

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO BECOMING A COMMUNITY NATIONAL SCHOOL



Foreword

Ireland has become recognised internationally for its evolution as a progressive, innovative and diverse country. The establishment of Community National Schools on a pilot basis in 2008 as Ireland's first state multid denominational primary schools was part of the State's response to this evolution. As CNSs open around the country, other educational stakeholders are becoming familiar with the model and what it has to offer. I am delighted to introduce the publication of *'Becoming a Community National School: A step-by-step Guide for Schools'* which explains in some detail what the Community National School model is and the types of supports and services available to them from the local Education and Training Board (ETB). It also gives a suggested approach that could be taken by a school in the exploration of the CNS model.



Education and Training Boards have a long-established history of providing high-quality education in the many communities we serve. A key part of the work of ETBs is being patrons of a growing number of Community National Schools and over 270 post-primary schools. The growth of the Community National School sector is a priority for ETBs as we see ourselves as best placed to support the needs of primary schools into the future.

The governance of schools has become increasingly complex and demanding on Boards of Management and school leaders. The additional supports provided by ETBs to Boards of Management and School leaders ensures that school management receives the best guidance and assistance in the running of their schools, thus enabling them to focus on their primary task of teaching and learning.

There are many reasons for an existing school to consider becoming a Community National School. School leaders who are considering this model are ones who constantly reflect on what is best for the school community as a whole. I commend the leaders of these schools in exploring this model with their school communities. Change brings both opportunities and challenges. ETBs with ETBI will ensure that school leaders have the information and support required to make the change.

I would like to thank all those in ETBI involved in the publication of *'Becoming a Community National School: A step-by-step Guide for Schools'*. I have no doubt that it will prove very useful to any school community considering this option.

Purpose of this Publication

As Education and Training Boards (ETBs) expand the growth of Community National Schools (CNSs) across the country, other primary schools have become more aware of the model and are interested in exploring it. This publication aims to support these schools by:

- Describing the core values characteristic spirit of a CNS
- Describing the supports available to CNSs from ETBs
- Guiding schools on how to approach the process of exploring becoming a CNS with their school community
- Providing an overview of the policies and practices that would be in place once the school becomes a CNS.

The publication is divided into a number of sections:

Community National Schools for Boards of Management:

This section contains three documents:

Community National Schools Explained sets out the core value and characteristic spirit of the Community National School model and the supports available to them from Education and Training Boards. This will be particularly relevant to members of the Board of Management and school staff.

Supports for Education and Training Boards sets out the supports available to Community National Schools from ETBs.

Exploring the Possibility of Becoming a Community National School provides a suggested approach to how schools could explore the possibility of becoming a Community National School with their school community. It also provides key information to schools that decide to become a Community National School on the priority areas to be addressed. This will be of particular relevance to members of the Boards of Management and the existing patron.

Community National Schools for Staff:

This two-page flyer aims to answer key questions members of staff may have about the practical implications for them if their school changes to become a Community National School. Further information is always available from your local ETB.

Community National Schools for Parents/Guardians:

The 'What are Community National Schools?' leaflet can be used to introduce parents/guardians and any other stakeholder to the Community National School model .

A Step-by-Step Guide to Becoming a Community National School

This document is divided into two sections.

Section 1 gives a suggested approach to schools on how might explore the possibility of becoming a Community National School with their school community.

Section 2 offers initial guidance to schools that decide to become a Community National Schools on the priority areas to be addressed.

Section 1 - Exploring the Possibility of Becoming a Community National School

Introduction

Each school seeking to explore the CNS model will arrive at this decision at different times and for different reasons. The drivers for considering this type of change may also come from different members of the school community. Therefore, the timeframe and pace of the steps outlined in this section are entirely up to individual schools.

Regardless of who initiates the exploration of the CNS model, we suggest that the Board of Management take the lead in exploring the practicalities of such a change. Effective leadership is crucial in determining the success of the exploration process.

Throughout the entire process, schools can access advice and support from the Director of Schools in their local ETB at any time. The types of supports available will be outlined throughout this section.

Initial Exploration

This is a time for gathering information, building awareness of the CNS model, the role of the ETB and discussion amongst members of the Board of Management. The aim of this phase is to get a clearer understanding of:

- The Community National School model and the local Education and Training Board
- The level of support for exploring becoming a Community National School amongst members of the Board of Management
- The types of changes that would be necessary within the school in becoming a Community National School

As stated previously, a request to explore the CNS model may come from any member of the school community and for a variety of reasons. Before engaging with the wider school community, the Board of Management should become familiar with the model and the ETB first. This can be done by requesting information in the form of literature or presentations from the local ETB. If the Board decide that they would like to explore the possibility of becoming a Community National School with their school community, they should inform their existing patron about the process they propose to embark on.

Exploring the Possibility of Becoming a Community National School with the School Community

If the Board of Management, after consulting with the existing patron, decides to further explore the Community National School model with the wider school community, it is suggested they take the following approach. It is important that the existing patron of the school is kept informed about the exploration process. The existing patron is the party who requests a transfer of patronage under Section 8(3) of the Education Act 1998. Therefore, it is imperative that they have a full understanding of the process.

Establish an Action Group:

An Action Group should be established to lead the exploration process with the school community. This group should consist of:

- Staff members (including the principal)
- Members of the Board of Management (including the chairperson)
- Parents (who may or may not be members of the Board of Management)

The number of members of the action group should be decided on an individual school basis. The Board of Management should formally agree the terms of reference and membership of the group. The Board should also decide how the action group reports on its work to the Board of Management.

The key responsibilities of the Action Group are to:

- Liaise with the local ETB in relation to gaining a deeper understanding of the CNS model
- Engage with their key stakeholders i.e. staff, parents and children
- Keep the key stakeholders constantly updated in relation to the process
- Organise information meetings with the school community
- Keep the school community updated in relation to the process
- Monitor and evaluate the progress of the process
- Regularly update the Board of Management on the process who in turn informs the current patron
- Keep minutes and records of all meetings held in relation to this process

The Action Group should engage with their key stakeholders i.e. staff, parents and children.

Staff: It is imperative that staff understand and support an exploration of becoming a Community National School. Issues relating to employment, Garda Vetting, panel rights, core values characteristic spirit and finances should be addressed at an early stage. It is important that the staff are fully aware of the types of changes that would be made when becoming a Community National School. The local ETB will assist schools when working with staff through these issues by attending staff meetings and addressing these issues in presentations and by providing relevant literature.

Parents/Guardians: The Board of Management should ensure that the parents/guardians are fully informed as to the rationale for considering becoming a Community National School. The Board of Management should write to the parent body explaining that this is being considered and why. This should be followed by a parents' information evening where parents/guardians are given the opportunity to express their views. The local ETB and ETBI, when requested, will attend this meeting to ensure that parents are fully informed about the ETB and CNS model.

Pupils: it is important that schools considering becoming a Community National School seek the views of pupils in meaningful ways.

Key Questions to Consider During this Phase:

The key questions to be considered at this stage are:

- What are the greatest strengths of our school currently?
- What challenges are currently facing our school community?
- What benefits do we see from becoming a Community National School?
- Are there any challenges to this change? If so, how can they be overcome?
- How supportive is the school community as a whole to becoming a Community National School?
- What is the view of the existing patron of this change?

Seeking the Views of the School Community

A decision to become a Community National School should reflect the wishes of the school community and the patron. The recommended way to achieve this is to hold a meeting/s with the school community so that they have a full understanding of the benefits and implications of becoming a Community National School.

A plebiscite may be organised that will result in a clear decision that reflects the wishes of the school community. This result can then be sent to the existing patron for consideration.

Section 2 - Becoming a Community National School

Introduction

After following the process outlined in Section 1, if a majority of the relevant stakeholders are in favour of becoming a Community National School and the existing patron is willing to proceed, the ETB will begin working with the existing patron on a lease agreement.

Although we recommend for schools not to change patronage mid-way through an academic year, work can begin at school level once permission is granted.

Any changes in the management of the school and practices and policies related to core values and characteristic spirit will take time. Schools which become Community National Schools will be given an opportunity to come in line with new governance structures and policies and practices over time.

This section looks at the various aspects of school life that need to be considered at school level when becoming a Community National School. There are many other considerations at patron level that are beyond the scope of this document.

Core Values and Characteristic Spirit

The school should begin preparing to come in line with the core values and characteristic spirit of Community National Schools. Some examples of changes that will have to be made are:

- Giving equal status to children of all religions/beliefs in terms of admissions
- Giving equal status to children of all religions/beliefs in terms of school celebrations
- Moving sacramental education to outside the school day and as the responsibility of the parish
- Teaching the '*Goodness Me! Goodness You!*' Curriculum

Admissions Policies

The Board of Management, with the support of the local ETB, should develop and ratify a new Admissions Policy to reflect the changed status in the school. A common template has been developed to ensure consistency between Community National Schools. This should be used as a basis for the development of the school's policy.

Boards of Management

The Board of Management (BoM) will need to be reconstituted to reflect the change in status of the school. Like before, the BoM in Community National Schools has eight members. The composition of the board is made of up two Patron's nominees, two teacher nominees (including the principal), two parent nominees, and two community members.

The local Education and Training Board will provide for the ongoing training of the Board of Management.

BoMs in Community National Schools adhere currently to the 'Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015 – 2019'. There is an additional document relevant to Community National Schools only (appendix 1) that is to be read in conjunction with the governance manual. This additional document outlines the difference in governance arrangements for schools under the patronage of ETBs. The information in the additional document pertaining to Community National Schools will be incorporated into the next iteration of the Governance Manual for all schools.

Continuous Professional Development

Relevant Continuous Professional Development (CPD) will be provided by the local ETB and ETBI to help schools adjust to the change in the characteristic spirit of their school.

Goodness Me! Goodness You!

All staff members will benefit from robust induction into the GMGY curriculum and the methodologies it uses. The NCCA and the local ETB/ETBI will support the school in ensuring that all staff members are comfortable with and confident in teaching GMGY. For more information on GMGY, go to www.cns.ie

Garda Vetting

As the employer of all school staff will change from the Board of Management to the Education and Training Board, all staff will need to be Garda Vetted. Garda Vetting will be organised through the local ETB.

Panel Rights

The Department of Education and Skills intends to establish a redeployment panel for Community National Schools and have it in operation for the 2019/2020 school year. The practical arrangements for same will be finalised following consultation with the relevant education partners at primary level.

In addition, the engagement with a School Patron (Catholic Bishop) in relation to reconfiguration of an existing school will also seek to have transition arrangements in place to enable existing teachers in that school to continue to have access to the diocesan panel for a period after the reconfiguration.

In addition to these provisions, the arrangements for redeployment of surplus permanent staff is set out in the annual circular on Staffing arrangements in Primary Schools – this is Circular 0010/2018 for the 2018/19 school year.

Branding, Name, logo

ETBs and CNSs have done a lot of work on developing their brand. Your local ETB will provide supports to the school in branding it as a Community National School.

Appendix 1 – Amendments to the Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015-2019 for Community National Schools

Introduction:

The Governance Manual for Primary Schools was published in Autumn 2015 and is applicable for the period 1 December 2015 to 30 November 2019.

The Governance Manual will continue to apply to Community National Schools subject to the amendments/clarifications outlined in this document. This document will be published on the Department website and will be updated as required.

This document should be read in conjunction with the Governance Manual and does not purport to be an exhaustive list of all the detailed changes required to same.

The Governance Manual should now be read on the basis that the employer is the ETB rather than the Board of Management.

Administrative support and guidance will be provided by the relevant ETBs to help facilitate the smooth transition of the Community National Schools to the ETB sector. To ensure consistency if ETBs have queries in relation to Community National Schools they should contact ETBI. Where a query arises in relation to the applicability of Department Circulars to Community National Schools then the matter should be referred in the first instance to ETBI.

The Governance Manual is next due to be revised during 2019 for the period 1 December 2019 to 30 November 2023. This will give an opportunity to reflect the arrangements for the Community National Schools in the published Governance Manual.

In the interim, the following is a non-exhaustive list of the main amendments to the Governance Manual arising from the transfer of patronage of the Community National Schools to the ETB sector.

A: Sections of the Governance Manual for Primary Schools which are no longer applicable:

1. Introduction and overview of the role of the Board of Management-The Board as Employer: This section has been replaced with a section entitled The ETB as Employer.
2. Section 21(f) Finance- Employment of person in a private capacity, and
3. Section 23 Appointment of all employees of the Board of Management.

B: Sections that are due to be updated:

1. Section 12 The Treasurer, and
2. Section 21 Finance.

These sections of the Governance Manual will be updated to reflect the financial arrangements outlined in the Memorandum of Understanding in relation to the transfer of patronage of Community National Schools. Pending finalisation of the new financial arrangements grants will continue to be paid as normal into the bank account of the Community National Schools.

However, pending the updating of the aforementioned sections a Treasurer should not be elected by the Board of Management. In relation to fund raising, it has been agreed that any monies raised by a school from fund raising will be ring-fenced for use by that school.

It should also be noted that the position in relation to Insurance is that the relevant ETB is responsible for ensuring that appropriate insurance arrangements are in place for each of the Community National Schools under its patronage. In the case where an ETB is renting a property for a Community National School, the ETB is responsible for Employers Liability, Contents and Public Liability Insurance. Responsibility for other insurances rests with the landlord or as determined by the relevant lease in place for the property.

C: Sections of the Governance Manual for Primary Schools which have been updated:

1. Introduction and overview of the role of the Board of Management: This section has been updated only where necessary to reflect the role of the ETB as employer, the Board of Management in an ETB school will still have responsibility for matters that are not employment related e.g. school policies, child protection, school planning etc.

The Board as Employer has therefore been replaced with the below text.

The ETB as Employer

The ETB is the body corporate for all schools established or maintained under its patronage in accordance with Schedule 3 of the Education and Training Boards Act, 2013.

While an ETB is the body corporate for all schools, colleges and centres established and maintained under its patronage, ETBs delegate many management functions and responsibilities to Boards of Management which are established as committees of the ETB in accordance with Section 44 of the Education and Training Boards Act, 2013.

The Board of Management of a Community National School under the patronage of an ETB is not the employer of staff in the school. In accordance with Section 6 of the Education (Amendment) Act, 2012, it is the responsibility of the ETB to employ the Principal, teachers and other staff of a school established or maintained by the ETB. All appointments shall be in accordance with statutory provision, relevant Department circulars, employment and sectoral agreements.

The recruitment and appointment procedures for teachers, principal teachers and SNAs (as set out in Appendix D, E and H of the Governance Manual) will continue to apply to the Community National Schools. However, they should now be read on the basis that the employer is the ETB rather than the Board of Management. The composition of interview selection boards in Community National Schools in the ETB sector are to remain the same as set out in the Appendices of the Governance Manual. The selection board will make the recommendation for appointments and as appointments are an executive function the CE will confirm the appointments.

All staff employed by an ETB are employed by the relevant ETB scheme and not by a particular ETB school, college or centre.

The ETB as employer is responsible for complying with the statutory requirements under the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016. The Department's Circular 0031/2016 "Commencement of Statutory Requirements for Garda Vetting" outlines the statutory requirements that apply to school authorities from 29 April 2016 along with the practical arrangements that will be in place in respect of the vetting of registered teachers, non-teaching staff and others. As and from 29 April 2016 Circular 0031/2016 supersedes and replaces both Circular 0063/2010 and Circular 26/2015.

2. Introduction and overview of the role of the Board of Management-Training for Boards:

Boards of Management should contact the relevant ETB for information in relation to available training or for advice and guidance in relation to Board matters.

3. Section 18 Freedom of Information Acts: Community National Schools are under the patronage of ETBs and are therefore no longer exempt under the FOI Acts.

4. Section 26 Guidelines on Health and Safety: The ETB as employer and the Board of Management as a committee of the ETB are responsible for ensuring as far as reasonably practicable, the safety and health at work of the staff in the school and the safety and health of those who are in any way affected by the work activities of an ETB school.

5. Section 27 Procurement of Goods and Services: Community National Schools should note that the relevant ETB should be contacted for advice and guidance in relation to procurement.

6. Section 28 The Protected Disclosures Act 2014: Each ETB is required to put in place a Protected Disclosures Policy and to have appropriate arrangements in place to receive protected disclosures from its employees.

7. Section 29 Registration of each school with the Charities Regulatory Authority (CRA): Community National Schools are no longer required to register individually with the Charities Regulatory Authority as the relevant ETBs registration encompasses all of the schools that are under its patronage.

8. Section 30 Energy Management in Schools: It is the responsibility of each ETB to report annually on the energy usage of each of its schools directly to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI).

D: Sections which will be subject to the approval of the relevant ETB:

1. Introduction and overview of the role of the Board of Management- Management of Resources: Any major repairs or alterations to a school premises, shall be subject to the prior approval of the relevant ETB and carried out under the direction of the relevant ETB. The National School Annual Census form (or the annual return through POD) should be signed by both the School Principal and the Chief Executive (or their delegated Officer) prior to its submission to the Department.

2. Section 20 Use of the school premises: A policy document governing the use of the school for community purposes shall be prepared by the ETB, in consultation with the Board of Management. This document should cover the issue of all costs (direct/indirect) and insurance requirements. Any rental income generated will be ring-fenced by the ETB for use by the school.

3. Section 24 Change of staff form: This form must be approved by the relevant ETB.

4. Section 25 On-Line Claim System: All claims must be approved by the relevant ETB. It is important that procedures are in place to ensure that the entering and approval of leave and claims is carried out in a timely fashion in order to meet payroll deadlines.

E: Clarifications:

1. Any references in the Governance Manual to 'in accordance with the Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015 – 2019' should be taken by Community National Schools as also including a reference to 'the amendments to the Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015-2019 for the Community National Schools'.

2. The constitution of Boards of Management and the procedure for the election and nomination of members of Boards of Management of the Community National Schools shall be the same as that for all primary schools as outlined in sections 3 and 4 of the Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015-2019. However, as the Board of Management of a Community National School is a committee established under section 44 of the Education and Training Boards Act 2013, in accordance with section 44(10) of this Act, the ETB is required to obtain the consent of the Minister for the appointment of the chairperson of the Board of Management.

3. Section 44(18) of the Education and Training Boards Act 2013 states that 'the acts of every committee established under this section ... shall be subject to confirmation by the education and training board that established it, save where the Minister otherwise directs'. In this regard, the Minister directs that this confirmation is not required in the case of a Board of Management of a Community National School in the ETB sector provided that:

- a) The ETB has formally (by resolution of the ETB) provided the Board of Management of a Community National School with terms of reference and the Board of Management of a Community National School is operating within these terms of reference. The Governance Manual for Primary Schools 2015-2019 (subject to the amendments/clarifications set out in this document in respect of Community National Schools) will suffice as terms of reference; and
- b) The Secretary of the Board of Management of the Community National School sends to the relevant ETB a copy of the draft minutes of the proceedings of a board meeting together with a copy of the adopted minutes of the previous board meeting.

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