



Education Minister Batt O'Keeffe at the opening of the Lucan East Educate Together NS MARTIN NOLAN

four separate locations in the Dun Laoghaire area.

"The teachers deserve credit because they were putting their careers on the line and taking a risk," says Mr Johnston. "The whole thing could have gone belly-up."

Mr Johnston believes the active involvement of parents in the setting up of the schools has been central to their success.

"I think that when parents help to run a school it gives the place a tremendous boost. They have an incentive for the schools to flourish."

Contrary to the early fears of detractors, the schools are not hostile to religion. Instead, they deliver what Educate Together describes as an "ethical education programme".

Pupils are taught about the main faiths and belief systems in the world.

Educate Together schools make facilities available to groups of parents who run faith-formation classes outside school hours. The extra-curricular Catholic religious classes tend to be heavily subscribed in the schools.

Paul Rowe, chief executive

## EDUCATE TOGETHER INTENDS TO EXPAND TO 45 SCHOOLS IN THE COMING YEARS

of Educate Together, says: "This avoids any situation in which children are separated on religious grounds during the school day, and fully respects the religious rights of parents, staff and children."

In some areas, most notably Lucan, the fast-expanding suburb of Dublin, Educate Together is fast achieving parity with church schools in terms of numbers.

The new Lucan East school is the fifth Educate Together school in the area.

Paul Rowe says: "There is a growing realisation among the new generation of Irish parents that the Ireland in which their children are growing up is radically more diverse than the Ireland in which they grew up themselves."

## 'Society in Ireland has changed so much...'

Parents in Waterford hope to open the country's first Educate Together second level school next year.

With the rapid expansion of the multi-denominational sector at primary level, there is now pent-up demand for non-religious second level schools.

A recent Trinity College study found that 90pc of parents with children in Educate Together primary schools said they would transfer their children to a second level school based on the same model if it was available.

"We have seven groups of parents nationwide looking to open new schools," says Educate Together second level co-ordinator Emer Nowlan.

"The growing demand is not just down to the fact that the schools are multi-denominational. It is the whole approach to education. The schools believe in academic excellence, but they are not just focused on exams.

"There is a feeling that society in Ireland has changed so much that second level education needs to step up to the mark."

## KEY PRINCIPLES OF ET SCHOOLS

- Multi-denominational. All children have equal rights of access to the school. Children of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds are equally respected.

- Co-educational and committed to encouraging all children to explore their full range of abilities and opportunities.

- Child-centred in their approach to education.

- Democratically-run with active participation by parents in the daily life of the school, while positively affirming the professional role of the teachers.

## GOING TO COLLEGE



MARY O'DONNELL

**M**OST of the students who received their Junior Certificate results last week are settling in to the senior cycle of their secondary education now. They face two more years of school, or three years, if they are taking the Transition Year. People wonder how important is the Junior Certificate in the wide scheme of things.

### Q. Do Junior Certificate results influence your chances of getting into college?

A. Not in any direct way. Irish third-level institutions choose standard school leaving applicants (who form the majority of applicants) on the basis of their performance in the Leaving Certificate examination, without any reference to their performance in any previous examinations. So, Junior Certificate results don't have any effect on Irish third-level college entry.

Several thousand Irish students apply to British colleges each year, and they make some decisions about applicants before they receive their school-leaving exam result. The colleges may give some consideration to applicants' previous exam records, as well as requiring them to achieve certain results in their Leaving Cert.

Junior Certificate results may determine the shape of a student's Leaving Certificate programme, and to that

extent may influence what students go on to do at third-level. Schools may recommend that a student who has obtained a good result in a Junior Certificate subject take that subject at higher level in the Leaving Certificate.

Entry to certain third-level courses depends on meeting particular course requirements, for example: higher level Irish grade C3 minimum for primary school teaching B.Ed degrees; higher level maths grade C3 minimum for most honours engineering degrees; specific science subjects are required for certain healthcare and other degrees, and so on.

### Q. Is it possible to appeal a Junior Certificate examination result?

A. Yes it is, although it is not so common a practice as appealing a Leaving Certificate grade.

Applications to appeal a Junior Certificate grade must be made through the school authorities. The fee is €30 per subject appealed, and it will be refunded if the result is upgraded. Applications for appeals must arrive from schools to the State Examinations Commission (SEC) no later than 5pm on Friday, September 26. The results of the appeals will be posted in the week ending November 7.

Last year, a total of 2,967 appeals were made against Junior Cert grades, resulting in 755 upgrades.

### Q. My daughter did not do as well as she had hoped in the Junior Certificate, and she is very discouraged. She is worried she will not do well in her Leaving Certificate.

A. Even if a student's Junior Certificate results have not been fantastic, students have plenty of time to achieve good Leaving Certificate results. A huge amount will depend on how hard the student works over the next two or three years.

Sometimes it is better that students are not lulled into a false sense of security by great Junior Certificate grades, as they may not work hard enough for the Leaving Certificate.

# Parents want more dialogue about Transition Year

## IN MY OPINION

**DR GERRY JEFFERS**  
Lecturer, NUI Maynooth

Last month, a private, 'for-profit' school triggered controversy with a radio advertisement that took a cynical swipe at Transition Year. The National Association for Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD) was so incensed by the ad that it complained to the Advertising Standards Authority.

In case you missed the ad, two male students discuss their plans for the year. When one says he is doing Transition Year, the other replies, 'Shame, I'm going to Ashfield College. Straight into fifth year for me. Get this whole thing out of the way'. Further on, a crunch line proclaims: 'Get serious!'. The implication is clear: Transition Year is not serious. This grind school has peddled that line for years.

Below the surface of these exchanges lie vital questions about young people and their needs. It is no accident that the advert features young males and taps into doubt and uncertainty. Concern and anxiety

generated by the 'points system' tend to relegate other goals of schooling to the margins.

A major challenge for schools is to blend personal and social development with academic progress. Transition Year is nothing if not ambitious. At its heart, the programme seeks to advance adolescent development: to improve self-awareness, social competence and active citizenship. It also aims to help students become more independent and focused learners - in short, to help adolescents 'grow up'.

However, while most schools now offer Transition Year, a sizeable number of young people

go, like the boy in the Ashfield advert 'straight into fifth year'. A complex web of issues lie behind this reality. These include changing views about schooling, perceptions of education as a commodity and a growing polarisation within schooling in Dublin.

Parents' understanding of schooling is shaped strongly by their own schooldays. For many, Transition Year is something new. One finding from research that I undertook for the Department of Education and Science, published last year, is that many parents tend to be open to the idea but need to know more

about it.

Parents want schools to inform them and to engage with them about Transition Year: the programme; the thinking behind the various modules; the relationship with the Leaving Certificate.

Furthermore, at parents' meetings it is often presentations by young people recounting their experiences of Transition Year that really help parents understand the programme's aim.

The evidence also points to many parents becoming convinced of the value of Transition Year when they see its effects on their own sons and daughters. Parents warm to their chil-

dren's new found confidence, fresh excitement in learning, the discovery of hidden talents, enthusiastic responses to new opportunities. They also appreciate what terms like 'independent-learner', 'decision-making skills' and 'more democratic classrooms' mean in practice.

The NAPD decision to complain to the advertising standards authority and stand up for a more holistic view of schooling is an important one. Their example should encourage schools to be more forthright in talking with parents about Transition Year, its rationale, its ambition, and about the purposes of schooling.