

DUBLIN 15 COMMUNITY COUNCIL

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Representing: Blanchardstown-Castleknock-Clonsilla-Mulhuddart

By e-mailed to
New Schools Advisory Committee
The Principal Officer
School Planning Section (New Schools)
Department Education & Science,
Portlaoise Road,
Tullamore,
Co. Offaly

28 January 2008

Dear Sirs,

On behalf of DUBLIN 15 COMMUNITY COUNCIL I wish to make the following observations on the proposal to establish the State's first two interdenominational national schools on a pilot basis in Dublin 15.

Dublin 15 Community Council welcomes the Minister's decision to establish the State's first two interdenominational national schools on a pilot basis in Dublin 15 next year.

The recent growth has produces an ever increasing demand for school places with a very diverse population, as documented in the report "Intercultural education in Dublin 15" available at www.bap.ie

The proposed interdenominational model, aiming to provide for religious education and faith formation during the school day for each of the main faith groups represented will go a long way to address this need.

Concerns about integration with the native Irish population need to be addressed by ensuring that they do not become a school for international children only, a catchment area based community school may encourage a mix of Irish and international children.

The shortage of reserved sites for schools in Dublin 15 mean that these schools will eventually become 24 classrooms or larger.

1. Introduction

The Dublin 15 Community Council was formed 15 years ago (merging the Castleknock & Blanchardstown community councils which date from the early 1970's) to provide an umbrella organisation for the many residents and voluntary community groups in the Dublin 15 area. The Dublin 15 Community Council also represents the Castaheany and Ongar area, through the affiliated Castaheany Ongar Community Council.

Our main objective is to develop the consensus views of the Dublin 15 community in matters relating to Planning & Development, Public Transport, Environment, Education, Health Care, Policing, Job Creation, Recreational Facilities, General Infrastructure and Tourist facilities. Having developed the consensus, make representation to State and other Statutory Bodies through a wide variety of communication channels, with the aim of improving the quality of life for the residents of Dublin 15.

Residents Associations and Community groups focus on their own specific areas but often feel powerless to influence the big issues like transport, educational, recreational & sporting infrastructure or crime prevention. The Community Council provides a forum to discuss these issues and potential solutions.

Dublin15 now has one of the most ethnically diverse and numerous immigrant communities in Ireland. The rate of settlement by immigrants into this area has thrown up a number of issues and special difficulties that need to be addressed.

Over the past decade the Government and Fingal County Council have facilitated intensive residential and commercial development in the wider Dublin 15 area.

However, whilst there was huge effort put into building, comparable little effort was being made to properly plan adequate social and amenity structures for the new communities. As a Community Council we are concerned at the slow pace of addressing the deficits that exist in these various areas.

For 2008 a sense of urgency must be developed by our politicians, civil and public servants with regard to providing an adequate number of schools, efficient and widely available public transport, access to a range of appropriate sporting and recreational facilities.

We have discussed the issues arising out of the recent population growth, on how we can best resolve these issues and how we can ensure that our new arrivals integrate and actively participate/contribute to our wider community.

Enclosed please find our submission on the proposal to establish the State's first two interdenominational national schools on a pilot basis in Dublin 15.

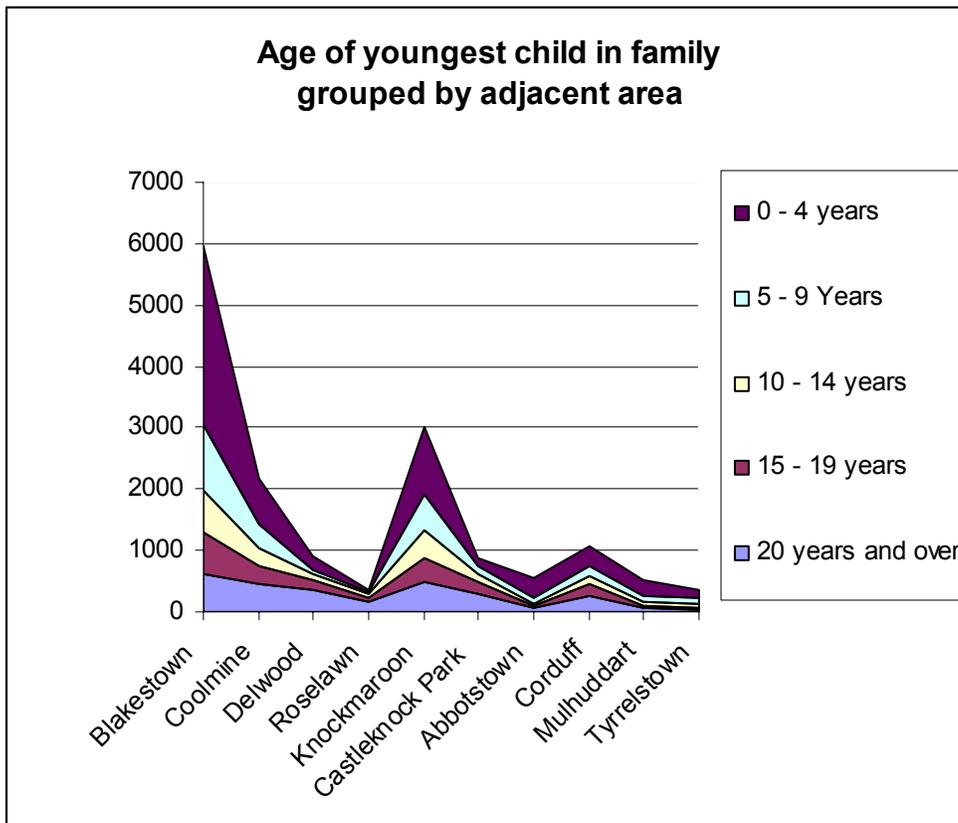
2. Population Growth in the Dublin 15 area

The Dublin 15 area has grown rapidly from 53,221 in 1996 to 90,952 an increase of 71%. The rapid population growth in Dublin 15 was reflected in junior infant enrolment which grew by 50% between 2000 and 2005. Subsequent years, school enrolments continue to rise with parents experiencing considerable anxiety finding school places.

Back in 2000, Dublin 15 was served by 20 primary schools and 6 post primary schools catering for an enrolment of 8,116 primary pupils. Since then:

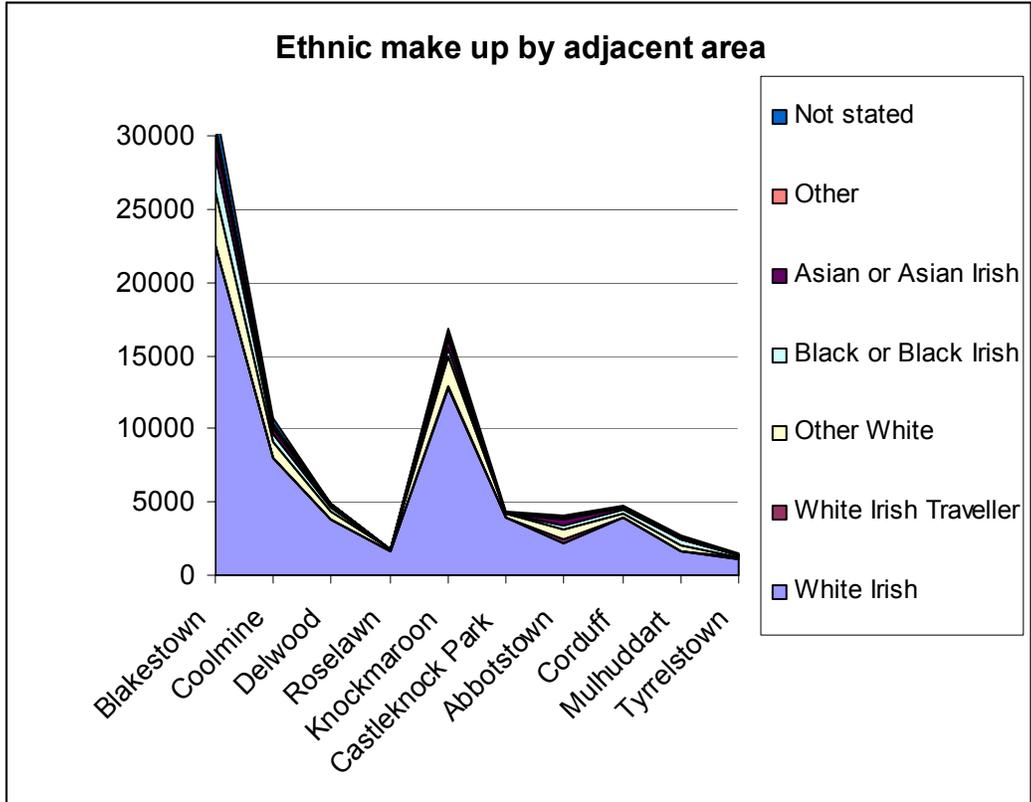
- ❑ 7 new primary schools were given official sanction between 2000 & 2007 (3 in Diswellstown/ Castleknock, 3 in Castaheany-Ongar, 1 in Tyrellstown).
- ❑ Three of these new schools were Educate Together, 3 schools were under catholic patronage and 1 school established under temporary catholic patronage.
- ❑ In addition, existing catholic primary schools have expanded to take 3 and 4 classes/year (24 to 32 classroom schools).
- ❑ The Church of Ireland established a new school in Dunboyne.

The CSO small area statistics published earlier this year convey the picture of the population on census day. Attached please find my analysis of this data. I have grouped the data by adjacent areas so that you get an overall picture of the population, the age of the youngest person in the families, the ethnic and religious distribution.

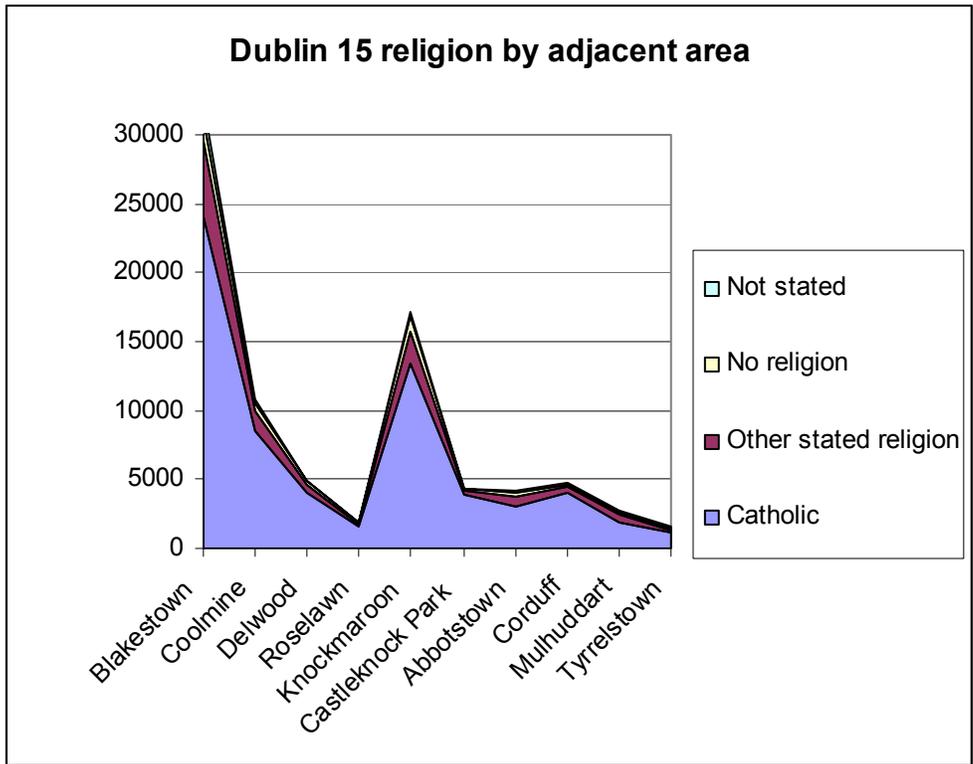


The figures are not surprising, with the Blakestown electoral division (Castaheany-Ongar) showing the greatest increase in young families. The second peak is in the Knockmaroon electoral division (Carpenterstown - Diswellstown).

When we look at the ethnic make up of Dublin 15 we see a similar profile with the Blakestown electoral division (Castaheany-Ongar) and the Knockmaroon electoral division (Carpenterstown - Diswellstown) showing a significant ethnic diversity



This profile is repeated in the declared religious make up.



3. 2007 report on “Intercultural Education: Primary Challenges in Dublin 15”

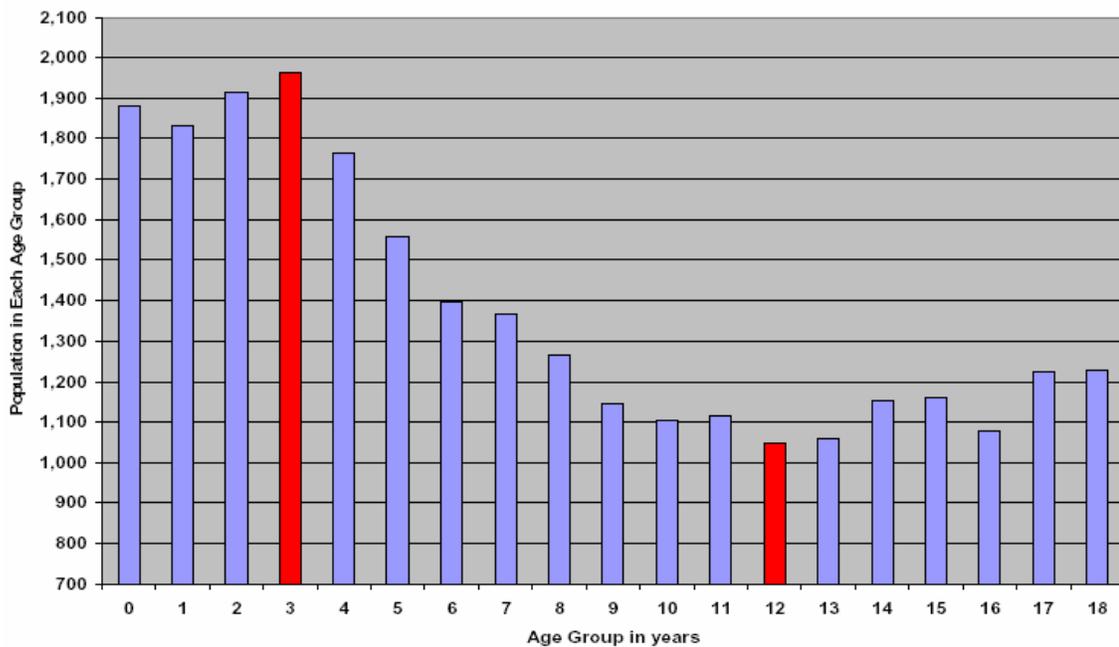
The CSO data is backed up by the study “Intercultural Education: Primary Challenges in Dublin 15” available at www.bap.ie.

This report funded by the Social Inclusion Unit of the Department of Education and Science in 2007 and was compiled by Enda McGorman (Principal, Mary, Mother of Hope National School, Littlepace) and Ciaran Sugrue (Education Department, St. Patrick’s College, Drumcondra)

3.1 Population growth and demand for education places in Dublin 15.

The intercultural education report looks in detail at the population growth and subsequent demand for education places in Dublin 15. The data is presented on a Dublin 15 area based analysis and looks at the problem in a holistic way.

Figure 4. page 31 graphs the Youth population of Dublin 15 by year group



The report draws attention to the profile of the youth population and its impact on the provision of new school places. While the number of children in the 9 to 18 years age range hovers at or below 1,200, there is a sharp rise in the younger cohort, many of whom are in the pre-school years. There were 1,559 five year olds, rising to a peak of 1,964 three year olds. The most startling statistic in this data is perhaps a comparison of the number of twelve year olds with the number of three year olds, which reveals an increase of 87%.

This problem of population growth represents an opportunity to tackle the larger problem of integration and intercultural education.

4. Challenges with a significant diverse population

This report documents in considerable detail the major demographic shifts that have occurred in recent years in Dublin 15, and their manifold impact on primary schools in the area. From being a series of small rural hamlets only three decades ago, the greater Blanchardstown area today is one of the most rapidly growing areas in the country as a whole. The area is also ‘home’ to a major proportion of recent immigrants, a percentage that is well above the national average.

Dublin 15 represents a unique case. The statistical evidence presented in chapters three and four makes this case overwhelmingly while indicating also that these recent and dramatic demographic shifts have had equally dramatic impact on school enrolment, provision of school places, as well as a plethora of knock-on implications for teaching and learning, their quality and delivery. When the voices of teachers, parents, principals, children and community activists are added to this ‘hard’ evidence, the full scale of the multi-cultural challenge is immediately apparent. It is evident also that there are considerable tensions around enrolment, distribution of resources within schools and the inadequacy of these resources in light of these major changes.

The evidence also points clearly to the necessity for appropriate legislative and policy responses if social fragmentation, and ghettoisation, exacerbated by ‘white flight,’ are not to become established and entrenched.

Analysis of the ethnicity of those leaving and joining these class groups indicates a significant trend—that of Irish pupils leaving the schools and immigrant pupils joining over the period, as Table 11 (page 59 of the report) below indicates.

Ethnic background of those joining and leaving classes 2003 - 2007	Number of Pupils	Irish	Non-Irish
Number of pupils who left in the period	175	82 (47%)	93 (53%)
Number of pupils who joined in the period	192	40 (21%)	152 (79%)

Consequently, these dramatic demographic shifts are not merely a responsibility for schools. Rather, they have major implications also for local authorities and central Government, to plan for and provide appropriate leadership to build systematically and imaginatively a ‘new’ multi-cultural, plural and diverse Ireland.

In establishing new schools in Dublin 15, the challenge is to promote quality teaching and learning as well as foster appropriate attitudes, values and behaviours that contribute to the development of multi-cultural, well integrated school communities that contribute also towards building diverse, yet, coherent and cosmopolitan communities.

5. Conclusions.

5.1 Population driven demand for new school places in Dublin 15.

The census statistics for 2006 (from the CSO small area data) reveal that the youth population in Dublin 15 is among the highest in the country. The percentage of the population aged 18 years or younger is 21% in the State including the wider Fingal area. However, in Dublin 15, this figure is significantly higher at 29%. This has huge implications for the provision of youth services generally, and educational services, including school places, in particular.

The graph of “Age of youngest child in family grouped by adjacent area” indicates that there is a significantly large cohort of children aged 4 or under in the Blakestown electoral division (Castaheany-Ongar) and the Knockmaroon electoral division (Carpenterstown - Diswellstown).

With Scoil Choilm planned to relocate from its temporary accommodation to a site in Diswellstown, the last remaining reserved sites for school in Dublin 15 are on the Phibblestown campus (next to Phibblestown community college which is presently under construction) and in the Phoenix Park racecourse site.

The detailed analysis in the Intercultural Education report give a break down by age cohort, the demand for school places year on year. This demonstrates that demand will continue to rise. It is worth noting that Dublin 15 continues to expand, has a large bank of residentially zoned land with many developments under construction.

There is a clear case for a new primary school in Phibblestown based on the population growth in the Blakestown electoral division.

There is also a clear case for a new school in the Castleknock area when demand in the Knockmaroon and Castleknock Park electoral divisions is combined.

The only available “reserved” site is in the Phoenix Park Racecourse development. The Racecourse development has commenced construction and when the 45.8ha site is fully constructed, will consist of in excess of 2,300 residential units.

A grade separated intersection on the N3 providing access and a new rail station on the Maynooth rail line are expected to accelerate this development despite a slow down in the housing market. The Phoenix Park Racecourse developments when constructed will more than double the size of the Castleknock Park electoral division.

5.2 Diversity

The CSO data shows a very diverse population for the Blakestown electoral division (Castaheany-Ongar) and the Knockmaroon electoral division (Carpenterstown - Diswellstown) in terms of both ethnic origin and declared religious affiliation.

Both areas are served by Catholic and Educate Together schools. The CSO breaks down religious affiliation into Catholic, other stated religions, no religion and no stated religions. Both the Catholic and Educate Together schools cater for all (or no) religious affiliation there is clearly a demand from religious denominations that do not currently have separate schools.

The new State model of community national school, under the patronage of County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC), proposed by Minister Hanafin in her announcement on 13 December, 2007 as *"the new schools will be open to children of all religions and none. They will be inter-denominational in character, aiming to provide for religious education and faith formation during the school day for each of the main faith groups represented. A general ethics programme will also be available for children whose parents opt for that and the schools will operate through an ethos of inclusiveness and respect for all beliefs, both religious and non-religious."*

"The changing shape of Irish society places new demands on the education system in responding to the needs of emerging communities. The role of the traditional churches in managing and providing schools is enormously valued and appreciated as is the growing role of other patronage bodies. In many of our new communities, however, there is a need for an additional choice that can accommodate the diverse preferences of parents for varying forms of religious education and faith formation during the school day, in a single school environment that includes and respects children of all religions and none. This new model of community national school provides that option and can be a rich addition to the range of primary school provision already offered by the existing patronage bodies".

This new State model of community national school, under the patronage of County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC), would clearly address this need with respect and sensitivity.

The Department of Education and Science recently announced 2 pilot VEC primary schools for Dublin 15. Given the shortage of reserved sites for schools, these pilot schools are located as close to the 2 peaks in the analysis, as is possible.

It is generally expected that these will be bigger schools than the traditional 16 classroom Educate Together School.

Dublin 15 Community Council welcomes the Minister's decision to establish the State's first two interdenominational national schools on a pilot basis in Dublin 15 next year and to bring Scoil Choilm (Diswellstown) into this sector within a relatively short space of time. We believe that these proposed schools address with respect and sensitivity a demand from religious denominations that do not currently have separate schools and whose religious belief and practice are not accommodated within existing schools.

5.3 Ensuring intercultural interaction.

One of the concerns expressed last year was the emergence of a Catholic (Diswellstown) and Educate Together (Balbriggan) school catering exclusively for the children of foreign born parents.

The Government and Irish NGOs prefer to speak of "interculturalism" when addressing diversity - suggestive of an interactive exchange, framed in large part on the Canadian model - as a desired third way between the theoretical poles of assimilationism and multiculturalism, and the concept guides many important policy initiatives here.

As Ireland searches for a way to accommodate the recent immigration, it tries to avoid the failures of assimilation (in which the migrant is expected to give up their values, customs and traditions) and multiculturalism (autonomy of each culture and the commonality of none) by pursuing an "Intercultural" approach.

At its core, intercultural education has two focal points:

- ❑ It is education which respects, celebrates and recognises the normality of diversity in all areas of human life. It sensitises the learner to the idea that humans have naturally developed a range of different ways of life, customs and worldviews, and that this breadth of human life enriches all of us.
- ❑ It is education, which promotes equality and human rights, challenges unfair discrimination, and promotes the values upon which equality is built.

While it is possible to promote interculturalism in a monoculture school by following the Department of Education & Science's guidelines "*Intercultural Education in the Primary School*" its easier when diversity exists in the classroom. Conversely providing an intercultural education in the absence of a native Irish population misses an important reference point for "newcomer" children.

It is our recommendation that these pilot VEC primary schools include a statistically significant native Irish population.

The question then arises; is how to encourage native Irish catholic children to enroll, participate and integrate? The most effective strategy appears to ensure these schools have a defined Catchment area to ensure a statistically significant native Irish population. Given the shortage of reserved sites, the primary catchment areas are recommended as:

- ❑ Phibblestown primary school catchment area should be the same as the Phibblestown Community College catchment area.
- ❑ Phoenix Park Racecourse primary school catchment area should be the same as the current Castleknock Community College catchment area. This eventually shared with Scoil Choilm (Diswellstown) to prevent competition between schools.

The rapid growth in the primary school population is not reflected in the provision of post primary schools in Dublin 15. There are currently 4,800 post primary places in 6 schools available with an additional 1,000 places under construction. To cope with the increase in primary school numbers an additional 3 to 4,000 places are required at post primary level.

This obvious shortage is a concern to many parents. Associating the two new pilot interdenominational national schools with the VEC post primary schools, increases the perceived attractiveness of these new primary schools.

6. Summary

The Dublin 15 Community Council welcomes the Minister's decision to establish the State's first two interdenominational national schools on a pilot basis in Dublin 15 next year. Developing a more inclusive, intercultural society is about inclusion by design, not as an add-on or afterthought, with a particular emphasis on interaction and equality.

We believe that the increase in population as discussed in sections 2 and 3 justify the establishment of new schools as a matter of urgency in Phibblestown and the Phoenix Park Racecourse.

Diversity within a school and diversity among schools are both legitimate aspects of the principle of diversity. The balance between separate schooling and integrated schooling is a delicate and difficult one.

We support the location of the State's first two interdenominational national schools in Phibblestown and the Phoenix Park Racecourse. We believe that these proposed schools will address with respect and sensitivity a demand from religious denominations that do not currently have separate schools and whose religious belief and practice are not accommodated within existing schools.

We are concerned at the social impact of the emergence of schools catering exclusively for the children of foreign born parents. We believe that tangible steps must be taken to encourage native Irish catholic children to enroll, participate and integrate. The most effective strategy appears to ensure these schools have a defined Catchment area aligned to post primary schools to ensure a statistically significant native Irish population.

We are available to discuss further any of the issues raised in our submission.

Yours sincerely,

Public Relations Officer,
Dublin 15 Community Council