



CONTENTS

Foreword from the Chairperson	1
Introduction from the Chief Executive	2
Planning for the future of NPC: Progress on the Strategic Plan	5
NPC Service – Responding to the Needs of Parents	6
NPC Training and Development Programme 2003	7
NPC at County Level	10
NPC – Interest Groups	11
Representing the Views of Parents	11
NPC – The International Dimension	16
NPC – Representatives on Committees	18
Representation	20
NPC - Staff	24



Chairperson's Foreword

The most important challenge for us as a parents' organisation is to make sure that we keep our attention fixed on the quality of children's lives. The experience of schooling and of learning must be an experience that is good for every child. Children have the right to be happy at school, just as they have the right to be happy at home. There is hard research evidence that it is when young people are not happy at school that they are most at risk of dropping out of school, and dropping out of learning.

We rightly pay a great deal of attention to the formal curriculum, and we have done really good things in curriculum development for primary school children. We are concerned about information technology, and about assessment; we devote a great deal of time to the question of resources. All of these things are important. But when and where do we think and talk about children's experience of schooling? What ways have we for checking and tracking if children are happy at school? Bullying is a huge problem in schools. Every day, NPC takes dozens of calls from parents about this. Whatever is being done, it is not working. It is more than time to take firm action. Bullying ruins children's lives. We can stop it. We must stop it.

Bringing more democracy into schools and involving children and young people in decisions that affect them must be a priority. This is not about power or taking power from teachers; this is about giving children the skills to be good citizens later on; it goes to the heart of what education is about.

We are greatly concerned about the needs of children who are at risk of missing out on what education has to offer on account of disadvantage or special educational need. NPC believes in the dignity and worth of every child. We believe that the state has a duty to ensure that every child gets a fair chance where parents and families cannot do that.

Parents carry a heavy burden of responsibility for children's lives and their learning. Our 'reason for being' as an organisation is that we know just how much influence parents have on children's life chances. We believe that parents must take their responsibility very seriously. Much of our work as an organisation is geared towards helping parents to do the best job they can for their children. We are working hard though our strategic plan to make sure that our organisation is geared up to do this well. We are grateful for the support of the Minister and the Department in this. We need their ongoing support. This is another of those partnerships that deserves the best chance so that children can have the best chance.

I want to note my gratitude for the work undertaken over the past year by the officer board and national executive. I am proud of their work and of the voluntary effort of parents at local, county and regional level. We thank our team of trainers for their supportive work during the year. This has been a difficult year for NPC with funding uncertainty and reduced staff numbers. NPC management and staff in Marlborough Court have risen to the many challenges. Their dedication and skill is much appreciated.

We all look forward to being active participants in shaping the vision for the future of education. More importantly we look forward to radical change arising from the vision.

Anita McCann, Chairperson

INTRODUCTION

The focus of much of our energy and activity over the past year has been to develop a strategy for the modernisation of National Parents Council Primary. Alongside this development we have made a strong case to the Minister for Education and Science to resource the development of parental involvement in education in Ireland.

A vision for the future of NPC

The time is now right for making a quantum shift in the capacity of National Parents Council Primary. A time when resources are scarce is a time for investing in those activities that yield maximum impact for relatively modest outlay.

Real parental involvement shapes children's life chances, in a way that few other kinds of educational endeavour can. This has been the message of NPC since its inception.

The capacity of parents to influence educational outcomes for the better is not confined to middle-class, well educated parents. All the evidence points to the impact of the motivation and commitment of parents of all backgrounds. We just need flexible and responsive ways to invite all parents to engage. At this time, NPC is actively engaged, through its strategic planning process, in ensuring that ours is an organisation for all.

Ours is a difficult message to promote, when there are strongly argued competing claims for resources in other areas of education. A commitment by Government to an integrated investment plan for NPC over the next four years would represent a long term vision for education, which places the learner and their parents at the centre of the system. It would help to create a solid and essential infrastructure to carry the work forward over the decades beyond.

The wider social framework

The Government had made a commitment to a partnership approach to social and economic planning, and to working with the Voluntary and Community sector in service delivery. The relationship between National Parents Council Primary and the Department of Education is a partnership relationship within that wider framework. National Parents Council Primary is more than a representative body for parents; it is an integral part of the educational service delivery framework, working with the State to reach shared goals.

The work of NPC goes beyond education. It contributes to creating a strong civil society. Parents and the wider public can be helped to develop a sense of ownership of the educational endeavour as a key part of all our lives, and not only the lives of students and teachers. In engaging parents and the public in the work of education, we help to create learning communities around the country, and add to the stock of social capital, which is so essential for a strong democracy.

The educational partnership between National Parents Council Primary and the Department of Education

National Parents Council Primary is founded on the fundamental understanding that parents have a crucial influence on children's life chances; this creates an imperative for the State to support the parents' role in several different ways. The work of National Parents Council Primary, through which parents themselves take responsibility for promoting parental involvement, is a central strand of the State's response to promoting parental involvement.

Modernisation

Standardisation of the school year: NPC had sought the standardisation of the school year. This is the first year that all primary schools were required to have the same holidays and

breaks. We now need to know how this has worked out for parents.

The Department has reached agreement with the INTO and school management on arrangements for the year 2004 – 05. NPC was not consulted. We are seeking the views of parents and will represent these to the Department.

Parent Teacher meetings negotiations: NPC asked throughout the Benchmarking process that the parent teacher meetings would be held normally in the evenings, or where there is local agreement to meet actual circumstances they could be held in the daytime but outside school hours.

On foot of proposals from the Arbitration Board it was agreed by the teacher union, the Department and school management bodies that ‘a parent should be able to have a formal meeting with a teacher at a suitable and convenient time. If such a meeting cannot be facilitated at a formal parent teacher meeting then the parent will be offered a suitable and convenient appointment. In each school year there will be one formal parent teacher meeting held in each primary school. This meeting will normally commence at 3.15pm and will end at 5.45pm unless otherwise agreed at local level between all the relevant parties. In any event the parent teacher meeting will not take place during the school tuition period. The school will close 15 minutes early on the day of the formal parent teacher meeting.’

NPC is disappointed with the outcome. NPC has always maintained that attending a parent teacher meeting during the day poses difficulties for the many working parents. There are almost half a million primary school parents, the majority of whom work outside the home. (Only 26.6% of adults are not employed outside the home). Many parents will need to attend parent teacher meetings for more than one child. However,

we are relieved that parents are to be offered an appointment that is suitable and convenient to their needs.

Whole School Evaluation (WSE)

Whole School Evaluation has started and will be carried out in approximately 20 primary schools of varying sizes in the year 2003/2004. Following considerable and ongoing representation by NPC, parents will be consulted as part of the evaluation. The inspectorate will meet with elected members of the committee of the parent association in schools where the parent association is affiliated to NPC. If there is no parent association or where the association is not affiliated the inspectorate will consult with the parents’ elected representatives on the board of management. There are also plans to develop a questionnaire for a random sample of parents in larger schools and for parents in general in small schools.

Through WSE, the inspectors from the Department of Education and Science carry out an evaluation of the quality of education being provided by a particular school. The team of inspectors evaluates the quality of: teaching and learning, school planning and school management. WSE differs from traditional inspection in a number of ways: at least two inspectors undertake the evaluation, the work of the whole school is looked at, as well as the work of teachers, the quality of school management and school planning are both given high priority in the evaluation.

Education for Persons with Disabilities Bill

Many of the changes to the Bill proposed by NPC to the Joint Committee on Education and Science seem to have been adopted. The participation of parents has been greatly strengthened.

An ombudsman for children

The appointment of Ireland's first ombudsman for children, Ms Emily Logan, was announced in December 2003. NPC had sought an ombudsman for many years and had campaigned strongly through our membership of the Children's Rights Alliance since 1995. NPC had successfully sought that the work of schools and hospitals would be within the remit of the ombudsman. NPC believes that the ombudsman can and must be a strong, independent friend of children who will champion their rights and defend their interests in all aspects of public life and policy that affect them.

NPC Training and Development

In 2003 the NPC budget for Training and Development was the subject of a massive cutback. This resulted in our original staff of six being reduced to two. This situation has made significant demands on staff and it is only because of their dedication, flexibility and hard work that we have been able to continue to develop our services for parents. We have done our best in the face of growing demands and diminished resources. We are very appreciative of the cooperation and help we have received from many Education Centres.

Last year our grant amounted to 50c per primary school parent. At the time of writing this report we have just heard that our funding has been allocated at the same rate as last year, fears of further cuts did not materialise.

'Your Education System –have your say on the future of education in Ireland'

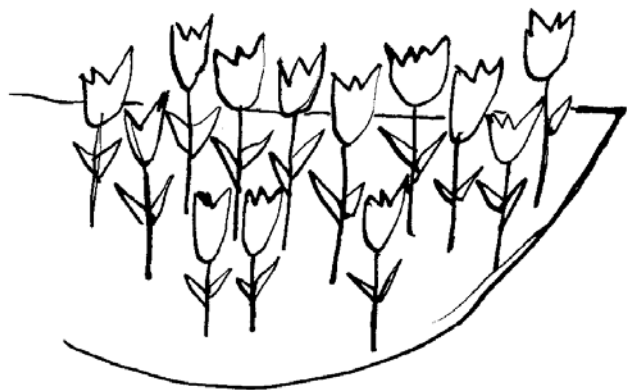
Over the years NPC has repeatedly called on the Minister for Education and the Government to consult with the partners in education and the public and to develop a cohesive and strategic approach to education. NPC welcomed the announcement by the Minister for

Education, Mr. Noel Dempsey that he was holding a national consultation on the future of education. 'To keep up with a fast changing world, we need to continue adapting our education system. What was ideal today may be less than ideal for tomorrow.' The Minister intends to provide every opportunity for each individual to contribute his or her views during the year 2004. For more information see www.npc.ie or phone the Department of Education and Science on 01 8892130.

National Parents Council Primary has consistently championed the interests of children and parents in the way no other group can do. We now urge each and every parent to take up the challenge and participate in the round of consultation opportunities that will be offered over the next year. We urge you, the parents of primary school children, to ensure that the voice of parents is heard resoundingly from every city, town, village and townland in Ireland.

Fionnuala Kilfeather

Chief Executive



Planning for the future of NPC: progress on the Strategic Plan

In January 2004, NPC took a major step forward in the task of modernising the organisation. At an Extraordinary Delegate Conference delegates voted overwhelmingly in favour of a broad framework of proposals for restructuring the organisation.

The framework of proposals for developing NPC endorsed at the Conference envisages the following changes and developments:

PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE

- Setting up 2 new categories of membership (i) Individual parent members and (ii) Associate members
- Making changes to ways of working at county, local and regional level
- Setting up a policy-making Council, which will also elect the board of parent directors

Conference also agreed that an Implementation Group would work on detailed plans for making the changes. The Group, which has now been established, will examine any changes needed to the Memorandum and Articles and Rules of NPC arising from these proposals. Draft changes will be put before EDC in 2005.

In addition, Conference endorsed a proposal to keep under formal review the way the new arrangements are working when they come in to effect.

The decision by delegates to adopt this change programme followed extensive consultation with parents over the past three years. That consultation process highlighted some very fundamental concerns about the extent to which the organisation is serving the needs of parents in the present social and economic climate.

The relevance of our organisation to the needs and lives of parents came 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 looked closely at our membership, we saw a pattern in which large sections of the community of parents across the country are not represented.

NPC has met these challenges honestly and openly, and set out to address them. We have been heartened by the overwhelming evidence of the value of parental involvement for children’s learning, the positive feedback about the 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 months leading up to the EDC in January 2004, the National Executive examined the feedback from all the consultations with parents in the previous two years. This work resulted in identifying a set of strategic challenges, which included these:

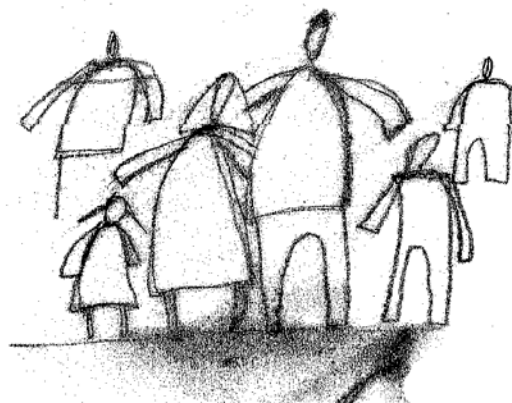
- To radically open up the membership base, to strengthen the voice and the influence of NPC as the parents’ voice; a voice for all kinds of parents in all parts of the country
- To have much more flexible ways to be part of a national movement at local level, in tune with the needs, interests and availability of parents – minimum bureaucracy and maximum access
- To have 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

- To have new and flexible ways of consulting, so as to widen the base of consultation and strengthen our hand in lobbying on behalf of parents
- To design new ways of developing stronger policy positions on educational issues, to strengthen our input into national policy
- To design new organisational structures to carry forward a (hopefully) hugely increased membership
- To develop new ways of using staffing structure to carry forward the work

Following much intensive work, the PROPOSALS FOR CHANGE, which were subsequently adopted at the Extraordinary Delegate Conference, were examined in detail at regional consultation meetings during October and November 2003. The response of parents throughout the country was strongly in support of the proposals.

As parents come under increasing pressures in their own lives, only the most vibrant and relevant organisations will attract them. Any organisation whose ways of working do not match in a very clear way with the needs and expectations of parents, and the realities of their lives, will lose their support, falter and eventually die, no matter how valid or worthy its mission. The National Executive and staff of NPC, together with parents, have grasped this reality, and this challenge, with courage and energy. 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.



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. We assist parents who are experiencing difficulties in having problems resolved at school level. Where problems are not resolved we assist parents who wish to raise these problems with the Department of Education and Science, the Ombudsman, the Commissioner for Information or with other appropriate authorities.

Demands on all aspects of the service have increased enormously over the years. We clearly need to expand our service for parents but this will not be possible without an increase in funding.

The NPC help and information service

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

Helpline Calls 2003

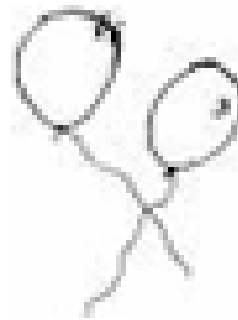
The majority of calls (34%) concerned Parent Associations (PA) including calls on affiliating to NPC, setting up a PA, election of PA committee, fundraising, insurance, speakers to address the PA, PA constitution and PA training. Board of Management (BOM) queries were numerous (17%), centred on election of the boards, training of boards, queries regarding the relationship between the boards and the PAs, and the issue of the boards' duty of care to the children. Bullying calls (9%) feature strongly every year, with this year being no exception. Calls involving the Complaints Procedure (3%) included issues such as bullying, suspension, withdrawal of children from school, signing of code of behaviour etc. Special Needs queries (10%) included issues regarding child assessment, resource teachers, special needs assistants and integrated education for children with special needs in mainstream schools. School policy calls (6%) mainly concerned the issue of supervision, both in the yard and classroom, also the issues of homework, healthy lunches, standardised tests, student councils, uniforms, administration of medicine, days off for teacher training, parent-teacher meetings, standardisation of the school year, pupil teacher ratios, split classes and many more. Calls regarding the Curriculum (4%) included parents wanting to know more about the new curriculum, the use of school books in this regard, exemption from Irish etc. Safety on school transport and the provision of school transport (3%). Extra curricular issues (2%) included calls on swimming and dance classes. The other main issues parents wanted information on (12%) included education at home, the Education Welfare Act, vetting teachers, parenting courses, school book rental schemes, discipline, time of school opening, the list goes on.

We are finding it very difficult to recruit volunteers who, with training, would support

the work of the help and information officer, and allow us to expand this service.

Advocacy service

The advocacy service is a service for parents who are taking or intend 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.



NPC TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2003

The Training and Development programme has been very busy in 2003. In spite of the 55% cut in funding we have achieved and surpassed our aims and goals for the year. We have offered parents new skills and support and have helped them to be actively involved in their children's education at all levels. The services in the Training and Development Programme promote positive parental involvement with all the educational partners.

Networking with other partners

We have continued to network and link with many other groups and programmes that have common interests in training and

development opportunities for parents and partnership. The groups include:

NCCA (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment), Home School Community Liaison, Education Centres, The Wheel, Family Resource Centres, Crisis Pregnancy Agency, Léargas, Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, National Educational Psychological Services, Department of Education and Science, European Parents Association, Teacher Training Colleges.

Support / Information evening

Support / Information evenings were held to give parents information about the role and responsibilities of a parent association. Similar sessions were run for parents who were interested in boards of management. These sessions were held in Education Centres around the country and gave parents a positive insight into parent associations and boards of management.

Training for new parent associations

During the past year trainers have worked with new parent associations to help them understand the role and the work of a parent association. The trainers have enabled parent associations develop skills to work together effectively with parents, teachers and all members of the school community.

NPC was able to fund training for groups of over 25 parents. Where the groups were smaller the group funded the training themselves. This has encouraged many parent associations to network with schools near to them.

Training for parent representatives on Boards of Management

Every school in the country was notified about the training for parents' representatives on the board of management. A very successful training programme for newly elected parents to the board took place in November and December. Where possible

this training took place in the Education Centres. We had excellent attendance at each of the 31 venues with an average of 25 parents' representatives at each session. We hope to do a follow up training / support session next autumn.

The aim of the training programme offered to parent 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 funding has been available to NPC county branches for the training of county executive members and for educational talks for parents. The primary focus of this funding is to offer training as well as to support volunteers at local level. The topics chosen were educational issues of interest to parents. The feedback from these sessions has been very positive.

Special Education Journey series of talks

Our Special Education Journey series of talks in Wynn's Hotel Dublin ran for seven consecutive weeks from Thursday 25th September to Thursday 6th November. We were overwhelmed by the response. Each week we had a full attendance with only those who came early getting a seat. The talks covered a broad spectrum of special education issues such as: how to recognize a child with special needs; dyslexia; curriculum for children with special needs; children with challenging behaviour; education provision and assessments; individual education plans (IEP); transition from primary to post primary. The feedback from the many parents and teachers who attended has shown us that we have fulfilled a real need in running this series. We hope to run two more special education series in different regions this year.

Partnership with the European Parents Association (EPA)

In 1998 a successful module on 'Training of Parents in Partnership' took place in every country of the European Union. Arising from this training 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 organisations in Italy and France, has worked with three teacher training colleges to develop a training module on 'Partnership with Parents'. 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'.

In Ireland NPC worked with the Marino Institute of Education in Dublin to deliver the pilot module to a group of eighteen student teachers. The module 'Partnership with Parents' was one of their elective choices. The training took place over six two hourly sessions. The training was facilitated by a NPC staff member and a staff member from the Marino Institute. Evaluation was very positive and it is hoped to run this module again with Marino.

Following the completion of the pilot module and the training of trainers from each of the participating countries, the module 'Partnership with Parents' was launched in November in Rome.

Since the launch, NPC has been involved in facilitating the delivery of the module to students during their pre-service training and to practicing teachers as part of in-service training. Other colleges of education have

expressed an interest in running the module in the next academic year both for students and practicing teachers.

National Parents Council Primary is active in promoting a positive collaboration with all of the educational partners and looks forward to continuing to work with this partnership project in the future.

Training Centre

National Parents Council Primary is a registered training centre with FETAC (Further Education and Training Awards Council). The Training and Development programme engages qualified trainers around the country to work directly with parents and volunteers. Ongoing up-skilling and training is part of our remit in the training programme.



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, workshops and seminars included NPC strategic plan; special educational needs; reading and primary movement; homework; bullying; the Internet; board of management information evenings; training for boards of management; training for parent associations; parental participation; training for committee members; running parent association meetings and AGMs; the school building programme; 'the hazards of clubbing on our young people'; dental hygiene; the environment; presentations on the work of parent associations; self-esteem; coping with dyslexia; the new curriculum; school building conditions; European day of parents and school.

Counties availed of training for new parent associations, existing parent associations and county executive training for 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: NPC strategic plan; school transport, speed limits outside schools; security in school buildings; safety and supervision; use of mobile phones / internet safety; the operation of boards of management; food and nutrition; funding for school books; school building conditions.

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

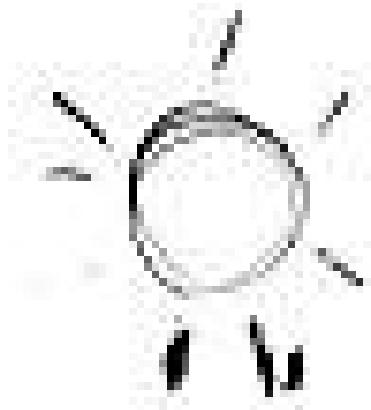
County branches and their quiz co-ordinators put a lot of work into organising the county finals of the Cadbury/NPC Challenge. This nationwide table quiz for children involved the support of teachers, the work of hundreds of parents and the participation of

thousands of children; an estimated 12,000 children from 1,800 schools.

Over the years the winners have included teams from counties Clare, Louth, Mayo, Tipperary, Carlow, Cork and 4 times County Galway. The winner of the 2003 quiz was Ennis National School, Kilrush Road, Ennis, Co Clare.

Cadbury (Ireland) have sponsored the quiz since 1992. For internal reasons Cadbury can no longer continue with the sponsorship. We are now working to find another sponsor.

We would like to record our real appreciation of an enjoyable and appreciated partnership with Cadbury.



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).

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.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment NCCA

Primary Curriculum and Early Childhood Education NCCA

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 draft curriculum framework for early childhood education is nearing completion and widespread consultation with parents and early childhood practitioners is planned before the guidelines are finalised.

Intercultural Education NCCA

The aim of the guidelines 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. The aim is to contribute to the development of a shared ability and sense of responsibility to protect for each other the right to be different and to live free from discrimination. These aims are very much in

keeping with representation made by NPC on intercultural society and the rights of minorities.

Curriculum for Children with General Learning Disabilities NCCA

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 are now being used in schools and have received positive feedback from teachers in a recent survey. Feedback from parents and teachers will inform the shape of the final curriculum. NCCA, in cooperation with NPC, has also made presentations to parents and sought their views.

ICT Steering Committee NCCA

The role of the committee is to oversee and coordinate the role of information and communication technologies in curriculum and assessment. NPC believes that parents have an important role and can contribute significant expertise to the development of the use of ICT in education.

National Educational Welfare Board NEWB

The National Educational Welfare Board is required to ensure that every child attends a recognised school or otherwise receives an appropriate education.

To discharge its responsibilities, the Board is developing a nationwide service that is accessible to schools, parents/guardians and others concerned with the welfare of young people. Twenty-six new staff are now working from local offices where they will provide a welfare-focused service to support regular school attendance. Assessments are being started for children who are being educated outside the national school system.

The NEWB is preparing information for parents about the service. See www.newb.ie

NEWB School Implementation Group

The Group which includes, parents, teachers, principals and school management, has been set up to give on-the-ground support and advice to the NEWB. The group has identified issues of concern to schools and the NEWB and is assisting in: the development of guidelines for schools; the development of relations between school and the NEWB; procedures for recording, monitoring and reporting pupil attendance and on actions to be taken by the Board, as appropriate.

Under the Education Welfare 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, we will be seeking guidelines that are child and parent friendly. This is very important as parents will have to sign the code of behaviour of the school their child is attending.

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

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. The City and County Development Boards have been given responsibility for the co-ordination of the

implementation of the National Children's Strategy at local level.

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children will provide an independent mechanism to vindicate the rights of children as required under the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child. The establishment of such an office is in recognition of the need for an independent person to act as a powerful advocate for children and promote the welfare and rights of the child.

A programme of research awards was introduced in September 2001. The purpose of this scheme is to improve capacity within the research community in relation to children's issues. The research scholarships are on the following subjects:

Youth suicide

Playtime in schools

The experiences of separated children who seek asylum

The projection of self among adolescents

The scope of article 12 under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Children's experiences of GP consultations:

A child-centred perspective

Commission on School Accommodation Steering Group

The Minister for Education and Science in 1996 established the Commission on School Accommodation. The partners in education structured the commission to combine the benefits of technical expertise and participation. The commission has undertaken the following:

- Rationalisation of vocational education committees
- Criteria and procedures for the recognition of new primary schools
- Area studies Lucan, north Dublin and Mayo
- Amalgamation of first level
- Amalgamation of second level
- Three Praxes – Planning school provision

- Criteria and procedures for establishing and maintaining provision through the medium of Irish in second level
- Criteria and procedures for the recognition of new second level schools

Gender Matters Review Steering Committee

The committee was established to review: the current approach to gender issues in schools and to develop a module/pack to assist schools in achieving gender equality. A research group was set up to explore gender equality in primary education. With the advice of the Steering Committee a template has been devised. The template requires all schools to develop a gender equality policy. Each school must regularly review its ethos and practice with regard to gender equality. Goals must be set and achieved within a time frame and will be monitored. The whole school community will be involved in the entire process.

Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education Consultative Committee

The Consultative Committee was established to inform interested participants of developments in relation to the project; to give them the opportunity to present their views and to provide a forum for discussion of issues related to early childhood and education.

Over 40 organisations, Government Departments and personalities are represented. Early discussions have covered the intrinsic link between early childhood care and education, the Education for persons with Disabilities Bill 2003 and the role of the Irish language in early childhood care and education.

The main objectives of the Centre are:

- To develop a quality framework for early childhood education
- To develop targeted interventions on a pilot basis for children who are

educationally disadvantaged and children with special needs

- To prepare the groundwork for the establishment of an Early Childhood Education Agency as envisaged by the White Paper

Advisory Committee on Education for the Deaf

The committee established to look into and review the services in education for deaf and hard of hearing learners and to help ensure that best provisions are available. All areas of deaf and hard of hearing education are being looked at.

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 NASC considers applications under the following criteria: whether the proposed school will meet a need that cannot reasonably be met within existing provision; the desirability of diversity of provision; the degree of local community support for the proposed school. NSAC publishes a notice in the local media so that parents and the community can make their views known and 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 www.sdps.ie.

SDP is now happening in all schools. A leaflet for parents on school development planning has been prepared by SDP, in consultation with NPC. Guidelines are being written to help schools, parents and children develop a code of behaviour.

National Assessment of Mathematical Attainment

This group was established to conduct a survey of mathematical attainment of pupils in fourth class in primary schools and will be used to compare the results with a survey, which was conducted in 1999. The study will also examine the use of calculators on fourth class and make recommendations on the mathematics curriculum. Questionnaires were prepared for pupils, parents, teachers, learning support teachers and schools. A letter from NPC accompanies the parents' questionnaire. The survey will be carried out in May 2004 in conjunction with a similar national assessment of reading attainment.

Education Centre Management Committee (Blackrock)

The remit of the Education Centres was broadened in the Education Act 1998 to include the wider community. A major review of the operation of Education Centres took place in 2003. The recommendations of this review together with budgetary restrictions are presenting Education Centres with new challenges. Blackrock Education Centre has now included representatives of parents on their management committee and developed links with other learning organisations. Like many of the Education Centres throughout the country Blackrock has cooperated with us in delivering NPC's training for parents' representatives on the board of management and for parent associations. For more information www.blackrock-edu.ie.

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). NPC has noted that consumption of alcohol has impacted on primary age children and stresses that alternative pastimes and activities need to be available to children and young people.

Children's Rights Alliance

The Alliance is an umbrella group of non-governmental organisations and individuals concerned with promoting the Rights and welfare of children in Ireland. The Alliance promotes the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and has worked to have an ombudsman for children in Ireland.

During 2003, the Children's Rights Alliance continued to promote the full implementation in Ireland of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Notable activities and developments included:

- Welcoming the appointment of Ireland's first Ombudsman for Children after a nine-year campaign
- Working for the elimination of child poverty and launching the End Child Poverty Coalition
- Advocating for the rights of Irish citizen children of non-Irish national parents threatened with deportation
- Being designated a Social Partner and a member of the Community and Voluntary Pillar within social partnership
- Monitoring and promoting the full implementation of the National Children's Strategy
- Launching, in conjunction with the National Youth Council of Ireland, the *Hearing Young Voices: Guidelines for Consultation*
- Making policy submissions to public bodies on numerous matters, including

the Education for Persons with Disabilities Bill, alcohol use and misuse, child protection policy for the Catholic Church, children's advertising code, adoption, EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, vetting, Charter of Rights for the Island of Ireland, housing and accommodation rights, Budget 2004, and lifelong learning, among others.

NPC Prebudget submission for 2004

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 person 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
- Immediate funding for schools, which breach health and safety regulations and schools which lack the basic facilities to deliver the curriculum
- Funding for new schools, which have received approval from the New Schools Advisory Committee
- 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 continued to press for modernisation of the education system arising from the benchmarking process and stressed that 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 children's entitlement to a full school year, benchmarking, the timing of parent teacher meetings, school holidays, starting school, transition to post primary, educational services for children, the cost of education, going back to school, childcare, education legislation, bullying, right of choice of school, commercial pressures on parents, safety on the internet and mobile phones, special education needs, learning support, curriculum and legislation.



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.

NPC participated in three EPA projects over the past year.

European Training Module

EPA, NPC and two other national parents' organisations worked with teacher training institutes and developed a module for initial training of teachers. Training was given to parents and teacher educators in the use of the module (see Training and Development Report).

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 partners aware of the importance of the role of parents, to make EPA visible at the European level, to inform school partners 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. To celebrate the second European Day of Parents and Schools, NPC asked that children working at home would make a card for their teacher and children working in school would make a card for their parents. These cards were exchanged on European Day. The Minister for Education and Science, Mr Noel Dempsey, TD, wrote to all primary schools signalling his support for the Day.

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 Berrings NS, Cork their project, 'Working Together for our Children'.

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

ICT Steering Committee

Maria Murphy

Interculturalism and the Curriculum

Cathy Kenna

Curriculum Guidelines for Students with Mild General Learning Disabilities

Margaret Carroll

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT UNIT *Steering Committee of the Directorate, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick*

Dolores Roberts

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE COMMITTEES

Steering Committee for a Gender Equality Initiative

Therese Murphy

Advisory Committee on Traveller Education

Francis Linden

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

Teresa Eccles

Janet Rose

Carolyn Gleeson

Commission on School Accommodation Needs

Marion Lyon

Mícheál Ó Cinnéide

School Development Planning Advisory Committee

Anne Colgan

Curriculum Implementation Group

Fionnuala Kilfeather

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

2004 National Assessment of Mathematical Achievement Advisory Committee

Maria Murphy

Leadership Development for Schools - Advisory Committee

Fionnuala Kilfeather

Performance Verification Group - for the education sector

Fionnuala Kilfeather

OTHER NATIONAL ORGANISATIONS *Management Committee of the Blackrock Education Centre*

Mary Crosbie

Dental Health Foundation Steering Committee

Ann Harmon

Centre for Early Childhood Development & Education – Consultative Committee

Irene Cassidy

National Children's Advisory Council

Cathy Kenna

Children's Rights Alliance

Geraldine Graydon

National Educational Welfare Board

Fionnuala Kilfeather

***National Educational Welfare Board
School Implementation Group***

Joan McLoughlin

***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***

Mary McDonnell NPC-Post Primary

**SOME EXAMPLES OF LOCAL
COMMITTEES**

***OMEC – World wide organisation for
education of preschool children***

Lorraine Crossan (Cork West)

Cork City Partnership

Peter Cox (Cork West)

Childcare Committee

Peter Cox

***Cork Chamber of Commerce – Local
Government and Economic Forum***

Sean O'Riordan (Cork West)

***Strategic Policy Committee – Environment
and Waste Management***

Sean O'Riordan

Douglas Tidy Towns

Sean O'Riordan

Parish Council – Youth Officer

Mary Haughney (Cork West)

Community Forum

Geraldine Graydon (Dublin South)

ACCS

Cathy Kenna (Dublin South)

***Dun Laoghaire Rathdown Community
Forum***

Geraldine Graydon

Laois County Enterprise Board

Nora Moore (Laois)

Riding for Disabled

Sean Campion (Laois)

GAA

Pat O'Sullivan (Laois)

Community Games

Winifred Cox (Laois)

Boy Brigade

Nora Moore

GAA

Francis Linden (Monaghan)

Scouting Ireland

Francis Linden

Youth Federation

Francis Linden

Louth Leader

Ann Harmon

***Louth County Community & Voluntary
Forum***

Ann Harmon

**NATIONAL
EXECUTIVE
MEMBERS**

Catherine Farrell
Carlow

Geraldine Gregan
Clare

Caroline Cashman
Cork East

Peter Cox
Cork West

Olwen Norton
Dublin NW

Therese Murphy
Dublin SW

Pat O'Sullivan
Laois

Diane Hickey
Limerick

Joan McLoughlin
Longford

Ann Harmon
Louth

John Tonra
Mayo

Maria Murphy
Meath

Francis Linden
Monaghan

Tessa Conneely
Tipperary

Margaret Molloy
Wexford

Michelle Waldron
Winifred Cox
Minority Religion

Anita McCann
Dominic Walsh
Scoileanna Lán Gaeilge

Geraldine Graydon
John Hynes
Special Education

Gerard O'Malley
Pam Robinson
Integrated Education

OFFICER BOARD

Chairperson
Anita McCann

Vice-Chairperson
Francis Linden

Honorary Secretary
Ann Harmon

*Assistant Honorary
Secretary*
Cathy Kenna
Maria Murphy

Honorary Treasurer
Tessa Conneely

*Assistant Honorary
Treasurer*
John Hynes

Public Relations Officer
Geraldine Graydon

**COUNTY
CHAIRPERSONS**

Sophie Kelly
Carlow

Teresa McCarren
Cavan

Dr Paul McKenna
(Brian Cotter)
Clare

Mary Fitzpatrick
Cork East

Lorraine Crossan
(Ann Rea)
Cork West

Veronica Hamilton
Dublin North

Lisa O'Neill
(Caitriona Morrison)
Dublin South

Monica Lunney
(Teresa Carroll)
Dublin SW

Mary Reidy (acting)
(Noel Finnerty)
Limerick

John Farrell
(Joan McLoughlin)
Longford

Alan Walters
(Caitriona Hughes)
Louth

Martin Farrelly
Meath

Gregory Sewell
Monaghan

Pat O'Donnell
Tipperary

John Keenan
Wexford

Peter Epidell
Wicklow

**COUNTY
SECRETARIES**

Elizabeth Farrell
Carlow

Teresa McCarren
Cavan

Fiona Trahe
Clare

Angela Ahern
Cork East

Mary Haughney
(Josephine Cronin)
Cork West

Rosemary O'Neill
Dublin North

Muriel Collins
Dublin NW

Mary Shannon
Dublin South

Karen Kiely (since Dec 03)
(Monica Lunney)
Dublin SW

Rosanne Rafferty
(Susan Clarke)
Galway

Margaret Whitely
Kilkenny

Winifred Cox
Laois

Mary Reidy
(Kristina McLean)
Limerick

Ann Brogan
Longford

Frank McArdle
Louth

Anne Murphy
Mayo

Maria Murphy
(Paul Carroll)
Meath

Annette Conlon
Monaghan

Séamus Leonard
(Bob Stanley)
Sligo

Carmel Leo
Tipperary

Sharon Butler
Wexford

Mairéad Lafferty
Wicklow

**COUNTY
TREASURERS**

Monica Mullins
Carlow

Mattie Lynch
Cavan

Heather Halton
Clare

Caroline Cashman
Cork East

Sean O'Riordan
Cork West

Paschal Fennell
Dublin North

Olwen Norton
Dublin NW

Geraldine Graydon
(Uwe Kalusche)
Dublin South

Carol Ollry
Dublin SW

Mervyn Kerr
Galway

Siobhan McGovern
Kilkenny

Pat Curran
Laois

Antoinette Collins
(Mary Reidy)
Limerick

Maura Reynolds
(Teresa Mullooly)
Longford

Clare Callanan
(Cilla Byrne)
Louth

John McDonagh
Mayo

Helen McGlew
Meath

Margaret O’Flaherty
(Maeve McCabe)
Monaghan

Mairéad Kennedy
Tipperary

Mary Ellen Doyle
Wexford

David Howe (04)
Wicklow

**COUNTY PUBLIC
RELATIONS
OFFICERS**

Helen Chalton
Carlow

Gerardine O’Driscoll
Clare

Marion Mullins
Cork East

Eileen Cotter
Cork West

Veronica Hamilton
Dublin North

Geraldine Graydon
Dublin South

Mary El Wafaie
Dublin SW

Finousa Hanlon
Kilkenny

Vicky Murphy
Limerick

Anita McCann
Louth

Martin Farrelly
Meath

Anne Malone
Monaghan

Séamus Gleeson
Tipperary

Sharon Butler
Wexford

David Howe
Wicklow

**STANDING ORDERS
COMMITTEE
(ADC 2003)**

Brian Foy
Jean O’Neill
Ann O’Regan
Anita Donohoe

**CADBURY NPC
CHALLENGE 2003**

Margaret O'Donoghue
National Coordinator

**COUNTY
COORDINATORS for
NPC CHALLENGE 2003**

Helen Chalton
Carlow

Gerry Pritchard
Cavan

Rose Fogarty
Clare

Mary Fitzpatrick
Cork East

Ireneaus Moloney
Cork West

Olive McGuinness
Dublin North

Catriona Peelo
Dublin NW

Brian Cotter
Dublin South

Monica Lunney
Dublin SW

Siobhán Lawless
Galway

Muriel Clarke
Kildare

Finousa Hanlon
Kilkenny

Pat O'Sullivan
Laois

Mary Foley
Leitrim

Ann O'Sullivan
Limerick

Mary McLoughlin
Longford

Muriel Gorman
Louth

Anne Clancy
Mayo

Rose Anne Clarke
Meath

Bridie Keenan
Monaghan

Rosaleen McCourt
Roscommon

Kay Cantwell
Tipperary

Camillus Perry
Westmeath

Sharon Butler
Wexford

Angela Nolan
Wicklow

ADVOCATES

Irene Cassidy
Winifred Jeffers

TRAINERS 2003

Mary Crosbie
Phyllis Gordon
Jean Healy
Kathleen Collins
Geraldine Butler
Nicola Rowntree Carroll
Aileen Barry
Benne Simpson
Ann O'Sullivan
Irene Cassidy
Margaret O'Sullivan
Olive McGuinness
Margaret Tuohy
Patricia Dunne
Mary O'Shea
Kathi Dillon
Noreen McMahon



NATIONAL PARENTS COUNCIL – PRIMARY

Staff

February 2004

DIRECTORS OFFICER BOARD

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Fionnuala Kilfeather

HELPLINE & INFORMATION OFFICER

Mary Killeen

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

Deirdre Sullivan

RESEARCH & PLANNING

Anne Colgan

ADMINISTRATION

Carmel Grahame: Finance/Administration/Company Secretary

Irene Glennon: Administrator Training & Development Programme

Michelle Davern: PA to CE/Website/Administration

Nora Bowes: Receptionist