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13 December, 2007 - Minister Hanafin announces new Community National Schools for two Dublin locations - Responding to diverse needs of changing society – Minister Hanafin

The Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin T.D., today announced that a new State model of community national school, under the patronage of County Dublin Vocational Education Committee (VEC), is to be piloted in two locations from September 2008. It is intended that the new schools will be opened in the Phoenix Park and in Phibblestown, Dublin 15. A further school, Scoil Choilm in Diswellstown, Dublin 15, which opened under the temporary patronage of the Catholic Church in September 2007, is to transition to the new community national school model after a two year period.

Announcing details of the two new schools, Minister Hanafin said "the new schools will be open to children of all religions and none. They will be inter-denominational in character, aiming to provide for religious education and faith formation during the school day for each of the main faith groups represented. A general ethics programme will also be available for children whose parents opt for that and the schools will operate through an ethos of inclusiveness and respect for all beliefs, both religious and non-religious."

The Minister said that the new model has been developed following a period of consultation with all of the main education partners and church groups. As in the primary school system generally, the schools will operate under the management of an independent Board of Management. The VEC will be represented on the Board of Management, as patron, and will provide practical management supports to the school. Arrangements will also be in place to enable the VEC to meet its general financial accountability responsibilities.

Minister Hanafin indicated that she will now be bringing proposals to Government to provide necessary amending legislation to underpin the VEC role in the primary sector. The Minister will act as interim patron in advance of the legislation being enacted. She said that arrangements will be put in place to monitor the operation of the pilot and that the experience drawn will be applied to any future roll-out.

"I am delighted that the consultations on this new model of school patronage have indicated widespread positive support for it in principle. In introducing it in two new locations from next September, with a third location to come on stream after a two year period, we will be able to test a range of practical implementation challenges and draw good lessons for its long-term success.

The changing shape of Irish society places new demands on the education system in responding to the needs of emerging communities. The role of the traditional churches in managing and providing schools is enormously valued and appreciated as is the growing role of other patronage bodies. In many of our new communities, however, there is a need for an additional choice that can accommodate the diverse preferences of parents for varying forms of religious education and faith formation during the school day, in a single school environment that includes and respects children of all religions and none. This new model of community national school provides that option and can be a rich addition to the range of primary school provision already offered by the existing patronage bodies" the Minister concluded.

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