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Chairperson's Foreword

On reflection the year since our Annual Delegate Conference 2002 for me, can be summed up as the year of "pressure". National Parents Council - Primary has been subject to many demands which had and have the potential to leave the organisation both divided and discredited.

First, there has been the need to revamp the organisation and bring it into the 21st century. This has necessitated an analysis of NPC structures and of evaluating what is working, what is not and of what could if the necessary energising supports are given. Much time has been given to this project because it will shape our future and ADC will facilitate discussion and examination of the structure and services of NPC. At the same time the National Executive will bring these findings and recommendations to our parents through county meetings. It is for you, our members, to digest and determine what satisfies you and leaves you hopefully wanting to frequent the NPC "restaurant".

Secondly, there has been a growing demand by parents to speak out and take action against an educational system which is hopelessly under-resourced and failing to satisfy its clients. This frustration and anger has fostered the creation of lobby groups dealing with single issues. These groups have much to recommend them but they are just that -single issue driven. The strength of National Parents Council - Primary is that it is concerned with all matters concerning primary education. Parents are understandably irate and frustrated. With over one hundred sub-standard primary schools in the south of Ireland and resource teaching hours being reduced for some pupils one must ask

"What picture of our educational system do we present to our northern colleagues and to our European partners?"

Certainly it is not one that is progressive, modern and fit for our citizens.

The National Parents Council - Primary must embrace the challenge of addressing the needs of parents and lead the way. We must have the courage to take action along with and on behalf of the half million parents and guardians whom we represent. Certainly, the National Executive has that courage and in the last year has demonstrated it by working on internal demands and producing actions as it deemed necessary. Now, we must look at the needs of our parents and quickly lead on the concerns which are resulting in the anger and frustration that we have witnessed over the last year.

The third pressure which we face revolves around funding. The funding to the NPC Training and Development Programme has been cut by fifty five per cent. Sadly this means that our two valued Outreach Workers (Ms Kathi Dillon and Ms Maria Ingle) have had to be let go. NPC Training and Development Manager, Ms Fidelma Finch has also left the organisation; we greatly appreciate her contribution and wish her well for the future. As a consequence of the cuts, we cannot cover the cost of running much-needed workshops such as Board of Management training and parent association development for all the counties. Instead, we are having to prioritise by targeting lapsed counties and fund the workshops to them as they are most in need. Other counties are being asked to cover the cost of running their workshops because of this loss of monies. None of us are happy with this request to counties. How could we be? We ask the question

“How do we fulfil the demands and obligations made of us through the Education Act to inform and empower parents without the necessary resources to do so?”

Understandably, this is an added pressure and one which should not exist. It is small wonder that tensions are brewing.

These are the challenges which will determine the viability and future of National Parents Council - Primary. As Chairperson, I hope and believe that we have the determination and commitment to successfully overcome these pressures. Much has been achieved by NPC because we believe in the empowerment of parents. Let us never forget that. Parents have much to offer to the educational partnership as we are the direct link between the child and the school, but the success of the partnership necessitates the other partners taking on board our concerns and working to resolve them. We want the best for our children and we demand it for them and on behalf of them. I believe that we have within us the ability and determination to achieve this desire. We must not shirk our responsibility.

Patricia Forde-Brennan

Chairperson

INTRODUCTION

Education Services suffer huge cutbacks

This has been a difficult year for NPC and the education community in general as a wide range of education programmes and services have been frozen or cut back severely.

The Minister for Finance has taken a short-sighted approach to education funding. The government should not treat children and primary education as a drain on national resources but as a valuable investment in the future. The foundation stone of children's education and future life is a good primary education. NPC, at all levels, will need to keep the primary education agenda as a Government priority and thus help to ensure that resources to secure that agenda are made a high priority in government spending.

When resources are scarce, there is an even greater need for a planned approach to the funding of education; we need to set priorities, with long-term goals in view. We see no evidence of such a strategic approach now. Programmes and services are being cut indiscriminately and across the board – even programmes that affect the most marginalized and vulnerable children. NPC calls on the Minister to immediately enter into consultation with the partners and organise an overall and strategic plan for education spending.

Slow progress on essential change

There have been many positive developments in education. However, progress continues to be disappointingly slow in some areas of great interest to parents. For example, NPC had greatly welcomed the new National Educational Welfare Board. The Board, with its duty to promote regular school attendance and to tackle absenteeism and early school leaving, could make a real difference for some of the most vulnerable children in Irish society. In

spite of this, the funding to allow the Board to fulfil its statutory remit was not made available.

NPC wanted a proper consultation process throughout the country on the provisions in the Education Disability Bill before the Bill was enacted. We are disappointed that this has not yet happened.

Another area where progress has been remarkably slow is in agreeing a complaints procedure for parents as provided for in the Education Act.

Modernisation

Teachers were awarded pay increases through the Benchmarking process. The public was promised that new and modern ways of working would be negotiated in return for these pay increases. NPC argued, and continues to argue, that time for parent teacher meetings outside children's teaching time, and to suit parents' work and home arrangements must be part of that modernisation.

We demanded too that other essential, and welcome, school related activities such as in-service days and school planning days should also take place outside children's teaching time. At present children are losing at least 7 days of valuable teaching time per year. We maintain that time for these essential school related activities should be part of a teacher's normal contract. Provision for adequate supervision of children during breaks and before and after schools was also stressed by NPC.

Our focus for 2001/2002

Last year parents identified four key priority areas in primary education: class size; the educational psychological service; safe school transport and school accommodation.

NPC mounted a campaign on class size. The issue was discussed throughout the country.

The campaign culminated when a petition of 36,000 signatures was presented to the Minister.

Successive governments have ignored the issue of safe school transport. A recent EU directive has called for seat belts on school buses. This is exactly what NPC has pressed for since its establishment and we must work hard to ensure that the Irish government incorporates the provision here.

A major survey was undertaken on the cost of free primary education to parents. The average cost of sending a child to primary school was over €1000, plus €1500 if after-school childcare is included.

Openness and Accountability

NPC welcomed the Minister's commitment to openness and transparency in the allocation of capital funding for school building. We also welcome the Minister's commitment to plan the capital budget over several years rather than for one year.

It is essential to have clear criteria and clear priorities for giving money for building projects. These are our priorities:

- Schools that breach health and safety regulations must be refurbished immediately
- Schools that lack the basic facilities to deliver the curriculum, are a priority
- We must maintain the existing school stock in good order, to avoid creating new accommodation problems
- Boards should build depreciation into their accounts, as other organisations do

There is huge ongoing investment in school buildings; this investment must yield benefits to the community and to the tax payer. New school facilities should also serve as community facilities – the community will then bear more responsibility for the upkeep of that facility.

The Department of Education and Science has decided that information is to be denied to parents about the work of the schools their children are attending. Parents yet again have no official source of information to help them choose a school for their child. As openness, transparency, and accountability are becoming more evident throughout public and private services, the DES moves in precisely the opposite direction. Why the secret about how our schools are doing for the nation's children?

NPC resources targeted for cutbacks

The 2003 budget allocation to NPC to provide a national training and development programme for parents and home-school partnership has been the subject of a massive cutback and amounts to a 55% cut on our 2002 allocation, resulting in a reduction from over €300,000 to €150 000.

It is essential now that the Department and parents have a clear picture of the seriousness of the crisis facing NPC. The future of the organisation is in the balance as a result of the cutbacks.

We can no longer employ the small core staff that has managed and delivered the national training and development programme. Two outreach workers who were working on developing innovative ways of working with parents at county level have been let go. Their work had excellent scope as a way forward for work on the ground with parents.

NPC has consistently contributed to, and supported the overall aims and objectives of the Department of Education and Science. We have given generously of our modest resources to help to develop policy and legislation at national level, and to work on programmes that are in tune with the Department's own commitment to the role parents play in ensuring good educational outcomes for children.

Other agencies or groups cannot take our place in the educational spectrum. We have consistently championed the interests of children in ways that no other interest group can. We have done this to the best of our ability in the face of growing demands on stretched resources. We are seriously disappointed that our role and our work have not been safeguarded by the Department.

There are many challenges for us as there are for others in the education community. In NPC we have been willing to take up the challenge to modernise our own organisation.

The organisation at all levels has worked hard so that we are now close to proposing a strategy for change and modernisation. This year we also undertook a prolonged process with an external consultant to help the board, management and staff, clarify and agree roles and relationships within the organisation. We as an organisation are committed to moving towards a vibrant future for parents and children. We welcome the challenge and look forward to change.

Fionnuala Kilfeather
Chief Executive

See NPC website for more information



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE OF NPC

Work on Strategic Plan 2002/2003

In recent times, NPC has been confronting many challenges to the future health and strength of the organisation. We have seen major changes in social patterns that pose problems for the organisation going forward. As parents come under increasing pressures in their own lives, only the most vibrant and relevant organisations will attract them. The relevance of our organisation to the needs and lives of parents has come under scrutiny from parents themselves; we have seen affiliations from parent associations 'stick' at an unacceptably low level; our county branches are struggling in several areas to win the interest and involvement of parents, creating an ever heavier burden of work on volunteers and staff. When we look closely at our membership, we see a pattern in which large sections of the community of parents across the country are not represented.

NPC has acknowledged these challenges honestly and openly, and set out to address them. We have also been heartened by the fact that there is so much evidence of the value and impact of the work we do, and the continuing commitment of parents to their children's education; these things are not in doubt, and these are the realities that have stiffened our resolve to modernise the organisation in line with the needs and wishes of parents.

In the course of a wide-ranging consultation process during 2001, we identified 4 key goals for the organisation, and core educational values that were important for parents:

These goals were:

- To make NPC accessible to a much wider range of parents
- To help parents to get the support they need for their role as educators

- To strengthen NPC's consultation, and its lobbying and representational role
- To help improve parental involvement at school level

During the past year, the National Executive and staff have worked on translating the goals proposed by parents into actions. This work has resulted in a set of strategic proposals. The elements of those proposals are as follows:

- A clear statement of our aim and purpose as an organisation, to focus the work of the organisation, and to energise parents around the goals and values of parental involvement in children's learning. The purpose of these statements would be to offer simple, but powerful messages about parents as a hugely significant voice for children in Irish education; what they want for children, and what they need to play their part
- Proposals for radically opening up the membership base, to strengthen the voice and the influence of NPC as the parents' voice; a voice for all kinds of parents in all parts of the country
- Proposals for much more flexible ways to be part of a national movement at local level, in tune with the needs, interests and availability of parents – minimum bureaucracy and maximum access
- New ways of focusing and targeting the very limited resources of the services, to get maximum gain for parents – working to influence national mainstream programmes, to work in partnership with other organisations, and target our own resources to things that only we can do best
- New and flexible ways of consulting, so as to widen the base of consultation and strengthen our hand in lobbying on behalf of parents

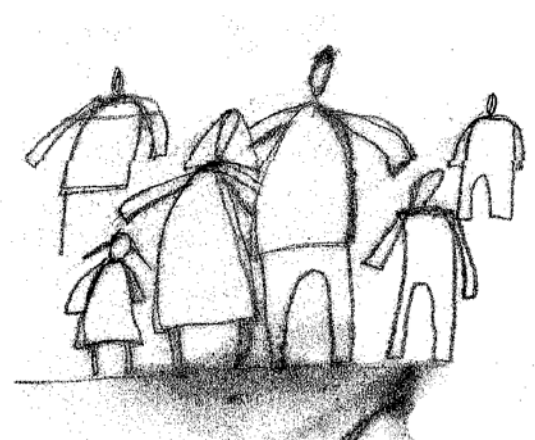
- Proposals for new ways of developing more comprehensive positions on educational issues, to strengthen our input into national policy
- Proposals for new organisational structures to carry forward a (hopefully) hugely increased membership
- New ways of using staffing structure to carry forward the work

The National Executive will be opening up a national discussion on these proposals, beginning at ADC 2003. Parents will have opportunities for exploration and debate on the proposals over the coming weeks and months.

The end outcome should be a new and energised organisation, which is open, accessible, flexible, and responsive to parents' needs, as well as being effective, efficient, targeted and accountable.

The discussions over the next few months are very important ones for parents and for their national organisation. We look forward to a rich and energetic engagement around radical possibilities for the future of the organisation.

It is the hope and expectation of the organisation that a strategy for change will be agreed very early in the coming school year, and will be put into place very quickly, on a staged basis.



NPC SERVICE - RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF PARENTS

The NPC service includes a help and information line and an advocacy service. The service provided by NPC is guided by the clear and expressed needs of parents. Demands on all aspects of the service have increased enormously over the years.

During the past year we have assisted parents who have experienced difficulties in having problems resolved at school level. Where problems have not been resolved we have assisted parents who wished to raise these problems with the Department of Education and Science, the Ombudsman, the Commissioner for Information or with other appropriate authorities.

We need to expand our service for parents but this will not be possible without additional resources.

The NPC help and information service

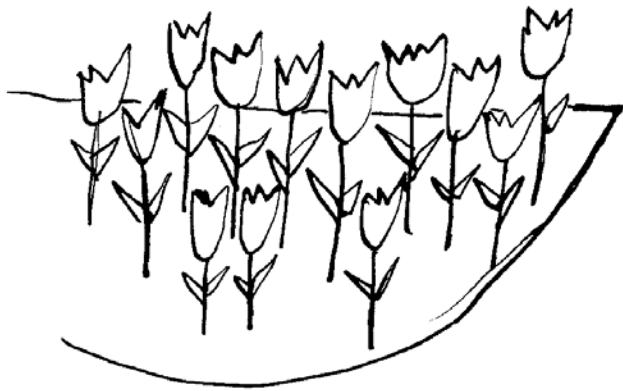
The NPC Helpline, which has been running for five years, is a service for parents of primary school children and is run by NPC help and information officer with the support of trained volunteers. Parents can access information, encouragement, and support to assist them in responding to their children's educational needs.

Many queries (22%) were about education provision and school policy, for example: in-service days for teachers, the erosion of the school year, enrolment policy at school level, modern language in the curriculum, homework, unqualified substitution, school uniforms and books, the weight of schoolbags. A further 18% of calls related to problems with principals and teachers, while 8% of calls were directly concerned with inadequate supervision of children. Bullying is still a matter of serious concern and was the subject of 17% of calls. Setting up and running Parent Associations, including

disputes within PAs accounted for 22% of calls. Board of Management issues made up 8% of enquiries. The remainder of calls 5% were about insurance and school transport.

Advocacy service

The advocacy service is a service for parents who are taking or intending to take a formal complaint to the board of management of their child's school. A skilled, trained advocate can help a parent to prepare well for a hearing of their complaint and present their case clearly and effectively. The advocate will attend the hearing if the parent wishes.



NPC TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2002

NPC runs a national programme for parents, offering them training, development and support in their involvement with their children's education and as partners in the education system. The purpose of the Training and Development programme is to offer parents skills and support, to help them to be actively involved in their children's education at every level.

The Education Act (1998) and the Revised Curriculum demonstrate the importance of the role of parents/guardians in supporting their children's education. The services in training, development and support offered by NPC aim to promote effective parental involvement and partnership at various levels and in different ways.

Networking with other partners

During the year, we pursued a policy of developing networks and linkages with many other groups and programmes that have common interests in training and development opportunities for parents and partnership. The groups included:

Traveller Centres, Asylum Support Services, Best Health for Children, Local/County Development Agencies, National Association for Parents, National Plan for Women (Dept of Justice, Equality and Law Reform), NCCA (Curriculum), INTO, School Principals, Education Centres.

Accreditation and Certified Training for NPC Trainers

The accredited training course which was designed by NPC in conjunction with FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council) for NPC trainers was completed successfully in November 2002. Six two-day professional development modules were delivered in 2001/02.

The focus in the training was on:

- understanding the adult learner and what impacts on the learning process
- recognising diversity in a training group and working with it to aid growth and development
- understanding group dynamics and its effects on learning
- understanding conflict and ways of managing conflict
- identifying the prerequisites for effective communication in groups
- designing, planning, delivering and reviewing training programmes appropriate to the needs of specific groups of parents

The cohort of NPC trainers will be a valuable resource for parents and NPC.

Training for new parent associations

During the past year trainers worked with new parent associations who requested such training. The purpose of the training is primarily to:

- help parents to understand the role and work of a parent association
- help the group to develop skills in working together
- help to build good partnerships of parents, staff and other members of the school community
- gain a knowledge of good practice in working on a committee

Training for parent representatives on Boards of Management

The aim of the training programme offered to parents representatives on the boards of management was to prepare them to be effective members on the board, to understand the role and responsibilities of a school board and to represent parents of children in that school.

Support and information sessions at local level

Since 1995 a fund has been in operation for projects to be run by county branches for the parents in their area. The primary focus of the county projects is to offer training and development opportunities for parents, as well as to support volunteers at county level – the county executive members – to organise and run these sessions.

The projects included evening talks on educational topics or longer sessions such as one day seminars and workshops to give more opportunity for in depth study of topics of interest to parents of primary school children. The topics chosen were educational issues of interest to parents. The feedback on these sessions has been very positive.

Home School Partnership Programme

The aim of the home school partnership programme has been to give tangible and practical support to the process of building partnership between home and school. Parents, teachers, and children were encouraged to work together on a practical project, which is seen by all to be educationally worthwhile. Evaluations of this programme over the past few years have shown its success in developing partnership between parents, teachers and children.

The findings and feedback from the evaluations will form the basis of a Handbook on Home School Partnership giving Guidelines and Suggestions.

Outreach Programme

Over the years, parents in many towns and villages around the country have benefited from their involvement with NPC and its training and development programmes. We have been concerned that there may be parents who, for one reason or another, have not been able to access NPC and its services at county or national level. Like other voluntary organisations, we embarked on a

new development in 2001, and put in place an Outreach Programme in three counties. This was intended to be a three year pilot project. The purpose was to explore, with local parents, good ways of supporting their children, acquiring information and accessing the services that parents of primary school children need for their children's education. The Outreach Programme had experience of working with county branches and other local agencies.

Work with home-school community liaison teachers, principals, community and resource centres and agencies has created possibilities for working with travellers, refugees and asylum seekers as well as disadvantaged parents who would otherwise not be involved with the NPC training and development programme. The Outreach Programme has had to be discontinued because of the cut in NPC funding.

In partnership with the European Parents Association (EPA)

In 1998 a successful Training of Parents in Partnership Module took place in every country of the European Union. Out of this module a need was identified for the training of teachers to work in partnership with parents.

Over the last two years National Parents Council - Primary along with the national parent bodies in Italy and France have worked in three teacher training institutes in delivering training to student teachers as part of their studies.

NPC has worked with the Marino Institute of Education in Dublin with a group of eighteen student teachers. The Module 'Partnership with Parents' was one of their elective choices. The course objective was that 'By the end of the module the participants would have an appreciation of the importance of home school collaboration for the effective learning of the child. They

will have acquired insights into the dynamics of the home school relationship and will have enhanced the skills they need to develop for this crucial aspect of their future professional role.'

The training took place over six two hourly sessions. It was delivered by an NPC staff member and a staff member from the Marino Institute.

Evaluation of the Irish module will begin shortly once student work has been assessed. The next step of the process is to witness the French module and then for Ireland, France and Italy to draw up a European module on Partnership with Parents.

The launch of the European module will take place in September 2003.



NPC AT COUNTY LEVEL

The NPC county branch is a structure through which parents and parent associations in a county can come together and work for the best possible educational experience for children. While many of the county activities focus on parents from affiliated schools, county branches regularly open educational talks, information sessions and workshops to all parents.

Through their county branch parent association delegates:

- exchange ideas about children's education
- share experiences
- develop partnerships between children, teachers and parents
- discuss educational issues of local and national importance

NPC's county branches offer opportunities to:

- build a network of parents at county level who can give and receive support
- enable parents to exchange ideas about their children's education, parental involvement and children's learning
- channel the views, ideas and concerns of parents to national level
- make links with teachers and others in the county who are interested in children's education
- offer opportunities for sharing information about the activities of parent associations within the county
- offer training and development projects to improve parents' capacity to help their children and to become involved in their schools
- disseminate up-to-date information on the work of NPC at national level to parents in the county.

County branches have undertaken many projects during the past year. Themes of talks, projects and workshops included bullying; self-esteem; coping with dyslexia; the new curriculum; drug abuse awareness; school transport; grants to boards of management; cost of back to school; 'Be Safe- Bí Slán'; school building conditions; Christmas card competition; European day of parents and school; integrated education; improving the structure of NPC; European Parents Association; primary to secondary school - the transition; specific learning difficulties; Internet safety; children's eating habits; psychological assessments; class size petition; SPHE; school Inspectorate; Whole School Evaluation; Education Act; school development planning; mobile phone safety; Children First Initiative; Family Welfare Conference; supervision; child abuse prevention programme; county newsletters. Members of the county executives gave talks to parent associations within their county branch. County Branches Cork West and Cork East held a joint event – a talk by child psychologist 'The building blocks of childhood development'. Counties used local media to highlight many of these issues.

County branches and their quiz co-ordinators put a lot of work into organising the county finals of the Cadbury/NPC Challenge. This nationwide table quiz for children involved the support of teachers, the work of hundreds of parents and the participation of thousands of children; an estimated 12,000 children from 1,800 schools. Sponsorship is by Cadbury, who have been sponsoring the quiz since 1992. The 2002 National Final was held on the 26th May 2002 in the Burlington Hotel, Dublin, the winner was St. Patrick's National School, Tuam, Co. Galway, who were also the winners in 2000. Over the years the winners have included teams from counties Clare, Louth, Mayo, Tipperary, Carlow, Cork and 4 times County Galway.

Counties availed of training for new parent associations, existing parent associations and for the core county group roles i.e. treasurer, chairperson, secretary.

County branches regularly undertake local consultation on important educational issues. The views of parents have been gathered on a range of topics: school transport, safety and supervision, funding for school books, school building conditions, availability of grant monies for boards of management, availability of special needs teachers, teacher/pupil ratios, cost of back to school, child abuse prevention programme, motions for conference, class size and parent/teacher meetings.

Many counties worked in cooperation with local Education Centres, Libraries, Health Boards, and County Councils and other organisations such as CPSMA.

FIRST EUROPEAN DAY OF PARENTS AND SCHOOL

NPC celebrated the first European Day of Parents and School at national, county and school level on 8 October 2002. This day, which will be an annual event, was celebrated in schools throughout Europe.

The goal of the day is to promote effective partnership between schools, teachers, parents and children. The day is also focussed at giving parents a voice in the formulation of educational policies at European level.

NPC in collaboration with the National Centre for Technology in Education took the opportunity to promote the safe use of the Internet for Children. The occasion provided an important opportunity to highlight the importance of parents, teachers, children and board members working

together to protect young people and to promote the responsible use of the Internet.

In Ireland there were many practical examples of parents, teachers, children and board members working in partnership at national and local level, for example:

- NPC brought together a cross-border group of parents, teachers and children from two scoileanna lán Gaeilge. The groups visited Croke Park, the Lord Mayor of Dublin, the National Museum and went bowling.
- At county level Laois County Branch hosted a public lecture on Bullying.
- A school in Cork used the day to promote environmental responsibility through a 'making your own compost project' collecting and making compost and ending with growing plants on the compost. They linked projects with a school in another country.
- St. Laurence O'Toole's National School in Roundwood, Co. Wicklow, hosted a European Day in their school where each class participated in various activities including art projects and quizzes relating to Europe, also the older children cooked dishes from different European countries.
- Presentation Convent Primary School Bandon, Co. Cork, participated in various programmes including a multinational project, the idea being to de-mystify multinational cultures and make them recognisable, parents of the children presented the unique cuisine from their countries of origin.

NPC – INTEREST GROUPS

NPC has four Interest Groups representing: Scoileanna Lán Gaeilge / Gaeltacht schools, Minority Religion schools, Special Education schools & an Integrated Education Group (representing parents of children with special educational needs who are integrated in mainstream school).

The Integrated Education Group met with the Department of Education and Science to discuss the Disability Bill, held a meeting with county Integrated Education representatives, gave a talk to Louth Branch of NPC, completed a questionnaire on determining the actual provision of resources to children in mainstream schools and completed their Terms of Reference.

The Minority Religion Group representing parents of children attending schools under minority religion management, contributed to a submission from NPC “to inform the education input into the National Plan against Racism”; part of the contribution was to ensure that children are made aware of all cultures and religions leading to a more tolerant society.

REPRESENTING THE VIEWS OF PARENTS

Through NPC, parents are represented on many education and other committees. This representation means that a parent perspective influences policy and practice on education and related areas. Some examples are given below.

Primary Curriculum

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment NCCA is now established as a statutory council. (www.ncca.ie) NPC has representation on committees involved in developing primary education. A curriculum framework for early childhood education

and curriculum is being developed, NPC will have an input.

Intercultural Education

The aim of the guidelines which are being developed is to contribute to the development of Ireland as an intercultural society, through the development of a shared sense that language, culture and ethnic diversity is valuable, and a shared willingness and capacity to protect for each other the right to be different. These aims are very much in keeping with representation made by NPC on interculturalism and the rights of minorities.

Curriculum for Children with General Learning Disabilities

Draft curriculum guidelines have been developed for children with mild general learning disabilities (adaptation of the mainstream curriculum); moderate general learning disabilities; severe and profound general learning disabilities (see www.ncca.ie). The guidelines will be in use in schools in the coming year. Feedback from parents and teachers will inform the shape of the final curriculum. NCCA with NPC will be consulting with parents.

RSE workshops for parents

NPC had made the case for a training programme to help parents to help their own child in the area of relationships and sexuality education, in co-operation with the work of the school-based programme. A pilot programme for this purpose was developed in collaboration with NPC. A workshop manual has been published and NPC is looking, with other agencies, at possibilities for delivering the programme.

National Educational Welfare Board

The National Educational Welfare Board is the independent organisation, which was set up under the Education (Welfare) Act 2002. The Board’s main responsibility is to provide new and supportive services to

encourage and promote attendance at school and to ensure that children and young people attend appropriate education and training. The Board has appointed a chief executive and education welfare officers will be appointed around the country to work in close co-operation with schools, teachers, parents and others. Parents will be required to ensure that their children attend school or otherwise receive an appropriate minimum education. The school-leaving age has been raised to 16.

There are a number of areas where national guidelines may be required. These include: school attendance strategies, the recording of attendances, codes of behaviour. Under the Act parents will participate fully in drawing up codes of behaviour at school level in accordance with national guidelines. Understanding that some children experience particular difficulties, NPC is concerned that parents will have to sign the codes of behaviour. We will be seeking guidelines that are child and parent friendly. (www.newb.ie)

National Children's Advisory Council The National Children's Strategy

The National Children's Advisory Council has an independent advisory role in relation to the implementation of the National Children's Strategy. Its membership includes representatives of the statutory and voluntary sector, research community, parents and children.

The National Children's Strategy Advisory Committee: advises the Minister on all aspects of children's lives, contributes to monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy, and advises on the development of mechanisms to consult with children.

Progress to date includes the establishment of Dáil na nÓg – October 2002 and a news programme for children - Network 2 at 5.00

pm. A grant has been given to the ISPCC for a children's consultation unit and a national research project is planned so that children's lives will be better understood. A play and recreation policy has been prepared and is due to be launched in the near future. A detailed document on the implementation of the Children First Guidelines and Vetting has been prepared for the Minister for Children.

Items on the agenda for 2003 include: childcare policy, alcohol and young people, disability issues, obesity in young people, young people and sexual activity

Advisory Committee on the Education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

This committee was set up in November 2001, by the then Minister for Education and Science to review the adequacy of the current range of educational support services for the deaf and hard of hearing and to advise the Minister on areas of the services which require development and adjustment, also to bring forward such proposals as are considered appropriate in order to ensure the development and delivery of an appropriate education support service for students. To date the committee has met with the Department to discuss the Disability Bill, and has received submissions from people throughout the country giving their experiences of the present system for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Ireland.

Commission on School Accommodation

Over the past year the committee has worked on planning for school provision in a rural area, criteria and procedures for the recognition of new second level schools, also criteria and procedures for establishing and maintaining provision through the medium of Irish in individual second level schools or cluster of schools.

New Schools Advisory Committee NSCA

The Minister for Education and Science established the NSAC to give him independent advice on applications for the establishment of new primary schools. The NSAC must consider the views of the existing schools and local community before making recommendations to the Minister. NSAC publish a notice in the local media so that parents and the community can make their views known. NSAC also informs other schools in the area. NPC had sought consultation, through the Commission on School Accommodation, with parents to see what kind of school they would like before new schools were set up.

School Development Planning Consultative Committee

The School Development Planning Consultative Committee is made up of representatives from the Department of Education and Science, National Parents Council, INTO, Catholic Primary School Managers Association, and the National Co-ordinator of SDP, Eileen Flynn. The group meets once a term to hear progress reports on the School Development Planning Initiative (SDPI).

SDPI is now happening in all schools. There are about 30 full time facilitators and 5 co-ordinators. NPC has strongly promoted the involvement of parents in the preparation of school plans, and there is strong commitment to this among the school planning teams. Focus groups of parents have been held, in partnership with the national Co-ordinator of SDPI. These focus groups have given SDPI staff an important insight into parents levels of awareness of school planning, and what they would like to see included in school plans. A booklet for parents on school development planning is being prepared by SDPI, in partnership with NPC.

Strategic Task Force on Alcohol

Established in January 2002 by the Minister for Health and Children to provide advice to Government and public bodies, the task Force made recommendations in ten strategy areas on measures to prevent and reduce alcohol harm (see www.healthpromotion.ie). The Government has agreed that the Minister for Health and Children would work with other Departments and Agencies to progress the recommendations. NPC has noted that consumption of alcohol has impacted on primary age children.

National Conjoint Child Health Committee

The Group was established to implement the recommendations of the Review of Child Health Services for the 0 – 12 year olds which was completed in 1996. Over the past year the committee carried out an assessment of training needs of doctors and nurses involved in delivery surveillance, also the development of child health indicators. Parent Support – a parenting strategy has been produced with key recommendations, universal neonatal audiology screening and metabolic screening of the newborn. Demonstration projects on the following topics are planned or have commenced throughout the country: child health indicators, consumer satisfaction with developmental/child health services, audit of health centre facilities, parent held child health records, school health services, protocols for liaison between community care and tertiary services, pilot of child health nurse.

Children's Rights Alliance

During the past year, the Children's Rights Alliance continued its work focusing on the implementation in Ireland of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The key achievement of the year was the passing of the Ombudsman for Children Act, legislation the Alliance had campaigned for since the early 1990s. The Alliance also

hosted a major international conference on child poverty, published the research report *'Ending Child Poverty in Rich Countries: What Works'* and engaged on a wide range of policy issues, including the rights of Irish children of non-national parents, juvenile justice concerns, access to primary health care, implementation of the Children Act 2001 and the provisions of Budget 2003. The Alliance also produced, in conjunction with NYCI, a ground-breaking research report on children's participation *'Hearing Young Voices'*.

NPC Prebudget submission for 2003

National Parents Council - Primary, since its establishment, has represented strongly that a quality early and primary education is a basic right for all children. A well-resourced primary system is essential if we are to promote equality of opportunity and outcome for each young citizen for his or her life now as a child and for the future. NPC supports the targeting of resources, based on rigorous evaluation of outcomes for children and young people. We believe, despite the current financial situation, that because quality primary education is the basis of justice for all citizens, it must take precedence over other sectors in the education system in terms of allocation of scarce resources.

Parents have identified some key priorities for the education system

- Smaller class size with priority to infant classes
- Access for all children who need the service to the educational psychological service
- The appointment of sufficient educational psychologists to do preventative systemic work as well as assessments
- Access to speech therapy and other ancillary services for all children who need these services

- A safe school transport system
- Training and support systems for school management

NPC continues to press for modernisation of the education system arising from the benchmarking process. There must be gains for children as well as for the teaching profession.

Representing the views of parents to the wider public

NPC members and staff contribute to education debate through public meetings and workshops and through national and local media. Topics covered this year include class size, school transport, children's entitlement to a full school year, benchmarking, educational services for children, the cost of education, going back to school, childcare, education legislation, bullying, right of choice of school, closure of school for elections, special education needs.



NPC - THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

European Parents Association (EPA)

NPC is a member of EPA, which represents over 100 million parents in the European Union and beyond. The EPA programme over the past year included:

- The General Assembly in Turin and conference on “Education and free time, role and responsibility of parents”.
- **European Training Module**, EPA together with three teacher training institutes and three national parents’ associations, has started the project of developing a module for initial training of teachers and for educating both parents and teachers in using this module.
- **East – West Dialogue**, Eastern European countries increasingly contact EPA. The contacts are often from local or regional levels that need help in organising the national level to be accepted as political representatives of parents. To help the needs of parents in Eastern European countries EPA is the co-ordinator of the project East-West Dialogue.
- **Language Clubs**, the project is a follow-up to the European Year of Languages; the aim is to encourage parents and children to learn a foreign language together.
- **European Day of Parents and School**, the aim of the day is to make parents aware of their responsibility as partners in their children’s education, to celebrate the school, to allow a reflection on parent-school collaboration from a European perspective, to encourage the development of home-school partnership, and to make the general public and educational actors aware of the importance of the role of parents, to make EPA visible at the European level, to inform school actors about the tools, opportunities and

initiatives of the European Commission such as Comenius projects, to be the starting point of actions/initiatives – a ‘plus for the future’, to highlight and promote the European dimension and to underline the building of Europe.

EPA Alcuin Award

The Alcuin Award is the European Parents Association annual award for innovation and good practice in partnership in education. This year NPC nominated Guardian Angels’ National School, Blackrock for their project entitled ‘History made tangible through family recollections’.

The German project “Compassion”, developed by the Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference and the Schools Foundation [Schulstiftung] of the Archdiocese of Freiburg, and presented by the Association Katholische Elternschaft Deutschlands (KED), was the overall Alcuin Award 2002 winner.

Socrates II Advisory Committee 2001-2006

The Socrates II Advisory Committee was set up to build on the experience of the first phase of the programme, which ended in 1999. It continues to provide the opportunity to enhance the quality of education and promote co-operation between European education systems across the continuum of the educational process from the earliest stages of learning to post-graduate university levels and including the formal and informal adult education sectors. There are 8 key actions in the new programme:

1. Comenius – targeting school partnerships and the training of educators
2. Erasmus – targeting cooperation in the university and higher education sectors
3. Grundwig – targeting adult education of lifelong learning
4. Lingua – targeting the promotion of language learning and development of teaching materials

5. Minerva – targeting the use of information and communication technologies in the field of education
6. Observation & Innovation – which targets cooperation between policy systems, this action is currently managed by the Department of Education and Science
7. Joint Actions – projects to promote complementarity and added value between Socrates, Leonardo DaVinci (vocational training) and Youth For Europe
8. Accompanying measures – projects to support and underpin the objectives of the programme in general, this is a centralised action managed by the European Commission.

National Parents Council - Primary is a company limited by guarantee and has charitable status. The directors of the company are the members of the National Executive. The directors formally resign at Annual Delegate Conference. Following ADC the members of the incoming executive take their place as directors.

NPC REPRESENTATIVES

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT (NCCA)

Fionnuala Kilfeather

Interculturalism and the Curriculum

Cathy Kenna

Curriculum Guidelines for Students with Mild General Learning Disabilities

Margaret Carroll

Special Education Steering Committee (finished Oct. 2002)

Nuala Uí Dhuill

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT UNIT

Steering Committee of the Directorate, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

Dolores Roberts

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE COMMITTEES

Advisory Committee on the Education of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing

Teresa Eccles

Carolyn Gleeson

Commission on School Accommodation Needs

Marion Lyon

Mícheál Ó Cinnéide

School Development Planning Advisory Committee

Anne Colgan

Curriculum Implementation Group

Fionnuala Kilfeather

Advisory Committee on Traveller Education

Geraldine Graydon

Léargas Socrates 2 (2000-2006) Advisory Committee

Patricia Forde Brennan

The Body established (Education Act 1998 Section 31) for teaching through Irish

Anita McCann

Review of Scrúdú Cailíochta sa Ghaeilge

Anita McCann

National Reading Survey & Reading Survey in Disadvantaged schools

Mary Killeen

Leadership Development for Schools – Advisory Committee

Fionnuala Kilfeather

National Educational Disadvantage Forum

Fidelma Finch

OTHER NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS

Conjoint Child Health Advisory Group

Patricia Forde Brennan

National Children's Advisory Council

Cathy Kenna

Children's Rights Alliance

Geraldine Graydon

National Educational Welfare Board

Fionnuala Kilfeather

Conjoint Committee on Children with Hearing Disabilities

Carolyn Gleeson

Strategic Task Force on Alcohol

Fionnuala Kilfeather – appointed by the Minister for Health and Children

EUROPEAN ORGANISATIONS

European Parents Association

Irish representative on the Administrative Council of the European Parents Association

Michael O'Regan *NPC-Post Primary*

Special Needs Task Force EPA

Geraldine Graydon

European Day of Parents and School 2002 Coordinator

Patricia Forde Brennan

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Midland Health Board

Winifred Cox

Laois County Development Board

Pat O'Sullivan

Community Games (Laois)

Nora Moore

AIRC – voluntary instructor

Seán Campion

Louth Leader

Ann Harmon

Local Task Force (Longford)

Joan McLoughlin

CPSMA Steering Group (Killala)

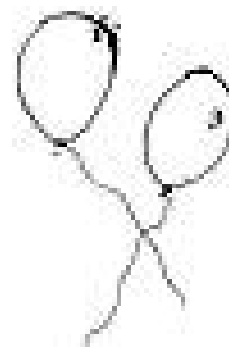
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CPSMA Steering Group (Tuam)

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February 2003

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Fidelma Finch (until February 2003)

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Maria Ingle Laois County
(both until January 2003)

Winifred Jeffers Dublin County
(until July 2002)

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Irene Glennon: Administrator Training & Development Programme

Michelle Davern: PA to CE/Website/Administration

Nora Bowes: Receptionist (CE scheme)