and they put the child down, the name down the day they were born, they were too late because the intake that was for junior**

**infants four years later because that class list was already full with children who had been born since September, so it got to be an unworkable situation where you might have a family with two or three children in the school and the fourth child wasn't getting a place'.**

The siblings policy that a number of Educate Together schools have may be preventing individuals from minority groups from enrolling. The sector must consider abandoning the siblings policy if it is proving an impediment to creating a multi-cultural and multi-denominational reality in each school.

A principal thought that the numbers of Catholics attending her school would go down when the it was decided to hold denominational instruction outside of school hours:

**'Now we all thought it would change it more because we thought some of the Catholic parents wouldn't enrol their children, that it would be sort of handier for them to have them in the local Catholic school where it would all come, now I don't mean to denigrate, it would all come as a convenient package, let's say'.**

She also said that some schools had begun to refuse to enrol families that only enrolled their male offspring while sending their girls to convent schools etc:

**'There's a few of the schools who won't enrol a family that only enrolls their boys, they have written that into their constitution'.**

This is an attempt to promote a better gender balance within their schools. This

approach is a radical step to take. It ought to give the impetus to Educate Together to come up with alternative solutions to addressing other needs as regards balance within their school communities.

A principal in a Dublin school had a novel way of showing the multi-cultural nature of the school by painting the flags of the countries of origin of the student body on to the walls of the main hall of the school. This Educate Together school is located in a large catchment area with relatively long established, ethnic communities.

**‘Well ours is very multi-cultural, I don’t know if you saw the way in the flags, 22 last term, I think we could have 25 – that’s 25 different nations here, which is ... and there’s only 130 kids in the school, up to one-third wouldn’t be Irish. Now of the ones that we have here, of the ones who are Irish a huge proportion of them wouldn’t be Catholic either, or Church of Ireland or anybody, a lot of them would have no faith, would be atheist or agnostic. And a proportion of them of course would be Catholics’.**

Another principal stated that a large number of Irish children of foreign parentage attend the school in which he works. This shows that many non-nationals feel that Educate Together schools will help their children to integrate without assimilating. This raises another major issue, i.e. how do Educate Together schools ensure that integration rather than assimilation is achieved? Schools must actively celebrate diversity and encourage pupils to take pride in their heritage while being respectful of others.

**‘At the moment we’ve 105, we would have quite a few where there maybe 7 or 8 children who weren’t born in Ireland, there are a lot more children who would have been born in Ireland with either both parents or one parent coming from a foreign country. So I think at last count we would have been in the region of 14 or 15 nationalities broadly speaking in terms of they could play football for the country but might not necessarily have been born here. Quite a few from Africa, Tanzania, Somalia, Nigeria, Egypt, big catchment from Algeria, we’d have Filipino children, we have Swedish child starting now in September, we would have one child’s mother is Portuguese, several children whose parents are French, so we get quite a nice mix’.**

Many Educate Together schools wish to have non-nationals on their staff as well as Irish people. However due to stringent Irish (Gaelic) language requirements many of these often very qualified and experienced primary teachers cannot get permanent jobs in this jurisdiction.

**‘Well there’s a girl from South Africa, another guy from Germany, it’s not an ethnic minority but we have teachers from other countries. There’s a bit of resistance in schools now to take on those people because of traditional values, we decided to be very brave and go ahead and take on people to try and get over that’. ‘Again we would love to, the difficulty being that despite the teacher shortage, the Department are still very intransigent and you have to have an Irish language qualification in order to get a permanent position in school. Now there are loads of teachers, we have had teachers from overseas, mostly English**

**speaking countries, coming in on temporary contract, they wouldn't have got the same financial remuneration as an Irish person with the same qualification because of their lack of Irish, so that makes it sort of difficult, there are a lot of very good teachers out there from overseas, but our hands are tied at the moment in terms of giving them permanent positions because of the Irish'.**

This raises an ideological dilemma i.e. is the Irish state hindering the development of multi-cultural staffs at primary level by its refusal to allow those without the necessary qualification in the Gaelic language secure a permanent post? Is the government's commitment to preserving the Irish language resulting in the inability of teachers trained outside the state from securing jobs in our educational system? Is this policy not resulting in the inability to recruit teachers from minority and foreign backgrounds? Is it not also leading to a situation by which trained teachers from Northern Ireland also find it difficult to secure posts in primary schools in the Republic of Ireland? Another principal agreed:

**'It is, it's a shame. We've had the odd New Zealander sub in here, and I think it's fantastic for the kids to come in contact, we'll say New Zealander, Australian, or whatever, but they've relaxed now somewhat in that they can come in and then work on the qualification, but I mean that exam there's no resemblance to day to day Irish. I saw the paper one year we were helping one of our teachers and it's just like studying Arabic'.**

**'Too harsh, penal, and to get other that hurdle you want to be very studious and I've no problem with the oral side of it, that's very important, the grammar and**

**the technical side, they need to water it down a bit’.**

The Department of Education and Science must address this issue. Qualified teachers entering the state must be allowed to teach and given a sufficient length of time to pass their Irish language examinations. English speaking schools ought to consider time-tabling Irish to a particular time each day thus allowing teachers proficient in that language to take the lesson while their colleagues who are not fluent in it could teach another subject during that period to a different group.

One principal in a multi-denominational Gaelscoil in a rural area stated that a large number of founder parents were emigrants from other European countries. However a teacher in a similar type of school in an urban area stated:

**‘Certainly, until the Nigerians and all the other nationalities coming in now, until they are very happy with English they’re never going to come to a Gaelscoil but I would envisage that in 10 – 15 years time we will be getting intake from other cultures as well’.**

Thus there are different patterns of settlement by immigrants in various parts of Ireland. Some Irish language schools have had several students from foreign backgrounds enrolled. However in many cases foreign born and educated parents have opted to send their offspring to English medium schools. Those children may well in their turn opt for Irish medium education for the next generation. Thus the future multi-denominational Gaelscoils may become multi-cultural as well, if that is not a contradiction in terms.



A principal in an Educate Together school stated that discriminatory policies based on socio-economic grounds existed in some denominational schools in the recent past.

**‘I know schools even into the late 80s who treated children differently according to whether they were from the local Corporation estate or the private houses. Now there are still schools if they take for instance three Junior Infants classes, when they take them in every year, who will divide the classes on the basis of the private houses and the Corporation houses and would have a completely different teacher, and different room altogether’.**

She goes on to describe how pupils in her school are encouraged to mix across socio-economic as well as religious and cultural divides.

**‘We have children from very wealthy families, which we had in [area] in the early days, still a small bit you would have it, children of very, very disadvantaged families, we have children from the local flats behind the school, now they’re going to come with us, get two buses up. And we encourage them always to visit one another and they do. I remember one boy we took up to the park to play football, passing by this beautiful big three-storey over basement Georgian house and these two children were partnered walking together, one of them from ..... Gardens, which I don’t know if you know them, they’re nearly the roughest flats in Dublin, the police won’t even go into them up near**

**the Phoenix Park and they were talking and this one boy says ‘oh that’s my house over there with the yellow door’ and the other part was saying ‘which part of it is your house?’ ‘No the house, the one with the yellow door’. ‘Yeh but which part is your house? Is it the upstairs or the downstairs or the right hand window or ..’ Could not comprehend at all. Now in someways it’s sad but that’s the world, that’s life’. ‘You are and also letting them see that the child who’s family is very wealthy is no more important and will be corrected just as quick and is the very same as the child from a very poor family’.**

This is a practical example of how this school is attempting to bridge the socio-economic divide and treat all students with respect regardless of the social class they come from. However the first come, first served policy can result in a lower number of children from poorer backgrounds been enrolled.

Another principal voiced concern about the first come, first served policy which they viewed as disadvantaging the less well-off in society:

**‘What I don’t like about Educate Together are things like a lot of school are middle-class exclusive sort of things, and we’re trying to get rid of that thinking very quickly but because it was so difficult to set up and because you had to have a pre-enrolment policy whereby it’s first come, first served because otherwise the Dept. wouldn’t listen to you unless you had your list of names and addresses of people, so you ended up with kind of in a sense of some cases a well heeled clientele, no Educate Together set-up in your local authority areas, but because you needed fund-raising, you needed people with computers and who**

**could work the system, very difficult'**

This complex issue must be addressed in order to create schools which are truly pluralistic in their composition. Paul Rowe acknowledges this but also comes up with another solution to this problem:

**'Now coming back to your question of the first come, first served policy, in our established schools are actually accommodating less children now than they did when they first developed and this is why we are pushing very, very hard for our established schools rather than to tinker with their enrolment policy that they should look very seriously at either a second stream per year or being the midwife for the development of their own school. Now what's happening say in our school in Lucan, was the first of our schools to go down the two class per year route, our school in Castleknock has also decided to go down that route, our school in Monkstown which is a school which was midwived by the Dalkey School Project, has also recently decided to go two classes per year. I think without our sector we would be a bit nervous about going beyond two classes per year, and whilst the Department are very keen for us to look at two classes per year, they aren't pressing us to go to three classes per year or four classes per year'.**

This would obviously result in the doubling of places in such schools thus countering to some degree the negative effects of the first come, first served policy. The possibility of trebling such places must also be looked at in areas where demand is

not being met and the Department is not prepared to sanction the creation of any other new schools.

## **7.8                    Plans for the future**

Many see the Educate Together sector emerging as a significant element of our education sector. They do not wish to displace the denominational schools but rather compliment them. They wish to see pluralism and greater diversity in Irish education. They believe that it is inevitable that the number of multi-denominational schools will increase. However they are realistic in that they also recognise that most primary schools will remain in the Church hands. The C.E.O. of Educate Together stated that in his view there would be a demand for such schools even in areas which are totally Catholic due to the fact that he believes that the Irish Catholic community contains a diverse array of views:

**‘We have learned that there is no such thing as a mono-culture of Catholicism, I mean for example we would identify in terms of family identities within the community at least five broad areas, there would be the really traditional Catholics who would lean towards the Tridentine view, there would be the Catholics who would follow the teachings of the current incumbent in the Vatican completely from A to Z, then there would be those who would be passionately committed to the ethos of Catholicism and its charismatic justice and equality agenda who would not be particularly agreeing with the current views of the Vatican. Then there would be those who would agree and these are**

very broad brushed, I'm just saying these divisions, the tall brush area of those who are religiously Catholic and following the teachings of the Vatican in all areas other than family matters and areas of sexuality and family planning etc. which we would find would probably be a significant majority of the modern Irish Catholics and then there would be people who are culturally Catholic and that is that they are Catholic as a marker for their cultural identity, not necessarily their national identity, in other words that they would define themselves as Catholic but they would really only be involved in their religious faith for baptism, confirmation, communion, weddings and funerals and maybe at Christmas and Easter and then, I suppose, you could say then there would be the grouping which would be regarded as lapsed Catholics, but if you're building a school based on the right of protecting and cherishing the identity of the child, you have to have sensitivity to all those differences of spiritual viewpoint even within a single denomination and the same thing applies in the churches and the other points is that a school built on that premise must respect the right of the child to explore and maybe even change that pupil in the course of their school career and that also would be interested, so I would say and one of the things I say many times, it is perfectly possible to run a fully fledged entirely consistently Educate Together school in which a 100% of the families attending that school would be nominally one religious background'.

Roe identifies a possible dilemma i.e. if there is such diversity of opinion within the Irish Catholic community, are the denominational schools catering to these different strands? Catholic primary schools will have to re-assess their approach to education

in light of the fact that a growing segment of their student cohorts are not practising Catholics. Paul Roe stated that he believed that Educate Together would give real choice to Irish parents. He also believes that their style of child-centred education with greater parental involvement would have a knock on effect on the more traditional denominational schools.

**‘I don’t see them making a massive breakthrough in the sense that there are 3,200 national schools, so 25 is a very small percentage of that. I don’t see them having 1,000 schools, but I do see them making a massive breakthrough in the following sense. It is without doubt that the Educate Together movement and the democratic nature, the involvement of parents in Educate Together schools has greatly influenced the vast majority of other schools and the breakthrough that I see coming is perhaps two-fold’.**

There is also the possibility of a new departure for Educate Together i.e. its entry into second-level education. At present there are no Educate Together secondary schools. This results in the ironic situation that parents who have often gone to amazing lengths to have their children educated in a multi-denominational environment have to send them to a denominational second level school. Indeed a significant proportion of the female students proceed to girls’ convent schools. This would seem to be a contradiction in terms and it may be due to the fact that there are few if any alternative schools. However in many cases these schools are regarded as having long traditions of academic achievement.

Many parents in the Educate Together system feel that they need to establish second level schools that reflect their ethos. They argue that such establishments would contribute to a debate on the merits of the points driven approach to education i.e. the enormous pressure on students to achieve results in their Leaving Certificate examinations that would give them a chance to enter university. They are of the opinion that due to this pressure the purpose of the whole educational project is put out of focus. In one of the Irish capital's fastest growing suburbs there are now two multi-denominational primary schools but no second level one. A vice-principal in that locality stated:

**'Will there's ..... Community College, there's St. ....'s for the girls and Colaiste ..... for the boys, but there are about ten primary schools. But there isn't spaces at all. I have thirteen in 6<sup>th</sup> last year and seven of them are actually going to ..... , and only one of them is in the community school, the other girls are going to Catholic all girls schools, which is not their parents' first choice but they don't have a choice, so no. 1 – first thing was there's no schools, no. 2 – there's only the one co-educational and parents wanted a co-ed, and they would all have the Catholic ethos'.**

She further stated:

**'[area] is going to have two Educate Together schools, you know that and there'll be a secondary one down there. Another big site here, Dept. of Education wants 7½ acres, we'd love to see a campus, I personally would love to**

**see a campus here with our school on it. I don't know if you're looking at this idea of campus sharing in economical view that the Department should buy a site, whatever and that there could be an educate together school on it'**

A founder parent in north County Dublin stated that her committee hoped to eventually help establish a multi-denominational school in her local area with the help of the local V.E.C.:

**'The VEC I know have designated Donabate as an area they are looking at and we certainly looking at the possibility can we can take this on or not. I think if the VEC came in we would like to maybe really work with them to try and make sure that the secondary school reflects some of the values the primary school would be dealing with'.**

This raises the interesting issue of what the difference would be between an existing V.E.C. second-level school and one that was set up in conjunction with Educate Together.

The C.E.O. of Educate Together said:

**'Well this year we've actually applied to open our first second level school in Lucan to open a second level school in the Adamstown town area of Lucan. Second level education would be something which is becoming increasingly a preoccupation for Educate Together nationally and we would be very**



**committed to the whole agenda of reform in second level education and we think that there is huge, a massive task to be accounted to redefine second level education according to the needs of the young people going through it, rather than from the needs of third level institutions and other curricular objectives’.**

He further stated that:

**‘We are aiming to open our second level school before 2005 we’ve applied for private funding for a full-time project manager for us at second level, we haven’t been successful in accessing funds for that at the moment but we’re still working on it’.**

Thus the Educate Together movement hopes to establish schools that embody its ethos at second-level. It would be interesting to find out if they hope to set up a multi-denominational teacher training college. Rowe is full of optimism for the future:

**‘Now I reckon that in the next couple of years, the next ten years, it will just explode and I think Educate Together are setting themselves up now in terms of being more professionally organised body in terms of having full-time people to cope with that but I think that people’s changing patterns of religious belief and all the rest have changed so much as well, that I think the growth is going to be phenomenal over the next couple of years’.**

He also projects in the future every child within the state will be in commuting distance of an Educate Together school

**‘I’ve recently been appointed Chief Executive of Educate Together to manage a development programme and our strategic objective is that no parents anywhere in Ireland should have to travel more than 30 minutes in the morning to access a school in which their conscience is respected by right and without question and I’d just like to clarify the fact we’re not primarily interested in controlling schools, we are a distinct educational philosophy which is promoting the concept of rights based education’.**

In a time of recession is it possible to provide an Educate Together school within thirty minutes commute of every location in the state? This question needs to be addressed in the current economic climate. Rowe speaks about rights based education, this also begs the question if Educate Together is the only body that can provide rights-based education.

**‘But the type of thing that we’re looking at would be something between 350 to 400 schools in the system. Another figure which we would talk about is the idea of the 10% of the system should be rights based schools so that equivalent to around 320. We are actively trying to get political parties and the government and society in general to work with us to achieve that objective’.**

Rowe further believes that existing church-owned schools would in the relatively

near future be afforded the right to change their ethos and transform themselves into multi-denominational ones. It would appear that leading members of the hierarchy are becoming aware of the need for a greater variety of types of primary schools with a more extensive mix of patrons. Archbishop Martin of Dublin emphasised that Catholic schools could only carry out their role if there were viable alternatives for parents. He said “It is clear that a system in which 92 per cent of all primary schools are managed by the Roman Catholic Church in a country where the Catholic population is 87 per cent is certainly not tenable”(Irish Times ,Wednesday, 17-6-2009). Archbishop Martin further stated that “Certainly a situation in which a church took over day-to-day responsibility for the running of most of the school system and of our hospitals was – and still is – an anomaly. But the answer, I believe, is not simply handing everything over to State bureaucracies whose efficiency has certainly yet to be proven, and in some cases efficiency may not even be the word to apply”(Irish Times, Monday, 20/7/2009). Archbishop Martin is clearly stating that he realises that the present situation in which the Catholic Church controls the vast majority of the primary schools in the state cannot continue unaltered.

**‘I feel at some future date, not too distant future, schools and parents within schools will be offered the facility of changing the structure and the management of their schools from within the churches to multi-denominational or Educate Together schools.**

However the following questions must be asked i.e. what about the minority who may not want the ethos of their school to change? Will a simple majority be enough

to change the system of patronage under which a school operates? Clear guidelines and processes must be enacted by the Department of Education and Science and the relevant patron bodies in order to facilitate existing primary schools to alter their ethos.

He further stated:

**‘But more significantly I feel that the kind of participation, the kind of democracy, the kind of religious education, that goes on in these schools is influencing both curriculum and the way other national schools are evolving, so I think the Educate Together breakthrough will come in the way that it has held up a mirror to schools in terms of mono-culture, mono-religion and that schools naturally find themselves reflecting the changing Irish national profile and that schools with children of various religions, different backgrounds, no religion, will in fact reflect that in their curriculum to the extent that Educate Together schools do in their religious education curriculum and therefore the influence of Educate Together is far beyond the number of schools that they have and it’s manifest in the revised curriculum where it specifically states that pluralism and pluralist nature of Ireland in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has to be reflected in the curriculum, so I think that was the influence of Educate Together in the new curriculum, so I do feel that there’s a breakthrough but it’s not the kind of breakthrough where you’re going to have 3,000 Educate Together schools’.**

**‘Since the new Education Act democracy is actually happening more in other**

**schools that it has been before and I think they're actually catching up now on what we have been doing all along'.**

## **7.9**

### **R.E./Instruction**

In Educate Together schools they are concerned with religious education rather than instruction. They develop their own education programmes in which they teach students about major facts concerning world religions. They do not place any belief system over any other. They give equal weight to religious faiths and atheism. Many lapsed or liberal Catholic parents favour this approach rather than the rigid all pervasive ethos that existed in a number of Church controlled schools in previous decades. Others associate multi-denominational schools with a departure from the very authoritarian, strict, highly disciplined ones that they themselves attended.

Educate Together encourages all member schools to allow denominational groups use the premises for the purpose of religious instruction after-school hours. Others schools try to facilitate their Muslim students to have set prayer times. Indeed one, which is located beside a Mosque, facilitates pupil wishing to attend Friday services. Do they allow Catholic students who wish to attend Mass on a daily basis during Lent do so? Many schools celebrate the major festivals of the world faiths that have followers in the school and those that may not have any members but are being studied by the pupils.

Religious instruction is carried on outside of school hours in most of them by the

appropriate denominational bodies in most cases Catholic parents committee's. However in some schools it is carried out during school hours. Catholics do not have a Sunday school network similar to that operated by most Protestant Churches. Therefore, Catholics depended very much on their primary schools (which accounted for over 90 per cent of such establishments in the state) for religious instruction, for the sacraments of Reconciliation, Eucharist and Confirmation. A legacy of the long tradition of Catholic elementary education in Ireland is that the demand for religious instruction is deep-seated and manifests itself in inter and multi-denominational schools where it is provided either inside or outside of school hours. The Dunboyne controversy over Catholic religious instruction has brought this issue onto the national stage especially in the light of the sacking of the principal and his subsequent re-employment by Educate Together.

Paul Rowe stated that:

**‘Anecdotally around about, I mean it will vary from school to school, around about 70% of the children in our schools would attend the Catholic Communion and Confirmation classes’.**

This is probably accounted for by the fact that unlike other religious groups, there is no Roman Catholic Sunday school equivalent. One Principal teacher spoke of her approach to teaching children of different religious backgrounds:

**‘ So I would never speak of for instance the Catholic child or the Jewish child, I would always speak of a child of Protestant parents or a child of particular**

**parents and I also tell children very definitely that they do not have to decide that these are issues for adults, that they are children and some people never decide exactly what their belief is, some people can go through life quite happily or normally without having worked out every single thing that they want to and I would fall into that category myself and I don't feel that I have to always know all the answers'.**

The R.E. programme in such schools deals with the acquiring of knowledge rather than the religious formation of the child which in Educate Together school is left to the parents. In one school they try to put all theistic and non theistic belief systems on the same level.

**'The older children they usually do a project for instance on belief systems in Ireland, it used to be place of worship in Ireland but then we found that that was excluding children who didn't have a God-based belief system in their family and also certain God-based belief systems who wouldn't have a place of worship'.**

She believes that R.E. should utilise the stories of the founders of the various faiths as a teaching aid.

**'Now I think the aspects of that most suitable for multi-denominational and most enriching can be the narrative aspects of any denomination of any religion because an awful lot of them are common to one another anyway, with**

**variations. For instance, the stories of creation, the stories, the narrative, the historical aspects, certainly the aesthetic, you know you would study the art aspect of it, and the celebratory aspects as well would be another one. I'm not happy that it would be too much gone into the dogmatic or the theological aspects of it and I would have some of those ideas from a man called Derek Bastide of his work on religious education from 5 to 13'.**

She further states that she would teach key religious stories saying that some accepted them as revealed truth while others believe they are fairy stories. She is unconcerned whether she offends parents or not.

**'For instance if you go back to the nativity story, I would present that as being this is a story that some people believe is a fairy story, some people believe it's a history story, something that really happened, there are other people who believe that's it's a very important thing that happened and other people who believe that this is the most important thing in their lives and it determines how they live their lives everyday and I said you might have a chat to your Mam and Dad what they believe or if they have opinions on it, and you can change your mind as you get older'.**

**'Because some people do think it's a fairy tale and I don't care if some parents are offended. I am the person dealing with the children, I mean you can for instance parents of some religions like children of Jehovah's Witness parents don't want the children read fairy tales at all, they don't want them to put**



**anything down on paper that's not real, which excludes Santa Clause, Halloween, fairies, anything like that. Now I'm not going along with that, I'm not because there is the wonder of childhood and I say in the very beginning I'm not going along with it, that I want the children exposed to the wonder of childhood and the innocence of it and the whole old fashionedness of childhood and they accept that'.**

In this particular school as in all other Educate Together schools Catholic parents committees organise catechism lessons for their children which may happen inside or outside of time-tabled hours.

**'The denominational instruction in our school takes place outside of school hours. Now up to now the only parent body that has asked for use of the building is that of the Catholic parents group'.**

**'Now in the early days when we signed our contract with the Dept. of Education we were told that the denominational instruction had to be within school hours. But it was within school hours and Dalkey and Bray were also within school hours'.**

**'Now we were very unsure of ourselves at the time and we did sign that document that it would be within school hours and it became very divisive among the parent body, some parents argued that it was going against the whole ethos of the school to have children withdrawn, you see for this half hour a day**

**it was the core curriculum and for one of those half hours, the children of Catholic parents were withdrawn and they left the room and they went down to another room and had religious instruction. And some parents argued that that was divisive and other parents said no that it's part of our liberalism that is quite normal, but we took legal advice on it and we were able to advise Kilkenny which was the school opening immediately after us, we have this stock of old furniture that we pass on as well. We were able to advise Kilkenny that they didn't have to sign that and Kilkenny was the first school to have it after school hours and all of them since have it after school hours'.**

One principal stated that if all religious groups tried to exercise their right to have denominational catechism classes on school grounds it would not be possible to cater for them all.

**'If it was done by various groups. Say for instance the Catholic parents group, the Jewish parents group, the Muslim parents group, the Mennonites, Plymouth Brethren, you would have had all these groups in school, say if they all wanted to do it, which they would have been entitled to do if one group was done it, it would have been totally unworkable within school hours'.**

In some schools very large numbers prepare for the Catholic sacraments. This possibly reflects the demographic patterns that exist within them.

**'I remember teacher in 6<sup>th</sup> class there one time, there were 35 children in the**

**class, and all except, five of them, they were having Catholic religious instruction’.**

The Catholic parents committee usually employ a qualified catechist who has trained in a Catholic teacher-training college:

**‘Various people, it would be a catechetics teacher, probably a graduate of Mater Dei, one of the religion lecturers in St. Pat’s did it for a while, various people. I think a nun who came in at one stage, various people came in’.**

One teacher brought pupils to the Catholic Church to see a nativity play as part of their R.E. programme.

**‘Yeh, we didn’t have a nativity play but I always teach the Christmas story, get that into the narrative, we did this frieze we would have our straw, we would have everything, I would bring them down to the Catholic church to see it’.**

This teacher was aware that in some Educate Together schools there may be an element who while open to all other faith traditions are hostile towards Catholicism:

**‘Well you see it’s the backlash I think. I think that will settle down in the next 8 or 10 years, it’s the backlash and it’s the ABC – anything but catholic. I mean you can have and in my previous school I remember in the early days there was a girl who was Islamic and she was doing her first year of Ramadan she had**

**turned 10 and she did a Ramadan fast and at the same time there were a few children in there it was Lent, the children off something for Lent, now I felt that they were being ignored, that this girl who was fasting was the centre of attention’.**

I was concerned that some teachers may be prejudiced against Catholicism because they may have rejected it themselves. In the case of the following principal I detected a certain a certain intellectual arrogance in her approach to observant Catholics:

**‘There are a lot of people who traditionally practice Catholicism because of a lower level of thinking, now that’s not necessarily that there’s anything wrong with it, that’s just the way it was. It was if you take the analogy of the sheep, to my mind that’s an important analogy that it means just doing what you’re told which would have been done in a lot of societies where people weren’t necessarily in a position to go beyond that, but that’s a bit like the external locus of control for morals and for your day to day actions’.**

One teacher pointed out that among the 90% of her students who were Catholic there were many shades of opinion.

**‘About 10% would be non-Catholic. Now within the Catholic as you’re probably aware there would be various shades of Catholicism as well and we would have people who want Catholic instruction for their children, but don’t practice. We would have who children when it comes to the Sacraments would be prepared for the Sacraments, would take part but they would not receive the**

**Sacrament our non-denominational children would do exactly the same thing or Church of Ireland children, they're given the choice and it depends on the family, so on ... take last year's, this passed June the First Communion class on the day we had Catholic children taking part, we had Church of Ireland children and we had children of no denomination taking part in the entire thing, so roughly that would be the breakdown of figures'.**

Another teacher stated that many lapsed Catholics were reacting against the rigidity of their own schools:

**'A lot want to go away from that, that they're not practising Catholics and they don't want such a rigid Catholic ethos for their children, that multi-denominational will suit them better and do the Catholicism outside of school. Now it depends really on the school, I mean there aren't as many religious now at all, whereas when I was growing up with the brothers, and the nuns and all it was very much Catholic and saying prayers, morning, noon and night and a lot of people don't do that anymore'.**

One teacher reflecting on her own education concurred with this point of view:

**'But I know I've been in other schools where it's very much, years ago, when we all lined up in the corridors and said morning prayers and that still does happen in schools and very much prayers before lunch and prayers after lunch and going to the church for the first Friday of the month, saying rosaries and all that**

**sort of thing whereas and a lot of adoration in the church, that's the wrong word, but where I think in Educate Together schools, it's in other schools as well, very much the whole child and the parents involved and it's not just the children, I know in some schools they're interested in the child but a lot of teachers don't want a lot to do with parents at all, whereas in Educate Together if you're buying into Educate Together you're buying into parental involvement, so you have to be a teacher who is willing to accept that and not all teachers are willing to accept that, that's the whole community, like the thing here it's the whole community, it's not the teachers and the classroom, it's the teachers, the children, the classroom assistant, the parents, the board, everybody and everybody knows everybody else, whereas other places if you're a teacher who likes your classroom and this is my classroom and my children, well then you wouldn't be into an Educate Together school, because it's very much community'.**

The above quotes highlight a possible ideological dilemma i.e. is there a bias against Catholicism in Educate Together schools? It also raises the issue of how can one counter possible anti-Catholic bias from embittered lapsed or ex- Catholic teachers working in these schools. Clear policies must be enacted to deal with this issue and disciplinary sanctions must be taken against those teachers who display a bias against any faith.

In one multi-denominational school not affiliated to Educate Together the following approach to R.E. is taken:

**‘We have assemblies two mornings a week and the other three mornings instead of assembly and prayers we have denominational instruction from 9 to 9.20 at assembly and prayers. Now what happens there is simultaneously in various parts of the school the Church of Ireland children are attended, the Catholic children are attended to and the children who want no instruction are attended to in so far as there are activities organised for example the case of the Catholic children they follow their programme, the Church of Ireland children follow the programme laid down by the Church of Ireland board and the non-denominational children in the case of the Church of Ireland children it is a teacher, a retired Church of Ireland teacher appointed by the minister. In the case of the Catholic children, for the most part it’s their teacher, with the staff of the school and in the case of the children who are non-denominational, one staff member takes those, takes the senior section and a person appointed by the parents of the non-denominational children take the junior section, because we’ve had to break them into groups’.**

**‘It happens during assembly and prayer time, because we don’t have prayer time because of the fact that it’s a multi-denominational, we don’t have a school prayer time as such, it was something that was discussed and as a result of consensus it was agreed that we would not have ever prayer time, we were trying to draft a prayer or something that would be acceptable to all people, we couldn’t do that, the non-denominational group were not willing to entertain any form of a service for want of a better word’.**

In this school all teachers teach the Catholic children R.E. at some stage.

**‘At some stage, you mean a teacher in the Catholic religion. Oh yes, everybody would teach the Catholic religion at some stage, but also we recognise the fact that there are a group of non-denominational children who have every entitlement to an education at that particular time and must be engaged in a worthwhile activity, so each year a different teacher takes that group’.**

The Born Again Christians also bring in their own catechist,

**‘We have a group of Born Again Christians as well and they have their own catechist coming in as well. Because again they were not happy that one of the staff would do it, they wanted somebody from their own tradition’.**

It was the principal’s opinion that the Church of Ireland felt compelled to appoint their own catechist due to the fact that many Anglican children were attending the Born Again Bible classes.

**‘For the most part, their parents either had a choice, they either kept them at home or they went into the Catholic instruction. That was it. Some of them went into the Born Again section and in actual fact I actually feel and I know that is what has caused movement on the part of the Church of Ireland parents, because they found that the people who would have been involved in providing the Bible study classes would have been very active outside of school time in that**



**they had lots of underage clubs for children who were attached to their church and the Church of Ireland community became aware that quite a considerable number of children who should be attending their church were now starting to partake in activities organised by what would be described as the Born Again Christians, so then they came on board’.**

In the above school which is not affiliated to Educate Together, the Church of Ireland appointed its own religion teacher due to the fact that they were afraid that Anglican children were being poached by the Born Again Christians, who were also providing denominational instruction there. In another multi-denominational school the Ba’hai children had their own R.E. lessons after school hours:

**‘We have the Ba’hai faith and they have their own classes, now it’s down to one pupil in their case’.**

All festivals are celebrated and acknowledged in some most of the schools:

**‘Well multi-culturalism and multi-denominational is where all creeds and cultures are working together. Here I have about 19 nationalities and we’ve 10 or 12 different religions or none religions as well and how we put it into practise is we have assemblies most months where we would celebrate everybody’s festivals. Obviously you can’t celebrate because there’d be one every day of the week, but at Christmas we celebrate Christmas, we talk about Christmas, the children learn about it, for Ramadan, for Hannukah, for Vesica day, for all the**

**different festivals. The children might dress up in their national costumes, here we celebrate the difference, some other schools would be multi-cultural and just look at them but not look at the difference so much whereas here we celebrate that everybody is different. We're all the same on one level, but we're all different'.**

This raises the following dilemma i.e. will parents be open to the acknowledgement of the beliefs/celebrations of faiths other than their own? It also raises the issue of whether one can acknowledge all cultures and faiths, ensuring that they are treated equally in the process. Policies must be developed in this sector which encourage treating all faiths with parity of esteem.

**'Well we had a question on our first year when it came to Christmas because Christmas seemed to be a bit bigger than anything else, just because of the fact of the commercialism more so than anything in the school and it came up especially with Jehovah's Witness because they don't have any celebrations and a lot of them felt that they were being pushed into the celebration, but we had a lot of meetings and discussions with parents and realised that we're celebrating, and it's not celebrating because that was a word that some people had a bit of .. bit annoyed over because we sent home a note once saying we're having a celebration of Diwali and some Muslim person said I don't want my child celebrating that, celebrating was the wrong word, they're not participating in the celebration, we are just acknowledging it, the way we got around it was that we acknowledge Christmas that it's a fairly big festival in Christian religion, not**

**just Catholic, and why should that be left out if Diwali and Hannukah and Ramadan and Vesica and everything are put in, and as well as that a lot of people felt that that it's a Christian festival but it's also an Irish festival and leave the Christian part out of it that a lot of the people who are Muslims and Sikhs they celebrate Christmas in a different not the religious end of it, but it's so commercial you can't get away from it. So we had a lot of discussions with parents because some said no, no we're not doing this and I said hang on we're multi-denominational, we're looking at everybody not a non-denominational'.**

A teacher in another school said that they tried to acknowledge all major festivals on a single class or whole-school basis.

**'This year it was Riz Van which was a Ba'hai festival, but last year it was Bealtaine which is a pagan festival, the year before that it was Christmas, so we do celebrate the Christian ones and we make a big deal out of the Christian ones when they are on our time table to do it. Junior infants also one of their main festivals every year is Christmas, so the junior infants do the nativity play every year for the parents of junior infants because we don't it bring it together as a whole school thing because most of the festivals that are done are actually done in the class, so I mean it would be just a class thing, but yes it is mentioned and certainly not ignored.'**

One principal summed up the R.E. programme of Educate Together schools in the following manner:

**‘We wouldn’t really go and talk about the Christian belief anymore than any other, even though that’s the one that they are predominantly being immersed in’.**

Due to Educate Together’s first come, first served policy many non-nationals find that they have to go the denominational route when it comes to their childrens’ education, even if that was not their first preference.

**‘I mean there’d be many schools in the area that would have children who wouldn’t necessarily be Catholic or Church of Ireland and they still take those kids in and unfortunately the children have to sit through instruction classes and it’s not just sitting through the classes, religion permeates the whole ethos of the school, icons on the wall, which we don’t have any of, which can be offensive to the children and the parents. And in terms of the children preparing for the Sacraments and all that kind of business, lots of time in the day goes to that particular thing in a denominational school’.**

**‘Basically, where your denominational school would have half a day given to religion, we would have half an hour given over to what we call core curriculum in that we would discuss various religious, various nationalities and of course it’s great having a child from a different background in the class, only just talking abstractly about another country or another religion but they can actually come up and tell you about it and they’re only too glad to do it. The corollary of that of course is that we would have a few children would make**

their first communion each year from this school, we provide the premises and they come in after school hours to teach them on site, they have to do 10 hours prior to the Confirmation or First Communion, so very much, so we very much embrace the Catholic ethos or the Protestant ethos as well but also include as many other religions as possible. We also have teacher of English to non-nationals which is a scheme that was introduced a few years ago by the government, so we have somebody to help in terms of language integration, but in general, you find that children learn more from each other than they do from the teachers, so something like putting them in a situation where they're experiencing other cultures, seeing the children from other cultures, that's different, intrinsically to themselves, then they learn'.

Major religious milestones in the lives of pupils are marked in many of these schools, whether it be a Confirmation or Bar Mitzvah:

'Yeh, we had, let's see in second class we had 16 children, we had five teachers, second and third are together, seven of them would have made their first communion, quite a high number this year, and that included a Tanzanian girl, you have that mix within that even. But in general we had one making Confirmation as well'.

'It was even more special for them because they come in the First Communion dresses or suits the following day'.

**‘Again they might have a Bar mitzvah or maybe at the end of Ramadan the other children would come in and they’ll be dressed up and they’ll explain why they’re ...’.**

A number of these schools would accommodate the religious needs of its student body. In one school located near a mosque, Muslim pupils were facilitated to attend Friday prayers. This again raises the issue of how far an Educate Together school expected to go in order to facilitate the diverse religious beliefs and practices of its student body.

**‘We would have at one stage last we, we had maybe 12 Muslim children, again we’re right beside the mosque, so they would be free on Friday for the service there, so we do try and accommodate the religions. A lot of people get the impression that we’re non-denominational, whereas in fact we’re the polar opposite, there’s no religion in that school, it’s actually every religion is in this school’.**

In the following school religious instruction occurs during school hours. In the Educate Together school in Limerick it takes place on a Saturday:

**‘It’s down within school hours, it creates a bit of a timetabling problem for me, most schools are actually putting it outside, there’s no demand for that to happen here and that our kids have come in from about a 25 mile radius and it would be logistically very hard for them to do it, but I know they do it in**

**Limerick where they come back in on a Saturday afternoon, but they're numbers are much smaller then as a result'.**

Educate Together primary schools have autonomy when it comes to organising their own R.E. programme:

**'Every primary school is obliged by law and it is recommended by the Dept. of Education to have religious education. The patron body decides what religious education. In denominational schools like Catholic schools, Church of Ireland, Islamic, they have religious instruction and they say this is the way it is. Educate Together hasn't got the same programme in all the schools, we develop our own. Here, for example, we have a Catholic Parents Association who organise the Communion and Confirmation for this year and most of the kids in school as is in most of the others would be Catholic or nominally Catholic at least and what we do is they organise it after school a catechist to come in and prepare them and we facilitate that. We have people involved in Confirmation and Communion so during school time we have our thing and next year we are going to have a fixed half hour slot, this year three new started off and did their own thing basically. Next year we'll have it organised and we'll have a half-hour slot – R&V programme as I call it and is education not instruction'.**

An experienced principal describes the Educate Together approach to R.E. as follows:

**'Well all the Educate Together schools would pursue a religious education**

curriculum. Mostly devised by themselves and the teachers within the school. For example, the Rathfarnham Ethical Education programme there and booklets like that, it just came on my desk in the last few days and our school would have one as well. So the amount of time that's allocated in the curriculum to Religious education is 2.5 hours per week would be allocated in Educate Together schools, what is not done and what is crucial to these schools is that children are not by the school personnel i.e. the students are not instructed in their own religion, nor do the teachers promote the views of one religion over another, nor do the teachers or school promote the idea that a religion is a superior state to be in than not having a religion. So in the sense that the faith systems from which the kids come, their rights to hold those is equally respected, irrespective of what that system is whether it's theistic or non-theistic, whether it is a formal religion or a minority religion or whatever?.

I was intrigued when one teacher told me they could no problem doing a Jewish play but they may have a problem with a nativity play because it was regarded as too Catholic. Is this a liberal approach to celebrating diversity? Is this an example of anti-Catholicism in action or is it a necessity in a society which has been traditionally so immersed in that faith?

'I know some places they don't have Christmas holidays they have winter holidays and that's something we discussed but we have kind of come around to the view, look it's just a word, we deliberately took upon us to play down Christmas and then before it was Ramadan so we did stuff on Ramadan in



**school but a nativity play is kind of something that is very much kind of a Catholic thing in a way and it might happen – I don't know, it's not in or out. But we're open to all sorts of things, I wouldn't see a problem with that, yes we could a little Jewish thing no problem and it wouldn't be Jews doing it'.**

This principal believes that the state is endowing one particular religion by supporting the current mainly denominationally controlled education system.

**'If you go to England, go to any of the continental countries the State provides, so by having that high number of denominational schools the State is actually endowing one particular religion and is therefore discriminating against children who ... parents can be still good Catholics and the very fact that so many parents here send their children to Catholic classes after school shows you how good and how committed they are as Catholics, but they don't want that education for their children, they want them educated in a broader sense of the word'.**

This principal does not agree with the American decision to keep religious education out of school. He favours a comparative religion approach:

**'So it's ... and indeed in education in a country such as Ireland, western European country, which along the lines of an American which prohibits the teaching of any religion schools or any religious symbols in schools would seem to me to be ignoring the facts of life, I mean we want in these days to say the**

changing face of Ireland look how many have different colours, and different ethnic backgrounds but one of the most obvious things in this country is the place of religion in country, I directed you here today past 2 or 3 churches and said you stop at 'x' church and you turn in left, I mean you either direct people in this country passed the pubs or past churches but to ignore the place of the church, ignore the place of religion in society, to ignore the place of religion in history, to ignore the place of religion in the future would be, it seems to me, to provide an incomplete education, so irrespective of one's beliefs, society has a place in it for religion and a school needs to take cognisance of that and education would be incomplete without an education about religion and its place within society'.

'It's moving towards the notion of comparative religions'.

One principal explores the causes of this anti-Catholic mentality:

'I think, for example, the Catholic church is getting a very negative publicity and has an awful lot of questions to answer for indeed as we speak they've set up a commission to look into their wrongdoings, which is an extraordinary situation and almost unheard of up until now, so I think in a society which to some extent is post-Christian, that the immediate reaction to the role of Christianity up to now there would be a tendency to be negative more negative than one would be about a religion that hadn't been influenced influentially in a country. I mean I can accept that it's from a non-confessional view it is very

**easy to examine Rastafarianism or Aboriginal creative stories or Islam or Hinduism, it's much easier to be dispassionate and objective about that than it is to be dispassionate and objective to a system that has had a huge influence on one's life and on one's country and on the education system, out of which we are moving, in that sense there could be a tendency to under-value the role of Christianity in a non-doctrinal educational programme about religions'.**

This highlights the difficulty a teacher may have in being dispassionate about the Catholic religion which had a major influence on the development of Irish society as opposed to faiths such as Rastafarianism which have had none. He also argues that it is necessary in an authentically multi-denominational R.E. programme not to ignore Christianity in all its forms;

**'There also is the assumption that a lot of people have an awful lot of knowledge about Christianity in this country, the vast majority of children having been inducted or baptised into that system and in the majority of schools the majority of children are doing to be Roman Catholic and a significant number of those are going to be practising Roman Catholics, so there is a tendency to say well they know about Roman Catholicism, let's teach them about Judaism. So I have at a recent conference in Kilkenny called for an examination of the balance of this whether we are shying away from Catholicism and Christianity in our curriculum, and I think it is something we need to look at, I would suggest that there is probably not a conscious bias but it is something would need to be looked at, it's easy to have a celebration of Diwali, or the Chinese new year, but**

**people tend to object and this comes significantly from parents in these schools if one were to have a Christmas play based on the story of the birth of Jesus, it probably wouldn't be for a group of people whose own views of their religion or their former religion are very negative'.**

He points to the fact that there could be a lot of ignorance about the basic key facts concerning Christianity;

**'There's an assumption that the vast majority of people would know the nativity story and very few would know of Buddha's life or Mohammed's life and therefore the fascination, the cultural difference is often an aspect of these things that people enjoy and like. Secondly, as I say a significant minority of people not alone have come through say a Catholic or a Christian background and have rejected it but they have hang-ups about it and in the parent body, the general school body and perhaps even among teachers that might be a factor when one is talking in terms of religion one talks in terms of the awe, the spirituality, the message, the scriptures, whatever they be and so on, and it is interesting and fascinating to do it within a culture that you are not immediately familiar with and it probably is one of the reason why, perhaps an imbalance in schools in their ethical education or religious education programmes against that which is very family'.**

**'So I don't have, nor do we have in this school have any difficulty with examining Christian celebrations as well as other celebrations rather than take**

**a particular religious thing like the nativity play’.**

He further states that Educate Together schools provide a value-based education that this is not solely the remit of denominational primary schools:

**‘Every school educates about values. And I mean that they’re the only people who educate values is not fully correct, we all educate about values. I was teaching in a Catholic school, I taught values, we taught honesty, we taught justice, we taught tolerance, everybody teaches them, because it’s part of the Christian message, it’s part of the Gospel message. But they do not teach it in the context of religious foundation, they teach it as value, and in the context of pluralism they teach that it’s a good thing to be honest, a good thing to be ?? and we all agree with that, but in the Christian tradition they would teach it and they would add to it the reasons why and they would bring in the message of Christ, the message of God and so forth and so forth. But the religious instruction side of it, or the formation part of it, is where you’re taught prayer, you’re taught about going to Mass, you’re taught about the sacraments, now they don’t do that in the multi-d school because anything to do with the denominational religion is the responsibility of the parents’.**

He also states that difference must not be ignored but faced up to:

**‘And the difficulty is there are differences, we cannot ignore the differences and we have to teach the differences, but we don’t teach them in the context that**

**they're wrong',**

He also acknowledges that in a state with such a high concentration of Catholics it would be a logistical nightmare for that church to establish an alternative mode of catechesis.

**'In the Catholic religion there is a certain amount of knowledge and a lot of formation, whereas in the Protestant churches there's an awful lot of religion, an awful lot of information, bibles, and so forth and there's less formation because the formation goes on within the parish – Sunday school'.**

**'In this country the Protestant number is small, may have been felt under siege if you like and this is the way they did it, but it would be a physical impossibility for the Catholic church in my view to focus in on Sunday school and try and deal with all the children in the parish'.**

**'All I'm saying is that in the Catholic church the tradition has always been that religion was such a part of the community, a part of the parish and the school was part of that community and part of that parish and it was central to what was going on in the school'.**

The Catholic Church must in the future have to grapple with the issue of establishing its own Sunday school system, if it wants to ensure that its flock will receive what they deem to be suitable religious instruction. This would pose major logistical

problems for the Catholic hierarchy but it is an issue that must be addressed. A catechist employed in two multi-denominational schools in Cork city believes that her students appreciate the classes more due to the fact that their parents have to pay for them:

**‘The only difference I can see is that they have to pay for it separately, they pay the committee and the committees pay me. And I think because they have to pay for it, it makes the difference in their thinking about it. It’s not taken as another subject that goes through the day, they have to make a decision that they’re going to send them to religion and that they’re going to pay for it separately’.**

She differentiates between the two Educate Together schools’ approach to religious instruction:

**‘I would think so, especially in the Project School. I mean here most of them are doing it, they do, but they treat it more as an ordinary denominational school really but in the Project School they have to make a conscious decision to let their child be withdrawn from class, to come to religion and they have to pay for it’.**

The C.E.O. of Educate Together stated that in his organisation’s opinion doctrinal instruction is solely the concern of the individual churches:

**‘Some figures in the Catholic church have said that the quality of religious instruction on offer in our schools is not very high, that misses the point that the quality of religious instruction, i.e. doctrinal instruction is entirely the responsibility of the religious organisation and the families which are member of those institutions and it is not the responsibility of the school’.**

He also echoes what others I have interviewed observed i.e. that some Catholic parents believe that their children will benefit in their religious formation from being educated within a multi-denominational framework.

**‘I have been quite fascinated with over the past five years is the small but significant number section of people who are very committed Catholics who have chosen to send their children to an Educate Together school and we would suggest that there maybe a case and I’d love somebody to do some research on this, maybe a case that the particular environment that we offer in education may offer a premium environment for the religious formation of children’.**

One teacher felt that being educated in a multi-denominational setting often resulted in Catholic students becoming stronger in their faith.

**‘No, in fact, we had a principal here and he felt that the Catholic children here were more Catholic than the Catholic children in his old school and I actually believe that too. He said that they seemed to be very serious about their religion, they’re Catholic and they believe that this is what they want to do and I think in one way it’s because they’re in a multi-denominational school they’re**



**nearly more proud of their religion than they would be if they were in an ordinary denominational school where religion is kind of, everyone is the same’.**

If this is so it surely contradicts the long held view of the Catholic hierarchy that only in their schools is the faith development of their adherents ensured.

### **7.10            Teacher Training Colleges**

Many of those I interviewed were very concerned about the fact that aspiring primary teachers who wish to train in the state must attend denominational teacher training colleges.

**‘Limerick is still very strong, the College in Blackrock wouldn’t be as strongly, that would be more neutral even though it is technically a Catholic college. The Church of Ireland in Rathmines is even more strict and more narrowly focused than St. Pat’s is, I think again because we spoke about it, they’re under pressure and that it assumed that everyone who went in there was a Catholic so they didn’t even ask’.**

**‘In the Church of Ireland one you had to fill out this form, say your background, your parents religion, your parish, your minister’s name, what church activity you’ve done, they were so much under threat that they had to**

**positively establish what you were, whereas St. Pat's in some ways were so arrogant that they would assume it, and that's why it never became an issue'.**

This interviewee implied that some people with unorthodox views could find themselves unemployable upon graduation:

**'There were people in my year who didn't get jobs and who had to leave teaching because they were blackened from getting jobs'.**

**'There was no other way to become a primary teacher and this is what's wrong in Ireland, there was no other way except go to the Catholic college or the Protestant college'.**

This issue raises a dilemma i.e. is it appropriate that all teacher training colleges in the state be owned and run by two churches? In a pluralistic society, is it appropriate in the third millennium that all people who wish to train in the state have to do so in denominationally controlled teacher training institutions? Does this model cater for all? The state must consider establishing a multi-denominational teacher training college or allowing an already established one to change its ethos and patron.

## **7.11            State Reaction**

The state had a long established relationship with the churches as managers of networks of schools. Thus there was some negativity within the Department of

Education towards this new radical force in Irish education i.e. the multi-denominational school movement. In the first decades of the state's existence it had been content to leave schools almost completely under church control. The churches and the state had developed a close relationship in the provision of education. Thus the emergence of school projects would require a new communications system between the Department of Education and these individual new schools. No longer would the cosy relationship between bishops and civil servants be the model that all schools were to aspire to.

The following interviewee provides us with his analysis of the development of denominational education in Ireland.

**'It seemed to me that schools were managed historically for a particular reason when the national school system was set up in 1831, the local cleric clergyman of whatever denomination was a person who could be trusted to have money dispersed and nearly always a him too, and obviously was literate and it was decided that he was a suitable local person in order to set up, to manage a school locally'.**

Another concurs with this view and further states:

**'Ah they have, the State had no money when it was established and the Church said right we'll run them and we'll pay 5% and we'll run them and we'll control them, and the State said fine we've no money, we'll pay for the teachers and**

**whatever and give a few bob for heating and cleaning but it's an agreement which was very much a denominational agreement and it did support Church of Ireland as well, the Manager was the P.P. or the local Rector, or whatever, who appointed the principal and in the case of Catholic schools, I think the percentage of male principals who are ex-Christian brothers or ex-religious is only phenomenal and there's logic to it other than the fact that they were picked because they were seen to be strong in religion, not necessarily good principals, some of them are, many of them are'.**

Dick Burke a former Fine Gael minister of Education was hostile in his attitude to the Dalkey School Project because he regarded it as an unnecessary departure in Irish education. However subsequent ministers such as Mary O'Rourke were positive towards the multi-denominational sector.

**'I think you'd have to describe it as improving. Mary O'Rourke, quite rightly, was personally very supportive of what and has remained very supportive of the Educate Together movement and even since she left the portfolio of the Department of Education, ministers come and ministers go but we go on forever'.**

O'Rourke often went beyond the call of duty to help multi-denominational schools as may be gleaned from the following interviewee:

**'Unless we had found an alternative and even when we moved in here in 1993,**

**this was a former Ashley School, the building in 1895 so it has to be updated, fireproofed, but the State paid for 85% of all that, but we were about to be evicted from our building up in MacCurtain Street, and it was actually Mary O'Rourke who stepped in and saved us'.**

**' She was very active and very positive. She came down to the little school and it rained and rained, it was a very bleak day and it suited us, she said go on and she went over to the Diocesan office and this building had been on the commercial market and it was offered to everyone and anyone and we had tried to get it and we couldn't and the next day a deal was struck whereby the building was released to us, I think we bought it for £50,000, no we bought the site ...'**

## **7.12            Gaelscoileanna**

All gaelscoileanna that have a multi-denominational ethos have An Foras as their patron body. This represents multi-denominational, inter-denominational and denominational Gaelic medium schools outside the gaeltacht i.e. the Gaelic speaking regions.

**'An Foras as recent times have proved, has been extremely proactive role in ensuring that whatever ethos a school professes to is carried through in the day to day working of the school, be it Catholic, multi-denominational or inter-denominational because they would be the three types of schools under the**

**patronage of An Foras’.**

All of these different categories of schools are represented on the board of An Foras as one of my interviewees a principal in county Cork told me:

**‘An Foras has representations from their Catholic schools, their inter-denominational schools and their multi-denominational schools. I was nominated to the multi-denominational panel and then all schools had a vote and all schools under An Foras and as a result of the vote I was elected’.**

She defines what the role of this organisation is:

**‘Well I suppose the role of An Foras Patrúnachta is similar to the role of any patron, rarely they’d have day to day involvement with the school except where there’s a problem or a dispute. Generally they entrust the care of the schools to their representatives on the Boards of Management and also they appointment the Boards of Management and they also appoint the chairpersons so in general terms there wouldn’t be a huge amount of day to day input similar to the bishops it would be only if there was a dispute or there was a problem or if the school needed advice or whatever’.**

A member of An Foras Pátrúnachta gave the following summary of its role:

**‘Well nowadays it is a patron body, it can open other schools ... traditionally when a Gaelscoil or any other school, denominational school opens they go to**

the local bishop or they go to the local community and they get a patron, the patronage of the bishop usually. In other Gaelscoil in others cases, some of the Gaelscoileanna couldn't open because the local bishops didn't want them to open because of other schools losing numbers and the Gaelscoileanna would have had the same problem as us in that way in that they wouldn't always have been very welcome and for that reason Foras Pátrúnachta was able to act as a patron for the schools whose bishops wouldn't allow them open, so they opened under the patronage of An Foras, but they actually then were Catholic schools as well. Some of them are Catholic, some others are multi-denominational, but they are not affiliated to Educate Together. There are two other multi-denominational schools. Clonakilty is, but it's not affiliated to Educate Together. So it would not, it's not like an Educate Together school'.

A principal outlines the difficulties that she believes will be faced by those schools who in the future may wish to transfer patronage:

'because transferring patronage is very difficult, it has only happened I think once or twice in the history of the State and I'm not sure how advisable or how easy or how doable it would be. Now I know that, I think it was the Ranelagh Church of Ireland School, switched over to be multi-denominational but that was with the agree of all people involved and something like that would be difficult to achieve in most instances because you'd be talking about change of conditions and of employment for teachers and so on, An Foras don't have a panel, for example, so and they would be changing their employer and they

**would be giving up their rights to places on the diocesan panels and so on, so it's quite a complex issue'.**

She further outlines how this patron body is unique in that it acts as patron to schools with very different types of ethos:

**'There are 6 interdenominational schools and 4 multi-denominational'.**

She is confident that there is no contradiction between having Foras Pátrúnachta as patron and also being affiliated to Educate Together.

**'Brendáin McCormack and I think that he saw an opportunity with Gaelscoil in Gort Allain to re-introduce the establishment of a new patron system again for Gaelscoileanna because here was a group of parents who wanted a multi-denominational Gaelscoil for whom if we did set up a special patronage system that it would suit them, do you know what I mean?'**

**'An Foras Patrunachta and Educate Together and Gaelscoileanna and Educate Together have always worked very well together and I can't see that we would be arguing about issues in terms of the schools, I think the three organisations know where each one is coming from and respect each other's views and I can't see that we'd be clashing'.**

This interviewee further outlines the difference between inter and multi-denominationalism:



**‘each parent in this country has a right to withdraw their children from religious instruction if they want, basically inter-denominationalism as it was first sort of proposed and accepted by An Foras was very clear on that, that the children would be taught about the different religions, that they would know what the differences were and that they wouldn’t be shunted off to various different rooms when the secrets of the Catholic church were being exposed for example, that it was very clear that they would be exposed to both and that they would visit both churches and have chaplains from both churches coming in and that they would be taught about and that they would celebrate both religions equally and so that the Protestant children would know that Catholic children believed that the body and blood of Christ was actually the body and blood of Christ and so on, but that they didn’t think that and that they would know that about each other and I know that people say well it’s very difficult to be teaching all of that to 7 or 8 year old but in the multi-denominational schools you are talking about far more complex issues in terms of the various different religions that the children are being told about, not necessarily taught, but told about and people seem to think that children of 7, 8, 9 or 10 can absorb the differences between the Muslim faith, the Hindu faith, whatever’.**

**‘Gaelscoil in Ghoirt Alainn obviously was the first multi-denominational school so when they were set up, naturally they went to Educate Together, we went to Educate Together ourselves in order to get information and advice for them, so I suppose they felt it was kind of a logical step to be aligned with Educate**

**Together’.**

Most Gaelscoileanna under An Foras Patrúnachta are Catholic in ethos, however they are not under the patronage of the local bishop who may or may not decide to appoint a priest as chaplain to such schools.

**‘Probably not, I mean one of the difficulties of the Foras schools is that not being religious we cannot provide chaplains, so you are dependent on the parish in which the school is established and in the diocese and in the bishops and so forth to be willing to accommodate schools under the Foras’.**

The ethos of such schools is decided by the founding parents and as such cannot be changed:

**‘So you base your patronage on what kind of school the founding parents want, do they want a Catholic school or a Catholic ethos, a multi-d or an inter-d and on the basis of that decision by the founding members then the school is that and the Foras then agree to be patronage of that, it takes the responsibility of the patron to protect that and preserve it forever more’.**

**‘You cannot change the ethos, you cannot change the characteristic spirit of a school, that is something that is part and parcel of patronage responsibility and the Dept. of Education have no say, they’ve no input in that and this goes back to the Stanley Letter the patron cannot be changed either without he agreeing to**

it’.

The Department lays down how much time is to be devoted to R.E. however it is up to each school to teach it in accordance with its own ethos

**‘Now the rules of the Dept. of Education lay down that religion is taught in schools according to the characteristic spirit of the school and that is the responsibility of the school, it’s the responsibility of the board, the responsibility of the teachers, and they are supposed to spend a half an hour per day teaching religion and there are other rules which allow maybe an hour once per month for celebrations and things like that’.**

He does not anticipate any problems with Educate Together in the future as long as they do not try to usurp the role of the patron.

**‘Well as long as Educate Together don’t interfere with the patronage’s responsibilities or with the board of management’s responsibilities because that’s not their function. They are a supportive organisation just the same way as Gaelscoileanna is a supportive organisation of the all-Irish schools and they don’t interfere with the patronage rights of the bishops. So if Educate Together were to start interfering with the running of the school, the management of the school and the patron’s issues in the school, certainly there’d be conflict with the Foras because that’s not their function, not their right’.**

**‘But basically as long as Educate Together does not interfere just the same way as I’m not going to interfere with the patron’s rights of the bishops or the patron’s rights of the Protestant schools or the patron’s rights of Educate Together schools, but whoever is the patron is the ultimate authority in a school, they appoint the board of management, who act on the patron’s behalf and the teacher’s are appointed to carry out the policies and the responsibilities of the teacher within the school and the parents are there to support it and whenever you get any of these functions or roles are being usurped by another group you’re going to have problems’.**

He states that to date Educate Together have maintained a good relationship with An Foras Patrunachta

**‘I don’t know an awful lot about Educate Together, but they’ve never been in conflict with the Foras but as far as I’m aware there’d be good relations between Gaelscoileanna and ourselves and Educate Together and we’d have no problem with them’.**

He further points out that there are more inter than multi-denominational schools under the patronage of his organisation:

**‘Four of ours are multi-denominational and six are inter-denominational. Now there are three new schools coming in this year and they’re going inter-denominational too, there’s one in Gorey, one in Naas and one in Ballyshannon and these will be inter-denominational, so there’ll be nine next year’.**

He defines the concept of inter-denominational education which is very similar to the integrated sector in Northern Ireland:

**‘Inter-denominational is basically an amalgamation of the Christian traditions which would be Catholic and Protestant. It’s a joint situation whereby the Catholic tradition, the Protestant tradition, is accepted, it’s recognised, it’s respected, it’s celebrated and they are not diminished as a result of the inter-denominationalism which means that both are regarded, both are respected, both are understood and the differences as well as the similarities are celebrated and appreciated and in that context, any kind of a diminution of either situation will be seen as in conflict with the concept of inter-denominationalism’.**

**‘But I just want you to understand that inter-denominationalism isn’t where you segregate people, it’s where you bring them together and make them appreciate and have regard for each other and that the differences aren’t that one is right and the other is wrong, it’s that there’s a difference and that we live with differences and that we accepted differences and we celebrate differences and this is the Foras’ understanding of inter-denominationalism and that’s what we believe’.**

He also explained how schools secured recognition of their Catholic ethos even though they were not under the patronage of the religious authorities. O’Connell speaks highly of the staff working in the Department and their ability to deal with

complex issues in a logical manner:

**‘Now when you saw people establishing a Catholic ethos school and they wanted to go under the Foras the Department kind of did a bit of a jig on it, wondering what will the bishop say, what will the church say in relation to this and they will have to recognise the school and recognise the school as being under the Foras as well. So they moved in a way, they moved sideways. The Department are a great crowd, I mean I have tremendous admiration for them because they have an answer to every situation and they are very, very logical, they’re very rational, they’re very, very good. And they said look we’ve no problem with this, and says you better OK it with the church. So negotiations started between the Foras and the church and it took a while for the church to accept the fact that we cannot stop you and that’s how the Catholic schools came into it, once the church said that’.**

**‘But as a patron the Foras has to realise and accept that the functions of Foras is to protect the ethos of a school which is our school is Gaelic and Christian and while members of the Foras who come from all walks of life need not necessarily be very, very committed Catholics, I don’t know what their religion I’m just saying they come from a dispirit group, very much involved in education, teachers, business, there are ten people in the Foras, one of them is a representative who represents the Catholic ethos schools and is elected by the Catholic ethos schools. One is representative of the multi-d schools and is elected by the multi-d schools and one is an inter-denominational representative**

**and elected by the inter-denominational schools, that's three'.**

An Foras is made up of members democratically elected by all interested parties :

**'And then the 40 schools, each school appoints their representative or their member of the Foras, so we have a membership and each school is a member of the Foras. So we now have 40 members and each school either selects'.**

**'Now those 40 members will elect the board that runs the Foras and the way they're elected is you'll have one who'll represent a multi-d school, one to represent the Catholic and one to represent the inter-d school, you have automatically as part of our Articles the two from Gaelscoil and then all the members which is 40 or 45 whatever it is will then elect five others. So there are ten members on the board of directors of An Foras whose responsibility is, according to the Memorandum and Articles of the Association, to run the Foras for their period.'**

He states the need for the patron to ensure the ethos in member schools is maintained:

**'They can also act as trustees of a school, they ensure that schools comply with the characteristic spirit of the school, they appoint boards of management, they also carry out all the functions of a patron as laid down in the Education Act and if you follow the Education Act, as a patron we have a legislative**

**responsibility authority, powers, whatever you want to call it, to do all things which means that you know, we are no different to the bishops as a patron, we have the powers, authorities, and so forth within our schools, we sanction the appointment of all teachers, and we appoint the board of management’.**

**‘But at the same time patronage has to do with the characteristic spirit of a school, protecting that, ensuring that the rules are carried out within the school, money areas are also an issue in that area’.**

**‘That as patrons we are responsible for the ethos of the school and in the case of all-Irish schools under the Foras you have a double or dual ethos, first of all you have the Irish element and secondly you have the religion element and the religion element is based basically on the decision of the founding members of the school as to what the ethos or the characteristic spirit of the school is as is the phraseology now used in the Education Act’.**

This member of An Foras Patrúnachta argues that the schools under the patronage of his organisation cannot simply change their ethos. However there have been cases in which patrons have handed over their schools to other patron bodies. It would appear in light of Archbishop Martin’s statement that he would consider handing over some schools under its patronage that there is more flexibility now on this issue than existed in the past.



## **Chapter 8**

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

#### **8.1**                      **Introduction**

This research has attempted to examine an educational phenomenon which is at a relatively early stage of development and which is changing rapidly. This means that we can only provide a snapshot of where the multi-denominational schools were at a particular moment in time. During the years of this research there have been major changes and the number of schools has almost doubled within this relatively small timeframe.

#### **8.2**                      **Main Conclusions**

This section provides an overview of the four organising questions of the dissertation (as laid out in section 1.5); each of the questions is answered in light of the data and analysis carried out for the study.

### **8.2.1**

### **How have the primary and secondary systems of education evolved?**

The system of primary education that we have in the Republic of Ireland owes its origins to British government policies enacted during the nineteenth century.

Originally it was envisaged that primary education would be carried out in state funded multi-denominational schools. However for reasons already outlined in my literature review, within twenty years the vast majority of schools were divided along sectarian lines. Thus in the century prior to partition, a denominationally controlled and state funded primary school system had been created and has continued to exist up to the present day in the Republic of Ireland. Many of our secondary schools date back to the last decades of British rule. They in the main catered for the privileged classes up until free education was introduced at second level in the Republic of Ireland. Prior to 1967 the vast majority of second level schools that prepared students for the Leaving Cert examinations were denominational in character and very often owned by Catholic religious orders. In recent the number of vocations to the teaching orders has declined markedly. Many Christian Brothers' owned schools have not got a single brother working in them. The same is also true in the case of schools run by female congregations e.g. the Sisters of Mercy.

Since the introduction of free education at second level, vocational schools have been encouraged to prepare their students for state examinations leading up to the Leaving Cert. Comprehensive schools and Community Colleges also have been created in recent decades. This demonstrates that the state is keen to establish ownership over a

significant section of the second level school system. However in these new types of schools denominational interests were represented on their boards of management. The Catholic church has been keen to expand its influence into these sectors.

In recent years a combination of unprecedented immigration into the state and clerical abuse scandals has brought the issue of denominational control of primary education under the spotlight. The creation of community national schools in the past few years are proof that the government is coming to the realisation that in a pluralistic society it is inappropriate that over 90% of primary schools are privately owned by one church. The fact that the government has nearly trebled the number of Educate Together schools in the past decade also bears testament to that fact. It would appear that the state holds the view that community national schools rather than those in the Educate Together sector provide a template for the development into the future of the Irish primary education system.

The state has begun in recent decades to develop new forms of schools e.g. community schools and colleges as well as comprehensives. However in the 1970s and 1980s it ensured good relations with the Catholic church in particular and the Church of Ireland by guaranteeing the ethos of Protestant and Catholic comprehensive schools and giving Catholic religious orders representation on the boards of management of community schools and colleges. In recent years however the state has begun to address the need for the creation of multi-denominational primary schools. It has done this by giving recognition to a growing number of Educate Together schools and the Department has also been innovative in pioneering

a new model of primary school i.e. the community national one. In the course of doing this research, it has become obvious that the system is ripe for change. Even Archbishop Martin of Dublin and other senior members of the Roman Catholic hierarchy are coming to the realisation that a primary education system, in which over 90% of the schools are in the ownership and espouse the ethos of one church is not sustainable or indeed desirable. However it remains to be seen what percentage of schools will remain under church patronage and whether the Educate Together or the community national school models will become the preferred option into the future. The latter has the advantage that it will appeal to those who wish their children to attend multi-denominational schools but also want them to be prepared within school hours for the Catholic sacraments.

Principals working within the denominational system are requesting that preparation for the sacraments be removed from schools. This would have been unheard of in the past and shows how clerical control over primary schools has eroded in recent decades.

The Irish primary system of education is at a crossroads, many of those who agreed to take part in this study are not prepared to accept a system that is segregated upon religious lines. They wish to create a multi-denominational, multi-cultural education sector which will not belong just to one section of the community but will embrace all as equals. Irish society has changed rapidly in the past three decades, these changes must be reflected in our school system. Ireland has relied for too long on an out-dated model of primary education which while state-funded is under clerical

management.

The state will have to facilitate the growing numbers who do not wish their children to attend church owned and managed schools. However it must be careful not to alienate those who are content to send their sons and daughters to denominational schools. It must create real choice for parents, which will see them have a choice other than the local Catholic or Protestant parish school. Educate Together has emerged as the first type of school to challenge and break through the almost totally denominationally controlled primary education sector in the Republic of Ireland. That sector can only grow in numbers during the coming years, however, it remains to be seen if Educate Together or the community national schools will be the model that will transform our current church owned and managed system of primary education.

### **8.2.2                      How is religious education provided for in the Irish school system?**

Catholic primary schools provide a religious education programme that devotes a significant proportion of time towards the preparation of students for the sacraments of Holy Communion and Confirmation. Church of Ireland schools cater generally for students of all Protestant denominations and focus on a Bible based religious education programme. They do not prepare students for Holy Communion etc because this is done within the Sunday school systems operated by the different Protestant churches. There are very few schools under the patronage of the Methodist

and Presbyterian churches, however, they too prepare their members for the sacraments outside of school hours. The different Protestant denominations have distinct approaches towards the preparation of their adherents for Holy Communion etc. However, they are united in doing so through their respective Sunday school networks. In second level schools R.E. up until recently was not examined in the state examinations. However in recent years it has been introduced as a subject in both the Junior and Leaving Certificate examinations. Some schools have opted to continue with the system of non-exam R.E. classes which had existed prior to the inclusion of Religious Studies as an official exam subject. Other schools have opted to offer this subject to all students in the junior cycle for the purpose of sitting it in the Junior Cert exam while not offering R.E. for the Leaving Cert. Only a small number of schools are preparing pupils for the senior cycle exam programme. In schools where R.E. is offered as an option for the Leaving Certificate examinations, non-exam Religion classes are held alongside it. All Irish schools must provide religious education (it is a constitutional obligation). However parents have the right to give permission to their children to opt out of R.E. lessons. R.E. as a non-exam subject was often especially in second level schools taught by teachers who held no qualifications in the subject. When they had been employed they were often required to teach this subject whether they wished to or not. R.E. as an exam subject consists of facts about what the different faiths believe or not. The introduction of R.E. in the last decade as a subject on the curriculum for the state exams has radically changed the way the subject is taught. The Junior Cert curriculum has a lot of information contained in it concerning the major beliefs of different faiths and thus teachers will not have the time to engage in as much faith formation as they did heretofore.

In a lot of schools including those under Catholic and Anglican patronage, students were removed during R.E. lessons, in order to get extra tuition, in their examination subjects. This clearly demonstrates that in some denominational schools academic achievement is far more important than religious education. In some schools at both primary and second levels in the Republic of Ireland a significant number of teachers are forced to teach R.E. even though they may have difficulties on grounds of conscience doing so.

Each Catholic and Protestant primary school in the state have their own R.E. programmes set down by their church authorities. At second-level, it is at the discretion of each school whether it will offer R.E. as a Junior Certificate or a Leaving Certificate subject. If students do not sit it as an examination subject, they are offered it on a non-examination basis. This opens up the possibility that all students in the state could in the future be encouraged to take R.E. as a core subject for the Junior Certificate examinations and an optional one for the Leaving Certificate. Furthermore non-exam R.E. lessons at senior cycle (the last two years of secondary school) might in the future be optional.

### **8.2.3            How are religious minorities catered for?**

The Republic of Ireland has provided denominationally controlled schools for religious minorities in the state. It has granted recognition to schools under the patronage of various Protestant denominations as well as those that had a Jewish or in more recent years had a Muslim ethos. Up until this year Protestant families were

given grants to send their children to boarding schools, if there was no alternative school of their denominational ethos in close proximity to them. More money was spent on Protestant students per head of population because the Republic and its predecessor the Irish Free State were keen to demonstrate that they were not discriminating against minority communities. Irish governments often criticized discrimination against Catholics in Northern Ireland and did not want to be accused of maltreating the Protestant community that remained in its territory. In some schools children whose parents did not wish them to attend R.E. lessons were up until recent decades asked to stand outside the room while it was being taught. Even today there is no consistent policy as some schools send children of minority faiths down to the library where they may be supervised but not taught another subject. In other schools pupils are made remain in the classroom while R.E. is being taught. They are told to study whatever they wish. However they are exposed to the lessons which their parents do not wish them to partake in. This practice raises the danger of possible indoctrination of pupils against their parents' wishes. In recent years due to mass immigration of individuals from a variety of religious backgrounds, many schools have been forced to address the issue of how they treat their minority groups. The Irish state has allowed minority religious groups such as the Jews and Muslims to set up state-funded primary schools and in the case of the former a second-level school with their own ethos.

**8.2.4**            **Is there a firmly integrated sector emerging in the south of Ireland?**



At present the status quo remains largely intact i.e. the vast majority of primary schools remain under the patronage of the Roman Catholic church or the Church of Ireland. However it must be noted that in recent years the Department of Education and Science has given recognition to more multi-denominational primary schools i.e. either Educate Together or community national schools than any other type. In the larger urban areas there has been a realisation that new models of primary schools must emerge in order to deal with the needs of an increasingly diverse society. The reputation of the Roman Catholic Church has been besmirched by the child abuse scandals. Many have begun to question the necessity of placing the primary school system in the hands of the churches in the twenty first century. Educate Together has now firmly established itself as a permanent fixture on the Irish educational scene. The community national school sector may yet develop more rapidly and overtake the Educate Together movement as the major model of multi-denominational primary school in the Republic of Ireland. These schools will be owned by the state, run by the local Vocational Education Committees and will allow all pupils study secular subjects together while affording them the right to separate denominational religious instruction lessons. These schools will prove popular with Catholic parents who wish their children to receive the sacraments and be prepared for them during school hours. The primary-secondary transition is an issue that must be addressed and is likely to affect the continued development of multi-denominational education. This issue is starting to surface due to the fact that a large number of students are entering second level in which at present there is no Educate Together school.

### **8.3**                    **Issues for Educate Together**

- Moving from primary to secondary school

The primary-secondary interface is a crucial area, which is likely to affect the development of multi-denominational education. As an issue it is only just beginning to surface as it is only now that considerable numbers of children are reaching the end of primary schooling and their parents have to decide where they should go for their secondary education. The possibilities which must be considered include, the setting up of at least some integrated secondary schools.

- Growth of Sector

The rapid growth of Educate Together set against the complex historical background of an almost universal denominational education system in Ireland has now reached a critical stage where difficult decisions about future development will have to be taken by all those involved. Educate Together schools still only cater for a very small minority of pupils but they do now constitute a distinct sector and the opening of 14 entirely new schools within a space of years, with a number coming on stream, has inevitably made a significant impact.

Whilst initially the number of Educate Together schools was too small to have any significant impact on existing schools except in isolated local situations, the schools currently in operation do have an effect on the enrolments of pre-existing schools in several areas and any further growth will significantly increase this impact. This is a sensitive issue at a time when there is an over-provision of school places in some areas and some sectors.

#### **8.4                      Possible Future Developments for the Sector**

Whatever the basis of the opinions held, the approaches suggested and the policies developed, Ireland's education system is very unlikely to return to its pre 1975 pattern. It must now adapt to a wider range of parental aspirations. For the foreseeable future the majority of parents will probably want their children to be educated in schools which provide a denominational ethos but there will also be a sizeable minority who will want alternatives, currently presented under the umbrella of integrated education. How will the system evolve to handle this?

At different phases in the development of the schools different issues have taken centre stage. In the first years the practicalities of funding and the detailed arrangements surrounding the establishment of each new school were the crucial issues, which absorbed the time and attention of those involved in Educate Together. As schools became established the provision of denominational religious education and relationships with the churches, particularly the Roman Catholic church were matters of serious concern. Attention has also been given to fostering new collaborative forms of relationships between parents and teachers, which arose from situations in which parents had been directly responsible for the foundation of schools and the appointment of teachers including the principals.

The most important concerns now seem to arise from the rate of expansion in the number of schools. Can expansion continue? Can the opening of new schools continue to be funded?

## **8.5**

### **Areas for Further Research**

As outlined throughout Chapter 7, a number of ideological dilemmas have emerged that would require further examination. I have outlined the main dilemmas below:

- Does multid denominational education celebrate and recognise difference? Can this be done when Catholic children have to prepare for sacraments outside of school hours? Is this not depriving them and their peers of an opportunity to celebrate difference?
- Are some parents opting for Educate Together schools because at present, there are no non-denominational schools at primary level in the Republic of Ireland? Are they being forced down the multi-denominational route?
- Can a school cater for all beliefs? Can a school be all things to everyone? Where does one draw the line? How can you acknowledge all cultures and ensure equality for all? Will parents be open to the acknowledgement of the beliefs/celebrations of other faiths?
- Does the first come first served policy backfire and result in recent immigrants and other minority groups failing to secure places in these schools? Does this policy tend to suit the more middle class Irish parent? Should a quota system for enrolling minority groups be established in all Educate Together schools in order to develop diversity within each school?
- Are denominational schools not also respectful of the rights of the child? Does Educate Together have a monopoly on this approach?
- Is there an anything but Catholic approach in some Educate Together schools due to the fact that the teachers may be embittered against that faith? Are

Christian feasts and festivals given the same priority as those of other great world religions in Educate Together Schools?

- Are Educate Together schools really open to parental involvement as they say they are? Is there a fear that parents may infringe on teacher professionalism? Are parents authentic partners in the education process or just a source of cheap manual labour if volunteers are required?
- Why does Educate Together wish to establish second level schools when the VEC is already providing state run education for that cohort?
- Is it acceptable that the teacher training colleges within the state are under denominational control?

## **8.6**

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the main findings of the dissertation are presented. From what is discovered from the interviews and literature review, an attempt is made to make recommendations for future development and future areas of research in the Irish context.

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