



Ms Jill Fannin  
Forward Planning  
Department of Education  
Portlaoise Road  
Tullamore  
Co. Offaly

7<sup>th</sup> June 2019

### **ETHX – Catchment of proposed second level school at Harold’s Cross**

Dear Jill,

We understand that you have recently taken over as Head of the Forward Planning Unit in the Department of Education. We are writing to you in the hope that you can bring a fresh and pragmatic approach to the issues we have been raising with both the Minister and your Department for over a year now. ETHX represents in or about 1,000 highly motivated and enthusiastic parents from Dublin 8 and Dublin 12. We are campaigning for the inclusion of Dublin 8 and 12 in the catchment area for the new second-level school in Harold’s Cross.

We appreciate that the work that goes into school planning and striking the right balance is phenomenal. We have attached one of our original position papers by way of background and hope you can take the time to read it and this correspondence (**App1**).

4 representatives of ETHX met with the Minister for Education on the 13<sup>th</sup> of February. This meeting followed a packed public meeting of local parents called to address the lack of choice of second level schools for the primary school children of Dublin 8 and Dublin 12. The first engagement we received from the Minister after that meeting, was a letter dated the 7<sup>th</sup> of May but circulated on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May (late on the morning that the Minister was due to officially open the new school building at Griffith Barracks on the South Circular Road, Dublin 8, where the public meeting had taken place). The Group were extremely disappointed both in terms of the timing and the content of the response received.

Inclusion of Dublin 8 and Dublin 12 in the catchment is not simply a policy issue for us but as parents something that directly affects us and goes to the root of our inalienable constitutional rights. It also greatly affects the health and well-being of a huge number of children in our local community. As a Group we attempted to address all the issues through advocacy and participation on a principled and reasonable basis. We felt that the letter we received from the Minister did not take any of our representations or the view of the actual parents in the community into account, for the reasons that we will set out below.

## **Privilege / Discrimination**

First, we want to address the overriding issue of privilege and discrimination that the Minister's letter has highlighted. What is disappointingly clear from the letter of the 7<sup>th</sup> of May last from the Minister for Education, Mr. Joe McHugh is that there is privilege upon privilege with regards to the provision of the new secondary schools serving Dublin South City. The school planning districts of Dublin 2, 4 and 6 have 100% progression levels, excellent choice in education (demonstrated by the number of parents from outside those postcodes, see **APP 2** choosing to send their children to those areas) and diversity of choice. Notwithstanding that they are being given three new non-feeing paying schools, which presumably in line with current demand will be multi-denominational and co-educational.

Also, what is clear from the letter is that three new multi denomination, co-education primary schools in Dublin 4, Dublin 2 and Dublin 6 are all being facilitated at second level with a brand-new second level school.

Canalway NS, Riverview NS and Griffith Barracks MDS opened before the three primary schools mentioned above in the adjoining school planning districts of Dublin 8 and Dublin 12, presumably to cater for demand. Yet, the children attending those schools have been given no such fabulous new resources for second level, leaving a fragmented school population forced to travel across the city to access choice in education. They are being further discriminated against by being denied access to the new schools on their doorstep.

It is also questionable whether, as the Minister puts it, this is actually "best use of taxpayer's money" buying school properties and providing three new south city schools in the most expensive areas in the City in which to live and buy property? Having a more inclusive catchment by including children from Dublin 8 and Dublin 12 may add justification to the spend.

To address the points discussed with the Minister and his response:

### **1. Demographic Demand**

- **Migration:** We are consistently being told that the Catchment for the proposed new school in Harold's Cross opening next year is "in response to imminent demographic demand arising in the Dublin 6, Clonskeagh and Dublin 6W School Planning Areas". The **attached (App2)** clearly demonstrates that one of the main pressures on school places in Dublin 6 and Dublin 6W is as a result of the migration of a significant number of children from Dublin 12 and Dublin 8. This migration is a result of the parents of those children, endeavouring to provide the best opportunities for their children, seeking to access choice and diversity in second level education. Dublin 12 currently has no such choice. The inclusion of Dublin 8 in the Catchment for the new school in Sandymount acknowledges a demographic demand. We are now simply looking for a more pragmatic acknowledgement of this need by giving first access to a closer school.

Families from Dublin 8 must face a tough daily commute through the densest rush hour traffic in the city to Sandymount and incur the cost of providing transport (€45 per child per week for a private bus), which is prohibitive for many parents and ludicrous when a school within walking distance (no transport cost) is now being opened, which presents a real and sustainable option.

- **Capacity:** In addition to demographic demand we were told that there is enough capacity in the current school offering in Dublin 8 and Dublin 12. It is clear however that the current offering does not give the choice and diversity that parents are looking for in respect of their children's progression to second level. Excluding these children from a brand-new school on their doorstep will not address the issues of under capacity in the current school offerings in these neighbourhoods.
- **Legitimate Expectation:** The letter states that a demographic exercise at primary level is undertaken also to determine where additional school accommodation is needed. Surely the fact that two new multi denominational co-educational non fee paying primary schools under the patronage of Educate Together have opened in Dublin 8 and Dublin 12 in the last few years (to add to the existing MDS at Griffith Barracks) should have a bearing on the allocation of new second level school places. The parents who subscribe to and support these new schools have a legitimate expectation that there would be some form of follow through available for their children as is being provided for the new primary schools serving Dublin 2, Dublin 4, Dublin 6\_ Clonskeagh and Dublin 6W.
- **Housing:** The letter goes on to say that new residential developments in school planning areas can alter demand but so can the rejuvenation of existing housing stock and nowhere is this more evident than in the Dublin 8 and Dublin 12 post codes. This must have had a bearing on planning the new primary schools in Dublin 8 and Dublin 12 over the last number of years. But there has been no equivalent provision made for second level, as has been for the most recent new primary schools at Dublin 2, Dublin 4 and Dublin 6.

## 2. Parental Preference

- The Department of Education speaks about parental preference and the importance of giving the parents of children attending schools in certain areas a vote in relation to the type of patronage they want for all new schools. The parents from Dublin 8 and Dublin 12 will continue to make every effort to access these new schools but by virtue of the catchment restrictions are being denied a voice in the patronage.

### 3. No Change required to School Planning Districts and Precedent for a Catchment including 4 school planning districts.

- The new school in Sandymount recognised a demand in Dublin 8 for choice and diversity in second level education and included Dublin 8 in the catchment. The Sandymount school provided **a regional solution incorporating 4 school planning districts into a catchment**, broadening access to that new school for as many children as possible.
- We are simply asking that this vision is also applied to the catchment in Harold's Cross by also including four school planning districts, Dublin 6\_ Clonskeagh and Dublin 6W together with Dublin 8 and Dublin 12 in the catchment. There is no deviation from previous practice in this regard. Access to the Harold's Cross site for Dublin 8 and Dublin 12 will provide a more sustainable option (that will not force children to travel for over an hour through the densest traffic in the city) and facilitate the vibrant primary school community of Dublin 12 and Dublin 8 continuing in their educational journey together.

#### **Our Request**

We are therefore appealing to you as the person in charge of planning for the future education of our children to address the following:

- Discrimination with the regards to access to education.
- Fragmentation of existing school communities to the detriment of children's health
- No choice and no voice for parental preference

By including Dublin 8 and Dublin 12 in the catchment for the Harold's Cross school you will be:

- Providing real choice and access to fabulous brand-new facilities to as many children in a community as possible.
- Working to preserve and promote vibrant school communities to the benefit of the health and well-being of as many children living in the city as possible.
- Giving a real voice to parental preference and a real opportunity for as many parents as possible to be part of these new school communities
- Providing real choice in education within easy commutable distances (walking and cycling) in line with the Governments action on climate change.

We are hugely enthusiastic about the proposal that negotiations will commence with regards to joint patronage of existing schools in Dublin 12. Every space that will come on stream in the coming years that offer diversity in education will be needed (In 2025 there will be over 150 children transitioning to post-primary from multi-denominational primary schools alone in Dublin 8 and Dublin 12). These may ultimately prove very successful however it is very early in the day to make an informed decision on this. Therefore, in the meantime, we request that you seriously consider giving all children equal access to new schools opening in their communities and a fair chance to continue their education based on choice as opposed to necessity. We are aspirational with regards to our children's education and are the type of parents needed to support all of these projects and we will do so.

We hope that you can appreciate that sometimes the statistics don't fully represent what is in fact happening on the ground whereas real people do. We are representative of a sizeable, motivated and enthusiastic group of parents (not a demographic exercise or statistic). We would like to demonstrate our enthusiasm and skill set to you in person. We will happily travel to Tullamore to meet with you at any stage for that purpose. I am also happy to take a call during office hours on XXXXXXXXXX. Please visit our website and engage with us on this issue and thank you for taking the time to read this correspondence.

Yours sincerely,

On Behalf of ETHX

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