



# What Are *Community National Schools* Anyway?

## CHILD-CENTRED, INCLUSIVE, MULTI-BELIEF, STATE-OPERATED PRIMARY SCHOOLS

### Why is there a need for a Community National School?

Ireland is changing. It used to be a significantly homogenous country with most people identifying as Roman Catholic. The religious identity of many Irish people has changed in recent years. Ireland has also morphed into a richly diverse country because of the migration experienced during the boom years. Due to these changes, the current school system which is 96% Church-run no longer fully reflects Irish society. Even with their best efforts, many Church-run schools are struggling to fully meet the needs of all of their children due to the constraints of their ethos.

### What is a Community National School?

The Irish State has responded to this need for change in Irish education. Historically, schools were managed by private patrons who also dictated the ethos of the school. The State has now developed its own primary school model with the Community National Schools. They are multi-denominational, inclusive schools that welcome all children from the local communities they serve.



### Who is the patron of these schools?

The patron of these schools is the Education and Training Boards (ETBs). ETBs, which were formerly known as VECs, are statutory authorities which have responsibility for education and youth work. ETBs manage and operate Community National Schools, Second-level school such as Community Colleges and a range of adult and further education centres. They have developed an excellent reputation for their provision of inclusive, innovative education that meets the needs of the entire community.



## Education and Training Boards Ireland

Piper's Hill  
Kilcullen Road  
Naas, Co Kildare  
Phone: 045 901 070  
Email: [seamus.conboy@etbi.ie](mailto:seamus.conboy@etbi.ie)  
Web: [www.etbi.ie](http://www.etbi.ie) | [www.cns.ie](http://www.cns.ie)

## What is the difference between Community National Schools and other school types?

Faced with a lot of choice, parents can be comforted knowing that every school, regardless of its patron, follows the same national curriculum. Schools mainly differ in what they call their 'ethos' or characteristic spirit. Many parents describe a Community National School as somewhere between the traditional denominational school and a secular school. Although Community National Schools do not prioritise any one religion over another, space is made within the school day for children to be nurtured in their own faith or secular belief while learning more about their friends' beliefs too.

Although these schools pride themselves on their commitment to inclusion and equality for all, their main commitment is to providing a child-centred education that prepares children to succeed in their futures. A focus on both academic and hands-on learning, IT and the nurturing of children's well-being ensures that they are prepared to thrive in and beyond their education journey.



### They are progressive schools rooted in the best of tradition.

They are similar to traditional schools in that the children wear a school uniform and the teacher is referred to formally e.g. Mr. Murphy, Múinteoir Orla.

They are similar to Educate Together Schools in that they have open enrolment policies which do not prioritise any one group over another, are multid denominational and have equality central to their ethos.

Unique to each school type is what is known as their 'Patron's Programme'. This is done for 30 minutes a day and underpins the ethos of the school. In a Church-run school it is a single faith formation programme. However, in a Community National School, it is a multi-belief and values education programme called Goodness Me! Goodness You!

## How do Community National Schools cater for religious/secular belief diversity?

Unlike single-denominational schools, Community National Schools have a multi-belief and values education programme that caters for children of all faiths and secular beliefs. The programme is called Goodness Me, Goodness You! or GMY. This programme was developed by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) which is the statutory body charged with the development of national curricula. It is a belief-nurturing programme where children, with the help of their teacher, parents and belief communities learn more about their own beliefs and those of their friends.

Children learn together about the same theme – the schools communicate with parents about the theme and they talk about it at home from their own faith/belief perspective. Children then share their perspective or experience of the same theme with their class and therefore learn more about themselves and each other.

## Does the school support children preparing for special rites of passages e.g. The Communion?

Community National Schools also offer Belief Specific Teaching (BST) where parents can request additional supports around specific rites of passage. For example, many Catholic parents want some support from the school around the sacraments. The schools work with the parents and parish around how they can support them, bearing in mind the limitations they have as they are primarily multid denominational schools. This is open to all families from all religions and beliefs. This support is different in every Community National School, depending on the needs of the community and the particular context of the school.

## Does the GMY Programme deal with topics other than religions and beliefs?

The GMY programme is also a values education programme. Children learn all about ethics and the values of the school such as equality and justice. They also do what is called 'Thinking Time' where the children learn to think critically and philosophically about different issues. A very nice part of the programme is what is known as 'Quiet Time' where children are encouraged to fall still and think about all that they have learnt that day in GMY and to consider how that relates to their lives as individuals.

## Where are the current Community National Schools and how are they doing?

To date, there are 11 Community National Schools in Dublin, Wicklow, Meath, Kildare and Cork. Each CNS has thrived in the areas they are in and have developed reputations for their inclusive ethos and commitment to excellence in education.

## Where can I find out more information about these schools?

For more information or to express an interest in enrolling your child in a new Community National School, please visit [www.cns.ie](http://www.cns.ie). Each school has its own individual website that can be accessed from here. For more information on Goodness Me! Goodness You! please visit [www.gmy.ie](http://www.gmy.ie).

