

***Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Education, Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny meeting on the Education (Admissions to School) Bill 2020***

Date February 1<sup>st</sup>. 2022

**Introduction**

Míle bhuíochas to you Mr. Chairperson and to your committee for the opportunity to present to you. My name is Pat McKelvey Director of Schools for Cork ETB and I represent ETBI here today. There are 250 post-primary schools in the ETB sector of which 48 offer education through the medium of Gaeilge. In addition, we have 27 Community National schools within our remit.

**Background and context**

When you walk into an ETB school, you walk into a school reflective of its own local community. You might see a few signs on the corridor walls: co-educational, multi denominational, excellence in teaching and learning, an inclusive school, a diverse school. When the school bell rings and the students of an ETB school emerge onto the corridors, you will witness at first hand a manifestation of those signs: children from traveller backgrounds, children in receipt of learning support, children emerging from a special educational setting, international students, students of various religious persuasions and none, refugee children, children living in the community.

The question has to be asked: how all of these students, representing such diversity, come through an admissions process and end up under one roof: the answer is simple - in an ETB school, the school community is a reflection of those who live and work within its environs. An ETB enrolment or admissions process is open: we accept all, and where we are oversubscribed, we have criteria within our policies that are very much embedded in a spirit of supporting the members of the local community.

Yes we have admissions criteria to support a fair and open admissions process, used especially where we have an oversubscribed school. Those criteria are very much

grounded in a community focus within the spirit of accepting all students and providing a welcome for everyone.

### Current issues

In a recent survey of our sixteen ETBs, representing 250 post primary schools, and 27 community national schools, only eight of the ETBs operated a past pupil criterion within their Admissions Policy, but in reality only two ETBs actually used that particular criterion for the 2021 cohort of students in first year. For the eight ETBs who have the past pupil as a criterion, on average this appeared as a fourth or fifth criteria, on a shortlisting list outlined in all admissions policies and was rarely used as a result of this low-level prioritisation of the past pupil criterion

The parent or grandparent criterion is a cause of concern and ETBI has no difficulty if it were not permitted to be a criteria. Many siblings, or students from primary feeder schools, or students in the recognised catchment area, are in fact children of past pupils, and these students, added to the 25% criterion set aside for past pupils, often result in a far greater percentage of past pupils representing a cohort of students in any incoming year group.

### Recommendations

While we have this opportunity today to consider the current Act, it does help us to give some consideration to all Admissions areas that are a cause of concern, within the current legislation.

- There is a loophole regarding applicants applying to other schools also, or more than one school. That is, there is nothing about the timeline for when parents must tell the school which school they are accepting.
- The Act does not allow age to be a reason to refuse a student, even in an undersubscribed school.
- The Act does not allow for a Principal or board of management to uphold its duty of care to the school community in the case of an applicant who poses a threat; if the school has a place then s/he must be accepted into the school. This

is fine as long as all schools apply the act in the same way, but that has not always been our experience in the ETB sector.

- The issue of twins/triplets continues to be a cause of concern: should we treat them as separate applications or as one? Either way they can be discriminated against.
- The approval/sanction by the SENO of a Special Class often comes after the Annual Admissions Notice has been published and the admissions application window has closed
- Cumbersome form filling is off-putting for many parents, particularly those with low level literacy skills. An admissions application process is a complicated journey for many families.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude, ETB schools have an open and transparent approach to admissions. Where the past pupil criteria do exist in a very small number of schools, it is so low down the list of selection criteria that it is not often used, and indeed many students of past pupils will be offered a place as a sibling, a feeder schools, or a catchment area. As such, it would not be a cause of great concern to us if it were removed, provided it is removed for every school.

### **List any policies/reports/documents used or referenced in compiling this submission**

Equal Status Acts 2000-2018  
 Education Act 1998  
 Education and Training Board Act 2013