



Catholic Schools Partnership

CATHOLIC EDUCATION AT SECOND-LEVEL IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIP

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VERITAS

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The future of Catholic secondary schools has been a matter of concern for all those involved in Catholic education over recent years. In November 2012, the Catholic Schools Partnership (CSP) issued a consultation paper to all trustees of Catholic voluntary secondary schools in the Republic of Ireland. Early in 2013 the CSP received responses from a large number of trustees and these were collated. It was then agreed that a Working Group composed of representatives from the Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS), the Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools (AMCSS/JMB) and CSP should analyse the issues and make proposals for the future.

In June 2013 the Working Group decided that it would be beneficial to consult broader school communities on the issues that were emerging. With this in mind, four regional assemblies were held in November 2013 where representatives from one hundred randomly selected schools were invited to join the conversation and make concrete proposals on the best way forward. The schools were selected from among the 344 Catholic voluntary secondary schools.

Participants at the regional assemblies were asked to identify what are the next most important steps in looking to the future of Catholic voluntary secondary schools. The responses can be grouped under six headings.

1. The Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools (ATCS), the Association of Management of Catholic Secondary Schools (AMCSS) and Catholic Schools Partnership (CSP) must work closely together. A strategic plan should be developed to underpin and give focus to this joint endeavour.
2. There is need for a unified public voice on matters of strategic interest when it comes to Catholic voluntary secondary schools. Sector-wide issues require a voice that speaks on behalf of the sector rather than any of its component parts.
3. Ongoing dialogue concerning the future must be facilitated at school, local and national level. This must include parents, staff and students.
4. The role of trustees needs to be clarified and amplified. This could be done through reflection at school level on the founding intention/ethos of the school and how this might be re-imagined for our times.

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5. The relationship between voluntary secondary schools and the various components of the state needs restructuring. This must include a review of the curricular and financial realities that schools face.
 6. The relationship between voluntary secondary schools and the various components of the Church needs reflection. The Church includes bishops, religious congregations, trustee bodies, school communities (made up of pupils, parents, staff and management), parish communities and their mutual interaction.

All of the presentations made at the assemblies and the summary report on them can be accessed at www.catholicschools.ie.

In response to these regional assemblies the CSP, in co-operation with ATCS and AMCSS, presents this paper on the future of Catholic education at second level. We invite all stakeholders in post-primary education to engage in a conversation on the important issues raised in this text.

There is no such thing as a value neutral education. All schools, whether established by the state or by one or other voluntary group, necessarily and implicitly espouse a vision of the human person and give expression to a particular ethos by their choices, actions and priorities. Some people argue that schools should adopt a neutral stance in relation to religion. The inference is that religious belief is purely a private matter and should have no role in the public sphere of education. However, those who would exclude religion from school also espouse their own ethos. They impart a worldview, a philosophy of life, just as much as the person of faith.

Throughout the world, democratic societies provide funding and legal protection for a plurality of school types. The spectrum of provision covers a broad range, from schools provided by the state itself to various forms of communal and voluntary groups who come together to give expression to a particular vision of education. Many of these groups owe their inspiration to religious beliefs.

Schools with a religious ethos exist in almost all countries except those where they are outlawed by non-democratic regimes. In many nations, as in Ireland, they form a central part of the education system, while in almost all democratic societies they receive funding from the state. Such schools provide a real public service and they are a notable expression of the contribution of the voluntary sector to the development of a vibrant civil society.

2. The Evolution of the Post-Primary School System in Ireland

Irish post-primary schools emerged over the last two centuries. From the late eighteenth century onwards voluntary denominational secondary schools were established in many towns and cities. To say that they were voluntary meant that they were not state schools. For the most part they were established by charismatic leaders and religious congregations as they responded to the needs of the Catholic community. Some of these religious congregations were newly-founded Irish organisations, while others had long roots in continental Europe and came to Ireland for the first time or were returning after the centuries of turmoil that followed the upheaval of the Reformation. A huge number of such schools was established and they played a critical role in Irish society. They charged fees until the introduction of free second-level education in 1967, though in many cases these were reduced or waived depending on family circumstances. The vast majority of Catholic voluntary secondary schools joined the new free education system in the 1960s, though a minority of them chose not to do so and continued to charge fees. All of these schools – the minority who charge fees and the vast majority who do not – are denominational schools. The other main providers of post-primary schools are the Education and Training Boards (ETBs), and community and comprehensive schools. ETBs, until recently known as Vocational Education Committees, were established in the 1930s. They run state schools under the non-denominational structure of the local ETB but provide Religious Education and formation in accord with parental choice.

In the 1960s the government promoted the establishment of comprehensive schools. These were denominational schools which provided a comprehensive curriculum (much wider than the traditional academic programme) in a co-educational (mixed gender) environment. A small number of such schools was established. A major change occurred in the 1970s with the introduction of community schools. This was a notable development, as for the first time there were joint patrons/trustees establishing co-educational schools with a comprehensive curriculum. Community schools have as joint patrons the local ETB and various Catholic bodies and they are multi-denominational in nature as they must provide for the Religious Education and formation of all pupils. The deed of trust for such schools states: 'The religious worship attended by any pupil at the school and the religious instruction given to any pupil shall be in accordance with the rites, practices and teaching of the religious denomination to which the pupil belongs.' (See Appendix A.)

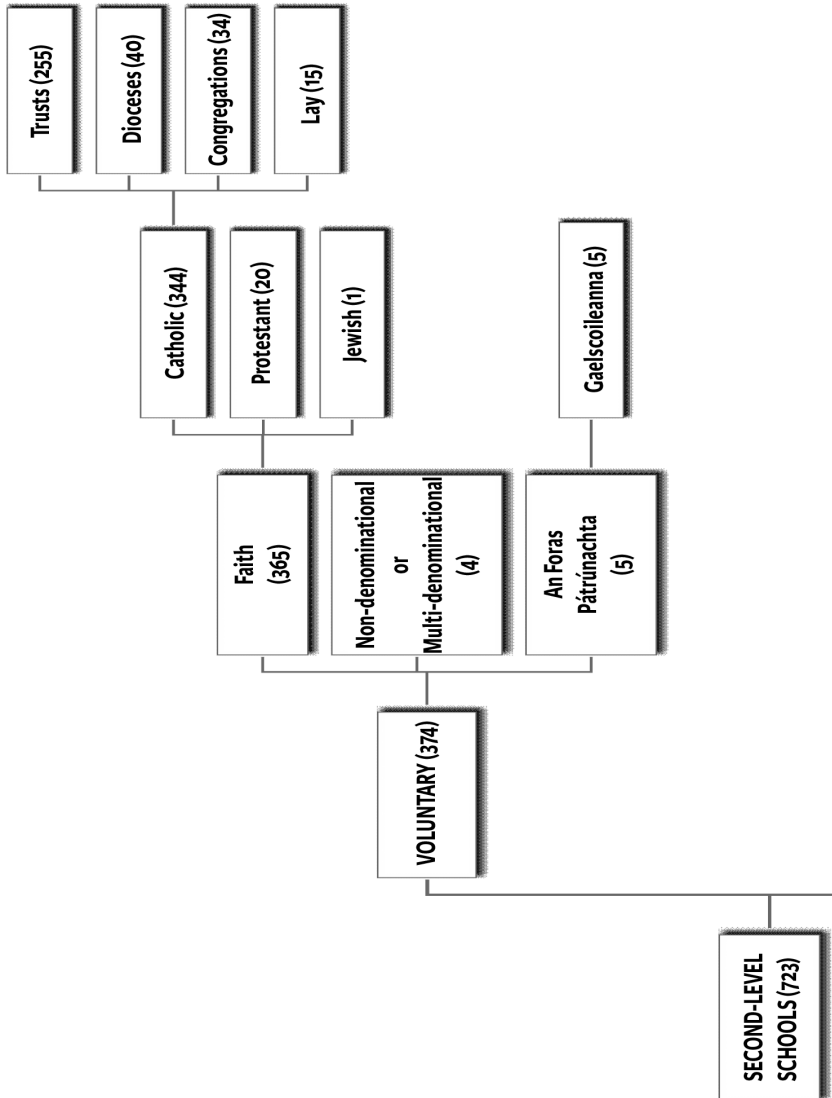
From the 1980s onwards ETBs opened community colleges. The local ETB entered into an arrangement with the Catholic bishop of the diocese and/or a religious congregation concerning their participation in the organisation and management of the college. In many respects these colleges mirror the structures of community schools. However, in the last few years ETBs have opened community colleges with no agreement with the local bishop. These colleges are referred to as non-designated, whereas designated community colleges have a model agreement with the local bishop and/or a religious congregation. (See Appendix B.)

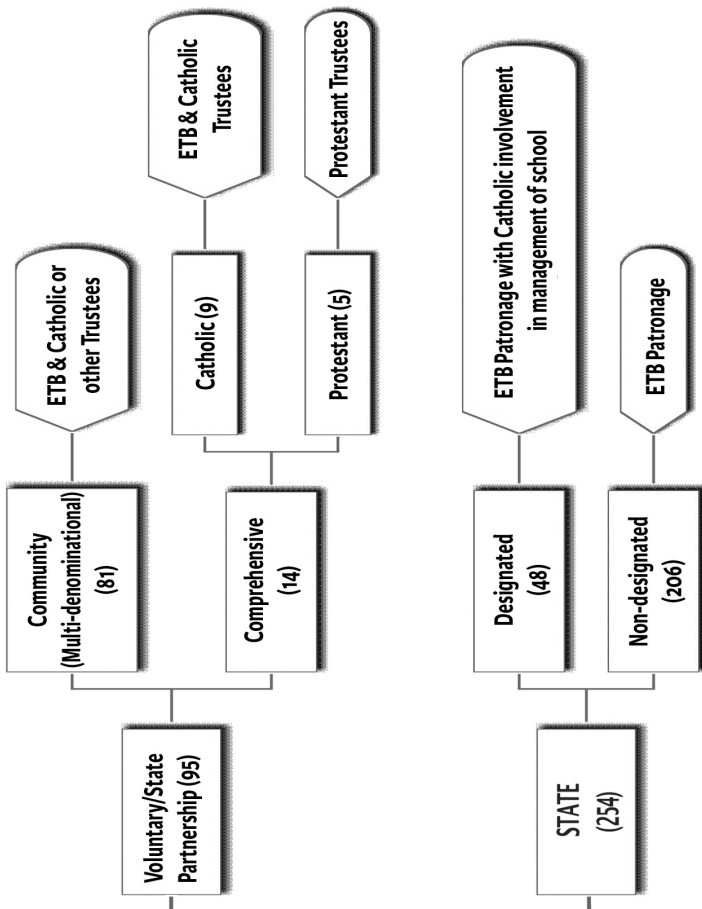
In recent years An Foras Pátrúnachta and Educate Together have established new voluntary secondary schools.

At present in the Republic of Ireland there are 723 second-level schools made up of 374 voluntary secondary schools, 254 ETB schools including community colleges and 95 community/comprehensive schools. The Reformed Church communities (Church of Ireland, Presbyterian, Methodist) are served by a range of voluntary secondary and comprehensive schools.

The overall structure of Irish second-level schooling is notably complex. It can be represented in diagram form, found on the following pages.

SECOND LEVEL: SCHOOLS BY SCHOOL TYPE IN REPUBLIC OF IRELAND 2014
 (number of schools in brackets)





3. What is the Voluntary Sector?

Social organisation is complex and has evolved over centuries. The most common way of understanding social structures in western democracies usually speaks of the public sector, the private sector and the voluntary sector.¹

The public sector is run by the state and generally covers areas of social action where profit-making institutions have never been involved, not least because there is little or no hope of making a profit. Think of public libraries, public parks, policing, all aspects of welfare from pensions and provision for those who are unemployed to large-scale financing of the health and education systems. The public sector is a key part of every humane society. As societies undergo economic development, the expectation of most citizens in European countries is that the state should provide a range of social services. Political parties largely define themselves on a spectrum of ever greater or lesser state intervention to provide services directly and to regulate the supply of services in the private sector. National elections allow citizens a voice in determining this complex balance of power between the private and public realms in social structure.

Most people operate in the private sector where, as employers, employees or self-employed, they seek to earn a living and participate in society. For the private sector to achieve its aims there is a need to make a profit. At its most extreme this can give rise to completely unregulated laissez-faire capitalism. Democratic systems of government have always intervened to regulate the worst excesses of such market-driven capitalism. But profit remains the main driving force of the energy and creativity of the private sector. Even the most socially progressive of private sector companies must guarantee secure profits to underpin their social activities. All western democracies allow a wide margin of freedom to private forces to pursue profit. Such countries vary in their efforts to regulate the private market and all of them seek some level of redistribution of profits to those less well-off.

Then there is the voluntary sector. It is private in the sense that it is not established or run by the state but it is quasi-public in that it is not for profit. Here we have a private reality established and run by citizens who are not acting as employees or agents of the state but whose primary goal is driven not by the desire to make profit but to provide some public benefit. This is based on a mission or vision as articulated by some individual or group. Thus, you should

¹ In Europe the voluntary is usually spoken of as the 'third sector', while in the USA it is the 'not-for-profit sector'.

never sever the link between a voluntary body and its founding vision as this is what distinguishes the voluntary body from the public and private sectors. The voluntary sector is, then, a tense space to occupy. Such tension is part of its very existence and will manifest itself most obviously in the endless efforts to secure adequate funding. This brings the voluntary sector into contact with the public sector as it seeks finance for socially benevolent activities. It also brings it into contact with the private sector where it seeks charitable support for its activities.

Sector	Origins	Function	Funding
Public	The state and agents of the state	To cover areas of social action of little or no interest to profit-making bodies	The public finances of the state
Private	Citizens seeking a livelihood as individuals or companies	To create profit and earn a livelihood	Resources of private individuals, companies or institutions
Voluntary	Citizens with a mission and vision intent on addressing a particular need	To provide some public benefit	Sought from both the public and private sectors and individual donations

A voluntary organisation is, in a way, owned by the public. It belongs to no private person and no one person controls the organisation. The assets of a voluntary body are irrevocably dedicated to the charitable, educational, literary, scientific, sporting or religious purposes of the organisation. The cash, equipment, and other property cannot be given to anyone or used for anyone's private benefit without fair market compensation to the voluntary organisation. When and if the organisation dissolves, any remaining assets after debts and liabilities are satisfied must go to another similar voluntary organisation and not to members of the former voluntary body or other private individuals.

Governance of a voluntary body is exercised by a board of directors or trustees. The responsibility of that board is to see that the organisation fulfils its purpose. Board members do not act as individuals, but must act as a group. No one can be guaranteed permanent tenure on a board, and the board can, if necessary, remove an executive or a board member. This means that no one, not even the founder of the organisation, can control a voluntary body. Members of boards of directors are not compensated, except for expenses such as travel to and from board meetings.

Given the nature of the voluntary sector, what implications can we draw for the Irish second-level education system whose history has been characterised by a large number of voluntary secondary schools?

4. Voluntary Schools in Ireland

The vast majority of schools in Ireland belong to the voluntary sector. The number of state schools is few in comparison. The churches and Educate Together are the main voluntary providers at primary level covering virtually all schools (99 per cent) while the Catholic and Protestant voluntary bodies provide about 50 per cent of post-primary schools directly and about another 20 per cent in partnership with the state through agreements with Education and Training Boards. The state itself provides about 30 per cent of post-primary schools.

Catholic secondary schools form a central part of the overall voluntary sector in Ireland. The vast majority of such schools were established and initially funded by religious congregations and dioceses with a particular vision of education. A small number of recognised Catholic lay-owned voluntary schools was also founded to serve local communities. In religious founded schools, the majority, the charism of the founder/foundress was the inspiration that led a particular movement to grow. Religiously professed sisters, brothers and priests staffed these schools and their presence provided a professional and human resource base on which secure foundations were laid. From the 1960s onwards large numbers of professional lay staff joined these schools and over time were employed in leadership roles. More recently, with the declining number of religiously professed personnel, many of these congregations have transferred their schools to new trustee bodies. These new voluntary organisations, with a civil and canonical identity, are now charged with giving contemporary expression to an inherited charism. A smaller number of voluntary secondary schools continues to operate under diocesan, religious or lay trusteeship.

All of these schools operate under the stewardship of voluntary patrons/trustees. The Education Act states:

The patron of a school shall carry out the functions and exercise the powers conferred on the patron by this Act and such other functions and powers as may be conferred on the patron by any Act of the Oireachtas or instrument made thereunder, deed, charter, articles of management or other such instrument relating to the establishment or operation of the school.²

Thus, patrons/trustees carry onerous responsibilities in terms of civil law (the Law of Trusts, Company Law, the Charities Act and legislation dealing with various

² Education Act (1998), section 8(6).

aspects of education). Patrons/trustees appoint boards of management whose responsibilities are detailed in the *Articles of Management for Catholic Secondary Schools*.³ The Education Act stipulates that the board of management shall:

uphold, and be accountable to the patron for so upholding, the characteristic spirit of the school as determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school, and at all times act in accordance with any Act of the Oireachtas or instrument made thereunder, deed, charter, articles of management or other such instrument relating to the establishment or operation of the school.⁴

The deeds and charters mentioned in the Act are important documents which articulate the vision and philosophy of education based on the founding intention of the school or network of schools. The new trustee bodies established in recent years have all devoted significant time and resources to creating their charters. These are very important documents for voluntary schools as they give expression to the founding intention in a contemporary idiom.

Catholic schools also have important rights and responsibilities based on Canon Law, especially in terms of the service that they provide to Catholic parents to educate their children in accordance with their beliefs and values. Canon Law states clearly that parents are the primary educators of their children and that all Church bodies, especially schools, are understood as assisting parents with the function of education. The legal understanding of Catholic schooling that emerges in Canon Law is a liberating one based on the foundation of a partnership between parents and other Catholic Church bodies, including trustee organisations, in service of a holistic education.

Since true education must strive for complete formation of the human person that looks to his or her final end as well as to the common good of societies, children and youth are to be nurtured in such a way that they are

³ JMB/AMCSS Secretariat, *Articles of Management for Catholic Secondary Schools*, 2003.

⁴ Education Act (1998), section 15(2)(b).

able to develop their physical, moral, and intellectual talents harmoniously, acquire a more perfect sense of responsibility and right use of freedom, and are formed to participate actively in social life.⁵

Several networks of Catholic schools have been recognised canonically as public juridic persons, meaning that they have the right to act in the name of the Church in a similar way to a diocese or parish or religious congregation. This is a significant step in recognising lay leadership in the Irish Catholic voluntary sector. Several useful publications deal at length with the role of trustees/patrons in voluntary secondary schools in Ireland.⁶

Catholic voluntary secondary schools are called to continue the mission of Christ in the social, legal and political landscape in which they operate. Precisely because they are part of the voluntary sector they must revisit their mission and articulate it anew. As a contribution to this task this paper now deals with the question: why do we have Catholic schools?

⁵ *Code of Canon Law*, no. 795.

⁶ Conference of Religious of Ireland (CORI), *The Trusteeship of Catholic Voluntary Secondary Schools – A handbook for the leaders of religious congregations* (Dublin, 1996); *Guidelines on the Role of Trustees in Catholic Voluntary Secondary Schools* (Dublin, 2005); Association of Trustees of Catholic Schools, *A Guide to Patronage and Trusteeship of Catholic Schools in Ireland* (Dublin, 2012).

5. Why do we have Catholic Schools?

The answer is found in the particular ethos or characteristic spirit of the school. Every school has its own ethos or characteristic spirit. In the Education Act 15 (2) (b) the characteristic spirit of the school is understood as being ‘determined by the cultural, educational, moral, religious, social, linguistic and spiritual values and traditions which inform and are characteristic of the objectives and conduct of the school’. It is clear from this that Catholic schools will vary depending on their history and the socio-demographic realities of the communities that they serve. Yet, from the small rural school serving a whole community to the large urban school serving a very diverse population, all such schools are challenged to give expression to their characteristic spirit through the lens of Catholic faith. This should not be understood as something static or oppressive; rather it is best understood as an invitation to allow Catholic faith inform the values and traditions that are lived out on a daily basis in the school.

It must be acknowledged that all schools hold much in common in terms of structures, curriculum, inspection and assessment. Every school attempts to serve society in a meaningful way. While a large percentage of schools are under the patronage of the Catholic Church these schools, like all schools in the Republic of Ireland, are regulated by the state through the Department of Education and Skills (DES). Section 30 of the Education Act (1998) states that the minister determines:

- (a) the subjects to be offered in recognised schools;
- (b) the syllabus of each subject;
- (c) the amount of instruction time to be allotted to each subject;
- (d) the guidance and counselling provision to be offered in schools.

The DES strictly regulates the curriculum of schools on advice from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and through the inspectorate’s evaluation and inspection processes while the State Examinations Commission organises the state examinations. Schools must comply not only with extensive legislation but also the multitude of circulars and guidelines which issue from the DES.

Schools today find themselves in challenging circumstances due to enormous social, cultural and economic changes. In an age dominated by media and information technology and during what is a serious economic recession, significant new pressures are brought to bear on children and adolescents, on

family structures, on religious practice, on community life and, not least, on behaviour in the school classroom. In this new cultural context every school needs to redefine its identity so that it is not just reacting to the latest trend or fashion but that it can truly articulate its self-understanding. This is a challenge that Catholic schools take seriously.

Catholic schools can usefully draw on the following principles as a resource in supporting their ethos:

- Catholic schools continue the work of Jesus the teacher;
- Catholic schools are part of a living tradition;
- Catholic schools respect both faith and reason;
- Catholic schools integrate Religious Education in the curriculum while providing opportunities for catechesis;
- Catholic schools give expression to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council;
- Catholic schools educate to intercultural dialogue.

Schools guided by these principles can provide an intellectually stimulating and spiritually nurturing environment for all students who attend them.

5.1 Catholic schools continue the work of Jesus the teacher

Jesus is called ‘teacher’ on forty-six occasions in the Gospels. It is the title most commonly associated with him by his first disciples. So what did Jesus teach? In the villages, hills and valleys of Galilee he taught the people that the reign of God was dawning in their midst. He spoke of the reign of God as healing for the sick, hearing for the deaf, new sight for the blind, freedom for prisoners, good news for the poor. He revealed a deeper communion with God through ordinary human realities. A key element of the Christian message is that life is not the way it was intended to be. It is broken in all sorts of ways. As a result, Christian discipleship is characterised by healing, hearing, new sight, freedom and good news.

The call of Christian discipleship demands that we always seek to lift the burden. Whether this means helping people to stand up and walk on their own, or exorcising their fear of the unknown, or expanding their minds through education, or feeding them when they are too weak to feed themselves, or opening their eyes to the reality of life, or challenging them to let go of hurts and prejudice, or liberating those who are unjustly oppressed, or introducing them to

ever greater horizons of transcendence and beauty, or unsealing their ears to hear the divine echo in their hearts, or unleashing their hope for the future, or sowing the seeds of eternal life, the healing ministry of Jesus is continued as ‘the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, the good news is proclaimed to the poor’ (Luke 7:22). To teach as Jesus taught means inviting people to live without the crutch or the grudge or the closed mind. Christian education invites people to become Christ-like in their lives so that the reign of God might continue to dawn in our world.

Notice that all of Jesus’ teaching takes place through the words that he speaks and the encounters that are at the centre of his ministry. To teach as Jesus taught is surely to speak words of honesty, words of forgiveness, words of compassion and it is to encounter people wherever they are at and invite, cajole, liberate them to move on. Think of the Samaritan woman at the well, little Zacchaeus in Jericho, Matthew the tax collector in Capernaum, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, Mary from the town of Magdala at the tomb on Easter Sunday morning – all people totally preoccupied with their own worries and concerns but who are challenged to move on through their encounter with Jesus. This teaching is truly education – to lead people out of ignorance, out of hostility, out of self-centredness, out of fear, into somewhere new. Such education is an endless task in all of our lives. Catholic schools are committed to continuing this ministry of Jesus.

5.2 Catholic schools are part of a living tradition

The interaction between religious belief and education is as old as schooling itself. From the schools and universities of medieval Europe, through the growing rates of literacy promoted by the reformation and counter-reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and on to the large number of Catholic schools throughout the world in the twenty-first century, Catholic tradition is inseparable from education.

So why has the Catholic Church been so involved in schools, colleges and universities? Because Christians, from the beginning, wanted to hand on their treasured tradition. Jesus proclaimed the reign of God. The early Christians believed that the decisive breakthrough of God’s reign in history occurred in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus the messenger became the message, the preacher became the preached, the proclaimer became the proclaimed. From the beginning Christians gathered to celebrate this mystery of Christ. They

listened to God's word as it was proclaimed to them from the scriptures and they shared in the breaking of the bread. In doing these actions they believed the Lord to be especially present in their midst. This tradition has been handed down from generation to generation of Christians, from parents to children to children's children right down to us today. And we will hand it on to the generations coming after us. This is what it means to be part of tradition: we receive it rather than create it; we recreate it as we try to live it; we cherish it and we hand it on in trust to those who will follow us. It forms us more than we form it. It gives our lives a story, a texture, a value which is more than the story of our own families, more than the texture of our own experience, more than the values that we could work out for ourselves. Thus, the reality of tradition became central to Christian identity and it is the bedrock for Catholic schools. It is like the sensible person who builds the house on rock. The rain, floods and gales that inevitably come will not prevail. Schools that are embedded in Catholic tradition and seek to live it for our times are a key part of the life of the Church.

5.3 Catholic schools respect both faith and reason

There is a temptation in contemporary Irish discourse to dismiss religious belief as inherently irrational, divisive and anti-intellectual. Some go so far as to say that schools with a Catholic ethos cannot create a sense of civic virtue. This runs completely contrary to the Catholic education tradition which is built on a respect for faith and reason. Those who dismiss schools with a religious ethos as little more than proselytising and indoctrinating tools of religious authorities show little sense of the long evolution of Catholic schools over many centuries, the rich diversity within the Catholic sector and the principles which underpin such education today. The most important principle of all is the value placed on both faith and reason. It is this principle which helps to explain why Catholic schools are so popular and respected throughout the world.

In an era often dominated by religious fundamentalism on the one hand and atheistic science on the other, this commitment to a dialogue between faith and reason was rarely more relevant. We live in an era when science and religion might completely diverge from each other as if it was impossible for the same person to be a rigorous scientist and a sincere religious believer. Faith and reason can live and thrive in the same person: while one cannot be reduced to the other they both play a dynamic role in forming and educating a mature person. There is no contradiction between being a fully educated person and a committed Christian.

There are few more important tasks for Christian educators than to revisit and re-imagine the relationship between faith and reason.

Pope Benedict XVI has consistently drawn attention to this fundamental issue. At his meeting with representatives of British society in Westminster Hall he said:

I would suggest that the world of reason and the world of faith – the world of secular rationality and the world of religious belief – need one another and should not be afraid to enter into a profound and ongoing dialogue, for the good of our civilization.⁷

Catholic schools were and are committed to academic excellence. This is achieved through respecting the autonomy and methodology of different disciplines while challenging students to achieve their potential across the curriculum. The aim is to facilitate the intellectual and emotional development of mature human persons who will have the capacity to draw upon multiple resources in interpreting their lives. As students follow their timetable during the school day the subjects vary but the individual student remains a unique person with a past and a future. Catholic education wants to provide students with the ability to draw from the rich treasures of both faith and reason in creating the future.

A fundamental aim of a vibrant school system is to facilitate the emergence of a literate society where individuals learn how to learn so that each person can embark on a life-long educational journey. Literacy impacts on all aspects of life and opens the door to further horizons of knowledge and imagination through literature, mathematics, music, science, religion, art, sport and the whole range of new possibilities that are emerging through information technology. If any education system fails to make students literate and numerate then it closes the door to much that matters in life.

The leaders of tomorrow are in the classrooms of today. All pupils are capable of imagining, creating and exploring. Fostering a commitment to critical thinking and creativity is the heartbeat of any living tradition and Catholic schooling is an expression of just such a living tradition. We hear much today of ‘innovation’ and the ‘knowledge economy’. To be truly innovative and knowledgeable is to be more fully human. It is human beings who will create the innovation and

⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Meeting with the Representatives of British Society, including the Diplomatic Corps, Politicians, Academics and Business Leaders*, Westminster Hall, 17 September 2010.

knowledge that we need. The aim of schooling is far greater than job training or qualification for a particular third-level programme – it seeks to create a human person who is knowledgeable and innovative and so can adapt to many different roles and realities in the future. We need an approach to schooling that keeps curiosity alive, fosters a love of learning, stimulates problem-solving and critical thinking and encourages students to become independent learners while they grow in responsible relationships and develop a sense of the common good.

5.4 Catholic schools integrate Religious Education in the curriculum while providing opportunities for catechesis

Religious Education and a chaplaincy service have an important part to play in the life of a Catholic school. Such Religious Education is integral to the curriculum and provides integration in personal development. Chaplaincy is a key part of pastoral care that acknowledges the holistic development of the human person. Resources should be allocated in order to make adequate provision for Religious Education and a chaplaincy service in all Catholic schools.

Religious Education deals with ultimate questions. Religious belief makes a fundamental claim on the conscience of believers. Since religion deals with matters of fundamental, ultimate concern it follows that the religious response has a priority in all one's subsequent reasoning and deliberation. The identity of believers is inseparable from their religious faith. It is not one more interest alongside others akin to a hobby or a leisure time pursuit or a family tradition. Rather, it is a reality that frames and interprets all of life. To equate all religions is, in a real sense, to empty them of any significance. No believer will ever do this. The study of religions and religious beliefs by the social sciences quite properly brackets out the question of belief and the truth claims of each religious tradition. But such studies, while contributing to our knowledge, are a limited lens through which to interpret the conscientious option for religious belief. Many parents are committed to the education and formation of their children in accord with their religious beliefs.

Catholic schools are called to support Catholic parents who wish to have their teenage children socialised in faith. The National Directory for Catechesis in Ireland, *Share the Good News*, opens up a vision of collaboration between home, school and parish.⁸ The primary aims of all schools are educational, including in

⁸ Irish Episcopal Conference, *Share the Good News* (Dublin: Veritas, 2010).

the area of Religious Education, but Catholic schools should also provide opportunities for catechesis, for formation in faith in the living God revealed in the person of Christ. The programmes in Religious Education at Junior Cycle and Leaving Certificate levels provide many such opportunities. Serious consideration should be given to how parents and parishes/dioceses can be involved in conversations which seek to strengthen the catechetical contribution of Catholic schools to the faith formation of teenagers.

The partnership with parents is particularly significant.

Close co-operation is especially important when treating sensitive issues such as religious, moral or sexual education, orientation towards a profession, or a choice of one's vocation in life. It is not a question of convenience, but a partnership based on faith. Catholic tradition teaches that God has bestowed on the family its own specific and unique educational mission. The first and primary educators of children are their parents ... The school is aware of this fact but, unfortunately, the same is not always true of the families themselves ... Every school should initiate meetings and other programmes which will make the parents more conscious of their role, and help to establish a partnership; it is impossible to do too much along these lines. It often happens that a meeting called to talk about the children becomes an opportunity to raise the consciousness of the parents.⁹

A properly resourced department of Religious Education and chaplaincy service will enable the Catholic school to foster a living partnership between home, school and parish.

5.5 Catholic schools give expression to the teachings of the Second Vatican Council

Though it took place some fifty years ago, the teaching and pastoral insights of the Second Vatican Council are still being received and interpreted in the broader Catholic community. The Council heralded a new openness to the modern world, which has been expressed most forcibly through various dialogues with other

⁹ Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School: Guidelines for Reflection and Renewal* (Vatican City, 1988), # 42, 43.

Christians, with people of other faiths and with non-believers. The most powerful symbolic expression of these dialogues has been in Assisi where St John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI gathered with leaders of Christian Churches and of other faiths. These dialogues take place at various levels from international gatherings to local communities, from universities to schools and colleges. The most important dialogue is that between faith and reason.

Pope Benedict XVI described the Second Vatican Council as dedicated to finding a new definition of the relationships between the Church and the modern age, between the Church and the modern state and between Christian faith and other religions.¹⁰ Catholic schools and colleges are continually reinterpreting these various relationships as they live at the interface of Catholic faith and modern science; they are a living expression of the interaction between Catholic institutions and democratic governments; and they are a context for the daily encounter with those of other faiths and none.

The ongoing reception and interpretation of Vatican II now takes place in the context of the ministry of Pope Francis. He has challenged all members of the Church to reach out again to the world, not least to those who are on the margins of society. He speaks of two temptations: that of seeking to return to a past which no longer exists; and that of embracing every secular trend. In contrast, he calls Christians to live out their faith in the world in which they find themselves. The ministry of Pope Francis will give renewed energy to Catholic schools in creating a mature relationship with modernity, in seeking to be active participants in democratic societies and in fostering dialogue between all people of goodwill.

He says that the social dimension of the preaching of the Gospel is critically important. If we are truly Christian then we are called to live with others and for others. This is because God, in Christ, has redeemed human society and not just each of us as individuals. Faith is not just a private matter between me and my God. This is an important insight for Catholic education. Pope Francis states:

No one can demand that religion should be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life, without concern for the soundness of civil institutions, without a right to offer an opinion on events affecting society. Who would claim to lock up in a church and silence the message of St Francis of Assisi or Blessed Teresa of

¹⁰ *Address of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the Roman Curia*, 22 December 2005.

Calcutta? They themselves would have found this unacceptable. An authentic faith – which is never comfortable or completely personal – always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.¹¹

5.6 Catholic schools educate to intercultural dialogue

Catholic schools in Ireland form part of a large international network of such schools throughout the world. Ever since the Second Vatican Council's *Declaration on Education*, the Holy See has published many important documents on Catholic education. The most recent is entitled *Education to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*.¹² It provides important reflections on what it is to be a Catholic school in a globalised world characterised by cultural and religious pluralism. Education is the key to mutual understanding and to building a civilisation of peace in such a complex world. The document challenges Catholic schools to engage in dialogue through facing the reality of a multicultural situation, by overcoming prejudices and by education through encounter with the other. It notes that 'schools are privileged places for intercultural dialogue'.¹³

What is this intercultural dialogue? It is not cultural relativism, which suggests that all cultures and traditions are essentially the same and often seeks to quarantine related practices within a purely private sphere of life. Nor is it religious fundamentalism, which fails to engage with that which is other and withdraws into a ghetto secure in its own unchallenged identity. Rather it is an invitation to engagement with the other person, the other faith, the other culture based on innovative and courageous fidelity to one's own faith and culture. Such dialogue is not just talking – it includes all interreligious relationships with both individuals and communities.¹⁴ It seeks common ethical values which are the foundations of justice and peace. The aim of this dialogue is not to abandon one's own inherited faith and practices but to rediscover them in a deeper way through encounter with the other. This is the opposite of relativism.

¹¹ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (Vatican City, 2013), # 183.

¹² Congregation for Catholic Education, *Education to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools: Living in Harmony for a Civilisation of Love* (Vatican City, 2013).

¹³ *Education to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*, no. 6.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 13.

The relativistic model is founded on the value of tolerance, but limits itself to accepting the other person, excluding the possibility of dialogue and recognition of each other in mutual transformation. Such an idea of tolerance, in fact, leads to a substantially passive meaning of relationship with whoever has a different culture. It does not demand that one take an interest in the needs and sufferings of others, nor that their reasons may be heard; there is no self-comparison with their values, and even less sense of developing love for them.¹⁵

How can a Catholic school be a vehicle of such intercultural dialogue? The document notes four types of dialogue: the dialogue of life; the dialogue of works; theological dialogue; and the dialogue of religious experience. The dialogue of life reflects on the joys, challenges and sorrows of life, especially in the context of the fundamental realities of family, language and culture. The dialogue of works encourages those involved to collaborate in the holistic development of all men and women. Theological dialogue demands knowledge of various religious traditions and their mutual interaction. The dialogue of religious experience is based on the lived encounter of various faiths, not on intellectual abstractions, but rather on the actual lives of the faithful.

Many Catholic schools throughout the world are centres for such dialogue. With a changing demographic profile in many Irish schools, opportunities are arising to foster such dialogue in the Irish context.

¹⁵ *Education to Intercultural Dialogue in Catholic Schools*, no. 22.

6. Catholic Voluntary Secondary Schools: Future Challenges

In this section the challenges facing voluntary schools are analysed. If such schools are to remain truly voluntary they must re-imagine their founding intention. This re-imagining must take account of the challenges faced by such schools. At the same time they must deal with the issues of funding and the relationship with the state.

Mission and founding intention

- a. Voluntary schools must take great care to maintain and renew their moral legitimacy by responding to social, cultural and demographic changes.
- b. Many in the general community may be unaware of the independent and voluntary status of the school, even though long-serving. For example, can parents articulate how the voluntary school that their children attend is different from their friends' state school up the road?
- c. The passion and vital energy that initially provided the impetus and vision to set up the school may become consumed under the practical administrative responsibilities. The challenge is to maintain a balance.
- d. The originality of the initial founding vision may become diluted as a result of the school's administrative tasks. Voluntary schools need to develop their unique appeal in the midst of the ever-increasing administrative burden.
- e. The founding vision may be based on altruistic or spiritual values that may be different from the values of many of the professional staff.
- f. Voluntary schools need to provide the space for all stakeholders to reflect on and articulate the vision and mission on an ongoing basis.
- g. The voluntary school cannot presume that the founding mission will be seen to be legitimate 'for ever and ever'. The mission will be conferred or denied legitimacy by the individuals involved within the school, i.e. the parents, teachers, students, members of boards of management, trustees and the community at large. The mission is a living and breathing reality, not something set in stone.
- h. Voluntary schools need to be respectfully unapologetic, robust and committed to their mission in order to ride the waves of the changing nature of culture, values and beliefs.
- i. The founding vision of the voluntary school is a key responsibility of the board of management and the principal. The vision belongs to the whole school community who can use it as a resource in looking to the future.

- j. There is a temptation to focus training and education in the areas of mission and moral legitimacy on the school principal and teachers of Religious Education. In the future, all stakeholders need this training, i.e. boards of management, professional staff, parents, students and the wider community.
- k. Voluntary sector schools must nurture volunteers who will serve the mission of the school in various ways. Such volunteers should be acknowledged and supported.

Funding and the relationship with the state

- a. The voluntary body often appears to be an agent of the state and many stakeholders, even including staff, can be unaware of its voluntary status. The major source of funding is the state. As these bodies work closely with the state, there is an increasing emphasis on planning, measurement and evaluation. Thus, the organisational independence of schools tends to decrease over time.
- b. Professional staff are employed and they exercise significant power within the organisation. As the majority of finance in voluntary schools is government supplied many staff may be unaware of the independent voluntary status of the schools in which they work. This needs to be clearly explained.
- c. The state has an ever-increasing input on staff recruitment procedures, pay and conditions of staff, and redeployment.
- d. The mission of each voluntary school needs to be embedded in the minds and hearts of all stakeholders, and significant resources need to be allotted to ensure that this takes place.
- e. The process of rationalisation of schools is a real challenge for the voluntary sector. How the state perceives voluntary secondary schools needs to be addressed and challenged. The voluntary sector should provide leadership in this regard.
- f. Leaders of voluntary schools have tended to work in isolation in the past. They need to co-operate and work together to establish greater political legitimacy for the good of the sector and in support of their own individual vision and mission.

The table below outlines the changes in the number and types of second-level schools in the period 1990–2014. The decline in the number of Catholic secondary schools is due in the most part to a rationalisation process which

resulted in the establishment of either community schools or community colleges. The programme of rationalisation has resulted in some parts of Ireland having no Catholic voluntary secondary school.

Schools at Post-Primary Level 1990–2014

	1989/90	1989/90	2013/14	2013/14
	No. of Schools	No. of Pupils	No. of Schools	No. of Pupils
Voluntary Secondary Schools	493	213,788	374	188,791
ETB Schools and Colleges	252	85,205	254	88,247
Community/Comprehensive Schools	63	40,139	95	56,137
TOTAL	808	339,132	723	333,175

Given these statistics, there is obvious concern about the future of Catholic voluntary secondary schools. One of the key issues relates to finance. Catholic schools receive significantly less funding than other second-level schools. Furthermore, the patronage structure which supports these schools receives no state funding. This is clearly unjust. A recent report by the ESRI, *Governance and Funding of Second-level Schools in Ireland*, provides detailed information on all the relevant issues.¹⁶ (See Appendix C.) Most people do not realise that schools in the Catholic secondary sector are severely disadvantaged in terms of annual grant support vis-à-vis the other two post-primary sectors. The ESRI report states:

¹⁶ ESRI, *Governance and Funding of Second-level Schools in Ireland* (Dublin, 2013).

Clear differences are evident between the three school sectors; voluntary secondary schools receive an average of just over two-thirds of their funding from government sources while the proportion is much larger for the vocational and community/comprehensive schools (with an average of 90 per cent and 93 per cent respectively). As a result, voluntary secondary schools are more reliant on other sources of income, including fees, fundraising, renting out school premises and income from the trust or other patron body.¹⁷

In the current economic situation such levels of fundraising by charitable and voluntary organisations are not sustainable. It also places a huge burden on school management, made up of volunteers who give willingly of their time and expertise, to sustain such fundraising which in turn reduces the time available for all of the other responsibilities that boards of management must undertake. In particular, there are serious concerns about the workload carried by principals in Catholic secondary schools as a result of increased administrative burdens and recent cuts in resources, both in terms of finance and personnel. This is exemplified in the experience of many schools where the advertisement of a teacher post draws several hundred applicants, while a vacancy for principal might elicit few applications. Such a scenario is unsustainable.

The ESRI report concludes that:

It is clear that voluntary secondary schools receive a significantly lower proportion of funding from the state and, as a result, are more reliant on voluntary contributions from parents and on general fundraising.¹⁸

The funding issue is related to the overall organisation of trusteeship. This has been restructured in recent years, as described earlier in this paper. Dialogue needs to take place between all interested parties to determine the most sustainable form of expressing the trustee role into the future.

¹⁷ ESRI, *Governance and Funding of Second-level Schools in Ireland*, p. 139.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

CSP is committed to working with all of the partners in Catholic schools and the broader post-primary sector in order to deal with some of the substantive issues raised in this paper. The principle of subsidiarity will guide this process. This means that issues should be dealt with at local level while central structures have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be undertaken effectively at a more immediate or local level. In particular, the following issues will be addressed:

1. Voluntary schools will be provided with a process to facilitate them in reflecting on their ethos through reimagining their founding intention. This will be done in the context of the trust/congregation/diocese which oversees the school.
2. CSP will publish a user-friendly pamphlet on frequently asked questions concerning Catholic voluntary secondary schools.
3. CSP, in co-operation with ATCS and AMCSS, will identify pilot areas where Catholic secondary schools will be invited to create a local forum that addresses common issues.
4. CSP will participate with all relevant stakeholders in a strategic review of the structure of Catholic patronage/trusteeship/management at second level.
5. The relationship of the voluntary sector with the state needs to be clarified. This should take account of the importance of the voluntary sector in the provision of second-level education and the fact that there are multiple Catholic and other voluntary patrons of schools.
6. CSP will continue to support patrons and bishops in their roles vis-à-vis ETB and community/comprehensive schools.

It is undoubtedly true to say that Catholic education is more than schooling. Rooted in an understanding of the human person as a child of God, redeemed by Christ and destined to share in God's own life forever, it is a lifelong process of human growth and development in response to God's call. It begins in the home, continues in the school and matures through involvement with the Christian community in the parish. These three dimensions of home, school and parish must work together if Catholic education is to truly attain its goal of forming mature human persons in the image and likeness of Christ. But schools remain critically important. The Church continues to be involved in education as it forms a central part of its mission and because there are parents who wish to have their children educated in a context that respects both faith and reason. We hope that those educated in such a context will be able to make a dynamic contribution to our democratic society, to the life of the Church and to the dialogue of faith and culture.

Christian faith is always lived in particular cultures. The dialogue between faith and culture takes place in the heart and mind of the individual believer, in families, in parish communities and, not least, in schools and colleges. Catholic schools and colleges stand as a reminder that the Christian faith is not a private, irrational commitment embraced by individuals but it comprises a philosophically justified act of faith in a transcendent, personal God and an intelligent and reasonable response to what was revealed in the life of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, they give expression to the public dimension of Christian faith in their commitment to social solidarity, outreach to those in need and promotion of the common good. There will always be a certain tension between religious faith and culture: some people reduce culture to religious faith and so withdraw into a fundamentalist ghetto where everything outside is seen as a threat; others empty culture of all religious reference so that religious belief amounts to nothing more than personal whim and traditional superstition. A true dialogue between faith and culture allows one to inform the other and calls individuals, families, communities, and indeed, our schools and colleges, to an ever greater commitment to human maturity.

There are 95 such schools – 81 community and 14 comprehensive. The majority of them were formed by the amalgamation of secondary and ETB schools. In the case of community schools there is a deed of trust which requires the co-trustees or co-patrons (the local ETB and one or more Catholic patrons) to run a school that serves the whole community, where Religious Education is provided for all students in accord with their religious tradition, and a chaplain is employed *ex quota*.

Comprehensive schools have a very complicated history. There is no deed of trust and each school evolved differently. Those with Catholic patrons tend to mirror the structure of community schools; those with Protestant patrons are clearly understood to be denominational schools.

In looking to the future of community schools there are many concerns that must be addressed. In the 81 schools there are 52 Catholic trustees/patrons (18 bishops and 34 religious congregations). Thirty of these 52 Catholic trustees/patrons have an interest in just one school. The question obviously arises concerning the organisation of this Catholic trustee/patronage role into the future. One possible way forward would be the transfer of the trustee role from religious congregations to dioceses and/or to the trusts established in recent years. This has been raised for discussion at meetings of the National Trustee Forum (a forum established to bring the trustees of community schools together under the auspices of the Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools, ACCS). Furthermore, a working group is reviewing the deed of trust in the context of legislative changes since the original deed was put in place.

It is clear that many Catholic students will receive their second-level education in community and comprehensive schools. It is therefore imperative that the future Catholic trustee/patronage structure and the review of the deed are sufficiently robust to guarantee an education for Catholic students in accord with the founding intention and original deed of trust of each of these schools. The Catholic patrons have a responsibility to draw from the rich tradition of Catholic schooling in their contribution to the developing ethos of each community school.

Education and Training Boards are the providers of state schools. These schools operate directly under the auspices of the local ETB. Many Catholic students attend such schools and their Religious Education has operated under the terms of circular 7/79, which states that it should be of the order of two hours per week.

Community colleges are established by the local ETB. They are distinguished from ETB schools through the signing of a model agreement with the local Catholic bishop and/or a religious congregation. The agreement confirms that the Catholic body will be involved in the organisation and management of the community college. It mirrors many of the articles of a deed of trust in community schools regarding Religious Education and the appointment of a chaplain. Further, it states that the participation of the Catholic body will be indefinite and without interruption. In recent years, ETBs have established community colleges where no model agreement is signed. These colleges are spoken of as non-designated community colleges. As a result, it is now the norm in ETBs to speak of the original community colleges (where an agreement was signed) as designated community colleges. It seems likely that all ETB schools will in the future be called (non-designated) community colleges.

The provision of education for Catholic students in state schools has worked on a partnership basis over several generations. It is important that each diocese continues to build on this partnership approach so that Religious Education and pastoral care is provided in a meaningful way for all Catholic parents/students.

This appendix provides some relevant extracts from the ESRI report, especially on the funding of the trustee/patron role in second-level schools.

There are different funding models for each of the three school types:

1. Voluntary secondary schools receive a per capita grant based on student numbers;
2. The ETBs (formerly VECs) are allocated a 'block grant' and distribute funds to their schools;
3. Community and comprehensive schools negotiate their own individual budgets with the DES.

The ESRI findings 'indicate a disparity in the funds available to, and costs to be covered by, voluntary secondary, vocational and community/comprehensive schools:

- Insurance costs are paid centrally by VECs [now ETBs] or are covered by state indemnity in community/comprehensive schools while these are paid by individual schools in the voluntary secondary sector;
- Pay for non-teaching staff is covered by the VECs [now ETBs] while secretarial and caretaking in voluntary secondary schools are not fully covered by grants. Any deficit is covered by the school;
- Survey data indicate that voluntary secondary principals are more likely than those in other sectors to spend the capitation grant on secretarial services, lighting, security and insurance than those in other sectors.' (ESRI, pp. xiii–xiv)

'Clear differences are evident between the three school sectors; voluntary secondary schools receive an average of just over two-thirds of their funding from government sources, while the proportion is much larger for the vocational and community/comprehensive schools (with an average of 90 per cent and 93 per cent respectively). As a result, voluntary secondary schools are more reliant on other sources of income, including fees, fundraising, renting out school premises and income from the trust or other patron body.' (ESRI, p. 139)

The ESRI research shows that:

- 87 per cent of voluntary schools receive parental voluntary contributions;
- 62 per cent of community/comprehensive schools receive parental voluntary contributions;

- 49 per cent of vocational schools receive parental voluntary contributions. (ESRI, p. xiv)

‘It is clear that voluntary secondary schools receive a significantly lower proportion of funding from the state and, as a result, are more reliant on voluntary contributions from parents and on general fundraising.’ (ESRI, p. 146)

‘44 per cent of voluntary secondary schools were found to use parental voluntary contributions to cover the cost of secretarial services (compared with 16 per cent of vocational schools and 13 per cent of community/comprehensive schools) (see p. 146). Voluntary secondary schools are also more likely than other school types to use capitation grant on security and insurance.’ (ESRI, pp. 153–4)

The funding of the trustee/patron function is a particular difficulty for the voluntary sector. Trustees of schools have duties which are identified in the Education Act. The trustees of any school promote and protect its ethos and philosophy. They are involved in appointing the board of management, in supporting building projects, in financial controls, in developing policies (e.g. the Admissions Policy), and in providing advice and supports to schools.

‘VECs [now ETBs] combine management and trusteeship functions and, as such, receive state funding which is delivered as a block grant to VECs [now ETBs].’ (ESRI, p. xv)

‘At least some elements of the trusteeship function of VECs (now ETBs) are funded through the block grant and the centralisation of specialist services and expertise at VEC level reduces the need for specialist legal and finance capacities at the school level. In contrast, the trusteeship function of voluntary secondary schools is paid for by religious orders or the Education Trust Companies, directly through providing support to schools and/or indirectly through the provision of specialist expertise on a voluntary basis.’ (ESRI, pp. 156–7)

The ESRI report demonstrates that there are a number of difficulties with respect to the funding structures of second-level schools. ‘This study highlights the need for greater transparency in the funding of school governance and operational costs. The findings also highlight the importance of funding for schools to be

equitable, reflecting variation in need rather than historical origins. The recent restructuring of VECs into Education and Training Boards may provide an opportune time to change the basis on which such information is reported and recorded, thereby making it easier to compare schools across second-level sectors.’ (ESRI, pp. xiv–xv)

