



An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

# Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity

Transfer of Patronage of Primary Schools -  
Information for Parents

March 2022

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## Information & FAQ for Parents/Guardians, Pupils and the School Community

### 1. Context

#### Are there different types of primary schools?

Primary schools can operate through either the English or Irish language. In terms of ethos, they can be:

- religious (or denominational) schools
- inter-denominational schools
- multi-denominational schools

Children normally attend one of their local primary schools. You can send your child to the primary school of your choice, as long as there is a place for him/her. All State-funded primary schools follow a common national curriculum and are subject to the same rules and regulations.

#### What is meant by patronage? What are the different types of patrons?

*Patronage* of a school refers to a person or body that manages a school, which is known as the school's *patron*.

The patron appoints the board of management to manage the operation of the school. The patron also determines the ethos and characteristic spirit of the school. Religious education or instruction may be provided at the school in line with its ethos.

Some examples of bodies which run religious (or denominational) schools are the Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland. Some examples of bodies which run multi-denominational schools are Education and Training Boards, Educate Together and An Foras Pátrúnachta.

Schools under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnachta have a dual ethos, the Irish language and a spiritual ethos such as multi-denominational, Catholic or inter-denominational.

#### Is the curriculum the same in all schools no matter who the patron is?

All State-funded primary schools follow a common national curriculum and are subject to the same rules and regulations.

Currently at primary level, Religious Education is one of 12 subjects in the 1999 Primary School Curriculum, with schools currently required to allocate thirty minutes per day for religious instruction.

Religious Education holds a unique position in that the responsibility for providing a programme of Religious Education rests with the patron bodies of individual schools and not the State. This means that the content of the religious education programme in a particular primary school is determined by the patron of the school.

There are a number of patrons' programmes within the primary school system reflecting the diversity of patronage. Some of these are denominational or religious in nature, emphasising the place of children's faith, spiritual and moral development in their lives. Other patrons'

programmes are ethical in nature and emphasise fostering children's understanding of ethics and values.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) is currently reviewing and redeveloping the full primary curriculum which was last published in 1999. Within this is the exploration on the integration of new areas of learning in the curriculum including areas like technology and sustainable development. As part of the process the NCCA published the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework for consultation in February 2020. Due to the pandemic and the circumstances in schools, the consultation was re-designed to run two phases:

Phase 1 involved engagement with national stakeholder organisations and bodies, and was open from February 2020 to January 2021. Phase 2, which opened in October 2021 and ran until the end of February 2022, involved engagement with the general public, teachers, school leaders, parents and children.

In the coming months, NCCA will be analysing the feedback from Phases 1 and 2 of the consultation and share the findings in a consultation report. These findings will be used to inform the finalisation of the Primary Curriculum Framework. Once published in early 2023, this framework will guide the development of the specifications for each of the curriculum areas.

The draft Primary Curriculum Framework aims to support the learning and development of children from different religious backgrounds and of non-religious backgrounds. The curriculum areas of Wellbeing and Social and Environmental Education present opportunities for incorporating this learning in the redeveloped curriculum.

### **What happens in a multi-denominational school?**

- Curriculum:

Multi-denominational schools deliver the national curriculum in the same way as all schools, regardless of patron, and are subject to the same rules and regulations.

The Irish language is nurtured in children attending multi-denominational schools in the same way as children attending other primary schools.

- How religion is taught:

Children in multi-denominational schools learn about all faiths and belief systems (for example atheistic and humanist perspectives) as part of the school day.

For example, Education and Training Board Community National Schools use a multi-belief and values education curriculum called "Goodness Me, Goodness You!". Educate Together schools use a moral and ethical curriculum called "Learn Together".

Schools under the patronage of An Foras Pátrúnachta have the Irish language as their ethos and their characteristic spirit is described as either multi-denominational, Catholic or inter-denominational. In their multi-denominational schools, the Croí na Scoile (Heart of the School) Programme as written by the school in collaboration with An Foras Pátrúnachta is used.

- How faith formation, for example preparation for First Communion and Confirmation, happens:

In multi-denominational schools faith formation classes do not take place during the school day. Various arrangements are in place to facilitate this outside of school hours.

Religious Instruction, faith formation and for example preparation for First Communion and Confirmation may be arranged in partnership between parents and the local parish. Practices vary from school to school and can operate at a local level.

- The celebration of religious festivals such as Christmas:

Multi-denominational schools may celebrate many of the important religious and non-religious events that take place throughout the year such as Christmas, Easter, Diwali, Eid, Vaisakhi, Holi, Darwin Day and other festivals throughout the school term. Arrangements can vary from school to school.

Many multi-denominational schools may have symbols and images on display in the school which may reflect the different religions and beliefs of children attending the school. Special times of year may also be marked with particular images and artefacts, for example, a crib at Christmas, Islamic art displays at Eid and so on. Again, arrangements can vary from school to school.

- How this differs from the teaching of religion in a religious ethos school:

The majority of primary schools are under Catholic denominational patronage and this informs the ethos and characteristic spirit of the school. In line with this, a Christian ethos permeates the school day and the life of the school.

Arrangements for faith formation and faith formation classes, for example preparation for First Communion & Confirmation, in schools under religious patronage are a matter for the patrons themselves. In most such schools faith formation and preparation for sacraments forms part of the school day.

The patron's programme (religious education programme) and implementation of it, including teacher training, is a matter for the patron and the school board of management.

## **1. Reconfiguration/Transfer of patronage**

### **What is Reconfiguration? What does it mean for a school?**

The Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity Process aims to provide more multi-denominational schools, in line with the choices of families and school communities and the Programme for Government commitment.

This process facilitates a change of patron, and ethos, in areas where there may be demand for more diversity in school type. In places where there is a lot of one type of patron, and a demand for more diversity/choice, existing denominational (religious) patrons may consider transferring a school under their patronage to a multi-denominational patron. This will offer choice to those parents that do not wish to send their children to a denominational (religious) school.

When a school transfers from one patron to another, the school remains open (with the same roll number and operating from the same school property), with staff and pupils remaining in place.

Government policy as set out in the Programme for Government is to expand and prioritise the transfer of viable schools to Education and Training Board Community National Schools.

Transfers of patronage to the Education and Training Board sector involve a change of employer for the staff of the school. For transfers to other multi-denominational patrons, such as Educate Together or An Foras Pátrúnachta, the school's board of management would remain the employer of the staff.

A patronage transfer will necessitate the appointment of a new board of management (or a single manager for an interim period) in accordance with the patron's legal obligations. This will include two direct nominees of the new patron. The reconstituted board may include members of the previous board of management.

The school patron is responsible for decisions on any transfer of patronage. It is possible for any school to transfer patronage (subject to the school's patron wishing to do so).

A number of schools have changed patronage in recent years. These school communities engaged in a process of engagement with their patron.

### **What has the Government committed to?**

The Programme for Government reflects the Government's objective of continuing to expand the plurality of schools to reflect the full breadth of society. It sets out that "students of all religions and none should have access to education, regardless of their belief system". The Programme for Government commitments in this area include to:

- "Achieve the target of at least 400 multi-denominational primary schools by 2030, to improve parental choice";
- "Expand and prioritise the transfer of viable schools to Community National Schools";
- "Work with communities to ensure the provision of clear, non-partisan information on the preparation for, and the consequences of, the divestment process and to respond to queries raised".

### **Why are efforts being made to increase the number of multi-denominational primary schools?**

All primary schools in Ireland have a patron, whose responsibilities include setting the ethos and characteristic spirit for the school. At present, 89% of primary schools have a Catholic ethos. Approximately 5% have a multi-denominational ethos and the remaining approximately 6% of primary schools have a religious ethos other than Catholic, mainly Church of Ireland.

Denominational schools have played an important role in primary education in Ireland for over a century. They, along with other primary schools, have a strong history of inclusivity in serving their local communities and they accept children of all faiths and none.

As Irish society has been changing it is considered desirable that the option of availing of education in school settings without a denominational ethos are more widely available.

Parents decide which school to send their children to for a wide variety of different reasons and ethos can be an important factor for some. There is demand for schools that don't have a denominational/religious ethos at their core.

Catholic patrons have indicated that they are supportive of an educational landscape which reflects the reality of the increasingly diverse society in our country, and that a true plurality of patronage across the country should ensure parental choice whilst enabling patrons to be true to their own ethos and characteristic spirit.

Representatives of Catholic patrons have stated that "Bishops would like to move as quickly as possible to a situation in which the State supports parents with the provision of schools whose ethos genuinely reflects what they want for their children". Some Catholic Bishops have already facilitated transfers of patronage, as have some Church of Ireland Bishops. Mainstream primary schools that have transferred patronage are listed in Appendix A.

The Government has set a target of increasing the number of multi-denominational primary schools to 400 by the year 2030. This would bring the percentage of multi-denominational primary schools to about 13% from *circa*. 5% currently.

### **How will parental preference be taken into account in any transfer of patronage?**

The voice of the parent and school community is important in the context of a decision to change to a multi-denominational ethos. The school patron is responsible for decisions on transfer of patronage. The Department encourages parents to discuss any views that they have on transfer of patronage and change of ethos with the patron of the school their children attend. Consultation with parents and school communities is very important.

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Prospective patrons may include existing multi-denominational providers such as the Education and Training Boards, An Foras Pátrúnachta and Educate Together.

### **Have transfers of patronage already happened in some areas?**

Yes, a number of patronage changes of mainstream primary schools to a multi-denominational patron have taken place in recent years, resulting in the provision of an additional 11 multi-denominational Community National Schools.

An Foras Pátrúnachta offers a full multi-denominational model and has also developed another model in a Gaelscoil.

A list of mainstream primary schools that have transferred patronage is at Appendix A.

### **How are schools selected for Reconfiguration?**

To provide choice for parents, it is hoped that in places, such as towns or areas of cities where there are a number of denominational schools but no multi-denominational schools, a process can be agreed whereby the existing majority patron (the relevant Catholic Bishop in most cases) can engage with the Department and the local community to identify a suitable school for reconfiguration.

The Department and the Council for Education of the Irish Episcopal Conference (representing the Catholic patrons) have been engaging for some time in relation to progressing the reconfiguration process. It has been agreed that work will commence immediately on a number of towns and areas of cities which have no multi-denominational provision at present as part of a pilot arrangement.

The Council for Education and relevant Bishops have confirmed their willingness to engage and co-operate fully with the Department in seeking to facilitate a more diverse school patronage in these towns and cities. The pilot areas are:

- Arklow
- Athlone
- Cork
- Dublin
- Dundalk
- Galway
- Limerick
- Youghal

As part of this pilot process, the Department has agreed to make available a number of independent facilitators to work with the school patron and relevant school authorities at a local level:

- to progress the reconfiguration pilot initiative;
- to assist in identifying potential school(s) in this regard; and
- to engage with stakeholders including school authorities, school staff and the school community

with a view to agreeing on a transfer of patronage and change of ethos, where there is sufficient demand for this.

### **When during the year should a transfer of patronage take place?**

Parents and the school community can engage with their school patron at any time of the year if they wish to discuss a potential transfer of patronage and work can begin at school level to prepare once agreement is reached in principle with the school patron.

However, for practical reasons it is recommended that transfers of patronage align with the start of a school year rather than during the school year. Depending on local circumstances, a longer lead-in time may be needed and in some cases it may take a number of years' preparation before a transfer of patronage takes place.

**Is it possible to transition from a religious ethos to a multi-denominational ethos over time?**

Yes, a number of different options are available to school patrons in relation to transferring patronage and changing to a multi-denominational ethos.

The first option is a transfer of patronage and change of ethos, which takes effect for the whole school community from the date of change of patron. This is the case for the majority of the 12 changes of mainstream primary school patronage that have taken place since 2017.

A second option is a gradual change of ethos over time, for example, where each new intake of junior infants engages in an Ethics and Morality Programme, while the more senior classes continue to follow the denominational programme until, over time, all pupils are following the multi-denominational Ethics and Morality Programme.

Thirdly, some patrons may be willing to offer parents of junior infants the choice of undertaking an Ethics and Morality Programme, and, for parents who so choose, a denominational programme is provided.

The most suitable option for a particular school will depend on the wishes of the school community, and the views of the outgoing and incoming patrons. Some multi-denominational patrons are willing to support some, but not all, of the above potential options.

**Is reconfiguration/transfer of patronage available to English-medium schools only?**

No, Irish-medium school communities can engage with their school patron in the same way as English-medium schools regarding a potential change to a multi-denominational patron. In a similar way to the vast majority of English-medium schools, many Irish-medium schools are under denominational patronage.

School communities who may be interested in exploring a transfer of patronage should engage with their school patron in the first instance.

In some cases, English-medium schools may wish to change from a religious ethos to a multi-denominational one and also may wish to transition from an English-medium to an Irish-medium school.

The reconfiguration/transfer of patronage process provides opportunities for additional multi-denominational schools in

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- "Achieve the target of at least 400 multi-denominational primary schools by 2030, to improve parental choice";
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either Irish or English and also opportunities for English-medium schools to make a transition to Irish-medium in that context.

While there is no detailed guidance currently on schools transitioning from English-medium to Irish-medium, the ongoing work underway on the development of a policy on Irish-medium education outside of the Gaeltacht will provide an opportunity to consider how an English-medium school can transition to an Irish-medium school in the context of reconfiguration.

### **What if I don't want the ethos of my child's school to change?**

The school patron is responsible for decisions on transfer of patronage and organising consultation with school communities on Reconfiguration.

The Department encourages parents to discuss any views that they have on transfer of patronage with the patron of the school their children attend. This information pack also sets out information for school boards of management regarding facilitating, where possible, the transfer of pupils if they and their parents wish from (and into) a school transferring patronage.

### **Is Reconfiguration the same as the Divesting Process?**

The Schools Reconfiguration for Diversity Process and the Patronage Divesting Process are separate initiatives with similar aims.

The Patronage Divesting Process arose from the recommendations of the 2012 report of the Advisory Group to the Forum on Patronage and Pluralism in the Primary Sector, following which the Department undertook surveys of parental preferences in 43 areas of stable population in 2012 and 2013 to establish the level of parental demand for a wider choice in the patronage of primary schools within these areas. Analysis of the parental preferences expressed in each area surveyed indicated that there was sufficient parental demand to support changes in school patronage in 28 areas.

Under the patronage divesting process, a school can be opened where a school building became, or was due to become available as a result of an amalgamation/closure of an existing school. In some areas in responding to demand for diversity where existing patrons were unable make school properties available, the Department also included an examination of properties held in public ownership.

In parallel with the Reconfiguration process, the Department of Education is continuing to work with stakeholders to progress delivery of diversity in areas already identified as part of the 2012 and 2013 patronage divesting surveys where a new school has yet to be established.

12 schools have been established under this process, all of which have a multi-denominational ethos. In two of the patronage divesting areas the demographics increased sufficiently to warrant the establishment of new schools for demographic purposes outside of the patronage divesting process and new multi-denominational schools have been established in these areas. In one of the divesting areas, a school is due to transfer patronage from the Catholic bishop to the local ETB as a Community National School from September 2022.

## Further Information

### i) Relevant websites of multi-denominational providers

1. **Education and Training Boards** : <https://www.etbi.ie/>
2. **Community National Schools**: <https://cns.ie/changing-school-patronage/>
3. **An Foras Pátrúnachta**: <http://www.foras.ie/en/>
4. **Educate Together** :  
<https://www.educatetogether.ie/Schools/Primary>  
[tps://www.educatetogether.ie/Schools/Primary](https://www.educatetogether.ie/Schools/Primary)

### ii) Department website

#### i) **Enrolment Policy**

<https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/c5bd9f-school-enrolment/#school-admissionsenrolment>

#### ii) **Forum on Patronage & Pluralism in the Primary Sector**

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/99634e-the-forum-on-patronage-and-pluralism-in-the-primary-sector-report-of/>

#### iii) **Primary Education**

<https://www.gov.ie/en/policy/655184-education/#primary-education>

#### iv) **Statistical Reports**

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/055810-education-statistics/#latest-statistical-reports/>

### iii) Census related info

#### **Primary School Census Data**

<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/primary-schools/>

## ➤ Appendix A

### List of transfers of mainstream primary schools which have already taken place

Roll No	School Name	Address	Former Patron	New Patron	Ethos	Date Change of Patron	Language
17365L	Two Mile CNS	Killarney, Co. Kerry. V93 WD82	Bishop of Kerry	KETB	Multi-D	Sept 2017	English
16817P	Brannoxtown CNS	Brannockstown, Co. Kildare	Archbishop of Dublin	KWETB	Multi-D	Sept 2018	English
18391R	Faughart CNS	Faughart, Dundalk, Co Louth	Archbishop of Armagh	LMETB	Multi-D	Sept 2018	English
13999J	Kilnamanagh CNS	Oulart Gorey Co Wexford. Y25HT63	Col Bishop of Cashel, Ferns and Ossory	WWETB	Multi-D	July 2019	English
20462D	Cuan Na Gaillmhe CNS	An Cimín Mór, Cappagh Road, Knocknacarra, Galway, H91 Y38E	Lifeways Ireland CLG	GRETB	Multi-D	July 2019	English
20312H	Raheen Wood CNS	Raheen Road, Tuamgraney, Co Clare V94RW32	Lifeways Ireland CLG	LCETB	Multi-D	July 2019	English
20313J	Mol an Óige CNS	Ennistymon Co Clare V95 D372	Lifeways Ireland CLG	LCETB	Multi-D	July 2019	English
18272J	Lecarrow CNS	Lecarrow Co Roscommon. F42HC83	Bishop of Elphin	GRETB	Multi-D	July 2019	English
05348S	Tahilla CNS	Tahilla, Sneem, Co. Kerry	Bishop Of Kerry	KETB	Multi-D	July 2019	English
08147A	Scoil an Ghleanna Pobal S N	Ballinskelligs, Killarney, Co Kerry	Bishop of Kerry	KETB	Multi-D	Aug 2019	Irish
19582G	Tallaght CNS	Kilclare Avenue, Jobstown, Tallaght, Dublin 24	Col Archbishop of Dublin and Glendalough	DDLETB	Multi-D	June 2020	English
19872P	Scoil Chaitlín Maude	Tallaght, Dublin 24	Archbishop of Dublin	AFP	*	Mar 2021	Irish
16344V	St. Mary's Jnr BNS	Nenagh, Co Tipperary	Bishop of Killaloe	TETB	Multi-D	Sept 2022	English

Multi-D = Multi-denominational. CNS = Community National School. AFP= An Foras Pátrúnachta

\* Since September 2021, this school offers parents of junior infants the choice of undertaking an Ethics and Morality Program or a Catholic Program.

