

Opening Remarks on the School Buildings Programme

I thank the Chairperson and the committee for the invitation to contribute to your consultation on the school building programme.

I should note that consultation on this matter with our members was not possible given that the invitation for submissions arrived when schools were already on their summer break.

As our written submission notes, the demand for school places and the consequential demand for the extension of existing schools and the construction of new schools is not well understood as the State collects little to no information, either qualitatively or quantitatively, on school admissions, over-subscription, and school place refusals.

As part of a previous submission to this committee on the impact of religion on school admissions we undertook a survey of schools in the greater Dublin area and found that aside from religion having a negligible influence on oversubscription that the issue of oversubscription was confined to just a few areas of the city. In these areas the State had failed to provide for an adequate number of school places, thereby causing schools to be over-subscribed – the issue is a *building barrier*, not a so-called *baptism barrier*.

From data we included in our written submission it is noticeable that the majority of oversubscribed schools are in areas that are experiencing rapid population growth. However, population growth is not the only factor: it is significant that not one of the oversubscribed schools identified is a DEIS school. Demand for what may be perceived as middle-class schools, or access to feeder schools for popular secondary schools, is also a factor. These factors influence parents to seek school places outside what may be understood as their natural catchment area. Other factors include the impact of commuting routes, with parents choosing schools that are convenient for drop-offs or collections to and from work.

We believe that public policy should be evidence driven. The current practice of using Census data to identify the need for the provision of additional school places in an area is not sufficient to capture the complexity of what is happening on the ground. Schools can provide significant and helpful data on the complex factors driving schools admissions and thereby assist in understanding where the provision of additional school places is needed. CPSMA are willing to engage with our members on this issue and to work with this committee in understanding the nature of the demands on our primary school system.