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A Brave New Vision
for Education in Ireland

This book is dedicated to my late husband Bill Hyland and to my daughters, Fiona, Niamh and Sonja

A Brave New Vision
for Education in Ireland

THE DALKEY SCHOOL PROJECT, 1974–1984

ÁINE HYLAND
with Desmond Green

First published in 2020 by
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Contents

Acknowledgements		7
Introduction		9
Chapter 1	*Ireland and its education system in the 1970s*	13
Chapter 2	*St. Patrick's National School, Dalkey 1972–1974*	31
Chapter 3	*A New Beginning – the Dalkey School Project Summer 1974–October 1975*	65
Chapter 4	*Keeping the Flame Alive October 1975–October 1976*	107
Chapter 5	*Determination and Resilience October 1976–Summer 1977*	131
Chapter 6	*Meanwhile, Back in St. Patrick's. 1974–1977*	155
Chapter 7	*Progress at last –a new government Summer 1977*	165
Chapter 8	*Opening the DSP National School September 1978*	195
Chapter 9	*The early years and a new building in Glenageary Lodge*	233
Chapter 10	*Epilogue – Educate Together and the growth of the sector*	259
Chapter 11	*Summary and Analysis*	269
Appendices		289
Bibliography		327

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Áine Hyland
October 2020.

Introduction

The title of this book *A Brave New Vision for Education in Ireland* is taken from the keynote address delivered by the President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins, at the annual general meeting of Educate Together in May 2016[1]. In his address he congratulated the founders of the first Educate Together school which opened in Dalkey, Co. Dublin in 1978, referring to "their courage, commitment and pioneering nature." He stated that the Educate Together movement which started at that time has been a critical and committed agent of change in the Irish education system. He reminded his audience that Ireland in 1978 was a very different landscape from that of today – an Ireland very much on the brink of seismic change but an Ireland which had yet to overcome a cultural conservatism that had dominated Ireland since independence.

The Dalkey School Project started in 1974 and the school – the DSP National School - opened in temporary premises in Vesey Place, Dun Laoghaire on 1st September 1978. The school moved to a purpose-built school building in Glenageary Lodge,

1. https://www.president.ie/en/media-library/speeches/speech-at-educate-together-agm

Glenageary in 1984. This book documents the early years of the Dalkey School Project, the aim of which was to set up Ireland's first state-aided multi-denominational primary school since the foundation of the State. A multi-denominational school was defined by the founders as a school in which children of all religions and none would have equal right of access and would be equally respected.

Ireland's primary or elementary education system is unusual by international standards. While its primary schools (also referred to as national schools) are publicly funded, they have traditionally been privately owned and managed – mostly by the churches. In the early 1970s there were about 3,500 national schools in the country attended by about 500,000 pupils. About 95% of these were Catholic schools and almost all the remainder were run either by the Church of Ireland (Anglican) or the Presbyterian church. The sites on which the schools were built had been provided by the churches and the state paid at least two-thirds of the capital cost of the school buildings. The state also paid the teachers' salaries and contributed towards the ongoing maintenance, heating, cleaning, and insurance of the schools. All schools taught the national school curriculum but the ethos of the schools, the religious education programme and enrolment policies were determined by the school patrons, i.e. the churches. Not all parents wanted their children to attend church-controlled schools and the Dalkey School Project was set up in 1974 to provide a focal point for those who wanted their children to be educated together.

The story that follows is based largely on the written records, including minute books, correspondence, speeches, newspaper cuttings, reports etc., of the Dalkey School Project, maintained by founder members for the past 45 years, especially by Micheal Johnston, Desmond Green and this author. It also draws on personal reminiscences of various individuals involved in the early years of the school, including pupils, parents and

teachers. I am particularly indebted to Micheal and Desmond for their help and advice and for comments on earlier drafts of the book.

In writing the book, papers and correspondence in the National Archive which relate to and were relevant to the setting up of the school were consulted, especially the Taoiseach's Office files for the period. The Department of Education has not yet deposited its archives for the period in the National Archive and while this author had hoped to access relevant files in the Department of Education, the restrictions imposed by the Covid 19 pandemic in early 2020 made this impossible. Covid restrictions also prevented access to other archival material which might have been relevant but since it was not clear when these restrictions would be lifted it was decided to proceed with publication at this stage.

While this book does not purport to be an objective or unbiased account of events relating to the early years of the Dalkey School Project, it has attempted to be as accurate as the records available at the time of writing allow. The analysis and interpretation of events are entirely those of the author and are not necessarily shared by other founding members, parents, teachers or pupils. It is possible that others, including future historians and sociologists, will interpret the evidence differently and will come to different conclusions to those expressed in this book.

This is a first and incomplete step in recording the history of the Dalkey School Project and of Educate Together and hopefully it will be followed in due course by other more complete histories.

Chapter 1

Ireland and Its Education System in the 1970s

For almost 50 years following the foundation of the Irish Free State in 1922, Ireland was noted for its conservatism and insularity. Following Independence, the cultural and educational focus was on the revival of the Irish language, history and culture and the economic focus was on self-sufficiency and the development of an agrarian economy. Ireland was officially neutral during the Second World War but its people suffered from the privations of war, and poverty was widespread. In the 1950s, when other western countries were benefiting from post-war investment, the Irish economic situation remained depressed and emigration was rife. It was not until the late 1950s, following the appointment of Seán Lemass as Taoiseach (Prime Minister), that Ireland's economic policy was revised and a more outward- looking approach to investment and expenditure was introduced. The focus moved from an agrarian self-sufficient economy to a more industrial-focused economy and incentives were introduced to encourage foreign direct investment.

The 1960s were a decade of growth, development and

relative liberalism in Ireland. The tide of emigration was stemmed and employment opportunities grew. For the first time since Independence, Ireland experienced inward migration and many of its earlier emigrants returned home to take up employment in some of the new industries[2]. Those returning had a broader vision of what was possible. They were more vocal and outspoken and were more likely to challenge the status quo than their peers who had never lived outside the country.

From a religious perspective, the teachings of Vatican 2 in the mid-1960s had an impact on the role of the laity who were encouraged to take a more active role in church affairs, including education. Vatican 2 encouraged a spirit of ecumenism within the Christian churches, and from the late 1960s onwards, the Catholic Church in Ireland adopted a flexible approach to the *Ne Temere Decree*. This was a decree which had been introduced by the Vatican in the early 20th century requiring that children born within so-called "mixed marriages" (i.e. of Catholics and Protestants) be educated and brought up as Catholics. While strictly speaking, the *Ne Temere Decree* had not been abolished, from the 1970s onwards, parents in mixed marriages no longer felt obliged to bring up their children as Catholics or to send their children to Catholic schools.

The international economic boom of the 1960s was followed by a recession in the 1970s. The oil crisis of the early 1970s led to economic retrenchment, and unemployment and emigration from Ireland grew again. The 1970s was a decade of rapid inflation and political instability[3].

The so-called "troubles" in Northern Ireland broke out in 1969, triggered by the shooting of civilians by the British Army on Bloody Sunday in Derry in June 1969. Sectarian violence escalated during the 1970s when the number of civilian deaths in the north rocketed. More than 100 civilians were killed in

2. M. Daly, *Sixties Ireland: Reshaping the Economy, State and Society 1957–1973.*
3. D. Ferriter, *Ambiguous Republic: Ireland in the 1970s*.

1971; this increased to over 320 in 1972, and in subsequent years an average of more than 200 civilians per annum were killed in Northern Ireland. Some of this violence spilled over to the south and a number of atrocities including the Monaghan and Dublin bombings in May 1974, the murder of the British Ambassador to Ireland, Christopher Ewart Biggs in Dublin in 1976, and the murder of Lord Mountbatten in Sligo in August 1979 contributed to the outrage felt by Irish citizens. There was a growing determination by the mid-1970s among many politicians and citizens, north and south, to bring an end to sectarian violence.

The 1970s was a period of political instability in the south, caused to some extent by the arms crisis of 1970 and resulting internal tensions within the Fianna Fáil party. Following decades of relatively stable governments between the 1930s and the 1960s, with Fianna Fáil in power for extended periods, there were five general elections in the decade from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, resulting in a coalition government of Fine Gael and Labour from Feb 1973 to June 1977; a Fianna Fáil government from June 1977 until June 1981; a Fine Gael-led coalition government from June 1981 to February 1982; a Fianna Fáil government from February to November 1982 and a Fine Gael-led coalition government from December 1982 to March 1987.

From 1973 to 1977, when the campaign to set up the DSP national school was underway, a coalition government of Fine Gael and Labour, led by Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave, was in power. This government had been formed in January 1973, following sixteen years of Fianna Fail rule. To quote Dermot Keogh, "It might have appeared as if the old order was changing at last"[4] but there was still a powerful conservative lobby opposed to change in Ireland. Among those were the Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave who was a T.D. in the constituency

4. Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth Century Ireland*, p. 330.

of Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown – the constituency in which Dalkey is situated - and the Minister for Education, Richard (Dick) Burke. In summer 1974 Burke was among nine Fine Gael T.D.s (including Taoiseach Cosgrave) who voted against their own government's bill to legislate for a limited form of contraception.

Ireland had joined the European Economic Community in 1973 and this resulted in many legislative changes, including the removal of the ban on married women working in the public service and the introduction of equal pay for men and women. Movements and organisations such as the Women's Liberation movement and the Women's Political Association were set up around this time and women became more vocal and confident about their rights in what had traditionally been a male-dominated society.

The National School System in Ireland – A Brief Overview

The national (primary) school system in Ireland in the early 1970s was to a large extent an anachronism. The origins of the system dated from the first half of the nineteenth century when it was envisaged that landlords would act as patrons of schools and take on the responsibility of educating children of the poorer classes with some financial help from the state. In the event, it was largely the churches which took on this role and because the corporate structure of the churches proved effective in the development of primary school provision, very little change had occurred in the structure of primary education between the mid-19th century and the early 1970s.[5]

When the campaign to set up the Dalkey School Project started in 1974, the national school system was religiously segregated. There were about 3,500 national schools in the country – virtually all of which were under Church patronage

5. John Coolahan, *Towards the Era of Lifelong Learning: A History of Irish Education, 1800–2016.*

and management, either the Catholic Church, the Church of Ireland (Anglican church), the Presbyterian Church, or the Methodist Church. There was one school under Jewish patronage. There were a handful of so-called "Model Schools" under the direct patronage of the Department of Education – relics from the 19th century when such schools were used as local training schools for teachers. There were also some "special schools" (i.e. schools for pupils with special needs) a small number of which were under the patronage of lay corporate bodies e.g. St. Michael's House.

The constitution of the Irish Free State in 1922 and of the Republic of Ireland in 1937 confirmed the subsidiary role of the state in the provision of education. The 1937 constitution, in particular, enshrined the primary role of parents in the education of their children. Article 42 reads as follows: "The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide according to their means for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children". The Article went on to state that parents "shall be free to provide this education in their homes or in private schools or in schools recognised or established by the State". The responsibilities of the state were relatively limited. Article 42.4 stated that: "The State shall provide for free primary education and shall endeavour to supplement and give reasonable aid to private and corporate educational initiative, and when the public good requires it provide other educational facilities or institutions with due regard however for the rights of parents especially in the matter of religious or moral formation".

The influence of Catholic social teaching on the 1937 Constitution of Ireland has been well documented. Referring to this in 1988, Dermot Keogh wrote:[6] "The document

6. Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth Century Ireland: Nation and State.*

(1937 Constitution) was self-consciously nationalist, strongly Catholic in tone and republican in aspiration. The influence of Catholic thinking was very evident". A similar point was made by Gerry Whyte in an article in 1992[7] when he stated that "These provisions (of the 1937 Constitution) reflected Roman Catholic social teaching by enshrining a principle of parental supremacy in respect of the education of children".

The Catholic Church was clear about the type of education which it regarded as appropriate for its children. Its code of Canon Law contained the following Canon (226.2): "Because they gave life to their children, parents have the most serious obligation and the right to educate them. It is therefore primarily the responsibility of Christian parents to ensure the Christian education of their children is in accordance with the teaching of the church". During the period 1918 to the late 1980s, Canon Law (1374) stated that "Catholic children may not attend non-Catholic, neutral or mixed schools, i.e. those which are open also to non-Catholics." In Ireland, these canons were interpreted strictly by the bishops. In their Lenten pastoral letters, bishops regularly reminded the laity that they were bound under pain of mortal sin to send their children to Catholic schools. This stricture applied to education at all levels, even university level. Until the early 1970s Catholics in Ireland were forbidden by their bishops to send their children to Trinity College, Dublin, which was regarded as unsuitable for young Catholic men and women[8].

Why and how did an education system which was originally intended to be religiously mixed, became denominational? In brief, the national school system in Ireland originated in 1831, when Lord Stanley sent a letter to the Duke of Leinster (then Chief Secretary for Ireland) proposing that the government should provide financial aid for the education of the poor of

7. G. Whyte, "Education and the Constitution" in *The Irish Jurist, Vo. 79, 1994.*
8. See for example John Charles McQuaid, *Lenten Pastoral Letter* 1973.

Ireland[9]. His proposal was accepted by government and the national schools which were set up as a result of Stanley's intervention were required to provide "combined moral and literary and separate religious instruction" for children of all religious persuasions under one roof. During the years of British administration, the Rules for National Schools upheld the principle that state aid would only be provided for schools which were open to children of all religious persuasions. All children, whatever their religious background, would attend the local school, where pupils of all religions would remain together for moral and literary instruction and would separate into separate religious groups for religious instruction. The curriculum for moral and literary instruction would be mandated by the Board of National Education– a board set up by government to oversee these schools - and the religious instruction curriculum would be designed and delivered by clergymen of the different churches for pupils of their respective religions. The primary school system was to be an aided (or subsidised) one. Funding for the schools would be given by the Board of National Education provided that a local contribution was provided. Schools would be under the overall direction of a local patron who would be required to name a suitable manager to manage the day-to-day affairs of the school[10].

None of the main Christian churches in Ireland at that time approved of religiously mixed schools and they gradually shaped the system to their own liking. From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, the patron of a primary school was most likely to be a bishop or church leader and each school catered almost exclusively for one denomination. Because of the need for school owners to be able to provide sites on which schools would be built, as well as a significant

9. This letter has since been known as "The Stanley Letter".

10. D.H. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment: the national system of education in Ireland in the nineteenth century.*

financial contribution towards the building of the school and an on-going contribution to current costs, the *de facto* situation from the mid-nineteenth century onwards was one whereby virtually all national schools were owned and controlled by the main churches.

Despite the *de facto* situation in relation to control and ownership, the rules for payment of grants to primary schools required that school management would not discriminate against children who were not members of the church which owned that school. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (until 1965) schools were required to timetable religious instruction during the school day in such a way that children whose parents did not want them to attend religious instruction classes could still attend the secular classes in the school. Moreover, the regulations required teachers to be sensitive to children of different religions in any matters which might be discussed or taught.

Surprisingly in 1965, at a time when Irish society was beginning to become more liberal, the rules of the Department of Education in relation to primary schools were changed. New rules published in 1965 gave explicit recognition to the denominational character of primary schools and many of the safeguards relating to children of minority religions or of no religion were removed[11]. A new rule was added to the Rules for National Schools – Rule 68 –which stated:

> Of all parts of the school curriculum, Religious instruction is by far the most important, as its subject matter, God's honour and service, includes the proper use of all man's faculties, and affords the most powerful inducements to their proper use. Religious Instruction is therefore, a fundamental part of the school course and a religious spirit should inform and vivify the whole work of the school …

11. Department of Education, *Rules for National Schools*, 1965 edition.

In 1971 a further complication was added to the situation. A new primary school curriculum was introduced and this new curriculum encouraged the integration of subjects, both religious and secular. The official teacher's handbook was specific in this regard[12]: "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 children whose parents did not wish them to attend exclusively denominational schools nor to attend religious instruction within such schools. The rule requiring teachers to be sensitive to the religious beliefs of those of different religious persuasions had been removed. According to the curriculum guidelines of the Department of Education, all schools were expected to offer an integrated curriculum where religious and secular instruction would be integrated. While the rule under which parents could opt their children out of religious instruction still remained, this rule became effectively inoperable since religious and secular instruction would now be integrated. Even if religious instruction was separately timetabled, it could be assumed that a specific religious ethos would "permeate the school day".

It was ironic that the denominational reality of the national school system was formally recognised at a time when parents were beginning to assert their rights in relation to the education of their children. There was a growing interest in education in Ireland in the 1960s and early 1970s. A landmark report,

12. Department of Education, *Curaclam na Bunscoile, Curriculum for Primary Schools*, 1971.

Investment in Education, partially funded by the OECD in the mid-1960s had, *inter alia,* highlighted the shortfalls in the Irish education system and led to the introduction in 1967 of free secondary education[13]. Community and comprehensive schools were set up in the ensuing decade and there was considerable public debate during this period about education issues generally, including the control and management of schools and the form of religious education that should be provided in them[14].

A fortnightly newspaper "*The Education Times*", edited by John Horgan, afterwards to become a Labour T.D. and Member of the European Parliament, subsequently professor of journalism in Dublin City University, and ultimately Ireland's first Press Ombudsman, was published between mid-1973 and mid-1976 and acted as a catalyst for educational debate. From the late 1960s onwards Catholic laity were encouraged by the findings of Vatican 2 to become more involved in what had traditionally been a clerically dominated church. The troubles in Northern Ireland contributed to the determination of many people to break down barriers between Protestant and Catholic on the island of Ireland. Many returned emigrants were comfortable with the more liberal regime of other countries and were prepared to question the *status quo* in Irish education.

Parents also became increasingly vocal and active in their children's education. In primary schools under Church of Ireland management, parent teacher associations (PTAs) were set up and most were affiliated to the Federation of Parent Teacher Associations, which was active during the early 1970s, under the chairpersonship of Catherine McGuinness (who subsequently became a barrister and was ultimately appointed

13. *Investment in Education, Report of the Survey Team*, 1966.
14. See for example, L. O'Flaherty, *Management and Control in Irish Education: the post-primary experience* and E. Randles, *Post-primary Education in Ireland 1957–1970.*

a Judge of the Supreme Court)[15]. The Catholic Church did not encourage the setting up of PTAs in schools under Catholic management although a small number of Catholic schools had active parent associations. There were increasing calls from movements such as the Parent School Movement and the Association for Democracy in Education for parental involvement in the management of schools through the setting up of school boards of management. These calls were finally acceded to when boards of management, comprising parents, teachers and patron nominees, were introduced in national schools in 1975. There were other vocal groups calling for reform of the education system. For example the School Children's Protection Organisation (SCPO), set up by Constance O'Connell, a Dublin parent, in 1954, campaigned, eventually successfully, for the abolition of corporal punishment in schools[16].

From the early 1970s onwards, in areas where new housing estates had been built and new schools were required for the growing number of young children, e.g. in Marley Grange, Rathfarnham, south Co. Dublin and Firhouse in south west Co. Dublin, many parents began to question why separate schools were being provided for Catholic and Protestant children. In the case of Marley Grange, in 1974, a survey of parents indicated that the majority would prefer their children to be educated together. A School Committee was set up by the local residents' association to campaign for an inter-denominational school, under the joint patronage and management of the Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland. However, without reference to the families in the area, who were under the impression that their wishes were being considered by the policy-makers, the Catholic Church negotiated with the

15. This author was secretary to the Federation of Parents' Association during that period.
16. P. Mulholland, *Love's Betrayal: The Decline of Catholicism and the Rise of New Religions in Ireland.*

Department of Education to build a national school under Catholic patronage and management, thus ignoring the wishes of the parents in the area[17].

In other areas, parents successfully campaigned for the setting up of Gaelscoileanna (schools in which all subjects were taught through the medium of the Irish language), but although the initiative to set up these schools was driven by parents and Irish language lobbies, the state insisted that they be set up under the patronage of the Catholic Church. The exception to church patronage were some special schools for children with special needs which were founded and run by groups of parents who were incorporated as limited companies e.g. St. Michael's House.

In Northern Ireland the *All Children Together* movement was set up in February 1974[18]. The movement, which was non-party-political and non-sectarian, sought changes in the education system of Northern Ireland "which would make it possible for parents who so wished to secure for their children an education in shared schools acceptable to all religious denominations and cultures, in which the churches would provide religious education and pastoral care". The first ACT school, Lagan College opened in 1979, and the movement grew over the years around the same time as the Educate Together movement was growing in the south. One of ACT's founder members, Cecil Linehan, contacted the Dalkey School Project founders at an early stage of the setting up of ACT and the two organisations kept in touch for many years.

During the decade from 1974 to 1984 there were no fewer than eight Ministers for Education in the Dublin government. Richard (Dick) Burke was minister from February 1973 until December 1976. He was born in Co. Tipperary and

17. J. Cooke, *Marley Grange Multi-Denominational School Challenge 1973–1978.*
18. J. Bardon, *The Struggle for Shared Schools in Northern Ireland: The History of All Children Together.*

had attended a Christian Brothers' juniorate[19] in his teens, with the intention of becoming a Christian Brother. He left the Christian Brothers in his early 20s and went to University College Dublin where he studied languages. He spent a year in France and later qualified as a secondary school teacher. Before entering politics, he taught in Blackrock College, a fee-paying boys' secondary boarding school, run by the Holy Ghost Fathers (the Spiritans). He has been described by Barry Desmond, who was a Labour T.D. in the constituency of Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown as "a very pompous politician" with a "cultivated gravitas" which Desmond found unimpressive[20]. Burke developed a "posh" accent, which belied the county of his upbringing. In April 1975, in an article in the *Sunday Press*, journalist Con Houlihan referred to the appointment of Dick Burke as Minister for Education in the following terms:

> The practice of appointing a Minister such as Dick Burke is a reflection of the mental climate. Mr. Burke has nothing to recommend him for the position (of Minister for Education) if you except a certain glibness and the fact that he is not likely to saucer his tea at official receptions. This darling of the convent parlour is by far the most disappointing member of the cabinet.

As Minister for Education, Burke did not favour the rational approach to educational planning that had been introduced in the Department of Education in the mid-1960s. In 1974, he dismantled the Department's Development Branch which had been set up eight years earlier following the publication of

19. Juniorates were educational institutions run by religious orders or congregations for young men and women aged between 13 and 18. They provided free secondary education in a cloistered environment for young people who believed they had a vocation to become a nun or a religious brother. The students in juniorates sat the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate and then went on to train as teachers in Catholic Teacher Training Colleges where they were segregated from lay students.
20. B. Desmond, *Finally and in Conclusion: A Political Memoir.*

the *Investment in Education* report[21]. As will be seen in later chapters, both the Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave and Minister Burke were strongly opposed to multi-denominational education.

When Dick Burke was appointed European Commissioner by Taoiseach Haughey in December 1976, he was replaced by Peter Barry who was Minister for Education, until the coalition government fell in June 1977. When Fianna Fáil came to government in June 1977, John Wilson was appointed Minister for Education – a post he held until June 1981, when he was replaced by John Boland. In February 1982, John Boland was replaced by Martin O'Donoghue who held the office of Minister until October of that year. Following O'Donoghue's sacking as Minister for Education by Taoiseach Charles Haughey, he (Haughey) nominated himself as Minister for Education for three weeks until Gerard Brady was appointed. When Fianna Fáil was defeated in the general election in November 1982, Gemma Hussey was appointed Minister for Education – a position she held until February 1986[22].

The founder members of the Dalkey School Project were careful to ensure that the campaign for multi-denominational education never became overly associated with any one political party. Throughout the early decades, the DSP wooed all political parties. Labour party politicians were particularly supportive. Barry Desmond, Labour T.D. in the Dun Laoghaire constituency was a staunch supporter and a member of the DSP Council as well as being one of its three trustees[23]. John Horgan was also a supporter, initially in his role as editor of the Education Times and journalist, and subsequently as a Labour Senator, T.D. and Member of the European Parliament. The

21. S. O Buachalla, *Education Policy in Twentieth Century Ireland*.
22. A. McManus, *Irish Education: The Ministerial Legacy, 1919–1999.*
23. Barry Desmond was first elected as a Labour T.D. in the Dun Laoghaire/ Rathdown constituency in 1969 and held his seat at every subsequent election until he retired from political life in 1989.

DSP also had supporters in the Fianna Fáil party, although members of the local Dalkey *cumann* of Fianna Fail were initially antagonistic. While some Fine Gael politicians, notably Garrett FitzGerald, were supportive of the concept of multi-denominational education, they were cautious in their support of the Dalkey School Project until after Cosgrave stepped down as leader of Fine Gael in summer 1977.

As regards the churches, Methodist and Presbyterian church leaders consistently voiced their support for multi-denominational education. The Church of Ireland was initially ambivalent and was particularly reluctant to support a multi-denominational school in Dalkey where it was seen as a threat to the local Church of Ireland national school. However, by the late 1970s the General Synod of the Church of Ireland had passed a resolution supporting such schools. The Catholic church initially opposed the Dalkey School Project and right-wing Catholic organisations were particularly vocal in their opposition, not only to the Dalkey School Project, but also to the emerging second-level Community schools, which were initially planned as multi-denominational schools. Opposition was led by organisations such as the Knights of St. Columbanus and associated groups such as the Council of Social Concern, the Irish Family League and a host of other small right-wing Catholic organisations, many of which operated from the headquarters of the Knights of St. Columbanus in Ely Place, Dublin 2.

In a review of a book by Evelyn Bolster, *The Knights of St. Columbanus* in 1977, Louis McRedmond described the Knights as "a secretive, if not strictly speaking secret society whose instincts are anti-intellectual and whose methods are less than democratic, a society shot through with that puritanism which is so profoundly un-Catholic but sadly not un-Irish"[24]. He stated that it seemed that:

24. Louis McRedmond "The Knights Revealed" in *The Irish Times*, 10th October 1977.

> The Knights suffer from either an inability or an unwillingness to think for themselves. Time and time again their senior officers urge them to study. We are told that they do so. They always emerge from the process committed word-for-word to the exact presentation of viewpoints enunciated in the Church documents which they study.

In her book, *Masterminds of the Right,* published in the early 1990s, Emily O'Reilly documented the various campaigns spearheaded by these organisations against social reform in Ireland – especially in areas such as divorce, contraception and abortion and even Ireland's accession as a member of the European Community[25]. The book referred in particular to the activities of one person, John O'Reilly, whom Emily O'Reilly described as "that state employee, whose machinations on behalf of the conservative catholic lobby throughout the following two decades would lead directly not just to the insertion of a constitutional ban on abortion in 1983, but also to the defeat of the divorce referendum three years later and to a major threat to the ratification of a new EC treaty six years after that". John O'Reilly was variously a member of the Irish Family League, the Knights of St. Columbanus, the Responsible Society, the Council for Social Concern, the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child, and Family Solidarity. He and his wife Treasa (Ó Raghallaigh), lived in Dalkey and kept a watchful eye on the activities of the Dalkey School Project.

The Knights of St. Columbanus were particularly influential in Irish education at that time. Many senior civil servants and inspectors in the Department of Education were Knights as were (male) principals of many Catholic national schools. Dominic Ó Laoghaire who was Secretary of the Department from April 1975 to November 1979 and his successor Liam O Laidhin who was Secretary from November 1979 to 1984 were thought

25. E. O'Reilly, *Masterminds of the Right*.

to be members of the Knights of St. Columbanus. In a book *The Missionary Impulse"*[26] which Dominic Ó Laoghaire wrote in 1991 after his retirement, he made it clear that he supported Catholic control of education. An assistant secretary, Padraig Breathnach, who was in charge of the Primary Branch in the Department of Education during the period when Burke was Minister, was also a member of the Knights of St. Columbanus as were many other senior figures in the Department.

The Minister for Education, Dick Burke, was a member of the Knights as were some other Fine Gael ministers including Oliver J. Flanagan. Among the vows taken by individual knights at their induction to the order was a commitment to support and enhance Catholic education in all its forms. Consequently, the Dalkey School Project campaigners were seen as a threat to the established order. However, many other officials in the Department of Education, both in the inspectorate and in administration, were exceptionally helpful to and supportive of the Dalkey School Project, especially after John Wilson became Minister for Education in summer 1977.

In any event, the influence of right-wing organisations such as the Knights of St. Columbanus began to wane by the early 1980s. In his book *Finally and in Conclusion*, Barry Desmond refers to Garrett FitzGerald's strongly held views about the "incompatibility between membership of government and secret membership of any other organisation". He stated that in December 1982, as incoming Taoiseach, FitzGerald wrote to all prospective cabinet ministers stating: "Anyone who may be a member of such an organisation or has in the past been a member and has not formally resigned must do so and inform me that he has done so". Fitzgerald's instruction to members of the Fine Gael party is also referred to by Fergal Bowers in his book *The Work: An Investigation into the History of Opus Dei*

26. D. Ó Laoghaire, *The Missionary Impulse*.

and how it operates in Ireland to-day[27].

The following chapters will document the story of the first ten years of the Dalkey School Project and the setting up of Ireland's first multi-denominational national school since the foundation of the State. The seeds of the Dalkey School Project were sown in St. Patrick's (Church of Ireland) National School, Dalkey during the period 1972 to 1974 and germinated for four years from 1974 to 1978 when the DSP National School opened. The campaign to start the school was difficult and challenging and was to become a *cause célebre* in subsequent years. It was driven by a group of determined parents who were not easily deflected from their target. In addition to parents and teachers, the *personae dramatis* included bishops, priests and rectors; civil servants and local authority officials; members of the media; supporters and detractors from the general public, and politicians from all political parties[28].

27. *F. Bowers, The Work: An Investigation into the History of Opus Dei and How It Operates in Ireland To-day.*
28. Micheal Johnston, "Educate Together and the Church of Ireland" in Virginia Kennerly (ed.), *Search*, Autumn 2006.

Chapter 2

St. Patrick's N.S., Dalkey 1972–1974

The seeds of the Dalkey School Project, Ireland's first multi-denominational national school since the foundation of the state, were sown in the early 1970s in St. Patrick's National School in Dalkey. St. Patrick's (also known as Dalkey No. 2 National School) was under the patronage and management of the Church of Ireland since its founding in 1894. It had been a one-teacher parish school from the 1890s until the 1960s, when under the leadership of its principal teacher, Florence Armstrong, it began to expand. By 1972 it was a five-teacher school, accepting pupils from families of all religious backgrounds and none. The school was accommodated in a stone-cut two-roomed building which was also used as a parish hall. In the early 1970s, two pre-fabricated classrooms had been added and the stage of the parish hall was also being used as a classroom. When demand for places in the school continued to grow in the early 1970s, difficulties were encountered in providing accommodation for the expanding enrolment.

St. Patrick's N.S. in the 1960s and early 1970s – innovative and popular.

Florrie Armstrong was born in Co. Cavan in 1928. She attended Coláiste Móibhí, Dublin, a second-level protestant preparatory college which taught through the medium of Irish. She qualified as a national school teacher in Kildare Place Training College, Dublin in the late 1940s and was awarded a B.A degree by Trinity College in 1951. She was initially appointed principal of a small protestant national school in Kildallan, Co. Cavan and in the early 60s she was appointed principal in St. Patrick's, Dalkey, Co. Dublin. When she first came to Dalkey the school building was "little more than a rundown old hall with a small number of children in attendance". She was "a progressive teacher, and her energy and enthusiasm meant that she was hungry for change and improvement"[29]. She was an inspiring school principal, with an impressive educational vision and her innovative approach to teaching and learning had been noted, not only by parents, but also by the inspectorate of the Department of Education.

In the late 1960s, St. Patrick's was chosen as a pilot school for a proposed new child-centred national school curriculum (which was introduced nationally in 1971) and the reputation of the school as a centre of excellence grew. The *de facto* multi-denominational nature of the school was popular at a time when Irish society was becoming more multi-cultural and inclusive. The troubles in Northern Ireland had focused minds on the negative outcomes of social and religious segregation and on the desirability of providing opportunities for young people to grow up in a more inclusive society. While it was never suggested that integrated schooling alone would solve the problems of divided societies, many people, both north and south, believed that such schooling would go some way

29. Jonathan Smyth, "Cavan Visionary Remembered", *Times Past in The Anglo-Celt,* 26th July 2020

towards alleviating division and dissension in society.

The community of Dalkey, a small town on the coast of south Co. Dublin, about 15 km from the capital, had for generations been socially, culturally and religiously mixed. During the late nineteen fifties and early sixties new housing estates were built in Dalkey, which had become a suburb of Dublin city, and a growing number of families who had emigrated in earlier decades and who returned to Ireland chose to live in Dalkey. Many were professional, well-educated people who began to question the long-standing traditions and norms of Irish society.

The schooling structure in Dalkey was similar to that of other Irish towns and suburbs. In addition to the Church of Ireland national school, there were two Catholic national schools in the town – a girls' and infant boys' school run by the Loreto nuns and a boys' lay national school (which enrolled boys from 7 to about 12 years of age) run by the Catholic parish. Side by side with the Loreto national school, there was a fee-paying girls' primary school, also run by the Loreto nuns. From four years' old upwards, Catholic children in Dalkey were separated not only by religion but also by gender and social class. The school under Church of Ireland management – St. Patrick's N.S. – was particularly attractive to parents who did not want their children segregated either by religion, social class or gender.

The manager of St. Patrick's N.S. in the 1960s and early 1970s was Rev. Desmond Murray, the rector of the Church of Ireland parish, who was popular with parishioners, parents and teachers. He took the point of view that St. Patrick's school was "a National state school" where children of all religions were welcome. He was happy to support the growing multi-denominational nature of the school and he co-operated in the setting up of a parent-teacher association (PTA) in St. Patrick's N.S. in the late 1960s. However, the growth of the school and the associated additional costs had contributed to a significant parish debt and understandably, this was an issue of concern

to the rector and the Select Vestry[30] of the parish. By the early 1970s, the growing enrolment in the school would soon entitle the school to appoint an additional teacher and the question of how and where another class of pupils would be accommodated had to be addressed. Referring to the growth of the school in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Micheal Johnston wrote[31]:

> The school's reputation grew, and with that its enrolment burgeoned. Not only did the numbers grow but the profile of the parent body changed dramatically. Coming along now were Church of Ireland parents who had not traditionally used the National School system; families from outside the parish; non-conformists who had not seen this school as their school; Roman Catholics who wanted a more liberal approach to education; mixed marriages, and some without any religious affiliation at all. In 1962 there were 53 children in the school; in 1967, 93 children; in 1972, 189 children on roll.

1972 — Decision to restrict enrolment in St. Patrick's N.S.

In 1971, Rev. Murray resigned as Rector of St. Patrick's, Dalkey due to poor health, and he was replaced by Rev. Eric Young. Rev. Young did not engage to the same extent as his predecessor had done with the school or with the PTA. In February 1972, within months of his appointment as manager of the school, and without consulting the PTA, he announced a new policy to restrict enrolment in St. Patrick's to a maximum of 190. The PTA, chaired by Micheal Johnston, reacted adversely to this decision. The manager felt that the PTA was attempting to interfere with managerial decisions and he broke off relations with the PTA, refusing to attend PTA meetings or to engage with the PTA, except through its chairman, Micheal Johnston.

Micheal Johnston is a central figure in the story of the

30. The Select Vestry of a Church of Ireland parish is a committee of parishioners selected to assist in the administration and organisation of the parish.

31. M. Johnston, *Educate Together and the Church of Ireland*.

Dalkey School Project. Micheal is the son of Denis Johnston, an author, playwright and journalist and Shelah Richards, a well -known Abbey actress in the 1940s and 50s. Shelah performed in the first production of *The Plough and the Stars* by Seán O'Casey in 1926. Micheal's father came from a Presbyterian background and his mother was from a Church of Ireland background. Micheal's wife Pat describes Micheal as a "tribal Protestant". Micheal was a well-known oarsman in his day and continued to be active in rowing circles for many decades. He was a graduate of Cambridge University and was one of the first television producer-directors with RTE when its television service opened in the early 1960s. His experience and understanding of media were invaluable during the early years of the Dalkey School project.

His wife, Pat, is from a Presbyterian background and was trained as a Home Economics teacher in England in the late 1950s. By the early seventies they had four children – their eldest daughter Brigid, had started school in St. Patrick's in 1965 and she was followed by her three siblings. Their fifth child, Josh was born in August 1974. Micheal had been active in the setting up of the PTA of St. Patrick's N.S. and was its chairman from the early 1970s. He was a crucial leader in the campaign for multi-denominational education – both within the context of St. Patrick's N.S. from 1972 to 1974 and in the Dalkey School Project from its inception as an association in mid-1974; throughout the four-year campaign until the opening of the first school in 1978, and throughout subsequent decades. He was also the founding chairman of Educate Together which was set up in 1984.

During 1972, the St. Patrick's N.S. PTA committee had meetings with the Department of Education and the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Buchanan (who was patron of St. Patrick's N.S.) to discuss their concerns about the decision of the manager to restrict the intake to the school. In an attempt to defuse the issue, the Archbishop met a delegation

from the PTA accompanied by the manager and members of the select vestry. From these discussions during 1972, came what was subsequently referred to as "the Archbishop's compromise" which suggested the following:

> That the school should be allowed to advance to become a six-teacher school; that there should be agreement to build one new classroom and one General Purpose room, provided that (1) the parents would take over the burden of school maintenance from the parish (2) the PTA would take the full responsibility for the local costs of the new building and (3) the PTA would undertake not to demand further building on parish ground.

On 7th December 1972, a notice was circulated to parents by Micheal Johnston, Chairman of the PTA, notifying them of an upcoming meeting, to be held on 13th December to discuss "the Archbishop's compromise" for solving the dispute over the future of the school. In that notice, it was pointed out that the parents had expressed their wish that the natural growth of the school be allowed to continue until it reached an eight-teacher school: "The PTA particularly value the type of school that St. Patrick's has become with a strong commitment to the New Curriculum and an interdenominational character."

The select vestry of the parish, on the other hand, had made it clear that they did not want any further building on church land. According to the notice circulated by the PTA in advance of the meeting: "The Select Vestry saw the school as a financial liability or at the very least a potential financial liability in the future; they saw the school primarily as a Parochial School which when it was convenient might take in outside pupils."

At the PTA meeting of the 13th December 1972, four options were discussed:

A: Accept the Archbishop's compromise;

B: Accept a modified version of the Archbishop's

compromise – i.e. that (a) there should be a management committee for the school, and (b) there should be an agreed policy on election to a management committee which would include an A and a B list – A list would be Church of Ireland parishioners and parents of children in the school. The B list would be others in the locality;

C. There would be no further development at St. Patrick's but the parish should with the encouragement of the Archbishop, seek to persuade the Department of Education to set up a pilot multi-denominational national school, on the recommendation of the Church of Ireland, local parents and teachers;

D. Do nothing.

Following a long discussion, it was clear that the weight of opinion of the meeting was towards option C. Neither options A nor D were acceptable.

Two months later, in February 1973, a general meeting of the PTA passed a resolution by a large majority that any policy of selection of entrants (such as for example the policy proposed by the then manager, Rev. Eric Young in February 1972) would be totally unacceptable and that restricting enrolment at this stage of the school's development would seriously damage the educational interests of the children.

March 1973 – Appointment of a new Rector, Rev. J.F.O. Williams

Around this time, the Rev. Eric Young resigned as rector and he was replaced in March 1973 by Rev. J.F.O. (Frank) Williams. Rev. Williams had originally come from Northern Ireland and had previously been rector of other parishes in the south of Ireland. He had experience of national school management and of dealing with the Department of Education. His theological leanings were evangelical rather than ecumenical and he was not enthusiastic about multi-denominational education.

During his term of office as rector of St. Patrick's, a monthly parish newsletter, *Contact,* included often lengthy letters from him – *"The Rector writes"*- in which he provided full, frank and sometimes amusing information about the various issues that had arisen in the parish during the previous month. These monthly missives were an invaluable source of information in the writing of this chapter.

From the date of his appointment, Rev. Williams made it clear that one of his main aims would be to clear the significant parish debt that he had inherited. For example, in an early newsletter he wrote: "Some folk might say that with inflation running at about 10% we would be better never to get rid of our debt, but not being a tycoon, I would rather take St. Paul's advice and "owe no man anything …". Since school costs had contributed and were continuing to contribute to the parish debt, he saw it as imperative that action should be taken to minimise the extent to which the school was indebted to the parish. Within a short time, it was agreed that the PTA would contribute to the running costs of the school and in the July/ August edition of the parish newsletter, Rev. Williams noted that:

> There is more good news round the corner – first of all the PTA have handed over a cheque for £250 towards the school heating and cleaning for 1972/3. Further, they have assessed every school family £7 for 1973/4, which they reckon should produce £1,000 for heating and cleaning if we are all spared. For the cheque and the promised help we are truly grateful.

While the PTA was willing to contribute its share to the cost of running the school its officers were aware that under the management of Rev. Williams they would have no say in managerial issues such as enrolment policy or the growth of the school. It was also clear by this stage that the option which had been adopted by the parents at the PTA general

meeting in February 1973, i.e. that there would be no further development at St. Patricks but that the parish should, with the encouragement of the Archbishop, seek to persuade the Department to set up a pilot multi-denominational national school, was not likely to be supported by the Rev. Williams nor by the select vestry of St. Patrick's.

May 1973 – Gauging Support for a multi-denominational school in Dalkey.

Recognising that the multi-denominational "experiment" in St. Patrick's was now at risk of coming to an end, in May 1973 the PTA elected a sub-committee to investigate the possibilities of setting up a new national school in the Dalkey/Dun Laoghaire area, which would be separate from St. Patrick's Church of Ireland parish. The school would be multi-denominational and co-educational and run by a committee of management, within the framework of the Departmental rules.

The sub-committee comprised Dermot Hourihane (chairman); Jill Cox (secretary); David Cabot; Patricia Johnston; James Buckley; Mavis Arnold and Patrick Willis. It got to work immediately and prepared and circulated a leaflet seeking supporting signatures for such a school. This leaflet was distributed widely in the Dun Laoghaire /Dalkey area, mostly through friends and acquaintances, and stated:

> We the undersigned are a sub-committee of the PTA of St. Patrick's NS., Dalkey, formed to investigate the possibilities of a new National School in the Dun Laoghaire area which would be multi-denominational, co-educational and run by a committee of management within the framework of the Department of Education rules. We believe there is a real need and desire for this type of school in the area and that it would be an important development in the context of Ireland today.

Within a fortnight, the sub-committee had collected over 500

signatures supporting the setting up of such a school. These 500 signatures were obtained without publicity and almost all through personal networks. The signatures represented 450 citizens living in the area representing 328 families and a total of 656 children under the age of 12.

1973 / 1974: Correspondence with An Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave and meeting with Minister for Education, Richard Burke T.D.

At the annual general meeting of the PTA in May 1973 a new committee had been elected. The new chairman (sic) was Hilary Pratt, the honorary secretary was Patricia Johnston and the treasurer was Mavis Arnold. Hilary Pratt (née Kirwan) is another key figure in the story of the Dalkey School Project. Hilary was one of the Kirwan family, a Church of Ireland family who lived in Dalkey Lodge, a listed house on Barnhill Road in Dalkey. The Kirwans also owned land in the Dalkey / Glenageary area. Hilary was a graduate of Trinity College and had taught History in Hillcourt School, Glenageary before she and her husband, Donald Pratt, bought Avoca Weavers in Kilmacanogue around 1974. Hilary was a founder member of the Women's Political Association and was actively involved in the women's movement in the 1970s. The Pratts had five children, four of whom attended St. Patrick's N.S. in the late 1960s / early 1970s.

Following the AGM of St. Patrick's National School in May 1973, the new PTA committee wrote to Richard Burke, Minister for Education asking for a meeting to discuss the future of the school. In October 1973, Mr. Burke agreed to a meeting and by letter of 15th October the PTA asked that this meeting be scheduled as soon as possible. Following some delay on the part of the Minister, a meeting was eventually arranged for 27th February 1974. Some days before the meeting, on 23rd February 1974, a press release issued by Hilary Pratt, was published in full in the *Education Times*. Indicating that the

school was one of the foremost primary schools in the country the press release stated that:

> Under C of I management (St. Patrick's) had developed a multi-denominational character. Parents and teachers welcomed this form of mixed education and saw themselves as co-operating together in an exciting educational experiment, in which the integration of children's learning, essential to the success of the new curriculum, was paralleled by the social integration of children with different church loyalties.

It added that what was referred to as "an experiment" was now felt to have reached a point of crisis owing to a number of factors. It maintained that the chief factor was the conflict between the managerial policy of restricting the school's natural development and the strongly held view of the PTA that it should allow the school to grow to an eight-teacher school. However, the parish believed that restricting numbers was the only way to stabilise the situation, and to preserve "the narrowly confined parish site from encroachment by more prefabricated classrooms". The PTA did not accept that and pointed out that the policy of limiting the numbers had already led to selection of entrants on the basis of religion.

The meeting with the Minister for Education took place in the Minister's Dáil office on 27th February 1974. The Dalkey delegation included representatives of the PTA and of the select vestry as well as the manager, Rev. J.F.O. Williams. The delegation, which was accompanied by Barry Desmond, Labour T.D., was received in Leinster House by the Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave, who as Fine Gael T.D. for the constituency of Dun Laoghaire /Rathdown, knew some of the members of the delegation. Cosgrave introduced the delegation to the Minister for Education, Mr. Richard Burke, and then left the meeting.

A paper prepared by the PTA prior to the meeting set out the issues clearly and cogently, stating:

> In the recent history of St. Patrick's School it has become clear that the development of a co-educational, multi-denominational national school with a progressive teaching and learning policy has raised acute problems which cannot be resolved within the local context.

It argued that the quality of education in the school was being put at risk by the restriction on the growth of the school. It referred to the many consultations that had taken place over the previous two years in an effort to overcome the difficulties of the school and acknowledged that the select vestry had tried to cope with the problems which the school had raised for the parish. It pointed out that:

> The fact that children of different denominations learn and play together has proved attractive to a large number of parents. There is a demand for places. However, the physical and material problems facing the parish have caused the manager to favour limiting the numbers admitted. Consequently, it has become apparent that implicit in the dilemma facing the school is the question of 'discrimination' between 'Parish children' and others – either the principle of selection by priority for the former or the principle of openness.

It referred to the resolution passed by a large majority of parents at the AGM in 1973 that any policy of selection of entrants was totally unacceptable and that restriction of numbers at this stage would seriously damage the educational interests of the children. It also informed the Minister that a PTA sub-committee had collected over 500 signatures seeking "an additional school in the Dun Laoghaire area which would be co-educational, multi-denominational, and under the management of a committee within the rules of the department".

The following day, 28th February 1974, the *Education Times* gave front page coverage to the Dalkey issue under the heading: "*Taoiseach, Burke in Dalkey talks*". The article reproduced the

statement issued by the PTA and stated that the chief point at issue was the parents' call for the immediate provision of an eight-teacher multi-denominational school primary school to serve the area.

However, if the PTA had hoped that the meeting of 27th February would result in the provision of a new multi-denominational school in the Dalkey/Dun Laoghaire area, they must have been sorely disappointed. Writing in the subsequent edition of *Contact*, Rev. J.F.O Williams wrote: "The Minister would not entertain the idea for a moment". However, while Minister Burke was aware of the problem of overcrowding in St. Patrick's N.S. and the unsuitability of the building, he explained to the delegation that he could not engage with the PTA's questions "because he was obliged by his regulations to negotiate only with the manager". He further pointed out that all future approaches must be made through the manager.

The negative response of the Minister for Education was referred to some days later in a letter dated 5th March 1974, which Pat Johnston, secretary of the PTA, wrote to Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave thanking him "very sincerely for taking the trouble of introducing our members to the Minister for Education last week" and stating that "Mr. Burke received us most graciously and generously devoted a considerable amount of time to discussion of our problem". The letter continued:

> Our main purpose here is to express to you, in your capacity as Taoiseach, our very real alarm at what seems to be the Department's proposed solution to our problem. This appears to be to limit the intake of children to the school on the basis of their religion. Indeed, it might be inferred that some of the children currently attending the school may be forced to leave on those grounds. Such a suggestion must be seen to have the gravest implications far beyond the sphere of influence of the Department of Education and it must inevitably have a divisive effect on community relations. We cannot

> believe that it could be the policy of the Government to seek to divide the various denominations which have come so happily together in our school, particularly at a time when we are seeking by every means possible to reassure our countrymen in the North of Ireland and to persuade them that our assurances are more than empty phrases. Such actions by the Department must surely speak stronger than words.

The letter went on to state that the PTA "feel that you will agree that not only should the present multi-denominational character of the school remain, but that you would also be anxious to support our efforts to expand this concept to accommodate children who are now awaiting, and in many cases are denied, entry to the school". To achieve that end it was pointed out that a new site and premises must be found; but because of the high cost of land in the area, the financing of such an undertaking would be clearly beyond the capability and capacity of either the parish or the PTA. It was considered that the problem was one which the Department of Education should solve, and disappointment was expressed that the proposal was rejected at the meeting by the Minister for Education.

The letter ended with the following paragraphs:

> … our request for recognition of our position in no way threatens the rights or interests of those who wish to have denominational education for their children, and indeed not one of the Regulations for National Schools would have to be changed to accommodate a school along the lines we have suggested …
>
> We make this approach however not only because of the very real problems confronting us and our children at this time, but also because in our solution – and in the contribution which however small one such school could make – there lies the key to the greater understanding and respect among our people out of which the new

> Ireland which we all hope to see will emerge.

The idealism expressed in the letter was to fall on barren grounds. The suggestion that education policy and practice would contribute to a less divided society was not on the government's agenda and would not be for many years to come.

The *Education Times* of 10th March 1974 again gave front page coverage to the meeting with the Minister, under the heading "*Dalkey parents pursue democracy campaign after ministerial rebuff*". The article went on to state:

> A delegation of parents from St. Patrick's NS met the Minister for Education last week in a fruitless attempt to persuade him to support their campaign for a multi-denominational school under democratic management in the area.

The article pointed out that "in terms of intake the school is already multi-denominational" and stated that a number of options were discussed at the meeting. However, it stated that "After two hours discussion with the Minister it now appears to be reasonably certain that the only option ruled out is the only one they really want – a fully multi-denominational school under democratic management", adding that the Department was of the view that if the Dalkey case were conceded there would be "a rash of similar applications" especially in urban areas.

Despite the unhelpful attitude of the Minister and his officials, the parents still clung onto some hope that a solution might be found. The article concluded:

> The end of the debate is not yet in sight. The PTA is meeting the Archbishop of Dublin next week. The situation may well be discussed at the General Synod of the Church of Ireland this year. What is happening in Dalkey could quite easily – not least because of its implications for the Northern policy of the Dublin government – become a national issue.

This last sentence was to prove prophetic, as subsequent years showed. The Dalkey delegation had opened a can of worms, a can which would not easily be closed again.

"Instruction" from Minister Burke to restrict enrolment on the basis of religion:

But lingering hopes or expectations about the intentions of the Minister for Education were quickly shattered ten days later, when a letter was received by the manager, Rev. Williams, from Padraig Breathnach, Assistant Secretary, Primary Branch, Department of Education, on 8th March 1974. This letter pulled no punches. It recognised that the current St. Patrick's National school building was unsuitable and overcrowded and that the only long-term solution would be the building of a new school on a new site. However, as this would take some years to achieve, the letter, which had been written with the approval of Minister Burke, directed the manager to restrict entry to children of five years and over until the enrolment matched the capacity of the school which the Department estimated to be about 180.

Having summarised the issues that had contributed to the overcrowding in the school, the letter continued:

> It is clear that conditions in St. Patrick's school can be made suitable only by the provision of a new school on a new site … It is recognised that it would be exceedingly difficult for you as manager, to obtain a suitable site for a new building and that as a consequence the school must continue to be conducted in the present premises for some time to come. This will mean that enrolment in the school must be restricted and the number of pupils reduced, as soon as may be feasible, to the number which can be accommodated on the basis of 15 square feet per pupil i.e. about 180.

The letter went on to state:

> The main reason for the present state of overcrowding seems to be that children have been enrolled in the school who would normally be expected to receive their primary education elsewhere than in St. Patrick's. As is stated in the Preface to the Rules for National Schools under the Department 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 the 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.
>
> In order to reduce the present excessive enrolment without excluding children who are at present at the school, children who have not yet reached the age of five years should not, for the present, be accepted for enrolment in the school. This type of restriction of enrolment is frequently operated in connection with schools in which overcrowding occurs. The circumstances of St. Patrick's N.S. are not such that the provision of additional temporary accommodation would be either warranted or easily feasible.

This letter was a turning point for some parents – including for this author. Until this point, some parents had harboured the hope that the multi-denominational experiment would be allowed to continue within the St. Patrick's N.S. context and that the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin and the Minister for Education would support and maybe even encourage such a development.

The "instruction" to the manager in the letter from the Department of Education to restrict entry to the school could

have a direct impact on our family. Our two older children, then aged eight and a half and seven years of age were pupils in St. Patrick's and our youngest daughter was at that time just three months old. Our children did not fit into either of the first two categories set out in the Department's letter. They were not "children of Church of Ireland parents living within the school district nor were they children of other Protestant families" and if the restrictive enrolment policy set down in the Department's letter were to be adopted our youngest child was unlikely to be offered a place in the school.

I had particular difficulty with the statement in the Department letter that "As is stated in the Preface to the Rules for National Schools under the Department of Education, the State gives explicit recognition to the denominational character of national schools". While, as a former civil servant in the Department of Education, I was familiar with the Rules for National Schools and also aware of the changes that had been made in the Rules in 1965, as far as I was aware, the rules had never before been quoted by the Department to justify the prioritisation of children of any one religion in enrolling in a National School. In a subsequent article, I wrote as follows[32]:

> It is difficult to understand how Articles 42 and 44.2.4 (of the Constitution of Ireland) can be construed in this way. It is one thing to recognise that denominational schools are an acceptable element in the system and to guarantee that all schools will receive equal treatment – it is quite a different thing to say that all schools are denominational and to enshrine such a statement in the official rules for national schools.

From Rev. J.F.O Williams's point of view, the letter from the Department was welcome as it provided a clear endorsement of the policy of restricting enrolment in St. Patrick's N.S. until

32. Áine Hyland, "The Multi-Denominational Experience in the National School System in Ireland" in *Irish Educational Studies,* 8.1.

the numbers matched the available space, thus providing a solution to the overcrowding issue. The letter also provided him with a mechanism for selection – an even more draconian mechanism than had been proposed by his predecessor, Rev. Eric Young, two years previously and which had been rejected by the PTA.

A few weeks later the *Education Times* drawing from Rev. Williams' newsletter, *Contact,* stated as follows[33]:

> Writing in *Contact,* the Rev. Williams now reports that Mr. Burke has directed him to restrict entry to children of five years or over, until the enrolment matches the capacity of the schools, which they estimate to be about 180. There are now more than 200 children in the school … This is perhaps the first time that a Minister has issued a directive to a school manager in which three grades of potential pupils have been specified. It certainly indicates that he has no intention of championing interdenominational schools in the face of a denominational managerial system.

Further correspondence with Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave:

Following the letter from the Department instructing the manager to restrict enrolment, a correspondence ensued between Pat Johnston, secretary of the PTA, Hilary Pratt, chairman of the PTA, and the Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave.

On 29th March 1974 a letter was received from the Taoiseach in reply to Pat Johnston's letter of 5th March stating:

> Since you wrote to me on the 5th March, I have been in touch with the Minister for Education about St. Patrick's National School, Dalkey. The Minister has given me a very full account of the proceedings of the meeting that your PTA had with him on Wednesday 27th February. He has also sent me a copy of his letter of

33. *Education Times,* 28th March 1974.

> 8th March to the Rev. Mr. F. Williams, manager of St. Patrick's School, The Rectory, Dalkey.
>
> The Minister looks on the situation at St. Patrick's as one which has arisen within the existing primary school system and which must be dealt with within that system. He has explained to me that he could not make a fundamental departure from that system to accommodate your Association's requests. Needless to say, he has given special thought to the problem that exists: that of overcrowding in an already unsuitable school building and the consequential educational disadvantages to the pupils. His Department's letter of the 8th March to the Rev. Mr. Williams, the contents of which will no doubt be known to you, refers in this context.
>
> In summary, the Minister takes the view that the aid required for the proposed multi-denominational school would of necessity be of a type more favourable than that given to schools under the management of different religious denominations and that such favourable treatment would not be permissible under the Constitution. I hope that the Rev. Mr. Williams will be able to deal with the problem on the lines suggested to him by the Minister and I can assure you that if proposals for a new school building are forthcoming, I will do my best to have them sanctioned as early as possible.

This was an interesting and unexpected response from the Taoiseach. While it reiterated the negative response of the Minister to the PTA, it also raised a new issue that had not arisen before – i.e. that "the aid required for the proposed multi-denominational school would of necessity be of a type more favourable than that given to schools under the management of different denominations". This issue had never previously been highlighted either by the Minister or his Department officials or by the PTA. It seemed on first reading to hold out

some hope that provided the aid requested was no more than that usually provided for denominational schools the proposal of the PTA might still be open to further consideration at government level.

However, a few days later, on 1st April 1974, a further letter received from the Taoiseach dashed any such hopes. This letter was to the chairman of the PTA, Hilary Pratt, and stated:

> The Minister for Education has told me that in Dalkey and the surrounding area there are State-aided primary schools (national schools) having overall pupil accommodation well in excess of what is required to serve the number of potential pupils from the age of six years onwards. (Six years is the age at which attendance at school becomes compulsory).

The Taoiseach's letter stated that the Minister did not consider that a further new national school (i.e. in the sense of a new institution) was required in the area, but he acknowledged the need for a new building for St. Patrick's N.S. He ended his letter by stating: "May I again express the hope that it will be possible for the Rev. Mr. Williams to overcome the problems which have arisen on the basis suggested by the Minister".

The letter of 8th March from the Department to Rev. J.F.O. Williams, and the two letters to the chairman and secretary of the PTA from the Taoiseach left the parents in no doubt that their request for support from government for a new multi-denominational school for the Dun Laoghaire/Dalkey area would not be conceded. And since the manager was clearly not in favour of allowing the multi-denominational "experiment" in St. Patrick's N.S. to continue, an impasse had been reached.

The *Education Times* of 4th April 1974 highlighted the Dalkey developments in its editorial, under the heading: "*Up the Rebels*". This editorial and a long article in the inside pages of the newspaper quoted from and commented on the letter of 8th March from the Department of Education. It questioned

the right of the Department under its own rules to instruct the manager to restrict entry to the school on the basis of religion and made the point that for over 140 years these rules specifically envisaged that national schools could not discriminate in their enrolment policies between children of different religions. This was a fundamental tenet of the national school system since its foundation in 1831 and in spite of some rule changes in 1965 this had remained unchanged. The article challenged the interpretation of the rules (and of the Irish Constitution) which was implicit in the Department's letter of 8th March and stated: "The founding of a school such as the Dalkey parents are asking for does not demand a revolution: but acceptance of the thinking behind the Minister's letter is tantamount to acceptance of a counter-revolution."

The article went on to state:

> The Dalkey case could have been dealt with by the Minister as an isolated phenomenon deserving his interested and positive consideration. Instead, he has chosen a method of resolving it which undermines a particular way of thinking about Ireland – which sees it as a country ruled by benevolent mandarins who are happy to allow a modest breathing space to their less fortunate fellow-countrymen of other persuasions and of none. Is this really the way we think about the island on which we live? Perhaps we should decide now, before the consequences become irreversible.

Meeting of the PTA of St. Patrick's N.S., April 1974:

Meanwhile, back in Dalkey, the PTA was not easily defeated. Within a few days of receiving the letter from the Taoiseach, a general meeting of the PTA was called (4th April 1974) at which a number of resolutions were passed unanimously:

"The PTA:

1. Endorses the efforts of the PTA committee in pursuing

the resolutions already passed by the Association expressing its commitment towards the development of an eight-teacher multi-denominational school, under a democratic management structure, and urges the committee to continue its efforts strenuously on the Association's behalf.

2. Considers that the Department of Education's instruction to the Manager to reject the applications of four-year olds, and to select other entries on denominational grounds will seriously damage the school, both in its educational structure and in respect of the multi-denominational character of the school; and is particularly concerned about the harm which will be inevitably done to the children whose educational development is being held back for a year

3. Calls on the Manager to reject this instruction, and to work with the PTA towards finding an interim solution to the problem which will enable a full entry of Junior Infants for the next school year, but which will not place any further financial liability on parochial funds

4. Authorise the PTA to take preliminary legal advice on the constitutionality or legality of the Minister's instruction to the Manager".

The following week[34], the *Education Times* gave full coverage to the motion passed by the St. Patrick's PTA in an article headed "*Dalkey N.S.: the paper war*". This article contained a report of the meeting of 27th February of the PTA with the Minister for Education as well as the text of the Taoiseach's correspondence with Pat Johnston and Hilary Pratt.

34. *Education Times,* 18th April 1974.

Opposition to and Support for the PTA's proposal, April 1974:

By this stage, the media coverage of the St. Patrick's saga had stimulated reaction from both supporters and critics. The critics included two Dalkey women, Mrs. Ann Lavelle and Mrs. Treasa Ó Raghallaigh, of the Irish Family League, who wrote to the Irish Press on 19th April 1974 as follows:

> As Dalkey parents, we would like to support the decision of the Minister for Education on the question of St. Patrick's N.S., Dalkey. We would also like to support the clerical manager, in this case, the C of I. vicar, who never made any request for any such school. We say this in appreciation of the fine virtues of Irish Protestantism, and their different tradition and philosophy. In inter-denominational education, we are talking of 95% (Catholic) v. 5% (Protestant) in the south. The Protestant pupils would be heavily outnumbered. And if this school system were widely adopted one can see no surer way of wiping out the Protestant tradition, fostered by its separate schools guaranteed by the Constitution. Who wishes to see that happen? We certainly don't, and to say that denominational education is in any way divisive, in Dalkey of all places, is completely unfounded. The religious formation of Catholics, we think, would be better catered for in a specifically Catholic school. What concerns us about the interdenominational idea is that it appears to be a perfect milieu for secular humanist infiltration and what begins off as an interdenominational theistic school ends up as a school for manufacturing humanists. No, let the Catholics have their schools, the C. of I. theirs, the Presbyterians theirs and the Humanists theirs – if they have enough children to fill one.

This was the first shot in what was to become an ongoing barrage of criticism of the Dalkey School Project from various right-wing groups and individuals. One of the authors of this

letter, Treasa Ó Raghallaigh, was the wife of John O'Reilly (Eoghan Ó Raghallaigh), referred to in Chapter 1.

However, for every objector, there was a supporter – and sometimes a significant voice, as was the case on this occasion. On 4th May 1974, Jack Lynch, leader of Fianna Fáil (then in opposition) in a speech at the annual dinner of the Tallaght *Comhairle Ceantair* at Blessington, Co. Wicklow said[35]:

> I am convinced that it would be eminently desirable in the context of the Northern Ireland situation, that young people of different religions should be brought together and given an opportunity to know and understand each other. In what better environment can this be done than at school?

While his comments related specifically to Northern Ireland and to a proposal by the then Northern Ireland Minister for Education, Basil McIvor, to undertake a pilot scheme for integrated education at primary level in the north, it was welcomed by supporters of multi-denominational education in the south as it was the first indication that support for the principle of multi-denominational or integrated education was forthcoming from one of the main political parties. In a speech in the Dáil the following month (June 1974) Lynch confirmed and extended his support with the following statement: "A reasonable progression of this development would be to make integrated education available in this country at primary level on a pilot basis and on a limited scale".

It is interesting that the first statement of political support for multi-denominational or integrated education referred to hope that educating children of different religions would contribute to a more peaceful society. Reminiscences received from one of the early pupils of the Dalkey School Project, Eoin Fahy who was nine years of age at the time also referred to the

35. *Irish Times*, 6th May 1974.

influence of the so-called "Northern Troubles". He states[36]:

> Perhaps surprisingly, given my age at the time, I did actually understand the significance of the project. Every day on the news I saw stories about the troubles in Northern Ireland at a time when violence was running at a high level. I 'got' that this was a religious conflict, and that my parents and others really believed that educating children separately (by religion) was part of the problem. I also understood, I think, that we should show a good example to the people of Northern Ireland by showing them that the Republic was tolerant of all religions and should not discriminate or separate in its own education system. As a child, at any rate, that was the argument that made most impact on me – I don't remember as much focus on more theoretical issues like separation of church and state, or concepts like human rights etc.

Unconditional support for multi-denominational education and for the Dalkey parents was forthcoming from the start from the Labour Party. The *Education Times* of 6th June 1974 reproduced the Labour Party's policy statement for the Dun Laoghaire / South Co. Dublin area which included a statement that "the party supports the Dalkey parents and teachers who are seeking an inter-denominational school for the area" and added: "Indeed, Labour favours the broadening of this concept to all levels of education".

A final effort on the part of the P.T.A. of St. Patrick's N.S.

By the end of April 1974, it was clear that neither the Minister for Education nor the manager of St. Patrick's N.S. were prepared to make any concessions to the PTA. In a reply to a Dáil question asked by Barry Desmond in April 1974, Minister Burke confirmed that he "would not appoint a sixth teacher to St. Patrick's N.S". This meant that a restrictive enrolment

36. Eoin Fahy, *Memories of the early days of the DSP,* 17th September 2019.

policy would be imposed immediately and that enrolment in the school would be capped at a maximum of 180 pupils from 1st July 1974. Given that there were at that time upwards of 200 pupils on rolls in the school, this new policy would effectively mean that no new pupils would be accepted to replace the pupils who were leaving the school at the end of the school year.

On 29th April 1974, Hilary Pratt, chairperson of the PTA, again wrote to the Taoiseach appealing to him to intervene and on 2nd May 1974, Pat Johnston, secretary of the PTA wrote to Minister Burke, sent him the resolutions passed by the parents at the meeting of 4th April and asked him to explain his statements in the Dáil "that he would not appoint a sixth teacher to St. Patrick's". However, neither the reply received from the Taoiseach nor the acknowledgement from the Minister for Education (both dated 19th June) gave any hope of a change in policy.

Micheal Johnston had been quietly active behind the scenes during the previous months ensuring that the media was kept informed of developments in Dalkey. On 9th May, in a lengthy article in the *Education Times* under the heading *"Dalkey School: The View from the Middle"* he wrote:

> The Dalkey parents involved in the St. Patrick's dispute, are not a number of things that their opponents would have them be: they are not a lunatic group of subversives out to embarrass the state in any way possible: they are not in any way trying to deprive the majority of people in the country of segregated educational system that meets their needs; they are not a group of unfortunates manipulated by a scheming and self-perpetuating committee; nor are they a parasitic group seeking a cut-rate elitist school at the expense of a struggling Church of Ireland parish. All these things we have been accused of being.

The reference in the article to a "cut-rate elitist school" related

to rumours that the Minister for Education, Richard Burke, had commented to some of his colleagues that what the Dalkey parents were really seeking under the guise of multi-denominational school was a selective non-fee-paying primary school funded by the Department of Education.

In the article, Micheal Johnston went on to clarify the five points in the Dalkey parents' commitment, which had been endorsed "time and time again unanimously, or almost unanimously" by the parents. In summary, the five points were:

1. A child-centred approach to education based on the 1971 New Primary Curriculum

2. Co-education

3. Multi-denominational

4. A school run by a management committee with significant democratic involvement of the parents

5. Planned development towards an 8-teacher school

His article stated that:

> We are not saying that everyone must have multi-denominational education; but just as those who wish to have Catholic education or Church of Ireland education should be entitled to have it, so too should those who wish to have multi-denominational education have that right.

This was a point that had to be made again and again in subsequent years, when the Dalkey School Project was continually accused of trying to drive the churches out of education and of planning to secularise the system of education in Ireland.

He ended the article with the statement:

> The Dalkey parents are not looking for preferential

> treatment; they are looking for fair treatment and for an educational framework to which they are Constitutionally entitled; and they are prepared to do their share in bringing this about. Is the State flexible enough and free enough to do its share?

The five principles set out by Micheal Johnston in his article were to become the founding principles of the Dalkey School Project some months later. In retrospect it is impressive that these key principles remained unchanged for so long, were widely adopted, and ultimately provided the basis for the Educate Together charter in the early 1990s. Apart from the fifth principle relating to school size they are still the keystone principles of Educate Together forty-five years later.

Annual General Meeting of St. Patrick's PTA, 20th June 1974,

It was now clear that there would be no changing the views of either the government or the manager of St. Patrick's N.S. Since the PTA was of the view that they had taken all reasonable steps, to no avail, to effect a change in the proposed enrolment policy, it was decided in the context of the AGM of the Association, to propose a vote of no confidence in the policy of the manager. The task of proposing the motion fell to the chair of the PTA, Hilary Pratt, who would be completing her term of office that evening and who would be ending her link with St. Patrick's N.S. as she would have no children in the school the following year.

In her report to the meeting, at which 71 families were represented out of a total of 118 families with children in the school, Ms. Pratt thanked the very many parents who had supported the school in various ways during the previous year. She also highlighted the difficult physical conditions in which the teachers had had to operate and thanked them for their patience and forbearance. She noted that the teacher of the infants' class, Mrs. Hazel Riordan was leaving the school for a post in another school and that there would be a number of

changes in the school in the coming year.

She then proposed the following motion of no confidence in the policy of the manager, Rev. J.F.O. Williams:

> That the PTA no longer has confidence in the policy of the Manager of St. Patrick's N.S. and invites him to offer his resignation as manager, and failing that requests the Archbishop of Dublin as patron of the school to resume management and to negotiate a new form of management with the interested parties.

She emphasised that the motion was not a motion of no confidence in the manager, but that it was rather a motion of no confidence in his policy, stating:

> I want to make it quite clear that this resolution is positive and not negative. If it looks like the victimisation of one person, the fault lies in the Managerial system which vests all authority in one man. Thus if we say we have no confidence in the policy of the Manager it can look like a lack of confidence in the man. The Minister for Education made it quite clear that he could negotiate only with the Manager and all our representations must come through him; but the Manager does not represent the views of the parents or the teachers. Therefore we have no alternative but to ask for a form of management that does represent us and can negotiate with the Department of Education.

She went on to highlight the extent to which St. Patrick's N.S. had been in the limelight during the previous year and made the point that there were dangers as well as advantages of being in the media spotlight.

> We have had a lot of publicity this year and the danger with publicity is that things can get distorted or motives misinterpreted. It is also true that the world is full of knockers who criticise anyone who is prepared to make the effort to stand up for what they believe is right. I

> am glad to say that there are also a lot of people who believe that what we have in Dalkey is worth standing up for and being counted for. The idea that children of all religions and none should go to school together is a good idea and a Christian idea – and where better for a Christian idea to start but from a Church school.

She finished her report by saying:

> Someone somewhere has said that there is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come. I pray that for the sake of this school and this country that the time is now.

The motion was passed with 76 votes in favour and 11 against. Voting was by secret ballot after due notice of the motion had been circulated to all members by post with the notice of the meeting. The teacher members of the association did not participate in the vote. An article in the *Irish Times* days later gave details of the outcome of the meeting, stating:

> The campaign for a multi-denominational school in Dalkey took a further step last week when a meeting of the PTA there voted 76 – 11 in favour of a resolution of no confidence in the policy adopted by the manager of their school, Rev. Frank Williams … During the meeting a letter from the Taoiseach, Mr. Liam Cosgrave, to Mrs. Hilary Pratt, outgoing chairman of the PTA, was read. In his letter Mr. Cosgrave said that while the Minister for Education was "most anxious" that parents and teachers should join together in "school associations" he could not envisage such an association being given the right of direct negotiation with the Minister in relation to matters affecting the school".

Legal Opinion

In the meantime, the PTA had decided to implement the final paragraph of the motion that had been passed at the

general meeting of 4th April, i.e. to seek legal advice on the constitutionality of the decision to restrict entry to the school. On 3rd May legal advice was sought from Donal Barrington, Senior Counsel, on the constitutionality of the directive in the Department's letter of 8th March. (Donal Barrington was subsequently appointed to the Court of First Instance in Luxembourg and was later appointed a Supreme Court Judge in Ireland).

The solicitor appointed to brief Donal Barrington, S.C. was Donald Pratt, husband of Hilary Pratt, outgoing chairman of the PTA. In his covering letter to senior counsel, Donald Pratt told Barrington that an issue of injustice had arisen in connection with the national school in Dalkey. "I take the liberty of sending you a Case relating to the problems which have occurred there. … I do not think that the moral values of the PTA's claims can be challenged. The only problem is whether there are any grounds upon which a claim under the Constitution can be made…". The brief was detailed and set out the history of the school, the issues which had arisen in the previous two years and the efforts made by the PTA to support the growth of the schools and the de facto multi-denominational intake of pupils.

Mr. Barrington provided his advice on 20th June 1974. While the advice raised questions about the Department's rules and its endorsement of an enrolment policy which would be based on the religious affiliation of pupils, he raised some fundamental questions about the standing of the PTA to take a case against either the manager or the Department. The advice stated:

> The Department of Education appears to … say if through circumstances which are insoluble in the short run, there is a shortage of places in a School owned and managed by a particular denomination, that the owners and managers of the School are entitled to take in children of their own particular denomination ahead of children of other denominations. In doing this they

> are preferring a particular child because of his religious belief. It appears to me that it is at least arguable that they are not entitled to do this.
>
> Article 44.2. 3. of the Constitution provides as follows: "The State shall not impose any disabilities or make any discrimination on the ground of religious profession, beliefs or status".
>
> This provision has been most strictly interpreted by the Courts; has been construed to mean that the State must not make any distinction at all between citizens based on their religious professions or status.

He then quoted page 8 of the Rules for National Schools which state: "In pursuance of the provisions of these Articles (of the Constitution) the State provides for free primary education for children in national schools and gives exclusive recognition to the denominational character of these schools", and commented: "This statement appears to raise the extraordinary suggestion, not in my view warranted by the Constitution, that all national schools are denominational schools".

However, overall, his advice was not encouraging in terms of the PTA's *locus standi*:

> To summarise, I do not see any means whereby PTAs can force the Minister to treat with it. The Association as such does not appear to have any status in law either vis-à-vis the Manager or vis-à-vis the Minister. …

While he thought that "it *may* be possible to force the School to accept children who are not members of the Church of Ireland and who are not Protestants …" he added:

> Needless to say this contention has far-reaching implications, which might have, if successful, a revolutionary effect on the whole national school system. For that reason, Querists, in attempting to challenge the Constitutional validity of the present system, would be assuming a very heavy onus which would involve them in prolonged and difficult litigation,

> the outcome of which could not be guaranteed … Such litigation might have to be taken to the Supreme Court. The costs incurred by the parents concerned would be very considerable. The PTA might have to arrange suitable indemnities for the parents who brought the proceedings.

While Senior Counsel Barrington indicated a willingness to consider the matter further and asked for more details about the national school system, the ownership of the St. Patrick's school building and other information, the PTA committee decided not to pursue the legal route and this cleared the way for the setting up of an association, independent of St. Patrick's and of any church or school.

In retrospect, the failure of the Church of Ireland to continue with the multi-denominational "experiment" in St. Patrick's N.S. Dalkey, might well be regarded as providential, because as Micheal Johnston wrote more than thirty years later: "what came later – the Dalkey School Project and EDUCATE TOGETHER – was a much more important and radical development for the Irish education system"[37].

37. M. Johnston, "Educate Together and the Church of Ireland" in *Search*, Autumn 2006.

Chapter 3

The Dalkey School Project Association June 1974 – October 1975

In Chapter 2, the saga of St. Patrick's N.S., Dalkey during the period from 1972 to 1974 was documented. At the AGM of the PTA in June 1974, a vote of no confidence in the policy of the manager of St. Patrick's had been carried decisively, but in spite of that, it was clear that he (the manager) had no intention of amending the enrolment policy which gave priority to children of Church of Ireland parishioners. He had the full support of the patron of the school (the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin) and of the Minister for Education for this policy, so the multi-denominational experiment in St. Patrick's N.S. had effectively come to an end. The PTA had no standing to negotiate with the Department of Education nor to take over the management of the school even if the manager resigned. Since the majority of the school's parents (and a significant number of parents who were not involved in St. Patrick's) wished to send their children to a multi-denominational school, some way of setting up such a

school would have to be found.

A campaign by a sub-committee of St. Patrick's PTA in late spring 1973 had gathered over 500 signatures in the Dalkey / Dun Laoghaire area which indicated that there would be very considerable support for a multi-denominational school. When it became clear that St. Patrick's, Dalkey, would no longer meet this need, Micheal Johnston and some other parents began to meet as an informal ad-hoc group to explore what other approaches might be adopted to pursue the goal of setting up such a school.

My husband, Bill, and I were among the parents who were involved in this group. Neither of us was surprised at the unwillingness of the Church of Ireland to sponsor a multi-denominational education in Dalkey. We had followed the controversy of the previous few years over the control and management of (post-primary) comprehensive and community schools in Ireland and it was clear that the two main Christian churches in Ireland were not interested in sharing control and power either with each other or with any other school patron[38]. As Bill was a civil servant working in the Department of Education, he had to be discreet about his involvement in the Dalkey movement which would be perceived as disruptive and undermining of the existing denominational national school system.

As a member of the *Investment in Education* team from 1962 to 1965 and subsequently as a senior statistician in the Development Branch of the Department of Education, Bill was known as a person who questioned and challenged the status quo in Irish education. Bill was born in Cork in 1925 where both his parents were teachers – his mother was a national school teacher and his father was a vocational school teacher. He was a boarder in St. Colman's diocesan college in Fermoy during the years of the Second World war and he

38. L. O'Flaherty, *Management and Control in Irish Education: the post-primary experience.*

subsequently spent four years in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth as a seminarian. He was disillusioned by the unintellectual approach of the Catholic church to the training of their priests and to its dogmatism and rigidity and left Maynooth to study mathematics and statistics in University College Cork where he graduated with a B.Sc. in 1947. The following year he was recruited as a statistician to the newly set up Central Statistics Office in Dublin. He subsequently spent a number of years as a statistician in the United Nations in New York before coming back to Ireland in 1962 as a member of the *Investment in Education* team, where he identified serious shortcomings in the Irish education system. In 1964 he returned to the United Nation and was sent to the Statistical Office of the Economic Commission for Europe in Geneva where he spent two years before returning to Dublin as Senior Statistician in the Department of Education in summer 1966.

From the mid-1960s to the early 1970s, when successive Fianna Fáil Ministers for Education were committed to updating and modernising the Irish education system, Bill's questioning and "contrarian" approach were regarded within the Department as a virtue[39]. He played a significant role in the introduction of free second level education and in the development of comprehensive and community schools as well as in other aspects of educational reform. However, when Richard Burke was appointed Minister for Education in 1972 with a more conservative agenda than his predecessors, the Development Branch was phased out and Bill's reforming ideas were no longer appreciated nor required within the Department of Education. Bill was ready for a new educational planning challenge – this time as an outsider rather than an insider!

During the subsequent four years – from 1974 until

39. J. Harford and B. Fleming, "Agency and Advocacy: The Key Actors behind the Free Education Initiative" in J. Harford (ed.) *Education for All? The Legacy of Free Post-Primary Education in Ireland*.

the DSP National School opened in 1978 – Bill played an important role in identifying, developing, and critiquing the plans and strategies adopted by the campaign. His planning and analytical skills were invaluable. In her PhD thesis in 2008, Belinda Moller described Bill as "the conceiving architect of the Educate Together school system" and stated that his role and influence in the setting up of the Dalkey School Project were "pivotal"[40]. She rightly pointed out that prior to the inaugural meetings of the Dalkey School Project in February 1975 he spent a significant amount of time thinking through the structural alternatives to the denominational school system and discussing with Micheal Johnston how the campaign for multi-denominational education should proceed.

My own background was also relevant and useful in developing a new strategy for the provision of multi-denominational education in the Dalkey area. I come from an Irish-speaking family of teachers and public servants. My father was a national school principal in the 1940s and was appointed a school inspector in 1948 from whence he rose through the ranks to become assistant chief inspector in the Department of Education in the 1970s and subsequently director of Institiúid Teangolaíocht na hEireann (the Linguistics Institute of Ireland). Five of my sisters are or were school principals or inspectors. When I sat my Leaving Certificate in 1959, I planned to become a national school teacher but left Carysfort (Teacher Training) College after a few months to take up a post as Executive Officer in the Buildings Branch of the Department of Education. I was seconded to work with the Investment in Education team from 1962 to 1964 where I met and fell in love with Bill Hyland. Because of the civil service marriage bar I had to resign my post in the Department of Education on my marriage to Bill. Following my marriage and the birth of my first two daughters, I qualified as a secondary school teacher in

40. B. Moller, *A Study of Values and Strategy Together in the Organisation.*

1969 and taught on a part-time basis in Hillcourt School from 1969 to 1973. In 1975, I graduated with a Masters Degree in Education from Trinity College, Dublin. My research was on the history of Irish education and in its administrative and financing structures, and given my years of experience as a civil servant in the Department of Education I had an in-depth understanding of the rules and procedures of the Department.

A New Approach

When it was clear that a multi-denominational school would no longer be supported in Dalkey by the Church of Ireland, Bill was adamant that those interested in exploring an alternative approach should disconnect entirely from the C of I parish of St. Patrick's. He argued that any new project or organisation should be clearly independent of and separate from the St. Patrick's N.S. PTA. A paper prepared by him in early summer 1974 on the strategy to be adopted by the new group set down a series of issues that needed to be considered:

> The tactical question is whether a public meeting to set up the Association formally should be held before or after the provisional association is incorporated as a limited company. The options (A and B respectively) apparently are:

A.

1. Hold a public meeting to formally constitute the Association inviting other people to become members. Elect officers and a committee to approve a constitution. State intention to form a company with the committee as the board of directors.

2. Form the company as appropriate after the public meeting

B.

1. Set up company as constituting the association without any public meeting, naming some persons (presumably members of the provisional committee) as temporary officers of the company and registering as shareholders those who have already paid their fees.

2. Hold a public meeting to invite other people to become shareholders in the company and let the public meeting be regarded as the first AGM of the company so that a new Board of directors can be appointed.

Bill's paper then went on to analyse the various options having set down criteria, advantages and disadvantages of each course of action. While he did not come down in favour of either option, the arguments were compelling in favour of Option A. This was the same methodology that Bill had applied when drafting the *Investment in Education* report in 1965. According to Belinda Moller, Bill's rational-analytic approach to the development of strategy, was critical to the success of the founding group.

Following consideration of the options, an ad-hoc group led by Micheal Johnston decided to accept option A and to hold a public meeting which would be open to anyone interested in the project and at which anyone could become a member of the new association.

On 15th June 1974 Micheal Johnston sent a one-page letter to the 500 families who had signalled their support for a multi-denominational school during the St. Patrick's campaign a year earlier as well as to the parents in St. Patrick's N.S. The letter stated:

> I am sending this note to you because you have already expressed interest in the principles, either by signing the questionnaire circulated by St. Patrick's N.S. PTA

> last year or in some other way. You may have other friends who are also interested.

He informed them that he (Micheal Johnston) had been asked "to act as Convenor of a steering committee to set up an Association of those interested in and committed to the provision of a multi-denominational National school under democratic management, centred on the Dalkey area", and stated that "only one decision had been made, to concentrate as a primary objective on making one such school a reality in an area where support for the principles has already been clearly expressed."

In the letter, he suggested that the five principles for such a school would be the principles which he had mooted at earlier meetings of the St. Patrick's PTA and had set out in an article in the *Education Times* in April 1974. These were:

1. A child-centred approach to education based on the 1971 New Primary Curriculum

2. Co-education

3. Multi-denominational

4. A school run by a management committee with significant democratic involvement of the parents

5. Planned development towards an 8-teacher school

The letter went on to state:

> It is recognised that in many parts of the country most people are quite satisfied with the present denominational character of primary education, and this scheme in no way seeks to undermine the rights of those who want such education, be they Catholic or Protestant, but with about 4,000 such National Schools in the country they are well catered for. The minority of us – and we would not claim to be more than a viable

> minority – who want our children educated together do not have one school.

The objective of the association would be "to concentrate our commitment in the way which will most effectively allow us to demonstrate the strength of our support, and which will enable us to collect whatever funds are necessary to achieve our objectives".

It was clear from this very early stage that despite its title, the Dalkey School Project was not just a local project. While the letter recognised that the initial support would centre around the Dalkey area, it stated: "we welcome and we will need support from all parts of the country – as we will hope to support others with a like interest when our primary objective has been achieved".

The letter indicated that a lot of thought had gone into the project already. It stated that there would be two meetings in the near future. At the first meeting the general principles of the association would be discussed, a steering committee would be elected, and the steering committee would draft a proposed constitution. The second meeting would consider this draft, amend it if necessary – and then formally adopt it, thus bringing the association into being. The officers and committee would be elected at the second meeting, and the ad hoc steering committee would cease to exist.

The two meetings would be held at 7.30 p.m. in Ross's Hotel, Dun Laoghaire on Sunday 30th June and Sunday 21st July. They would be private meetings for those sharing a common interest in the principles and objectives outlined in this note. Recognising that there was likely to be opposition to the project, the letter stated: "There will be plenty of opportunity for public debate with those who oppose these ideas after the DSP has been formally instituted."

Local Elections, June 1974:

Local elections, which were scheduled to take place on 18th June 1974 provided the first opportunity for the Dalkey campaign to go public, to inform the political parties about the proposed Dalkey School Project, and to canvass support from the candidates for the local elections.

On 15th June 1974 a one-page leaflet signed by Micheal Johnston, Convenor and headed: *Multi-Denominational National School for Dalkey: The Dalkey School Project,* was widely distributed in the Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown electoral area. This leaflet stated:

> All the candidates for the three Local Electoral Areas of Dun Laoghaire in the election for the Dun Laoghaire Corporation have been canvassed for their support for the objectives and principles of the DALKEY SCHOOL PROJECT: the candidates listed below all support the provision of a multi-denominational National School, centred on Dalkey, with a management committee which shall be significantly democratic in character.

The leaflet pointed out that there was support for the project "from right across the party spectrum", and the leaflet asked that everyone who supported the aims of the project would vote for candidates who were committed supporters.

A number of supporting candidates were elected to Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown Council and in subsequent years Jack Loughran (labour), Donal Marren (Fine Gael), and Margaret Waugh were particularly supportive and could be counted on to publicly support the Dalkey School Project whenever requested.

Preliminary Meeting of the Dalkey School Project – 30th June 1974.

On 30th June 1974 a preliminary meeting of the Dalkey School Project was held at 7.30 p.m. in Ross's Hotel, Dun Laoghaire. The convenor was Micheal Johnston and the minutes of the

meeting were taken by this author. From the very beginning we were determined that the campaign would comply with best practice in the running of its meetings. Notices were sent out in advance, including agenda and motions where relevant; minutes were carefully taken and hand-written into leather-bound minute books. Attendance lists were appended to the minutes and proposers and seconders of motions were recorded. Having spent a lot of time in national and local archives in the early 1970s when researching my Masters thesis, I was aware not just of the contemporary importance of accurate and well-written minutes but also of the long-term value to historians of such minutes. Consequently, the minutes of the many meetings of various committees of the Dalkey School Project were meticulously written and preserved and have been invaluable in researching and writing this book.

The first preliminary meeting of the Dalkey School Project was attended by 45 people who were described in the minutes as "those interested in a multi-denominational school in the Dalkey area." Micheal Johnston briefly outlined the history of St. Patrick's NS, Dalkey and concluded that "experience there had shown that multi-denominational education under denominational management was not a feasible proposition". He stated that it was clear that there was a demand in the Dalkey area for a multi-denominational school and that it was proposed to set up an association to set up such a school. The five proposed principles for such a school would be as set out in earlier documents.

He pointed out that it was recognised that in many parts of the country most people were quite happy with the denominational character of primary education and that the Dalkey School Project would in no way seek to undermine the rights of those who wanted such education. However, at that time there were over 3,500 denominational national schools in the country but there was not one national school under democratic multi-denominational management to cater for the

viable minority who wanted their children educated together. He proposed that a steering committee might be elected to draw up a draft constitution for the association.

Mrs. Helen Fahy seconded Micheal Johnston's proposal. She stated that there were a number of parents who had not been prepared to send their children to a multi-denominational school under Church of Ireland management but who would probably be happy to support such a school under democratic management. She raised the issue of the patronage of national schools and pointed out that even though the vast majority of the 3,500 schools in the country were under the patronage of the bishop of the diocese (either Catholic or Church of Ireland) this was not laid down in the Rules for National Schools. She proposed that the Dalkey School Project should seek a national school where all children regardless of religious or cultural background would be cherished equally and where no one would be a second-class citizen. She stated that as citizens we had a constitutional right to such a school.

Helen Fahy's intervention at this stage was very significant. Helen and Hugh Fahy were residents of Dun Laoghaire (they lived in Rosmeen Park) and both of them were from a Catholic background. Helen (née Moriarty) came from a Catholic nationalist family from Tralee, Co. Kerry, and in common with many such families she did not have much interaction with Protestants during her earlier life. Helen had been a civil servant in the Department of Education during the 1950s and early 1960s and was a friend of mine. Like myself, she had had to resign from the civil service on her marriage in the early 1960s. Hugh was a professional civil servant – he worked in the Department of Forestry (afterwards to become Coillte) and was born and reared in Dun Laoghaire. Helen and Hugh had two sons, Eoin and Colm, who in 1974 were aged six and two years of age. Helen's willingness to become involved in the Dalkey School Project (and subsequently to become secretary of the association) was significant as it meant that the leaders of

the DSP were no longer exclusively parents from St. Patrick's N.S. Helen brought a wealth of experience and knowledge of the administrative practices of the Department of Education to the Dalkey School Project table and was an ideal secretary for this new association.

The principles of the Dalkey School Project as set out in the notice of the meeting were discussed at some length at the preliminary meeting in Ross's Hotel on 30th June. A long discussion ensued as to whether the proposed school should be multi-denominational or non-denominational and eventually the meeting supported the proposal that it be a multi-denominational school. This issue was to be discussed at many subsequent meetings and continues to be a cause of lively debate in some Educate Together circles to the present day. Another principle which was discussed was the "democratic management" principle, with differing views being aired as to whether the management board should be 'significantly democratic' or 'predominantly democratic'. It was eventually agreed that the latter term – 'predominantly democratic' be adopted. It was subsequently explained that the word 'predominantly' was used in the interest of flexibility: for example it would enable a representative of transferors, who might in the future wish to transfer a school from the denominational sector to the multi-denominational, to be on the board of management or a representative of the Department of Education, or of a Local Authority. But in such a school the elected representatives must constitute a majority of the Committee.

A steering committee to prepare for the setting up of a formal association was elected at the meeting. The committee comprised Micheal Johnston (Convenor); Helen Fahy; Isobel Moore; Hilary Jenkins; David Spearman; Paddy Willis and Áine Hyland. It was notable that just two of the seven members of the steering committee had not been parents in St. Patrick's N.S. and had not been previously involved in the debate about

multi-denominational schooling – these were Helen Fahy and Isobel Moore.

21st July 1974 – Dalkey School Project – Second Preliminary Meeting

A second preliminary meeting was held as planned on 21st July. A reminder of this meeting was sent to "anyone interested in furthering the aims of the scheme" whether they were able to attend the first meeting or not. The note continued: "we would like to thank those who could not attend but wrote letters of support".

The main item on the agenda was the adoption of an initial draft of a constitution and the enlargement of the steering committee. The reminder pointed out that copies of the draft constitution would be available at Ross's Hotel from 7 p.m. or could be collected from Micheal Johnston's home before that. The reminder explained that "as this draft will become guidelines to our legal advisers, rather than a formal constitution, it was felt unnecessary and uneconomical to have 600 copies printed for all those who have expressed interest in the aims of the Project".

The second preliminary meeting was attended by 49 people. As was the case at the first preliminary meeting, the convenor was Micheal Johnston and I was the minute taker. The initial draft constitution was considered in the context that if it was agreed it should form the basic terms of reference and guidelines to be passed to the legal adviser to the project who would form a limited company. The draft constitution was accepted with some small amendments.

The meeting resolved "that the Steering Committee be authorised to proceed with the setting up of a company". In addition, the steering committee was enlarged and authorised to carry on the work of the project until the limited company was formed. The three names which were added to the steering committee were Patricia Lyle, Jim Buckley and Jim Love. Neither Patricia Lyle nor Jim Love had been associated with the St. Patrick's N.S. saga.

Under *Any Other Business,* it was reported that "to date £40 + had been collected and expenses had been about the same. All money so subscribed would be credited towards the first year's subscription once the organisation was formally set up. A further £30 was collected at this meeting on that basis".

It was to be some months before the formal inaugural meeting of the Dalkey School Project was held. Micheal and Pat Johnston's youngest son, Josh, was born in August 1974 and the following months were busy family months. The solicitor who had been appointed to set up the Dalkey School Project as a limited company (Donald Pratt) had discontinued practising as a solicitor to set up a business and another solicitor had to be found and briefed. Moreover, some of the members of the steering committee continued to be active and busy in the PTA in St. Patrick's N.S. Dalkey. The DSP steering committee held many informal meetings during the period from summer 1974 to February 1975 when issues such as the structures of the association, the responsibilities of various bodies and procedural issues such as quora of meetings, terms of reference etc. were teased out and agreed.

23rd February 1975: Dalkey School Project Inaugural Meeting

The inaugural meeting of the Dalkey School Project was held in Ross's Hotel, Dun Laoghaire at 7.30 p.m. As had been the case for the two preliminary meetings, Micheal Johnston was convenor and I was minute-taker. The meeting was attended by over 80 people. The agenda for the meeting included: formal registration of members; adoption of the proposed constitution (as revised following the meeting of July 1974); election of officers and executive committee; resignation of the steering committee and the taking of office of the executive committee.

In his introductory speech, Micheal Johnston set out the actions taken to date and said that there was ample evidence of demand for such a school in the Dalkey area. He stressed that

countrywide support would be very welcome and expressed the belief that the establishment of the first such school would open the door to the possibility of such a school in any area of the country where there might be viable support.

In an impressive speech, David Spearman, a Professor in the School of Mathematics in Trinity College, afterwards to become Vice-Provost of TCD, formally proposed the setting up of the Dalkey School Project. At that time, Professor Spearman was also a member of the board of Mount Temple comprehensive school, one of two Protestant comprehensive schools which had been set up in Dublin. In his speech he stated that "children of different denominations or religious outlook will be brought together and will find what they have in common instead of being segregated and having differences emphasised". He added: "It has become clear that many parents would seek this integrated school environment, with freedom from denominational control, for their children", stating that "At present, at primary level, it is probably correct to say that there is no such school in this country – although there are some school under denominational management which have a reasonable denominational mix among their pupils".

As was repeated many, many times during the subsequent debate on the Dalkey School Project, Professor Spearman emphasised:

> Lest there be any confusion it should be made clear that there is no suggestion that the present denominational system should be overthrown; all that we ask is that this alternative type of school should be available to those who seek it.

Emphasising the democratic aspect of the project, he said:

> Why should we be so concerned about control? Well primarily of course this is to ensure that the objective relating to the nature of the school may be attained. It is also important to ensure that the school will be

> managed by people whose concern is for the school and its educational wellbeing and who will not be torn by a conflict of interest, for example between school and parochial objectives.

He referred to the civil rights aspect, which he described as "the matter of recognition by the State of people as individuals not categorised by denominational labels", adding:

> You may be surprised that I should raise this as a problem because one might suppose that such recognition was to be taken for granted in a country such as ours. It should of course, but where primary education is concerned it is not.

He pointed out that primary education was currently provided by the State on a denominational basis, stating: "We are expected to divide up under denominational labels and schools will be provided within these categories. I realise that many people are quite happy with this arrangement but some of us are not."

He concluded his speech by saying:

> We look to the State to recognise the rights of those who seek an integrated school for their children and where there is sufficient demand to provide schools for them. An important reason to me for supporting this project is that it seeks to establish the rights of a group of people, probably quite a small minority, who seek recognition and equal treatment which at present appears to be denied to them. I see this not just in the narrow sense of individuals demanding their rights but also in the wider sense of making a contribution to the improvement of our country.

Other speakers at the inaugural meeting included Jack Loughran, Mike Norris, Robin Tamplin, Desmond Green, Vincent Philips, Andrew Parkes, Niall de Bharóid, John de Courcy-Ireland. None of these speakers had been involved in the St. Patrick's Dalkey controversy so their engagement was particularly welcome.

This was the first meeting attended by Desmond Green who

subsequently became a central figure in the Dalkey School Project. Desmond was born in Athlone where he was educated by the La Sainte Union nuns in a co-educational primary school. The school was across the road from the Church of Ireland primary school so he had an early realisation of segregation by religion but at that time he accepted it as the way the world was. He then attended the Marist Brothers secondary school – an all-boys' school – where he played hurling and was a member of the rowing team. He also played rugby while some of his schoolmates played soccer. Both games were frowned upon by the school and were considered 'foreign' games. He went on to UCD to study Chemical Engineering and while there, unusually for an engineering student, he was elected Auditor of the L&H Society. In 1962 he went to the University of New Brunswick in Canada where he was conferred with an MSc. He befriended fellow graduate students from India, Pakistan, China and Korea as well as other European countries. His involvement with the World University Service there introduced him to many different cultures and religious beliefs. Later at the University of Waterloo he came to know and befriend people of Amish and Lutheran backgrounds. He taught in Canada for two years before working in industry in Canada and the USA. He married Gale O'Brien (a Canadian and an Episcopalian) in 1967 and they returned to Ireland in 1971. At the time of the inaugural meeting of the Dalkey School Project in 1975, Desmond and Gale had two children - Siobán aged 5, who was attending a Montessori school, and Deirdre aged 3. Desmond was a practising Catholic.

In a subsequent interview, Desmond referred to the DSP inaugural meeting as follows[41]:

> I spoke at that meeting. I think a lot of people had come through an experience in St. Patrick's in Dalkey in which they had attempted to make a Church of Ireland

41. Quoted in B. *Moller, A Study of Values and Strategy Together in the Organisation.*

> school multi-denominational. But you couldn't actually transform an institution that was denominational into one that was multi-denominational. In my opinion it would have to have a fresh start. I had none of the scars of the battle in St. Patrick's … so I suppose I had the benefit that I was fresh and had no interest in their previous battles … Because what I was interested in was actually formulating this idea, abandoning the past, and setting up a new model. So that is really where it came from. And the inner dynamic of thinking that would satisfy the cultural and religious traditions for both my wife and I – and that it would respect them.

Bill Hyland was particularly pleased at the emergence of this unknown and previously uninvolved person and his contribution to the discussion at the inaugural meeting. Bill felt strongly that some of the critical figures representing the movement would have to be 'respectable and practising Catholics'. He was determined to find a Catholic figure who would be 'as passionately concerned as he was and who would be freer to speak up' – and he had found such a person in Desmond Green.

At this inaugural meeting, on 23rd February 1975, Micheal Johnston was elected chairman; Jim Love was elected honorary treasurer and Helen Fahy was elected honorary secretary. The newly elected committee comprised Hilary Jenkins; Hilary Pratt; Jim Buckley; David Spearman; Desmond Green and Áine Hyland. Of the nine members of the new executive committee, four had had no involvement in St. Patrick's N.S.

As well as setting out the fundamental objectives and principles of the Dalkey School Project, the two-page constitution which was adopted, included details about the various administrative structures which would be set up. The constitution stated:

> The DSP is an Association with the following fundamental objectives: To develop and support in

> Ireland the establishment of schools which are multi-denominational (i.e with equal right of access for the children of Catholic, Protestant and other parents, and with the cultural and social background of each child held in equal respect), coeducational and managed under a system which is predominantly democratic in character, wherever and whenever there is viable local support for such a school.

The second paragraph of the constitution spelled out that the first school would be a pilot school in the Dalkey area:

> The pilot enterprise of the project, in response to clearly expressed local commitment in the Dalkey area, is to provide a framework by which a National School under the Department of Education's Rules for National Schools may be established in the area which will meet the … five principles.

Membership of the association would be open to everyone who was prepared to accept the constitution of the project and to abide by its rules and decisions. The administrative structures and procedures were also included in the constitution. There would be a council of 20 members whose role would be to ensure that the principles of the association were upheld. Three members of the council would be elected as trustees of the project and an executive committee, elected annually at the AGM, would have responsibility for the day to day administration of the project. The constitution also set down procedures for annual general meetings, general meetings and special meetings as well as defining the roles of the chairman, secretary and treasurer.

The inaugural meeting of the Dalkey School Project got good coverage in the media. The *Irish Independent* of 21st Feb 1975 under the heading "*Seek school without labels*", wrote:

> Parents who are trying to get a multi-religious school started in Dalkey are not trying to "force the idea

> down anybody's throat" or take away the rights of those who see the need for denominational protection in our educational system. This was stated yesterday by Micheal Johnston, convenor of the Dalkey School Project, who announced that an inaugural meeting for the project will take place next night in Ross's Hotel, Dun Laoghaire. Sunday's meeting is the next stage in the search by a group of parents for the reality of an educational system in which their children may exist "without labels" in which Catholic, Protestant and other children may learn together, with the traditions and culture of each group held equally in respect. .. The parents have already agreed the basic principles for the school …"

The *Irish Press* and *Evening Press* of 24th February 1975 also covered the inaugural meeting. Under the headings "*School Plan Moves Ahead*" and "*School Experiment Launched*" it was reported that "the Dalkey School Project was inaugurated at a meeting attended by over 80 people in Dun Laoghaire last night …" The report pointed out that one of the first priorities of the project would be to carry out an extensive and thorough survey to find out the prospective number of pupils for the school and that the Association would concentrate for its pilot project on the establishment of a school in Dalkey where there had been evidence of support for their ideals over the past few years. It added: "They hoped that eventually there would be viable support for others in various areas".

The *Education Times* of 27th February 1975 included full page coverage of the inaugural meeting, quoting at length from the various speeches that had been made. A particular point that had not been highlighted in other reports was a reply given by Micheal Johnston to a query about religious education in a school under the patronage of the Dalkey School Project. In his reply he stated:

> Each school established under the DSP will have a

> management committee running it. This committee will represent the parents of the children in that school and will be responsible to them. One of their functions will be to provide for those parents the form of religious education which those parents require subject of course to the Rules of the Department of Education and of the Dalkey School Project. I would not envisage that every school committee would arrive at the same answer, nor would the Dalkey School Project expect them to; some might wish to invite the clergy of all denominations in to teach the children of those parents who wished for specific denominational instruction for their children: whereas another school's parents might decide that this would have a divisive effect on the school, and choose to make arrangements outside school hours for instruction in the various denominations. Either of these formulae would be acceptable to the Dalkey School Project with the democratic views of the parents concerned the deciding factor.

It was an interesting reply which summarised succinctly the approach taken by Educate Together during the first two decades of its existence. (The issue of how religious education was provided in the Dalkey School Project N.S. will be treated in more detail in an appendix).

Within a month of the inaugural meeting, the executive committee got down to work. On 17th March 1975 a one-page bulletin signed by the chairman Micheal Johnston, was widely disseminated, summarising the decisions that had been taken at the inaugural meeting on 23rd February. It is interesting to note that the phrase "EDUCATE TOGETHER" was used as a heading on this bulletin – a phrase that was later to be adopted as the name of the umbrella organisation for all multi-denominational schools. Since the mid-1990s, Educate Together is the legal name of the limited company recognised by the Department of Education as patron of subsequent multi-denominational schools.

The bulletin stated that over 200 people had already become members of the Dalkey School Project and had paid their 1975 subscriptions (£2 per individual and £3 per couple). The circular pointed out that "The Dalkey School Project now exists as a focal point for everyone in Ireland who would like to see the establishment of schools which are multi-denominational, co-educational, and under democratic management, wherever and whenever there is viable local support for such a school".

As in previous notices, the bulletin stated that the project's pilot enterprise was to bring about the establishment of a national school in the Dalkey area, pointing out that this would not be an easy task:

> The first school may be the hardest to achieve because although it could be set up tomorrow under the present Dept of Education Rules, it does cut across the present practice of schools under denominational management. The Project does not seek to abolish or even threaten such schools, but merely to seek comparable facilities for those whose lawful and conscientious preference is to have children educated together.

Already by this stage, the Minister for Education had been formally notified about the Dalkey School Project and its intentions. But the DSP was aware that its first tasks must be:

> To build our strength and membership, to plan and cost our pilot project (site costs, local costs of building and management etc). to find and acquire our site, and to build our Project fund; this educational trust fund may have to be considerable …

Opposition: Have the Snakes Come Back?

Opposition to the Dalkey School Project was already beginning to build. On 16th February, just a week before the inaugural meeting, the Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor, Dr. William Philbin was reported in the Sunday Press as stating: "Short of

banning religion completely, there is no greater injury that could be done to Catholicism than by interference with the character and identity of our schools". While this comment was not specifically aimed at the Dalkey School Project, it reflected the growing unease within the Catholic Church with what it regarded as a challenge to the monopoly of the Church in the ownership and management of schools.

The following month, a pamphlet entitled *Have the Snakes Come Back or Education and the Irish Child*, by an anonymous "Group of Catholic Parents" and edited by *Vera Verba*, was widely circulated in educational circles. The date of publication was St. Patrick's Day, 17th March 1975 and the title of the pamphlet was drawn from the story, well known to Irish school children at the time, of St. Patrick banishing the snakes from Ireland in the year 432.

While initially the "Group of Catholic Parents" hid behind a cloak of anonymity, in spite of efforts by the *Education Times* to identify them, *Vera Verba* (the English translation was "true words") was later found to be associated with The Council of Social Concern which shared an address at 8 Ely Place, Dublin 2 with the headquarters of the Knights of St. Columbanus. Other organisations which shared the same address and were described as "constituent organisations of the Council for Social Concern" were the Irish Family League, the Society to Outlaw Pornography; Christian Political Action Movement; Concerned Doctor Group; Youth Alert and Veritas Christi[42].

The pamphlet was scathing about some recent developments in Irish education criticising in particularly the Department of Education's agenda for post-primary education. Referring to the newly set up comprehensive and community schools, the pamphlet alleged that "the Department's ideal of a post-primary school is the jumbo American type of 'Blackboard Jungle' fame" and stated that *"it has been established that the*

42. E. O'Reilly, *Masterminds of the Right.*

Department has been in constant consultation with UNESCO" as well as the Council of Europe, the World Bank, the OECD and other external influences. It accused the Department of "marching to some distant drummer which no one else can hear. That drummer is UNESCO".

It went on to add: "The UN and its agencies may sound completely above board and respectable – whatever that means. Nazism was very respectable in Nazi Germany and atheistic communism is very respectable in Moscow and Peking …" The pamphlet named a number of civil servants in the Department of Education who it implied were collaborating with these reprehensible agencies, including Bill Hyland, who "had spent ten years as a statistician with the United Nations before his appointment as senior statistician in the Department of Education in the mid-1960s".

The pamphlet was strongly critical of John Dewey's philosophy of education and stated that "Progressive education is slowly penetrating into Ireland through UNESCO and other sources though it is not here officially yet". The Dalkey School Project was referred to as an example of such infiltration: "You can see flashes of it, in places, such as in the recent inter-denominational Dalkey School Project's request for child-centred education … and in other avant-garde or radical sources". "Multi-denominational, interdenominational or integrated schools" were particularly criticised, described as "basically neutral schools". The pamphlet reminded its readers that "such educational cocktails" were condemned by Pope Leo XIII and that "by their very nature these schools produce indifferentism". It ended by reminding readers that Catholic education in Ireland "has been bought with blood and suffering and the dedication of many people" and warned that the new trends in education were ignoring "the Catholic ethic and sixteen hundred years of history".

Correspondence with Minister for Education, Richard Burke:

The first meeting of the executive committee of the Dalkey School Project was held on 4th February 1975. This was a business-like meeting at which a range of practical issues were discussed, and responsibility was allocated to different members of the committee to undertake research and to report to the next meeting on membership; public relations; fund-raising; site costs, school costs and operation costs; site location; architect; school in relation to community; setting up of a Trust; undertaking a survey; identifying a catchment area; contacting the clergy; researching an International Foundations directory.

A month later, on 5th March 1975, a letter (jointly signed by Micheal Johnston as chairman and Helen Fahy as secretary) was sent to Minister Richard Burke informing him that the DSP had been formed as an association on 23rd February and apprising him of the fundamental objectives of the association … "The DSP's pilot enterprise will be to provide the framework by which such a National School may be established in the Dalkey area, in response to the clearly expressed local commitment over the past number of years".

The letter went on to state:

> At this time we are not making concrete proposals, because before we will be ready to do that we will have the initial tasks of building up our membership and funds, and quantifying more accurately than has been done to this time the support in the area and elsewhere for our plans. However we enclose for the information of your Department copies of the agenda of our inaugural meeting and of the Constitution passed at it.

The letter concluded by asking for "an opportunity to meet with officers of your Department with a view to formulating our eventual request to you in the way which is most compatible with your Department's procedures and with your general policies".

On 7th March 1975 an acknowledgement was received from the Minister's Secretary, P. Heffernan, stating "that a further letter will be sent to you as soon as possible". This was the first of many such acknowledgements.

The second meeting of the executive committee of the DSP was held on 8th March 1975. The chairman reported on membership and on the Trust. Hilary Pratt reported on a possible site. She also suggested from a public relations perspective that it might be wise to keep a low profile while trying to find a site. Desmond Green gave an outline report on how a survey might be carried out and showing an Ordnance Survey map of the area, suggested a possible catchment area for the survey. It was already becoming clear even at this early stage who the active and reliable members of the committee would be. Meetings were held monthly from that point on and regular updates about progress on the various issues were provided.

Jack Lynch's Petrus 75 article:

In early April 1975, the Fianna Fáil leader, Jack Lynch wrote an article entitled *"The Politician and the Church"* in *Petrus 75*, the annual magazine of St. Peter's College, Wexford stating his support for multi-denominational education. He emphasised the need to build a new pluralist society, north and south, "based on mutual respect for and an appreciation of the religious beliefs of our fellow men". He called for a new partnership between the churches and the state whereby the best traditions of the existing education system would be kept "while we promote the new and more exciting system of multi-denominational education and pass on their management to the laity". He added: "The denominational nature of primary education north and south of the border should be gradually phased out, while at the same time making adequate provision for the Churches' legitimate interests."

The *Irish Times* of 11th April, summarising Lynch's article,

predicted that the next decade would see vast changes in the position of the churches in the educational system of the republic. It stated that on education Lynch was of the view that there could be little doubt that both the churches and the politicians favoured change.

There was an immediate critical reaction from senior clerics in the Catholic Church to Jack Lynch's article. Writing in the bulletin *Intercom*, Fr. Con Sayers, secretary of the Episcopal Commission for Education stated:

> No attempts are made to tease out the practical implications of the term interdenominational education. Does it mean that every school must have a committee of management of lay people from different churches? Does it mean that every school must have a proportion of Catholic and Protestant teachers? Does it mean that parents of different religions will be told that their child must go to a particular school in order to maintain its interdenominational character? Does it mean that no voluntary body will have the right to manage a school? … In less than a year, Mr. Lynch seems to have moved a long way from his call for a pilot scheme for interdenominational schools at primary level of May 1974 …

Brother Eamon Ó Beacháin, a lecturer in education in St. Patrick's College, Maynooth also challenged Mr. Lynch to defend his proposals[43] commenting that he (Jack Lynch) "seemed to have moved a long way from his call for a pilot scheme for multi-denominational education in June 1974".

The Church of Ireland was more open to Jack Lynch's proposal. Dr. Kenneth Milne, secretary of the Education Board of the Church of Ireland, was cautiously supportive and said that the churches in Ireland, spanning the border as they did, and each having experience of being in a minority situation,

43. *Intercom*, June 1975.

should attempt "to learn about each other and from each other, and not least in our view of religion and the school".

The negative responses from Catholic clergy to Lynch's *Petrus* article were echoed by one of the education correspondents of the national newspapers. In the *Irish Press* of 9th May, Pat Holmes wrote:

> There is quite obviously a small but quite articulate lobby which would want to see education secularised in this country. It has some surprising adherents but it is quite obvious that the mass of people would not want this. To eliminate the religious dimension from education in the schools or to water it down and strip it of its familiar devotional expression would be to strike a mortal blow at the distinctive character of the Irish people and the real source of their strength. Some of the adherents of this lobby are pure secularists but many are people, I suspect, who have not thought the thing through or seen its implications. Others I am afraid are simply grasping at something which they think will sound "advanced". As I say, we are concerned at this but not over-concerned, because we are confident of the balance and sanity of the people as a whole.

On 30th June 1975, *Irish Independent* education correspondent John Walshe reported on an interview with Most Rev. Dr. Daly, Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise under the heading "*Joint Schools Not the Answer*" in which he (the Bishop) said that "integrated education would create more difficulties than it would solve and that it was not the answer to the Northern problem".

In response to the various criticisms of his *Petrus* article, Jack Lynch wrote a further article in the *Sunday Press* of 6th July 1975 in which he sought to set down his philosophical beliefs about education and to clarify his earlier statement. His article rowed back on some of the suggestions he had made in his *Petrus* article and strove to mollify the Catholic Church.

He stated: "There is no question of dismantling our current system; certainly I have not the slightest wish to see it done". He defined integrated education as follows: "Children from various religious backgrounds could attend the same school and receive their secular instruction side by side. Different groups would then follow different religious curricula appropriate to their different religious beliefs. It is in this sense that I use the term integrated education". He quoted from the well-known speech of the Catholic Bishop of Kildare and Leighlin (JKL) from 1830 in which he (JKL) said:

> I do not see how any man wishing well to the public peace, and who looks to Ireland as his country, can think that peace can ever be permanently established or the prosperity of the country ever be well secured, if children are separated at the commencement of life on account of their religious opinions. I do not know any means which would prepare the way for a better feeling in Ireland than uniting children at an early age, and bringing them up in the same school, leading them to commune with one another and to form those little intimacies and friendships which often subsist through life.

He went on to state that in Ireland:

> There is no power in the land which can prevent a group of parents from establishing a denominational school if they so wish … Likewise, there is no power in the land to prevent a group of parents from establishing an interdenominational school if that is what they want. The right of the parents is paramount in one case as in the other. This right seems to me to be fundamental …

He reminded his readers that on several occasions during the past two years he had suggested a small pilot scheme of multi-denominational school, adding:

> If there are undesirable side effects, then we could

> modify our position when these show up. Such schools would have students and teachers belonging to different denominations. There would be separate religious instruction for each group within the normal school day and a shared curriculum for other subjects.

He stated that there was absolutely no question of interfering with the existing provision of new schools unless parents opted for interdenominational facilities and stated: "Where a clear majority want a multi-denominational school in a viable school situation, they have similar rights".

On 7th July in the *Irish Independent*, John Walshe commented on Jack Lynch's article in the *Sunday Press* under the heading *"Lynch has Rethink on Integrated Education".* He stated that "Fianna Fáil leader Jack Lynch appears to have modified his demands for integrated education", pointing out that in April Lynch had called for the phasing out of the denominational nature of primary schools both north and south. But now he was talking about pilot projects and asserting that there was absolutely no question of dismantling our current system of education. Walshe quoted Fr. Con Sayers as saying that the latest views expressed had been considerably modified and moderated in a number of important areas. Lynch was no longer talking about the phasing out of denominational education, but about integrated pilot experiments which he felt might be "more acceptable given careful monitoring and the proper checks and balances."

Interestingly, Walshe reported that Mr. John Wilson T.D., Fianna Fáil's spokesperson for education, had disclosed to the *Irish Independent* that a summary of Mr. Lynch's views would be contained in Fianna Fáil's new discussion document on education, which was nearly completed and which would be circulated to local *cumainn* in the near future. It would take some time for this to be relevant for the Dalkey School Project, but ultimately, Jack Lynch's openness to pilot projects on multi-denominational education, and the inclusion of this in Fianna

Fáil's election manifesto two years later would eventually provide the long-awaited breakthrough for the Dalkey School Project.

In his article, Walshe quoted Micheal Johnston as saying that the Dalkey School Project was delighted with Mr. Lynch's remarks. He (Michel Johnston) had stated that its supporters had no desire to ram integrated education down anybody's throat. But they felt that where there was sufficient demand for it, a multi-denominational school should be provided.

In the meantime, on 2nd May 1975, Helen Fahy, Secretary of the DSP had sent a further letter to the Minister for Education Richard Burke stating:

> The DSP now has a membership of over 230 and it is apparent that there is considerable support for the proposal to establish a multi-denominational National School in the Dalkey area. Our Committee is now preparing to carry out a detailed survey of the area to establish the full extent of our local support. We would appreciate the advice of officers of your Department as to the format and layout of our proposed questionnaire. With this in view we are now requesting a meeting with your officers to discuss the matter.

On 15th May 1975 a further acknowledgement was received from the Minister's Secretary, P. Heffernan stating: "I will bring (your letter) to the attention of the Minister".

At the same time, Micheal Johnston had issued a press release to update the media on developments. On 11th May 1975, the *Sunday Press* reported under the heading "*New Mixed School Plan*" that "over 200 fully paid up members have now given their support to setting up a co-educational multi-denominational school in Dalkey". It also stated that the Dalkey School Project had now informed the Minister for Education and members of the political parties of their plans, but so far the committee had made no formal demands of the Department of Education. It added that the DSP hoped to build

up its membership from within their own area "and outside", and that they had agreed on five principles. The article added: "According to Mr. Johnston, the management committee has not yet decided what type of religious instruction, if any, will be undertaken at the school".

What the Dalkey School Project did not know at the time was that right-wing groups within the Catholic Church were already lobbying the government in support of retaining and strengthening the position of denominational schools. A file from the Taoiseach's office, now accessible in the National Archive, contains a letter dated May 1975 from Eilís Bean Ui Riain, secretary to the Federation of Christian Brothers' Parents Associations – a powerful lobby group at that time – referring to the Labour Party's pledge to "support groups and communities who are attempting to set up schools of the type envisaged by Labour Party policy – notably multi-denominational, co-educational schools under democratic control". The letter asked whether Labour Party policy was also committed to preserving "the freedom of choice of those many thousands of parents who wish their children to be educated in denominational school?" and asserted that "The answer to this question would appear to be a categorical "no". They warned the Taoiseach that such a move "would be totally unacceptable to the vast majority of Irish parents".

29th June 1975: DSP Seminar in Ross's Hotel: "EDUCATE TOGETHER – why? Or why not?

On 29th June the DSP held a public seminar on the theme of "EDUCATE TOGETHER" in Ross's Hotel, Dun Laoghaire, at which a wide range of speakers were invited. There were three sessions.

The topic of the first session was "Multi-denominational and multi-cultural education". This session was chaired by Hilary Jenkins from the Department of History in UCD and a

member of the executive committee of the DSP. Speakers were Barry Desmond T.D; Tony Spencer (QUB); T.C.G. O'Mahony and Paul McQuaid, child psychiatrist.

The second session was about "Democratic Control and Co-Education" and was chaired by David Spearman. Speakers were Patrick Lynch, UCD; Tommy Phelan, Ballyfermot; Maire Mullarney, Association for Democracy in Education, and Catherine McGuinness, Chair of the Federation of Parents' Association.

The third session focused on "The Practical Way Ahead" and was chaired by Desmond Green. Speakers were Cecil Linehan, Chair of the Northern Ireland All Children Together; Pat Moloney, St. Michael's House; Riobard MacGabhráin, Gael Linn; Senator John Horgan; and Jim Love, Treasurer DSP.

In her talk, Catherine McGuinness, then chairperson of the Federation of Parents' Associations and afterwards to become a Judge of the Supreme Court, referred to the announcement by the Minister for Education that financial grants to national schools would be dependent on the setting up of a new system of management committees. She stated:

> Over past years, the constitutional guarantees on the family as primary and natural educator of the child, and on the inalienable rights of parents, not to mention the imprescriptible rights of the child, have existed hand in hand with an educational system where rigid Department of Education control of curricula, examinations, and the inspection system was coupled with firm control of ownership and management by religious, quasi-religious and private bodies. Freedom of choice never operated for parents who did not want their children educated on a rigidly denominational pattern.

Mrs. Cecil Linehan of Northern Ireland's All Children Together, outlined the growth of the integrated education movement in the north. The main block, she said "was in the

Catholic Church", and she stated that as long as the Church authorities refuse to give the proper means for consultation and discussion, "matters of concern will either not be discussed at all or end up in public discussion".

A pessimistic note was sounded by Barry Desmond, T.D., who, while praising Jack Lynch's stance on integrated education, indicated that he did not foresee the present government (of which he was a member) supporting multi-denominational education. Reporting on Barry Desmond's speech in the *Irish Times* on 30th June, religious affairs correspondent, John Cooney wrote that *"Integrated schools unlikely under coalition, says Desmond"*. He stated that in his speech, Barry Desmond had referred to the "courageous and encouraging" statements of Jack Lynch but added: "we have seen the bitter and entrenched reaction to Mr. Lynch's statements from some Catholic spokesmen". Desmond had gone on to state that he personally supported the Dalkey School Project and believed that the Irish people could no longer afford the luxury of separate schools.

T.C.G. O'Mahony, a speaker at the first session, was a Dublin solicitor from whose office an organisation called Community Concern operated. He had been a vocal critic of change in Irish education during the previous years and had attended earlier public meetings of the Dalkey School Project with a tape-recorder, recording various speakers. In an article in the magazine *Hibernia* in June 1976, he was described by Brian Trench as

> Representing the thin end of a wedge of 'Catholic backlash' against mounting pressure in Dublin's newer residential areas for multi-denominational or inter-denominational education. He and his dedicated band of followers are committed to the defence of narrowly understood 'Catholic ethical principles'.

Micheal Johnston had decided to invite O'Mahony to speak

at the seminar so that he (O'Mahony) could publicly state his concerns about multi-denominational education. O'Mahony's rhetoric and conspiracy theories echoed those in the pamphlet "*Have the Snakes come back*". He stated that an attempt was being made to set up multi-denominational schools from which religion – and religious – would be excluded. He alleged that "there were very many active Communists in the country, and organisations such as USI and IUSS were controlled or manipulated by Communists who were trying to take over our schools". UNESCO was behind a lot of this, he said, and if anyone was in any doubt about it they would be shown the proof. "If the humanists want a school", he said "then let them declare their Godless philosophy and let them build their own school, do their own work – isn't that what the Christian Brothers did in the last century?"

Micheal Johnston subsequently wrote:

> T.C.G. O'Mahony and the friends that he brought with him, about ten in number, illustrated very clearly to the members and others present at the Seminar the very deep worries which they felt about any move away from the present strictly denominational set-up of Irish education, and their presence was valuable to the Seminar, giving it a tension which would otherwise have been absent and convincing many of our members that we have much work to do.

Closing the seminar, Johnston reaffirmed the aims of the Dalkey School Project and stressed that the project would need between £100,000 and £250,000 to enable it to get a school off the ground. A site in the project area would be the first major expense; there would also be the local contribution for the building and for the maintenance of the school. He emphasised that when a formal proposition was made to the Minister, the project must be able to show that it commanded viable support and that it could meet local commitments financially. He recognised that there would be a long haul

ahead but that it would be an important one for the country. He concluded by saying:

> If this small challenge cannot be met, if we cannot make it possible for people on this island who want their children educated together to be so, it says little for the possibilities for the much more important reconciliation that we hope to see outside the classrooms of this land.

A report on the seminar in the E*ducation Times* of July 3rd stated:

> Politicians, publicists, polemicists and parents joined forces at the weekend for a seminar on integrated education organised by the Dalkey School Project in Ross's Hotel, Dun Laoghaire under the general title "Educate Together". The seminar which was described by Micheal Johnston as the DSPs' "first public appearance" heard praise of Mr. Jack Lynch from Barry Desmond, T.D., attacks on UNESCO and other trends by Mr. T.C.G. O'Mahony; and a suggestion by QUB sociologist, Mr. Tony Spencer, that school committees should leave the management of schools to the principal teacher.

In an article in the *Newsletter* of the Labour Party – Dun Laoghaire Constituency – July 1975, branch secretary Nora Nowlan reported on the DSP seminar and stated:

> It might seem ludicrous to many people outside Ireland that parents should have to form a pressure group to try to obtain the right to educate their children together. It might also seem to many people incredible that we still segregate children by sex in schools. … (The DSP parents) wish their children to be educated together – a perfectly legitimate and proper aspiration. Neither the Department of Education nor the Church authorities should put obstacles in their path. The question for the Department of Education should be – not WHY multi-denominational education, by WHY NOT?

Predictably, some letter-writers to newspaper editors reacted negatively. A letter to the *Irish Press* on 18th July 1975 made the point that only one speaker on the panel represented the majority of Irish opinion on the subject. This correspondent stated that T.C.G. O'Mahony read an excellent paper "on the threat posed by multi-denominational schools to the traditional upbringing of our children". The end result would be being that the State "could dictate the philosophy to be taught to our children". This would mean that as happened in other countries the State would sponsor "courses on Marxism and other subversive subjects". Another letter (not specifically about the Dalkey School Project) from a Fr. James Abbot warned of the dangers of "disturbers, alcoholics and pagan Christians being elected to school Boards of Management". He stated that "Communists are in key positions in most countries largely because ordinary people did nothing. In this country, Communists tend to wear green over red. They will try to get elected to school committees".

Yet another correspondent, Irene O'Sullivan BCL, UCD, referring specifically to the Dalkey School Project, also echoed the sentiments in the pamphlet *Have the Snakes Come Back,* stating:

> The type of education sought by the people of Dalkey was given to the people of America a long time ago. Eventually it became a crime to mention the name of God in the schools. Out of this educational jungle students could say of their own country: We've got America on the run … What's needed now is a new generation of people who are freaky, crazy, irrational, sexy, angry, irreligious, childish and mad. Do we want our children to say in a few years' time: "We've got Ireland on the run". That will be us.

Hostile speech by the Minister for Education

Shortly afterwards, on 24th September, the Minister for Education, Richard Burke expressed his hostility to multi-denominational education at a speech in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Alleging that those campaigning for multi-denominational primary schools often based their demands on arguments that were fallacious, he stated[44]:

> 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, that is completely false. Indeed. I regard it as a libel on teachers to suggest that in educating children in accordance with the particular teaching and beliefs of the religion of their homes, the teachers implant the seeds of intolerance and encourage attitudes of bigotry. It is also arrant nonsense.

He said that the rights of the individual in the matter of religious education were admirably safeguarded in the rules for national schools, which were open to children of all or no religious denomination, adding:

> It may be that those who do not like the present situation are repelled by the statement in the rules that a 'religious spirit should inform and vivify the whole work of the school'.[45] I am not prepared to jettison that principle however. Neither my own reasoning nor the evidence available in this and other countries, suggests to me that a fundamental change in the provisions for religious education in national schools could properly be characterised as reform.

44 *Irish Times*, 25th September 1975.

45. This was the wording of Rule 68 of the 1965 version of the Rules for National Schools. In January 2015, Minister for Education, Jan O'Sullivan, formally removed this rule from the rule book.

He pointed out that no child could receive instruction of which his parents or guardians disapproved. If not provided at school, pupils must be given time off to receive this instruction elsewhere. He failed however to address the issue of how pupils attending a denominational school could be excluded from religious instruction if a 'religious spirit should inform and vivify the whole work of the school'.

The same weekend, the Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave, speaking in St. Michaels' School, Ballsbridge, stated[46]:

> The debt this country owes to the work of the religious of all denominations in the provision of education is incalculable. In the past this education was not only provided at little or no cost, but it enabled many generations to have the inestimable advantage of the benefit of education with a Christian foundation. Every era sees changes but continued involvement of religious in the sphere of education can only be to the advantage of the nation.

And Brother Laurence Warren, Executive Secretary of the Teaching Brothers' Association, speaking on 24th September at the conference of Convent Primary Schools stated that "Such people (i.e. the promoters of multi-denominational education) are made of the stuff of demagogues and autocrats" and asked[47]: "Would these people deny parents the right to send their children to the school of their choice? – and many parents choose religious schools." Echoing the accusations made the previous week by the Taoiseach and the Minister for Education that 'these people' wanted to drive the Churches out of education, he added: "let us say to such leftist liberals and pseudo-socialists that we intend to provide Catholic education for children as long as the parents of these children wish it". He finished his speech by saying:

46. *Irish Times*, 26th September 1975.
47. *Irish Times*, 25th September 1975.

> Why paint over the rich mosaic of Irish society with some sickly shade of green, and bury our varying differences in the interest of so-called pluralism? I am sure that such a negative step would defeat its own purpose and destroy the pluralism it purports to serve.

From this point on, there was no doubting the antagonism of the Taoiseach and the Minister for Education to multi-denominational education. Like some right-wing Catholic groups, both men had falsely accused the promoters of multi-denominational education of campaigning to exclude the religious and religion from education. Moreover, the Minister had attempted to set the teachers of the country against those who supported multi-denominational education by stating that the latter group had "libelled teachers in denominational schools" by accusing them of teaching intolerance and bigotry.

But the Taoiseach's categorical statements did not placate some right-wing groups. They wanted confirmation that Fine Gael official policy on education coincided with the Taoiseach's views. In a letter from Eilis Bean Uí Riain to the Taoiseach on 29th October 1975 (now in the National Archive) she informed him that the national executive of the Federation of Parents Associations of Christian Brothers' Schools "welcome wholeheartedly the recent public statements made by you and the Minister for Education in support of denominational education and we wish to congratulate you both on your firm enunciation of principle". The federation hoped "that your statements were an indication of your party's official policy, but we have no confirmation of this". Referring to Barry Desmond's having publicly stated that "four government Minsters were supporters of the principle of multi-denominational education" the Federation felt that "a clear statement of the Fine Gael Party policy on this issue is extremely important".

However, there was some solace for the protagonists of multi-denominational education in a hard-hitting and strong editorial in the *Irish Times* on 2nd October 1975, which asked:

> Which are the pressure groups referred to by the Minister in his weekend speech on the perils of multi-denominational education? He did not mention any of them by name but any shopping list of groups calling for multidenominational education would have to include not only organisations like the Dalkey School Project and the Association for Democracy in Education, and three-quarters of the respondents to the recent Marley Grange Survey, but the entire Labour Party and a substantial body of opinion within Fine Gael, not to mention the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Jack Lynch. It is quite a demonology.

The editorial went on to state:

> The Minister's speech was rich in what might be described as the rhetoric of deprivation – a twisting of the facts of the situation in order to portray the proponents of multi-denominational education as lobbyists who wish to deprive the plain people of Ireland of something which they presently possess. It is much more accurate to describe them as anxious to provide the plain people of Ireland – or as many of them as want it as least – with something that they currently lack. And in passing it might be pointed out that the primary level is the only level at which State-provided multi-denominational education is actually unobtainable.

Continuing in strong language the editorial added:

> None of these organisations or individuals would recognise themselves in the lurid and inaccurate portrait drawn by the Minister. The issue which he prefers not to face is that the time is rapidly drawing to a close when the control and disposition of vast quantities of public money by self-appointed and democratically unaccountable persons can any longer be justified by emotional references to what parents are supposed to desire. Much of the evidence indeed suggests that an

> increasing number of parents actually desire something other than the creaky and unrepresentative old model which the Minister continues to parade in front of them, and which is essentially being perpetuated in the reformed 'management system' now under discussion.
>
> To bring religion into the question is to drag in the most pungent of red herrings. If there is any evidence that a "religious spirit" would not "inform and vivify the whole work" of a multi-denominational school, under democratic control, or that religion would be excluded from any such school, it should in all conscience be brought forward, or is the Minister also consigning the entire vocational system to perdition?

The editorial ended with the sentence: "The late Henry Ford once advised his clients that they could have any colour they wanted as long it was black. He has a worthy successor in Marlborough St."

Chapter 4

Keeping the Flame Alive October 1975 – October 1976

First Annual General Meeting of the Dalkey School Project – 26th October 1975

At the first annual general meeting of the Dalkey School Project on 26th October 1975 in Ross's Hotel, Dun Laoghaire, the executive committee presented the following schedule of priorities, setting out the stages which the project would have to pursue if the objective of opening a multi-denominational school in Dalkey under new patronage and management was to be achieved:

1. We must build our membership
2. We must explain what we stand for
3. We must plan and cost our pilot project
4. We must build our Project fund, so that we may pay whatever the costs will be

5. We must find and acquire a site

6. We must give evidence that we command viable support

7. We must gain recognition from the Department of Education.

Under each of these headings the committee reported on progress during the previous nine months. As regards membership, there were now 267 members, and the target for the coming year was 1,000. In relation to the second priority, letters had been written to all members of the Oireachtas, the bishops and other church leaders, to the Minister for Education and to the INTO, to explain to each of them what the Dalkey School Project stood for.

As regards planning and costing, it was reported that in the region of £100,000 (roughly €800,000 in 2020 prices) would be necessary to cover the capital cost of the first school, i.e. the cost of the site and of the local contribution towards construction. It was clear that the Project would need to start a serious fund-raising effort and it was decided to hold a weekly "Country Market" in Dun Laoghaire / Dalkey starting at the beginning of February 1976. The financial target of the market would be £100 per week. Other proposed fund-raising events were also discussed.

The committee had already looked at some possible sites. However, it was agreed that it would be premature to consider purchasing a site in advance of the development of the project account – such a major financial commitment could not be undertaken without significant funding and at least some indication that official sanction for a school would be forthcoming.

In order to gauge the level of support for a school in Dalkey / Dun Laoghaire, it was announced that a survey was being conducted in the area. A small pilot survey had been completed, mainly to test the questionnaire and the survey procedures. The

main survey was now underway and preliminary results were very encouraging – it appeared that over 85% of respondents indicated that multi-denominational schools should receive State financial support equivalent to that given to existing denominational schools.

The Minister and the Department of Education had been informed about the existence and the objectives of the Dalkey School Project. No formal proposals had been made to date to the Department, though their advice was sought on certain points. The committee advised that when recognition was sought from the Department it was essential that the project would be "absolutely ready to take on the full responsibilities that such recognition would imply".

At the meeting, Micheal Johnston and Helen Fahy were re-elected as chair and honorary secretary and Desmond Green was elected honorary treasurer. The new committee consisted of Marlene Bean; Áine Hyland; Patsy Lyle; Mike Norris; Noreen O'Brien; John Raven and Anne Ryan. Whereas the previous DSP committee comprised a majority of members whose children had attended St. Patrick's N.S., only two of the ten members of the newly elected committee had been involved in the St. Patrick's saga.

18 of the 20 members of the Council were also elected at this meeting – nine for a three-year term and 9 for a six-year term. The first nine were Hilary Jenkins; Jim Buckley; Denis Johnston; Cllr. Jack Loughran; James Love; Hilary Heron; Rev. Gerard Watson; Cllr. Margaret Waugh; Canon F.A.G. Willis; Rev. W.A. McComish. For a six-year term, the names were David Andrews, T.D.; Michael Classon; Barry Desmond, T.D.; Catherine McGuinness; Dr. Charles Mollan; Hilary Pratt; Dr. Patrick Randals; Joy Rudd and Professor David Spearman. In accordance with the constitution, three trustees were also elected. These were Barry Desmond; Hilary Pratt and Professor David Spearman.

At its first meeting a few weeks later, the new executive

committee drew up a plan of action. Desmond Green informed the meeting that the cost of purchasing a site of 1 to 1.5 acres for a school in the Dalkey / Dun Laoghaire area would be in the region of £20,000 to £30,000 and the committee should set a fund-raising target of £10,000 for the coming year. Charitable status should be sought from the Revenue Commissioners so that the company could benefit from tax-free status. It was agreed that every opportunity for publicity and for explaining what the Project was about should be availed of. In that context, invitations to speak at Glencree Reconciliation Centre on 15th Nov 1975 on the theme "towards a Pluralist Society" and at a meeting of Labour Teachers in December were accepted.

Cost of National School Sites:

One of the Department of Education requirements for the recognition of a new national school was the provision by the applicant of a site for the school. No grant aid would be available for the purchase of a site and the Dalkey School Project was aware that this would be a major challenge, not only financially but also logistically. A site for an eight-teacher school building in the Dalkey /Dun Laoghaire area would be very difficult to find and was likely to be very expensive. A site of two and a half acres would be required for an eight-teacher school, although in exceptional situations a smaller site might be considered. However, the Department could insist on the required two and a half acres if they wished to be obstructive or unhelpful.

For a number of years the Catholic Church had been lobbying the government for a change in policy so that grants would be available not only for building new schools, but also for the purchase of primary school sites[48]. During the early 1970s, the provision of sites for national school buildings was

48. Department of the Taoiseach, *Primary Schools: Provision of Sites*, April 1975 - March 1977, File No. 2007/116/319. Dublin: National Archive.

proving to be quite a challenge for the Church, especially in new suburban areas of Dublin, where the population was growing rapidly. Records from the Taoiseach's Office, now in the National Archive, show that in April 1973, Bishop McCormack of Meath, who was secretary to the Episcopal Conference of (Catholic) Bishops at the time, wrote to the Minister for Education, Richard Burke, asking that urgent consideration be given to the request of the bishops that "the provision of sites for new primary schools, or extensions, should attract State grants in the same proportion to the total cost as those allocated for building". An interdepartmental committee was set by the Taoiseach to look into the matter and in 1975 the committee recommended that such grants be made available.

On 17th June 1975, the Archbishop of Dublin, Dr. Dermot Ryan, accompanied by the chairman of the Dublin Diocesan Finance Committee, Mr. Leo Booth, met the Taoiseach and the Minister for Education, Richard Burke, 'to discuss the implications of the cost of primary school buildings'. The meeting was described by officials in the Taoiseach's office as 'the culmination of a long series of meetings and representations on the problem over the previous two years'. The delegation stressed the critical financial situation facing the Dublin diocese in relation to the purchase of sites for primary schools, pointing out that land owned by the local authority cost about £6,000 per acre for a school and the cost of sites bought from private developers could cost up to £15,000 per acre. The Archbishop indicated that on the basis of their projections, unless government funding was made available, the diocese would run out of money and would be unable to buy any further sites.

Following this meeting, in September 1975, a letter was sent from the Department of Education to the Department of Finance stating that the Minister for Education

> Having carefully considered the outcomes of the

> deliberations of the inter-departmental committee on this matter and the representations since made by ecclesiastical authorities has come to the conclusion that the simplest and most equitable way of meeting their difficulties in this matter would be for the State to make a standard grant in all cases of 90% of the cost of the site and building, leaving to the ecclesiastical authorities, on a diocesan or other suitable basis, the responsibility for dealing with any cases of hardship out of the additional financial assistance thereby made available.

Pointing out that the matter was one of extreme urgency, especially in the archdiocese of Dublin, the Minister for Education requested the agreement in principle of the Minister for Finance to the proposal, and indicated that it was intended that this arrangement would come into operation on 1st January 1976. However, a memo in the Department of the Taoiseach in October 1975 was not optimistic that the Department of Finance would be favourable to this proposal 'in view of the extremely serious budgetary position in 1975'. It would appear that the Department of Finance engaged in discussions with the Department of Local Government about the matter and in April 1976, and as predicted, a letter from the Minister of Finance to the Taoiseach rejected the proposal, stating: "I don't think I can hold out any hope of providing such assistance (i.e. providing grants for school sites)".

There is no indication in the files in the National Archive that the Dublin Archdiocese raised the matter of grant aid towards school sites again with the government. This may have been a strategic decision on the part of the Catholic Church as they realised that such grants could remove one of the key obstacles to groups such as the Dalkey School Project in pursing their aim of setting up multi-denominational schools. As far as the DSP committee was concerned, it was accepted that the cost of a site would be a major challenge but this was a challenge they were determined to overcome to get the first

multi-denominational school set up.

Fund–Raising — the Dalkey School Project Home Produce Market:

While much of the energy of the executive committee during the autumn and winter of 1975/1976 was focused on carrying out and analysing the results of a survey designed to gauge the extent of the demand for a multi-denominational school in the Dalkey area (see Appendix 1) a plan to fund-raise for the new school also began to take shape. The committee agreed that a weekly home produce market would be set up, and the first such market was held in Dalkey Town Hall on Saturday 2nd February 1976 from 10 a.m. until midday. This was a well-planned and executed market which was held weekly until the mid-1980s. It was run with military precision – overseen initially by an informal organising committee led by Helen Fahy and Pat Johnston. It was a really good example of successful woman-power at a time when cooking, baking and shopping were regarded as "women's work". Approximately 80 women indicated willingness to contribute home produce on a regular or occasional basis to the market. In addition, plants, seedlings, cuttings, flowers, vegetables, fruit or other home-grown produce were sold seasonally at the market.

Nothing was left to chance. The contributions were collected between 8.30 and 9.30 a.m. every Saturday morning by a team of about 8 collectors. As one of the collectors, I set out at 8.30 a.m. every Saturday to collect cakes, scones, jams, salads and a variety of other "marketable" goods from about 10 households in my immediate area (Hillside, Mapas Road, Dalkey Avenue and Barnhill Road). Forty-three years later I remember clearly who "my" contributors were and what they contributed. Over the years, they included Josie Dixon, Teresa McInerney, Elly McCrea, Evelyn Sheehan, Beth Westrup, Alexandra Wejchert, Florence Byrne, Noreen O'Brien and Eileen O'Connor. In time, specific contributions were associated with identified individuals. My own weekly contribution consisted of two

home-made coffee cakes, often baked late on Friday night. (I don't think I have ever since baked a coffee cake!). Alexandra Wejchert baked what she called "jungle crumble" – a fruit crumble baked from end-of-line fruit that she collected every week from a local greengrocer. Beth Westrup's home-made shortbread biscuits were snapped up as soon as the market opened.

Helen Fahy spent most of the week baking and arrived on Saturday morning at Dalkey Town Hall laden down with fruit cakes, apple tarts, quiches, scones and other home baked goods. Her son, Eoin has vivid memories of the Dalkey Market. He remembers driving around on Thursdays "picking up ingredients from donors and of course the madness of Fridays when my mother baked non-stop all day, pretty much, the house full of the lovely smell of baking, and my mother covered in flour." He also remembers "hanging around the market in Dalkey Town Hall for a couple of hours on a Saturday morning, eating Pat Johnston's waffles with maple syrup". Pat Johnston became synonymous with DSP waffles and most of us associate Pat with the first Canadian-style waffles we ever tasted. In fact, the waffles were initially introduced to the Dalkey Market by Nol and Trude Visser, a Dutch/Norwegian couple living in Dalkey, who were great supporters. They had an electric waffle iron and they served the waffles with real maple syrup which was sourced from Canadian friends. After the first year or so, Pat Johnston took over the waffle stall. She acquired two electric waffle irons at a time when such irons were rare and exotic, and the queue for her waffles, cooked on the spot in Dalkey Town Hall, was legendary. Pat's chicken liver paté, her homemade lemonade and her other tasty contributions were also eagerly awaited. Siobán Green remembers that her mother, Gayle, dedicated a day a week to baking and cooking with Pat Johnston to prepare items for the market. Siobán has "really good memories of the market as a meeting place with discussion, planning and intense conversation taking place

amongst the adults" and lots of "delicious waffle eating" with her sister and friends.

Pat Johnston was and is a wonderful cook, having trained as a home economics teacher, and she not only produced endless goodies, and provided thousands of waffles for the market but also organised a commercial-like catering service, the proceeds of which went into the DSP fund. Among her "clients" were the Cottage Home in Dun Laoghaire and an old people's home, Abbeyfield, in Monkstown – where she and her team undertook the weekend catering for many years. She and others also collected tinned or bottled goods close to their "sell-by" date from wholesalers who were happy to offload them, and they were sold at the market at a cut-price rate. And of course, Christmas and Easter were great times for baking, preparing and selling speciality foods and decorations. Who said that multi-denominational schools don't celebrate Christmas?

Anne Johnston, who was one of the "catering team", has vivid memories of the Dalkey Market ("that weekly commitment … for how many years?") and of fund-raising generally:

> I threw myself into fund-raising. … We catered for several cocktail parties, two weddings, … I think that we were paid £200 per wedding … trusting souls paid us to cook for their dinner parties in their own houses (not wholly successful!). I had a standing order for a large chocolate sponge cake … one every six weeks on demand. For the Christmas Market I remember baking 12 dozen mince pies using Pat Johnston's recipe for mincemeat and my pastry. We sold them for 6 pence each. Outlay for ingredients was greatly reduced when Pat somehow acquired a ticket for a wholesale outlet – Musgraves in Sallynoggin. We held a Dream Auction where punters could bid for a service, babysitting, driving lessons etc.

From the date of its launch in February 1976, the market

could be relied on to make a profit of around £100 per week. This quickly added up and the financial accounts of the Project showed that by June the market had netted over £1,000. Regular income from the market was important as a guarantee for the bank if a loan were to be sought.

The market was also an invaluable publicity outlet and a venue for social gathering and networking. Accurate information about the Project was available there and its leaders and supporters were visible for all to see. It quickly became apparent to local naysayers that the members of the Dalkey School Project were human beings with no other agenda but to start a multi-denominational school and that they did not have cloven hooves or horns! The market was also popular with the children who would subsequently become pupils in the new school. They got to know each other and made friends.

Pre–enrolment list

The preliminary results of the survey had become available in December 1975 and to the surprise and satisfaction of all involved, 75% of respondents were in favour of a single national school for children of all denominations. Only 17% were in favour of separate National Schools for each denomination. When these results emerged, it became clear that one eight-teacher school would not be sufficient to cater for all those in the area who had indicated their interest in sending their children to a multi-denominational school.

I was aware that in new Dublin suburbs, it was Department policy to build 16- teacher schools, i.e. schools which accepted a two-stream intake annually, but this option was never seriously considered by the DSP. The challenge of identifying a site and temporary premises and of fund-raising for a school of half that size i.e. an eight-teacher school was more than enough. Moreover, parents who were familiar only with Church of Ireland schools were of the view that the optimum size of school was an eight-teacher school i.e. a school that (in those

days) catered for around 275 pupils. (The Department's teacher appointment schedule at that time allowed an additional teacher for every 35 pupils).

Given that the target of an eight-teacher school had been written into its constitution, and that the size of the first school would not be revisited by the Dalkey School Project, in December 1975, the executive committee decided to open a pre-enrolment list as soon as possible, recognising that an eight-teacher school would be unlikely to meet the demand for places. A circular was sent to all families in the survey area to alert them to the need to put their children's name on the list if they wished to be assured of a place in the school. The summer 1976 Newsletter included the following paragraph:

> We cannot estimate at this stage when the pilot school will be a reality, but the Survey Report makes it very clear that one pilot 8-teacher National School will fall far short of satisfying the need for multi-denominational schools; it will therefore be necessary to form a queue for places in the first school, and we are inviting parents – members and others – to submit the names, addresses and birth dates of children for whom they would like to book places in the school. This enrolment list will be built up strictly on a first-come, first-served basis, and when we achieve our aim and can open our first school, this list will be the priority list for enrolments, with the top 35 names in each age group sure of places, and all others on a waiting list.

The pre-enrolment list did indeed fill up very quickly and was meticulously maintained over the years. There would be no exception to the "first-come, first-served" policy and this meant that inevitably, some children, even children of the most ardent supporters, might fail to get a place in the school if they neglected to put their children's names on the list. When the school opened in September 1978, every eligible child (i.e. aged four years and over) whose name was on the list, was

accommodated in the school, but from 1979 onwards, demand invariably exceeded the number of available places and there were many disappointed parents and children. As years went on, even some of the founder families failed to get a place in the school for their younger children, as the time of year in which a child was born became a factor in accepting pupils.

The Dalkey School Project Survey

Preliminary results of the Dalkey survey were available by December 1975 and an *Irish Independent* article on 12th January 1976 headed "*Majority want Mixed Schools; Dalkey Project Supported*" stated: "Three-quarters of 1365 households surveyed in Dalkey would prefer multi-denominational schools in the area, which was a finding that "staggered and delighted" its organisers". The article went on to state that the project's priority was to establish the first pilot school in the Dalkey area in order to be part of the system which was easier to fight from within rather than without. The article quoted Micheal Johnston as saying: "Our experience over the past two years illustrates what I mean – with a rigid determination from the Department of Education to treat us as though we did not exist". He concluded his address by urging the churches to throw their weight in a positive way behind the establishment of the co-existence of denominational and multi-denominational schools in the community, reflecting the needs of the area rather than "convenience of institutions which too often show themselves to be lagging behind or out of touch with their own adherents".

On 18th February 1976, a letter was sent to Minister Burke enclosing the preliminary results of the Dalkey survey, stating that these results more than confirmed the *raison d'etre* of the Dalkey School Project. The letter indicated that support existed on a far wider scale than even the Project itself had anticipated. In addition, there was evidence from one other area, and indications in others, that this was not solely a Dalkey phenomenon. The letter continued:

> We think therefore that it is very important that the Department of Education should wish to see the development on a pilot basis of the first of such schools in areas which can show that such schools – and only such schools – can meet the conscientious requirements and lawful preferences of a viable number of parents of young children. It is the intention of the Dalkey School Project to establish such a National School in this area; and I now have pleasure in applying to you for an appointment with one or a number of your appropriate officers so that this intention may be processed in accordance with the procedures of your Department.

On 23rd February 1976 an acknowledgement was received from the Minister's office indicating that the letter would be brought to the attention of the Minister.

During the first six months of 1976 there was a resurgence of a national debate about multi-denominational education. For example, the March 1976 journal of the Irish National Teachers' Association – *An Múinteoir Náisiúnta* – came to the defence of denominational schools in an editorial which stated: "It is being contended that denominational schools have contributed to the intolerance that is bedevilling the North. There has been nothing to substantiate that. By and large attitudes are not established in the school. They spring from home mostly. …. Let us get back to basics and face the fact that religion is the most important factor in a child's education … Remove religion and you remove God … Remove God and you remove morality …"

However, the Church of Ireland was more supportive. At its annual synod in April 1976, Rev. Victor Griffin, Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, supported the call for integrated education, stating that the tragic situation in Northern Ireland provided a strong plea for acceptance of the pluralist society. He called for all Christians to move towards integrated education and multi-denominational schools and proposed a motion to this effect.

He said that it was only through integration that children of all denominations could learn to know, understand and trust one another. Religious segregation in education, he added, had perpetrated the memory of "old unhappy far off things and battles long ago". It had meant that the teaching and ethos of the school would reflect only one side of the Irish religious historical and cultural heritage. The motion was passed by the General Synod[49].

On 7th April 1976 Micheal Johnston wrote to the *Irish Times* welcoming the decision by the Synod of the Church of Ireland. He stated:

> It has been a long time coming but at last I think we are turning the corner when I see the Church of Ireland on two pages of the *Irish Times* of 5th April beginning to make up its mind in favour of multi-denominational education in those areas where substantial numbers want it.

Referring to the stance of the Church of Ireland in the period 1973/74 when they had decided not to continue to the multi-denominational experiment in St. Patrick's N.S., Dalkey he said:

> However, at that time it was not to be: and in retrospect this may turn out to be no bad thing … For the lack of any progress, or likelihood of it, on that front was one factor which led to the foundation of the Dalkey School Project … Our pilot project is to bring about the establishment of such a national school in the Dalkey area …

Refuting some oft-quoted accusations, he wrote:

> We are not seeking nor have ever done so, the abolition of denominational schools … we welcome the reciprocal comment of Eilis Bean Ui Riain and the National

49. *Irish Times* 5th April 1976.

> Federation of Christian Brothers Schools Parents Councils respecting the rights of parents to want and presumably to get schools which are different to those to which they themselves are committed …

He added:

> We are particularly pleased to see that within all the Churches, within all the political parties, within all sections of the community, there are growing numbers of Irish people who see the right to educate together is fundamental: we ask them all to join us in making this right a practical reality for those who want it.

Divided Opinions About the Dalkey School Project

During the following months a number of politicians entered the debate on integrated education and the divisions within Fine Gael between supporters and opposers became clearer. On 29th April, Dick Walshe of the *Irish Times* reported that the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Garrett FitzGerald "last night entered the debate on sectarianism and Church-State relations"[50]. He stated that FitzGerald supported the stance adopted by his colleague the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs, Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien and opposed by the Bishop of Limerick, the Most Rev. Dr. Newman. In relation to education, FitzGerald said:

> There is certainly a growing body of opinion in the Republic, only partly influenced by events in Northern Ireland, favouring the view that the interests both of the next generation, and of Christianity in Ireland, would be better served if children of different denominations were educated together, with separate religious instruction.

However, FitzGerald was cautious in his support, stating that

50. *Irish Times*, 29th April 1976.

any change could only be gradual and that in the Republic, where sectarianism was so much less acute than in Northern Ireland, the case for seeking to accelerate the change was weaker. He added that where parents in a new area, or a substantial number of them, expressed a clear preference for inter-denominational or non-denominational education for their children, the state had a duty to meet their wishes rather than to impose on them a system which they rejected. He suggested that it might well be a constitutional right of parents "subject only to the practical problem of implementing it in settled areas where separate facilities already exist or where the numbers seeking mixed education are insufficient to sustain a school".

He went on to say:

> At present the situation is complicated by virtue of the fact that traditionally the sponsors of a school provide a site and the State then finances much the greater part of building the school, as well as its running costs. … This is a problem which the State has a clear duty to examine just as in settled areas where a significant demand develops for mixed primary schooling, it must try to disentangle the historical heritage in a way that will so far as possible meet the wishes of the different groups of parents – taking due care to ensure that the demand for mixed schooling is not a disguised demand for separate national schools to be provided at State expense for middle-class groups seeking to segregate their children in class terms under the guise of mixing them denominationally. (This may not be a real danger, but it cannot be ignored as a possibility).

The suggestion by FitzGerald (however tentative) that the demand for multi-denominational schools might be a "disguised demand for separate national schools for middle-class groups" was unfortunate and was to become one of a number of red herrings in the debate about the Dalkey School Project in the months and years ahead.

By early May 1976, a statement from Fr. Con Sayers, director of the Dublin diocesan education secretariat also seemed to suggest a softening of the Catholic Church's position on multi-denominational education[51]. He said that "people have a Constitutional right to multi-denominational schools", but that Catholics also had a right to their own schools. In an interview, Fr. Sayers agreed that some people wished to have all the children of their locality educated together, but he added that "they equally wish that the traditions of the home should be fostered in the schools, and for the past 150 years no practical way has been found to marry these two wishes." Two days later in an article in the *Irish Times* entitled *"Tough Luck if you Don't Fit the System"*, John Horgan suggested that "at the moment much of the hostility to multi-denominational schools appears to be fuelled by the fear that creating such schools would reverse completely the existing pattern"[52].

On 5th May 1976, the leader of the opposition, Jack Lynch, challenged the Taoiseach to clarify his party's official policy on multi-denominational education. Lynch quoted from FitzGerald's speech of 28th April and asked the Taoiseach whether this view represented government policy. The Taoiseach replied that Dr. FitzGerald was expressing his personal views in his speech of April 28th, but he (the Taoiseach) failed to clarify what Fine Gael policy was on the matter.

Writing in *Hibernia* about multi-denominational education a month later, Brian Trench referred to "total absence of any political leadership on this issue from the Government". He stated[53]:

> Whatever Conor Cruise O'Brien's interest may be in trying to promote a reasonable debate about the church's position in society, his colleague Dick Burke, does not share it. He takes his assessment of the democratic will

51. *Irish Independent*, 3rd May 1976.
52. *Irish Times*, 5th May 1976.
53. Brian Trench, *Hibernia*. June 1976.

> from the clergy and the religious orders and turns his back on the evidence that parents in certain areas do want non-denominational schools.

Reply from Minister Burke to the Dalkey School Project correspondence.

On 25th May 1976, a substantive reply was finally received from the Minister for Education's secretary to the Dalkey School Project's many letters. The reply was not encouraging. It stated that there was adequate national school accommodation in the Dalkey area and that grant aid would not be made available for a new multi-denominational school. The letter went on:

> The Minister is satisfied that, on the basis of the information available to him, the accommodation in the existing schools – including that to be provided in the proposed new premises for Dalkey (2) N.S., in replacement of the present school premises – is fully adequate to meet requirements on the basis of the number of pupils from the area for whom provision will be necessary in the immediate future. In these circumstances, it is not open to him in accordance with the provisions of the Rules for National Schools to make grants towards the cost of an additional national school in the area.

In response to the request that a grant be made available towards the cost of the survey, the letter stated:

> I am also to explain that the Minister has no funds at his disposal from which a grant could be authorised towards the cost of the survey referred to in your letter.

However, the door was not totally closed. The final paragraph of the letter read:

> The Minister desires me to add that it is open to you to make suitable arrangements to meet officials of the Department to discuss your views in relation to the provision for educational facilities which you would

> consider most appropriate to the needs of the Dalkey area.

Micheal Johnston replied immediately, thanking the Minister's secretary for his letter. He informed him that the publication date of the report of the Dalkey survey had been set for 13th June, and that a copy of the report would be sent to the Minister as soon as it was available from the printer.

Launch of the Report of the Dalkey School Project Survey:

The launch of the (full) report of the survey on 13th June 1976 coincided with a meeting of the DSP Council followed by a general meeting of members. Introducing the report, Micheal Johnston thanked everyone involved, especially the survey co-ordinator, Desmond Green, the four supervisors. He highlighted for special mention Dr. Sarah Davis, a lecturer in statistics in Trinity College who had been "the processing director" for the Survey and who organised and carried out the computer analysis of the results. As well as providing statistical expertise to the survey Sarah had had access to the computer facilities of Trinity College where the data was analysed.

In his speech, Micheal Johnston stated that the Project was never in doubt that the survey would be a matter of controversy, and that it would be criticised because of the involvement of its members in its delivery and execution. He pointed out that great pains had been taken to ensure that there was no bias and he explained that scrutineers had been invited from the different political parties who had access to all the documentation of the survey and to all its meetings.

He also referred to the tactics of the Department of Education who were giving "a sort of super-priority to the building of the new Marley Grange Catholic schools and to the re-building of the Dalkey Protestant school in order to pre-empt the known wishes of the parents of the two areas". He was in no doubt that "these super-priorities are originating in

the office of the Minister himself". He maintained that this was not the result of government policy because recent statements by both Garrett FitzGerald and the Taoiseach had made it clear that this area was one which was open for debate in Fine Gael and that the Labour Party was committed, as a matter of policy, to multi-denominational education where viable numbers want it. He stated:

> It is opinion, personal opinion, and not policy that makes the Minister unresponsive to the growing call for the possibility of change within our system; Our elected representatives and the organs of the state hold their trust from the people, and their responsibilities are to provide for the people the structures that the people want and need …

Legislation to copper–fasten the religious character of schools?

Three days later, on 16th June, a public meeting was held in Ross's Hotel at which the full survey report was launched and at which the pre-enrolment list was formally opened to the public. The publication of the results of the survey led indirectly to a renewed national debate on denominational versus multi-denominational education. This debate was driven not only by the results of the survey, but also by the ongoing rumours that at second level, denominational schools would be phased out and "secular" community schools would take over. Some right-wing Catholic parents' groups, most notably the Federation of Christian Brothers' Parents Association, began to lobby the government to introduce legislation that would copper-fasten and guarantee the place of religious and of religion in schools.

Richard Burke responded with alacrity to these calls. On 26th June 1976, in an article in the *Irish Independent* headed "*State May Guarantee Religion in Schools",* John Walshe wrote:

> Legislation which would ensure the continued existence of church schools and which would guarantee religious

> instruction in schools which get money from the state was hinted at yesterday by the Minister for Education, Richard Burke, in Dublin … Setting out the principles on which such legislation should be based he said if it were passed, school authorities would have a clear understanding of their statutory rights and duties … The public would be aware of the education facilities statutorily available to them and would be better able to make an informed decision about children's schooling.

At a meeting of the executive committee of the Dalkey School Project on 19th July 1976, it was noted that the launch of the survey report had gone very well, that the pre-enrolment list had been formally opened and that already there were 66 names on the list ranging from children born from 1966 to 1976. The committee also discussed Minister Burke's declared intention to "enshrine" the place of religious in education on a legislative basis. Given the momentum that had developed, Mike Norris, a member of the executive committee proposed that the DSP should try and open in temporary premise in January 1977, but doubts were expressed about the feasibility of this approach.

During July, the debate within the Fine Gael party about its policy on multi-denominational education escalated and became public. Records in the National Archive show that this debate was closely followed in the Taoiseach's office where a file containing newspaper cuttings on the debate was kept[54]. An article on 20th July 1976 in the *Irish Times* with the headline "*Moves to create 'Godless society' in schools deplored*" summarised a speech given by Oliver J. Flanagan in his constituency in which he praised the Minister for Education for his support of denominational education. He stated that the Minister for Education, Richard Burke, "had done more than any other man in the history of our country to prevent the establishment of a Godless society in our schools". He said it

54. Office of the Taoiseach, *Education: Miscellaneous*, File 2005/151/117, S14395, Dublin: National Archive.

was now time for a firm stand, supported by legislation, on the future of education in Ireland. He referred to pressure groups 'springing up here and there expressing views on education'. These pressure groups, he said, "are very small in number but very loud in talk. Their aim is to drive God out of education and prevent religious instruction in the classrooms". He went on to praise the work of religious orders in Catholic schools and he called for legislation to copper-fasten the role of religious in education.

According to a report the same day in the *Irish Times*, in an interview with Oliver J. Flanagan on radio he referred to these pressure groups as "crackpots" and asked: "Where do we stand in this country if the real essentials of life which are only to be got by religious training and religious education are to be ignored. We must believe in God".

During the same radio programme, the Minister for Education, Mr. Burke said that

> "Government decisions which have already been announced will be enshrined in legislation in the reasonably near future and it seems to me that such legislation might also comprehend matters which have been raised in debate from time to time but in relation to which educational interests do not appear to have arrived at a consensus".

However, the government was quick to clarify its position. According to an *Irish Times* report:

> An official spokesman said that the Government has not decided on any legislation giving effective statutory guarantees to such matters as the continued existence of Church schools, the equality of opportunity for the establishment of new schools and the renovation and extension of existing schools. The spokesman said the comments also referred to guarantees of comprehensive religious instruction, formation and worship.

In summarising the reaction to Oliver J. Flanagans' speech, the *Irish Times* report stated that

> Labour supporters including members of the Parliamentary Party who have grown accustomed to throwing up their hands in horror at Mr. Burke's pronouncements were more than usually appalled at Mr. Flanagan's description of the groups (unnamed) who are in his view attempting to drive God out of education. On radio he simply called them crackpots.

Later that month (on 27th July), Micheal Johnston gave a long speech at a seminar organised by the Association for Democracy in Education. He emphasised that (notwithstanding its title) the Dalkey School Project was a national organisation with national aims whose priority it was to set up the first multi-denominational school rather than spend years talking general principles. He challenged a bureaucracy which was so unresponsive to a real demand for change, quoting the results of the surveys in both Dalkey and Marley Grange. He quoted Dr. Noel Whelan, then Deputy Secretary of the Department of Economic Planning and Development, who said: "No democratically elected government at national level can ignore democratic demands for real devolution of functions, if these demands are strong enough and articulated effectively. It is one of the great strengths of Parliamentary democracy that the electorate, in the long run, gets what it really wants." Johnston pointed out that there were ways in which the bureaucracy could attempt to de-energise the commitment of people "such as ourselves":

> … No outright refusals, acknowledgements to letters but no answers to questions. If our demand was less strong, if it was less well articulated, we would by the normal process get bored by the whole business in the end, or grow old and tired, or be consigned to the ranks of cranks because we repeat the same cries so often and so regularly.

However, the Project was determined that this bureaucratic strategy was not going to work. For those who believed in the principle of Educate Together it was vitally important that supporters were "not lulled into a sense of boredom with the whole matter". To get that first school open, infinite patience, infinite determination and a great deal of hard work would be needed. He concluded:

> We must get the first school into existence; because by doing this we will have broken the bureaucratic code and established a new norm for the bureaucracy to maintain. Once the first school is established a procedure to start such school will exist.

Chapter 5

Determination and Resilience October 1976 – Summer 1977

At the meeting of the executive committee of the Dalkey School Project on 13th September 1976 the determination and resilience called for by Micheal Johnston in July was evident. A letter from Minister Burke to the Dalkey School Project the same month had made it clear that he (Burke) was resolutely opposed to sanctioning a multi-denominational school in Dalkey. The Minister reiterated his opposition in a letter to the Dun Laoghaire branch of the Labour Party stating that there were already enough school places in the Dalkey / Dun Laoghaire area. However, these letters did not dampen the determination of the committee which decided to ask the Minister if there was any bar in principle against setting up a multi-denominational school. The committee also decided to avail of every opportunity for publicity and to keep the pressure on the politicians, especially the four local T.Ds.

Is Integrated Schooling the Answer?

A further opportunity for publicity followed the publication

of a booklet entitled "Is *Integrated Schooling the Answer? Education and the Irish Child* by "a Group of Catholic Parents" and edited by Vera Verba on 7th October 1976. This was the same group which had published the booklet *"Have the Snakes Come Back"* eighteen months previously. Like the earlier booklet, this publication came from the address of the Knights of St. Columbanus in Ely Place, Dublin 2.

The 68-page, rather philosophical treatise was a delayed response to Jack Lynch's article in Petrus in April 1975. The booklet summarised the various responses to the article – and started by quoting from *Iris Fianna Fáil* (summer 1975) which, with the following statement, had challenged the opposers of integrated education to state what their objections were: "if there is any cogency in the argument of those who are against the introduction of interdenominational education, then let that group spell it out loud and clear". The booklet counter-argued that the burden of proof was equally on those proposing the innovations and stated that the Church had spelt out its objections many times.

As regards political support for integrated or multi-denominational education, the booklet indicated that it was a reasonable assumption to make that the Lynch thesis was shared by most of the Labour Party, a section of the Fianna Fáil Party, and the Fitzgerald/ Cooney element of the Fine Gael Party. In summary, support for the concept was "a trans-party phenomenon". However, it argued that radically differing from such views were the Taoiseach, Mr. Cosgrave, the Minister for Education, a small segment of the Labour Party, a large section of Fine Gael, and perhaps, a larger section of Fianna Fail, "the party with possibly the deepest Catholic roots".

While "integrationists hold that denominational schools are divisive", the authors of the booklet argued that those supporting separate schools should not be singled out. It stated:

> Religion itself is divisive as are most things in life.

> Separate religions are divisive; trade unions are divisive; professional organisations and promotional grades in every employment are divisive; football teams are divisive; Political parties are themselves extremely divisive and have been accused of fostering rivalry and bitterness from Dáil to grassroots level. Yet there has never been any proposal to integrate all the political parties. The liberal politicians would be the first to proclaim the dangers to democracy of such a move, and indeed with every justification.

Referring to "atheists, agnostics and humanists", the booklet particularly focused on humanists for criticism:

> Humanists … deplore the existence of denominational schools, and some of their members have been campaigning in different pressure groups for multi- or inter-denominational schools. They have at least one member in a sensitive post in the Department of Education, whose knowledge has been no doubt been of value …

The reference to "one member in a sensitive post in the Department of Education" was clearly a reference to Bill Hyland, who had attended the early meetings of the then embryonic Irish Humanist Association, but the authors were careful then and later, to avoid mentioning Bill's name.

However, booklets such as *"Is Integrated Schooling the Answer"* attracted critical as well as supportive comments. The *Irish Times* on 29th October 1976 reported Rev. Dr. Hedley W. Plunkett, former president of the Methodist Church in Ireland, as stating that there was a growing conviction, which he personally shared, that the final solution to communal divisions in Ireland would only come when we had a non-sectarian system of education, from nursery school to university, which would produce respect and acceptance of one another as persons and a growth of mutual tolerance and love.

Further Publicity for the Dalkey School Project

On 17th November 1976 there was a full-page article by Helen Fahy in the *Irish Press* headed *"The Right to Choose"*. The article referred to a radio interview with Dr. Philbin, Bishop of Down and Conor, in which he (Philbin) voiced his objection to integrated education. It also referred to comments by "his fellow prelate Cardinal Hume of Westminster" who said that integrated schools might indeed be a help in Northern Ireland. The article went on to state:

> Those of us who are concerned for the future of integrated or multi-denominational education are saddened by the intransigent attitude of our fellow countrymen and we are concerned that the real issue involved are not being discussed …

Two issues in particular were identified. The first, which was described as "totally unreal" was the allegation that all three and a half thousand denominational national schools – Catholic, Church of Ireland, Methodist, Presbyterian and Jewish – would be closed down and non-denominational national schools built in their stead. The second issue was the real issue: "Should some pilot multi-denominational schools be set up and recognised as national schools in areas where they would be viable?". The article went on to clarify that the Dalkey School Project was concerned only with the second issue and explained its principles. It concluded by saying: "What is regrettably becoming increasingly evident is that the authorities of State are determined to retain the present unjust monopolistic position, even if this involves them in denying basic civil rights to others."

A few days later, Fr. Con Sayers of the Dublin Catholic Diocesan Education secretariat was reported in the media as saying that "It should be our ambition that parents could always send their children to the schools of their first choice". He went on to argue that 70% of the population wanted

voluntary secondary schools, because in practice 70% of young people are sent to these schools. He was of course arguing to protect the position of denominational secondary schools but it was clear that his argument could equally apply to the establishment of multi-denominational national schools.

During the autumn and winter of 1975/1976, further opportunities were availed of to publicise the aims of the Dalkey School Project. In a speech which Micheal Johnston gave at a students' union debate *"That Religion Breeds Prejudice"* in University College Dublin in Earlsfort Terrace on 24th November, he stated:

> In the Dalkey School Project aims we've said Catholic, Protestant and others – perhaps this is the 20th century modification of Tone's 18th century idea. We believe that we can live together, grow up together, learn together, work together, with the many strands of our history and our culture making the strong cord that binds us together today.

However, there continued to be negative comments. A report in the *Sunday Press* of 28th November 1976 stated that Very Rev. Thomas Dooley, SM., president of Catholic University School (CUS) warned that there were many advocates of multi-denominational, inter-denominational and "even non-denominational" schools, and stated that they were encouraging "a serious dilution of attitudes to religion". He added: "And they should have the honesty to admit it".

And on 6th December 1976, a letter from Mrs. M Fehily, secretary of *Pro Fide*, to the *Irish Times*, criticised the publicity being given to the issue of integrated schools in Ireland. She maintained that the call for integrated education was basically an attack on denominational schooling "which is the hard-won and constitutionalised system of education in this country". She went on to state:

> The change desired, through a campaign of pressure and

> publicity is to oust denominational parent / Church-run schools and establish State-run, multi-denominational or integrated schools. Once State control is established by a State of no established religion, as is the Irish State with its amended Constitution, it is a near, and legally certain, outcome that all State schools in this country must be non-denominational or un-denominational …

She called on all fair-minded people concerned with this issue, inside and outside of politics, to consider these facts "before destroying the freedoms for which our forbears fought and died".

Meanwhile, the autumn Dalkey School Project Newsletter informed the membership of the reply received from the Minister's office which stated that there was sufficient national school accommodation in the Dalkey area to meet the present and foreseen primary schooling requirements of the area. The newsletter went on to say:

> This conflicts directly with the survey report, which shows that, even allowing for the Department's present building programme, there are nowhere near enough national school places, denominational or otherwise, for the children in the area, no matter how the area is defined.

The Second Annual General Meeting of the Dalkey School Project – 30th October 1976

At the second AGM of the Project on 30th October 1976, some new members were elected to the executive committee. The committee now consisted of Micheal Johnston (Chairman); Helen Fahy (Secretary); Desmond Green (Treasurer); Áine Hyland; Mike Norris; Phillipa Mollan; Noreen O'Brien; Patsy Lyle; Noel Visser; Hilda Oskamp. The meetings were becoming repetitive and one could detect the very sense of frustration and helplessness that Micheal Johnston had warned

against in one of his talks some months earlier. While the members agreed that "we do not intend to be fobbed off by this stone-walling," no original ideas to break the logjam were suggested. The chairman expressed disappointment that the report of the survey had received "very scant attention, even from the detractors of our aims", and stated that the only tangible criticism was "that as our members were collecting the information they may have influenced the response".

The meeting was told that a site "that will be the key to concrete progress towards our pilot school" had not yet been identified but that the committee had also been turning its attention to the possibility of opening in temporary premises as many other schools had done – especially Irish language schools.

The chairman's speech concluded with the statement:

> "We have tried very hard to pursue our objectives in a civilised and constructive manner: we believe that our objectives are legitimate and relevant ones in Ireland today. We know that Fianna Fail supports the very thing that we ask for, pilot experiments in multi-denominational education in areas where there are viable numbers seeking it. We know that the Labour Party is committed to this in quite specific terms since their last conference in Dun Laoghaire: we know that Fine Gael policy is not yet formulated on this subject …

On 24th November 1976, the executive wrote to Minister Burke asking if there was any reason in principle why a school such as suggested should not exist. As with previous correspondence, an acknowledgement was received but no substantive reply. However, change was afoot – something that none of us had anticipated.

A new Minister for Education and renewed hope for the DSP.

Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh resigned as President of Ireland on

22nd October 1976. By agreement between Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil, Patrick Hillery, whose term of office as European Commissioner was due to expire on 31st December, was appointed unopposed as President of Ireland on 9th November. This left a vacancy for Ireland to fill in Europe and the government decided to appoint Richard Burke as Commissioner[55]. He was replaced as Minister for Education by Peter Barry, previously Minister for Transport and Power, presaging a new and more encouraging era for the Dalkey School Project.

In early December the Dalkey School Project had written to the Minister and to the Taoiseach asking that in the Dalkey situation not just the number of places required but also the type of places required in schools should be considered. The Taoiseach replied just before Christmas to say that the new Minister for Education "intended to make a fresh study of all aspects of this matter". Since it was expected that 1977 would be an election year the Dalkey School Project was determined to make the most of the political support it had within the constituency. Two of the four TDs in the area – Barry Desmond, and David Andrews were supportive. The third TD - Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave – "was concerned" about the DSP problem, and the fourth T.D. in the constituency, Percy Dockrell, had shown no interest in the issue and had not replied to any correspondence,

On 11th January 1977 Micheal Johnston spoke at a *New Ireland Forum* Discussion Group in Buswells' Hotel, Dublin. His speech was entitled "Why Can't we Do it in Ireland?" He started off by stating: "in case you have been reading some of the incredible accusations levelled at groups like ours, I'd like to tell you what we stand for: that will give us a reasonable ground for discussion, whether we all agree or differ in our views". He continued: "… Our detractors have attempted to turn the

55. D. Ferriter, *Ambiguous Republic: Ireland in the 1970s*.

whole issue of multi-denominational education into the highly emotional one of being for or against the Churches" which he said was not accurate. He emphasised that the objectives of the Project were national and that therefore the opposition was quite correct in saying that if one school was started it could lead to many more.

He then summarised the position of the churches in relation to multi-denominational education. The non-conformist Churches – the Presbyterian and Methodist churches – had for many years advocated integrated schools. The Church of Ireland had pondered this for some time but they eventually came down in favour of experiments in integrated education where there was local support. The Catholic Bishops in Ireland were the most consistent group opposing such innovation. In other countries the Catholic Church was able to live with a state education system but here in Ireland they succeeded in gaining control over their share of the educational system, and they very much looked on the Catholic school as being an integral part of the formation of the Catholic child.

During the same event, Fianna Fáil leader Mr. Lynch said that he sincerely believed that Ireland must have "some modicum of inter-denominational education". "We had to get away from the idea of complete segregation of people because of their religious beliefs", he said, adding:

> If you are going to segregate Christians among themselves I think it will be damaging to the Christian ideal ultimately ... If you are going to bring up young Christians of different denominations with the feeling that one is inferior to the other then you are going to continue this dilution of the moral fibre – not only in this country but in the world generally. People in the North had been brought up to hate those of other denominations … and that upbringing had contributed enormously to the kind of violence which was an everyday occurrence in NI now, as well as the

intransigence in both communities there.

The reports on the *New Ireland Forum* discussion led to some critical responses. Brother Eamon O Beacháin, a lecturer in the Education Department of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, while careful not to attribute any views to Jack Lynch, wrote, "Those who from prejudice bias or conviction advocate the elimination of the Churches from education, thereby do harm to ultimate values in education and also harm the very process of democracy itself".

A week later the (London-based) *Times Educational Supplement* reported that Jack Lynch, leader of Fianna Fail, had come out strongly against Church control of education in a radio interview in which he committed his party to several important policy initiatives if they were returned to power. The main thrust of his attack was at primary level where he again supported the need for multi-denominational education initiatives[56].

A BBC / Open University Television Programme

In January 1977 the BBC had come to Ireland to make a television programme on "The Multi-denominational Dispute" as part of an Open University series on democracy in education. Some members of the Dalkey School Project were interviewed for the programme as well as the Fianna Fáil spokesman on education, John Wilson, and some church representatives, including Fr. Con Sayers. John Wilson was unambiguous in his support of the Dalkey School Project and said that if Fianna Fáil were in government they would support the opening of a multi-denominational school. Helen Fahy was one of those who was interviewed for the programme. Her son Eoin remembers "watching his mother … being interviewed down at the seaside in Sandycove". He has "a vague memory of BBC TV coverage at some stage". Surprisingly for such a young boy, he was

56. *Times Educational Supplement*, 21st January 1977.

aware of the different roles played by different individuals. He was "certainly aware" that his mother (Helen) was secretary through those years, and indeed he knew who all the officers were at the time … "and even those who were hugely involved (like his father Hugh and Bill Hyland) but who could not be officially recognised because they were civil servants".

In early February, addressing the South Co. Council constituency of the Labour Party, Senator John Horgan urged the government to consider the establishment of integrated or multi-denominational school, under predominantly democratic management "on terms no less favourable than the best terms offered to other interests". He asked that "the air of official obstructionism" which had been the normal response to any attempt to establish such schools should give way to an open and genuine willingness to help. While deprecating the failure of the coalition government to respond to what was in some communities a vital need, Senator Horgan warned of the "the blandishments of the Fianna Fáil crocodile"!

At the end of January, a further letter was received by the Dalkey School Project from the Taoiseach stating that the new Minister for Education, Peter Barry had informed him that it was his intention to make a fresh study of all aspects of the case and that a letter would issue as soon as possible after he (the Minister) had informed the Taoiseach of his findings.

Buoyed by this commitment, the Dalkey School Project executive decided to go ahead and open a multi-denominational school in temporary premises in September 1977. A search had begun for possible temporary premises and in early February a newly built house on an extensive site on Barnhill Road, Dalkey, which was on the market for £70,000, was identified. However, the committee felt that it would be unsuitable for a school and in any event the DSP did not have the funds available to buy it. Some members of the committee, including myself, were sceptical about the proposal to open a school in September pointing out the following schedule of actions that would have

to be taken if the school was to open in temporary premises in September 1977:

Schedule of action by DSP committee for a school opening in September 1997:

7th Sep: Opening

7th July: Teachers appointed give notice in present jobs

1st July: Notify teachers of their appointment

1st May: Recognition of school: Advertise for teachers; Rent accommodation.

14th March: Final formal application for recognition with pupil data and accommodation proposals.

4th March: End of Canvas

1 February: Preliminary application for recognition: Search for accommodation.

Sanction sought to open DSP school in temporary premises in September 1977:

Nevertheless, on 9th February, a letter was sent to the Minister seeking sanction to open a school in temporary premises the following September. This milestone was referred to in an article in the local newspaper, *Southside,* under the heading "*School Plan to end Dalkey Crux":*

> The plan by the DSP to provide multi-denominational schools, has taken another step forward. The committee working on the project have decided to apply to the Minister for Education to open a pilot school in temporary premises next September. Micheal Johnston

> said: "We would like the Minister's agreement in principle to the project. Subject to the agreement of the primary and buildings branches of the Department, we hope to have a temporary premises ready by the autumn. Already the parents of more than 100 children have sought enrolment … We were very encouraged by a letter we received from the Taoiseach recently in which he stated that the government was reconsidering the entire subject …"

Accusations of Moral Blackmail?

Meanwhile, the question of multi-denominational education continued to be debated in the media. An article in the *Irish Times* on 9th February – *"Integrated Schools: moral blackmail warning by Bishop"* – reported on a lecture by the Catholic auxiliary Bishop of Dublin, Dr. Kavanagh in which he criticised those who blamed the segregation of schools for the troubles in the north. He stated that so much emphasis was put on that issue that it amounted to a sort of moral blackmail as if those not favouring integration were responsible for the continuation of the troubles. However, he indicated that personally he would welcome experiments in areas where a sufficient number of parents would like to have their children attend school with children of other denominations, provided adequate religious instruction was included in the curriculum.

An editorial on the issue in the *Irish Independent* of 11th February provided an opportunity for the Dalkey School Project to enter the debate again. On 18th February 1977 a letter from Helen Fahy was published in the *Irish Independent.* Challenging Bishop Kavanagh's criticism about those who blamed the schools for the Troubles in the north, her letter stated:

> "None of the groups seeking the integrated alternative in Irish education … is claiming that the Northern troubles have been caused by segregated schools.

> But equally I do not think that one rational person in Ireland would doubt that these schools are one factor in the present situation …

This letter then went on to state the aims of the Dalkey School Project and summarised the difficulties encountered during the ministry of Richard Burke. It added that members of the DSP weren't the only ones disappointed by Mr. Burke, stating: "He made his promises to the religious to copper-fasten their position in the system, but even these promises were still unmet when he left office". However, the letter pointed out that Burke's successor (Peter Barry) started his duties showing a much greater degree of flexibility and expressed the hope that the new Minister would look again at those areas where substantial numbers have said they want integrated national schools . It was hoped that "he would find a way within the present system to allow and assist that aspiration to be met". The letter ended with the statement:

> The choice which we are looking for will not only meet an urgent need in our community, but it will, in fact, also strengthen the denominational sector which will be able to concentrate on serving those who really believe in it, rather than those who use it merely because they have no choice.

The issue was also taken up in a supportive way by Christina Murphy, Education correspondent of the *Irish Times* who on 10th March 1977 published an article about what she referred to as "*The Multi-Denominational Conspiracy Theory*". She started the article by quoting extracts from an invitation to a parents' meeting in a CBS school in Walkinstown which stated: "All voluntary Catholic schools are under attack … Their right to exist is being denied … It is claimed that all schools should be State-controlled secular schools". She went on to refer to a speech by Professor Feichin O'Doherty of University College Dublin who referred to "pleas for the secularisation

of the school system" and asked: "Who are those people who are going around making speeches and writing letters alleging that Catholic schools are being denied the right to exist". She challenged them to "publicise the source of the threat", stating that if "Fr. Feichin O'Doherty knows something which the media is unaware of, then surely he should let us know what it is".

She went on to state that "if there are groups who are trying to get the religious and religion out of our education system altogether, this is a serious national matter and the churches, religious orders and interested lay people are quite right to defend themselves vigorously". But she stated that the present approach was unfair and confusing as well as being dishonest, adding: "There are well-intentioned people who want multi-denominational schools for their children and who have no intention whatsoever to get religion out of education". She ended by saying that "if these unsubstantiated and undefined allegations are kept circulating, then it will inevitably be assumed that the multi-denominational lobby is the source of the threat".

A Further Canvass of the Dalkey area by the Dalkey School Project.

In the meantime, as part of its plan to open a school in September, the Dalkey School Project undertook a canvass of the area to update the pre-enrolment list and to increase membership. The same methodology that proved so successful in the survey was used. A one-page description of what the DSP stood for, a membership application form and a pre-enrolment form plus a reply-paid envelope were delivered to each household in the canvass area. The canvass was carried out during the weekend of February 4th and was a huge success. It resulted in 200 new members, 12 supporters and 128 new children on the pre-enrolment list. (It also elicited 26 letters objecting to the canvass). There were now 135 children ready to start the following September with 74 younger children on

the list. This would be enough for a 3 to 4 teacher school.

At the meeting of the executive committee in March, the committee was told that the Parish Priest of Dalkey, Fr. Meagher had condemned the survey and the canvass during a sermon at Mass in the parish church in Dalkey. Desmond Green attended that Mass and remembers the sermon as "a serious attack on the Dalkey School Project." Desmond went on to say that Fr Meagher "could not have known about the success of the canvass but following the well-publicised results of the survey this further encroachment on his authority must have been too much". Apparently, during his sermon, Fr. Meagher spoke for several minutes but Desmond's only memory of what he said was when he thundered: 'We all know what a Catholic Education is'; 'We all know what a Protestant Education is.' This was followed by "the great rhetorical question": 'But what', pause and the mystery, 'is a Multi Denominational Education' - longer pause. Desmond concludes his description of the event: "I had had enough. I stood up and for the first time in my life I walked out of Mass".

Desmond Green was not the only parent who encountered the opposition of the Catholic clergy. Helen and Hugh Fahy, who lived in the parish of Glasthule, were visited by their parish priest who tried to put pressure on them to stop their involvement with the DSP. According to their son, Eoin, the visit "was not exactly a routine occurrence. They had never before had such a visit". However, the parish priest had no influence on them and if anything the visit strengthened their support of the Dalkey School Project. My husband, Bill, and I also experienced a similar visit from the curate in Dalkey parish, Fr. O'Brien, who asked where we had got married, whether our children had been baptised in the parish and other personal questions. I had seen him coming directly to our house from Eoin and Treasa Ó Raghallaigh's house up the road – Fr. O'Brien was well known locally at the time as a supporter of the Irish Family League and the anti-contraception lobby.

Lobbying of the Taoiseach by right-wing groups

Records now available in the National Archive show that around this time, right-wing Catholic groups had intensified their lobbying of the Taoiseach about the government's stance on Catholic education. While there is no evidence on file to indicate that this lobbying had an effect on government policy, the fact that these records are amongst a small number of educational records retained on file during the term of office of Cosgrave suggests that they were treated seriously by his office.

Following a seminar on 19th and 20th March organised by "the following Organisations, Movements, and Societies" a series of resolutions "adopted unanimously" were sent to the Taoiseach. The organisations were the Pro Fide Movement (Ireland); Irish Family League; International Council for European Freedom; League of Decency; Christian Community Co-Operation; Society to Outlaw Pornography (STOP); Single Women's Association; Youth Alert; Nazareth Family Movement; Christian Political Action; Faith Concern; Civitas; and the Dublin Ovulation Method Advisory Service. The education resolutions were as follows:

A: We urge legal enactments in the following:

1. The right of existing voluntary schools to continue to provide education, and to extend and develop as needs require.

2. The right of citizens in Voluntary Associations to establish and develop schools of their choice without restrictions or conditions other than that pupils be taught their basic civic duties

3. The right of citizens to establish and administer such schools and be afforded, directly or indirectly,

State subvention on the basis of absolute equality with other schools

4. That Religious Worship and Religious Education be provided in the school for children of different denominations, except where a request to the contrary is tendered in writing by the parents.

B: We demand that Colleges and Universities effectively prohibit the distribution of Contraceptives to their students on pain of withdrawal of public funds

C. We call on Catholic Secondary Schools, Seminaries and Training Colleges to provide adequate instruction to arm the students against the danger presented by International Communism.

Would it be possible to open the DSP school in September 1977?

Time was now running out for the DSP in its quest to open a school in temporary premises the following September. No reply had yet been received from the Minister for Education. Speaking at an Irish Civil Liberties Conference on 26th March, Micheal Johnston summarised the obstacles that were facing the DSP in its quest to open a school. These were:

> Firstly, emotional and unsubstantiated suggestions about what we stand for; secondly the inertia of bureaucracy, which sees problems ahead if a delicate and well-tried equilibrium is disturbed; and thirdly the vested interests of power and property that now control our educational facilities. Our function is like that of a sheep dog at this stage to limit the room for manoeuvre, to confine the area of the argument to the relevant.

He added: "the anti-conspiracy group seem to be saying that there are people – unnamed – planning to drive the churches and religion out of Irish education: none of the groups proposing

multi-denominational education are seeking any such thing".

By mid-April, the Dalkey School Project committee had reluctantly concluded that it was unlikely that the school would be open the following September. No reply had been received from the Minister and sanction to open the school had not been received. However, at a meeting of the Project's Council on 16th April, Barry Desmond sounded a note of optimism reporting that there appeared to be a shift in thinking at government level in relation to multi-denominational education. He said that it was difficult to gauge the extent of the shift at this stage – he had tabled a Dáil question for following week – but he felt that the time was ripe to upscale the lobbying. He suggested a campaign of letters to local TDs and meetings with the Taoiseach and local councillors. He felt that a degree of optimism might be appropriate at the general meeting.

Micheal Johnston reported that the debate on multi-denominational education was growing. He stated that the opposition had been notable for its failure to challenge or contradict any of the Project's assertions. In general, these attacks talked about the attack on religion and about "alleged long-term objectives of a sinister nature designed to get religion and the religious out of the Irish school system, and probably out of Irish life". He went on to state that "These smearing attacks on no named groups are designed to condemn by association anyone who is not satisfied with the status quo, with its absolute denominational nature". David Spearman suggested that an effort should be made to submit a motion for the AGM of the INTO, or at least an effort should be made to start discussion with the teachers. Charles Mollan asked if the Dalkey School Project failed to get sanction from the Minister would it opt to start a private school and hope for retrospective recognition? There was no support for this suggestion.

A special general meeting of members and of parents with children on the pre-enrolment list, attended by more than 60 people, was held on 16th April. At this meeting Micheal

Johnston announced that according to a schedule prepared by Áine Hyland it was unlikely that the school would open in Sep 1977. (This announcement was made reluctantly by Micheal who continued to hold out some hope that the deadline might be achieved). He informed the meeting that the membership had increased from 200 to 500 and that the pre-enrolment list now stood at 221 (including children under 4 years of age). There had been no reply yet from Minister Peter Barry but in response to a phone call to the Minister's office, Micheal Johnston had been informed that the matter was being considered "at the highest level". It was agreed to ask the Minister to meet a formal delegation from the Project – Barry Desmond and David Andrews had agreed to accompany the delegation. Members were also asked to write to their local TDs. The Treasurer reported that there was now almost £3,000 in the project account mainly contributed by the market and that a sponsored swim in the Blue Pool in Mountown the following day as well as a 'sponsored slim' would add further to the account.

In spite of the assurance from the Minister's office that the Dalkey School Project request was being considered "at the highest level", weeks later no response had been received. On 28th April 1977, the following Dáil Question was tabled by Barry Desmond to Minister for Education, Peter Barry.

> To ask the Minister for Education if he will state, further to the submissions of the Dalkey School Project during 1976 and 1977 seeking recognition for the establishment of a national school in the area under the auspices of the project, whether consideration has been given by his Department to these submissions?

The reply was as follows:

> The submissions made by the DSP in relation to the establishment of a national school in Dalkey are still receiving attention in my Department. As the Deputy

> is, I believe, aware, one of the matters to be weighed in relation to these submissions is the extent to which the establishment of an additional school in the area would result in a surplus of national school accommodation in the area, particularly in view of the fact that a decision in principle has long since been given that one of the already established schools be replaced by a new building. I shall try to have the matter brought to a decision as quickly as possible.

When asked a supplementary by Barry Andrews if he (the Minister) would agree to meet officers of the DSP the Minister replied: "I will so agree".

The May 1977 newsletter of the Dalkey School Project summarised the frustrating wait for a substantive reply to its request for sanction to open a school. It pointed out that "we are assured that our request is being considered 'at the highest level', but three months have now passed since our request and all we have received is an acknowledgement". The Newsletter asked: "Is this an acceptable form of efficiency for those conducting the business of the nation? Or is multi-denominational education being shut out because it is politically unacceptable?"

By this stage, a further £500 had been raised by the Swim-In and "the sinister Slim-In continues" had raised more than £100 so far! (The "sinister Slim-In" was a reference to a sponsored weight-loss fund-raiser which had been ongoing for some months. A few overweight members of the executive committee had set themselves a target to lose a specified number of stones and lbs. and their friends and family had committed to paying a sponsorship levy for each lb. lost).

Education and the political parties

In spite of the many delays and procrastinations on the part of government, the Dalkey School Project was determined not to allow the issue of integrated education be a party political

football. Support had always been sought across all the political parties and the Dalkey School Project tried to respect the contrary views of those 'who think differently' whatever political party they belonged to.

The Labour Party was committed by the following decision taken at its annual conference: "The Labour Party should support fully the establishment of multi-denominational and democratically managed schools wherever and whenever there is viable support for such schools". Fianna Fáil had re-affirmed its similar commitment when their leader Jack Lynch repeated on 29th April 1977 "his suggestion of pilot schemes of interdenominational education at primary level where a majority of parents wished to test such an innovation". And Fine Gael had as yet no policy on the issue – so when either Dr. Garret FitzGerald spoke in favour of "such experiments" or Oliver J. Flanagan or anyone spoke against, they were expressing their own opinions only: both supportive and non-supportive views were represented within the party.

As regards the attitude of the churches, the Newsletter stated that "During our recent canvas and following it, the Dalkey School Project was preached against at least three times in local Catholic Churches and twice in the Church of Ireland parish magazine in Dalkey". However, it pointed out that in the parish magazine *Contact* the Rector stressed that "that the Dalkey School Project and Dalkey No. 2 National School development are two entirely separate entities and are not one and the same".

The Newsletter continued:

> Dalkey's Parish priest referred to "an unsolicited letter inviting applications to a school which does not exist". We hope very much it will exist next September, and in the meantime every family in the area has an opportunity to put their children on to our pre-enrolment list., which will be the only priority for places in a school which will fall far short of the eventual need. Fr. Meagher also

> referred to the DSP as an elitist group and wondered why we had not canvassed St. Begnet's Villas and Glasthule. Both areas were of course canvassed, St. Begnet's Villas, in fact, by the Chairman just two evenings before this inaccurate reference was made.

Surprisingly, the May newsletter appeared to hold out some hope that the school might still open in September although the April meeting of the executive committee had accepted that this would not be possible. It was not until a speech which he gave on 24th June 1977 at the Glencree Reconciliation Centre that the chairman Micheal Johnston conceded that "time has probably run out on us as far as opening next September is concerned". With July upon us, he acknowledged that it would scarcely be possible to advertise for teachers and give the successful applicants the time to give proper notice in their present jobs. He also acknowledged that there would also have to be many discussions with the Dept. about the premises and other requirements. He stated however that the Dalkey School Project had a record for persistence and expressed determination to succeed.

Referring to statements from the objectors to multi-denominational education he reiterated that none of the groups pressing for the choice of a multi-denominational alternative in the Irish educational system was claiming that such a choice would solve the "Irish problem". That would be a naïve suggestion and there was certainly no evidence for making such a claim. He concluded: "Shadowy figures in the wings attach the multi-denominational lobby in general terms as godless, anti-religious and subversive".

But the days of the Fine Gael /Labour coalition were numbered, although the Taoiseach, Liam Cosgrave had no inkling of this when he called a general election in May 1977, nine months before the expiry of his term of office. He was confident that Fine Gael and Labour would be returned to government and political commentators generally predicted

that the coalition would sweep to victory. However, when the results of the election were announced in June, Fianna Fáil had achieved an overwhelming majority, winning 84 seats out of 148, the biggest majority ever recorded in Dáil Eireann. A combination of the reduction of the voting age from 21 to 18 and a very attractive Fianna Fáil election manifesto had contributed to this victory. The overall result of the 1977 general election has been described by Joe Lee as "a sensation[57]". The consequences for the party leadership were immediate and unprecedented. Both Liam Cosgrave and Brendan Corish resigned as leaders of the Fine Gael and Labour parties respectively, and a new era of Irish politics had begun.

57. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985: Politics and Society*.

Chapter 6

Meanwhile – Back in St. Patrick's N.S 1974–1977

Chapter 2 described events in St. Patrick's N.S. between 1972 and 1974 and concluded that following receipt of the letter dated 8th March 1974 from the Department of Education to the Manager, Rev. J.F.O. Williams, the die had been cast and the multi-denominational experiment, which had been started in St. Patrick's by Miss Armstrong in the late 1960s had come to an end. The policy of restricting enrolment had been implemented during the summer of 1974 and numbers in the school began to fall. The hope and expectations of the PTA that a sixth teacher would be appointed had been irrevocably dashed.

Miss Armstrong's secondment from St. Patrick's N.S. 1975 to 1978

By September 1974 the tension between the parish and the school had taken its toll on pupils, parents and teachers. The principal, Florence Armstrong, was on sick leave during the first term of the school year – from September to Christmas

1974 – and in January 1975 she was granted a two-year secondment to take up a post in a teacher training college in Nigeria. In the event, Miss Armstrong never returned to St. Patrick's N.S. When her two-year secondment to Nigeria ended in January 1977, she applied to the Department of Education for an extension of this secondment which was granted, and she did not return to Ireland until summer 1978 when she accepted the post of principal of the Dalkey School Project N.S.

The uncertainty created by her ongoing secondment was a source of concern to the manager of St. Patrick's N.S., Rev. Mr. Williams, who in February 1977, when Miss Armstrong was due to end her secondment, wrote:

> An immediate quandary is that at the moment we don't know whether we will have Miss Armstrong back with us on 1st February, the planned date for the end of her two-year secondment to the Nigerian government. We have heard from someone who had received a letter that there is the possibility of an extension to her term of duty. In all fairness, it must be said that we are no more in the dark than the Department of Education in this matter … It would appear that at least two letters addressed to them did not arrive on their desks … We can be very thankful that we have a most capable Mrs. Wilson to ensure the smooth day-to-day running of the school …

A month later he wrote:

> We got a letter from the Department of Education on 5th or 6th February telling us that we need not expect our Principal Teacher back before 1st February 1978, as Miss Armstrong has been granted a year extension to her leave of absence for secondment to the Nigerian Government dating from 1st Feb past … If we include the term of sick leave before she left for Africa, this means that we will be deprived of our Principal for nearly three and a half years … our opinion was not sought in this matter …

By September of 1977, the situation was no clearer. Writing in *Contact* in September 1977, Rev. Williams stated:

> Miss Armstrong has been on holidays during the summer months. Some of the members of the Board of Management have met her, and it now seems unlikely that she will be returning to teach in Dalkey before September of next year 1978 …

A substitute teacher had been appointed in place of Ms. Armstrong in September 1974, and Mrs. Violet Wilson, who had been teaching in St. Patrick's N.S. for many years, was appointed as acting principal. A new teacher was appointed to replace Hazel Riordan, the popular junior infant teacher who had left St. Patrick's for a post in Taney N.S., Dundrum in July 1974. Demand for places in the school was no longer as strong as it had been and the policy of restricting enrolment had begun to impact on pupil numbers. For example, in September 1977, the school reopened with 165 pupils and enrolment increased to 175 by 1st January 1978. The 1974 enrolment of around 200 was never again reached and a sixth teacher was never appointed. Today, in September 2020, St. Patrick's N.S. is a four-classroom school with a principal teacher and four assistant teachers. Junior and Senior Infants are in one classroom; first and second in another; third and fourth in another and fifth and sixth in another.

During the school years 1974/5 to 1977/8, the PTA in St. Patrick's continued to be active but it was now clear that it would have no role in determining school policy. Parents of children attending St. Patrick's N.S. who were also involved in the DSP continued to be active in St. Patrick's PTA. From the time the DSP had been formally launched as an association in February 1975, its members were anxious to make it clear that the newly formed DSP was quite separate from St. Patrick's, but the distinction was not always understood, especially by some of its critics who continued to accuse the DSP of trying

to "wrest control of the school from the Church of Ireland".

This accusation was not helped by some letters from the Rector in the parish magazine, *Contact*. For example in March 1977, Rev. Williams wrote that he:

> Had been asked and many are questioning whether the Dalkey School Project and the "6-classroomed school" which the Taoiseach says may be sanctioned are one and the same venture. The answer is simply NO. The DSP went out on their own when they were unable to take over our Parish School through the PTA. The aims and objects of the DSP are well publicised through circulars and the media, and their hope is that they will be able to open a pilot-multi-denominational co-educational school run by a committee of management but this has nothing whatever to do with the Board of School Management of St. Patrick's School, Dalkey, our Parish school, at least not directly. It may raise questions as to where all the pupils will come from or go to, for it must mean that parents will be switching their children from one school to another, according to where they hear there is the best teaching.

However, in the parish magazine the following month he clarified his statement:

> At the last PTA meeting exception was taken to my remarks in reference to the Dalkey School Project. The PTA officially never did more than ask me to resign as Manager, and leave the way open for the Archbishop, as Patron, to negotiate a new form of management accepted to the parents as stated in a Resolution.

Adding:

> It was a time of great unrest, and there were many calls on me to resign as Manager, and hand over the management to those who could develop the school along the lines of their own ideas and ideals. It was never the wish of the Select Vestry, as representatives

> of the Parish, that the School should be handed over to such a committee, and this was constantly re-iterated. It is my recollection that someone finally arose at a General Meeting of the PTA and said that of their ideals were to be attained, it would have to be independently of what was happening at Dalkey No. 2. This is all ancient history; my memory may be playing me false; the one point I wanted to make, and still want to make, is that the D.S.P. and Dalkey No.2 developments are two entirely separate entities and not one and the same.

Setting up of Boards of Management in National Schools – September 1975

The decision by the Minister for Education, Richard Burke, to set up boards of management in national schools in September 1975 alleviated some of the tensions that had existed between the parents and the parish of St. Patrick's in Dalkey. Some of the parents who were also involved in the Dalkey School Project were elected to the first Board of Management of St. Patrick's N.S in September 1975. Pat Johnston, who had been secretary of the PTA in June 1974 when the vote of no confidence in the policies of the manager had been passed, and whose youngest son had been born in August 1974, was elected as a parent representative and was correspondence secretary to the Board from September 1975 to September 1977. The second parent who was elected to the board of management was Gerard Sheehan, an active parishioner in St. Patrick's parish, but also a supporter of the Dalkey School Project.

The more cordial relationship between the school and the parish was encapsulated in the report of the Chair of the PTA in June 1976 as follows:

> It is my pleasure as outgoing chairman of the PTA to report that 1975/6 was a year which saw an end to friction between the PTA and parish, a year of renewed

> growth in the school and a year of co-operative effort in furthering the interests of St. Patrick's N.S. … The success of the past year was due in no small measure to the setting up of a Board of Management last September … We elected Pat Johnston and Gerald Sheehan as our representatives … Other members of the Board are Violet Wilson, ex officio, Rev. Mr. Williams, Capt. Greenlea and Terry Read. Relations between the Board and the PTA have been most cordial …

The report included an extract from a letter from the board of management during the year setting out the school's enrolment policy. The policy was a compromise between the earlier demands of the PTA and the policy which had been introduced in 1972. It reflected a greater sense of trust between the school and the parish which had been facilitated by the setting up of the board of management. The fact that the demand for places had abated during Miss Armstrong's absence was a significant factor in enabling the board to adopt the following selection policy:

1. The Board believes that the policy must be based on a planned intake into the junior classes

2. The Board has fully agreed that the Principal should accept on its behalf the names and details of all prospective pupils

3. If and when selection should become necessary, joint priority will be given to brothers and sisters of children already in the school and to the children of Church of Ireland parishioners.

The chairperson's report concluded with the statement:

> In conclusion, may I say that I look forward to continued growth and success in the school during the coming year and to a continuation of the very good relations

that now exist between all parties involved.

A New Building for St. Patrick's N.S. ?

Meanwhile the question of a new building to replace the unsuitable and overcrowded parish building which housed St. Patrick's N.S. continued to be on the agenda of the Department of Education and to some extent on the parish agenda. While the Rev. Williams had not actively pursued this proposal, some members of the parish and some parents supported the building of a new school. A new building would end any friction between the school and the parish in relation to the dual use of the parish hall and would be a fitting legacy for future generations.

A member of the parish, and also of the board of management of the school, Mr. Terry Read, who had moved to the area some years previously, had bought a house on a large site (Charleville House) adjacent to St. Patrick's Church and school, and in December 1974, he offered part of the site of Charleville to the select vestry to facilitate the building of a new St. Patrick's school. This very generous offer was subject to certain conditions, "the most pertinent of which was that the school should not be less than six-teacher size, the intention being that there should be the possibility of expansion to an eight-teacher school if this was deemed desirable".

A committee of select vestry members and parents discussed the proposal from January to April 1975 and expressed themselves in favour of proceeding. According to the rector, a small meeting of parishioners in March 1975 expressed "no firm measure of support for the idea". A request to the parishioners in April 1975 through the *Contact* magazine to make their views about a new building known, produced virtually no reaction one way or the other. During the summer of 1975 there was communication between the select vestry and the Department and the Office of Public Works, which at

that time was responsible for the architectural aspects of school design and building. According to Rev. Williams "there was no fundamental objection on the part of the Department to the building of a school of the desired size, but neither was there any great enthusiasm among parish members".

A meeting of the board of management with the Minister in February 1976 did not produce a satisfactory outcome to the situation. It appears that at that stage the Department was willing only to fund a four-classroom school, which was not acceptable to the board. During 1976, when Terry Read heard that the Department was only willing to fund a four-teacher school, he stated that the offer of the site must be considered withdrawn. By early 1977, he indicated that he required an early decision on whether or not the parish wanted to accept his offer of a site for a new school building. Early in 1977, correspondence with the Taoiseach suggested that the government would now be willing to grant-aid a six-classroom school and when Terry Read heard that a six teacher school was again on the agenda he indicated that "The (current) Taoiseach's offer … makes it possible to reinstate the offer of a site …".

Although he was only nine years old at the time, Helen Fahy's son, Eoin, who was not a pupil in St. Patrick's N.S., has a very clear memory of a discussion around that time when the Johnstons showed some of the DSP committee members a letter which had been received from the Department "giving the go-ahead for a new Number 2 primary school for Dalkey". He remembers being told that "Number 2 meant Church of Ireland "and that "this was a sort of pre-emptive strike against the DSP – by giving permission for that C of I school, it was taking away support for a multi-denominational school".

However, fortunately for the Dalkey School Project, Rev. Williams was not enthusiastic about proceeding with the building of a new Church of Ireland school. In January 1977, he wrote in Contact:

> I believe that the project cannot go forward without the wholehearted support and enthusiasm of (a) The present and future parents in the area (b) The Select Vestry representing the Parish of Dalkey and (c) The Board of Management which will carefully weigh the task of running such a school.

He added:

> We are now in 1977 and I do not think it is unreasonable that I ask at this stage (a) whether the relevant bodies intend to enter into negotiation again with the Department of Education? And (b) whether as a result of these negotiations the offer of the site is going to be taken up?

His letter concluded:

> Included in this issue is a letter from Mr. Terence Read. He has been most patient with the dilly-dallying of the Department of Education and their proposals and counter-proposals about the size of the new building. His is a most generous offer of a very valuable site … the Taoiseach's letter to me that the Minister will be getting in touch with me "shortly" on this matter is only the preliminary signal that we are about to start on the long road of negotiating the planning, costing, sharing the costs, raising funds, building, making legal agreements and all the hundreds of other things that have to be done …

Two months later Rev. Mr. Williams wrote (March 1977) in *Contact:* "The Taoiseach's "shortly" in which the Minister for Education was to get in touch with us about re-housing of our present School, is getting longer every day … We hope that the Minister is not having a re-think in our case". And in May 1977 he wrote: "There is no real progress towards the re-housing of our School in a new building "

The surprising reference by Rev. Williams in his newsletter

of January 1977 to the "the relevant bodies" whom he felt should now re-enter negotiations with the Department of Education about the new school building, suggested that he did not regard himself as one of those "relevant bodies". The lukewarm support of Rev. Williams, as chairman of the board of management of St. Patrick's N.S. and his failure to pro-actively pursue the proposal for a new school building must have been a puzzle to the Department of Education, given the controversies of the previous few years.

Under the procedures of the Department of Education, the responsibility and the initiative in relation to building a new school lies unambiguously in the lap of a school's board of management which is expected to take a pro-active approach to the matter. The passive approach taken by Rev. Williams suggests that he did not want St. Patrick's N.S. to grow to a six-classroom school – much less an 8-classroom school – and that his wish to maintain the school as a small parish school for Church of Ireland parishioners had not changed since his appointment as rector in 1973.

In the event, the failure of Rev. Williams and the board of management of St. Patrick's to pursue the replacement of the dual-purpose building on the Church site in which St. Patrick's N.S. had been housed for so long, by a new purpose-built school on the adjoining land offered by Terry Read, was to the advantage of the newly-founded Dalkey School Project. However, that same failure must have led to some head-scratching among civil servants in the Department of Education and was likely to be a contributory factor in the reluctance of the Department to give the go-ahead to the Dalkey School Project.

Chapter 7

Progress at Last – A New Government Summer 1977

Prior to the general election in June 1977, over 10,000 circulars had been distributed by the Dalkey School Project to houses in the Dun Laoghaire constituency, encouraging voters to vote for candidates who supported the Project. The circular stated that:

> The Dalkey School Project is seeking a pilot school – to show how such a school works in practice: neither at this time, or in the future, does the DSP seek to take denominational schools from those who want them. We stand with those people for the parents' right to choose according to their lawful and conscientious preference – a choice that does not exist today.

The DSP also appealed to its members to write to the outgoing Taoiseach and to all the candidates who were running for election in the constituency.

The results of the election were very encouraging for the Dalkey School Project, both locally and nationally. Three of

the four TDs elected in the constituency were members of the Dalkey School Project – Barry Desmond (Labour); David Andrews (Fianna Fáil) and Martin O'Donoghue (Fianna Fáil). Barry Desmond was a member of the Council of the DSP and had been a consistent supporter during his previous term as T.D. when he was also a member of the government and a cabinet minister. David Andrews had also supported the DSP and Martin O'Donoghue, an economist and a lecturer in Trinity College Dublin, who was a first-time Fianna Fáil candidate, was a friend and colleague of Bill and myself, with whom we had worked on the *Investment in Education* team from 1962 to 1964.

With a significant majority in the Dáil (84 seats out of 148) Fianna Fáil was now in government. Jack Lynch was the new Taoiseach, and he appointed Martin O'Donoghue as Minister for Economic Development and Planning and John Wilson as Minister for Education. This was an excellent situation for the Dalkey School Project. During the previous two years both Jack Lynch and John Wilson had publicly stated their support for pilot multi-denominational schools in areas where there was local support for such school. Expectations were high among DSP members and supporters that a breakthrough was imminent.

On 18th August 1977, the BBC Open University programme on democracy in education, which had been recorded in January, was broadcast on RTE. As part of the airing of the programme John Wilson, now Minister for Education, was interviewed on RTE's television "Seven Days" programme and when asked about the situation in Dalkey, he replied that "surely the people who should decide whether a multi-denominational school is required in Dalkey should be the people themselves?" When pressed further, he gave a "categorical assurance" that a multi-denominational school would go ahead in Dalkey. An article by Christina Murphy, Education Correspondent in the *Irish Times* the following day, stated:

> The Minister for Education, Mr. Wilson, yesterday gave a categorical assurance that a multi-denominational school in Dalkey, Co. Dublin, will go ahead. The Minister was speaking on a BBC Open University radio programme. The programme was recorded before the general election but broadcast only yesterday morning. Mr Wilson said that his party was committed to such projects where they were viable and people wanted them. Fianna Fail was also committed to respecting the wishes of those who wanted denominational or voluntary schools. … Rev. Con Sayers, director of the Dublin Diocesan Education Secretariat, who also spoke on the programme, said that the people of Ireland did not want multi-denominational schools.

Writing in the *Irish Independent*, Education Correspondent John Walshe stated:

> Talks begin next month between Department of Education officials and the Dalkey School Project on the practicalities of setting up the country's first multi-denominational national school. This follows the go ahead for the project by the new Minister for Education, Mr. Wilson … The approval was given at a recent meeting between Project leaders and the Minister who gave a categorical assurance on the question yesterday during a BBC Open University programme which dealt with the multi-denominational school issue in the Republic of Ireland.

Walshe's article also stated that Fr. Con Sayers had claimed that the people of Ireland did not want multi-denominational schools at present. Walshe also said that the Church of Ireland Archdeacon of Dublin, Dr. Poyntz said there was divergence of opinion within the Church of Ireland on multi-denominational schools with some fearing that they would be "swamped" if they agreed to take part. As far as Dalkey was concerned, Dr. Poyntz expressed concern that if the Dalkey school went

ahead "it would become secularised". As far as the teacher unions were concerned, Walshe reported that "the country's largest teaching organisation, the INTO, declined to have a representative on the television programme, saying it had no policy on the question".

Good News at Last

On 17th August 1977, the day before the programme was broadcast, Minister John Wilson invited Micheal Johnston and Desmond Green to a meeting in his office. The Minister stated that Fianna Fáil was committed to multi-denominational education where there was sufficient local demand and confirmed that subject to meeting the Department's practical requirements, the Dalkey School Project would be recognised to open a school in temporary premises on 1st July 1978[58]. He asked that this information be treated in a low-key way and that there should be "no triumphalism". Before leaving the meeting, Desmond Green asked that a date be fixed for a meeting with the Department officials and a date of 1st September was agreed.

The Dalkey School Project executive committee and some council members met on 31st August to discuss what issues should be raised with Department of Education officials on the following day. David Spearman advised that the delegation should not get into discussion about patronage. A decision had been made as to patronage – the matter was not for discussion. Department officials should be asked about requirements for temporary premises and site. At the meeting two sub-committees were set up – a site and temporary premises sub-committee chaired by Aine Hyland and a fund-raising committee chaired by Desmond Green. The committee was told that David Andrews had informed the local Dalkey

58. In the 1970s and for many years before and after, the national school year started on 1st July and ended on 30th June.

Cumann of Fianna Fáil (which had previously been antagonistic to the DSP) of Fianna Fáil policy on multi-denominational education.

On 1st September a meeting was held between the officers of the Dalkey School Project (Micheal Johnston, Helen Fahy and Desmond Green) and officials of the Department of Education. The department officials were Art Callanan and Paddy Maloney, both of whom were known to myself and Helen Fahy. From our personal experience, we were confident that they would not be ideologically opposed or unsympathetic to the principles of the Project. As planned, the meeting focused on practical details. The draft constitution of the Dalkey School Project company was given to the officials who said they would send it to their legal adviser for approval. They also indicated that the Department would consider paying up to 50% of the rent of suitable temporary premises, which was very welcome information to the delegation. In addition, they asked that a policy statement on religious education be provided.

An article in the *Irish Times* the following day stated: "*Dalkey mixed school to open next year*"[59]. The article quoted from an interview with Micheal Johnston who had informed their correspondent that "the target date for the opening of the multi-denominational national school at Dalkey, Co. Dublin is July 1st next year". Johnston said that Mr. Wilson had given assurances in principle that the school could go ahead, provided there existed a viable number of pupils and that the school met other conditions. He referred to the meeting in the Department of Education to plan for the school and said that temporary premises were needed as well as a site for a permanent school. He added that the project had about 500 supporters and that there were 200 children on the pre-enrolment list. He was confident that there would be enough pupils to have at least a three-teacher school.

59. *Irish Times*, 2nd September 1977.

Later that month, at a meeting of the Dalkey School Project Council, the chairman relayed the good news that "the principles which we stand for have finally been legitimated". With typical Micheal Johnston confidence, he added: "We always believed that it could not be otherwise". Referring to "our 27-letter correspondence between the DSP and the Minister's office from March 1975 to June of this year" he stated that it had been a "salutary learning experience". But the Minister's acceptance of the Project's *bona fides* was not the end of its work, it was much rather "the beginning of it in earnest". Because there were no longer any obstacles of principle in the way, there was just the practical question: can we do it?

The challenge now would be to open the school in July 1978 in temporary premises, and to have tangible and practical plans for the building of the permanent pilot school not many years after that. Pre-enrolment figures were growing and since the announcement that the school was to open in July 1978, additional children had been added to the list. There were now 263 children on the pre-enrolment list – 184 of whom would be eligible for enrolment in July 1978. If all these children accepted a place, a four-teacher school would be required.

The next requirement would be formal recognition; and the Dalkey School Project had already anticipated this requirement. Its re-constitution from an Association into a company limited by guarantee had already been discussed at general meetings and steps were well advanced to implement this. The draft articles of association were already with two government departments – Education and Finance – to ensure that all the official requirements were satisfied. It was hoped that at the AGM in October a procedural motion would be passed to bring this important change into place.

The convenors of the two sub-committees – fund-raising (Desmond Green) and site and premises (Áine Hyland) – reported that while the Project was likely to have the resources

to secure temporary premises, it would be very difficult to acquire a site if one became available because of the cost involved. The treasurer undertook to talk to the bank manager about the possibility of raising a loan in the name of the Dalkey School Project.

More Media Controversy!

Predictably, once the news of the decision to open a pilot multi-denominational school in Dalkey in July 1978 was made public, letters of objection and concern began to appear in the media. Some of the objections were ideological – others were more protectionist, i.e. objections from quarters which purported to be concerned that a new multi-denominational school would have an impact on existing schools.

During September, both Fr. Con Sayers of the Catholic Dublin Diocesan Secretariat, and Rev. J.F.O. Williams, Church of Ireland rector in Dalkey raised questions in the media about the proposed new school and its implications for denominational schools. A letter from Micheal Johnston and Helen Fahy to the *Sunday Independent* on 27th September 1977 sought to allay their concerns, stating:

> We in the DSP have read with great interest the views of the two clergymen Re. JFO Williams and Rev Con Sayers who have commented in your columns in the last two weeks about the integrated National School which we will be opening in the Dalkey area next July. If they have both read what we have written over the past few years they will know that we have always endorsed the position of the denominational, parochial school wherever it can be shown to be what people want; indeed we would go further than Fr. Sayers who says he would hope that "the majority who wish to send their children to parochial schools will not be deprived of their schools"; we would insist that the right exists also for viable minorities who want parochial schools".

> The right of course also exists for those who want to see Catholic, Protestant and other children educated together in Ireland … Our claims have not been extravagant and they certainly haven't been exclusive: we have conducted the debate rationally and calmly.

A letter to the *Irish Times* the following month (10th October 1977) from the parish priest of Churchtown, Fr. McCabe, was more negative. He stated that he had watched with special interest the campaign waged by the Dalkey School Project and described it as

> a fascinating example of how a determined few, backed by sympathetic elements in the radio and press, can forward their case. Every week they get coverage in one or other newspaper – often several times. And now we are led to believe that Liam Cosgrave stands alone as the only one who will not support their campaign.

He went on to state:

> He (Cosgrave) is certainly not alone. Both the Catholic and Protestant authorities in the Dalkey area are not going to support it. For the Protestant population the proposed type of school would virtually mark the end of their existence. For the Catholic it is simply not acceptable. The attitude to religion and religious teaching as appears from the public statements of its chief protagonists, shows that the school is just not on for parents who wish to bring their children up as believing, practising members of any religion …

He then repeated some of the accusations that had been levelled at the DSP, and asked: "has the secular humanist philosophy made such inroads that we now have a substantial core of people whose position in practice is best summed up by the word 'agnostic'?" He also repeated an accusation that had begun to grow legs among those opposed to the DSP and which had first been articulated by Garrett FitzGerald the previous

year. He stated that the protagonists of multi-denominational schools

> will usually be found to come from the privileged members of society who up to recently paid for their own private schools. Their type of school will have its own inbuilt selection process, which will tend to make it extremely elitist in the social sense. So they must be prepared to face the same problems as the rest of us – payment for the school site and in particular the pupil/ teacher ratio.

He went on to concede that "If there are sufficient numbers of people then they are constitutionally entitled to a school of their choice" but added that "it must be on equal terms with other schools". He went on to ask:

> Wouldn't it be easier for them and cheaper for the country if they were to join in our existing schools? There are plenty of empty schoolrooms throughout the Borough (of Dun Laoghaire) and more teachers are in danger of losing their posts. And wouldn't it be more democratic? Desegregation of one type could be a smoke-screen for segregation of another type.

Referring to the Dalkey survey he stated, "that things are not as they seem in the survey". According to Fr. McCabe, "many, many people were confused by the terms used and the propaganda". When they saw what was really involved they would not be so impressed. Stating that "A theory may seem clever in a debate, but when it comes to the crunch – "But what do I want for my child" – a lot of new answers come up" he concluded: "We have debated long enough the question: "What is an inter-denominational school?". Now comes the real question: "What is an inter-denominational child?". The answer could be "nothing".

The Dalkey School Project was quick to respond. On 17 October 1977 Micheal Johnston replied to Fr. McCabe's letter

as follows: "(The letter) saddened me because I do not like to see any Christian leaders using arguments which are inaccurate, mean, and lacking in tolerance and charity". Adverting to the Project's membership he stated that it comprised people of different beliefs including:

> many practising Protestants, both Church of Ireland and Dissenters, whose churches are either in favour of integrated schooling quite unambiguously, or who are, like the Church of Ireland, committed towards experiments in integrated education. We also have those who claim no denominational affiliation – we make no apology for that – be they agnostics, atheists, humanists or whatever; such people exist in Ireland, and we do not see them as a caste of untouchables. But they, no more than any group, will not have the right to impose their exclusive view of life on our school.

He went on to state that he was confident that the pilot school, which would be opening next July, would have the ethos of a community in which Irish people – "and I include in this the new Irish, the first generation immigrants from overseas" – Catholic, Protestants and others, live, work and play together, adding: "When I say that, I mean also that I am confident that we can satisfy the needs of all the parents in the school as regards religious education for their children …"

Referring to Fr. McCabe's suggestion that the Dalkey School Project was looking for special privileges over the denominational schools as regards state support towards the costs of sites, or the pupil-teacher ratio he stated that the Project had never sought such a special position, even though it did not have "the taxing capacity of the Churches". Addressing the charge of elitism from Fr. McCabe he stated that he (Fr. McCabe) must have read nothing about the aims of the Project. But he (Fr. McCabe) could be assured of one thing:

> … on the site of our school there will be one national

> school open to all, there will not be one gate to one school for the uniformed fee-paying children and another gate for the children who cannot pay who go to the National School.

(This was a reference to the fee-paying private primary schools run by a number of Catholic religious orders – including the Loreto schools in Dalkey at that time).

The letter concluded by welcoming Fr. McCabe's letter and stating that

> Every letter like Fr. McCabe's is good for us; it reminds our more passive Catholic and Protestant supporters how important it is that we succeed. Each such letter, each such harangue from the pulpit, brings us more members. As we have no Sunday collections from which to finance our work this is very important to us. Our most vital objective now is to open that first school next July …

Some days earlier (13th October 1977) Micheal Johnston had written to the *Church of Ireland Gazette* in reply to a piece by Fr. Con Sayers that had been published on 7th October. He referred to the piece as "a frontal assault on both the Dalkey School Project and myself" and as "a skilful piece of argument". He quoted Fr. Sayers as saying as having "a paternalistic arm around the Church of Ireland shoulder" when he (Fr. Sayers) wrote:

> "It seems to me that the ideas of the Church of Ireland on the school ethos coincides with that of the Catholic Church. Both Churches desire that the child be educated in an atmosphere which is close as possible to that of the home. Hence we seek the ideal of denominational education for our children".

Micheal Johnston's letter went on to clarify the aims of the Dalkey School Project and to summarise its history. He made the point that the Dalkey survey was not unique in

identifying the large majority of parents who would favour multi-denominational schools. He referred in particular to the then recently published "vast survey of the whole Dublin area" carried out by Fr. Michael McGréil of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth, which showed that Dalkey was by no means unique. Fr. McGréil's study "*Prejudice and Tolerance in Ireland*" published in 1977, had found that 77.8% of respondents "supported a radical concept in education i.e. interdenominational, mixed, free, community schools"[60].

Reiterating that the Project's first aim was to open a pilot school next July, he stated that:

> it is absolutely true that among our members there are agnostics, atheists, humanists; there are Protestants and Catholics who do not go to Church; there are even Christians who refused to be labelled denominationally; They are all very welcome as members of the DSP. There are also very many committed church-going Protestants and Catholics, who share with the others a desire to have their children educated together in schools which reflect their homes in a society which has these many strands in it … But in our schools, no group will have the right to claim that their views or their tradition must provide the exclusive ethos of the school.

He then went on to state that there had not been a tradition of lay involvement in theology and administration in the Catholic Church in the past, so he could understand Fr. Sayers' reluctance to accept that parents must be the ones who determine the basis on which their children receive their religious education. He said that this was in sharp contrast with the strong lay involvement in both administration and thinking that was the tradition of the Church of Ireland and the other Protestant Churches.

As regards religious education, he accused Fr. Sayers of

60. McGréil, M. *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ireland*.

being "less than accurate when he accuses me of suggesting that untrained lay people should decide on a curriculum of religious education" and stated that "Our teachers trained in the recognised Colleges of Education will be competent to develop specific programmes and curricula according to the basic principles laid down by the Dalkey School Project and the parents of the particular school". He added:" I would hope that the Churches would be prepared to offer their help and advice when it is needed".

Emphasising that it was the intention that the Dalkey pilot school would be the first of many such schools, he stated that

> If our contention proves correct, that many people want the opportunity for their children to be educated together, and that this can be achieved in a way which enriches our children and our community by breaking down barriers of ignorance which existed among us for many years, then we can proceed to build more such schools in other areas where it can be shown that this is what people want.

Third Annual General Meeting of the Dalkey School Project Oct. 1977

Meanwhile the site and premises sub-committee of the DSP had begun the search for temporary premises and a site. At its meeting on 19th October 1977, Patsy Lyle and Phillipa Mollan reported that they had visited the Squash Centre in Dalkey to see whether all or part of it might be suitable and available as temporary premises. The management had promised to let the DSP know by Christmas whether it might be available from September next. Micheal Johnston reported that he was following up a very promising offer of a site and temporary premises, the location of which had to be kept confidential at this stage of the negotiations. As regards the Project's policy on Religious Education it was proposed to hold a special extended meeting or seminar on the matter in late November / early

December. Position papers would be invited from anyone who wished to contribute ideas on the subject.

At the annual third general meeting of the DSP on 23rd October 1977, the chairman summarised what had been achieved in the last three years. 1974 was the year of gestation: 1975 was the year of the Survey; 1976 was the year of the publication and the dissemination of the Report and most importantly the opening of the pre-enrolment list; 1977 was the year when Mr. Wilson's two successors, Mr. Barry and Mr. Wilson showed a more enlightened attitude. Another very important development was the growth in membership and in the numbers on the pre-enrolment list. He emphasised that the DSP's problems were by no means over. Some obstacles had been removed – but there were many practical obstacles to be faced. The real challenges were only just starting.

The Treasurer reported that there was now over £4,600 in the Project Account and he again reiterated the need for major fund-raising by the following summer – suggesting a target of £25,000. The motion to set up the Dalkey School Project as a Limited Company was passed at that meeting and a new executive committee was elected. The same officers were elected and there were a few new names on the executive committee – Eileen Sinnott, Tony Fahy and Conor Fennell.

Another "Vera Verba" Pamphlet – The Dalkey School Saga.

A week after the third Dalkey School Project annual general meeting, the executive committee had a new challenge to contend with. On 30th October, a pamphlet entitled "*The Dalkey School Saga: Has the government surrendered to the multi-denominational pressure groups*?" published by Vera Verba and issued "in the public interest" by the Council of Social Concern, Ely House, was widely distributed in the Dalkey area.

The pamphlet purported to inform its readers about the origins of the Dalkey School Project, tying it inextricably to

St. Patrick's N.S. in Dalkey. Under the heading "Where it all Began", it alleged that the pupil intake of St. Patrick's "dropped some years ago and it began enrolling some Catholic children in order to keep its numbers up. Some of the Catholic children were products of mixed-marriages". The story went on:

> The school soon boasted a vigorous Parents Association which was infiltrated by secular humanists and political activists of a radical bent. The school also had an energetic headmistress. In time a confrontation developed between the rector and the Parents' Association over the Religious Instruction of Church of Ireland children, amongst other things. Although the Rector was the manager of the school, the Schoolmistress refused to separate the Church of Ireland children from the others so that he could give them religious instruction. Instead she taught all creeds together a vague sort of watered down "religion". One lesson was for the class to skim through the Bible and list all the birds and animals encountered there.

The pamphlet then went on to describe subsequent events, with a mixture of truths, half-truths and falsehoods. It described the parents' association "which backed the teacher against the rector" as having grown, "quite ambitious and power-hungry". "It now wished to have a multi-denominational school in its own right under the sovereign management of parents – can you guess which parents? The plan to achieve this was literally to hijack the school by wresting it from the control of the rector and the Church of Ireland".

Referring to an "intensive campaign" launched in the media in mid-1974, the pamphlet referred to "the shameless emotionalism of the campaign which portrayed the parents as the victims of unenlightened intolerance". In reality, according to the pamphlet, "they were naked aggressors trying to grab a school from the Church of Ireland, which that Church had built, endowed and maintained. Fortunately, the Rector, his

Archbishop and the Minister for Education stood firm and the attempt came to naught".

The pamphlet then went on to describe the subsequent setting up of the Dalkey School Project and alleged that "Of over 500 people invited, only 60 or 70 (from all Ireland) attended the Project's launching seminar in June 1975". The pamphlet was scathing about what it referred to as a "scientific" survey of the area in order to gauge support, alleging that it was not "an objective detached exercise but was organised and conducted entirely by supporters of the Project". It stated that the survey questions were slanted and that it was no great surprise that the results of the survey seemed to indicate massive support for a multi-denominational school. According to the authors of the pamphlet "It was most unwise of the Minister to take this survey of a self-appointed pressure group at face value. This survey was completely carried out at its sensitive stages by dedicated supporters of the DSP". The pamphlet asked:" If the presence or absence of local support is to be the criterion, why would the Minister not conduct his own survey"?

Referring to the latest news, "emanating not from the Minister for Education but from the Project promoters", that Mr. John Wilson T.D. had given the project permission to open a school in July 1978, the pamphlet referred to the fact that "on behalf of the Dalkey School Project, Mrs. Áine Hyland, a founder member, sang Mr. Wilson's praises on RTE (12th Sep 1977)", She was described as "the wife of a statistician in the Department of Education who collaborated with Mr. Martin O'Donoghue on the monumental *Investment in Education* over a decade ago". The pamphlet went on to state that "The Irish Humanist Association has also come out very strongly in favour of a multi-denominational school in Dalkey – a body militantly opposed to any kind of religion. And it stated that "Predictably enough, other politicians who support the Dalkey School Project are Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien, Mr. John Horgan and Senator Mary Robinson".

Referring to comments made by Micheal Johnston about the teaching of religion in the proposed DSP school, the pamphlet referred to it as: "The religion of nobody, taught by anybody and paid for by everybody" and added: "As far as religious and moral formation is concerned, this type of religious course is little better than listing birds and animals from the Bible. Whilst it may provide an interesting lesson in comparative religion for children from indifferent or unbelieving homes, it is a spiritual wasteland for children from religious homes."

The authors of the pamphlet went on to allege that:

> What atheists want are schools completely without religion. There are simply not enough atheists in Ireland to form a viable school. But multi-denominational schools give them other allies and opportunity to control. In time, religion will fade out of the curriculum. The matter goes deeper than the religious course. An atheistic outlook in a school can colour the teaching of most secular subjects e.g. science, civics, politics, biology, history etc. The atheist's view of man, his origin and destiny, his morals and his right to life are poles apart from the religious view.

The pamphlet concluded by alerting its readers to the dangers ahead, stating that

> Atheistic interest in the Dalkey School Project is clear. Ireland's system of education is denominational by Constitutional guarantee. The Rules for National Schools, published in 1965 by the then Minister for Education, Dr. Patrick Hillery, now President of Ireland, places great stress on the teaching of religion in schools – meaningful religious instruction.
>
> 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. The Project has consciously set itself up as a 'beacon' to encourage similar projects elsewhere. Dalkey could be

a precedent for major trouble in other areas.

And adding a political note, the pamphlet concluded: "The Minister should also bear in mind that the success of Fianna Fáil in the last election was a violent reaction to the antics of Labour and the 'trendy' wing of Fine Gael. Better things are expected of De Valera's party in power."

Reaction to the Vera Verba pamphlet

On 2nd November 1977 the Irish Times carried an article about the leaflet, criticising its tone and content. The article highlighted the fact that the address of the authors of the leaflet was also the address of the headquarters of the Knights of St. Columbanus. Once again, an initiative that was planned to damage the credibility of the Dalkey School Project, did the opposite by encouraging more people to publicise their support, as subsequent letters to the Irish Times showed.

Whether co-incidentally or not, a few days later (7th November) Desmond O'Malley, T.D., subsequently to become leader of the Progressive Democrats, added his voice to that of other Fianna Fáil supporters of multi-denominational education, stating: "If the practice of the keeping apart of very young children in education, almost from the cradle, was ended, it would be an investment for the future. In this way, it would be more feasible for all Irish people, of all traditions, to live together in peace".

The first letter responding to the allegations in the leaflet was published on 10th November in the Irish Times from ten former pupils of St. Patrick's N.S. who thought it important to state "that our memory of the school is of a friendly happy place; and the fact that we were not made conscious of any sectarian differences seems to us now one of the great benefits we received". Referring to the statement in the leaflet that "an atheistic outlook in a school can colour the teaching of most secular subjects", they felt "that the picture

of our school presented in the circular is very high-coloured indeed". In conclusion the letter added: "to prevent a possible misunderstanding (may we state) that we are not all children of "secular humanists and political activists of a radical bent". Among the signatories of this letter was Jonathan Westrup, then in his early teens, who almost forty years later was elected chair of the Dalkey School Project.

In the same edition of the *Irish Times*, a local resident, Tony Moynihan stated:

> I wish to protest at the publication of the "Dalkey School Saga" leaflet which was left at my door early this morning. I find the tone of this document … to be most offensive (and hysterical) and full of scurrilous innuendo … If as this anonymous group claim, the Dalkey School Project has no substantial support in this area, it will die. So why the hysteria? Are they afraid it may succeed?

The *Irish Times* correspondence prompted a reply on 15th November from Niall Darragh of the Council of Social Concern. Niall Darragh was either then or subsequently the Chief Knight of the Knights of St. Columbanus, thus verifying that there was indeed a link of some kind between the Council of Social Concern and the Knights. However, in his letter Darragh denied such a link stating:

> The Council of Social Concern is not connected with the Knights of St. Columbanus though some of its members are Knights and it meets at Ely House courtesy of the Knights. Briefly we are a steering committee of ten (at present) socially concerned organisations backed by specialist assistance, for the purpose of achieving co-operation in certain fields of activity. To save space I shall not list the member organisations. The Irish Family League, the Christian Political Action Movement, and the Society to outlaw Pornography are amongst those represented.

Referring to the Dalkey School Saga leaflet, he stated:

> … Clearly no criticism of the Church of Ireland N.S., St. Patrick's Dalkey, was implied nor included in the leaflet. … It is a cold fact that the DSP originated amongst parents of St. Patrick's N.S … They actually attempted to "hijack" the school from the Church of Ireland, a school which that church had built and maintained. If they had succeeded in this, a great injustice would have been done, and the Church of Ireland children in Dalkey parish would have been deprived of the denominational education which is their right. The would-be hijackers were given just as good a press at that time as they were later to receive in the Dalkey School Project.

He went on to refer to the letter of 10th November from Tony Moynihan in which Mr. Moynihan purported to find the leaflet "scurrilous" and even "hysterical". In this regard Niall Darragh stated:

> The truth of the matter is unpleasant and it is indeed no pleasure for us to recount. It is the media's sole function to provide the public with full and accurate information. If the media had done its job in this area fairly and competently, there would have been no need for our information leaflet. … Our main contention is that the Dalkey School Project's survey and declared intentions deserve to be treated with the utmost cynicism in view of its past history.

Ironically, Darragh's letter only served to elicit more support for the Dalkey School Project. On 19th November a letter was published in *The Irish Times* from Gemma Hussey, then an NUI senator and afterwards to become a Fine Gael T.D. and Minister for Education, stating that it gave her great pleasure to allow her name to appear among the list of supporters of the Dalkey School Project. She explained that almost since its inception she had been involved "albeit distantly" with the project. Pointing out that "every public representative except

one in the Dalkey area" is also publicly associated with this multi-denominational project, she appealed to Ministers, Parliamentary Secretaries, TDs and Senators to denounce "the dangerously bigoted leaflet circulated from the HQ of the Knights of Columbanus, and to do so publicly". She added: "The Catholic Church has always had some strange bedfellows but surely it must dissociate itself from this sad and sick document. Silence simply will not do".

Her letter concluded:

> I very much hope that the children whose future we all want to protect and enrich have not become aware of the cruel mud-slinging going on in the name of Catholicism. In an age when it is becoming increasingly difficult to explain why our generation are making such a mess of the country surely this hate-filled leaflet can only add one more impenetrable "no exit" for young people looking for answers.

A further letter from Mrs. Phil Moore (Dartry) on 5th December 1977 expressed the hope that the Minister for Education would not waver in his determination to support a multi-denominational school in the near future in Dalkey. She asked readers not to forget that "in the dust raised by those who blindly oppose the idea, enough people have shown, clearly and democratically, that this is what they want for their children, and so they must be given it. Those who do not want it do not have to avail of it".

And a letter on 16th November from Sheila McLoughlin, then a young mother in the area, to Helen Fahy, Secretary of the DSP, reflected the many supportive comments which were received by the DSP about the COSC leaflet.

> The struggle of the Dalkey School Project never really meant very much to me until recently when I received a scurrilous and extremely unchristian pamphlet through my doorway telling me why I should object to this

> particular type of school. My reaction to this pamphlet was to find out all I could about the aims of the DSP. Having now found out all I need to know, I wish to apply for membership and enter my young son's name for enrolment.
>
> I am dropping you this little note so that you will know that, instead of doing your project much harm, perhaps this pamphlet did inadvertently some good in so far as many more people might react as I have done and help you achieve your aims and set up the Dalkey school.

Sheila McLoughlin went on to become a staunch supporter of the DSP and was subsequently an elected officer and secretary to the Board of Management of the school.

On 25th November 1977 the *Irish Times* published a letter from Treasa Ó Raghallaigh who was known locally as being closely involved with a number of the organisations which constituted the Council for Social Concern, although in her letter to the *Irish Times* she denied being a member of the Council of Social Concern "or any of its affiliates". She must have forgotten that she had written to the *Irish Press* on 19th April 1974 about St. Patrick's N.S. and had co-signed her letter with Mrs. Ann Lavelle, describing herself as a member of the Irish Family League, one of the many organisations affiliated to the Council of Social Concern (see Chapter 3).

In her letter to the *Irish Times*, Ó Raghallaigh stated that she personally endorsed the contents of the leaflet which had been delivered to the houses in the DSP survey area, alleging that "Ms Hussey has grossly misread it". While she (Ms. Hussey) might not agree with the contents of the leaflet, "to style it as hate-filled, dangerously bigoted, sick and cruel mud-slinging etc. all without one rational word of substantiation" was, she alleged, a complete misrepresentation". She went on to state:

> The Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland in Dalkey are united in their attitude to the Dalkey School

> Project. Local meetings of the DSP have never drawn more than a handful of supporters. And there is good reason for this. The present activists of the DSP tried hard to evict the rector and the Church of Ireland from its own school and so take it over. This disturbed many Catholics and Protestants in Dalkey, as these very columns attested in 1974. … (The DSP then) conducted a "survey" manned at all stages by their own supporters. Not surprisingly it seemed to indicate massive support for the DSP …

Echoing comments made in the Department of Education's letter to the rector of St. Patrick's in March 1974, she referred to the Rules of the Department of Education which "recognised the purely denominational status of Irish national schools, citing Bunreacht Eireann in support"[61], and added:

> Anything but a denominational national school would thus appear to be Constitution-barred. I may be wrong but I venture to suggest that it is extremely doubtful that the DSP could comply with "the usual conditions for recognition as a national school", stipulated by the Minister.

The Dalkey School Project was not prepared to leave the letters from Niall Darragh and Treasa Ó Raghallaigh unanswered. On 29th November the *Irish Times* published a long reply from Micheal Johnston, in which he re-affirmed that the DSP and St. Patrick's N.S. were two separate entities, although he acknowledged that they had some overlapping members "just as COSC and the Knights of St. Columbanus have overlapping membership". He asked whether common membership implied common identity? And answered: "Of course it does

61. This was a reference to the Preface of the 1965 edition of the Rules for National Schools which states: "In pursuance of the provisions of these Articles (of the 1937 Constitution) the State provides for free primary education for children in national schools, and gives explicit recognition to the denominational character of these schools".

not, neither in the case of COSC nor the DSP." He went on to state:

> Nowhere is there any evidence of any group infiltrating the PTA as the Ely Place document suggests and nowhere is there any suggestion of an attempt to take the school from the Church of Ireland" … it was always recognised that this was a school under Church of Ireland Patronage and that no change could take place without the consent of the Church of Ireland.

He quoted the statement from the Church of Ireland Board of Education to the General Synod that "it would welcome agreed experiments towards encouraging integration in education on the understanding that denominational interests be respected". Asking where the hijack or "school-nap" theory come from, he replied "Not from any Church of Ireland source … But from Eoghan Ó Raghallaigh, husband of Treasa Ó Raghallaigh, in the *Evening Press* of 16th October 1975".

He went on to state that over the past four years, Eoghan and Treasa Ó Raghallaigh had been perhaps the most consistent defenders of the parochial nature of the national school system and pointed out that "They have not themselves sent their children to their local parish schools, rather they have exercised a choice which is open to them – to send their children to an Irish-speaking National School the other side of Dun Laoghaire".

Meantime, the Project's executive committee continued to respond to the requirements set by the Department of Education for the opening of its school the following July. A meeting of the committee on 8th November indicated that progress was slow but that work was ongoing on a number of fronts, including setting up a limited company and seeking charitable status; the search for temporary premises and for a site; fund-raising; and preparations for a seminar on religious education in early December. It was reported that two age-

groups on the pre-enrolment list had passed the 40 mark – and that a waiting list started at No. 35. It was also reported that a group of parents in Bray, Co. Wicklow also wished to start a multi-denominational school and that the DSP would provide advice and support if requested.

Meeting on Religious Education in the Dalkey School Project school:

On 16th December 1977 a special general meeting on religious education in the proposed school – a private meeting for members only – was held in the Royal Marine Hotel. There were some observers from Bray who were welcomed to the meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to find out members' views on religious education and to formulate a policy statement which the Department of Education had requested. It was acknowledged and accepted that since the school would be a national school it would have to abide by the Department of Education's Rules for National Schools. The attention of the meeting was drawn to Rule 68 and to extracts from the Departments's (then new) curriculum of 1971 – both of which emphasised that religious instruction was a fundamental part of the national school curriculum. At the meeting, it was agreed that the Dalkey School Project would distinguish between religious education and denominational instruction (nowadays referred to as Faith Formation). Issues discussed included the relative role of the patron and of the board of management in the provision of religious education, as well as to what degree a common religious education core curriculum would be possible. The meeting also discussed how requests from groups of parents for specific denominational instruction might be met and what the role of the teachers might be.

The general consensus was that a central core curriculum of broadly-based religious education (with perhaps an element of civics in it) available to all, should be taught by the teachers as part of the school curriculum. This should be supplemented by separate denominational religious instruction for those who

required it (provided the numbers were viable). The central role of parents and respect for their views were emphasised, as were the practical aspects of developing and teaching a religious education core curriculum. A sub-committee was set up to (a) to formulate a draft policy document on RE and (b) to study the practicalities involved and to report back to a meeting of the membership. It would also act as a back-up advisory body to the teachers when the school opened.

A Possible Site?

At the next meeting of the executive committee on 28th December 1977, there was a major breakthrough on a possible site and temporary premises for the school when the chairman read a letter from the Kirwan Family offering a site in the Avondale Road / Glenageary Road area. The Kirwan family have been mentioned earlier in this book – they were a Church of Ireland family, from Barnhill Road, Dalkey, and were also owners and co-owners of some land in the extended area. Hilary Pratt and her sister Jill Cox were both members of the Kirwan family, had been parents of children in St. Patrick's N.S. and had been hugely supportive of the Dalkey School Project from the beginning. The site which was now on offer, which had planning permission for four houses, was owned jointly by the Kirwan family and another developer, in the proportion of two-thirds to one-third. It was part of a housing development on the site of Glenageary House and adjoined a large tract of land which was zoned as public open space. The site of four houses together with the public open space covering an area of over one a half acres was being offered to the Dalkey School Project. The Kirwan family was willing to gift their portion of the site and as the total site was valued at £22,000 this meant that the Project would only have to pay one-third of this amount – or slightly more than £7,000. This was a very attractive offer and was immediately accepted by the executive committee. In addition the Kirwan family was willing to offer

the use of Glenageary House as a temporary premises for the proposed school. Glenageary House was an old house which was no longer occupied and which was due to be demolished when the new housing estate was nearing completion.

On 27th January 1978, Micheal Johnston and Helen Fahy had a further meeting in the Department of Education with Paddy Maloney and Art Callanan. At this meeting they were issued with a form of application for a new school. This was seen as a major step and was very welcome. However, further steps still had to be taken before formal recognition would be granted. Confirmation would have to be sought from parents whose children's name were on the pre-enrolment list that they intended to send their children to the school in the coming school year. No further action would be taken by the Department until this was done. Within days, parents of children on the pre-enrolment list were asked to confirm that they would send their children to the school on 1st July[62].

The officials also requested that a formal letter be written to the Department's building branch seeking approval and recognition of the temporary premises, giving details of the size of rooms, number of toilets, heating arrangements etc. The Department officials also advised that a Board of Management be constituted for the school as soon as possible. The officials were very helpful in discussing a provisional timetable and advised that it would be desirable to advertise for a principal teacher by the end of February at the latest. They agreed that it would not be quite as urgent to advertise for assistant teachers although technically advertising for them should commence by the beginning of March. A further meeting was scheduled with the Department for 3rd February.

62. It subsequently emerged that when the Marley Grange School Committee in Rathfarnham had sought similar confirmation in 1976 for their proposed inter-denominational school, only 25 children were confirmed on their pre-enrolment list. This had probably influenced the Department to ask the Dalkey School Project to re-confirm its pre-enrolment list.

At the subsequent Dalkey School Project committee meeting, the information from the meeting with Department of Education officials was welcomed. It was reported that the articles of association of the DSP company had been sent to the Department of Industry and Commerce to ensure that they met with that Department's requirements. The question of planning permission for the new school and temporary premises was also discussed and Áine Hyland and her sub-committee were asked to look into this. The chairman reported that the religious education sub-committee had met and had a good discussion. A draft document would be ready for discussion for the next meeting of the sub-committee.

By early February 1978, the names of 85 children were confirmed on the pre-enrolment list for 1st July. The parents of a further 42 children asked that their children's name would be kept on the pre-enrolment list – though they would not take up their place on 1st July. These numbers suggested that the new school would qualify for the appointment of three teachers.

As regards the temporary premises, Áine Hyland and Micheal Johnston had gone to see the temporary premises in Glenageary House. They confirmed that there were 4 large rooms on the ground floor which in their view would be suitable as classrooms. There were 2 toilets and 2 bathrooms. More toilets would be required but this should not be a problem. The committee instructed the officers to write to the Department, offer these premises and request the Department to inspect them. The question of planning permission for the temporary premises and the site was discussed and the urgency of seeking planning permission was stressed.

It was agreed unanimously that a Board of Management would be set up on a *pro tem* basis, consisting of Micheal Johnston, Helen Fahy, Desmond Green, Aine Hyland and Conor Fennell and that the Department be informed.

Later that month an inspector from the Department of Education, Mr. Seán Ó Dálaigh, inspected the temporary

premises and a letter was received from the Department accepting the temporary premises with some conditions. The letter also allocated a roll number to the school – No. 19612. The letter confirmed that the *pro-tem* Board of Management has been recognised and that the DSP has been authorised to advertise for a principal and 2 assistant teachers. The committee recognised that this was a momentous decision and was cause for celebration. This was the point at which I believed the school was going to open.

It was reported that a second meeting of the religious education sub- committee had been held. A draft policy document had been agreed, and a meeting of the membership and parents has been held at which the draft was passed with minor amendments. A copy of the draft policy on religious education had now been sent to the Department.

A further meeting of the officers of the DSP and the Dept. of Education officials had been held – again with Mr. Maloney and Callanan. The DSP was asked to furnish details of the religious denomination of the children on the confirmed list – in order to assure the Department that the school "would really be a multidenominational school". The DSP officers disagreed in principle with this request repeating the definition of multi-denominational education in its constitution, but nevertheless they sought the information from any parent who wished to supply it. A summary of the results was sent to the Department. There were now 92 children on the confirmed list. The executive committee (as patron) nominated Micheal Johnston as chair of the board of management of the school and he reported that he had been in touch with the INTO locally.

As regards planning permission, the planning officer of Dun Laoghaire Corporation (Mr. Garth May) had been very helpful and advised that an architect be appointed immediately (a) to draw up plans for the renovation of the temporary premises and (b) to deal with the site and new school.

General Meeting of Parents – 28th February 1978

At a general meeting of members and parents on 28th February 1978 it was all good news. Formal approval had been given by the Department of Education for the Dalkey School Project N.S. and a Roll Number had been allocated. The Department of Education had approved the use of the rooms on the ground floor of Glenageary House as temporary accommodation for the school subject to six conditions. The Department had also recognised the interim board of management as nominated by the Patron on 6th February. Approval had also been given to the Board to arrange for the appointment of teachers. The confirmed enrolment of 92 pupils on the pre-enrolment list would warrant the appointment of a Principal and two assistants.

Chapter 8

Opening the DSP National School September 1978

The pro-tem board of management:

The first meeting of the *pro-tem* board of management was held on the 8th March 1978. A request to the local branch of the Irish National Teachers Association to nominate a teacher to the board was turned down as the INTO was of the view that the principal teacher, when appointed, would be the appropriate person to fill this role. In accordance with the *Constitution of Boards of Management of National Schools,* all members signed an undertaking that the *Rules for National Schools* would be complied with. Micheal Johnston was appointed chairman of the board following his election by the other members of the Board. Áine Hyland was elected recording secretary and Desmond Green was elected as treasurer.

At that first meeting, there was a sense of elation that the DSP had got this far, and an awareness of the historic significance of the occasion. A leather-bound minute book was purchased, and over the next two years, during my two-

year term of office as secretary, I wrote more than 220 pages of minutes, and the minute book included attendance sheets, reports of sub-committees, circulars to parents etc. This minute book has been an invaluable resource in the writing of this and the following chapters.

Thirty-five meetings of the board were held during the period March 1978 to September 1980, 14 of which occurred between March and September 1978. A lot had been achieved by the patron before the *pro-tem* board was set up, but there was still a long way to go. The proposed school had a roll number and that the board was confident it would have sufficient pupils in the first year to appoint three teachers. The temporary premises in Glenageary House had been approved and it seemed likely that the proposed site for the new school building in Glenageary Lodge would also be approved. While there was still a lot of work to do, the board members felt that the worst was over. As regards temporary accommodation, the chairman stated that the board would now proceed to negotiate a lease for the temporary premises and would also proceed with the necessary steps to acquire the site. It was agreed to send a map of the site to the Department of Education and request them to proceed with the necessary steps in relation to the new building. Planning permission for temporary change of use of Glenageary House as a school would be required, but the board was confident that this would be forthcoming. Dun Laoghaire corporation had indicated that a sketch plan indicating the lay out of the proposed school within the premises should be submitted with details of access etc. The Board agreed that the chair would approach a firm of architects, A and D Wejchert, who had designed many recent award-winning schools and colleges, and ask whether they would be prepared to draw up the required sketch plans.

Approval for the appointment of principal teacher and two assistant teachers

By the second meeting of the board on 29th March steps had been taken to advertise for a principal teacher. The post was advertised in three newspapers and in *An Múinteoir Náisiúnta*, and in accordance with the rules and procedures of the Department of Education for the appointment of principals, a selection board of three people – Micheal Johnston (Chair), Gemma Hussey and Michael Classon – was appointed. It was agreed that the other officers of the Board, Áine Hyland and Desmond Green, should sit in on the interviews in a non-voting capacity.

By the next meeting of the board on 4th April 1978 completed application forms for the post of principal had been returned by five applicants and a sixth application was received some time later. The advertisement for two assistant teachers had been inserted in three daily Dublin newspapers on 31st March. Already over 90 requests for application forms had been received.

A week later another meeting of the board was held. By this stage, more than 130 requests had been received for application forms for the posts of assistant teachers. No reply had yet been received from the Department of Education on the eligibility of the applicants for principal and it was agreed to await the appointment of the principal before notifying parents of the current position. As regards the temporary premises the local district inspector from the Department of Education, John McNamara, had called on Micheal Johnston to discuss the furniture requirements for the school. The meeting also recorded that "the necessary steps for procuring the site for the permanent school are in hand". The chair and secretary reported that they had arranged to meet the architect later in the week to discuss planning permission for the temporary premises.

Further meetings of the board were held on a weekly basis in April. By the meeting of 24th April, the Department had notified the board that four of the applicants for the post of

principal teacher were eligible for appointment. More than 100 completed application forms had been received for the two assistant teacher positions and it was felt that it would be desirable to appoint experienced teachers to those first posts. The selection committee for the assistant teacher posts would consist of Micheal Johnston, Desmond Green, Áine Hyland and the new principal. As regards the site and temporary premises, meetings had been held with the architect, Andrezj Wejchert and with the Planning Officer of Dun Laoghaire Co. Council, Garth May, and an application for change of use for Glenageary House had been prepared. Garth May had indicated that planning permission would not usually be sought until the Department had formally approved the temporary premises and the site. There was some discussion about the dual use of the open space but at that stage no concern was expressed about it. The board was anxious to make arrangements to purchase the site and to sign a lease for the temporary premises.

Glenageary House not available as temporary premises

At the next meeting of the board of 4th May 1978, the chairman dropped a bombshell. He had learned that Glenageary House would NOT be available as temporary premises for the proposed DSP school. It had not proved possible to persuade the developer who owned one-third of the development site on which Glenageary House was located to lease the building temporarily to the DSP. In retrospect one can understand his reluctance. A major housing project was underway on the site – which would ultimately require the demolition of Glenageary House. While the optimists in the DSP believed that the new school building would be ready for occupation within a year or so, and that Glenageary House could then be demolished without holding up the development of the estate, from my own experience in the Buildings Branch of the Department of Education I knew that the time frame was likely to be considerably longer. I was aware that in those days

the average time between the decision to build a new school and its completion was twelve years[63]. In the event, the time frame for the DSP turned out to be "only" six years, but we were not to know this at the time. The news that the proposed temporary premises would not be available came as quite a shock to the board and was a serious set-back to our plans.

However, interviews for the principal teacher had gone ahead earlier that day as planned. Contact had been made with Florence Armstrong in Africa and she was one of the applicants for the post. The selection board unanimously recommended that the post be offered to her, and on the proposal of Desmond Green, seconded by Conor Fennel, the board accepted the recommendation of the selection board. It was agreed that the post be offered (by Telex) to Ms. Armstrong but that she should be informed that a problem had arisen about the temporary premises and advised not to give notice yet to her current employer.

Search for new temporary premises

The following six weeks were hectic for the board although no formal board meeting took place until 17th June. A renewed search for temporary premises was spear-headed by me as chair of the temporary premises sub-committee, assisted by Helen Fahy. Over 40 letters were written and almost thirty premises were inspected. A number of the premises seemed promising on first viewing, e.g. Epworth Hall, Dalkey; Methodist Hall, Dun Laoghaire; St. Joseph's Boys' Club in Tivoli Terrace, Dun Laoghaire; the old Kingston Grammar School in York Road, then owned by Dun Laoghaire V.E.C; the Coastguard Station in Dun Laoghaire Harbour; St. John's Parish Hall, Mounttown; Boylan Community Centre, Dun Laoghaire; Friends' Meeting House, Monkstown, and many other premises. At first it appeared that at least one of these premises might be available

63. Investment in Education, *Report of the Survey Team, Appendix D*, 1966.

to rent as temporary premises, but ultimately, none of them was available. A letter to the Minister for Education, John Wilson, from Micheal Johnston on 31st May listed over thirty premises which had been visited and considered but at that stage no definite possibility had been identified.

During this period, Department of Education inspectors, especially Brendan Molloy and Seán Ó Dálaigh, were very helpful and made themselves available at very short notice to advise on the suitability of possible premises. It was a stressful few weeks and eventually it became clear that premises which had established use for community purposes and which would not require planning permission for change of use, e.g. club premises, community halls etc. would NOT be available to rent from 1st September.

Tuitions Ltd.

However, the Dalkey School Project was not to be defeated at this late stage. Following frantic deliberations, a group of parents and supporters came together and decided that they would set up a separate company with the sole aim of purchasing premises which could be leased to the DSP. An off-the-shelf company – Tuitions Ltd. – was bought and this company purchased a house – 14 Vesey Place, Dun Laoghaire – with a view to renting it to the DSP. The house, which previously had been used as a private residence with a basement flat which was let separately, cost around £25,000 and this amount was provided as a loan to Tuitions Ltd. by about eight families whose shareholdings were proportionate to the size of their loan.

Among the shareholders were Micheal and Pat Johnston, Helen and Hugh Fahy, Bill and Áine Hyland, Pat and Teresa McInerney, Desmond Green, Hilary Pratt, John Burgess, and Richard and Gráinne More O'Ferrall. I remember that Bill and I contributed £5,000 – the sum total of our savings at that time! Helen and Hugh Fahy mortgaged their house in Rosmeen Park,

Dun Laoghaire to enable them to contribute to the purchase. It was important that the directors of the company would not include any members of the executive committee of the DSP or the board of management and that there would be an "arms-length relationship" between Tuitions Ltd. and the DSP. John Burgess, a local architect, whose children subsequently attended the school, agreed to become (company) secretary of Tuitions Ltd. and for the duration of the period when the school had a lease on the house in Vesey Place, he managed the company effectively and efficiently and oversaw its sale in 1985 when the building was no longer required by the DSP.

I remember the day when Micheal Johnston and I went to the public counter of the offices of Dun Laoghaire Corporation on Marine Road to enquire about applying for permission for change of use of 14 Vesey Place from residential to school use. The receptionist at the front desk called to a woman in the back office: "There are two people here who want to know about planning permission for change of use of a private house to a temporary school for the Dalkey School Project". Without hesitation, the woman in the back office shouted back: "Is that the house in Monkstown that is used by the Family Planning Association?" Of course the DSP had no association with the Family Planning Association, but the remark reminded us that many people tarred all of us "liberal trouble-makers" with one brush!

At the board of management meeting of 17th June, the chairman reported that an inspector from the Department had approved the ground floor and the lower ground floor of 14 Vesey Place for use as a school. The premises would be available for a rent of £3,000 p.a. and the board was now in a position to sign a lease. The Department had intimated that it would be prepared to pay a proportion of the rent and it was agreed to press for the maximum possible grant. Necessary alterations to the two floors to make them suitable for a school would be carried out by the DSP. A sum of £1,000 had been

made available to the board by the DSP executive committee for the alterations – and as much of the work as possible would be carried out by voluntary labour.

Appointment of teachers

The interviews for the assistant teachers had taken place and the selection committee recommended that the posts be offered to Síle Harrington and Jayne Doran. Ms. Harrington was qualified to teach at both primary and post-primary level. She had taught in Mount St. Anne's N.S., Milltown and was teaching in Ballyfermot Vocational School at the time of interview. She had also participated in curriculum development projects with the City of Dublin VEC's Curriculum Development Unit. Jayne Doran taught second class in Scoil Mhuire Loreto, Tallaght. Ms. Harrington was required to give a month's notice to her employer and Ms. Doran had already given in her notice. As regards the religious affiliation of the principal and teachers, Micheal Johnston pointed out that this question had not been asked on the application form nor would it be asked in relation to any future appointments.

Jayne Doran told us afterwards that before she accepted the post, she phoned INTO headquarters to enquire whether the school was a recognised national school. She was told that the Dalkey School Project had sought recognition as a national school but she was advised not to take the post because if the school failed "she would never again be employed in the Archdiocese of Dublin". A few years later, another teacher, Mary Stuart (afterwards to become Principal of Monkstown Educate Together N.S.) got a similar response from an inspector who was a friend of hers. He advised her to be very careful about accepting a position in the DSP national school as "she might be blacklisted if it didn't work out". During the first decade of the school's existence, teachers had no fallback situation in the event of the school's failure. In all other national schools, teachers could avail of redeployment via a system

of diocesan panels (either Catholic or Church of Ireland) in the event of their school closing or their appointment being "surplus to requirements". It was not until the early 1990s that the Department of Education agreed to provide panel rights for teachers in Educate Together schools, and even then the scheme was much more limited because there were so few Educate Together schools and they were geographically far apart from each other.

In view of the restricted size of the temporary premises, the board of management at that stage agreed that the pre-enrolment list be closed at the then number of 97 and that notification of this would be sent to the parents.

The chairman reported that the site at Glenageary Lodge had been transferred in trust to the Dalkey School Project and that the necessary money had been paid. It was agreed to expedite discussions and preliminary arrangements with the Office of Public Works. Shortly afterwards, a meeting was held with Garth May, architect in Dun Laoghaire planning office and a formal application for planning permission for change of use of 14 Vesey Place would be lodged before 1st July.

On 27th June a further meeting of the board of management was held and at this meeting it was agreed that the school would open on 1st September 1978. The Department of Education had agreed to this opening date, and teacher appointments and the transfer of pupils from other schools would date from then. As regards the site at Glenageary Lodge, a letter was received from the developer asking that the DSP architect get in touch with the architect for the developer to delineate the formal boundary. The meeting agreed that A. and D. Wejchert be appointed as architects for the new school building. Arrangements would also be made to meet Mr. Lindsay of the Board of Works in relation to the proposed building.

Refurbishment of 14 Vesey Place as temporary premises for the DSP school

July and August 1978 were hectic months for the board of

management and for the army of voluntary helpers who were recruited to prepare the temporary premises in Vesey Place for use as a school. Many of us cancelled holiday plans and it was a case of all hands on deck. The house had been a private residence with a basement flat and there was no staircase between the ground floor and the basement. A new staircase would have to be installed. Additional toilets would also have to be provided as well as a safe and reliable heating system. While the back garden was small the house was situated directly opposite a public park which could be used as a playground. There were many building challenges for the voluntary team, many of whom were undertaking renovation work of this kind for the first time. An odd-job man, Jim Ballance, who was a good friend of Micheal and Pat Johnston, proved to be an invaluable building supervisor and ally. He could turn his hand to any kind of work – carpentry, plumbing, plastering, painting – just name it and he would do it. One of the sights I will never forget was that of Bill Hyland and Micheal Johnston digging drains in the basement of 14 Vesey Place for the extra toilets that were required for the pupils. (In the 35 years that I lived with Bill, I never before or after saw him undertaking any kind of manual work!).

Mike Norris, a member of the DSP executive committee arranged that concrete slabs that were surplus to needs in the post-primary school in which he was then teaching, would be gifted to the DSP where a team made up mostly of women laid them in the back garden. Jack Loughran, an electrician and a Labour Councillor as well as a member of the DSP Council, arrived with a van-load of second hand storage heaters which were no longer required in the Catholic presbytery in Glasthule where oil-fired central heating was being installed. These were among many gifts which were donated to the school by well-wishers. Mary Farrell from Mountown, a parent of two children, who was afterwards employed as the school cleaner, and whose then partner was a brickie, coined the jingle – "nick a brick a

day for the DSP" – so much building material was arriving at the door of the school from known and unknown sources! My daughter Sonja, then four years of age, remembers going down to Vesey Place with Bill and myself as we were working to get the school ready. She recalls:

> … my mother heaving paving slabs into place in the back garden, ripping up filthy old carpets from rooms in the basement and sawing off overhanging branches and painting the stumps with what looked like green paint. My father, I'm fairly sure, had lodged himself in a corner somewhere with someone arguing about the philosophy behind multi-denominational education; he was never a man who thought much about the practicalities of life.

Of course, the refurbishment of the building was not the only issue with which the board of management had to contend. The local inspector had to revisit and re-approve the furniture allocation. Unfortunately, district inspector John McNamara, who had been very helpful when Glenageary House was mooted as the temporary premises had been replaced by a less enthusiastic colleague who was reluctant (perhaps understandably) to interrupt his summer holidays to accommodate the Dalkey School Project. Having phoned him a few times, and having collected the requisite forms from the Department of Education, I can remember driving out to his house on the north side of the city one evening to discuss with him how many pupils' chairs and tables of various sizes would be required as well as other free-standing furniture such as bookshelves, cupboards, teachers desks etc. and also to persuade him to sign the requisite forms for the Department of Education so that the furniture would be eligible for grant-aid and we could seek three tenders and place an order for delivery before 1st September.

While the fact that so much work had to be done in such a short time contributed to an air of excitement and positive

engagement on the part of parents, it also led to tensions, some of which highlighted social and cultural differences among parents and supporters. Eoin Fahy remembers spending a lot of time with his parents who were working in the house at Vesey Place in the run up to the opening and noticing "a fair amount of tension". Different people had different views as to how the building should be renovated and "there was no hugely clear structure in terms of who was running the project". Eoin recalls a row about measuring windows in the building for net curtains – and I also remember that row - which escalated way beyond the specific issue of the measurement of curtains. There were, as Eoin so rightly remembers "a lot of big personalities involved". Then and later, I learned that differences between Catholic and Protestant went way beyond religious and doctrinal niceties such as transubstantiation and the wording of the Lord's Prayer. Issues such as "to have or not to have net curtains"; "to have home-made or shop biscuits"; "to have or not to have fund-raising raffles" - these and other unforeseen differences turned out to be inextricably linked to historic tensions between nationalist and unionist values, and between Catholics and Protestants.

By this stage, Florence Armstrong had returned from Nigeria and had accepted the post of principal. It was early August before she arrived back in Dublin and gave notice to her former employer, the board of management of St. Patrick's N.S, Dalkey. The normal notice by a principal teacher was three months, so if the board of St. Patrick's N.S. insisted on this notice Ms. Armstrong would not be in a position to take up the post of principal of the DSP N.S. until October or November. In early August, Micheal Johnston accompanied Ms. Armstrong to a meeting with Rev. J.F.O. Williams, chair of the St. Patrick's board of management, who to everyone's relief agreed to release Ms. Armstrong from her contract on 1st September. The appointment of the two assistant teachers had been approved by the Department of Education but

the board had been informed that contracts should not be signed "pending experience of the averages" (i.e. enrolment). However, we were confident that we would meet the required "averages" as figures available at the beginning of August indicated that enrolment would be between 90 and 100.

Planning permission problems

Tuitions Ltd., the owners of the house on Vesey Place, had applied on 30th June for permission to Dun Laoghaire Corporation for planning permission for change of use of the building, for permission under the Housing Act and for bye-law approval for the alterations to the drains etc. In addition, an application had been made to the Department of the Environment under the Housing Act for change of use from housing to school use. At a meeting of 4th August the chairman of the board of management reported that he had just heard that the application for change of use had been rejected by Dun Laoghaire corporation, but that we could appeal to the Minister for the Environment. The board agreed that fall-back strategies should be investigated e.g use of rooms in private houses in case it proved impossible to occupy Vesey Place on 1st September. It was also agreed that a meeting of parents should be called for Monday 28th August and that parents should be informed that planning permission was still being processed.

However it wasn't all bad news – the board was relieved to hear that the Dalkey School Project had finally been set up as a company limited by guarantee and that it was expected that the company would be registered by the end of September. The solicitor was also in the process of setting up a legal Trust.

The chairman also reported on "an informal but very useful meeting" that he and Áine Hyland had held with an inspector from the Dept., Mr. Brendan Molloy, an architect from the Board of Works, Mr. Lindsay, and the DSP architect regarding the planning of the new school. It was indicated that the Department of Education would be prepared to consider a

grant of 90% towards the cost of the new building and furniture, as had been requested by the Dalkey School Project. This information was very much welcomed. Members of the board who had been familiar with the St. Patrick's, Dalkey, situation were aware that the Department was only obliged to provide a grant of two-thirds of the cost of national school building and improvement works, and that in the case of St. Patrick's when grants had been received for small improvements and furniture, the board there was grateful to receive a grant of five-sixths of the cost. On the other hand, from my experience in the Buildings Branch, I was aware that where management made a compelling case, the Department could and did provide grant aid of 90% or more. Records now available in the National Archive confirm that the normal grant for new schools in the Catholic diocese of Dublin at that time was 90%. The information that the DSP's request for a 90% grant had been approved was a major boost to the board which immediately sent a letter to the Department accepting the offer.

At the meeting of 4th August the chairman also reported that a German foundation, the *Friedrich Neumann Stiftung* was interested in funding a seminar on democracy in education in Dublin in November 1978 and that the *stiftung* would welcome the opportunity to co-organise this conference with the DSP. The *Friedrich Neumann Stiftung* was the Trust or Foundation of the Free Liberal Party in Germany and had funding to organise joint conferences with sister foundations in other European countries. As Ireland had no Liberal Party, the *stiftung* was anxious to find a group in Ireland which shared its liberal values. Hilary Pratt had previously had contact with the *stiftung* through the Women's Political Association and she suggested that the Dalkey School Project might be a suitable partner for a conference on education.

Micheal Johnston was enthusiastic about the proposed conference. He recently told me that he regarded the opportunity for a conference as "manna from heaven" for the

Dalkey School Project. He felt that the timing was perfect as the school would have just opened in temporary premises and that international publicity would be very welcome. Moreover, the *stiftung* would pay all the costs associated with the conference which would be held in the Royal Marine Hotel and would pay for simultaneous translation and the publication of the conference papers.

I must admit that I did not share Micheal Johnston's enthusiasm for this offer. Since I had begun to undertake research for my Masters and Ph. D. degrees in Trinity College Dublin some years earlier, I had been involved in helping to organise educational conferences and I knew how much work was required to run a successful one. I also had reservations about the DSP collaborating with a German *stiftung* given the accusations of infiltration from sources abroad that had been circulated by the Council for Social Concern and other such organisations. I felt that we had enough on our plate at that time without the distraction of a conference! However, I was the only person with such reservations and it was not an issue worth arguing about!

We were all exhausted by this stage. As well as attending almost daily meetings about the school, whether with other board members, the executive committee, or the Directors of Tuitions Ltd., Micheal Johnston and I met regularly with the DSP solicitors and architects, officials of Dun Laoghaire Corporation, architects from the Board of Works and numerous other relevant officials. In addition, we took it in turns (with our spouses and other board members) to spend time at 14 Vesey Place acting as project managers for the refurbishment as well as working as voluntary building labourers. As we all had family responsibilities and small children, we were trying to juggle domestic affairs and child-minding with the building and administrative work. Parents who provided baby-sitting and child-minding services, such as Caroline Mullan, who had two-year-old twin boys at the time, played as important a role

in getting the school up and running as those who were active on committees and on site.

Parents' Meeting, 28th August 1978

A meeting called by the board of management to which all parents were invited took place in the temporary school premises in 14 Vesey Place on Monday 28th August 1978. The meeting was attended by over 85 parents and by the principal Florence Armstrong and Jayne Doran. By this stage the building was almost ready for use as a school and in spite of the uncertainty regarding planning permission the mood of the meeting was positive and enthusiastic. Micheal Johnston explained the position regarding Housing Act, planning permission and bye-law approval. Dun Laoghaire Corporation had rejected the application for change of use of the two floors for school purposes under the Housing Act and an appeal had been lodged with the Department of the Environment. No reply had been received from Dun Laoghaire Corporation to the application for planning permission and bye-law approval, although informally an officer from the corporation had monitored the work carried out on the drains and we were confident that bye-law approval would be forthcoming.

In the knowledge that occupying the building as a school on 1st September would be in violation of planning laws, Maureen Colleary proposed and Patsy Lyle seconded a motion: "We authorise the Board of Management at their discretion, to start the DSP National School in good faith at 14 Vesey Place on 1st September 1978". The motion was carried unanimously.

An atmosphere of local goodwill was palpable at that meeting. Gráinne Sarris from The Mews, 13 Vesey Place, offered the use of her house telephone to parents who needed to get an urgent message to the school. (In those days there was a long waiting list in Ireland to get a telephone line and access to phones was limited). She informed the meeting that her mother, Mrs. Val Cave, was usually at home in the mornings and would take messages.

The pupils would be registered on 1st September – those whose surnames were between A and L should register between 10 and 11 a.m. and those from M to Z should register from 11 a.m. to 12 midday. A transport table would be set up on 1st September to help parents arrange shared transport for their children to and from the school.

It was agreed that there would be a general meeting on 11th September to elect a board of management and that the principal would give a talk on the curriculum. As regards the board of management, David Spearman suggested that as much new blood as possible should be encouraged to come onto the board. He suggested that the board should elect its own chairman after a few meetings rather than doing so immediately.

Refusal of planning permission 30th August 1978

On 30th August, an emergency meeting of the board of management was held. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss yet another bombshell – a letter which had been received that day from Dun Laoghaire Corporation refusing planning permission for temporary use of the building as a school. The minutes of the meeting record that the refusal was unexpected since as far as was known permission for temporary use of a premises as a national school had not previously been refused by a planning authority. While this refusal could and would be appealed to An Bord Pleanála within a month it was a devastating setback. I had regarded the earlier refusal for change of use under the Housing Act as a technicality and we were confident that approval for change of use would be forthcoming from the Minister for the Environment. Planning permission was a different issue. I was familiar with the long-drawn out procedure of planning appeals to An Bord Pleanala, and the fact that anybody could object on any grounds to an appeal relating to planning permission. I had never before heard of a case where planning permission was refused by a

local authority for a building which had been approved by the Department of Education as a school and I had not expected this bad news.

It was some consolation that bye-law approval was granted for the alterations to the building subject to some work being carried out to the satisfaction of the fire officer. As regards the appeal which had been made to the Minister for the Environment for a change of use of 14 Vesey Place under the housing act, it was reported that both Barry Desmond and David Andrews had made representations to the Minister on our behalf. (This approval was received some weeks later).

In spite of the refusal of planning permission the board agreed that enrolment should take place in Vesey Place on Friday 1st September as planned. A sub-committee would spend the next 24 hours looking into the implications of the planning refusal and would report back to a resumed meeting of the board the following evening. A second sub-committee would investigate alternative contingency accommodation and also report back in 24 hours.

As regards legal matters, it was noted that Janus Holdings (the owners of the site in Glenageary) had agreed to make a straight and unconditional transfer of the land to the Trust. And in relation to the setting up of the DSP as a company, Micheal Johnston, Desmond Green, Helen Fahy and I recorded our interest in Tuitions Ltd.

At a resumed meeting of the board the following day, a sub-committee of Micheal Johnston, Bill Hyland and Desmond Green reported that they had spoken to the architect and a solicitor about the implications of the refusal of planning permission for temporary change of use of 14 Vesey Place. It would be open to the local authority to serve a warning notice to quit – which would take effect immediately – or an enforcement order which would not come into effect for two months after issue. No fines or penalties could occur until either of these two actions were taken. The legal adviser had checked

and could find no precedent for issuing a warning notice since the Planning Act of 1976 had come into effect. However, in the event of a worst case scenario, fallback arrangements had been made. A large room in each of six different private houses had been offered by parents and sympathisers and in and emergency situation, if the Vesey Place building had to be vacated, classes could continue for a period of time.

It was agreed that classes should start in the school in Vesey Place as planned and that an appeal against change of use under the Planning Acts should be lodged within the required period. It was also agreed that local residents should be informed that the school was starting on 1st September and that the Department of Education should be informed of the refusal of planning permission.

Friday 1st September 1978 – The Opening of the DSP National School.

Friday 1st September 1978 was a momentous and long-awaited day. It was the day that the Dalkey School Project N.S. opened its doors in temporary premises in 14 Vesey Place, Dun Laoghaire to 90 pupils and three teachers. The day has been described by pupils, parents, teachers and supporters as an exciting and happy occasion. Jayne Doran, one of the first teachers appointed, recently described the opening day as follows:

> September 1st 1978, an historic moment in the Irish Educational system. I remember it as if it was yesterday – crowds of happy smiling children streaming into 14 Vesey Place, groups of relieved parents knowing that they had fulfilled the almost impossible dream, the opening of Ireland's first multi-denominational school in the face of extreme and often hostile opposition, the press swarming around anxious to record this momentous occasion for posterity, one bemused teacher wondering what she had let herself in for. I was just settling the children down and getting to know my

> new class when Micheal Johnston put his head around the door and while wishing us well added " by the way, just to let you know we are opening without planning permission. It hasn't been sorted yet." Right! I had just been advised by my trade union (the INTO) not to accept the position as they were very concerned that if the project failed "I would never again be employed in the Diocese of Dublin," Now with no planning I was going to end up in the clink as well!! This was going to be some adventure!

Siobán Green, one of the first pupils enrolled in the school, then seven years of age, also has vivid and positive memories of that first day:

> I was so excited that day that I picked my favourite blue dress at the time to wear in my new school which I quickly realised was a good decision as there were press, photographers, queues of students and their families when we got to Vesey Place in Dun Laoghaire. This was probably the most exciting event to date in my life as a 7-year old. I recall the previous summer my parents were working to create the new school garden with the Hylands and the Johnstons … of course there had been years of meetings to get to this point …

For Alex Johnston, who had previously been a pupil in St. Patrick's N.S., Dalkey, and already knew a number of pupils, the move to the DSP was something he found "obscurely exciting".

> It helped that I wasn't going alone: most if not all of my friends were coming along too. I wasn't totally sure why we were going, exactly, but St Patrick's had been a plain, rather dour, established sort of place, whereas we were pioneers (of some sort) going to a brand new school with the word 'project' in its name, making it sound like the space program.

In spite of the request to parents to stagger their attendance

in order to enrol their children, the school premises were crowded with parents and supporters throughout the morning of 1st September. While almost all the refurbishment works had been completed, there were still some odds and ends to finalise. I remember that a fridge was delivered at an awkward moment and that it sat in the hallway outside the door of a classroom on the first floor, blocking the flow of traffic for some time. It was at that moment that the enormity of our decision to open the school hit me. I felt that there were far too many people in the building for safety purposes, and as secretary to the board of management I was overwhelmed by a sense of huge responsibility. Moreover, memories of the tragic incident in Carmody's Hotel in Ennis twenty years earlier, where the joists of an upper floor in which too many people had congregated collapsed, flooded back to me. My younger brother Tomás, then aged 13 (as well as seven others) had died in that tragedy[64].

I found it impossible to share the elation of my fellow board members at the opening – all I felt was sheer exhaustion and apprehension. Here were almost 90 pupils and three teachers starting classes in what appeared that day to be an overcrowded building for which planning permission had been refused. I was very conscious that we were in breach of planning laws by opening the school in a private house on Vesey Place. I was aware of the penalties for such a breach and I realised that Dun Laoghaire Corporation had the authority to close the school and to forbid us to continue to operate as a school in that premises. What we all needed at this stage was a break and a rest, but unfortunately there was still so much to do and so many unforeseen issues to contend with.

Although the board had decided to avoid media publicity pending the resolution of planning issues, there was some low key media coverage of the opening. There was an article in

64. J. Bradley, *Carmody's Hotel, Ennis* (in association with Clare-Roots Society).

the *Irish Independent* by Bruce Arnold; an article in *Magill* by Mavis Arnold and some radio and television coverage. Publicity was generally positive. A low-key article in the *Irish Times* on 2nd September by its educational correspondent reported:

> Irish education passed through a historic moment yesterday when the first Department of Education recognised multi-denominational school opened its doors in Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin. The school is the Dalkey School Project and it opened for enrolment yesterday after years of controversy. The school is housed in temporary premises in Dun Laoghaire but a site has been acquired in the Glenageary area and a permanent school will be available there by the autumn of 1980.

The article continued:

> One hitch has arisen in relation to the temporary premises. Dun Laoghaire Borough has refused planning permission for temporary change of use and permission under the Housing Acts. Both decisions, however, are being appealed and by-law permission for the necessary conversion has been granted.

I was not alone in thinking that the building was very crowded. One of the pupils, Eoin Fahy, remembers that

> Facilities in 14 Vesey Place were basic. Fourth, fifth and sixth classes were all together, though the two or three pupils in sixth class were in a sort of annex to the side of the room. It really was very crowded and although I know it passed fire regulations (I remember a lot of discussion about that actually) it's hard to imagine how, as it really was very tight.

Siobán Green also remembers the cramped classroom shared by 4th, 5th and 6th classes, but saw it as providing opportunities for a different and exciting approach to learning:

> It was very obvious that this was no ordinary school.

> Apart from being in a Georgian House spread over a few floors with tenants renting the top two floors, we as pupils, were taking part in something special – a new way of learning and very importantly of being heard because our thoughts, suggestions, inputs and ideas were actually very important.

Describing the challenges of lack of space and scarce resources Siobán continued:

> I know blended learning today means the integration of digital tools, techniques and materials with the physical classroom but in the DSP school in 1978 it meant 4th, 5th and 6th class were all in the same space with one teacher. Did this act as a stimulating environment for us as students? Of course! We 4th class students were keen to keep up with and participate with the older groups and for many of our visiting guest speakers we were all together and all encouraged to ask and post questions to them.

And the shortage of resources contributed to a realisation that fund-raising would be required.

> … fundraising was an ongoing issue; school resources such as paper and other stationery supplies were seen as particularly scarce and valuable. I think part of the appreciation we had for school resources came from my teacher, Florrie Armstrong, who had taught in settings in Africa which had much more limited resources than we had. However, in the true expression of child-centredness it meant that we, as pupils, better get stuck into fundraising too.

Siobán remembers how fund-raising helped the pupils to develop entrepreneurial skills. She remembers being elected, at the age of 9, as chairperson of the mini-market committee where she managed a small stall, with fellow pupils and friends, at the weekly DSP Dalkey market. There, they sold

their "previously loved toys, books and games to contribute to our school running costs". In retrospect, she regards this as bringing a whole-school approach to fundraising and a great opportunity to develop skills which were not usually developed at primary school age!

> I think it sowed the seeds for organisational and entrepreunerial skills for us too … My grounding and learning in ethics and social understanding, communication skills, personal effectiveness and development, team-working and leadership and entrepreneurship and innovation all began the day I walked in the door of (the DSP national school) to register as a 4th class student and has continued ever since. The very foundation of the skills I have in these areas was formed at primary school … the dynamic and questioning environment I experienced in DSP where the student voice and input was encouraged, sought and importantly welcomed has surely planted the seeds of innovation in me and my fellow pupils.

In a talk to parents at the opening of the school, Miss Armstrong had summarised her educational philosophy as follows:

> Children would be helped to think clearly, constructively and critically and the personal participation of each individual pupil would be encouraged. This would apply to religious as well as secular subjects. Parental involvement would be encouraged within and outside school hours, under the supervision of the principal and staff.

Eoin Fahy remembers Miss Armstrong as a "superb educator and teacher". What he remembers more than anything was "the way she would ask questions and get us thinking, rather than drilling things into us". He can still remember little projects that they did, "like the surge and collapse in the price of gold (of all things!)". Anna Johnston, who started in fifth class, remembers that "in the classroom, Florrie Armstrong

made room for independent and creative thinking (in fact she insisted on it) - so discussion and group work were always lively".

Alex Johnston remembers Miss Armstrong as "the closest I've ever known an actual human to come to Star Trek's Jean-Luc Picard: stern, possibly even forbidding, but intelligent, sensitive, fundamentally kind, and with an infallible sense of the right thing to do". He gives as an example, her approach to disciplining a pupil who had thrown a hard snowball at another pupil:

> I remember after one kid had committed some more serious than usual playground felony, Miss Armstrong, placing the offender in a public interrogation, in which she quietly asked his motives for throwing a snowball with a rock in it: Why did he do it? Didn't he know it was wrong? Did it give him pleasure? I still remember the kid's braggadocio slowly imploding, as his initial demeanour of stoical ain't-give-a-damn was replaced by a glum admission that he hadn't been thinking and he didn't even know why he'd done it. It was a practical lesson in growing a conscience. I wouldn't say it made me a better person, but it showed me something about thinking before you act.

For Alex, inclusion and diversity were outstanding characteristics of the school. He remembers:

> … the enormous map of the EEC that covered the classroom wall, and a general abundance of posters and books and bits of information from other benign multinational organisations like UNESCO. The diversity of the DSP, and its firm belief that different kinds of children should be taught together, seemed to place us in that tradition, and indeed I retain great fondness for those ambitious, idealistic post-WW2 organisations that represented different groups coming together to combat hatred and isolation … Nowadays,

> when bigotry and jingoism are on the rise, those values are more threatened than they have been in a long time. I thank the DSP for making me feel like I belonged to a group of people that was lined up against the Blue Meanies.

And Anna Johnston, who was a pupil in Fifth Class that first year "felt extremely lucky to make it to the DSP". Her older siblings – Brigid, Becky and Luke – had already started second level and had missed the chance. She remembers the feeling

> that this was a place that belonged to all of us – not just in terms of the fundamental ethos but in some very concrete, tangible way. We had seen a house being turned into a school and an idea chased into reality through endless meetings, hard graft, determination … And lots and lots of waffles. Our school-in-a-house felt like a new and different kind of space: a living project that we were now shaping.

And as regards the philosophy of the school, she remembers

> Our active involvement, the emphasis on questioning everything and thinking for yourself, a crazily wide variety of experiences and encounters and that sense of shared ownership made DSP a really exciting school and project to be part of.

Florrie Armstrong's inclusive philosophy was wide-reaching. Another family, who had enrolled their children in the school as soon as the pre-enrolment list opened in 1976 had gone to live in Canada but returned to Ireland in 1979. Their main objective when they enrolled their children was that as a non-religious family they wanted them to be educated in a multi-denominational, multi-cultural milieu. They had not thought quite so much about the importance of another DSP principle – child-centred education. However they came to appreciate the importance of equality in education and inclusivity in the school setting when, on their return from Canada, where their

son had been diagnosed with a specific learning disability, he enrolled in First Class in the DSP N.S. His mother remembers Florrie Armstrong as a person "with wide educational experience and an open mind" who quickly identified that their son had dyslexia. When the mother showed Florrie the psycho-educational assessment confirming her son's diagnosis, Florrie's response was: "We may not be able to do much to help" she said, "but we will try not to do any harm." At that time, Irish schools lacked remedial or resource teachers, special needs or classroom assistants, or even basic awareness of different learning styles. But according to the boy's mother:

> Florrie's recognition of a learning difficulty and the will to accept it was invaluable. Little things can help enormously, and they did. A bit of leeway in regard to homework, tact regarding the result of spelling tests, appreciation of oral contributions, praise for effort made and above all a willingness to see the real, human child behind the learning difference. I will always be grateful to Florrie Armstrong and the DSP for this.

Jayne Doran had been apprehensive about meeting Ms. Armstrong, who unusually had not been on the interview board that appointed her. Writing forty years later, Jayne wrote:

> But I need not have worried. As well as being an inspirational teacher and educationalist, (Florrie Armstrong) was also a kind, caring and empathic leader who in supporting her staff in both their personal and professional lives, engendered a working environment that was exciting, energetic, fulfilling and most of all fun.

Jayne remained on the staff of the DSP from the date of its opening on 1st September 1978 until she retired – almost 35 years later. Reflecting on her professional career in the DSP, she wrote:

> And what an exciting and stimulating journey it proved

> to be, being involved with committed, steadfast parents who refused to accept that "authorities" and "powers that be" knew what was educationally best for their parents also fulfilling my professional love by teaching and learning from over 900 bright, articulate and yes sometimes challenging children who by their fun and laughter helped me retain a positive and "can do" attitude to life and most of all working with dedicated and caring colleagues whose friendship, empathy and support has meant so much to me.

And she concluded: "So in looking back, my happy treasured memories will remain with me forever, and I thank fate and good fortune that for once in my life I did not take INTO advice".

Siobán Green also has very happy memories of her time as a pupil in the DSP school:

> I remember my three years in the DSP school as incredibly happy, stimulating, being in a very creative environment where our voices as pupils mattered – we could query things and … our ideas and needs were taken seriously. There was lots of fun, great friendships made, a thought-provoking learning environment where an exceptionally holistic approach to education, learning and citizenship was really part of every school day. All the while as pupils, we were conscious of inclusion and our potential future role in Ireland and the world, as engaged vocal citizens.

Canvassing Local Support

On Saturday 2nd September, Desmond Green organised teams of parents to call on local residents to inform them that the school was about to open in 14 Vesey Place and to answer any questions that they might have. On the whole the attitude of residents was positive, with remarkably few negative comments. Predictably, some residents expressed concern about possible

traffic congestions as the road outside the school was quite narrow. They were told that parents had been asked not to drive up or down Vesey Place but to park on York Road and to ask their children to walk to the school from there and that this would be monitored by the board. Some weeks later, over 30 residents of the area signed a letter in support of the Dalkey School Project's appeal to An Bord Pleanála for permission to use the building as a school. The appeal was accompanied by a letter from the Department of Education confirming that as far as they could ascertain permission for temporary use of a building as a school had not previously been refused by a local authority in the case of premises approved by the Department.

Board of Management meeting – 10th September 1978

On 10th September a meeting of the board of management was held to review the situation in the school during the first ten days and to arrange for a meeting of parents to elect a board of management. Ms. Armstrong sent an apology and explained that the INTO had issued a directive to its members not to attend board of management meetings until issues it had raised with the Department of Education about the composition and role of boards were resolved. This boycott by members of the INTO of boards of management continued until 3rd June 1981 – throughout the first three years of the DSP National School.

Ms. Armstrong obeyed the INTO directive to the letter, which sometimes led to communication difficulties with the board of management as well as creating additional work for board members. In order to ensure that communication would be maintained between the board and the principal, in my capacity as secretary, I met Ms. Armstrong before every board meeting to discuss the agenda and then met her afterwards to inform her of board decisions. All correspondence and actions arising out of decisions taken at the Board meetings were the responsibility of the board secretary during that period, and no assistance was received from the principal or the staff. The

principal was the educational leader in the school but much of the administrative work which in the past – and the future – would be a matter for the principal and school secretary, was carried out by the (voluntary) board secretary in those early years.

Fortunately I was working only on a part-time basis during that first year. I was registered for a Ph.D. in Trinity College, but I came off the books for the year so that I could devote my time and attention to the DSP. I was not the only mother in the school who gave so much time on a voluntary basis to the school. Many of the mothers who had married prior to 1973, and who had worked either in the public service or elsewhere where the marriage bar was in force had had to resign their posts on marriage. While Ireland's accession to the EEC in 1972 meant that this arcane law was abolished, it was not until the early 1980s that those who had resigned prior to 1973 were allowed to re-apply for their posts. Ironically, the implications of the marriage bar meant that the DSP (and subsequent school projects in Bray and North Dublin) benefited from the expertise and experience of highly qualified and motivated women – women like Helen Fahy, Anne Hughes, Sheila McLoughlin, Anne Johnston, Caroline Mullen and many others – who were excluded from the paid workforce by reason of marriage.

Election of Board of Management

On the evening of 11th September, a meeting of parents was held in the school to elect a board of management for the school as required by the Department of Education's Rules for National Schools. There was a discrepancy between the constitution of the board as laid down by the Department and the constitution of the DSP which required the school to be under "predominantly democratic" management. Determined as ever to hold fast to DSP principles, Micheal Johnston reported that as the DSP had decided that the parents would

elect three parents, the election would proceed on this basis. There would be two nominees of the patron on the board, although the Department's requirement at the time was for four nominees of the patron and two elected parents, as well as the principal teacher. The chairman and other officers of the board would be elected by the board when constituted – it was expected that everyone offering to serve on the board would be prepared to function as officer if elected.

The parents' meeting, chaired by Desmond Green, was very well attended. Six parents put their names forward for election and following the counting of votes, Micheal Johnston, Áine Hyland and Pauline Geoghegan were declared elected. In subsequent weeks the DSP as patron nominated Justin Wallace and Mike Norris as patron's nominees and except for the principal and a teacher, who obeyed the INTO directive not to serve on boards of management, the new board was now complete. At a subsequent meeting, Micheal Johnston was elected chair; Áine Hyland was elected secretary and Justin Wallace was elected treasurer. However, as I had predicted, the Department refused to accept the board as constituted by the DSP and refused to pay the capitation grant until the DSP conformed to the Department's requirement. Consequently, many months later, at the board meeting on 30th April 1979, "for the purposes of recognition of the board by the Department of Education for the payment of the capitation grant" it was agreed that "the board shall be deemed to be constituted as follows":

Patron's nominees: Justin Wallace, Mike Norris, Pauline Geoghegan and Micheal Classon

Elected Parents: Micheal Johnston and Áine Hyland.

At the parents' meeting on 11th September, it was also agreed that a PTA would be set up and that preliminary steps should be taken to set up such an association. With this in mind,

the following were elected as a committee which would draft a constitution for a PTA and would report back to the parent body: - Anne Johnston, Gordon Colleary; Desmond Green; Justin Wallace; Patsy Lyle; Jayne Doran and Bill Hyland. A Parent Teacher Association was set up shortly afterwards, chaired by Anne Johnston, which proved to be a great support to staff and pupils as well as to the board of management in subsequent years.

Parental Involvement:

Looking back on those early years, the pupils particularly remember the extent of parental involvement in the classroom. Anna Johnston states that "the feeling that the families were an integral part of the school carried into the classroom too." She remembers that:

> Parents came in to share their skills and knowledge: we made looms in woodwork with Rosemary Jenkins to weave on with my mum, Pat. We learned proportional representation by doing it; after intense campaigns with party manifestos and debates, class elections were followed by a PR count, conducted by students and meticulously overseen by my dad, Micheal Johnston (in full flow).

Eoin Fahy also remembers parental involvement:

> … one thing that stands out in my mind was the degree of parent involvement. I can remember being taught how to sew and – believe it or not – knit and crochet by volunteer parents. We also made puppets in a woodwork project, again run by parents, while there was also a small school library run by my mother among others. I can still sew and even knit a few stitches at a stretch – there weren't many boys who were taught to knit and sew in the 1970s!

The involvement of parents in the classroom was also remembered by Siobán Green:

> French classes were delivered by a native French

> speaking mum. Drama and debating (classes were provided) to ensure we were all competent to speak up, to unpack and discuss issues and topics together. Memorable parental presentations included Mike Johnston on the proportional representation system by (having) us holding elections – so that we really understood how it worked. My dad came in for class chemistry experiment demonstrations and my mum led out on civics, including a visit to Dáil Eireann – very kindly organised by Barry Desmond, one of our local TDs. I've visited the Dáil many time since then, in work and lobbying capacities, but the excitement of realising as a nine-year old that I was in a very special place where democracy plays out, decisions are made that affect us all as citizens and residents in Ireland and that had an unlimited supply of Club Milk chocolate bars for all of us child visitors has always remained with me.

The board of management minutes record the involvement and help provided by various parents during the school year 1978-79. Helen Burgess helped on two mornings a week with music; Pat Johnston and Rosemary Jenkins helped with arts and crafts; Anne Johnston and Helen Fahy set up a library and subsequently Helen ran a school shop and Anne acted as school secretary on a voluntary basis. Gale Varian and Eilis Downes acted as substitute teachers during short-term illnesses of the principal and one of the teachers. Beth Westrup assisted with remedial reading four days a week. Donations of audio-visual and other equipment continued to arrive. A cassette recorder was donated by Maeve Hearns; Teresa McInerney donated a screen and she and her husband Pat donated two televisions. Mavis Arnold donated a new projector and John Horgan donated an 8 mm. movie projector. Kevin Toomey (an AV equipment firm) donated a considerable amount of Maths Equipment.

Brian Whiteside remembers that in the early days, he was

asked if he could get a typewriter for the school at the right price. He points out that:

> This was before the days of computers and the school was completely without any such equipment. I worked in an office equipment company at the time and arranged a second-hand typewriter at a knocked-down price – the DSP had made its first small step into the world of technology.

Subsequent meetings of the board were held on a fortnightly basis and the minute books of the board refer to the many day-to-day issues that had to be resolved during the early months, including the logistics of implementing the patron's policy on religious education. The new school building in Glenageary Lodge, including discussions of its design to reflect the DSP philosophy, was an agenda item at virtually every board meeting from September 1978 until the building was ready for occupation in 1984.

Enrolment issues and class size

By March 1979 there were 95 pupils enrolled in the school – 32 in the infants' class; 32 in Ms. Doran's class and 31 in Ms. Armstrong's class. The small size of the classrooms in 14 Vesey Place created a challenge for the teachers and the question of restricting enrolment was raised by the principal and discussed at one of the early meetings of the board of management. While the board was anxious to accommodate the concerns of the teachers, the risks associated with maintaining enrolment too close to the required figures for the appointment of three teachers were foremost in my mind. The divisional inspector, Seán Ó Dálaigh, also indicated his concern at restricting enrolment, especially as it was DSP policy that the school would grow year by year to an eight-teacher school. To achieve this, enrolments on 1st October every year would have to meet the Department's required figures for the appointment of

an additional teacher or teachers. At that time an additional teacher was sanctioned for every 35 extra pupils after the third teacher was appointed.

Demand for places in the school continued to grow. By May 1979, there were 161 pupils confirmed for the following September with a further 7 accepted before the end of 1979. This would entitle the school to two additional teachers provided suitable accommodation could be found. Suitable accommodation was indeed found. From September 1979, a room on the second floor of 14 Vesey Place was rented from Tuitions Ltd. and a hall at the back of the Presbyterian Church on York Road was rented from the church authorities there. The Rev. Mr. Caskey, the Presbyterian Minister in York Road, had been very helpful and supportive to the school, and from January 1979, the hall had been made available to the school for P.E. and other activities. As regards enrolments for the school year 1979/80, it was agreed that when the list reached 175, further applicants should be put on a waiting list and their parents should be informed accordingly. Confident of strong enrolment figures, two additional teachers, Valerie Stanley and Fiona Poole, were appointed in June 1979. But in spite of the fact that there were prospective pupils on a waiting list when the school reopened in September 1979, actual enrolments barely met the required figures for the appointment of the extra teachers and there were some nail-biting moments during the month of September to ensure that the required "averages" would be met by 1st October. It was left to me as secretary to the board to phone the parents of pupils who had accepted a place in the school but who had failed to turn up and to parents whose children were on a waiting list to ensure that we met the required enrolment. These were the early-day stresses which it gives me no pleasure to remember!

Planning issues resolved

The issues of planning permission and permission for change

of use of the building were resolved by early 1979. The minutes of the board meeting of 13th November 1978 record that the Minister for the Environment had accepted the appeal under the Housing Act and had agreed to the change of use from residential to educational of the portion of 14 Vesey Place being used as a school. At the board meeting in early February 1979 the chairman reported that An Bord Pleanála had overruled the decision of Dun Laoghaire Corporation and that permission had been granted for temporary change of use of the Vesey Place building until August 1981. The board recorded its thanks and congratulations to the architects, A and D. Wejchert, the Project's solicitor, and Mr. Garth May, planning consultant, whose help in drafting the appeal to An Bord Pleanála was invaluable. Thanks were also recorded to the many councillors of Dun Laoghaire corporation who supported the DSP during the six difficult months and to the residents who had supported the appeal.

It would be wrong to assume that the first years of the DSP National School were uneventful, just because this chapter focuses only on a small number of issues! A myriad of challenges arose on a regular basis during those years which were resolved on a case by case basis. Delays in grant payments from the Department of Education meant that there were cash-flow problems - and fund-raising for the running of the school was endless. As the principal and staff wanted the very best for their pupils, there were numerous demands for more resources – classroom materials, audio-visual aids, reference books for the mainstream curriculum as well as for the religious education core curriculum. From my experience subsequently on school boards of management, the demands in the case of those first years of the DSP school were considerably greater than a school board would normally experience. The fact that the principal was a teaching principal and that she did not attend board meetings because of the INTO directive, undoubtedly contributed to the additional work carried out by

board members and requests for resources were drawn up by the staff in a vacuum, unaware of the many other challenges faced by the board. The situation wasn't helped either by the fact that there was a prolonged postal dispute in Ireland that lasted from 19th February to the end of June 1979 – and communications to and from the Department of Education (including the payment of capitation grants) and the local authority etc – not to mention letters to and from the DSP architects and solicitors – were severely compromised.

The DSP National school continued to grow over the following years until it reached its target size of an eight-teacher school (with Ms. Armstrong as an administrative principal) by 1982. By that stage the school was in four locations and five more teachers had been appointed. There were four classes in Vesey Place; a class in the Presbyterian Hall on York Road; a class in the church hall of St. John's church, Mountown, and two classes in pre-fabricated classrooms in the grounds of Sallynoggin Vocational school. Mary Brady was appointed to the staff in 1980; Marian Rollins and Mary Stuart were appointed in 1981 and in 1982, Declan d'Estelle Roe and Chris O'Grady were appointed.

The multi-campus school created difficulties for teachers and pupils alike. The principal, Florrie Armstrong, had to oversee four different locations and some parents had to face the logistical difficulties of delivering and collecting their children from different locations – as far as four miles apart. The pupils who enrolled in the Infant class in 1978 were taught in classrooms in Vesey Place, York Road, Sallynoggin Vocational School and the new building in Glenageary during their eight years in the DSP.

Sonja Hyland remembers "vivid snippets from her first years in the school" –

> … being in Senior Infants with Ms Harrington (in Vesey Place); First Class in Vesey Place with Ms Stanley,

> learning about ancient Egypt and singing 'Joseph and his Technicolor Dreamcoat'; and Second Class with Ms Doran, learning Donegal Irish and starting to do debating, with a classmate (I still remember his name: Sinai Nafisi) in charge of slapping a large bamboo stick down on the table and yelling 'Order!' when things got too heated'; Third Class in a prefab in the grounds of Sallynoggin Community School and being terrified of going to the bathroom in the main school and having to navigate what appeared to me to be gigantic aggressive adults (in reality, teenage secondary school students).

And of course, four separate temporary premises created a high demand for ongoing maintenance, a demand that like so many others was met by the voluntary input of parents and supporters. Brian Whiteside remembers being one of these early volunteers:

> At one of the early meetings Micheal Johnston made a plea for volunteers to help with the maintenance of the various temporary buildings the school occupied at the time. Two people put up their hands: Jim Love and myself. Jim was in his late 50s and his children had already left school so his family were not going to directly benefit from the DSP but that didn't stop Jim being extremely passionate about the cause.
>
> Jim and I would call down to Vesey Place every Wednesday evening and pick up the list that Florrie would have left on her desk. A chair was broken in the basement of the Presbyterian Church on York Road; a lavatory wouldn't flush in Vesey Place; a table needed attention in Sallynoggin – and so forth. Jim and I would attend to all these and then, if there was anything to be reported, we would call down to Micheal and Pat's house where we would discuss the affairs of the school over a drink …

Chapter 9

A New School Building in Glenageary Lodge 1984

The bureaucracy and paperwork, not to mention the fund-raising required to build a purpose-built school in Glenageary Lodge for the Dalkey School Project was considerable, as the records for the period show. The time lapse between the time the site was identified in 1978 until the new building was opened was six years. In spring 1984 the pupils and their teachers finally moved from the four separate temporary premises to a brand-new purpose-built school.

During the six years from 1978 to 1984, the bulk of the responsibility for steering and driving this aspect of the Dalkey School Projects's work lay with Desmond Green. He was ably assisted on the financial side by Richard More O'Farrell. In writing this chapter I am particularly indebted to Desmond Green, who prepared a chronology of events leading up to the opening of the new building.

The offer of a site for the new DSP National School in Glenageary by the Kirwan family in March 1978 had been a

major milestone in the history of the Dalkey School Project, removing as it did a key obstacle to the opening of the school. As mentioned earlier, the site was part of a major new housing development in Glenageary Lodge and consisted of the site of four houses for which planning permission had already been granted as well as a substantial area of public open space which could not be built on but which would provide ideal playing space for the school and its pupils. The total area of the site was 1.6 acres – which while not quite meeting the requirements of the Department of Education for an eight-teacher school, was adequate and was accepted by the Department of Education. The proposal to offer a site for a new school, which included an element of public open space, was not unprecedented in the borough of Dun Laoghaire. A few years previously, a new building for Killiney Church of Ireland National School had been granted planning permission on a similar basis in Wyvern, Killiney.

During the weeks and months leading up to the opening of the DSP National School in temporary premises in September 1978, the energies of the founding members had been largely directed at getting the school started. However, within weeks of the opening of the school, the patron body and the board of management began to focus on pressing ahead with the arrangements for the new school building. By early November 1978 most of the issues that would need to be addressed to progress the new building had been identified and it was time to get down to serious action.

Since I had worked in the Buildings Branch of the Department of Education for three years in the early 1960s, I was familiar with Departmental requirements in relation to new school buildings and in November 1978, I prepared a memorandum for the DSP committee and the board of management setting out the steps ahead. At various meetings with parents and teachers in the period leading up to the opening of the school in temporary premises, Micheal

Johnston had promised that the pupils and teachers would spend the minimum time possible in temporary premises and he indicated that he anticipated that the new school building would be completed by September 1980. From the beginning, I felt that this was an unrealistic target date and in a memo in November 1978, I stated that "You will note that on this timetable the school will not open until Sept. 81. Ideally we would like it to open in Sept. 80 but this would be very tight". I conceded that it was possible that some operations could be streamlined but I pointed out there were some actions which could not be commenced until earlier ones were completed.

To ensure that it would be a case of all hands on deck it was suggested that some of the actions might be undertaken by the DSP as patron and others by the board of management. For example, the patron might take responsibility for actions relating to title and fund-raising and the board of management could take responsbility for the physical design of the school and for routine correspondence. Responsibility for planning permission, could be undertaken by either group but it was suggested that it would be better handled by the board of management since it was closely related to physical design.

The memo of November 1978 drew attention in particular to two documents. The first was an Office of Public Works document "Procedures in Managers' cases" which stated:

> … The O.P.W. will inspect the site and if suitable for the school will advise the Chairman that he may acquire the site and instruct his Architect to prepare a draft sketch scheme. The Local Authority must be consulted before purchase and their approval in principle sought to the proposed buildings. If they impose any conditions the O.P.W. must be advised and the latter approval obtained in writing to these.

The second was an extract from the Primary School Managers' Handbook (published by the Education Office of Catholic

Archbishop's House in Dublin) which set out the actions that were necessary to ensure that the title to the site would be in order before the Department of Education would sanction a grant for the building:

1. Obtain a document from the Land Registry Office to establish title;

2. If the site is being bought, produce a map of the holding indicating the site;

3. Send this map to the Land Commission for approval of division of holdings.

4. The Land Commission Deed will be returned to the Solicitor.

5. Arrange for the Manager and vendor to sign a Deed of Sale;

6. Send the Deed of Sale to the Revenue Commissioners for stamping;

7. Send the Deed of Sale to the Land Registry Office;

8. Arrange that the land is vested in a (Diocesan) Trust.

9. A Deed of Trust to which the Minister is party, is then drawn up by the Chief State Solicitor's Office.

Pointing out that the Dept. of Education would not sanction a grant for the new building until the Chief State Solicitor was satisfied that all necessary steps had been completed, the memo emphasised that the question of title to the site was a critical one, stating: "There is no point in rushing on other aspects if we come to a dead stop until title is resolved." In the event, it was to be September 1979 before the DSP solicitors

were in a position to provide clear title to the site.

A Proposed Timetable for the New Building

Since we had received no guidance from the Department of Education as to the steps involved in satisfying the requirements, I prepared a gantt chart (reproduced on the next page) setting out the various actions and allocating them appropriately. This gantt chart subsequently proved to be overly optimistic. The chart envisaged that the new building would be ready for occupation in September 1981. In the event, it was spring 1984 before the staff and pupils could move in.

List of Operations and Time-table relating to the building of the new D.S.P. National School. Opening September 1981

(prepared by Áine Hyland - Nov. 1978)

Code	*Description of Operation*	*Agent*	*Time*
A	Submit evidence re. size D. Ed.	B/M	Nov 78
B	Begin collection towards local contribution	DSP	Nov 78
C	Set up Company; establish Trust	DSP	Dec 78
D	Approve 8 teacher school and site	D.Ed & OPW	Dec 78
E	Transfer land; submit title to Land Registry/Registry of Deeds	DSP	Jan 79
F	Submit sketch plans (SP) to OPW via D. Ed	B/M	Jan 79
G	Estimate cost; approve S.P.	OPW	Mar 79
H	Register title	LR/R. of D.	Mar 79
I	Submit registered title to D.Ed via B/M	DSP	Mar 79
J	Sanction grant	D. Ed	Apr 79
K	Initiate working drawings (WD)	Arch.	Apr 79
L	Authorise work on working drawings	OPW	May 79
M	Submit WD to LA (DLC) for planning permission	B/M	May 79
N	Submit cost plans to OPW	B/M	Jun 79
O	Authorise Cost plans	OPW	Sep 79
P	Complete WD and submit to OPW	B/M	Nov 79
Q	Authorise B/M to invite tenders	OPW	Jan 80
R	Invite tenders; present to OPW	B/M	Feb 80
S	Give final planning permission	DLC/ABP	Apr 80

T	Approve tender. OK setting of contract	OPW	May 80
U	Apply to bank for balance of L.C.	DSP	May 80
V	Loan balance of L.C.	Bank	Jun 80
W	Sign contract; pay over L.C.	B/M	Jul 80
X	Build school	Contractor	Jul 81
Y	Prepare and open school	B/M	Sep 81
Z	Make final payments	D.Ed	Dec 81

A joint meeting of the DSP committee and the board of management was held on 12th December 1978 to consider the various actions and timelines associated with the proposed new building. At that meeting it was agreed that the board would take responsibility for plans, planning and negotiating grants with the Department of Education and that the DSP as patron, would be responsible for fund-raising and finalising the legal transfer of the site to the DSP trust and ensuring that the title to the site was in order. It was noted that the DSP at that time had just £1,000 in the project (i.e. building) account and that significant fund-raising would be required to raise the local contribution.

A "Shared-Area" School Building

In the meantime, at its meeting on 28 November 1978, the Board of Management had received two (alternative) sets of plans for the new building from the architect, A.& D. Wejchert. Both sets of plans were based on the concept of what was then known as "shared-areas." A school designed on a shared-area basis pre-supposed collaborative teaching – where two teachers would work together in a large space comprising two relatively small bases and a larger "shared area". This design approach was encouraged by the Department of Education inspectorate at that time as it was considered particularly appropriate for

teaching the then "new" 1971 curriculum.

While welcoming these plans, the board of management noted that the Department of Education had not yet formally approved the site nor given sanction to the board to employ its own architect. It was also noted that before the building started, the board would be required to pay a minimum of between £20k and £25k as a local contribution upfront. Progress on transferring the title of the site to the DSP Trust had been slow. By early January 1979, the matter of title had not been progressed and the minutes of the board meeting that month noted that "the DSP continues to work with solicitor to ensure title to the site is in order". It was again noted that until the title to the site was in order, the grant for building the school would not be sanctioned by the Department and that therefore finalising legal ownership of the site had to be a top priority for the DSP.

During the final months of 1978 and early months of 1979, Ms. Armstrong and I visited some new school buildings in the Dublin suburbs which were designed on a shared-area basis to see how the concept worked in practice. We were facilitated during these visits by Con O'Sullivan, Deputy Chief Inspector in the Department of Education and a strong proponent of shared-area classrooms, and by Rev. Fr. Sherry, then parish priest in Tallaght and chairman of the boards of management of a number of shared-area national schools. Fr. Sherry was afterwards appointed a Monsignor in the Archdiocese of Dublin. He and I had many discussions on school design and an academic paper which I published around that time focused on the relationship between educational philosophy and school design[65]. As the board of the DSP school was anxious to engage the teachers in decisions about the design of the new building, two of the teachers were invited to accompany

65. Hyland, Áine, "Shared Areas in Irish National Schools" *in Proceedings of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland Conference*. Dublin: 1979.

myself and the principal on some of our visits to those schools. We also attended a seminar organised by the Department of Education for school architects and a meeting organised by the Catholic Diocesan Secretariat where principals and teachers, INTO representatives and Colleges of Education discussed the advantages and disadvantages of schools designed on a shared-area basis.

At the end of January, Ms. Armstrong and I prepared a position paper on the design of the new building. The paper emphasised that a school building should facilitate the teachers in implementing the school's philosophy - it should not dictate a school's philosophy. It noted that the DSP was committed to implementing the new primary school curriculum which was child-centred, and which envisaged that each child would work and develop at his/her own pace and within his/her own capabilities and that group-work would be an inherent part of this type of approach. The paper pointed out that since the DSP N.S. aimed to cultivate in its pupils and teachers a spirit of co-operation, tolerance, ability to work with others, independent-mindedness, responsibility and openness to other points of view, a school building designed on shared-area principles would be particularly appropriate.

Explaining the concept of "shared-area", where two teachers would share their teaching, the paper clarified that the teaching situation would be carefully structured and would involve co-operation in lesson preparation. The extent of teaching co-operation could vary. The paper suggested that shared-area design would facilitate parental support as additional spaces could be made available where parental help could be deployed to the best advantage under teacher guidance. It concluded by advising that since the innovative approach to teaching implicit in the design might not last, the architect should be asked to design the structure in such a way that each pair of rooms could have the base walls removed and a new block wall built down the middle if the need arose in the future. This proved

to be a wise suggestion as by the early 1990s the DSP teachers asked that the internal walls be moved and the building was redesigned at that time to create traditional classrooms.

Planning Permission Problems

But unfortunately the DSP faced planning permission problems with the proposed new building as it had done with the temporary premises in Vesey Place. The plans for the new building were tabled at a meeting of the Dun Laoghaire Corporation on 15th October 1979 and were supported by elected councillors who had lobbied in advance by DSP parents and supporters. In November further information was sought by the planning authorities but at the end of January 1980, outline planning permission for the new building was refused by the Corporation on the basis that planning had already been granted for housing on the site and since part of the site had been designated as public open space the school would "encroach on public open space". In March 1980, the DSP appealed the decision to An Bord Pleanála but this appeal was rejected in June 1980 and the decision of Dun Laoghaire Corporation was upheld.

The DSP was back to square one again. This was another serious setback. Teachers, parents and supporters had been informed that the school would be moving to the new building in September 1980 but now there was absolutely no possibility that this deadline would be met. Even the less optimistic target of September 1981 would not now be achieved. The DSP had a site but no planning permission. Enrolment in the school had grown to almost 200 and there would be six teachers employed by September 1980. A series of meetings were held during June 1980 to inform the principal, staff and parents of the refusal of outline planning permission and to discuss the implications of this decision. The refusal meant that the school would be in temporary premises for at least a further two years. And since the planning permission for 14 Vesey Place would run out in

June 1981 this was an issue that also had to be faced. While they were not happy with the situation the teachers agreed that they would prefer to suffer ongoing difficult temporary accommodation conditions than prevent the growth of the school to its target of eight classes.

Department of Education Sanctions a Grant for the New Building

Ironically just as the Board, the teachers and parents were grappling with the refusal of planning permission, the Department of Education sanctioned the grant for the new building. A letter dated 12th Sept 1980 informed the board that a grant of 90% of the estimated cost of the school and furnishings had been sanctioned - the estimated cost of the new building was £362,000 and of the furniture was £10,000. This meant that the DSP would have to raise a local contribution of one-tenth of the cost – then estimated at £37,000. The Department's letter stated that grant "would be adjusted to nine-tenths of the actual cost in due course". The sanctioning of the grant was a great relief to me as I knew that once a grant was sanctioned, the Department of Education was unlikely to renege on its commitment to financially support the building of the new school. From now on, the DSP would be dealing mostly with the technical aspects of the building, and our architects would conduct negotiations with the Office of Public Works and the planning authorities. Some days later this was confirmed in a letter from the OPW:

> You may now instruct your Architect to prepare the Working Drawings and Specification and to submit these to this Office for approval. It has been agreed that 100% shared areas may be provided. It is important that the cost limit be adhered to because non-adherence would inevitably delay the project. Under no circumstances should tenders be invited without the prior written permission of this Office.

In the following months, the design of the building was revised by the architect to meet the various requirements of the Office of Works and the planning authorities and to ensure that the cost limits were adhered to. In early December 1980, revised plans were submitted to Dun Laoghaire Corporation for outline planning permission. This time the DSP engaged in even more lobbying of the councillors and at its meeting on 9th January 1981, Dun Laoghaire Councillors unanimously recommended that the DSP planning application be approved. A week later outline planning permission was formally granted, much to the relief of teachers, parents and supporters.

However, it wasn't over yet. Within days, the Bellevue & District Residents Association (the residents' association for the area in which the school would be located) lodged an appeal with An Bord Pleanala against the decision of Dun Laoghaire Corporation to grant planning permission for the school. Their appeal was on the grounds that they objected to the fact that the DSP had legal ownership of the public open space and they feared that the open space would not be properly maintained. Yet another campaign had to be mounted by the DSP – this time with a view to persuading the residents' association to withdraw its appeal. Leaflets were dropped into every house in the area reassuring the residents that the open space would remain open to the public and would be well maintained.

The Residents' Association initially refused to accept the reassurances and escalated their appeal with a request to An Bord Pleanala for an oral hearing. The DSP was aware that this could cause a delay of up to nine months – a delay which the school could ill afford. During the following weeks, the DSP engaged in diplomatic negotiations with the officers of the Bellevue Residents' Association. I remember in particular a meeting between the DSP officers and the officers of the Residents' Association in the kitchen of Micheal Johnston's house which went on into the early hours of the morning at which the DSP representatives used every stratagem in its toolbox to

convince the officers that the DSP would be responsible and indeed excellent neighbours. Finally in early June, following a general meeting of the Residents' Association at which many young parents in the newly-built houses voiced their wish that the school building should go ahead, the officers of the association relented and agreed to withdraw their objection. On 2nd July 1981, official confirmation of the approval of planning permission was received and some months later bye-law approval was also granted. We could finally breathe a sigh of relief – we were on our way to building the new school, hopefully with no further delays.

Delay in Approval to Invite Tenders for the Building

In the meantime, John Wilson, who was still Minister for Education, and continued to be very supportive of the DSP, had given authorisation in principle to the Board to invite tenders for the building, subject to full planning permission and bye-law approval being received. His authorisation was timely as the Fianna Fáil government was defeated in the general election in June 1981 and Wilson was replaced by a Fine Gael Minister, John Boland. By September the detailed tender documents had been prepared by A&D. Wejchert and were sent to the Department of Education and the OPW. By early December approval was still awaited and the DSP had been reminded by the OPW that before any grant money would be forthcoming, the local contribution would have to be "fully expended".

A Dáil question by Noel Browne in December about the delay in getting approval elicited the information that the Department of Education was having second thoughts about the open space. The Department officials had also begun to question other aspects of the new building. A completely new issue was raised about "abnormal site costs" – an issue which had never before arisen and seemed to the DSP to be a complete red herring. The DSP had signed all the necessary

undertakings regarding the site and were genuinely puzzled about this new obstacle about abnormal site costs.

It was decided that the only way to solve the issue was to have a meeting with Minister Boland and this meeting was arranged for 21st January 1982. The DSP pulled out all its political support for this meeting and six delegates from the DSP (Micheal Johnston, Aine Hyland, Desmond Green, Richard More O'Farrell, Gerry Hughes and Florrie Armstrong) were accompanied by no fewer than four local TDs – David Andrews (Fianna Fáil), Sean Barrett (Fine Gael), Liam Cosgrave (Fine Gael), and Barry Desmond (Labour) as well as by the Cathaoirleach of Dun Laoghaire Corporation, Donal Marren (FG). The Minister was accompanied by his two advisers, John Harris and Jerry Cronin as well as three civil servants, Pádraig O Nualláin (Assistant Secretary); C. Ni Loingsigh (Principal Officer) and Seán O Nualláin (Assistant Principal). The main purpose of the meeting was to get permission to go to tender for the building and to get formal acceptance by the Dept. of the condition regarding the public open space on the school site.

The Minister explained that permission had not yet been given to go to tender because there were two outstanding matters to be resolved - the planning permission condition in relation to the open space and the additional site works arising because the site was on 'filled land'. The delegation told the Minister that this was the first indication they had that the site was deemed by the Department to be on 'filled land' and pointed out that O.P.W. had not mentioned this issue during the meeting with the D.S.P. on 18 November 1981, nor had the Dept. of Education informed the D.S.P. that this was one of the reasons for the delay in granting permission to go tender. The Minister expressed the opinion that the problem of excess costs could be resolved and said issues relating to the public open space on the site would be resolved in discussions between his Dept., O.P.W., and the D.S.P.

Unfortunately, some civil servants in the Department of Education and the OPW were less than helpful in this discussion. Those civil servants who had been particularly helpful to the DSP in earlier years had moved on and had been replaced by more cautious and suspicious colleagues. It is also likely that these more recently appointed civil servants were unfamiliar with the rather unusual arrangement that had been agreed with the Department and the Office of Public Works about the use of the public open space and the unusual design of the school. During the following weeks, various meetings were held with the architects, Department and the OPW officials but it was not until 29th April 1982 that approval to advertise for tenders for the building was finally received. In the meantime, the coalition government had fallen and Fianna Fáil was back in power, with Martin O'Donoghue as Minister for Education. Martin O'Donoghue had always been a great DSP supporter and his appointment was a welcome one as far as the DSP was concerned at this crucial stage of negotiations. Following further correspondence he smoothed the way to ensure that tenders could finally be invited.

During the summer of 1982 a variety of issues continued to arise – getting the developers to remove rubble which had been dumped on the DSP site, agreeing the boundaries of the site, ensuring that the site was vested as required by the Department etc. For a brief period that summer there was concern because a group of travelers had camped on the site but this issue was also satisfactorily resolved.

In the meantime (on May 26th 1982) a Dáil question from Proinsias de Rossa to the Minister for Education Martin O'Donoghue elicited the response that the Minister believed that it was desirable, so far as possible, that parents should have available to them the type of education they would wish for their children. He (the Minister) was satisfied that the existing arrangements for the establishment of National schools, including interdenominational schools, were suitable

and adequate and he would do all that he could, "within the framework of the general rules, to help resolve difficulties faced by any group seeking to establish such schools". O'Donoghue's support as Minister was invaluable to the DSP in those important few weeks and helped to ensure that bureaucratic obstacles were removed.

Tenders Invited for the New Building

By mid-summer, tenders had been invited for the new school building and 13 tenders had been received, ranging in cost from £435k to £665k – considerably more than the original estimate of £362,000. On 22nd June, architects A. &D. Wejchert recommended that a tender from the building company Patona be accepted. The board was informed that a significant proportion of the costs would be excluded from grant aid, which would mean that the DSP's local contribution would now more than double from the anticipated £40k to over £85 k. The DSP would be required to pay one half of its share of the capital building costs quite early in the building schedule and the remainder at a later stage. There might be some small flexibility as to when the non-grant aided elements of the tender would be carried out, in which event some of the local costs might be deferred.

The period from 1980 to 1982 was a period of considerable inflation in Ireland, especially in the building industry. Between January 1980 and June 1982, the building cost index had increased by 43.8%. So while the tender cost for the DSP school was considerably higher than the cost as estimated when the grant was sanctioned in September 1980, if the building inflation index was applied, the Patona tender was within the cost limits of the Department of Education and should have been acceptable.

In mid-August 1982, the Minister for Education, Martin O'Donoghue gave approval to accept the tender but within days a letter was received from Patona withdrawing their

tender. The next lowest tender from O'Reilly Builders was £461k (as compared to Patona's €435k) and in early September the DSP was authorised to proceed with this tender. It now appeared that the DSP would have to provide a total of £114k as a local contribution. The local contribution would have to be paid in full before the Department of Education would start paying the grant.

Signing the Contract for the New School Building and more Fund-Raising

By early October the contract was ready for signature and the DSP tried to meet with Minister O'Donoghue to discuss the excessive local contribution which was considerably above what the DSP had anticipated. But on 6th October, following an unsuccessful attempt within Fianna Fáil to oust Charles Haughey as Taoiseach, Martin O'Donoghue was removed as Minister for Education and Haughey temporarily took on the role of Minister for Education himself.

This period of political turbulence was also a period of considerable turbulence within the DSP. The point of signing the building contract had finally been reached but the financial implications for the project were way above what had been estimated. The total amount to be raised would be between £110,000 and £120,000 – the DSP had about €50k in its Building Fund and a deficit of up to €75k would have to be raised, most of it before building could start.

Yet again the DSP pulled out all the stops. Advice was sought from all quarters - political, legal and financial. Legal advice received from Philip O'Sullivan, S.C., stated that there was:

> A strong case in justice that the Department should not be allowed to break a promise which has been made in unequivocal terms and relied on by a group of people who perform their share of the arrangement at considerable

> inconvenience and at the expenditure of great effort … the facts of the case to my mind give rise to a strong argument in justice that the Department should now be held to its bargain. The facts would justify bringing an action for equitable relief and there is sufficient judicial precedent to justify a measure of confidence.

However, a legal action would take a long time and in the meantime the builder would not wait. Yet another fund-raising effort had to be made. On 21st Oct. 1982 a meeting of parents and supporters was held in the Royal Marine Hotel, Dun Laoghaire. Advice had been received from a fund-raising firm as to how the campaign for additional funding might best be organised. The full position re the financial shortfall was explained at the meeting and it was pointed out that to go ahead with the new building an additional £75,000 would have to be raised - at least £30,000 immediately. Every parent was asked to give as much as possible with a view to raising an immediate £30,000.

A report in the *Irish Times* on 23 October 1982 summarised the meeting as follows:

> Retrospective withdrawal of grant aid already promised in writing by the Department of Education means that a national primary school in Dublin is having to raise €30,000 in cash and cast-iron commitments over the Bank Holiday weekend. The cash – which the Department had been expected to provide – is needed to meet the "upfront" costs of building a new school for the DSP national school. Construction is due to start on Tuesday. An emergency meeting attended by more than 200 parents … was told that although the plans for the new school were approved and 90% grant aid promised in writing in 1980, the Department of Education is now seeking to exclude four elements of the cost. Together these exclusions more than double the amount of money to be raised by parents and supporters of the

> school, who will now have to find an additional £70,000 before the end of next year.

I well remember the fund-raising campaign which was undertaken during the October Bank Holiday 1982. The military-style campaign was not unlike the original survey which had been undertaken in 1975. A group of "leaders" were identified and each leader was allocated about ten families who had to be contacted in person during the weekend. I was one of the "leaders" and while I was distinctly uncomfortable making a direct request for yet more money to the families I had been allocated I did what I was asked to do. To my surprise and relief, the campaign was almost 100% successful. By Monday evening of the Bank Holiday, the necessary £30,000 had been guaranteed by the parents and supporters. In order to grasp the significance of the fund-raising achievement that weekend, it is worth noting that a sum of Ir.£30,000 in October 1982 would be worth almost €108,000 today.

One of the parents, Brian Whiteside, who was also a fund-raising "leader", remembers the meeting in the Royal Marine Hotel and the subsequent campaign:

> "… at a meeting Micheal Johnston made an impassioned plea for more money to be raised. It was a couple of days before a Bank Holiday weekend and we had just been informed by the Department that extra money was needed if the new building was to go ahead. A number of us spent the weekend calling on parents and supporters explaining the situation and begging for more money. The necessary money was collected and that particular panic was over.

However, while enough money had been raised to sign the contract and to proceed with the building, a substantial deficit still remained and the executive committee was determined to maintain pressure on the Department to abide by its original commitment to pay 90% of the building costs. Moreover,

the DSP could not accept that some of the exclusions, and especially the so-called "abnormal site costs" were justified.

Laying the Foundation Stone of the School.

The builder moved onto the site in early November and on 1st December a dedication ceremony was held on the site. The ceremony was attended by members of the DSP Executive, the Board of Management, some Council members and representatives of the pupils from every class in the school. Speaking at the ceremony, Hilary Pratt described the 'struggle' to start the school and to get the new school building completed as "a David and Goliath story that will shine from the history books as a bright light in a dark and troubled decade". She went on to add: "It is the story of dogged hard slog and unbelievable tenacity, and above all it is the story of people who believed that education is about children".

The principal, Florrie Armstrong also spoke at the ceremony, and welcoming the fact that the foundation stone was finally being laid, she stated:

> Bricks and mortar, of course, are not everything to do with creating a wrthwhile school community, but if the physical factors such as the appearance of the school buildings, their maintenance, the provision of adequate resources and the general comfort of the staff and pupils are ignored, it is inevitable that the quality of the education will drop.

She went on to welcome the design of the new building, while recognising that it would bring its challenges, saying:

> The design of our new school is in keeping with our policy of sharing and tolerance. The flexible design with freely communicating spaces lends itself to co-operation between teachers, pupils and parents. And again we face a challenge – for while many new schools have adapted to the system of co-operative teaching

> I don't know another example of one which plans the twinning of each two successive school years together, as we shall be doing in this school. We are prepared to accept this challenge and are looking forward to it.

And in her speech she emphasised the importance of human relationships:

> At the heart of all good education lies the warmth of human relationships. I hope our school will produce individuals capable of dealing with the demands of an increasingly complex society – and that like their parents and teachers today who have taken up a challenge in the creating of this school and this new sector of the Irish educational system the children from this school will contribute to the society of tomorrow – and that they will not be overwhelmed or demoralised by the complicated pressures of the world in which they are growing up.

Another new Government and new Ministers for Education.

In the meantime, back in Dáil Eireann, there had been another change of Minister for Education. On 27th October, Gerard Brady, T.D. was appointed by Taoiseach Charlie Haughey – but his term of office was short. Within weeks, the Fianna Fáil government had fallen and the DSP again mounted a campaign to get support from election candidates. The new government was a coalition government of Fine Gael and Labour led by Garrett Fitzgerald. To the delight and relief of the DSP, Gemma Hussey was appointed Minister for Education. She had been a supporter of the Dalkey School Project from day one and had been a member of the interview board in 1978 that recommended the appointment of Florence Armstrong as principal. Gemma Hussey took up office as Minister for Education on 14th December 1982.

The next few months were yet again a period of intensive

political lobbying by the DSP. Shortly after her appointment as Minister the DSP contacted Minister Hussey[66] update her on the issues that had arisen about the funding for the new DSP school building and asking her to intervene with her officials to ensure that the original commitment to provide "90% of the actual costs of the building" be adhered to. In a further letter on 27th January 1983, the DSP reiterated its appeal, arguing that cost limits for national schools generally had increased by 43% between January 1980 and June 1982 and that the house building cost index had also increased by 43.8%. On the basis of these inflation indices the DSP argued that the now estimated cost of the new building - £461K – was in line with national building inflation costs. The DSP was not asking for any more than had been sanctioned and if the Department persisted in seeking a local contribution of £116,500 the proportion paid by the DSP would effectively be more than 20% - not the 10% which had been agreed.

A series of correspondence and meetings and technical discussions took place over the following months between the Office of Public Works, the DSP architects and quantity surveyors and the Department of Education. It was clear by now that some of the senior civil servants in the Department of Education were unsympathetic to the DSP but Minister Gemma Hussey was doing everything she could do to resolve the differences and to restore the grant-aid to a sum more closely aligned to the original expectations of the DSP.

On 20th May 1983 a very significant meeting was organized by the Minister in her offices in Marlborough St. The DSP had prepared very carefully for this meeting as we recognized that it was a make-or-break meeting. We would have to be able to provide convincing evidence for our case. The meeting was attended by Desmond Green, Micheal Johnston, Richard More O'Ferrall, Florrie Armstrong, Denis O'Toole (Quantity

66. Letter dated 30th December 1982 from the Dalkey School Project to Minister Gemma Hussey.

Surveyor) and myself. The Minister was accompanied by her adviser Dr. John Harris and the Principal Officer in the Buildings Branch, Kathleen Lynch. The Minister had been provided with a very long brief by her civil servants detailing the long and convoluted history of the DSP building project and while the DSP delegation had to clarify and in some respects correct the brief, it enabled the discussion to proceed along rational and evidence-based lines.

By the end of the meeting the DSP delegation was optimistic that good progress had been made and this was confirmed a month later when on 17th July a letter was sent by Minister Hussey to Micheal Johnston effectively restoring most of the original grant and dismissing her officials' advice that "abnormal site works" were ineligible for grant. The decision of the Minister meant that whereas in September 1982 the DSP had been told it would have to provide a local contribution of £116,537 towards a then estimated cost of £529,176 (an effective 22%) – by July 1983 the local contribution had been reduced to £84,070 towards an overall cost of £605,582 (an effective 13.9%). While this was not quite the 10% local contribution that had been anticipated when the grant was sanctioned in September 1980, the DSP was very grateful indeed for the intervention of the Minister and Micheal Johnston replied immediately accepting the proposal. By her intervention, the Minister had effectively saved the DSP the sum of £32,000 – as I said to her at the time, that figure represented an enormous amount of cakes, pots of jam and waffles – and represented more than six years of weekly Dalkey Country Markets!

On 6th March 1984 the pupils and teachers moved into the new building. The move was a low-key one initially as it was planned to have a formal official opening later in the year. The official opening took place on 28th May 1984. The guest of honour was Minister Gemma Hussey who unveiled a plaque marking the opening of the school. The opening ceremony was attended by a wide range of dignitaries including Jack Lynch,

all the local T.Ds and most of the local councillors. There were representatives from the INTO and from All Children Together in Northern Ireland. The Bray School Project, which had opened in 1981 and the North Dublin School Project, which was about to open, were also represented.

To mark the opening of the new building the following poem was written by 6th class pupil Conor McGann:

> From within a dream the thought
>
> Is kindled
>
> Slowly forming a revolutionary idea
>
> Like a flower the seed is sown
>
> Fighting to survive the winter and all diseases that inhibit it.
>
> Waiting and hoping for the spring ....
>
> And then the sun came,
>
> With it the satisfaction of triumph
>
> Making all toils and struggles worthwhile;
>
> From a dream a reality
>
> From a thought an existence.

And the principal, Florrie Armstrong stated:

> ... we now have the school which we planned to create – a school where the religious, cultural and social backgrounds of our children reflect the whoile community rather than any particular sections of it. We don't find it necessary to label our children, or to segregate them; instead they are learning together as they live together, making their own individual

> contributions and recognising and acknowledging that there are many difference among them, and that our society is enriched by this diversity. The atmosphere, or ethos, of our school is one of tolerance and integrity, a place where controversial topics needn't necessarily be avoided but rather where they can be honestly presented and examined. In this way we aim to help our children to achieve their highest potential as individuals and as responsible members of their community.

A decade after the Dalkey School Project had had its inaugural meeting, the new school building was finally completed and occupied by happy pupils and their teachers.

Chapter 10

Epilogue
Educate Together and the Growth of the Sector

During the period while the new school for the Dalkey School Project was being built, other groups with similar aims were active around the country, and in 1981 the Bray School Project N.S. opened in temporary premises – in pre-fabricated classrooms on a site leased from Bray Vocational Education Committee, Co. Wicklow. Like the Dalkey School Project, enrolment in the Bray school increased rapidly and within five years it had outgrown its temporary premises. After some difficulty, a site was acquired about 2 km outside the town of Bray and in 1990 a purpose built 8-classroom school with a school library, a school hall and a remedial teaching room was formally opened by the then Minister for Education, Mary O'Rourke. Like the Dalkey School Project, the Bray Project also had to engage in considerable fund-raising – in their case the total raised exceeded €120,000. Also, like Dalkey, the Bray School Project had to register as a Limited Company in order to be recognized as Patron of the school. It was originally

intended that the Dalkey School Project would be patron of the Bray school, as well as any other schools which subscribed to the articles of memorandum of the Dalkey School Project, but the Department of Education refused to accept this proposal and insisted that the Bray School Project acted independently as patron of its own school.

North Dublin National School Project was set up in the early 1980s and from the start had a close relationship with the Dalkey and Bray groups. In 1984, the North Dublin group negotiated with the Office of Public Works to lease an empty Model School building in Glasnevin on the north side of Dublin city and the North Dublin National School Project opened in September of that year. The building which had housed a religiously mixed "model school" from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century had more recently been used as temporary premises by a Gaelscoil (an Irish language school) and subsequently by a special school for children with learning difficulties. Both groups had moved to new purpose-built school buildings in the early 1980s and the old Model School building in Glasnevin was empty.

Like Dalkey and Bray, North Dublin N.S. Project grew rapidly and within a few years, most of the playground space was used to accommodate pre-fabricated buildings. It was another decade before a site was identified for a purpose-built school for NDNSP and by this stage the Department of Education had introduced new and less stringent rules about providing grants for both sites and buildings. By this stage other groups around the country had indicated an interest in setting up multi-denominational schools and it was decided in 1984 to set up a committee – Educate Together – to coordinate the existing groups and to support new groups. Micheal Johnston was the first Chairperson of Educate Together.

No new Educate Together schools opened between 1984 and 1987 but a number of groups throughout the country began to campaign for a multi-denominational school in their

area. While the first three schools had been set up in the greater Dublin area, the next phase of development occurred in cities and towns outside Dublin. Between 1985 and 1987 four Projects were set up and became associate members of Educate Together – in Waterford, Cork, Sligo and Kilkenny. Sligo, Kilkenny and Cork were successful in their efforts to start a school but it was another decade before Waterford was successful. Sligo, Kilkenny and Cork managed to open in spite of new "regulations" introduced by the Department of Educationwhich applied to multi-denominational and all-Irish schools, but not to denominational schools and which made it even more challenging for the new groups than it had been for Dalkey, Bray and North Dublin. The new "regulations" not included in any rule book or circular but cited in letters from the Department of Education to the new groups, stated that multi-denominational schools, if recognized, would have temporary or provisional recognition only in the early years (an unspecified period) and during that period the schools would not be eligible for any capital grants. This meant that at the stage when the schools 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 was reluctant to recognize further national schools – even though those which existed were under denominational control and did not meet the "conscientious and lawful preference" of many parents throughout the country.

On 30th October 1986, Senator Michael D. Higgins, then a Senator and now President of Ireland, raised the issue of multi-denominational ediucation in the Seanad. A reply by the then (Fine Gael) Minister for Education, Patrick Cooney, mirrored

the antagonism and the negative responses which the Dalkey School Project had experienced a decade earlier from Minister Richard Burke. Cooney's reply to Micheal D. was as follows[68]:

> 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 official would have a lot of egg on our faces and would be the buff of indignant taxpayers if we were to fully grant something that we were not satisfied was going to endure …

As I wrote in an article some time later[69]:

> This was an extraordinary statement given the many educational initiatives that had been introduced by the Department of Education during the previous twenty years. Was Minister Cooney seriously suggesting that Comprehensive or Community Schools should not have been financially aided by the Department of Education – not to mention Regional Technical Colleges (now Institutes of Technology) nor the N.I H.Es in Dublin or Limerick?. (These are now Dublin City University and the University of Limerick).

I went on to add:

> Should the Department of Education 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 oversubscribed and unable to meet the demand for places?

68. *Seanad Eireann (Official Report), Vol. 114, No. 10*, 30th October 1986, p. 1108.
69. A. Hyland, "Multi-Denominational Schools" in C. Moffatt (ed.), *Education Together for a Change*.

Referring specifically to the situation in Sligo, Minister Cooney added in his reply to Michael D. Higgins:

> In an effort to help the Sligo School Project, we drew their attention to the fact that there were empty classrooms at taxpayers' expense in the town. The management of those schools and the project people did not meet 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.

While initially, those seeking a multi-denominational school in Sligo failed to reach agreement with the Catholic Church about getting access to some empty classrooms, they achieved this objective some years later, when the Catholic church softened its attitude to multi-denominational education. In an article in the *Magill* magazine in September 1987, Cathy Herbert wrote[70]:

> The church no longer opposes the setting up of multi-denominational schools. Bishop McKernan, chairman of the Episcopal Commission for Education says: "Once you have a denominational system of education, implicit in it is the right of groups of pareents to have a multi-denominational system. For that reason, the Catholic church does not try to prevent groups from exercising what is their constitutional right in setting up multi-denominational schools. The principle of multi-denominational education is now accepted by all political parties ...

70. C. Herbert, "Obstacle Course for Multi-Creed Schools" in *Magill*, September 1987.

The success of Fianna Fáil in the General Election of 1986 and the appointment of Mary O'Rourke as Minister for Education in spring 1987 was an important landmark in the growth of the Educate Together sector. During her Ministry from 1987 to the end of 1991, seven new Educate Together schools were set up. On many occasions during her term as Minister, Mary O'Rourke spoke in support of the sector and she visited all the Educate Together schools during her term of office as Minister[71]. 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 1990 when she announced that children attending multi-denominational schools would be entitled to the same school transport benefits as children attending denominational schools. This was a very significant breakthrough and meant that many children living outside a two or a three-mile radius but within travelling distance of a multi-denominational school would be allowed to avail of subsidized school transport to travel to and from an Educate Together school. After Mary O'Rourke retired from national politics in the early 2000s, she accepted an invitation to join the Board of Educate Together.

During the first decade of its existence as a national "umbrella-body" for multidenominational schools, Educate Together was a voluntary organization with a minimal budget, which provided support and training to new groups and to principals and teachers in the new schools. By the mid-1990s as the movement and the number of schools grew, it became clear that some full-time staff with appropriate funding would be required. In 1996 it was decided to appoint a Chief Executive who would be available in a full-time paid capacity to support the growth of Educate Together. Paul Rowe was appointed to the position and he proved to be an excellent appointment. Paul was a committed leader and a prolific fund-raiser for

71. M. O'Rourke, *Just Mary: A Memoir.*

the movement and within a few years, Educate Together, which by this stage had registered with the Companies Office as a limited company, was recognised by the Department of Education as Patron of national schools. This meant that all new Educate Together schools which opened from the mid-1990s onwards were under the patronage of Educate Together. Paul Rowe sourced significant funding from philanthropic and other organisations and the Educate Together is now a very active and supportive organization for the various local groups around the country seeking an alternative to denominationally controlled National schools.

Whereas during the first decade of its existence, ten multi-denominational schools had opened, each with its own patron, subsequent to the recognition of Educate Together as Patron and the appointment of Paul Rowe as Chief Executive in the mid-1990s the growth of the sector was much more rapid. There are now (in the school year 2020/21) 95 Educate Together national schools in Ireland. In 2011, Educate Together was recognised by the Department of Education as a patron of post-primary schools and the first such school opened in 2014. In the current school year there are nineteen Educate Together post-primary schools in the country with many more in the pipeline. In all, there are more than 30,000 pupils enrolled in Educate Together schools.

During the past decade, some of the obstacles to starting new multi-denominational schools have been removed. It is now government policy to encourage and support the setting up of multi-denominational schools where there is evidence that parents wish to have such a school for their children. A local group which campaigns for an Educate Together school is no longer required to provide a site or temporary premises for such a school. Once the Department of Education is satisfied that there is viable demand for an Educate Together school, departmental officials work with the local group to identify and procure a suitable temporary premises for the school and to

provide a permanent purpose-built school as soon as possible – although in many cases this can take many years. Moreover, there is no longer any discrimination between denominational and multi-denominational schools as regards public funding, but this is not to say that public funding is sufficient nor that it is easy to start an Educate Together school. As with all other National schools, Educate Together schools have to undertake considerable fund-raising to provide the standard and quality of education their children need and deserve.

However, in spite of the growth of Educate Together schools in recent years, the proportion of national school pupils who attend Educate Together schools is still less than 5%. As John Coolahan stated in 2017 "the current provision of primary schools is out of alignment with a society that has been experiencing a great admixture of other religious and ethnic groupings, as well as changes in its traditional belief systems and practices[72]".

The Educate Together website today describes its schools as "equality-based, co-educational, child-centred and democratically run". It describes its Ethical Education programme, Learn Together, as "teaching children about different belief systems as well as atheism, agnosticism and humanism without promoting any one worldview over another". The website further states that:

> Learn Together includes learning about morality and spirituality, equality and justice, belief systems and an ethical approach to the environment. Learn Together replaces Religious Instruction and is recognised as a model of best practice in Intercultural Education by the European Union.

The "brave new vision for education in Ireland" referred to by President Michael D. Higgins in 2016 has to some extent come to fruition although with fewer than 100 of the 3,000 national

72. John Coolahan. *Towards the Era of Lifelong Learning*. p. 211.

schools under Educate Together patronage, Ireland still has a long way to go.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, the Dalkey School Project and the Educate Together movement in the south was paralleled by All Children Together and the Integrated Education movement in Northern Ireland. The campaign to start a multi-denominational school in Dalkey coincided with the campaign for integrated education in Northern Ireland. It was no coincidence that these two movements emerged at around the same time in the mid-1970s. The escalating violence in the north made many people reconsider traditional structures in society and any initiative which might contribute to greater understanding and respect across the traditional divides in society was worth trying.

It was recognised from the start that both groups had common problems but 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. In order to achieve this, a decision was taken by All Children Together to maintain a balance in numbers between Protestant and Catholic pupils and teachers in their schools. 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 the Dalkey School Project was based on the principle that the ethos of the school should reflect the ethos of a society in which there are many social, cultural and religious strands co-existing in harmony and mutual respect. The Religious Education curriculum was designed to help children to understand the different

traditions of life and thought that they would meet in their environment – this would include Catholic and Protestant, but it would also include Jewish, Baha'i, Muslim, Jehovah Witness, Mormon, Mennonite, humanist, atheist and agnostic. Thus the R.E curriculum in the Dalkey School Project attempted to be as all-embracing as possible to ensure that no child would be an outsider whatever his/her belief.

Chapter 11

Summary and Analysis

This book documents the early years of the Dalkey School Project and the challenges involved in opening Ireland's first multi-denominational national school since the foundation of the State. It describes events in the early years of the 1970s in St. Patrick's Church of Ireland National School, Dalkey which led to the decision of a small group of parents to seek state sanction and state aid for a school which would be independent of the churches and where children of all religious backgrounds and none would have equal right of access and would be equally respected. It chronicles the struggle between 1974 and 1978 to achieve this – a struggle that was protracted and controversial. The founders had to overcome the objections of both church and state as well as to raise considerable funds before the Dalkey School Project National School was opened in temporary premises in Dun Laoghaire on 1st September 1978. The challenges encountered before a purpose-built school in Glenageary was finally ready for occupation in 1984 are also discussed.

One might have expected that the 1970s would have been a propitious period for an initiative such as the Dalkey School Project. The 1960s had been a decade of growth and

development, socially, culturally and economically. Emigration began to fall for the first time in decade and according to historian Mary Daly:[73]

> One of the recurrent themes in the 1960s was that Ireland had abandoned its preoccupation with the past to focus on the present, redirecting its energies towards economic and social development instead of the previous fixation on national sovereignty. National pride and national commitment were increasingly linked with economic success and Ireland's greater involvement in world affairs.

The sixties were a politically stable decade with Fianna Fáil in power from 1957 to 1973. The Labour Party had issued a policy document entitled *Challenge and Change in Education* in March 1963 which called for far-reaching changes in educational structures[74]. The publication in 1966 of Fine Gael's *Policy for a Just Society* suggested that there was cross-party support for social reform[75]. Education had experienced increased investment and significant change following the publication of the *Investment in Education* report in 1966. At primary level, a policy of amalgamating small rural schools was adopted and the number of national schools fell from more than 4,000 in the mid-60s to about 3,500 in the mid-70s. During the late 1960s, a new child-centred primary school curriculum was piloted and this new curriculum was introduced in all national schools in 1971. Free post-primary education was introduced in 1967 with free transport provided for pupils who lived beyond a three-mile radius of their nearest school. Comprehensive schools were built in catchment areas where there was no other form of post-primary education and

73. Mary E. Daly, *Sixties Ireland: Reshaping the Economy, State and Society, 1957–1973*, p. 362.
74. J. Walsh, *The Politics of Expansion: The transformation of educational policy in the Republic of Ireland, 1957–1972*.
75. Declan Costello, *Fine Gael Policy for a Just Society*

by the end of the 1960s discussions were taking place about the setting up of Community schools. The curriculum offered in Vocational schools was expanded to enable pupils to sit the Intermediate and Leaving Certificate examinations. Between 1965 and 1970, enrolments at post-primary schools increased by almost 50% with most of the increase occurring in voluntary (denominational) secondary schools. The expansion of post-primary education led to heated debates about the control and management of the new Comprehensive and Community schools with the Catholic Church eventually gaining control[76]. In higher education, the first of the Regional Technical Colleges were built and an expanded scholarship and grant system was introduced to enable young people from poorer families to access university education.

The 1970s initially promised further economic and social expansion. The population of the Republic continued to grow - from 2,978,248 in 1971 to 3,364,881 in 1979, a 13 per cent increase[77]. Ireland had become a member of the European Economic Community in 1973 and this led to a liberalisation of a number of Irish laws and practices including the removal of the ban on married women working and the introduction of equal pay for men and women.

But the political situation was volatile. The "troubles" in Northern Ireland broke out in 1969 triggered by the shooting of civilians on Bloody Sunday in Derry in June of that year. Sectarian violence escalated during the 1970s and some of the violence spilled over to the south with the Monaghan and Dublin bombings in May 1974 and the murder of the British Ambassador to Ireland, Christopher Ewart Biggs in Dublin in 1976. There was a growing determination by the mid-1970s among many politicians and citizens, north and south, to bring an end to sectarian violence and to make whatever social or

76. E. Randles, *Post-Primary Education in Ireland 1957-1960 and Louis O'Flaherty, Management and Control in Irish Education: the Post-primary Experience*.
77. Central Statistics Office, Census figures, 1971 and 1981.

legislative changes that would contribute to this. Political instability in the south was reflected in the number of general elections - no fewer than five – which were held between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s, with a total of eight Ministers for Education during the same period.

The economic situation was also unstable. When a coalition of Fine Gael and Labour took over from Fianna Fáil in 1973, the level of public debt was higher than ever before and the new government was under considerable pressure to cut back on public expenditure. An international oil crisis exacerbated economic challenges. The rate of inflation increased significantly in the early years of the 1970s and also in the 1980s. Consumer prices doubled and government expenditure as a proportion of GNP increased from 38 to 49 per cent between 1969 and 1976[78]. The conservatism of Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave and some of his Ministers together with the economic downturn meant that the momentum for change, especially social and educational change, had slowed considerably by the mid 1970s.

The 1970s were a decade of consolidation and retrenchment in education. To quote Séamas Ó Buachalla[79]:

> The decade from the end of the Fianna Fáil administration in 1973 (to the end of the 70s) was characterised by severe tensions between demand and supply of educational services. For the ministers in question funding an over-expanding system became a major problem … The economic recession further restricted the scope of policy to little more than coping with the rising costs of the system.

According to Ó Buachalla, Richard Burke, who was Minister for Education from 1973 to 1977 "lacked the strong commitment to planning which had characterised the ministers of the sixties". Burke was not a reforming Minister and one of his first

78. D. Ferriter, *Ambiguous Republic: Ireland in the 1970s*.
79. S. Ó Buachalla, *Education Policy in 20th Century Ireland*, p. 288

actions on his appointment as Minister in 1973 was to close down the Development Unit of the Department of Education. He overturned some decisions of the previous government, for example he re-opened the national school in Dún Chaoin in the Kerry Gaeltacht which had been closed some years earlier as part of the policy of closing small schools[80]. Seán O'Connor, who had been one of the leaders of educational change in the Department of Education in the late 60s and early 70s, retired as Secretary of the Department in 1975 and his successors, Dominic Ó Laoghaire who was Secretary from 1975 to 1979 and Liam Ó Laidhin, who was Secretary from 1979 until 1984, were cautious and conservative and supportive of the educational *status quo*[81].

The story of the Dalkey School Project began with a controversy in the early 1970s in St Patrick's Church of Ireland national school in Dalkey over pupil enrolment. St. Patrick's was a one-teacher Church of Ireland national school whose principal, Florence Armstrong was an inspirational teacher who welcomed children from all religious backgrounds and none. She believed that there was no place for 'indoctrination and evangelism' in a classroom[82]. She encouraged parental involvement in the school and by the early 1970s the school boasted a strong parent teacher association. Under Ms. Armstrong's leadership the school had grown from a one-teacher school in the early 1960s to a five-teacher school in the early 1970s. Demand for places continued to grow but the school could not accommodate any more pupils in the limited space available. The Church of Ireland rector, who was manager of the school, was not happy with the growing *de facto* multi-denominational character of the school, nor

80. Colm Ó Snodaigh, *Dún Chaoin: Oscail an Scoil*.

81. See for example D. Ó Laoghaire, *The Missionary Impulse: A Tribute to Vocational Education.* Dublin: 1991 and D. Ó Laoghaire, "Some Schools more equal than others" in *Magill,* January 1988.

82. J. Smyth, "Cavan Visionary Remembered" in *Anglo-Celt,* 26th July 2020.

was he willing to extend the school building to respond to growing demand. Instead he decided to introduce a policy of prioritising the enrolment of children of Church of Ireland and other Protestant families. The parents appealed the decision of the rector to the Church of Ireland Archbishop of Dublin who was patron of the school, and while he tried to broker a compromise, no solution was reached.

In March 1974 the decision to give priority to Protestant children was endorsed by Minister Richard Burke – a decision which caused consternation among parents and the principal. This was the first time in the history of Irish education that a Minister for Education had "instructed" a national school manager to give priority of enrolment to children of any one religion. The decision seemed to contravene the basic principles of the national school system, which for almost 150 years had guaranteed equality of access for children of all religions.

By summer 1974 following legal advice, the parents realised that the multi-denominational "experiment" introduced in St. Patrick's N.S. over the previous decade had effectively come to an end. A different approach would have to be taken if children of all religions and none were to continue to be educated together. If the Church of Ireland was no longer willing to support a multi-denominational school, then the parents would have to go it alone and set up their own school. And that is what they decided to do.

The Dalkey School Project was set up in summer 1974 with the aim of setting up national schools which would be:

1. Child-centred, with an approach to education based on the 1971 New Primary Curriculum

2. Co-educational (boys and girls would be educated together)

3. Multi-denominational (children of all religions and none

would have equal right of access to then school and would be equally respected)

4. Run by a management committee with significant democratic involvement of the parents

5. Planned to develop towards an 8-teacher school

From its earliest days, the Dalkey School Project recognised that most Irish people were happy with the denominational character of primary education and it emphasised that it in no way sought to undermine the rights of those people. But given that there were more than 3,500 denominational national schools in the country such people were well catered for. Conceding that those who wanted their children educated together were probably a minority the Project pointed out that such parents did not have even one school in the country.

The Dalkey School Project was formally inaugurated as an association with a constitution and articles of memorandum in February 1975. Those who initiated the project were parents of children who had attended St. Patrick's N.S. as well as others who had not been involved in the St. Patrick's controversy. The founders were a mixed bunch. They included members of many religions – Catholic, Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, other Christians, Jehovah Witnesses, Baha'is and Muslims – as well as atheists, humanists and agnostics. They came from a wide range of social backgrounds, nationalities, professions and occupations, but the one thing they all had in common was a determination to open a multi-denominational national school where all children would have equal right of access and would be equally respected.

The first task undertaken by the founders was to carry out a survey of the Dalkey area to identify the extent of the demand for such a school. The survey was carried out in autumn 1975 in a professional way and with military precision. A random sample of 25% of houses – 1356 households in all – within

a one and a quarter mile radius of Dalkey Town Hall were included in the survey. A questionnaire seeking the views of households on multi-denominational education, co-education and democratically controlled schools was distributed by over 50 volunteers. Almost 80% of those surveyed replied to the questionnaire and the outcome surprised even the most optimistic observers. 75% of respondents favoured multi-denominational schools: 82% preferred co-education and 75% expressed a preference for democratic control of schools. Even taking account of the non-response rate of slightly over 20% it was clear that a significant majority of respondents supported the aims of the Dalkey School Project. Two years later, in 1977, the findings of a nationwide survey undertaken by Fr. Micheal MacGréil of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth and published in the report *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ireland* mirrored the results of the Dalkey survey[83].

But the Minister for Education, Richard Burke, was not impressed. For over a year he refused to engage with the Dalkey School Project, ignoring successive letters and requests for a meeting. It was not until May 1976 that a substantive reply was received from the Minister and this reply was a flat refusal to even consider sanctioning a new multi-denominational school in the Dalkey area. He was satisfied that the accommodation available in the existing schools was "fully adequate" to meet requirements. He stated that it was not open to him "in accordance with the provisions of the Rules for National Schools" to make grants towards the cost of an additional national school in the area[84].

The subsequent six months were frustrating and it was difficult to see how the Dalkey School Project could overcome the intransigence of the Minister. While there were occasional chinks of hope, as for example when the leader of the

83. Micheál MacGréil *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ireland,* Maynooth 1977.

84. Letter from the Minister for Education's secretary to Micheal Johnston, 25th May 1976.

opposition, Jack Lynch publicly declared his support for some pilot projects in integrated education both north and south, many of the founder members were beginning to lose hope. The Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave was under pressure from right-wing groups to copper-fasten the role of the religious and of religion in Irish education and there was even a suggestion within government circles that legislation would be introduced to this end.

A political crisis in November 1976 sparked by the unprecedented resignation of the President of Ireland, Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh had an unexpected outcome. The election of Patrick Hillery as President and the consequent nomination by Taoiseach Charles Haughey of Richard Burke as a European Commissioner resulted in the appointment of a new Minister for Education, Peter Barry. Barry was more open to the concept of multi-denominational education than his predecessor but his tenure as Minister was short and no breakthrough occurred during his time as Minister.

The unexpected decision by Taoiseach Liam Cosgrave to call a general election in early summer 1977 was seized by the Dalkey School Project as an opportunity to launch a major campaign both nationally and in the Dún Laoghaire constituency. All Dáil candidates in the constituency were lobbied. While political commentators and indeed most observers expected the sitting government to be re-elected, to everyone's surprise and the delight of those who had lobbied for state recognition of multi-denominational education, Fianna Fáil was elected to government with a significant majority. Four of the T.Ds elected in the Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown constituency had publicly expressed their support for the Dalkey School Project, as had the new Taoiseach, Jack Lynch, and the new Minister for Education, John Wilson. In August 1977 newly appointed Minister Wilson declared his approval in principle for a new national school for the Dalkey School Project and asked that the necessary preliminaries be

completed to enable the school to open in July 1978[85].

The challenges and practical obstacles that had to be overcome in order to get the school off the ground were considerable. The Dalkey School Project had to show that it would be an appropriate "corporate body" to act as Patron of a national school, a position that was filled in the denominational sector by the Bishop. It had to provide a policy document on religious education which would be acceptable to the Department of Education. It had to commit to obeying the Rules for National Schools and to teaching the national school curriculum. It had to provide evidence that there would be long-term demand for such a school and that there would be a viable number of pupils available. As promoters of a new school the Dalkey School Project would have to provide temporary premises in which to start the school, a site on which a new school building could be built and the finance necessary to provide temporary accommodation, to contribute towards the cost of the new building and to the costs of running and maintaining the school building. Teacher salaries would be provided by the State as well as a capital grant of up to 90% of the cost of the building.

From September 1977 to September 1978 it was a case of all hands on deck. In early 1978 the Department of Education approved the Dalkey School Project as school patron. A further canvass of the area together with a pre-enrolment list of prospective pupils showed that there would be demand for at least a three-teacher school. Thanks to the generosity of a local family, the Kirwans, a suitable temporary premises and a site for a new school building in Glenageary were made available. In March 1978, formal approval to open the school was granted by the Department of Education and a roll number was allocated for the new school. At last there was light at the end of the tunnel.

85. In the 1970s, the national school year started on 1st July.

The following months were a period of intense activity. In early April it emerged that the temporary premises in Glenageary would not be available and a massive search to rent an alternative building failed to find a suitable alternative. At the last minute, in June 1978, a group of parents and supporters clubbed together to buy a large private house in Dun Laoghaire and leased it to the Dalkey School Project for use as a temporary premises for the school. The setbacks and challenges of obtaining planning permission for the temporary premises were nerve-racking and extraordinary efforts were made to ensure that the school would open on 1st September which it did. The highs and lows experienced by the founder members and the resilience of the pupils as well as the courage of the teachers who undertook professional risks in accepting posts in the school in the early years are documented in the book. The excitement of the pupils on D-Day, 1st September 1978, are reflected in the quotations from some of the first pupils enrolled in the school.

Although the founders had anticipated that the school would be in temporary premises for only a year or two, this did not prove to be the case. It was to be six years before the new building in Glenageary Lodge was ready for occupation in spring 1984. During those six years as enrolment increased the school was accommodated in four separate temporary premises in Vesey Place, York Road, Dun Laoghaire, Mountown and Sallynoggin. Securing planning permission for the new building in Glenageary was another challenge. There were local objections to the building of the school. Some were linked to ideological objections on the part of various lobby groups, others were typical of the type of objections that were made to many building developments. From an economic point of view the timing of the building was unfortunate. To quote Diarmuid Ferriter[86]: "If the Irish economy had endured a troubled 1970s

86. D. Ferriter, *Ambiguous Republic: Ireland in the 1970s.*

it was set to experience a traumatic 1980s". The period from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s was a period of huge inflation. Financial cutbacks were experienced in every department of government. In the four-year period from 1980 when the grant for the new building was sanctioned until 1984 when the pupils and teachers moved to the new building, construction costs nationally increased by 45%. The extent of fund-raising which had to be undertaken to meet the local contribution to the cost of building the school were formidable.

Throughout all this period, the Dalkey School Project secured and maintained a high and mostly positive profile in the national media. Regular information briefings were held, press releases were distributed and the Project provided speakers at seminars, conferences and discussion groups. The education correspondents of the national newspapers, in particular John Horgan and Christina Murphy of the *Irish Times* and John Walshe of the *Irish Independent* provided regular media coverage. Journals such as *Magill* and *Hibernia* commented supportively on the activities of the Dalkey School Project. Local newspapers such as *Southside* covered some meetings and events.

All political parties were kept informed of developments and care was taken that the Dalkey School Project should not become over-associated with any one party or ideological group. Early supporters included local T.D.s Barry Desmond and David Andrews followed later by Martin O'Donoghue and Seán Barrett. At national level Jack Lynch was a consistent supporter, initially as leader of Fianna Fáil in opposition and later as Taoiseach. A key Fianna Fáil supporter was John Wilson, T.D. for Cavan / Monaghan. When he was appointed Minister for Education in summer 1973 one of his first decisions was to give approval in principle for the opening of a multi-denominational national school in Dalkey. On the Fine Gael side, Gemma Hussey was a supporter from the beginning. As a member of Seanad Eireann, she publicly supported the

Dalkey School Project in the early 1970s and as Minister for Education from 1983 onwards she brokered a solution to what had been a long-standing controversy about the grant for the new school building. By ensuring that the Department of Education abided by its original agreement to pay 90% of the cost of the new building, an intervention by Minister Hussey in 1983 resulted in a potential saving to the Project of more than Ir£32,000[87]. Hussey also included a commitment to multi-denominational education in *The Programme for Action in Education* 1984-87, which was the first such government commitment. Garret Fitzgerald, T.D. was also supportive, especially after he became Taoiseach in 1983 although he had been cautious in his support in the 1970s when Liam Cosgrave was Taoiseach.

There were of course many who objected to multi-denominational education, some of whom, either intentionally or otherwise, misinterpreted the aims of the project and accused the founders of "trying to drive God out of education[88]". The fact that the Dalkey School Project had emerged during a period when controversy over the control and management of Community Schools was at its height contributed to the antagonism of conservative and religious right-wing groups. Religious and cultural prejudices emerged into the open. The most active and outspoken objectors to multi-denominational education were religiously conservative organisations such as the Council for Social Concern and the Irish Family League, which operated from the headquarters of the Knights of St. Columbanus in Ely Place, Dublin 2. Between 1975 and 1977 the Council for Social Concern published three pamphlets condemning multi-denominational schools – *Have the Snakes Come Back? in 1975; Is Integrated Education the Answer?* in 1976 and *The Dalkey School Saga: Has the Government*

87. The equivalent in 2020 Euro prices of about €115,000

88. Oliver J. Flanagan, T.D., quoted in D. Ferriter, *Ambiguous Republic: Ireland in the 1970s*, p. 130.

Surrendered to the Multi-Denominational Pressure Groups? in 1977.

Prejudice against the Dalkey School Project was also apparent among some civil servants, some local authority staff and some churchmen. Referring to this in a talk which he gave in November 1976, Micheal Johnston spoke as follows[89]:

> Prejudice alas there is around us in Ireland; its influence is all too evident, most obviously of course in the North, but it is here in the South just as deeply ingrained in all of us, and all of us have an enormous task to shake it off, to keep it under control. It is of course often confused in our minds with our cultural background, with our religious beliefs, with our national identity – all inextricably intertwined here in Ireland.

It was inconceivable to many that a small group of lay people would deign to challenge, much less dismantle, the close and long-standing relationship between church and state in matters of education. Barry Desmond opined that the founders were "very effective campaigners – dealing with the ultra-Catholic ethos of the Department of Education". He referred to the "singular antagonism" of Minister Dick Burke "slowly but surely going through the interminable procedures of the Department of Education[90]". As he saw it "Liam Cosgrave and several of his fellow Fine Gael ministers had hoped that the project would fade away". An article in *Magill* magazine in the 1980s stated that the opening of the Dalkey School Project represented "a triumph over prejudice, intolerance and polite stone-walling on the art of the coalition government lasting four years[91]". It was undoubtedly a David and Goliath struggle.

The many people who contributed to the success of the Dalkey School project in its early years are mentioned

89. Speech of Micheal Johnston at a Debate on 24 November 1976 in Earlsfort Terrace, "That Religion Breeds Prejudice".

90. B. Desmond, *Finally and In Conclusion: A Political Memoir*.

91. C. Herbert, xxxx in Magill

throughout the book. Foremost among them were Micheal and Pat Johnston, who had been key protagonists in the earlier controversy in St. Patrick's (Church of Ireland) N.S., Dalkey. Micheal's leadership and his unwavering determination throughout the first decade of the DSP was central to its success. His media skills ensured that the DSP remained in the public eye throughout the first decade and beyond. He was a convincing public speaker and his many speeches were very well crafted. He was absolutely confident that the Dalkey School Project would be a success – even if it took some time. He never gave up and was unfailingly optimistic throughout the ten years from 1974 to 1984 when the school moved to the new building in Glenageary. His wife Pat was unstinting in giving of her time and expertise to the many fund-raising activities over the years. Their house in Burdett Avenue was and continues to be the registered address of the Dalkey School Project company and was the venue for hundreds of meetings and interviews. Their daughter Anna and their son, Josh, enrolled in the DSP National School when it opened on 1st September 1978 – the then four-year old Josh was the first pupil registered on the school roll.

Helen and Hugh Fahy were also key to the success of the Dalkey School Project. They had not been involved in the St. Patrick's N.S controversy and when they attended the preliminary meetings of the DSP in 1974 and 1975, they brought a fresh perspective to the movement. Helen was the first secretary of the Dalkey School Project and her background as a civil servant in the Department of Education before her marriage brought an expertise and understanding of the national school system which was invaluable. She was also an inveterate fund-raiser and her total commitment and that of her husband Hugh to the DSP never wavered. Their sons Eoin and Colm enrolled in the school on the day it opened - 1st September 1978.

Desmond Green first came on the scene at the inaugural

meeting of the Dalkey School Project in February 1975. He was also an "outsider" i.e. he had not been involved in the St. Patrick's controversy. A chemical engineer Desmond had spent a number of years as a graduate student in New Brunswick in Canada. He was a practising Catholic and his wife Gale was a Canadian Episcopalian. Desmond's business and financial acumen as well as his diplomatic skills were an invaluable asset to the Project. Desmond led the Dalkey survey in 1976. He was chair of the building committee for the new school and with treasurer Richard More O'Ferrall he ensured that the many financial challenges were met on time and satisfied in full. He was a calming influence on occasions when tensions arose. His daughters Siobán and Deirdre enrolled in the school the day it opened.

My husband Bill and I were involved both in St. Patrick's N.S and the Dalkey School Project. Our two older daughters were pupils in St. Patrick's N.S. and they had already completed sixth class by the time the DSP school opened. Our youngest daughter Sonja was one of the first pupils enrolled in the Dalkey School Project N.S. in September 1978. Bill's expertise as a statistician and a strategist were central to the planning and development of the Project. His inside knowledge of the Department of Education, where he was senior statistician was often useful although he was always careful to abide by the Official Secrets Act. Barry Desmond later described Bill as "the strategist of the campaign … he had the vision … he was the broad brush-strokes man"[92]. Belinda Moller described him, perhaps over-generously, as "the conceiving architect of the Educate Together school system" and stated that his role and influence were "pivotal"[93]. I can vouch for the thousands of hours that Bill spent – often throughout the night – working out solutions to the problems that arose and painstakingly identifying the pros and cons of possible solutions. My

92. Barry Desmond, *Finally and in Conclusion: a Political Memoir.*
93. B. Moller, *op. cit.*

own years as a civil servant in the Buildings Branch of the Department of Education in the early 1960s meant that I had an in-depth knowledge of the rules and procedures for new schools and new school buildings, knowledge that proved to be useful when we met with obstacles and challenges in getting the Dalkey School Project off the ground.

There were numerous others who played an invaluable role in ensuring that the dream of starting a multi-denominational school became a reality. Among these were Hilary and Donald Pratt and the Kirwan family, who provided a site for the school building in Glenageary and offered a temporary premises for the school in 1978. While this temporary premises (Glenageary House) was ultimately not available for a school, the offer of the building at the time broke the logjam with the Department of Education officials and unleashed a flurry of activity which led to official approval for the opening of the Dalkey School Project N.S. There were many, many others, some of whom are mentioned throughout the book, without whom the project could never have succeeded. To quote Desmond Green[94]:

> … there were some people more in the centre … but the total picture could not be seen unless you saw each ripple in the pond. There was no point in determining that the ripple at the centre was the most important. Actually, all the ripples were equally important in order to get a full picture …

Crucial to the success of the school were the principal Florence Armstrong and her staff, especially Jayne Doran and Síle Harrington, who were the first teachers appointed to the school in 1978 when there was considerable uncertainty surrounding its future. To quote Belinda Moller[95]:

> Florrie Armstrong is a symbolic figure in this story. But, because she was not leading or initiating the

94. Belinda Moller, *op. cit.*, p. 154
95. Belinda Moller, *op. cit.*, p. 165

> management and structural changes core to the strategic development of the movement, the reader might be forgiven for thinking that she was an absent figure. It is important to remember that she was symbolic to the multi-denominational movement as a whole because she was one of the first principals in the country to demonstrate new practices in educating children of different denominations together. In fact, much of the activity recounted in this story was indicative of the implicit support for Florence Armstrong's work and the work of the staff.

The internal dynamics of the movement were not always smooth. There were tensions and differences of opinion within the organisation. Some of the differences derived from deep-seated cultural differences. The tradition of the Anglican Church of sharing power and of lay people being active members of their church meant that those from a Protestant tradition were generally more outspoken and more willing to challenge authority and the status quo. They had come from a tradition of open discussion where dissent could be seen as constructive. Many from a Catholic background were uncomfortable challenging authority, especially when they were accused by those authorities of undermining traditional values and practices. To quote Belinda Moller: "The tension was in the desire to hold to traditional values whilst also changing individual behaviour and outlook"[96].

Looking back at the early days of the Dalkey School Project, Anna Johnston later stated that for many pupils the Project had been a big part of their childhood lives long before they sat in their new classrooms on the first day of September 1978. She remembered that her family

> had pretty much lived in Dalkey Town Hall every Saturday morning for years (at the DSP Market) and

96. Belinda Moller, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

> streams of people passed through our house daily to plan and scheme … or to cook or stuff envelopes or simply to find out more. My (then) four-year-old brother Josh even played mummies and daddies DSP style with his friend Sonja Hyland: "Oh! It's eight o'clock darling, time for a meeting". We spent all summer of 1978 in Vesey Place with parents digging and lifting and cleaning as the excitement built.

For many of us founder members, the ten years from 1974 to 1984 were the most challenging and ultimately the most satisfying years of our lives. We worked incredibly hard to achieve the goal we were committed to, i.e. to open Ireland's first multi-denominational school. We met unexpected obstacles along the way and learned how to overcome them. We addressed numerous challenges, some of which were demanding and sometimes painful. We learned new skills and developed expertise which for some eventually led to new careers. We made many friends (and a few enemies) and maintained these friends ever since. One of the most consistent and involved founder members, Anne Johnston, summarised the decade from 1974 to 1984 as follows:

> It was ten years of very hard work and dedicated effort but I was then – and still am – immensely satisfied that I stood beside so many courageous people, some of whom took painful decisions to abandon institutions and social groups where they had forged or inherited deep roots. I admired our first teachers who took a deal of criticism but had faith not only in the cause itself but also in the personnel driving it. They were true trailblazers, but then in a different way were the many other colleagues who became firm friends. Today it is a source of quiet, sometimes emotional satisfaction to listen to my grandchildren singing the anthem of gratitude the present generation of DSP pupils wrote this year, the 40th since we began. They are well aware and immensely proud of their school and that itself is a tribute to the current teaching staff.

Appendix 1

The Dalkey School Project Survey, 1976

At the first public meeting of the Dalkey School Project on 23rd February 1975, it had been agreed that one of the first actions of the newly set up association would be to carry out a survey in the Dalkey / Dun Laoghaire area to identify the extent of support for multi-denominational education. An *ad hoc* campaign undertaken in late spring 1973 by parents associated with St Patrick's Church of Ireland N.S. in Dalkey had collected more than 500 signatures supporting the setting up of such a school. Around the same time, surveys had been carried out in Marley Grange and in Firhouse[97] to identify the extent of support in those new housing areas for multi-denominational education and those surveys had suggested that there was a great deal of support among young parents for such schools. Although the Dalkey School Project felt that there was substantial support for their aims there was no researched evidence about people´s view on the subject.

At its meetings between February and June 1975, the

97. Jim Cooke, *Marley Grange Multi-Denominational Challenge 1973 – 1978.*

executive committee had preliminary discussions about a possible survey and at its September meeting the committee had a prolonged discussed on the logistics of such a survey. It was decided to carry out a pilot survey in the first instance to test a questionnaire, and to determine the practical challenges that would have to be met, as well as to provide an estimate of costings. It was agreed that Dr. Joy Rudd (a sociologist who done some consultancy work for the Department of Education) would be contacted as well as Gabriel Kiely, a sociologist who had undertaken the survey in Marley Grange. Assistance would also be sought from Dr. Sarah Davis, an academic statistician in Trinity College and a supporter of the Dalkey School Project. Desmond Green was appointed co-ordinator of the survey.

Bill Hyland's input into the planning and implementation of the survey as well as the analysis of the questionnaires was significant. As a statistician and analyst for almost twenty years, initially with the (Irish) Central Statistics Offices, subsequently with the statistical offices of the United Nations in New York and Geneva and since the mid-1960s with the Department of Education in Dublin, Bill's expertise and experience were invaluable. He had carried out a number of key surveys for the O.E.C.D. *Investment in Education* report between 1962 and 1965 and was familiar with the technical and statistical issues relating to education surveys. However given the sensitivity of his post as senior statistician in the Department of Education, his role in the Dalkey School Project survey had to be discreet and unacknowledged.

Hand-written and typed documents and computer printouts relating to the survey show the detailed and meticulous planning and execution that went into the survey. For example, draft proposals were prepared for each step of the survey and were submitted to the executive committee for approval. Detailed lists of households by road, taken from the electoral registers with data on the numbers of houses and voters on each street and road, were prepared. Maps of the area to be surveyed with

information and detailed instructions were provided for the supervisors and collectors as well as coding instructions for the computerised analysis of the collected questionnaires.

Planning for the survey began in September 1975. Planning included determining the survey objectives, the survey area, the survey methodology, the survey documents, how the data would be analysed and how the survey would be externally supervised to provide credibility, as it was anticipated that there would be criticism of the findings, especially if the findings were positive.

A pilot survey was carried out during September in several locations which were outside the survey area. This was to test the model that had been designed. The pilot survey helped to identify any issues that might arise in the course of the main survey and ensured that most eventualities were considered in advance.

On 3rd September 1975, a letter was sent to Minister Richard Burke stating: "We are now in a position to proceed with our survey to establish the full extent of the support for the DSP in this area. In this context we request an early meeting with officials of your Dept. to discuss the format, content, and layout of our questionnaire". Six days letter an acknowledgement was received from the Minister's office acknowledging the letter and stating that it would be brought to the attention of the Minister. Later in the month (on 26th September) Desmond Green, survey co-ordinator, wrote to the Minister inviting him "to nominate an officer of your Department as a Monitor/ Scrutineer to the Survey". Again this letter was acknowledged on 8th October 1975 but there was no substantive reply.

The three major political parties (Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour), the Irish National Teachers' Organisation and the Department of Education were also invited to appoint Monitors/Scrutineers to the Survey. The local *cumann* of Fianna Fáil, which had been openly opposed to the DSP, initially rejected the invitation, but following an appeal to

Fianna Fail headquarters, Frank Dunlop was appointed by Fianna Fáil headquarters to undertake the task of scrutineer. Scrutineers were also appointed by Fine Gael and the Labour Party and these appointees had access to all meetings of the survey committee, to all documentation in relation to the survey and to the opening, counting and processing of all completed questionnaires. They were invited to attend the briefing of collectors, and if they wished, to accompany collectors on their rounds.

The Department of Education was requested to provide advice and guidance in conducting the survey and asked if any funds might be available to meet the costs. The only response was that there were no funds from which the Department might help meet the costs of the survey. The limited resources available was a factor in deciding on the sample design and the survey method, which was a self-administered questionnaire with direct delivery and collection.

The survey had four objectives:

- To determine the degree of support for the three elements of the Dalkey School Project and the degree of support for the completed D.S.P. package.

- To determine if there was agreement that multi-denominational schools should receive State financial support equivalent to that given to existing denominational national schools.

- To determine if parents who were in favour of a multi-denominational, co-educational national school under predominantly democratic management would send their children to such a school if it were generally satisfactory.

- To determine whether characteristics such as religious denomination, age and sex affected the attitudes of respondents.

The survey area was based on a radius of one and a quarter miles centred on Dalkey Town Hall: this extended as far as the People's Park, Dun Laoghaire, the roundabouts at Sallynoggin and Rochestown Avenue and a point on the Vico Road, Dalkey. 25% of houses in the area were surveyed and statistically valid random procedures for selecting sample houses were used to identify the houses to be surveyed. This ensured that collectors had no influence on the choice of sample houses.

The survey area was divided into five sectors, each sector had a supervisor and each supervisor had ten volunteers. The supervisors were Helen Fahy, Hilary Pratt, Aine Hyland, Patsy Lyle and Micheal Johnston – all members of the executive committee of the DSP. The delivery and collection of questionnaires were undertaken by 49 volunteers working under the five supervisors who in turn reported to the survey co-ordinator. Collectors were briefed and issued with instructions which clearly defined their role as collectors – their job was to collect completed questionnaires, not to influence opinions. A briefing meeting for the supervisors and volunteers was held in Ross's hotel towards the end of September. The results and lessons of the pilot survey were reviewed, and a detailed presentation given with the assistance of slides. The 'Instructions to Collectors' were also reviewed to ensure that the collectors were clear about their role and would be able to deal with any questions that arose.

Each envelope to be delivered contained a covering letter and two questionnaires. The supervisors were each assigned an area, provided with a map and estimates of the number of houses in the area and number of persons in each house all of which had been obtained from the electoral register. Envelopes were delivered to 1,356 households. Contact was made with 1,330 households, while no contact could be made with 26 households. Collectors were instructed to collect two pieces of information from each household on first contact: (1) Whether there were any young children (under 12 years) in

the house and (2) How many adults (over 18 years) lived in the house.

Completed returns were received from 1,022 households, a household response rate of 77% of those contacted. 22% of the households contacted stated that they were not interested, refused to participate or returned only black forms. The balance of 1% were uncompleted for some other reason: these were persons who had neither returned forms nor refused to participate by the final date. A total of 1,900 adults completed the questionnaire and 816 of these were parents of young children comprising 476 families. There were 1,054 young children (i.e. children under 12 in October, 1975) in the 476 families with young children.

Delivery of questionnaires began on 6th October 1975 and the collection of completed questionnaires concluded on 4th November. A preliminary report based on a manual analysis of data was published on 28th December. The data was then subjected to computer analysis, and the results of that analysis formed the body of the final report which was published in June 1976.

Survey Results:

Objective 1

The level of support for the three elements of the Dalkey School Project was as follows:

- 75% of all respondents preferred multi-denominational national schools.
- 81.5% of all respondents preferred co-education and
- 75.6% of all respondents preferred democratic control.

Over 70% of all respondents were in favour of at least two elements of the Dalkey School Project and were not opposed

to any element. Just over 4% of all respondents were opposed to at least two elements in the proposal and no more than neutral to the third.

These results were re-weighted to take account of non-responders to the survey and the institutional population, and the following re-weighted results indicated the level of support for the elements of the Dalkey School Project and for the complete DSP proposal amongst the total population of the survey area.

- 64% of all adults and 68% of all parents of young children in the survey area preferred multi-denominational national schools.

- 78% of all adults in the survey area preferred co-education and

- 73% of all adults inn the survey area preferred democratic control.

Thus the survey showed that there was an extremely high level of support amongst the total adult population of the survey area for the three main elements of the Dalkey School Project and also for the complete Dalkey School Project proposal.

Objective 2.

87.4% of all respondents agreed that multi-denominational national schools should receive State financial support equivalent to that given to existing denominational national schools. The re-weighted results for this question indicated that 83% of the total population in the survey area were in favour of equivalent support for multi-denominational national schools.

Objective 3.

The parents of 53.6% of all young children in responding

families were in favour of multi-denominational, co-educational national schools under predominantly democratic management and stated that they would definitely send their children to a multi-denominational school if it was generally satisfactory. In addition parents of 4.1% of all young children in responding families were likely to send their children to such a school.

When the results were re-weighted to include all families in the sample containing young children then following figures were obtained. The parents of 47.3% of young children in all sample households would definitely send their children to such a school and the parents of 3.6% of young children in all sample households were likely to send their children to such a school.

Objective 4;

The results of the survey showed that characteristics such as religious denomination, age and sex had comparatively little effect on the degree of support for the objectives of the Dalkey School Project. Although the results showed that Protestants were more favourable to the DSP aims than Roman Catholics, the effect was slight.

In general younger adults were more favourable to the DSP objectives than older adults and the effect of age on attitude was more marked and more systematic among Roman Catholics than among others. There was no appreciable difference between the responses of males and females to the attitudinal variables.

The objectives which were set forth in the survey were achieved and the survey showed that there was substantial support for the objectives of the Dalkey School Project from the total population in the survey area. This support was not significantly affected by religious denomination, age or sex. The survey area consisted of a very wide range of housing spread across the complete range of the socio-economic scale. The area included what were then new housing developments as

well as districts long settled, private housing and local authority housing. In this respect the survey differed from some other recent surveys (e.g. Marley Grange and Firhouse) which were conducted entirely in new housing development areas.

The results of the survey showed that characteristics such as religious denomination, age and sex had comparatively small effect on the degree of support for the objectives of the Dalkey School Project. Although the survey showed that Protestants were systematically more favourable to the DSP aims than Roman Catholics the effect was slight. In general younger adults were more favourable to the objectives than older adults and the effect of age on attitude was more marked and more systematic among Roman Catholics than among others. There was no appreciable difference between the responses of males and females to the attitudinal variables.

Every effort was made to take account of those who failed to respond to the questionnaires. Using what data was available, it was estimated that there were 61 households with young children which did not return any completed questionnaires – assuming the same proportion of one-parent families in this group as in those who responded, it was estimated that there were a total of 117 parents of young children in those households. To this were added the 95 other parents of young children in families where only one of two parents responded. The following table summarised the adult response pattern, distinguishing parents of young children from others, and internal from external non-response:

	RESPONDENTS	Non-Respondents INTERNAL	Non-Respondents EXTERNAL	TOTAL
Parents of Young Children	816 79.4%	95 9.2%	117 11.4%	1,028
Other Adults	1,084 60.7%	228 12.8%	474 26.5%	1,786
Total Adults in Sample	1,900 68.0%	323 11.5%	591 21.0%	2,814

Predictably there was an appreciably higher response rate for parents of young children. Of the 537 families with young children in the sample, replies were received from at least one parent in 476 (89%) of such families. There were an estimated 1,194 young children in all the sample families, and 1,054 of these (88%) were in families from whom at least one completed questionnaire was received.

Using the survey results it was estimated that there were approximately 2,860 national school pupils in the survey area and that 12 eight teacher schools would be required for these pupils. Based on the survey results six of these schools should be multi denominational, co-educational and under democratic management: Four schools should be single denominational Roman Catholic: one single denominational Church of Ireland and one other single denominational school.

The results of the survey provided incontrovertible evidence that there was a demand for the type of schools proposed by the DSP. If this were so in the Dalkey area it was likely that there were like minded persons elsewhere in Ireland. It would be more difficult in future for policy-makers to state that there was no demand for multi-denominational schools in Ireland. In an interview some years later, Desmond Green explained the impact of the DSP survey on early DSP members: "The survey was very powerful ... it energised us in terms of knowing

we were on the right track and that this was what was wanted".

Two years later, in 1977, a nationwide survey was undertaken by Fr. Micheál MacGréil of St. Patrick's College Maynooth. Its results, published in a report entitled *Prejudice and tolerance in Ireland* were very similar to the results of the DSP survey. In the MacGréil report, 77.8% of respondents "supported a radical concept in education, i.e. interdenominational, mixed, free community schools[98]". (It is interesting to note that in March 1979, the DSP invited Fr. Mac Gréil to be a member of the Council of the DSP. While he indicated that he would personally be happy to accept the invitation, he failed to get the approval of the ordinary of the diocese.)

Parents involved in carrying out the survey remember its impact and how meticulously it was organised. Anne Johnston writes:

> The Survey did seem important. I remember Desmond Green's briefings which were serious and also rather inspiring! He made us feel our contributions held significance. The message was clear that outside forces badly wanted us to fail and we had to be scrupulous in all dealings. I took it all very seriously indeed and when I was invited indoors to explain the cause, in one or two dwellings, I told the story simply, saying we wanted an alternative for our own children as the Constitution permitted and we were not trying to change the nation. One family actually enrolled later. Nobody was unpleasant to me, indeed two maiden sisters, teachers both, were very interested without having a child to educate. They remained supportive neighbours of mine, and regular Country Market supporters.

The results of the survey got quite some media coverage and while much of this was positive, the publicity also galvanised some of those opposed to muti-denominational education.

98. M. Mac Gréil, *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ireland*, 1977.

Appendix 2

Religious Education in the Dalkey School Project

The Department of Education's Rules for National Schools in the 1970s were unambiguous in relation to Religious Instruction. Rule 68 stated:

> Of all parts of a school curriculum, Religious Instruction is by far the most important, as its subject-matter, God's honour and service, includes the proper use of all man's faculties and affords the most powerful inducements to their proper use.

The rule went on to add: "Religious Instruction is therefore a fundamental part of the school course, and a religious spirit should inform and vivify the whole work of the school".

The 1971 *Primary School Curriculum: Teacher's Handbook* repeated this Rule stating that "the transcendent values with which religious education is concerned, and its central significance for the school are reflected in the terms of Rule 68". It added: "It is felt that this statement needs no further elaboration as a declaration of the principles by which Religious Instruction in our primary schools is animated". The

Handbook went on to state:

> As however, the prescribing of the subject matter of Religious Instruction, the examination of it, and the supervision of its teaching are outside the competence of the Department of Education, no syllabuses are here set forth.

The Dalkey School Project was aware from the start that the Department of Education had no role in prescribing the subject matter of religious instruction and that responsibility for deciding what should be taught under that heading would be a local matter. I was aware that decisions on religious instruction would be a matter for the patron of the school, although initially, some civil servants in the Department of Education had indicated that they would be a matter for the church authorities.

In the first public statement from the Dalkey School Project on the form of religious education to be provided in schools under its patronage, Micheal Johnston stated that this would be a matter for the board of management of each individual school. In 1976, in response to a query on this matter he stated:

> Each school established under the DSP will have a management committee running it. This committee will represent the parents of the children in that school and will be responsible to them. One of their functions will be to provide for those parents the form of religious education which those parents require subject of course to the Rules of the Department of Education and of the Dalkey School Project. I would not envisage that every school committee would arrive at the same answer, nor would the Dalkey School Project expect them to; some might wish to invite the clergy of all denominations in to teach the children of those parents who wished for specific denominational instruction for their children: whereas another school's parents might decide that this would have a divisive effect on the school, and choose to

> make arrangements outside school hours for instruction in the various denominations. Either of these formulae would be acceptable to the Dalkey School Project with the democratic views of the parents concerned the deciding factor".

On 23rd April 1977 the project's approach was further elaborated by Micheal Johnston in a speech which he delivered at Union of Students of Ireland Theological Seminar in the Jesuit-run Milltown Park. He started his speech as follows:

> I would like to make it very clear that the DSP very much respects the views of those who wish to have their children in denominational schools, schools which reflect the ethos of their own particular denomination. And the Constitution makes it possible for some very small schools to exist, which must be very close to the limits of viability, so that children may be sent to the school their parents think appropriate. As long as the only choice that people wanted was between Catholic and Protestant schools the present system, for all that it frustrated the original aims of the National School system to educate all children together, the present system was adequate. But now, in the face of increasing evidence that this does not represent the complete choice that people want, change must come, and must start to come very soon.

He then went on to quote the Rules for National Schools and referred to the contradiction between the new curriculum which proposed that religious and secular subjects be integrated and Rule 69 (2) which stated that "no pupil shall receive, or be present at any religious instruction of which his parents or guardians disapprove." Rule 69 also stated that "the periods of formal religious instruction shall be fixed so as to facilitate the withdrawal of pupils".

In his talk, Johnston adverting to this issue, stated that "there has been in recent years, following the by and large excellent

New Curriculum, a growing tendency to feel that religion cannot be compartmentalised into certain hours of the day, but must run through the total school life in an integrated way". He argued that this posed serious problems for the person who would prefer a multi-denominational school, adding:

> Till this time he could choose to opt his child out of religious classes but now religion and the ethos of the school management runs throughout the complete school day. For those who want the ethos of the complete, diverse community there is no longer a serious alternative; there must be schools which reflect that ethos: there must be multi-denominational schools.

He went on to state that the decision to teach a child religion belonged firstly to that child's parents or guardians, referring to it as "a delicate trust, and one for which the parent will be held responsible by the child when he is old enough to make his own decision". He again highlighted the role of the school's board of management stating that "in a multi-denominational school, the management committee would have the responsibility to determine the form which religious education should take in the school, in accordance with the wishes of the parents and the principles of the school".

He added:

> Ireland is reaching a time when people can take decisions for themselves, and it is my belief that many of them have decided now that they want to have their children educated together. It will be a test for the Churches, because it seems to challenge them on a field that they have controlled for many years: I believe it will also be an opportunity for Christianity, to see if it works in Ireland.

September 1977:

One of the conditions set down by the Department of

Education officials at a meeting on 1st September 1977 following confirmation by Minister John Wilson that the DSP could open its first school the following summer, was that the Dalkey School Project would submit to the Department a policy statement on religious instruction. In order to inform this submission, the DSP committee decided to hold a seminar on the matter before the end of the academic year and to invite submissions from its members. The only submission on file is a paper by Bill Hyland entitled *"Religious Education in an Integrated National School: Objectives and Options"* which had a significant influence on the direction of the DSP's policy on religious education.

In this paper, Bill made the point that the religious education programme in a DSP school must accord with the DSP aim "that Catholic, Protestant and other children must have equal right of access to such schools and the social, religious and cultural background of each child must be equally respected". He stated that an important distinction would have to be made between those components (of an overall programme) which "assumed adherence to a particular denomination and components which do not assume such adherence". In his view, courses could be developed containing both kinds of components. Those components implying specific denominational commitment would be optional and would probably be restricted to those so committed. Other components would hopefully be accepted by the parents of all the pupils. His paper set out the objectives of the religious education (RE) programme as follows:

A. To give children an appreciation of the importance of religious ideas and institutions in the development of cultures, in the history of the country, in contemporary social reality and in individual lives;

B. To help them realise the distinctive contribution monotheistic religions, specifically the Jewish and

Christian religions have made to Western civilisation;

C. To give them an awareness of the main tenets of Christianity, identifying both what is common to the main traditions and what differs from one denomination to another;

D. Where the child is a member of a particular denomination, the school should co-operate with the authorities of that denomination in providing him/her with the basics of that faith, in those cases where the parents wish the school to participate in that task. The extent to which the school should provide the required denominational modules directly, as distinct from providing facilities to the appropriate denomination would need to be considered in the light of the different administrative conventions of the various denominations.

E. To help the child, not only with his/her own faith, but to be aware of and appreciative of the commitment of others to their faith. The aim of the DSP would be to foster not only tolerance but understanding.

F. To give the child a capacity for developing a personal commitment to religious values in his/her own life on the basis of knowledge and free choice.

G. To help the child to understand the part that religious concepts and their embodiment in religious and other institutions have played in the development of our society particularly in view of the sometimes close association of those institutions with political values and structures.

Bill Hyland's paper accepted that developing a Religious Education Core Curriculum would be a pedagogic task of some difficulty, involving fostering the DSP aims on the one hand and

at the same time ensuring that it would be suitable for children of primary school age. He suggested that the development of the RE core curriculum would be primarily a matter for the teachers in the school and could not be undertaken prior to the appointment of these teachers. He indicated that as it would present a new challenge to Irish primary teachers the DSP might expect that (a) the Department would be sympathetic to the need to learn from experience and modify programmes accordingly, and (b) that specialised institutions in a position to help would be willing to do so.

The central role of the teachers in developing a religious education programme was also emphasised by Micheal Johnston some weeks later when he spoke at a seminar in Bray on 24th November 1977, at which he stated:

> It is important that parents … are very sensitive and aware of the functions of the various elements … That they do not trample on the professional sensitivities of the teachers, their most important allies in the education of their children …

Meeting of 16th December 1977 to discuss the DSP policy on Religious Education:

On 16th December 1977 a special general meeting on religious education – a private meeting for members only – was held in the Royal Marine Hotel, Dun Laoghaire. There were some observers from Bray who were welcomed. The purpose of the meeting was to find out what the members' views were on RE and to formulate a policy statement as requested by the Department of Education. Micheal Johnston, who chaired the meeting, reminded the members present of the five principles of the DSP. He also read out statements from the Department Rules (Rule 68) and from the Department's new curriculum of 1971 – both emphasising that religious instruction was a fundamental part of the National School Curriculum.

At the outset of the meeting, it was agreed that the DSP would distinguish between Religious Education and Denominational Instruction (nowadays referred to as Faith Formation). Issues discussed included:

1. At what point would the Patron intervene with the decisions of the Board of Management?

2. Whether the DSP as Patron would be limited in intervening?

3. To what degree a common core curriculum would be possible?

4. How to meet requests from groups of parents for specific denominational instruction?

5. What would be the role of the teachers?

The minutes of the meeting record that "A very long discussion on RE followed … And the general consensus was that we should investigate the possibility of having a central core curriculum of broadly-based religious education (with perhaps an element of civics in it) available to all". It was agreed that the RE core curriculum should be supplemented by separate denominational religious instruction for those who requested it (provided there were viable numbers). Members stressed the important role of the parents as well as respect for parents and the children in a DSP school. It was agreed that a sub-committee be set up to formulate a draft policy document on RE, to study the practicalities involved and to report back to a further meeting of the membership.

February 1978 — Patron's Policy on Religious Education.

By the end of February 1978 the RE sub-committee had prepared a draft policy document and this was approved by a full meeting of the membership and parents and had been sent

to the Department of Education.

In summary, the patron's policy document which was agreed and ratified at subsequent general meetings of the DSP, was as follows:

1. The fundamental principles of the DSP will determine that the ethos of a DSP school reflects the ethos of a society in which there are many social cultural and religious strands co-existing in harmony and mutual respect; these DSP principles are as follows:

    A. The multi-denominational principle – all children have equal right of access to the school and the religious, cultural and social background of each child must be respected

    B. The co-educational principle – each child must be allowed to develop his or her potential without distinction by sex

    C. The democratic principle – the DSP must at all times be sensitive and aware of the needs and aspirations of its parents, teachers and children, both individually and collectively, and be responsive to them.

2. The primary responsibility for the religious education of each child lies with its parents; any programme for religious education must therefore take account of parents' wishes with regard to the religious education of their children

3. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from religious education classes.

4. In accordance with the fundamental principles of the

DSP, the Board of Management will offer a Religious Education Core Curriculum, designed to help children to understand the religious traditions of life and thought that they will meet in their environment; and to help them to be sensitive to the ultimate questions posed by life and to the dimensions of mystery and wonder that underlies all human experience.

5. The Board of Management shall also facilitate any group of parents that may require it to provide Denominational Instruction as required by them for their children to take place where numbers, resources and time-tabling permit within school hours. In the case of very small numbers where this is not practical, the Board of Management will facilitate the parents concerned by making the school premises available at some other suitable time. Qualified catechists may be appointed by such a group by agreement between the Board of Management and the parents concerned.

6. The DSP will as patron set up a Religious Education Advisory Committee, which will function on an ongoing basis as a research and development unit in relation to the DSP's Religious Education Core Curriculum, and will be available as required by teachers as an advisory body to help with the planning of specific programmes.

This remained the policy of the Dalkey School Project for decades and has changed little to the present day. The policy was also initially adopted as the policy of Educate Together when Educate Together was set up as an umbrella body for multi-denominational schools in 1984. It was only when Educate Together was recognised by the Department of Education as a patron body in the mid-1990s that its policy on religious education changed and a new Ethical Education policy and programme, *Learn Together,* was introduced.

Religious Education in the Dalkey School Project N.S. in the early years

During the early years of the school, the energies of patron, management, principal and teachers were spread over a wide range of activities in relation to the practicalities of managing and running the school which had grown very rapidly. The challenges of a multi-campus school and of managing the construction of the new school building in Glenageary Lodge were demanding and time-consuming for the board of management and the patron. As regards religious education, much of the discussion in the first two years related to the provision of denominational instruction, and in particular Catholic instruction. In November 1978, a questionnaire was sent to all parents to ascertain their requirements in relation to denominational instruction and about 15 replies were received. Following scrutiny of the replies a meeting of parents who requested Catholic instruction for their children was held under the auspices of the board of management on 19th December, and arising from this meeting two decisions were taken and put into effect:

A. Catholic Instruction (preparation for First Communion) would be provided by a trained catechist (who was also a parent). The necessary teaching materials would be purchased and the classes held from 8.50 a.m. to 9.20 a.m. on two mornings a week. A register would be kept by Ms. Armstrong of all children attending these classes and parents would be asked to sign the register.

B. An Advisory Committee on Catholic Religious Instruction was set up, with the brief of acting as a link between parents and the board of management. The members of the group were Justin Wallace (convenor), Eilis Downes and Mrs. Ekloff.

Requests were also received from a small number of parents

of children of the Baha'I faith for denominational instruction for their children and this request was also facilitated, as was a request from members of the Jehovah Witnesses some years later. However, as the number of requests for denominational instruction grew, so did the practical problems of facilitating these requests. Accommodation in the temporary premises was very cramped and apart from a very small staffroom, there were no separate rooms in which denominational instruction could be accommodated.

Moreover, the principal and some of the teachers were unenthusiastic about the provision of denominational instruction inside school hours – both for ideological and practical reasons – and on many occasions in the early years, the board of management was contacted by Ms. Armstrong about the challenges faced by her and her staff in facilitating denominational instruction within school hours. By 1983, when total enrolment in the school was almost 250, and the numbers in first to sixth class totalled 160, Catholic Instruction classes were attended by 70 pupils (from first to sixth class) or 45% of the relevant group. During the years when the school was based in Vesey Place, and in the parish of Monkstown, the clergy of the three main Christian churches were very helpful and supportive. Rev. Fr. Quilter, a curate in the Catholic parish of Monkstown, helped to arrange the First Communion and the Confirmation ceremonies for the children who attended the Catholic Instruction classes which were organised by the Advisory Committee on Catholic Education and faciliated by the school.

In the early years of the school, different solutions were found to the challenges of facilitating denominational instruction. These solutions depended on a number of factors including the availability of an (external) teacher for the various instruction classes, the numbers of pupils involved, and the availability of transport for the pupils. The challenges were exacerbated when the pupils were in four separate temporary

premises, geographically distant from each other. Sometimes denominational instruction was provided outside school hours – sometimes within school hours and occasionally a combination of both. The DSP was conscious in the early years that it had had been required to make a commitment to the Department of Education that it would facilitate the provision of denominational instruction, and it wished to be seen to abide by this commitment.

In a report prepared by Educate Together in July 2011, the situation relating to denominational instruction (or faith formation) in the early years of the DSP school was summarised as follows[99]:

> For the first decade and a half of the school's existence faith formation was included in the school day, but classes were informally moved in and out of school hours throughout the 1980s depending on teacher availability, parent demand, and access to facilities. The final push to move faith formation outside of school hours took place between 1991 and 1996 and the school had maintained faith formation outside school hours since this date.

While issues relating to the implementation of the patron's policy on religious education were regularly raised by parents and teachers, neither the board of management nor the patron body were actively engaged in the development of the religious education core curriculum in the early years. This was in accordance with the oft-repeated statement of the chairman that the role of implementing the patron's policy would be left to the principal and the teachers. The religious education sub-committee which had developed the patron's policy in the early months of 1978 had not been active since the policy had been adopted and approved by the Department of Education at that time.

99. Educate Together, *A Report on the Transition to Faith Formation Outside School Hours in Early Educate Together Schools* (Dublin: Educate Together Office, 2011)

However, the expectation that teachers, who were busy teaching all the other primary school subjects and looking after pupils in class sizes that were close to 40 at times, would have time to develop a detailed syllabus in response to the patron's policy was unrealistic. During the school year 1979-1980, the principal requested that more definite guidelines be made available to the staff in relation to the core curriculum. Early in 1980, a (new) religious education advisory committee was set up and its inaugural meeting was held on 18th March 1980. It was agreed that as an interim measure a document setting out working guidelines and clarifying the patron's draft policy be prepared and circulated. Working guidelines would contain clarification to the effect that:

A. The RE core curriculum should constitute a positive exposure both to one's own and to other traditions, recognising that the religious, cultural and social background of everyone involved in the curriculum (teachers and pupils) provided a positive input into the development of the RE core curriculum

B. The concepts underlying the RE core curriculum were compatible with the principles of cherishing all our children equally

C. The core curriculum should be essentially a curriculum of discovery, aiming to educate rather than to indoctrinate

D. The core curriculum should provide an opportunity for enrichment by diversity

E. The themes used in the core curriculum be integrated where feasible with the other subjects of the curriculum.

The original members of the RE sub-committee were: Hilary Jenkins (Convenor); Florrie Armstrong; Cormac MacRis; Sr. Benevenuta McCurtain; Jim Harten; Terence McCaughey;

Toni Healy and Professor Weingreen, with Micheal Johnston and Aine Hyland providing administrative support. Representatives from the Islamic Centre and from the School of Ecumenics were also to be invited. The sub-committee was subsequently expanded to add teachers and parents from both the Dalkey and the Bray School Projects including Kieran Griffin (principal of the Bray School Project N.S.); Sile Harrington (vice-principal of the DSP school); Mary McNeil; Declan d'Estelle Roe; Hugh O'Doherty; Brendan O'Brien and Alice Lawless.

It was not until 1982 that the RE Advisory Committee really became active. It met for the first time as an enlarged committee in June 1982 and on six subsequent occasions in the period from June 1982 to April 1984. I acted as secretary to the advisory committee and the meetings were professionally run and formally minuted. By this stage I had completed my Ph.D., I was working on a full-time basis in Carysfort College of Education and was undertaking research on curriculum development models nationally and internationally. I was now in a position to engage more actively in supporting the teachers to develop the RE Core Curriculum and to source materials from a range of religious and secular sources in Ireland and in other jurisdictions.

At one of the first meetings of the enlarged Advisory Committee, it was agreed that the first priority of the committee would be to draw up a statement of aims for a religious education core curriculum. It would then be possible to translate these aims into more specific objectives and then to move on to producing guidelines for content (including methodology and process) and to collecting and developing resources. This approach to curriculum development was the norm at the time. By May 1983, a draft statement of aims was produced by the committee and was widely circulated. In January 1984 the aims document was endorsed by the DSP Board of Management and in April it was approved by staff of

the school, with some small suggestions.

The D.S.P Religious Education Core Curriculum.

In autumn 1984 I resigned as secretary of the DSP to give more time to supporting and writing up the RE Core Curriculum. I had recently been appointed by the Minister for Education, Gemma Hussey, as a member of the Curriculum and Examination (C & E) Board – the first government-appointed body to advise on curriculum at primary and post-primary levels since the foundation of the State. During my time on that board, I chaired the Joint Committee – a committee of more than 35 teachers, parents and experts who advised on the reform of the school curriculum for 6 to 15-year-olds. My experience and engagement on the C & E board was invaluable in the context of developing the RE core curriculum for the DSP.

It quickly became clear that many of the teachers had identified and developed some excellent materials and resources for the RE Core Curriculum. The challenge now was to bring this material together and to provide training opportunities for the teachers. I was a member of the management committee of the Blackrock Teachers' Centre and I was familiar with the Department's regulations about summer courses for teachers. This meant that teachers who attended a recognised course for a week during their summer holidays would be entitled to three days special leave from their school during the subsequent school year. From 1984 to 1989, each summer, I facilitated a one-week summer course on the teaching of the Religious Education Core Curriculum - a course which was recognised by the Department of Education. As all involved in the course gave their time and expertise for free, there was no fee and the course was well attended by teachers from the DSP school as well as some teachers from other schools. The summer courses proved to be a good opportunity for the teachers to share their experience and materials and enabled me to write up a draft

programme based on the work of the teachers. A *Religious Education Core Curriculum - Draft Guidelines for Teachers* was produced every year – and it grew and improved annually during that period.

I wrote a final draft of the programme after the 1989 summer course and I also wrote a booklet entitled *Religious Education Core Curriculum - Information Booklet for Parents and Members,* which was approved by the patron and board of management. This 35-page booklet included an explanatory section on the patronage and management of the school; it also included the DSP's policy on Religious Education as well as the aims of the RE Core Curriculum. It explained the distinction between the RE Core Curriculum and Denominational Instruction and provided an outline of how the RE Core Curriculum might be implemented at different levels of the school programme. The booklet also listed some publications and resources that could be used by different age groups of pupils. The booklet remained in circulation for many years and provided the basis for the RE Core Curriculum in the DSP and some other Educate Together schools.

The memories of the early pupils in relation to the implementation of the RE Core Curriculum are interesting. Eoin Fahy remembers that there were several presentations and discussions on different religions like Bahai, Jehovah's Witnesses, Quakers etc, often facilitated by pupils of that religion and sometimes by outside experts. Anna Johnston states that "religion was a dynamic subject: we visited mosques, synagogues, church and meeting house and the people we met took time to take our questions seriously". Siobán Green remembers:

> There was a particular focus on visiting places of worship and learning about many beliefs and faiths. We visited a synagogue, a Muslim place of prayer, the Quaker Meeting House and had guest speakers from a range of religions. We, as pupils, were always encouraged to

> ask questions and broaden our own knowledge. I often think now that as an adult this exposure, as an integral part of my education, has had such a profound impact on me, personally and professionally and has really prepared and propelled me and enabled me to work and live in different countries and in different roles where populations and staff were not as homogenous as Ireland was in the 1970s.

The Religious Education Core Curriculum was one of the unique features of the Dalkey School Project in the early years, at a time when comparative religion did not form part of the Religious Instruction programmes of the main Christian churches in Ireland. However, in some other countries, notably the United Kingdom, an inclusive religious education curriculum was developed for primary school pupils and I was confident that the approach being taken by the Dalkey School Project was professionally sound. However, the lack of culturally appropriate resources for the RE Core Curriculum and the lack of planning time remained a challenge for the teachers, but they nevertheless addressed this challenge very well for many years.

The introduction by Educate Together of the *Learn Together* Ethical Education curriculum in the early years of the 21st century brought a coherence to teaching about religion in Educate Together schools. According to the Educate Together website, *Learn Together* "teaches children about different belief systems as well as atheism, agnosticism and humanism without promoting any one worldwide view over another". Denominational Instruction (faith formation) is no longer provided within school hours in schools under the patronage of Educate Together – such classes are facilitated only outside school hours.

Appendix 3 (a)

Attendance at the First Preliminary Meeting of the Dalkey School Project

Held in Ross's Hotel, Dun Laoghaire, Sunday 30th June 1974

Micheal Johnston
Pat Johnston
Helen Fahy
Hugh Fahy
Blenner Courtney
Natalie Joynt
Zoe Devlin
Peter Devlin
Muriel Firth
Y. Brown
M. Lewis
Caroline Mullan
Kay Kavanagh
Margaret Waugh
John Bird
Mary Bird
Gay Hogan
Eithne O'Kelly
Nuala McBennett
Aine Hyland
Hilary Pratt
Mavis Armold
Sue Gray
Ann Booth
Tony Moynihan

Nuala Moynihan
Joy Rudd
David Spearman
James Buckley
Patricia Lyle
G.M. Fessler
J.S. Love
Tony Holmes
Liz Holmes
John Forsythe
Mary Crowley
Mairead Doyle
John Lewis
Maureen Lewis

J. Brown
Pat Johnston
David Cabot
Penny Cabot
Helen O'Boyle
Gail Varian
Ann Booth
Des Hearns
Shelah Richards
P. Whalley
Bill Hyland

Appendix 3 (b)

Attendance at the Second Preliminary Meeting of the Dalkey School Project

Held in Ross's Hotel, Dun Laoghaire, 21st July 1974

Zoe Devlin
Peter Devlin
Mrs. Jo Connell
Dick Westrup
Elizabeth Westrup
Anna Ryan
Helen Fahy
Hugh Fahy
Marlene Bean
Eithne Strong
Blenner Courtney
Nuala McBennett
Mary Keegan
Mike Norris
Joseph O'Mahony
Seán Ó Cuinneagáin
Marguerite Condon
Mary Bird
John Bird
Dermot Ashmore
Penny Fennell
Joy Rudd
Máire Mullarney
Eithne Hilliard
Desmond Doyle
Mairéad Doyle
Penny Cabot
Marguerite Condon
Mary Keegan
Noelle Casey
Patricia Lyle
Eoin Butler
Pat Johnston
Hilary Jenkins
Bill and Áine Hyland
Mary Crowley
Mr. and Mrs. Mc Govern

Appendix 3 (c)

Attendance at the Inaugural Meeting of the Dalkey School Project

Held in Ross's Hotel, Dun Laoghaire, 23rd February 1975

Micheal Johnston
Pat Johnston
Madeline McDonnell
Pat Lyle
John Lyle
Fidelma Macken
Tony Macken
Anne Johnston
Betty Johnston
Neill Murray
Conor Fennell
Bart Sinnott
Eileen Sinnott
Mr. R. Leslie Forsythe
Mrs. R. Leslie Forsythe
Neil Mullan
Caroline Mullan
Frances Galvin
David Cox
Mavis Arnold
Hilary Pratt
Mairéad Doyle
Mike Norris
Joy Rudd
Mrs. M. O'Donnell
Iris Tunner
Chris Moore
JJ. Mc Luskey
John de Courcy Ireland
Mrs. McEoghan
John Lyle
Jim Galvin
John Fulton
Pat Phillips
Vincent Phillips
J.P Buckley
Niall de Baróid
Jill Cox
Desmond Green
Jim Love
John Raven
Graham Shepherd
Noreen O'Brien
Marlene Bean

Susan Grey
Mary Crowley
Susan D. Gray
Kathleen Quigley
Andrew Parkes
Joseph Davis
Sarah Davis
Mary Keegan
Eileen Sinnott
Elly McCrea
Blenner Courtney
Paddy Walley
Pat O'Brien
Malachy O'Neill
David Spearman
Garry Owens
Robin Tamplin
Hazel Tamplin
Josie Dixon
Gail Varian
Clark Fisher
Zoe Devlin
Pete Devlin
Bill Hyland
Áine Hyland
Eithne O'Reilly
Nuala McBennett
Helen Fahy
Joe O'Mahony
Jack Loughran
Grace Loughran
Jim Galvin
Frances Galvin

Appendix 3 (d)

Attendance at Meeting on 28th August 1978

14 Vesey Place, Dun Laoghaire

Áine Hyland
Desmond Green
Jim Barragry
M. O'Leary
Jayne Barragry
Bill Powell
Madeline Powell
Bert Killoran
Pauline Killoran
Jane Kerrigan
A.Kunst
Arnold Kunst
Johnny Hildrick
Eileen Hildrick
T. Regan
Maureen Colleary
Paula O'Shaughnessy
Jeremy Johnston
Pat Lyle
Richard More O'Ferrall
Gemma Barry
Grania More O'Ferrall
Anne Johnston
Mary Farrell
Gwen Lingley
K. Matthews
T. McInerney
P. Warner
G. Hick
K. Towey
S.J. Kirby
Colm Kiely
Helen Burgess
John Burgess
Des Hearns
Maeve Hearns
Pat McInerney
T. Mathews Penny Fennell
M. Britton
B. Britton
Paul Kerrigan
Justin Wallace

Emer Wallace
Daphne Ashmore
Gail Varian
John Lyle
Mary Crowley
David Spearman
Pat Johnston
Eddie Barrett
Geraldine Barrett
Theresa Muldoon
Patricia Penston
Andrew Penston
Graham Shepherd
Eoin Butler
Christopher Cummins
Philip Geoghegan
Pauline Geoghegan

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