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# Educate Together Schools in the Republic of Ireland

## The First Stage 1975 - 1994

*(Article written by Aine Hyland for Fortnight Educational Trust, Belfast, Jan. 1993).*

## Introduction

This article attempts to give an overview of the development of multi-denominational schools in the the Republic of Ireland. It looks at the historical development of primary education in Ireland and the general educational context within which primary schools operate in the Republic. It discusses the background to the setting up of multi-denominational schools, identifying the issues faced by the individual schools and their present position. It explains the role and activities of Educate Together - the co-ordinating committee for existing and prospective schools. The article also briefly addresses a number of other related issues - the indirect role which the setting up of these schools has had in encouraging and developing an attitude of self-help and creative enterprise; in developing a sense of community in people who might previously have felt marginalised; in contributing to a more embracing sense of Irish identity; in helping adults as well as children to develop skills in conflict-resolution through having to resolve problems which arise; in helping to develop a sense of democracy; in the empowerment of women. The article concludes by discussing the key problems faced by the sector at this point in its development and by suggesting ways in which the forthcoming White Paper and educational legislation in the Republic might help to overcome these problems.

## An Overview of the Evolution of the System of Primary (national) Education in Ireland.

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 some of the schools which were taken into connection with the Board in the early years were jointly managed, the main Christian Churches put pressure on the government to allow aid to be given to schools under the management of individual Churches.[1] This pressure was so effective that by the mid nineteenth century, only 4% of national schools were under mixed management.[2]

In terms of the curriculum, the main principle of 19th and early 20th century primary education in Ireland was that schools should offer "combined moral and literary instruction and separate religious instruction"[3]. 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 in the Republc to the present day state that "no pupil shall receive or be present at any religious instruction of which his parents or guardians do not approve"[4] and also "that the periods of formal religious instruction shall be fixed so as to facilitate the withdrawal of (such) pupils".[5] The principle of mixed education remained the keystone of the national school system from 1831 to 1965. However in practice by the beginning of the twentieth century the national system had developed in such a way that virtually all schools were under denominational Church management. In this respect, the Irish system of national education was fundamentally different to systems of education in Great Britain where "parallel" systems had evolved, i.e. denominational schools existed side by side with local authority controlled schools.[6]

It is significant to note that there is no legislation underpinning primary education in the Republic of Ireland. While educational legislation was introduced in Northern Ireland in 1923, no legislative measures were introduced to change the control system of national education in the south which remained de facto denominational. Virtually all national schools were under the Patronage and

management of either the Catholic or Protestant churches. From the early 1930s onwards, a Jewish national school was also recognised and funded by the state authorities.

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" [7](author's italics). 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, no cognisance was taken of the fact that not all national schools were attended exclusively by children of the same denomination. Neither was there any provision made for parents who might not wish their children to attend denominational schools, although Article 42.4. of the 1937 Constitution of Ireland which recognised "the rights of parents, especially in the matter of religious and moral formation' was quoted. In the preface to the new Rules (1965 edition), the following statement was made:[8]

> "In pursuance of the provisions of these Articles (Articles 42 and 44.2.4.) the State provides for free primary education for children in national schools and gives explicit recognition to the denominational character of these schools".

It is difficult to understand how articles 42 and 44.2.4 could have been construed in this way. It was one thing to recognise that denominational schools would be an acceptable element in the system and to guarantee that all schools would receive equal treatment - it was quite a different thing to say that all schools were necessarily denominational and to enshrine such a statement in the official Rules for National Schools.

The publication of a new curriculum in 1971 added a further complication to the situation.[9] The new curriculum, which was widely welcomed for its many innovations, encouraged the integration of subjects, both religious and "secular" subjects. In the introduction to Part 1 of the Teachers' Handbook, it was stated that the curriculum should be seen "more as an integral whole rather than as a logical structure containing conveniently differentiated parts." The handbook was specific that this integration should embrace all aspects of the curriculum:[10]

> 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.

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, nor even adverted to the rights of those children whose parents did not wish them to attend exclusively denominational schools or to attend Religious Instruction wthin such schools. It had removed the requirement for teachers to be sensitive to the religious beliefs of "those of different religious persuasions". 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, the rule became 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."

## The Experience in Dalkey, 1974 - 1988.

There was a growing interest in education in Ireland in the 1960s and early 70s. In 1967 free secondary education had been introduced and there was considerable public debate about educational issues generally in the late 60s and early 70s. A weekly newspaper "The Education Times" was published between 1973 and 1975 and acted as a catalyst for educational debate. Vatican II had encouraged involvement by the Catholic laity in what had traditionally been a clerically dominated Church. Some Catholics argued that "a fairly strong case can be made from the reading of the documents of Vatican II for the introduction of integrated schools....".[11] The troubles in Northern Ireland had erupted afresh and after 1969 many Irish people were anxious to break down barriers between Protestant and Catholic on the island of Ireland

In some areas of Dublin, growing numbers of families from a Catholic tradition began to send their children to local Church of Ireland schools, perhaps because they felt that the ethos of such schools was less pervasive than that of Catholic schools. One such area was the village of Dalkey in south Co. Dublin. The local Church of Ireland school, St. Patrick's, had been a national school since the early 1890s. It had been a one-teacher school for over 60 years.[12] In the 1960s it became increasingly popular and the enrolment began to increase. By 1974 it was a five teacher school with over 180 pupils on rolls.[13] 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 school Patron (the C. of I. Archbishop of Dublin) to endorse the de facto multi-denominational nature of the school and to introduce a more democratic management structure. However, the school manager (the local C. of I rector) and the Select Vestry of the parish were unwilling to go along with the wises of the parents. Following discussions with the Dept. the manager was "directed" by the Dept. to restrict enrolment to the existing capacity of the school. A letter from the Dept. dated 8 March 1974, included the following paragraph:[14]

> "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".

This letter set on record unambiguously the enrolment implications of the 1965 Rules for National Schools. It also had other implications. If St. Patrick's National School was unable to accept "other children" and if the parents of these children did not wish them to attend the local Catholic school, the state saw no reason to make provision for them within the national school system.

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 recently 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 strategy of the new organisation was to work to get one school into the system first, rather than argue principle at national level for many years to come.[15]The task confronting the Project was formidable. 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 (currently £28 per pupil per annum) towards maintenance costs. The Dalkey School Project realised that the entry fee for any new partner into the network would be high and that 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.

Political support for the option of multi-denominational education within the national school system began to emerge around the mid 1970s. The then leader of the Fianna Fáil party, 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".[16] 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.[17] During the years 1975 to 1978 the Dalkey School Project was involved in protracted correspondence with the political parties and with the Dept. of Education while simultaneously building up its membership, establishing the extent of local support for a school,[18]organising fund-raising activities and searching for suitable premises in which to open a school.

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 (the building in which the school started was actually bought for the purpose by Project supporters since no other building could be secured) and in obtaining planning permission from the local authority to use the building as a school.[19] 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. This difficulty was articulated by a former secretary of the Dept. of Education, T. O Raifeartaigh, in his keynote address to the E.S.A.I. conference in 1979[20] and was also evident in an article in Magill magazine in 1988 by Dominic O Laoghaire, who was Secretary of the Dept. of Education at the time of the opening of the D.S.P. national school, where he referred to the opening of the Dalkey School Project and other multi-denominational schools as a "concession".[21] However, many departmental and local authority officials were very helpful to the project in its initial stages and helped its passage through the complex bureaucratic web which had been woven throughout the century and a half 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 at a premium and selection is on a first come first served basis. At the end of the period in temporary premises the school was on four separate campuses - apart from the original building, classrooms were made available by the local Presbyterian Church, the Church of Ireland and the Dun Laoghaire V.E.C. 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 task of starting the first multi-denominational school in the Republic had not been easy. There had not been a great deal of overt opposition to the movement, but on occasions, opposition surfaced, as in 1978 when an organisation called the Council for Social Concern, with an address in Ely Place, launched an attack on the Dalkey School Project organisers. A circular which was distributed in the Dalkey area calling on the electorate to contact their T.Ds. or to write to the Minister for Education registering their objection to the proposed school, included the following statement:[22]

> "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.

Apart from the time and energy expended on the Project, the financial costs had been substantial - 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. In addition to these costs, the school management provides the local share of current costs every year - at present in the region of £12,000 p.a.[23]

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 within 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. At the time of writing, the Bray School Project is happy with its new accommodation but because of space restrictions, like Dalkey, it can only accept about half of the children who apply.

## North Dublin National School Project, Glasnevin 1984

North Dublin National School Project was set up in the early 1980s and from the start had a close relationship with Dalkey and Bray. In 1984, the North Dublin group negotiated a lease with the Board of Works for an empty Model School building in Glasnevin and opened as a national school in September of that year. This building which had housed a multi-denominational model school from the middle of the 19th century until the foundation of the Free State in 1921, had more recently been used as temporary premises by an all Irish school and subsequently by a special school for mentally handicapped children. Both groups had moved to new purpose-built schools in the early 1980s and the old Model School was empty.

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's energies were then refocused on trying to acquire one of these premises, but despite the combined efforts of the Project and officials of the Department of Education, the attempt proved fruitless. 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.

The current situation for the school is frustrating. The old model school building - now almost 150 years old - is overcrowded and inadequate. The Department is reluctant to grant-aid a new school building in circumstances where there are empty or partially empty schools in the area. The N.D.N.S.P. has tried every avenue to gain access to these buildings without success. They have now refocused their attention on trying to acquire a site and on convincing the decision-makers, political and bureaucratic, that this is the only realistic option. But acquiring a site is not easy in an area which is within 3 km. of the city centre and where land is exorbitantly expensive. Under current Department

regulations, no grant aid is available for the purchase of a school site. In an area where sufficient land to build a school could cost £250,000 on the open market, the task facing the N.D.N.S.P. is even more formidable than that faced by Dalkey and Bray.

Meanwhile, in spite of its unsuitable premises, N.D.N.S.P. has to turn away almost as many pupils every year as it can accommodate. Some of the disappointed parents in the north Dublin area decided to try and get sanction for another school and their efforts were rewarded in 1991 when the North Bay National School was set up (see below).

## 1984 - 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. By this stage there were indications that 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 co-ordinate the existing groups and to support new groups.

## 1984-1987

No new school opened between 1984 and 1987 but a number of Projects began to develop. While the first three Projects had been set up in the greater Dublin area, the next phase of development was concentrated in cities and towns outside Dublin. 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. Unfortunately, both the Waterford and the South Dublin School Projects became inactive by 1986 and 1988 respectively. While they both had viable numbers on their pre-enrolment list to start a school and had met regularly for two years or more, they had failed to find a premises in which to start and became disillusioned.

Sligo, Kilkenny and Cork were more successful and in 1987 all three projects managed to get a school started. They managed to do this despite new "regulations" introduced by the Department of Education around this time - applying to multi-denominational and all-Irish schools, but not to denominational schools - which made the going more difficult in some ways than it had been for Dalkey, Bray and North Dublin and created a situation which was arguably in breach of the Constitution of Ireland. The new regulations (not included in any rule book or circular but cited in letters from the Department to the new Projects) stated that multi-denominational national schools, if recognised, would have temporary or provisional recognition only in the early years (an unspecified period) and during this period the schools would not be eligible for 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.

## The Senate Debate 30 October 1986

Sligo was the first Project which had to face the additional obstacles which had been placed in the way of new multi-denominational schools. 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. On 30th October 1986, Senator Michael D. Higgins raised the Sligo case in the Seanad and a reply by the Minister for Education, Patrick Cooney, was interesting in a number of respects. He attempted to justify the new regulation whereby temporary recognition only would be given to a new multi-denomiational schools and no capital grants would be available with the following words:

> "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....

This was an extraordinary statement given the many educational initiatives that had been introduced by the Department of Education during the previous 20 years. Was Minister Cooney seriously suggesting that Comprehensive or Community schools should not have been financially aided by the Department, not to mention Regional Technical Colleges or the N.I.H.Es in Dublin or Limerick? Should the Department never support educational innovation? And why make this statement when the three previous multi-denominational schools had not only proved their viability but were by now already over-subscribed and unable to meet the demand for places? His justification for provisional recognition lacked credibility but unfortunately he held all the power 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.

Despite the fact that the State contributes on average 85% of the building costs of a national school it was now becoming clear that the official tripartite lease of a national school building to which the Minister for Education was a party gave only limited powers to the Minister. Effectively he had the power to require the Trustees to repay the unexpired value of the grant if the building ceased to be used for national school purposes during the 99 year period of the lease and he could prevent the building from being sold during the period of the lease by refusing to relinquish his interest in the lease. But that appeared to be the limit of the Minister's control over the use of national school buildings, financed primarily from the public purse. (In practice neither Minister Conney nor any subsequent Minister ever intervened to prevent the sale of a national school building which was sought by a multi-denominational school). The longer-term significance of Minister Cooney's statement for the growth of the Educate Together did not become apparent until later.

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

While most Ministers for Education since 1977 supported the principle of multi-denominational education, the appointment of Mary O'Rourke as Minister in spring 1987 was an important landmark in

the growth of the sector. During her Ministry from 1987 to the end of 1991, seven new Educate Together schools were set up. On many occasions during that period Minister O'Rourke spoke in support of the sector and she visited all ten schools during her period as Minister. She also launched the Educate Together Charter in Galway in 1990.

Apart from her support of individual schools, Minister O'Rourke made an important policy-decision in 1980 when she announced that children attending multi-denominational schools were entitled to the same school transport benefits as children attending denominational schools. This was a very significant breakthrough and has meant that many children living outside a two or three mile radius but within travelling distance of a multi-denominational school have been allowed since 1980 to avail of subsidised school transport to travel to and from school.

## Sligo School Project, 1987

The first indication that Mary O'Rourke's Ministry would provide a breakthrough came 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 early projections had seemed to indicate that demand might result in a four or six teacher school. In the event, demand in Sligo has been much greater than anticipated and at the time of writing the school has more than 260 pupils on rolls and employs 8 teachers. Like the other schools, it quickly outgrew its temporary premises and further prefabs have had to be provided on the Model school site.

The longer-term accommodation situation in Sligo is however unclear. In 1990 the Project was optimistic that the old Model school building itself would be renovated and extended to provide a permanent home for the school. Unfortunately this plan did not go ahead but instead it was decided that the building would be transferred to the Sligo Town Council and would be renovated to become a Heritage Centre. As part of this deal it was agreed that the Town Council would make a site available to the Sligo School Project for a new building. This has not yet happened despite ongoing pressure from the Sligo School Project who are now uncomfortably crowded in their temporary premises. Moreover, St. Anne's National School - referred to in the Senate debate in 1986 as having six empty classrooms - is now completely empty a couple of hundred yards away from the pre-fabs in which over 200 pupils are accommodated in the Sligo School Project.

## Cork, 1987

In September 1987, Kilkenny and Cork School Projects also opened in temporary premises. In the case of Cork, the Presbyterian Church agreed to lease to the Project a hall behind their Church on North William St. - a building which would accommodate a two teacher school. Like the other schools, the Cork school grew rapidly, and three pre-fabricated classrooms were erected at the back of the Church on a very limited site. Since 1991 a further two teachers and their pupils have been accommodated in a building belonging to the Cork Vocational Educational Committee. This building which has no playground is situated a few hundred years from the main school along a busy and dangerous road and children and teachers have to walk to and from the main school up to six times a day.

However, a recent development, negotiated during the Ministry of Mary O'Rourke, augurs well for the future of the Cork School Project. An empty Catholic national school in the centre of Cork - St. Francis' N.S. - has been bought back by the Dept. of Education from the Cork Diocese. It is hoped in the near future that the Dept. will transfer this premises to the Cork School Project which will pay the equivalent of the cost of the site and of the local contribution paid by the Catholic Church during the period when the building was a Catholic national school. The building also needs to be renovated and the Cork School Project expects to get the usual grant from the Department for this work. The school had

initially hoped that the transfer and the work would be completed in time for the 1993/4 school year but it now seems unlikely that this deadline will be met.

## 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 260 pupils and 8 teachers in the school). The population in the Kilkenny area is not experiencing the same decrease as other areas of the country and there are no empty school buildings in Kilkenny. Consequently, permission has recently been given by the 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. They are currently negotiating to buy a site and hopefully their accommodation problems will be solved in the relatively near future.

## 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 Church of Ireland 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.

Prolonged negotiations with the Department of Education followed and in December 1989 provisional recognition was granted to the school, backdated to September 1988. The school has continued to develop since then. There are now five teachers in the school and the Association's policy is to continue a phased growth until it becomes an 8-teacher school in 1997. The premises in which the school is accommodated comprise an old schoolhouse and church (part of which is currently leased to the Greek Orthodox Church but which will revert shortly to the Ranelagh Multi-denominational school association) and some pre-fabricated classrooms. The site is not extensive but with creative planning, it will be adequate for a new school building with 8 classrooms and ancillary accommodation.

The Department of Education has not yet sanctioned a new building and for the past few years has indicated that it would favour the use of empty school buildings in the general vicinity. However there is no obvious empty school accommodation in this area which is an old established residential area relatively near the city centre and which in recent years has become a popular area for newly married couples. It is difficult to see what the alternative would be to demolishing the existing buildings and building a new school on the site and this is the solution favoured by the school and for which they are anxious to obtain Departmental sanction.

## 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. (The building had originally been a Meeting Hall of the Society of Friends and one room was still set aside for Quaker meetings). 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. By this stage it could no longer be accommodated in the Red Cross Hall and 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. While the immediate accommodation problems of the Limerick School Project have been resolved, their situation is far from ideal. They have no playground space and both of the buildings in which they have temporary accommodation have many drawbacks. However, the old Employment Exchange is a big old building and will provide the school with sufficient space for a few years more.

Like other Educate Together schools, the longer term accommodation problem is unresolved. Limerick City has seen a significant fall in its child population in the past few years and it is projected that there will be empty classrooms and/or schools in the area during the coming decade. However, to date 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.

## 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 - ranging from Milltown through Rathgar, Rathmines, Ranelagh, Terenure, to Harolds' Cross, Crumlin etc. 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. However, the decision not to amalgamate proved to be a sensible one, as within a very short time Ranelagh was unable to accept all those who sought places and when South City School Project eventually set up its school in Crumlin in 1990 it found that there was more than adequate demand for places.

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. More than 30 schools were contacted - it had been establsihed that many of these had some empty space - but not one of them was willing to lease their empty classrooms. Most of them did not reply to a letter requesting them to do so. Those who replied explained their inability to provide accommodation in a number of ways. One said: "The Board regrets that it cannot provide accommodation for you in the vacant classrooms as these are let to outside groups which have been using them for several years". Another reply was similar: "I am sorry we cannot accommodate you as the classrooms are already let". Another stated "We regret we have no space available at present or for the foreseeable future". A fourth was more specific: "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". It all sounded uncomfortably like the refusal 2,000 years earlier: "Sorry but we have no room in the Inn"!

Perhaps the most disappointing refusal was in relation to an empty national school building in Milltown. This building was a relatively new building with about 8 classrooms- about 30 years old - 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 falling numbers in the area and it was advertised for sale through an estate agent in 1987. Despite letters to the Department, the estate agent and the Solicitors for the Diocesan Trust indicating that they were interested in acquiring or leasing the building, 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.

The school has now filled all the available space in the building and there is great concern about the longer-term situation. It is ironic that in an area where there are very many empty classrooms and even large empty buildings under Catholic patronage, it fell to the Church of Ireland to come to the rescue and provide accommodation in which a multi-denominational school could start in Crumlin.

## North Bay School Project, 1990.

In August 1988 a group of parents in the North Dublin area, some of whom had failed to get a place for their children in the North Dublin National School Project, constituted themselves as the North Bay National School Project and applied to become an Associate member of Educate Together. Like so many groups before them, their major task 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 currently 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-denomintaional 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. Predictably the numbers enrolled were small - only about 20 pupils - and the school opened with one teacher who bravely took on the task of teaching a range of children from junior infants to fourth class. 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 in the block in which the school is accommodated and it is expected that an additional four classrooms will be made available as required. The accommodation situation of the North Bay School Project is the most satisfactory of all Educate Together schools to date. If this solution could be replicated in other areas, the sector would grow much more rapidly and multi-denominational education would be accessible to families who seek such education.

## The Current Situation of New Groups

There are four further associate members of Educate Together - projects which have not yet succeeded in finding premises in which to open a school. These are Galway, North Kildare (Celbridge), Dingle and Terenure. The first three have been active now for three or four years. Galway has become particularly frustrated in its search for suitable premises. In 1991 and 1992 the situation looked hopeful - they had identified accommodation in which they hoped to open a school. But each time, problems arose in relation to the suitability or the availability of the premises and the current situation is not encouraging. A request to the former bishop of Galway, Dr. Casey, who was Patron of all Catholic national schools in the diocese asking if some the empty classrooms in the city might be leased by the Project was refused outright. There is no shortage of potential pupils for a multi-denominational school in Galway and there appear to be empty classrooms in some denominational schools but so far there has been no breakthrough in getting access to them. Neither are there any

other premises currently available in which a school could start. It is very difficult for parents to remain optimistic when school year follows school year and there is no sign of a school.

The situation in North Kildare would appear to be more hopeful. There is a lot of new housing in the area with a young and growing population. Not only is there no surplus school accommodation there but it appears that there may be need for further national school places to accommodate all the young children. Up until recently, the North Kildare School Project had hoped that the Department would sanction the use of an old Methodist Hall now owned by the Department of Defence as a temporary school. Although limited in size - it could accommodate a two teacher school with perhaps a further two prefabricated classrooms - it would enable a school to get started and would provide adequate accommodation for at least three years. At the time of writing, the situation is unclear but it seems that the Department is not enthusiastic about this solution and would prefer to see the Project negotiating for a green-field site on which prefabs could be sited in the short term.

A school in Dingle is likely to be a smaller school and is also likely to be an all-Irish school. The Dingle group was very active in 1990 and 1991 and had identified possible premises in which to start a school. These premises proved not to be available and for the moment no further option has been identified.

Terenure School Project is less than a year old. It has become an Associate member of Educate Together within the past few months. Already its pre-enrolment list has begun to build up and there could well be demand for a further multi-denominational school in the greater south city area. However, the experience of South City School Project in seeking suitable premises for a school in the area does not suggest that finding a place to start a school will be easy. On the other hand, new solutions could emerge at any time and it makes sense for a new group to monitor the local accommodation situation closely.

## Summary and Analysis of Individual School Developments to date

All of the ten multi-denominational schools which exist in the Republic had difficulties in finding suitable accommodation in which to start. Apart from the North Bay School Project (Dublin) which has leased classrooms in a modern purpose-built school from the Department of Education, the other schools started in less than satisfactory temporary premises, ranging from private housing to Scout halls to pre-fabricated buildings. It is significant to note that in a number of cases the Protestant churches provided accommodation. This was the case in Dalkey - which leased rooms from both the Church of Ireland and the Presbyterian churches; in Cork, which has leased accommodation from the Presbyterian Church; and in Ranelagh and Dublin South City which are housed in old school buildings which belonged to the Church of Ireland. The Vocational Education Committees in a number of areas were also supportive - Dalkey rented classrooms from Dun Laoghaire V.E.C. Bray's temporary classrooms were located on a site belonging to Bray V.E.C. Cork is currently renting two classrooms from the City of Cork V.E.C. Accommodation owned by the State has also been made available to some schools on a temporary basis. North Dublin and Sligo are both accommodated on the site of former Model schools and Limerick's most recent classrooms are accommodated in an old Labour Exchange building.

Unfortunately, to date, no school has succeeded in gaining access to acccommodation owned by the Catholic Church, despite efforts by almost all of the schools to do so. In many areas, there are empty classrooms and even school buildings belonging to the Catholic Church but to date none of the Diocesan Trusts has been willing to lease or sell these buildings to Educate Together schools. Some Projects were also refused access to other buildings in which the Catholic Church had an interest, e.g. Sports Centres, Youth Centres etc. Given that so much property which has planning permission for public use in the Republic is owned by the Catholic Church, the unwillingness of the Church to accommodate Educate Together schools is a great deterrent to progress.

Educate Together schools have had a great deal of support from individual Ministers for Education, but on the rare occasion when a Minister was less than sympathetic, it was more difficult for Educate Togeher schools to make progress. There has been a lack of a clearly-defined official policy in regard

to multi-denominational education and this is an issue which must be addressed in the coming White Paper and in the proposed legislation.

## Role of Educate Together to Date:

Educate Together has played an important role to date in co-ordinating the existing schools and supporting new groups which want to start a multi-denominational school. Its aims are

(a) to ensure liaison between the existing School Projects

(b) to represent, where appropriate, the interests of the multi-denominational sector within the National School system

(c) to co-ordinate public relations activities at non-local level

(d) to co-ordinate fund-raising activities at non-local level.

Although its funds have been limited, it has undertaken a number of important initiatives in addition to the routine work of co-ordinating and supporting Projects throughout the country, These intitiatives include:

- An annual Educate Together Day for members, parents, teachers and friends.

- Summer courses for teachers; two such courses were organised, each lasting a week, in 1988 and 1989. The purpose of these courses was to share experiences in the development and implementation of the Religious Education Core Curriculum. A set of guidelines for teachers on the Religious Education Core Curriculum was produced as a result of these courses and have proved very useful, particularly for new and substitute teachers.

- A residential weekend workshop for Principal teachers was held in November 1992.

- Training Workshops for Boards of Management were held in 1991. An Information Pack for Board members was prepared and issued to all schools at that time.

- Submissions were made on behalf of the sector to the O.E.C.D. Review of National Education Policy in Ireland (1991); the Primary Curriculum Review Body (1991); the Primary Education Review Body (1991). A preliminary response to the Green Paper was made in July 1992 and a more complete response was submitted in November 1992.

- An Information Pack on Starting an Educate Together School was prepared in 1992 and was launched by President Mary Robinson in January 1993.

- Regular contact is maintained with parallel organisations in Northern Ireland (N.I.C.I.E. and A.C.T.) and elsewhere.

- Meetings are held with the Department of Education and other bodies (such as the I.N.T.O.) to discuss issues of interest and concern to the sector.

The only source of income available to Educate Together during the first six years of its existence was an annual contribution of between £25 and £50 each from member Projects. Since 1990, full member organisations have contributed an amount equal to 50p per pupil enrolled in their school and associate groups paid £30 each. This has resulted in an annual income of about £900 in the past two years. A once-off grant of St£1,000 was received in December 1991 from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation towards the cost of producing the Information Pack on Starting an Educate Together school. During 1992 various grants of around £2,500 were received towards in-service courses including the cost of a residential workshop for Principals.

## A Comparison between Educate Together Schools in the Republic and Integrated Schools in Northern Ireland.

The multi-denominational schools in the Republic and the integrated schools in Northern Ireland share many common problems and challenges. It was no co-incidence that the movements for integrated schools in the north and for multi-denominational schools in the south emerged at around the same period in the mid 1970s. The escalating violence in the north in the early 1970s made many people think again about traditional structures in society and any initiative which might contribute to greater understanding and respect across the traditional divides was worth a try.

When the Dalkey School Project was set up in 1975, its founders kept in close contact with the founders of the All Children Together movement in the north and attended some of the early meetings in Belfast. Members of All Children Together also attended meetings in Dalkey. From the start, it was recognised that both groups had common problems but that there were also differences in the solutions being considered. The aim of the movement in the north was to integrate in one school children from Protestant and Catholic traditions and in order to achieve this a decision was taken by All Children Together members to maintain a balance in numbers between Protestant and Catholic pupils and teachers. The Dalkey School Project and the subsequent Educate Together schools took a different approach. From the start the term multi-denominational was defined as "all children having equal rights of access to the school and children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds being equally respected". Educate Together schools do not ask parents to disclose their religious affiliation (if any) and therefore no statistical breakdown of children by religion is available. The Religious Education policy of Educate Together schools is based on the principle that the ethos of the schools should reflect the ethos of a society in which there are many social, cultural and religious strands co-existing in harmony and mutual respect. Consequently the Religious Education Core Curriculum is designed to help children to understand the different traditions of life and thought that they will meet in their environment - this will include Catholic and Protestant, but it will also include Jewish, Baha'i, Muslim, Jehovah Witness, Mormon, Mennonite, humanist, atheistic, etc. Thus, the R.E. Core Curriculum attempts to be as all-embracing as possible and to ensure that no child is an outsider whatever his/her tradition or belief.

The other main difference between the movements in the north and in the south is the age-level of pupils for which the schools provide. In the south, it was decided to concentrate on setting up schools at primary level. This was the level at which there was no option for parents of different religious backgrounds who wanted to have their children educated together since all primary schools in the south were either Catholic or Protestant. At post-primary level the vocational schools in the south have always been undenominational and democratically run and since the 1960s and 1970s the newer community schools were not exclusively confined to one denominational group, although their management structure gave the right to nominate a majority of Board members to the local Catholic or the Church of Ireland Bishop. Although there are some areas of the country where access to undenominational schooling at post-primary level is not easy, Educate Together has continued to concentrate on the primary level and to date all Educate Together schools are primary (national) schools.

In Northern Ireland, the original focus was on providing an integrated second-level school and the first integrated school was All Children Together's Lagan College which caters for second-level pupils. The focus has since broadened in the north to encompass both primary and post-primary schools and the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education supports schools at both levels.

Since the setting up of N.I.C.I.E. in the late 1980s, Educate Together has maintained contact with its director and staff and we have been very pleased to welcome its Director to a number of our functions. We believe that the link between Educate Together and N.I.C.I.E. should be strengthened. I can envisage a number of possible joint initiatives with teachers and parents as well as joint seminars and workshops.

## Lessons Learned in Setting up Educate Together Schools.

We make no claim that Educate Together schools are "better" than other schools in our national school system. What we seek is that the choice of multi-denominational education should be available for those parents who want it for their children. Ireland is one of the few countries of the western world where children have had no choice but to be segregated by religion during their primary schooling. Before the Dalkey School Project N.S. was set up in 1978 there was no recognition that not every child in the country was either a Catholic or a Protestant or a Jew. The growing numbers of children of minority religions and of no stated religion were not catered for by our national schools system, nor was there any recognition that some parents would prefer not to have their children segregated by religion.

In most countries parallel systems of primary education developed during the past century, i.e. (a) state schools, usually fully funded by the central or local authority, attended by a cross section of children and (b) schools under private (usually religious) management, attended by children of one religious group. In Ireland, there is no state or local authority primary school, consequently the only way forward for parents who want multi-denominational schools is to set them up and manage them themselves.

While this is a huge undertaking and is far from ideal, in our experience, it can be an exercise in local democracy with beneficial spin-offs in spite of difficulties and frustrations. A group of parents who come together for the first time to consider setting up an Educate Together school may have little or nothing in common other than their interest in multi-denominational schooling. They are likely to come from different religious, cultural, social, ideological, and political backgrounds and would probably never have met had the education question not brought them together. Many may have little or no expereince of meeting anyone outside their own religious and social circle. Issues arise that one would never consider in a more homogenous group. For example, the question of meeting in a pub or of going to the pub after a meeting has to be handled with tact and delicacy. For people of some religious backgrounds the pub is effectively out of bounds. The issue of punctuality can also arise. While punctuality is not uniquely related to religious background, we found that some traditions interpret time "more loosely" than others, often causing tension in a group until this question was faced up to, discussed and some agreement reached. While these are small examples, they indicate the unexpected areas where tensions can occur and which can escalate if not addressed. Deep-rooted cultural/religious prejudice can also emerge. A confident, well-presented and impressively-articulated presentation by one member of a group can be interpreted by a person from a different cultural tradition as being an arrogant and patronising speech and it may be very difficult to break down old cross-cultural suspicions.

However, in our experience, these problems are usually overcome and learning how to operate and cope with democracy is the next important milestone for new groups. The first few meetings are usually cosy and mutually supportive where parents are glad to find support in their quest for multi-denominational schooling. The next step of formalising the group can sometimes be more tricky. Usually a "proceduralist" will emerge who is in his/her element drawing up a constitution and setting the procedures in place for future action. Many people find this stage (which is of course necessary) intensely boring and there is a danger that if this stage is not moved through quickly, the ultimate purpose of the group will be lost sight of and good people will drop out.

The period of consolidation between setting up the group and opening the school is very important. This is the stage when people with various strengths and skills will emerge. The challenge for the group is to harness these strengths in a constructive way and to forge ahead with the task of starting the school. Often the most valuable members of the group at this stage are those who are prepared to

challenge the status quo - to question assumptions about property ownership for example, when premises are being sought in which to open the school, or to question various educational philosophies and methodologies. Creative and divergent thinkers can be invaluable for coming up with fund-raising ideas and a sense of self-empowerment will often become evident as the group develops. Ironically, when the school opens, those who have been most active in breaking through the various barriers which created difficulties before the school opened, may find it more difficult to cope with being part of the "status quo" and may not be particularly effective members of the school's management struture. Their tendency to question and challenge authority - which when the school is set up might well be the Principal teacher and/or staff - can lead to tension and conflict which may not be at all constructive at the early stage of the school's development. It is often better for someone who has been a key person in founding the school to step aside for a while when the school is opened and give time and space for staff and parents to grow into the school. However, this is not an easy thing to do.

Virtually every school Project provided an opportunity for women to come forward and play a key role in the setting up of the school. Many of these were women who never thought of themselves as having the kinds of skills which they proved to have. They emerged as leaders; as entrepreneurs who spearheaded successful fund-raising ventures; as public relations and marketing executives, "selling" the new school and finding potential pupils; as excellent negotiators with officialdom at both local and central level; as counsellors and mediators who helped to resolve conflicts as they arose, and as experts in a whole range of areas which they had never previously encountered. Most of these women were working full-time in the home raising their children when they first became involved. Apart from the skills which they developed on the task, they became more confident as time went on and in many cases they subsequently took on paid employment exploiting the skills and expertise that they had developed during their time with the school Project.

The Chairpersons of six of the ten schools in the Educate Together sector are women. Of the 34 Patron's nominees on Boards of Management, 22 (64%) are women. 8 of the ten Principal teachers are women and in the 5 schools which are large enough to have elected teachers on the Board, 4 out of 5 of these teachers are women. Overall, over two-thirds of the members of the Boards of Management of Educate Together schools are women - which is almost certainly a higher proportion than average in national schools throughout the country.

## Religious Education

In an earlier section I adverted to some of the issues which cause conflict when adults from different religious and cultural backgrounds come together for the first time. While conflict is not common when the schools get underway, it would be disingenuous to suggest that there are no issues which cause conflict. Predictably the question of Religious Education can become a focus for difference which if not sorted out at an early stage can escalate. The Religious Education policy of Educate Together schools is two pronged - (a) the Board of Management of each school offers a Religious Education Core Curriculum, which is taught by the full-time teachers and (b) the Board of Management of each school facilitates any group of parents that may wish to provide denominational instruction for their children. Qualified instructors may be appointed by such a group by agreement between the Board of Management and the parents concerned.

The development and implementation of a Religious Education Core Curriculum has been a challenging and often exciting process in which parents and teachers participate. A number of schools have produced written handbooks or guidelines on their Religious Education Core Curriculum and Educate Together, through its in-service courses, has provided an opportuntiy for teachers to share their expertise and experiences in this area. Educate Together has also produced written guidelines for teachers which can be useful as a starting point for new schools.

Each school makes its own arrangements for facilitating denominational instruction. In some schools, denominational classes are timetabled within schools hours; in others they are held on the school premises outside school hours and others have worked out a combination of timetabling inside and outside school hours. There are a number of factors which contribute to the different timetabling arrangements - these include problems of accommodation and of transport. Schools which are in very

cramped accommodation can find it impossible to find classroom space for a group of children for denominational instruction within school hours. On the other hand, if children are relying on inflexible school or public transport to get home, there may be no option but to timetable denominational instruction for them within school hours. Even a school which has adequate accommodation may find it difficult to find space for denominational instruction for four or five different religious groups. Consequently it might not be possible to facilitate a group of parents who would like to provide denominational instruction for their children in precisely the way the parents would like.

Almost every school has encountered tension with some parents at some stage over the question of the timetabling of denominational instruction. Often the motivation of the school in taking whatever action it has taken, is misunderstood and an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust can develop. In such cases, Educate Together recommends that the question be brought out into the open and discussed at a meeting to which all parents are invited. Such meetings have taken place in almost all our schools at some stage since they were set up. Some of the meetings have initially been confrontational with emotional accusations being made. Deep-rooted resentments about "the other side" sometimes emerge which can be disconcerting to parents and teachers who had no idea that their actions were being interpreted in this way. The aim of such meetings is to come to an agreement which will go as far as possible to meeting the requests of the parents involved while at the same time ensuring that a "majority rule' mentality does not develop.

I have attended many such meetings during the past 15 years in different schools and I have found that similar issues and concerns emerge at all of them. The numerically smaller religious groups or parents who are not affiliated to any religious group are worried that their children might be marginalised or "swamped" if the larger groups regularly come together within school hours for denominational instruction. They fear that their children will feel outsiders in a school where no child should be an outsider. The Catholic group, surprisingly, often feels threatened if it is asked to contribute to a compromise. Catholic parents in the south are familiar with the tradition of Catholic schools where arrangements for religious instruction are made on the assumption that all children are Catholics and often such parents have not fully faced the implications of sending their children to a multi-denominational school. In spite of the discomfort a general meeting produces, it has been my experience that the airing and sharing of views and attitudes has been beneficial in the long-term for the development of the school involved. In every case to date, a satisfactory compromise has been reached. However, schools must be prepared to reconsider their arrangements from time to time as the external situation or the parents' wishes change.

## What are The Main Challenges Ahead?

The difficulty of getting access to suitable accommodation has been the single greatest deterrent for parents who want to send their children to multi-denominational schools in this country. All other member states of the European Community provide publicly owned buildings for basic education. Ireland is unique in requiring citizens to provide privately owned accommodation for this purpose. Of the ten national schools in our sector, only three are in permanent purpose-built accommodation and only one of these has sufficient accommodation to meet the demand for places. The other seven are in various types of temporary premises, ranging from pre-fabs to buildings such as Scout Halls, Red Cross Halls, etc. which are shared with other users. These premises are inadequate and are becoming increasingly overcrowded as demand for places grows. In addition to the existing schools, there are parent groups around the country who have demonstrated to the satisfaction of the Dept. of Education that there is a demand for multi-denominational education in their area but who have failed to start a school because of the impossibility of getting access to the accommodation necessary to start a school.

Although classrooms and even whole school buildings have become empty because of the decline in the pupil population, they are not available for Educate Together schools because they are owned by the Churches though initially financed mainly from public funds. However, because there are empty school buildings in certain areas, the Department will not provide grant aid for new buildings for multi-denominational schools. Meeting the demand for multi-denominational education and providing an effective underpinning of the constitutional rights of parents, requires a solution to the accommodation

problem. In the present demographic situation it makes good sense to use existing school buildings and Educate Together would like to see some administrative changes to allow this to happen.

In its submission to the Minister in the context of forthcoming White Paper and legislation Educate Together has made a number of proposals which would facilitate Educate Together schools in getting access to suitable accommodation in the short term. We would also like to see the longer-term issue of the conditions under which grants are made available for school buildings addressed in the legislation. For example, parents involved in Educate Together schools have no particular interest in becoming owners and trustees of school buildings. Surely it should be possible to move towards a situation where groups like ours would have the option of being housed in public buildings which would revert to the State if the demand for multi-denominational education no longer existed in the area?

The second issue which militates against the development of multi-denominational education in the south is the practice introduced by Minister Cooney in 1986 whereby our schools are recognised in a provisional capacity only in the early years and are ineligible for capital grants during these crucial and expensive years. In the Green Paper it is stated that "where the establishment of further multi-denominational schools represents the wishes of parents, and where such schools can be justified on the basis of demand, the Department of Education will facilitate and support the establishment of such schools on the same terms as those available for the establishment of denominational schools". Educate Together has called on the Minister to implement this commitment immediately, to remove the discriminatory practice of provisional recognition and to provide capital grants for multi-denominational schools from the start.

## Conclusion:

In spite of the many difficulties encountered by Educate Together schools in the past 15 years, it is probably fair to say that morale among parents, teachers and pupils is high and that there is a sense of confidence that the current problems wll be overcome. The presence of President Mary Robinson at the launch of the Educate Together Information Pack in January was a great boost to the movement. The willingness of the Gulbenkian Foundation to grant aid the publication was also very important - while the grant itself was not very large, it was the first time the work of the movement was recognised outside the limited circles of Educate Together and the launch provided an opportunity to distribute accurate information about Educate Together to a wider audience.

The debate on the Green Paper has also provided a platform where the difficulties and problems of Educate Together have been aired - as well its enthusiasm, commitment and success. In spite of everything, the story of Educate Together to date has been a success story. It is a story of change and development from the bottom up - a story of ordinary people from a variety of different backgrounds - religious, cultural and social - working together to provide an educational system where their children can be educated together.

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**4.** Department of Education, Rules for National Schools (1965 ed.), rule 68.

**5.** Ibid., rule 69.

**6.** Graham Balfour, The educational system of Great Britain and Ireland (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903).

**7.** Department of Education, Report of the Council of Education on (1) the function of the primary school, (2) the curriculum to be pursued in the primary school (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1954) Pr. 2583.

**8.** Preface to the Rules for National Schools, 1965 ed.

**9.** Department of Education, Curaclam na Bunscoile - Primary School Curriculum - Teachers' Handbook (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1971).

**10.** Ibid., Introduction.

**11.** Fr. Colm Burke, The Furrow, February 1975, p.104.

**12.** Micheal Johnston, The History of St. Patrick's National School, Dalkey. (Unpublished dissertation for H. Dip. in T.C.D., 1974).

**13.** Report of the chairperson of the P.T.A. of St. Patrick's N.S., 1974 (copy in possession of author).

**14.** Quoted in Contact (parish magazine of St. Patrick's Church, Dalkey), April 1974.

**15.** Micheal Johnston, Talk entitled "Integrated Education" given at the Methodist Centenary Church, Dublin on 7th February 1988.

**16.** Irish Independent, 12 January 1977.

**17.** See for example, report in Irish Press, 29 Sep. 1975 in which Richard Burke is quoted as stating:

> There is at present a campaign for what its promoters call "multi-denominational" education in primary schools based on the suggestion that education in schools under the control of persons of their own religious faith and by teachers of their own religious faith promotes disharmony and dissension in the community. To my mind this is completely false. Indeed I regard it as a libel on teachers to suggest that in educating children in accordance with the particular teachings and belief of the religion of their homes, the teachers implant the seeds of intolerance and encourage attitudes of bigotry. It is also arrant nonsense.

**18.** Dalkey School Project, Survey of Attitudes and Preferences towards multi-denominational, co-educational, democratically managed National Schools, June 1976.

**19.** Demokratisierung des Erziehungswesens Proceedings of an international seminar hosted jointly by the Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung and the Dalkey School Project in Dun Laoghaire from 17-19 Nov.1978.

**20.** T. O Raifeartaigh, "Integrated Education": keynote address in Annual Proceedings of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland, Dublin 1979.

**21.** Dominic O Laoghaire, "Some schools more equal than others?", in Magill, January 1988.

**22.** Leaflet entitled The Dalkey School Saga: has the government surrendered to the multi-denominational pressure groups? distributed by the Council of Social Concern, Ely Place, Jan. 1988.

**23.** Treasurer's report at the annual general meeting of the Dalkey School Project, December 1992.

**24.** Evie Maddock, "150 Years A'Growing" Proceedings of the 1988 Drumcondra Education Conference (Dublin: I.N.T.O. 1988).

**25.** Letter sent from the Dept. of Education to the Sligo School Project in August 1987 setting out the conditions under which recognition was given to the school.

**26.** Davy Kelleher McCarthy Ltd., Ireland's Changing Population Structure - with forecasts of population and labour force to 2001. (Dublin: Sept., 1987).

**27.** Seanad Eireann (Official Report), Vol. 114, No.10 (30 Oct. 1986), p. 1108.

**28.** Ibid.

**29.** Extract from official lease of national schools vested in trustees (1965 edition).

**30.** Dept. of Education circular 1990 - School Transport; Multi-denominational schools.

**31.** Newsletter of the Ranelagh Multi-denominational School Association, 1991.

**32.** Newsletter of the Limerick School Project, Autumn 1989.

**33.** Copies of these letter were made available to Educate Together.

**34.** Dept. of Education, Education for a Changing World, A Green Paper, p. 142 (Dublin; Stationery Office, June 1992)